

# ILS TRENDS



## ARRIVAL INFRASTRUCTURES: HELPING NEW ARRIVALS FIND THEIR FEET IN GERMANY

Whether new arrivals find their feet in Germany is no matter of course. Immigrants arriving in German cities find themselves faced with a variety of barriers, whether legal, linguistic or social. Arrival infrastructures can help people access such important resources as housing, work, language courses, education and social networks. Of key importance in this respect are urban space and, in particular, neighbourhoods long characterised by migration and featuring established support infrastructures. But which infrastructures play a decisive role in the arrival process? Which infrastructures facilitate arrival? And how can these be made accessible? This TRENDS issue presents the results of the international AIMEC research project, with a focus on Dortmund's Nordstadt district.

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Research shows that whether migrants find their feet in their new environment depends not only on their individual backgrounds and efforts, but is also largely shaped by local contexts and resources (Phillimore 2020). One key aspect is an individual's access to resources such as housing, work, welfare benefits, education or care services. Certain urban districts such as Dortmund's Nordstadt play a special role in such arrival processes, not only because people find their first home here, but also because of their concentrations of people and organisations who can be important door openers for people finding their feet in a new country (Hans et al. 2019, Hanhörster/Wessendorf 2020, see ILS TRENDS 02/2020). The wide range of services and structures on offer to steer and accelerate the arrival of migrants in certain directions (but also possibly slowing it down or even block-

ing it) are referred to as arrival infrastructures (Meeus et al. 2019). The infrastructure perspective enables us to think beyond (administrative) boundaries, paying particular attention to the (in) accessibility of resources and structures (Bovo 2020; El-Kayed/Keskinkilic 2023). The focus is on the quality of support structures for people arriving, looking at their first few months in the country, a period which also has an impact on future spatial and social mobility. Between 2021 and 2024, the research project AIMEC (Arrival Infrastructures and Migrant Newcomers in European Cities, funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council ESRC, Grant Agreement No. ES/T015810/1) studied how arrival infrastructures shape the arrival processes of migrant newcomers and enable them to find their feet in society. In three neighbourhoods – Dortmund, London and Brussels –, arrival

spaces, structures and processes for migrant newcomers with different socio-economic and legal statuses as well as different national backgrounds were examined. This TRENDS issue focuses on the results of the Dortmund case study.

### **DORTMUND'S NORDSTADT: STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY**

Accounting for around a tenth of the city's total population, some 60,000 people live in Nordstadt, an inner-city neighbourhood north of Dortmund's main railway station. A working-class neighbourhood, Nordstadt has been characterised by migration right from the start. More than 75% of the population currently has a migrant background, and more than half of them are foreign nationals (Stadt Dortmund 2023a). In recent years, Nordstadt has been shaped above all by the influx of EU

citizens, mainly from Romania, Bulgaria and Spain, as well as refugees, especially from Syria, Somalia and Ukraine. At 477 changes of residence per 1,000 residents, the demographic fluctuation rate – calculated as the number of people moving into, out of or within the neighbourhood over a four-year period – is significantly higher than the city average of 258 (Stadt Dortmund 2019: 56-57). Nordstadt is a low-income neighbourhood, with more than twice as many residents (39.4%) receiving welfare benefits than the city as a whole (Stadt Dortmund 2019: 118).

In recent decades, numerous structures have been created in Dortmund to facilitate the arrival of migrant newcomers (Neßler et al. 2024; see also Dymarz et al. 2018), with the city administration and a large number of civil society organisations working together to create good arrival conditions. As part of the ‘Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy’ (see info box 1), numerous support structures have been created, many of them in Nordstadt. These are complemented by often informal yet

well-established support practices between residents in Nordstadt and a large number of opportunity structures for exchanging information, finding work, and networking, such as ethnic supermarkets or religious institutions (Hans/Hanhörster 2020, Kurtenbach/Rosenberger 2021).

Forming the context for our research, the many formal and informal support structures in Dortmund’s Nordstadt were examined with the help of three methodological building blocks<sup>1</sup>: (1) 35 semi-structured interviews with people from different countries of origin (see fig. 1) who have arrived in Dortmund in the last ten years and have a connection to Nordstadt (housing, work, language course, etc.); (2) 45 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from the city administration and civil society as well as other individuals involved in formal and informal support services; (3) 14 months of participant observations in informal and formal arrival infrastructures (e.g. commercial support services and a neighbourhood education centre).

The coded data gathered by these methods forms the basis for this TRENDS issue. In addition, we selectively incorporate findings and practical examples from the other project case studies in London (Newham) and Brussels (Cureghem) (see info box 2).

### WHICH ARRIVAL INFRASTRUCTURES ARE IMPORTANT FOR NEW ARRIVALS?

Due to its density of arrival infrastructures, Dortmund’s Nordstadt takes an important role extending beyond the city limits. This is reflected in the fact that places such as counselling centres, shops and religious institutions are not

<sup>1</sup> The empirical data collection was carried out in cooperation with the ReROOT project (Arrival Infrastructures as Sites of Integration for Recent Newcomers, funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101004704). Interviewees’ names have been pseudonymised. Some of the interview statements have been translated or adapted for better readability.

