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Article

"A variety of measures and initiatives can accelerate the immigration process for today's refugees": Five questions to Martin Kroh

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Prof. Martin Kroh, Deputy Head of Research Infrastructure at the Socio-Economic Panel at DIW Berlin and Professor for Social Science Research Methods at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO MARTIN KROH

»A variety of measures and initiatives can accelerate the immigration process for today's refugees«

1. Prof. Kroh, DIW Berlin analyzed 2013 survey data on refugees who, for the most part, came to Germany between 1990 and 2010. How many of those refugees were employed in Germany at the time of the survey? In the group we analyzed, approximately two thirds of all male refugees reported finding a job within the first five years of their arrival in Germany. This share was considerably smaller among female refugees: only one out of every four had found a job in the same time span. Overall, more refugees than other migrants were still unemployed even years after their arrival in Germany.
2. Which countries did the refugees come from, and what kind of qualifications and language skills did they have upon arrival? Many respondents to our survey came in the 1990s from the civil war-stricken regions of Yugoslavia or from Muslim and Arab countries. In many of these countries, formal vocational qualifications apart from university degrees are uncommon—and these kinds of vocational qualifications are important on the German labor market. Approximately half of the refugees arrived in Germany with a formal education. Many of the younger refugees invested effort in obtaining educational and vocational qualifications in Germany. The situation was more difficult for older refugees. Refugees' German language proficiency upon arrival was typically very poor—which is to be expected, since refugee migration is by nature unplanned. The opposite is the case for labor migration, where potential migrants can prepare themselves ahead of time.
3. What kinds of conclusions can be drawn from your findings on the current refugee situation? Integration into the labor market has typically taken longer for refugees than it has for other migrants. But refugees also showed signs of catching up to some extent during the period under study. That is noteworthy, since we are talking about a time when there were far fewer measures promoting labor integration than exist today.

The institutional obstacles to labor market participation posed by the application process itself were also clearly more difficult to overcome than they are today. In this respect, we do not share the pessimism about labor market integration of today's refugees that is sometimes heard in public debates.

4. What kinds of institutional obstacles stand in the way of refugees' labor market integration? In our study, we are dealing with refugees from the past 20 years. During this time, there were various changes in labor market access for recognized refugees and tolerated persons (those with a *Duldung*). Even in the past few months, this access has been improved for more diverse groups of people. In the past, however, refugees and tolerated persons were subject to work restrictions during the application process. So if an application process takes one full year, as is currently the case, this also pushes back labor market entry by one year. If we want to accelerate refugees' entry to the labor market, we need put the institutional structures in place to make this possible. It is also important that refugees have the possibility to start attending language courses while waiting for their applications to be approved—but currently we don't have the capacity to offer that to everyone.
5. Labor market integration is not the full picture. What about integration into German society? There is a broad civic engagement in this area that has continued despite the increasingly critical tenor of debate in recent months. This is of course important for the integration process. Moreover, children of refugees frequently take advantage of extracurricular activities offered in schools. Refugees are less likely than the rest of the population to send children under the age of three to day care, however, so there is still potential here for further integration.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg



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