"Forced Migration and Transnational Family Arrangements – Eritrean and Syrian Refugees in Germany (TransFAR)" – The aim, scope and design of a new quantitative survey

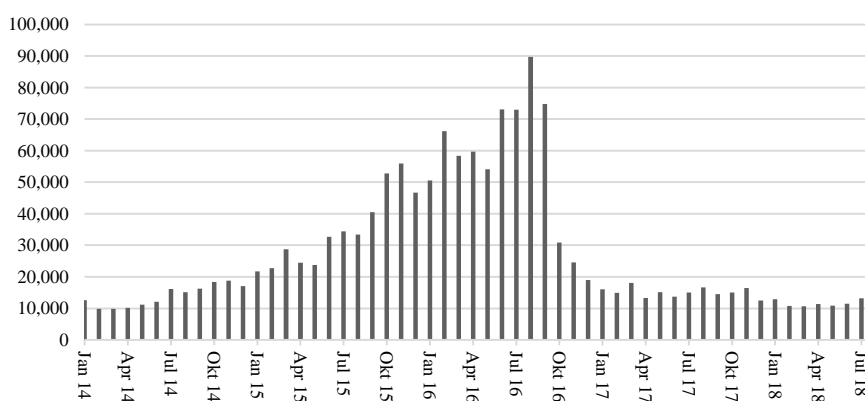Elisabeth K. Kraus, Nikola Sander, Lenore Sauer, Susanne Schührer

1. Introduction

The number of refugees and asylum-seekers around the globe has reached a new peak in 2018 with approx. 29.4 million persons (UNHCR 2019). Although the majority seeks protection in neighbouring countries, the on-going conflicts and oppressive political regimes in the Middle East and in Sub-Saharan Africa have also contributed to sharply rising numbers of people claiming asylum in Europe. Germany is one of the major destination countries in terms of absolute numbers with more than 740,000 men and women applying for asylum in 2016 alone (BAMF 2019; Figure 1). Furthermore, residence permits for family reasons have increased in Germany (BMI 2019) and beyond.

Figure 1: Trend of first-time asylum applications, 2014-2017

Source: BAMF (2019, p. 16, fig. 1)
Note: Monthly values cannot be added up to yearly values due to retroactive changes.

Despite the increasing importance of both forced migration and family migration processes, quantitative surveys on refugee populations in European destination countries are still scarce. This is partly due to the lack of reliable national databases and registers that can be used as a sampling frame. Existing surveys focus mainly on individuals and little attention has thus far been paid to families and their transnational arrangements and social integration into the host society. The new project *"Forced Migration and Transnational Family Arrangements – Eritrean and Syrian Refugees in Germany"* (TransFAR[1]) – carried out by the German Federal Institute for Population Research in cooperation with the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees – aims at filling this gap in data and empirical research. The new survey uses the Central Register of Foreigners of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees as a sampling frame for a nationally representative sample. The main objective of the survey is to improve the availability of reliable and representative data on migrants from Eritrea and Syria residing in Germany. The

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[1] www.bib.bund.de/EN/Research/Migration/Projects/forced-migration-transnational-family-arrangements

resulting dataset will allow empirical research into the diverse patterns of family arrangements, family structures and transnational activities, as well as the social integration in a comparative perspective.

This paper discusses the aim, scope and design of the survey and illustrates methodological as well as substantive results obtained as part of the pre-test. We elaborate on the suitability of a sampling frame based on the Central Register of Foreigners, the duration and content of the questionnaire, as well as item and unit non-responses. We highlight the potential of the survey for studying transnational family arrangements and social networks.

2. Motivation and objectives

It is generally accepted that the family context is important for the decision to migrate, to return, to re-unite with left-behind family members, and also for migrants' wellbeing and integration into the host society. Substantial research has been done on transnational families, in which one partner and/or one or several children remain in the country of origin while one or both partners migrate to another country. However, the majority of earlier work is qualitative in nature, or the focus is on labour migration. Only few studies and surveys have thus far looked at (transnational) family arrangements of refugee families in a comprehensive manner.

To fill this gap, the overall aim of the TransFAR project is to determine the structure and spatial dispersion of forced migrants' (transnational) families as well as the way in which these interact with social life and participation in the host country. To reach this aim, the project focusses on three key aspects:

1) Family: Diversity of family structures and arrangements and spatial dispersion of family members
2) "Doing transnational family": Transnational contact and mutual support between family members across national borders
3) Social life and social integration/participation: Social networks and life satisfaction in Germany and its interrelation with different forms of family structures and arrangements

3. Case selection: Eritrea and Syria

The survey covers two different countries of origin of refugees currently residing in Germany: Eritrea and Syria. These two countries serve as illustrative examples of the migration/flight dynamics established between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, and European refugee receiving countries. On the one hand, both countries experience severe political unrest and violent conflict and represent important origins of migration towards Germany and Europe. On the other hand, these two countries are characterised by distinct cultural, family and political systems and norms. Therefore, we anticipate different forms and degrees of transnationalism as well as diverse effects on social integration. Moreover, similar to other Sub-Saharan African countries, Eritreans might experience transnational family life by choice ('voluntary transnationalism'), and hence these arrangements are rather institutionalized, while transnationalism of Syrians may be rather enforced and/or accidentally/by chance ('involuntary transnationalism') (Al-Ali et al. 2001).

