

CALL FOR PAPERS

THE POLITICS OF UNCERTAINTY: PRODUCING, REINFORCING AND MEDIATING (LEGAL) UNCERTAINTY IN LOCAL REFUGEE RECEPTION

*Workshop to be held at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity,
Göttingen, on 15-16 November 2017*

*Organized in cooperation with the “Local refugee politics” working group of the
Netzwerk Flüchtlingsforschung*

Keynote Speaker: BARBARA OOMEN, University College Roosevelt, Utrecht University

Migration is a phenomenon that carries multiple uncertainties. This holds especially true for forced migration, about which uncertainty and even physical insecurity are inherent. In fact, the international refugee regime is structured to reduce physical insecurity for (some groups of) forcibly displaced migrants. Nevertheless, (legal) uncertainty arises from the question of who is actually entitled to international protection, and under which circumstances. This uncertainty persists and sometimes even increases during asylum-procedures, i.e. under national and sub-national legislation and through administrative practices. While their asylum case is still pending, but also after a decision has been made, asylum-seekers often experience extreme uncertainty, both in terms of their legal situation and socially. Legal uncertainty touches every aspect of refugees' lives: from family reunification to access to the labour market or education, from housing to making contacts in their new environment.

Public debates and scholarly research often portray municipalities and other local actors as crucial to the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees. In line with different authors we maintain that it is important to focus on the local context as setting. Uncertainty is experienced most directly at the local level, and asylum-seekers and refugees have to adjust to this uncertainty in local contexts. At the same time, municipalities, local decision-makers as well as local populations face uncertainty, too. The often built-in ambiguity of laws, regulations and norms and a notion of uncertainty about the social and political context of refugee protection also affect the

actions of street-level bureaucrats, the practices of (local) refugee politics and even the behaviour of non-governmental organizations. At the local level, there is a vast variety of practices in dealing with legal and political uncertainties. Some actors just pass on the uncertainty, which they experience, to the migrants. Others try to mediate and even reduce uncertainty. For example, in some municipalities, local strategies and guidelines try to guarantee a coherent approach to local refugee protection; some cities even speak out publicly against deportation (movement of “sanctuary cities”) or offer to host more refugees (“solidarity cities”). In consequence, these local and regional variations may be a further source of uncertainty.

The workshop aims at exploring further, what dimensions this uncertainty has; what consequences it has for the participation of asylum-seekers and refugees in society, especially at the local level, and how they deal with uncertainty as one aspect of the migration regime in the local context. Also, we are interested in understanding better, how local actors contribute to the production of this uncertainty or what they do in order to reinforcing or moderating its effects. The workshop will be structured along three lines: 1) Institutions and the legal framework: The production of uncertainty at different levels, 2) the effects of uncertainty on the asylum-seekers and their ways of dealing with it, 3) the way local actors handle uncertainty. Conceptual papers and empirical studies referring, for instance, to the following questions are welcome:

1) Institutional and legal framework

- What are the institutional / legal dimensions of uncertainty? Which forms does it take? What are the drivers for legal and institutional uncertainty?
- Do the characteristics of institutional uncertainty vary between different government levels? What is specific for the local / municipal level?
- In what way(s) can local actors contribute, reinforce or alleviate (the effects of) uncertainty?

2) Effects of uncertainty on asylum-seekers and refugees and their ways of dealing with it

- Which strategies do asylum-seekers and refugees develop to cope with uncertainty?
- How does uncertainty affect different aspects of refugees' lives (e.g. health, education, employment)?
- What is the impact of uncertainty on their participation in society?

3) Local actors dealing with uncertainty

- In what ways do local authorities contribute to the production, reinforcement or mediation of (legal) uncertainty in local refugee reception?
- What do local authorities (including street level bureaucrats) and NGOs perceive as "uncertain"? How do they cope with uncertainty?
- What is the role of local organizations (trade unions, religious communities etc.), volunteers and activists in mediating (or increasing) uncertainty?
- How does uncertainty affect the work of social workers, teachers etc. who work with asylum-seekers and refugees?
- How does the local population react to and deal with uncertainty?

We are also interested in theoretical and / or methodological contributions touching, among others, the following questions:

- Which concepts can we use to look at the different aspects of uncertainty and their effects in the context of local refugee reception?
- What is the relation between uncertainty, (mis) trust and control?
- How can we survey and measure (legal) uncertainty and its effects in the context of local refugee reception? Which effects can be traced back to local or regional variations?
- Is it possible to transfer policies or practices in dealing with uncertainty from one locality to another?

We invite colleagues with different disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical and methodological approaches to shed light on the processes of producing, reinforcing and reducing uncertainty and its effects at different levels.

We are looking forward to qualitative as well as quantitative contributions that address the outlined questions. We appreciate contributions that take a cross-national, comparative perspective as well as comparisons between particular cities and between larger cities, small towns and rural areas, but also single case studies.

The workshop language will be English. Selected papers may be part of a special issue in a peer-reviewed journal. For cases in which funding from own institutions is not available, participants' travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the Max Planck Institute.

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Authors should submit the details of their papers, including an abstract of no more than 400 words, to the organizing team (please send your abstract and information to all five email addresses) no later than 15 August 2017. Draft papers will be due by 1 November 2017.

Proposals should include: paper title; name, institutional affiliation and email address. The organizers will review and select papers by 1 September 2017.

For any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the organizing team:

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Timetable

Deadline for abstracts: 15 August 2017

Notification of selection: 1 September 2017

Deadline for draft papers: 1 November 2017