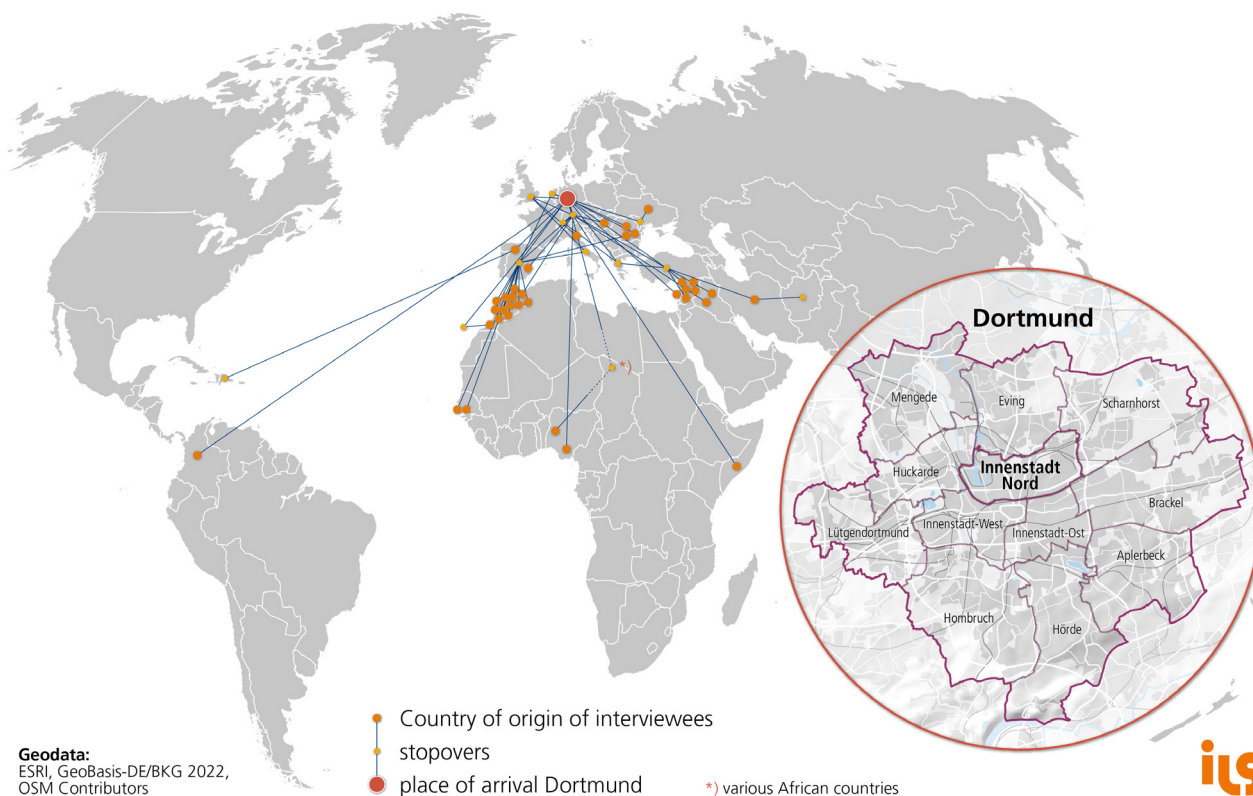


Figure 1: Countries of origin and intermediate stations of our interviewees (Own figure)

only frequented by Nordstadt residents but also people from other Dortmund districts and even neighbouring towns. This role as an arrival neighbourhood is characterised not only by formal support structures but also more informal practices, such as chance encounters and the exchange of information between residents in everyday places such as shops, cafés or public spaces. Drawing on the results of our research, we go on to present the range of arrival infrastructures in Nordstadt, looking at six different categories (based on Xiang/Lindquist 2014; see fig. 3). While there is a certain degree of overlapping, each is shaped by different constellations of formal and informal factors.

**State** structures such as immigration authorities, social welfare offices and job centres play an important role in the arrival process. Certain institutions, including the job centre and the youth welfare office, offer advice services in Nordstadt's residential areas

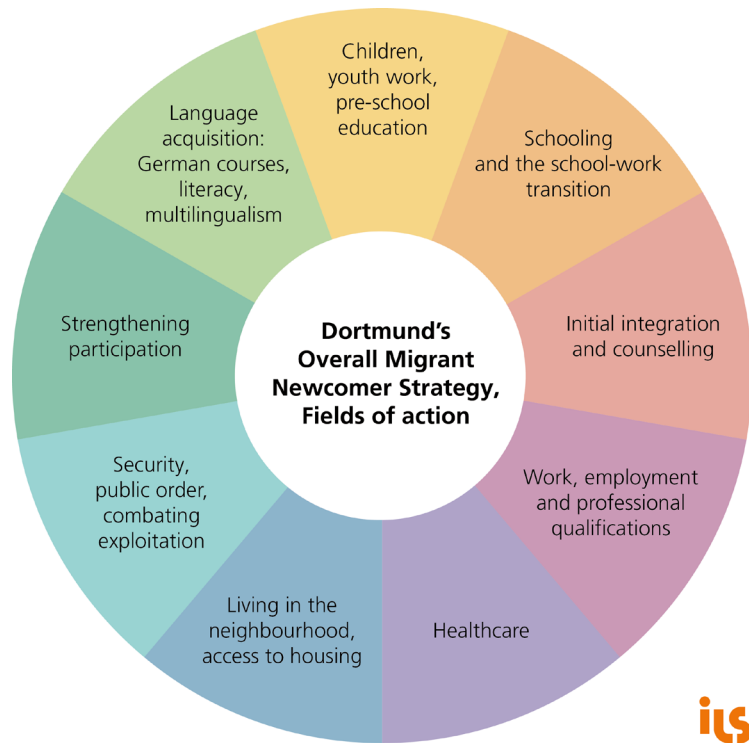


Figure 2: Fields of action of Dortmund's 'Overall Newcomer Strategy' (Own figure, based on Stadt Dortmund 2023b)

