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Article

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Prof. Dr. Jürgen Schupp, Director, Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin

EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR JÜRGEN SCHUPP

»Refugees have a strong educational orientation«

1. Mr. Schupp, more than 2300 refugees above the age of 18 have been interviewed in a representative survey. Which countries do these refugees come from? For the first time, we have drawn a representative picture of the influx of refugees to Germany between January 2013 and January 2016. The large majority of refugees in our sample—about 60 percent—came from Syria, but we also have many from Afghanistan and Africa.
2. What were the refugees' main reasons for fleeing their home countries? For the large majority, the main reason was fear of violent conflicts and war. That was the case for 70 percent of the refugees in our sample. We can refer to this as forced migration. Other reasons reported include poor personal living conditions, a bad economic situation, and discrimination in the country of origin. One of the main reasons reported by men from African countries was forced military recruitment.
3. How high were the risks and costs of migration for these refugees? The financial costs amounted to around 7,000 euros per person. That was the average amount of money each refugee had to pay to travel from their home country to Germany. That is a large sum of money and therefore I think that this is also an indicator of a certain degree of selection, because not everybody who lives in these countries can afford such a journey to Europe.
4. What is the average level of education of the refugees? In terms of educational levels, we see a polarized picture. On the one hand we see 31 percent of the refugees who attended at least middle school and 37 percent who attended secondary school. But on the other hand, we also have 10 percent of the refugees who attended only a few years of elementary school and 9 percent who never went to school.
5. How much do the personal values of refugees differ from the values generally held in Germany? We were surprised to find that there is not a very big difference in values between refugees and Germans. The majority of refugees value democratic systems in general and our political system in Germany in particular. They also agree with the values of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women. But if we compare the values of Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees who came to Germany to the averages for people still living in their home countries, we find that the acceptance of democratic values is lower in the respective countries of origin. We made this comparison using what is known as the World Value Survey, a global survey that asks values-related questions to people in many countries worldwide. Obviously there is also a kind of selection of values, because those individuals who have made their way to Germany have a much greater tendency to share our values.
6. What language skills do refugees bring with them to Germany? The majority do not know any German upon arrival. Only 10 percent know some German. But compared to other migrant populations, we see a more rapid improvement in German language skills. Of course, integration policies foster refugees' language learning ambitions and help them to gain access to German language courses.
7. What percentage of refugees succeed in entering the German labor market? When we surveyed the refugees this year, only about 13 percent had already entered the labor market, but if we compare this group to those who came in 2013, we already see an increase. That means the longer the refugees stay in Germany, the more they will enter the labor market. We expect that in about five years, we will see about 50 percent of the refugees in employment.
8. To what extent are German integration policies successful in integrating refugees into German society and the job market? We have to consider that a lot has already changed in the last year. There have been improvements in the processing of asylum claims after refugees arrive in Germany. This process lasts about seven months and improvements have already been made to reduce this period. Meanwhile, refugees are now able to start learning German sooner, and significant improvements have been made in programs to foster integration. In addition to political measures, we should not forget that there is a broad support network for refugees from the broader population.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg



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