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Article

"Majority of German public back UN refugee convention": Six questions to Jürgen Schupp

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

SIX QUESTIONS TO JÜRGEN SCHUPP

»Majority of German public back UN Refugee Convention«

1. Professor Schupp, in Germany, public debate on the refugee issue has sometimes been quite heated. Is the population really as concerned as it often appears? If we are talking about granting refugees the right to remain in Germany in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention, it's clear that the vast majority of the population are in favor of granting temporary asylum. This particularly applies to refugees who were forced to flee their countries of origin due to civil war or armed conflict.
2. What do respondents to the SOEP's Barometer of Public Opinion on Refugees in Germany feel about the risks of admitting refugees into the country? In answer to the question as to whether respondents primarily perceive the risks or whether they also see the opportunities of immigration, it is clear that a firm majority of the population associate immigration with risks rather than opportunities. Particularly when it comes to short-term risks, three-quarters of respondents consider these outweigh any potential opportunities. Even if we only focus on respondents' assessment of the economic consequences of immigration, it wasn't until our March survey that respondents thought risks and opportunities were more or less on an equal footing. With regard to the economy, just over one-third of respondents felt immigration brought more opportunities and the same proportion associated it with more risks. Specifically when it comes to the short-term consequences, however, the population's concerns and negative attitudes prevail.
3. What exactly are the population's concerns? One worry is that immigration may affect and potentially jeopardize society's values. However, we also asked people if they were afraid of being personally disadvantaged as a result of refugees being admitted into the country and a total of 20 percent of respondents were concerned that this might happen.
4. To what extent is support for admitting refugees into Germany contingent on their reason for seeking asylum? Here too, we distinguished between different scenarios in our survey questions. The reason that meets with most support is also the one that is currently the basis for granting subsidiary protection in Germany, in other words, displacement because of war or civil war (the question of whether there is a direct threat to life and limb). If an individual is disadvantaged and forced to flee as a result of campaigning for human rights in their country of origin, this reason is assigned similarly high importance. However, according to our indicators, an individual who has been disadvantaged due to labor union activism, for instance, meets with a lower level of popular approval.
5. Should refugees be allowed to stay in Germany, or should they be deported, even if they have been living here for a number of years? This is the second key finding of our study. Alongside a considerable majority who believe that refugees should be admitted into Germany, we also see a majority (55 percent) who are in favor of these individuals returning home once the situation in their countries of origin has improved. Only around 28 percent of respondents advocated a permanent right to remain in Germany, regardless of the circumstances in their home countries and any changes to that situation.
6. To what extent do survey responses differ by category of respondents? Here, the same pattern can be observed as in other studies. Those with higher levels of education are more likely to be in favor of refugees being granted the right of residency and support repatriation to a lesser degree. Negative attitudes tend to prevail among eastern Germans, and if we look at political leaning, our findings are also in line with the stereotype that support for admitting refugees into the country is less pronounced among those to the right of the political spectrum. Yet even among the members of this group, there is a majority in favor of granting at least temporary asylum to those forced to leave their countries of origin for humanitarian reasons.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg



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