#### INFO BOX 1

## DORTMUND'S 'OVERALL MIGRANT NEWCOMER STRATEGY'

The strategy was developed in the context of the rise in migration following the EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria. Established in 2011, the first network involved a large number of municipal and civil society stakeholders. In 2013, Dortmund City Council decided that the city would systematically support migrant newcomers. Under the leadership of the city's department of social affairs, a framework for action on migration from South-East Europe was developed, on the basis of which the 'Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy' was created. The focus was on supporting Roma, a group already affected by exclusion and poverty in Bulgaria and Romania and whose situation remains precarious in Germany due to legal exclusions and difficult living and working conditions. In the

context of the influx of refugees in 2015/16, mainly from Syria, the target group was expanded. The strategy now focuses on different groups of migrant newcomers. The 'Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy' is based on interdisciplinary and inter-agency cooperation on an equal footing. The work of the more than 100 active members currently covers nine fields of activity, from pre-school education to healthcare (see fig. 2). An important basic principle is that each field is coordinated by a tandem consisting of representatives from the city administration and civil society organisations. The 'Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy' attempts to close gaps in public services that particularly affect migrant newcomers in the form of (bureaucratic and legal) obstacles and/or discrimination.

For example, there are consultation hours for children, young people and pregnant women who do not have health insurance, a so-called 'clearing centre' to establish health insurance protection in the regular system, as well as projects to find accommodation for young homeless people and to integrate newcomers into work. The strategy forms an umbrella for a large number of projects, most of which are financed by subsidies. Many of these are developed and implemented in an inter-agency manner, such as the ecumenical contact point 'Willkommen Europa'. While several municipal integration measures are supported by the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia, many measures require ongoing acquisitions and the investment of municipal budget funds.

## INFO BOX 2

## A LOOK BEYOND OUR OWN BACKYARD: NEWHAM (LONDON) AND CUREGHEM (BRUSSELS)

Located in East London, the borough of Newham is home to more than 350,000 people. A working-class district, Newham has historically been shaped by the Port of London and the rail industry.

Migration and diversity are part of the neighbourhood's past and present: Since the late 1940s, new arrivals have mainly come from the Caribbean, South Asia and Africa in the context of Britain's post-colonial restructuring. The number of East European residents in Newham increased considerably as a result of the EU's eastward expansion, while people from other European countries, including many with roots in Latin America, Africa or South Asia, have also increasingly been moving there.

Newham currently has one of the country's highest population fluctuation rates, with more than a fifth of the population either moving out of or into the district within a twelve-month period. Despite its location close to London's financial district, the area is

one of the most deprived in the UK, as witnessed by the high child poverty rate. 32% of the population live on welfare benefits. Newham offers few state-funded services for newcomers, mainly due to the government's austerity and anti-migration policies.

Since Brexit and the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act, homelessness has increased dramatically, especially among EU citizens. Until they fulfil the criteria for settled status, most migrants have only limited access to welfare benefits and state infrastructures such as social housing and childcare. Asylum-seekers are often housed in hard-to-reach hostels with poor-quality accommodation. In many places, support is only provided on a voluntary basis or as a commercial service.

Located close to the centre of Brussels, Cureghem developed during the industrialisation of Belgium between the Brussels-Charleroi Canal and a dense railway network. Very densely populated, it is home to almost 30,000 (registered) inhabitants, more than

half of whom have a migration background. The neighbourhood is historically characterised by labour migration – a phenomenon that increased in the post-war decades, with workers coming especially from Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco and Turkey. As in the other case studies, the neighbourhood's nationalities have diversified considerably since the early 2000s. Economically, the district is shaped by the former abattoir, now a huge weekly market, as well as by the import and export of cars and the wholesale trade (textiles, cheap electronics, household goods, etc.).

The Brussels housing market is tight, meaning that many people in Cureghem live in poor housing conditions. There are also many homeless people in the neighbourhood, as the Belgian state has suspended the provision of accommodation to single male asylum-seekers. However, there are some civil society services for homeless people, especially near the Gare du Midi train station.

With its wide range of information and work opportunities as well as formal and informal support structures, Cureghem's importance stretches far beyond the neighbourhood's boundaries. In addition to the Belgian government's rather hostile attitude towards migrants and a lack of financial resources, Belgium's multi-level federal system and the neighbourhood's administrative fragmentation – stretching across several municipalities in the Brussels region – make the work of local stakeholders more difficult.



in addition to their main locations, either within their own offices or on the premises of civil society organisations. There are also municipal advice services such as the Migration and Integration Service Centre MigraDO (see info box 3) specifically targeting migrant newcomers. Other institutions, such as schools, have also developed into important arrival infrastructures. In addition, there are state-funded programmes such as integration courses.

**Civil society** arrival infrastructures are run by civil society organisations such as charities, clubs, religious communities or initiatives. Though many of the organisations were not originally founded to support new arrivals, they have been continually adapting to new target groups and their changing needs. Highly visible and often specialised in the needs of newcomers, civil society arrival infrastructures are particularly

concentrated in Nordstadt, more so than in the other two case studies. Even though voluntary work plays an important role in this area, many services in Nordstadt have been professionalised and are financed by public, mostly project-based funds. Examples often mentioned by our interviewees include Willkommen Europa, Grünbau, Raum vor Ort, Train of Hope e.V., Planerladen, VMDO e.V., Caritas as well as lokal willkommen, a cooperation project between various NGOs and Dortmund's city administration.