4. Methods and study design

Sampling procedure and sampling frame

Our target population comprises individuals with a Syrian or Eritrean citizenship aged 18 to 45 years at arrival, who moved to Germany between 30.06.2013 and 30.06.2019. As of March 2019, about 373,000 Syrians and 50,000 Eritreans (Table 1), who met these criteria, were registered as residing in Germany. The

lower age limit was chosen to ensure that individuals migrated as adults – i.e. not as (unaccompanied) minors, while the upper age limit marks the age up to which most migrations occur.

The goal of our survey is to complete 1,200 interviews. To enable in-depth comparative analyses across both nationalities, as well as for men and women, Eritreans and women of both nationalities are oversampled. Thus, we aim for 600 interviews for each nationality with equal shares of men and women. We use the Central Register of Foreigners (*Ausländerzentralregister*) of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees as a nationally representative sampling frame. The register contains all persons with foreign citizenship with an (intended) length of stay of at least three months, and has the by far best coverage of foreigners in Germany. The Research Centre of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is responsible for the sampling of this survey. The sample is drawn in a two-stage clustered stratification process. In the first step, a sample of municipal immigration offices is drawn within geographical clusters. In the second step, individuals from the target population registered at these offices are randomly selected. A disproportionate number for each of the four subgroups is drawn, however within groups, proportional to their geographical distribution across federal states and the size of the municipalities. Hence, while the sample was designed disproportionally regarding sex and nationality, it is laid out to be proportional to the geographical distribution of the target population (Kroh et al. 2018).

Table 1: Distribution of Syrian and Eritrean men and women in Germany, entering Germany between June 2013 and June 2019, aged 18 – 46 at arrival

	Syria	Eritrea
Men	242,986	36,981
	65%	74%
Women	130,042	12,983
	35%	26%
Total	373,028	49,964
	100%	100%

Source: Central Register of Foreigners, as of 31.03.2019, own calculations.

Survey mode

The survey is based on computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) and computer-assisted self-interviews (CASI). In both cases, an interviewer will be present. The items are programmed bilingually, meaning that two language versions (German and either Arabic, Tigrinya or English) are shown simultaneously on the screen. This procedure enables the interviews to be carried out among respondents who do not have a sufficient command of the German language, and with interviewers who are not able to speak the respective foreign language. Furthermore, Arabic-speaking interviewers are employed.

Survey instrument

For both origin groups the same questionnaire in different language versions will be used. It is a fully standardised survey instrument with only very few open-ended questions for residual categories. The German original version of the questionnaire will be translated into English, Syrian Arabic and Tigrinya.

The main aspects and dimensions covered by the questionnaire, in addition to the standard socio-economic and demographic questions, are:

1) Family:
   - Location, socio-economic information and living conditions of married and unmarried partners (also accounting for polygamous partnerships)
   - Locations and living conditions of children
   - Locations of parents, parents-in-law and siblings
   - Transnational contact and mutual support (remittances, caregiving, organizational support) between family members
   - Significance of family
2) Ego-centric personal social networks (based on name generators) covering the following three dimensions:
   - Discussion of important personal matters
   - Spending together free time/leisure time
   - Receiving instrumental support and help
   - Several demographic and socio-economic characteristics for each network member
3) Migration:
   - Reasons for migration
   - Persons involved in the decision to migrate
   - Migration/flight route
   - Previous migratory experience
4) Subjective wellbeing and life in Germany:
   - Satisfaction with life in general
   - Satisfaction with social life
   - Comparison of the situation upon arrival in Germany and at time of interview in the following dimensions: number of friends and acquaintances, quality of family life, and the financial situation

5. First results based on pre-test sample

The field work will be carried out in summer 2020; however, first results of the pre-test will be already available by March 2020. The pre-test sample includes a minimum of 50 completed interviews with individuals from the target population, half of them Eritrean and half Syrian. Furthermore, at least 7 persons per sex will be interviewed for each origin group. The pre-test will provide valuable insights into the suitability of questions for our specific target population and other specificities of refugee populations that are also of importance for future surveys in other countries.

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