

Between civil war and integration—Refugees and the challenges and opportunities of societal change in North Rhine-Westphalia

Module 4

Peace negotiations, refugee rights and resources in the Syrian and Afghan peace processes

Peace negotiations can represent decisive turning points for societies suffering war. Yet surprisingly little is known about how these negotiations develop, often over the course of several years and with continuously varying constellations of actors. In NRW, Bonn hosted the Afghan peace negotiations in 2001, and individuals who had fled Afghanistan played a prominent role. Paradoxically, the state of NRW is now home to the highest number of Syrian refugees in Europe, yet they find no representation in the present Syria negotiations in Geneva/Astana.

While there is no fixed format in peace processes, this module asks: To what extent have refugee communities in NRW been able to use their network resources and subsequently been acknowledged as parties in peace negotiations, or if not, why? More generally, the module will seek to answer the following question: How do peace negotiations unfold, and to what extent can different participants in the process shape this newly emerging space of opportunities both in terms of actors and contents produced?

Following Miyazaki (2004), the question of what constitutes Hope for participants is utilized as guiding method to understand their individual visions of the future while simultaneously serving as a means of their empowerment. This module builds on an oral history approach, which involves participants in the ongoing Syrian and 2001 Afghan peace negotiations to trace, document and interpret the history of these processes. In parallel, it also draws on individuals and groups who were (in-)voluntarily excluded from the process and the differing roles of refugee communities in both cases. In this manner, a critical analysis of diverging narratives serves to preserve the history of these processes from an internal perspective with nevertheless significant post-war impact and to produce lessons for future ones.