**Social** networks were cited by many interviewees as the most important support. Including family and friends, many of these acquaintances either already existed prior to migration or developed after arrival. Our three case studies indicate that people with personal arrival experience are the ones most likely to share their knowledge and resources with other migrant newcomers. Family



Square in front of St Joseph's Church in Nordstadt

and friends who migrated to Germany earlier play an important role, as was the case with our interviewee Laila<sup>2</sup>, who came to Dortmund during the coronavirus pandemic:

*“At the start, we only had my husband's family. They showed us everything and also translated. They helped us get to know the right places and shops here“*

*(Laila, own translation)*

It is often children who learn the language faster and then sometimes support a wider circle of family members.

**Commercial** arrival infrastructures offer support for a fee. In Nordstadt, there are both players operating exploitatively, charging several thousand euros for brokerage services, and those offering support services for a comparatively small fee, e. g. as a service in shops.

Despite the sometimes poor quality, commercial arrival infrastructures provided important support for many interviewees, even if the associated costs were high. This applied, for example, to new arrivals who had not yet gained access to state, civil society or social structures, who lacked people they could trust in these structures or appropriate services, or who needed short-term help.

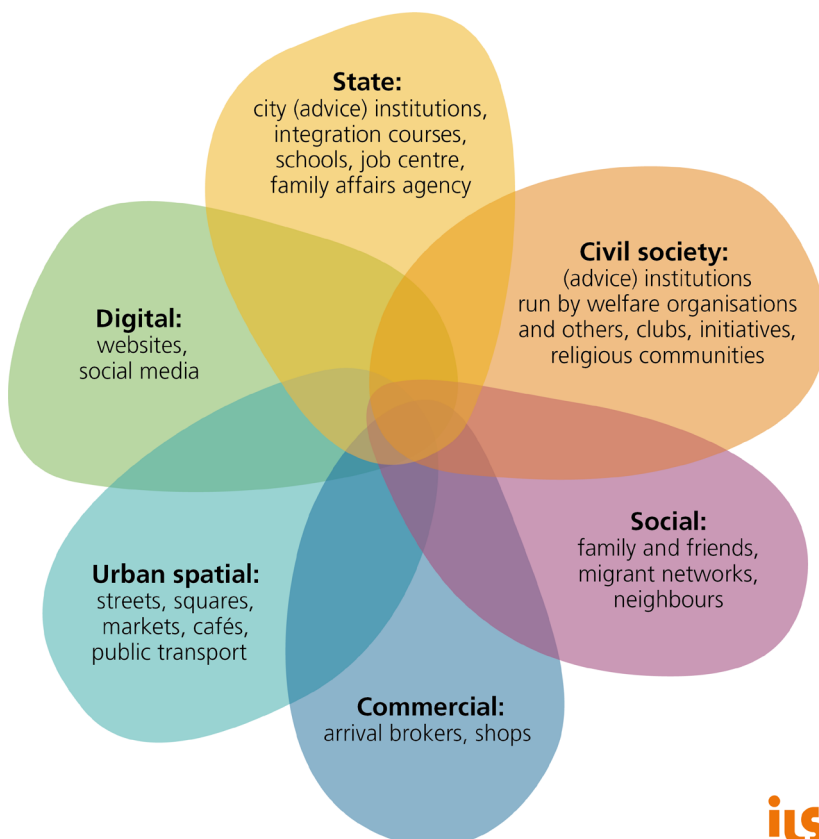


Figure 3: The six categories of arrival infrastructures in Nordstadt (Own figure)



<sup>2</sup> The names of the interviewees are pseudonyms. Some of the interview statements have been translated or linguistically adapted for better readability.

Public and semi-public spaces are examples of **urban-spatial** arrival infrastructures. Interviewees reported a variety of chance encounters and (situational) support on the street, in squares and markets, on buses and trams, in stores and cafés. Central markets and shopping streets, such as Nordmarkt and Münsterstraße (one section of which is also known as “Arab” or “Moroccan” Street) with its many small shops, were important places for our interviewees.

Finally, **digital** arrival infrastructures, in the form of internet platforms and social media channels, are important sources of information and support for new arrivals. Digital, often Dortmund-wide networks, such as the Facebook group ‘Українці Дортмунда - Ukrainians in Dortmund’ with more than 15.000 members, the Facebook group ‘Extranjeros en Dortmund’ with more than 1.500 members or a private WhatsApp App group for Spanish-Moroccan women with more than 200 members, help distribute knowledge. Alongside these local networks, there are also numerous transnational digital networks, some of

