

Psychologists pinpoint psychological factors of refugee integration

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Due to border closures in the wake of the corona crisis, the arrival of refugees in Europe has temporarily dipped. However, worldwide numbers of refugees have surged, again, within a year, driven by

violence, war, persecution, economic hardship, or climate change. In the foreseeable future, many refugees will not be able to return to their homes. The integration of refugees in receiving countries is the most promising and decent response to this situation. Yet, how such integration can be achieved remains an open issue and ongoing challenge. What are the potential barriers to integration among refugees and residents in receiving countries? How can the different needs, feelings, and concerns of these groups be balanced and conflicts be resolved?

Psychologists at the University of Münster (Germany) have developed a model of the psychological factors that are critical for successful integration of refugees. The model, running under the acronym PARI (Psychological Antecedents of Refugee Integration), takes into account the perspectives of both refugees and members of the receiving society. The researchers have published their model in the journal *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

About the model

The PARI model was developed by Gerald Echterhoff, Jens Hellmann, Mitja Back, Joscha Kärtner, Nexhmedin Morina and Guido Hertel from the Institute of Psychology at Münster University. The authors consider distinctive features of [refugee migration](#): being forced to leave one's home country, associated with various perils and risks to one's safety and wellbeing. What matters from a psychological perspective is the subjective perception of being forced to migrate rather than the "objective" circumstances of migration or the legal conditions of being granted refugee status. "From a psychological point of view, refugees experience external pressures that force them to migrate. As a result, they see migration as being imposed on them, leaving no alternative," explains Dr. Jens Hellmann.

According to the PARI [model](#), the characteristics of forced migration trigger predictable responses in both refugees and members of the receiving society, revealing a specific psychological signature of reactions to refugeehood. For instance, the stress and perils of migration can strengthen refugees' need for integration in a safe receiving country. However, the feeling of losing control, the role of being a needy victim, or coping with traumatic memories can restrict mental resources needed for adaptation and [integration](#).

Residents' responses to the distinctive characteristics of refugee immigration can also tilt towards the positive or negative side: "On the one hand, the perception of forced migration and its associated perils can strengthen residents' empathy for immigrants who come as refugees. On the other hand, these perceptions can also induce residents to experience increased feelings of threat and lack of control," says lead author Prof. Gerald Echterhoff.

More information: Gerald Echterhoff et al, Psychological Antecedents of Refugee Integration (PARI), *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1745691619898838](https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619898838)

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