

Humboldt Kolleg

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### *Global Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

- 1) Technological development and human health/ quality of life*
- 2) Climate change and environmental sustainability*
- 3) Democracy and cohesion in Europe*

### *Perceived Context of Reception, Sense of Belonging and Well-being among Syrian Refugees in a Mid-sized Town in Germany*

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2015 was the year of the “welcoming culture”, in which Germany opened its borders for hundreds and thousands of people from Syria and other war-inflicted regions. Since then, the integration of refugees in the receiving societies has been an important issue. Although there is some research examining the initial experiences of refugees arriving in Germany, we know less about the experiences and attitudes of the refugees after they have settled down in their new home countries. In this study, we focused on the experiences of Syrian refugees, as one of the largest groups of refugees that arrived in Germany since 2015 in a mid-sized town in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. In an online survey conducted among Syrian refugees in Hagen (N = 112, snowball sampling) we examined the perceived context of reception, discrimination experiences, contact experiences, sense of belonging, acculturation attitudes and psychological well-being, as well as the perceived challenges to their social integration.

Results show that, despite some experiences with discrimination, there is a positive perceived context of reception. A large majority of the participants identifies with the city and sees their future in Hagen. Furthermore, almost all respondents welcome participation in German society, while at the same time want to maintain their own culture. Language, finding appropriate work and German bureaucracy, as well as socializing with Germans were listed as the main challenges. Multivariate regression analyses showed that especially the experiences made with local authorities are important for the participants' well-being and sense of belonging. Practical implications are discussed.

**Jolanda van der Noll** is a senior researcher and lecturer at the Chair of Community Psychology at the FernUniversität in Hagen. Dr. Van der Noll has broad interests within political psychology, with a particular focus on intergroup relations, Islamophobia, integration, social cohesion, and the role of religion in society. Her research has been widely published in international journals.