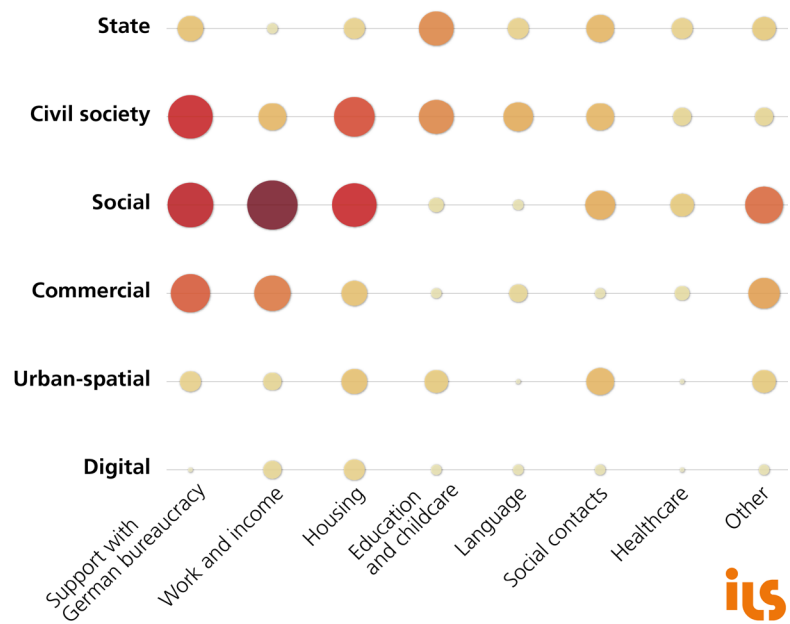
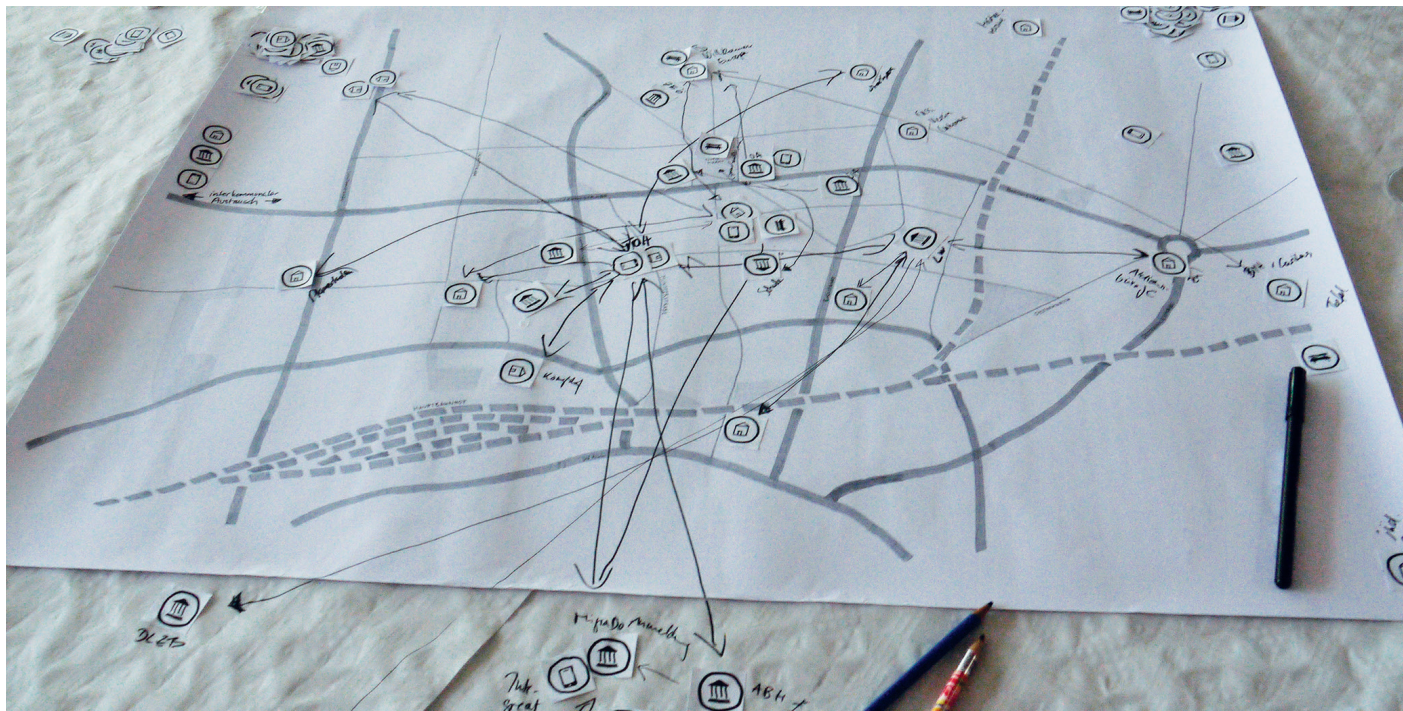


Figure 4: Arrival infrastructures and their (subjectively perceived) relevance for newcomers' access to resources. (Based on coding of interviews with migrants) (Own figure)

which provide support in the country of origin prior to departure.

Arrival infrastructures differ not only in terms of their organisational forms and logics, but also in their importance for migrant newcomers and their specific

role in arrival processes (see fig. 4). Although state structures, such as the job centre or the schools department, often regulate access to resources such as work/income (welfare benefits), education (school enrolment) and language (covering costs for language courses), it



Mapping of various infrastructures at a workshop in May 2022



Münsterstraße in Dortmund's Nordstadt

is interesting to note that they are rarely mentioned as support structures. Similarly, municipal counselling facilities such as the MigraDO one-stop shop (see info box 3), which started offering its services during the research, barely featured in our surveys. The focus was much more on people and places primarily seen as intermediaries providing support in application processes for the different areas. Civil society infrastructures also played an important role. For example, one interviewee, who had been living in Nordstadt for about a year at the time of being interviewed, spoke of the importance of an advice centre:

*“It was very difficult for us to find someone to support us at the immigration office and in our search for a school. But then we got to know ‘Willkommen Europe.’ They’re very friendly there and speak all languages. They show you what you have to do and they’re really friendly. They’ll help you find a job or a school. [...] That was the easiest way we found here, and it meant we had no difficulties“*

*(Fatou, own translation)*

Other interviewees also emphasised the important role of civil society arrival infrastructures, especially for support with red tape and in finding language courses, work, schools and childcare facilities. Even though civil society or-

ganisations often provide support with rent problems and sometimes also with the search for housing, initial access to housing was largely arranged via social and commercial arrival infrastructures – in some cases in the country of origin. Immediately after arrival, especially for EU citizens, social or commercial infrastructures often provided a lot of support in a multitude of interlinked ways, such as resident registration, finding housing and a job, and opening a bank account. For example, one interviewee who moved to Nordstadt from Spain in 2021 talked about her arrival experience and the support she received from an arrival broker (in Arabic: Simsar):

*“The most important thing at the start is housing. But if you come from abroad, without a job, without anything, you can’t get a good apartment [...] because you don’t have a contract, you know? [...] And you need to be registered, because you can’t work here without registration. So that’s why the first contact was a Simsar, because he’s the one who’ll find you an apartment. Once you’ve found **some-where** to live, you register.“*

*(Rachida, translation by language mediator Latifa)*

Chance encounters in (semi-)public spaces also played an important role in helping interviewees find jobs and so-

cial contacts. The services offered by the state and civil society organisations are thus not sufficient or sufficiently accessible, especially when it comes to support in dealing with red tape, finding housing and, in some cases, employment. Social, commercial, urban and digital infrastructures therefore play an important role in newcomers’ arrival process. At the same time, they are not always able to ensure satisfactory access to resources. Many interviewees reported poor housing conditions, errors in application procedures or slow help in finding schools and childcare facilities. Moreover, support from these more informal infrastructures means that help is more dependent on a newcomer’s social contacts and financial resources.

#### HOW CAN ARRIVAL INFRASTRUCTURES BE MADE ACCESSIBLE?

Arrival infrastructures must be designed in an accessible way in order to provide people with support. Based on our observations and interviews – both with new arrivals and people working in formal and informal arrival infrastructures – we identified five design principles important for the accessibility of arrival infrastructures:

**Creating spatial accessibility and visibility:** Migrant newcomers combine various ways of finding and accessing arrival infrastructures, depending on their language skills, mobility, etc. In many cases, different places are visited upon arrival. Services that are offered in an inviting manner or are visible from the street are more accessible. During the Covid-19 pandemic, crowds of people often formed in front of these contact points. Several interviewees gained access to the services as a result, as was the case with Saida, in Dortmund since 2018, who had this to say in 2022:

*“I found ‘Raum vor Ort’ a year ago. There were lots of people standing in front of it and at first, I thought it was a kindergarten. Then I found out that they were offering help with papers. I’ve been coming here ever since.“*

*(Saida, translation by language mediator Latifa)*



Until then, Saida had received support from commercial agents. Though she had previously already heard about a Caritas centre, it had been too far away from her home, especially as a mother with a child in a pram. For people with small children and with limited mobility, it is very important to have services close to home or along routes taken every day. Many organisations take these considerations into account when choosing a location:

*“We actually specifically looked for premises on Münsterstraße because it’s an arrival point where lots of people come and go.”*



*(Chairwoman of a migrant organisation with premises on Münsterstraße)*

**Using social networks and individuals as bridge-builders:** Migrant newcomers make use of the (arrival) experiences of others in their immediate sur-

roundings and social networks. Many find offers of support through word of mouth, as was the case with our interviewee Ioana who has lived with her family in Nordstadt since 2018:

*“I came here with a friend. [...] And she said to me: Come along with me, we’ll have a coffee, talk to other people. Maybe you can get help there – for your papers, you don’t have to pay more, for a German course, for something else. Come along with me if you want.”*

*(Ioana)*

The embedding of infrastructures in social, and especially migrant networks is therefore an important prerequisite for accessibility. Several organisations and institutions make targeted use of newcomers as volunteers and full-time employees to strengthen bridges to different social groups (see info box 4 and 5).

### **Leveraging strategic moments and transitions:**

It seems important to identify key moments in the arrival process and to leverage these to access information and advice. Such moments include resident registration, the (spatial) starting point for advice at MigraDo (see info box 3). The decentralised contact points of the local civil society integration network ‘lokal willkommen’ are a further example. These target the transition from the initial reception centre to a migrant’s own apartment. **A good network of services is therefore also important.**

This often requires taking migrants by the hand and showing them where they have to go. Where different institutions are represented in one place or are active through consultation hours in different neighbourhood counselling centres, accessibility is increased and barriers broken down.

### **INFO BOX 3**

## **ONE-STOP-SHOPS:**

### **‘MigraDO’ in Dortmund and ‘Welcome Newham’**

One-stop-shops are central contact points bundling several (bureaucratic) processes. In our case Dortmund and the London borough of Newham, one-stop-shops were set up in 2022 to provide targeted support for migrant newcomers, allowing them to complete several administrative processes all in one go and obtain advice.

‘MigraDO’, Dortmund’s service centre for migration and integration, was initially intended for refugees, but the target group was expanded during the start-up phase. Since opening in 2022, it has been open to all those moving to Dortmund from Germany and abroad. Located in Dortmund’s city centre in

the immediate vicinity of the Immigration Office and Citizen Service Centre, it is open five days a week. The EU-funded centre offers free arrival advice in people’s native language or, if necessary, translated by video interpreter, covering such topics as housing, schools, language support and welfare benefits, depending on their needs. In addition, the centre bundles registration for EU citizens, provision of advice by immigration authorities, the job centre and welfare associations, as well as advice on language courses.

The one-stop-shop ‘Welcome Newham’ was initially set up for Ukrainian refugees, but quickly expanded to

target new arrivals of various legal statuses and countries of origin. The one-stop-shop opens once a week in a local library. It is characterised by its ease of access: advice is multilingual and culturally sensitive and reminiscent of a “shop”, for example featuring information tables on various topics such as housing, health, etc. The aim of this municipal, state-funded initiative is to prevent homelessness among new arrivals and to provide them with a safe arrival. To this end, administrative staff and civil society organisations offer support in accessing welfare benefits, healthcare, school enrolment, residence permits, language courses, work and housing.

**Expanding opening hours:** Many of our newly arrived interviewees reported difficulties in making appointments with state institutions. The pandemic-induced switch to making appointments online and the discontinuation of open consultation hours posed major barriers for many people, which they were only able to overcome with the help of increased efforts by civil society, social and commercial arrival infrastructures.

A look at commercial arrival infrastructures and their accessibility, including evenings or weekends, also shows that people sometimes need extended opening hours, for example due to their working hours or family commitments. We observed that many employees and volunteers in civil society and state organisations were trying to meet this need despite limi-

ted resources, working beyond their contractual hours and being available online.

**Avoiding discrimination:** Migrant newcomers must first build up trust, particularly in formal infrastructures. Many civil society organisations and some state institutions show that a discrimination-sensitive attitude, multilingual employees and, above all, employees with their own experience of arrival are a great help in building up trust and mutual understanding.

Sara, who works as an educational mediator (see info box 5) at a primary school and is also active as a volunteer, reports on how her work makes educational institutions more accessible:

*“Yes, the kindergarten and school have also undergone a learning process. In the past, children used to be given a let-*

*ter, but their parents didn’t understand it. [...] Now the teachers know what to do. I’m in a WhatsApp group with every teacher, and when they want something, they say to me: [Sara], can you send a message in Romanian to these parents? So, I send out the message in Spanish, Portuguese, Romani, Romanian and then the parents understand.”*

*(Sara, educational mediator at a primary school in Nordstadt)*

Specific individuals in organisations and institutions often play an important role for newcomers. Their designation as intermediaries, multipliers or mediators (see info box 5 and image on page 13) refers to their central mediating and bridge-building role. If they have to stop working, for example because project funding has run out, this often has negative consequences, as contacts that have been established are irretrievably



“What does arriving mean to you?”. An activity at the Science Walk in May 2023 in Nordstadt. Among other things, the event was about bringing science and research about *the Nordstadt* into *the Nordstadt*.

## INFO BOX 4

## MIGRANT NEWCOMERS ACTIVE IN SHAPING THE ‘RAUM VOR ORT’ (DORTMUND) AND THE ‘RENEWAL PROGRAMME’ (LONDON)

In Dortmund’s ‘Raum vor Ort’, a neighbourhood education centre run by the Catholic KEFB (Katholische Erwachsenen- und Familienbildung), migrant newcomers not only take part in activities, but also design them themselves. Refugees, EU citizens, residents and students work closely together to create a provision reflecting the needs and interests of the various target groups. As they are well networked in their respective communities, they are also seen as mediators between newcomers, service providers and institutions. They introduce new developments

to ‘Raum vor Ort’, receive training for example from the job centre and the families agency with the aim of passing on their knowledge, and make ‘Raum vor Ort’ services known. As tutors, they also receive a fee.

In the same vein, newcomers play an important role as volunteers in the ‘Renewal Programme’, a neighbourhood centre in Newham. One target group here are asylum-seekers, many of whom have been housed in inadequate accommodation for years and are not allowed to work. They distribute food,

help other newcomers with red tape, run the neighbourhood café and help with translations. Although they only receive a flat-rate allowance and get their travel expenses reimbursed, the volunteers reported how important this work was for them, even if they themselves still lived in sometimes precarious conditions: Getting involved helped them structure their day-to-day lives, make new contacts and acquire new knowledge, and gave them a sense of belonging and participation.

broken off. Fatou spoke of the consequences of the ending of the contract of the employee responsible for her case:

*“I don’t have anywhere else to go. I don’t have anybody else. But she told me that her contract had ended and she could no longer work with me. So now I’m all alone.”*

*(Fatou, own translation)*

Trust and mutual understanding are important factors for the accessibility of arrival infrastructures. This underlines the importance of long-term support services.

### WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE TAILORED DEVELOPMENT OF ARRIVAL INFRASTRUCTURES?

Arrival infrastructures must not only be accessible but must also provide tailored access to resources. We see the interaction of two factors as crucial for the demand-oriented design of arrival infrastructures: orientation towards newcomers’ circumstances and structural embedding.

**Availability:** During the arrival process, many newcomers face the challenge of gaining access to important social resources and finding their way around the (bureaucratic) system and the new city. In order to create tailored services and structures, those planning and running arrival infrastructures must keep an eye on current developments, new target groups and new needs. This happens, for example, during open consultation hours, as explained by the head of a social institution in Nordstadt:

*“In these consultations, we talk to people about their problems, finding out exactly what is needed. I can’t just sit in my office and think up something, [...] ‘It would be really cool to do this or that course’. That completely ignores people’s needs.”*

*(Head of a neighbourhood education centre in Nordstadt)*

To keep track of current developments, civil society organisations and the city authorities have worked closely together for years in numerous net-

works, such as the ‘Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy’ (see info box 1). New developments, findings and challenges are shared, and approaches discussed with a view to constantly adapting and developing provision. In many organisations and institutions, newcomers are actively involved in designing services, e.g. as lecturers and native speaker advisors. Up to now, however, this has often taken the form of voluntary or low-paid work. Moreover, there has been little direct participation of newcomers at a strategic level to date. In this respect, initiatives such as the Arrival Lab (DE: Labor Ankommen) (see info box 6) are calling for a rethink.

**Structural view:** Project work needs to be strategically embedded. The ‘Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy’ covers a wide range of provisions, many of which target specific groups. They are designed to support people in particularly precarious circumstances and with special needs. At the same time, however, many of the



Impression of the Science Walk in May 2023

projects also compensate for gaps in standard services – either because welfare state services regulated by EU and German laws, such as welfare benefits and health insurance, are not available (without barriers) to all residents, or because public services have inadequate resources. Two examples of the latter are the lack of several hundred primary school places and the acute shortage of paediatricians. These deficits can be traced back to supra-local planning errors (e. g. by the association of statutory health insurance physicians).

Civil society and community initiatives such as school substitution programmes or consultation hours for

children without health insurance cannot and should not offset these deficits. We observed a high level of awareness among Dortmund's stakeholders of the structural causes behind lacking resources, or the difficulties in accessing them. Especially when dealing with the precarious living conditions of EU citizens and in the context of supra-local strategic work, many stakeholders underlined the city's comparatively progressive attitude:

*“Because Dortmund, compared to other cities, has understood that welfare benefits are important for [...] people, as this means that they are not severely affected by poverty and that thus crime rates are low. [...] I see Dortmund as a pioneer*

*when it comes to getting things moving at federal level.”*

*(Chairperson of a migrant organisation in Nordstadt)*

State and civil society stakeholders as well as newcomers themselves (see info box 5 and 6) are drawing attention to structural problems, responding to them with specific projects and trying to break down barriers. At the same time, they are calling for higher political levels to take responsibility for opening up and expanding regulatory systems and reliably financing arrival infrastructures.

#### INFO BOX 5

## MEDIATORS IN STATE STRUCTURES IN DORTMUND AND BRUSSELS

There are so-called educational mediators in nine Dortmund primary schools. They work to make schools less discriminatory and at the same time improve the educational opportunities of Roma pupils. Themselves Roma, especially of these part-time mediators have only been in Dortmund for a few years. Following a success-

ful four-year pilot phase, the project has been funded by the North Rhine-Westphalian programme ‘Vast vaste - Hand in Hand in NRW’ since 2023.

Similar experiences were reported from Brussels. ‘Preventiservice’, a department of the Anderlecht district administration, employs intercultural

mediators on a permanent basis. They act as linguistic and culturally sensitive mediators between the administration and migrant newcomers. They work in institutions comparable to citizen and social services as well as in schools.

## CONCLUSION

Especially in the context of current and ongoing crises, it is important to create opportunities for everyone to participate in society, right from the start. Populist claims that making access to social resources more difficult will deter immigration are not true – as also shown by comparisons with the AIMEC case studies in Belgium and the United Kingdom where immigration numbers are high despite hostile migration politics. Instead, the case studies show that such policies and attitudes clearly have detrimental effects on social cohesion and the future prospects of people who are (whether temporarily or long-term) part of our society.

In the context of the AIMEC research project, we were able to show how opportunities for participation are co-designed at city level: In Dortmund's Nordstadt, state, civil society, social, commercial, urban and digital arrival infrastructures provide orientation and

enable migrant newcomers to access resources such as housing, work and language courses. To ensure equal access to important social resources, participation should not be dependent on newcomers' respective social contacts and financial resources but should be created and promoted by the state. Dortmund's Nordstadt features a large number of civil society and state infrastructures. These must be both accessible and access-enabling. In other words, arrival infrastructures should ensure and enable participation in society.

Our analysis shows that the accessibility of arrival infrastructures is significantly promoted by spatial accessibility, appropriate opening hours, social and structural embedding and non-discriminatory design. Dortmund shows how access can be made possible despite precarious living conditions, discrimination and deficient and non-inclusive regulatory structures. This requires flexible structures aligned to

current developments and the needs of new arrival groups. Structurally well-established in Dortmund, the co-operation between civil society and the city's administration is an important building block. We also see that newcomers themselves, even if they are still in the process of arriving, can make important contributions and pass on their own experiences, insofar as they are supported accordingly.

At the same time, it is also clear that structural deficits can only be offset by local-level projects to a limited extent and with immense (financial) resources. Instead, work should be done – at all levels of government – to reduce (bureaucratic) barriers, open up the necessary regulatory systems, expand public service infrastructures and reliably finance established arrival infrastructures. This is the only way to ensure equal participation for all, newcomers and established residents, in the long term.



Outcome of a workshop in January 2022 with volunteer and full-time mediators in the local area on their role in arrival processes

## INFO BOX 6

## PROMOTING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE ‘ARRIVAL LAB‘ (‘LABOR ANKOMMEN‘)

The Arrival Lab is a transdisciplinary network with the aim of strengthening newcomers' social and political participation. Launched in 2023 by 'Raum vor Ort', a local educational institution run by the Catholic church (KEFB), it now has eight member organisations (educational and social institutions, migrant organisations and academia) active in the Nordstadt and beyond. The starting point for the Arrival Lab was the observation that many migrant newcomers had no voice in democratic processes and were rarely involved in decision-making. As one example of the Lab's

work, a campaign for more educational equality (picture below) was able to awaken the political interest of new Dortmund residents, giving them a voice and thus spotlighting their needs, such as kindergarten places for their children. As the term 'lab' suggests, new methods are developed and tested in the Arrival Lab, whether for the political education and participation of migrant newcomers, or for developing tools for professionals working with them. At the same time, by involving and addressing decision-makers, the Lab aims to draw greater attention to the needs of migrant

newcomers and the structural barriers preventing their social and political participation. In so doing, it contributes to change. For example, several workshops on political education as well as a specialist workshop for employees in civil society organisations and the administration were organised in 2023. In addition, a meeting was held with the Nordstadt local council to discuss, among other things, the shortage of paediatricians and the lack of child-friendly public spaces. The Lab demonstrates how migrant newcomers, often considered hard to reach, can be included.



Demonstration in May 2023 for more educational equality. It took place as part of the '400 chairs' campaign, in which a large number of stakeholders from Nordstadt joined forces with the ILS to draw attention to the lack of school places, particularly in primary schools.

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