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Article

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Integrating refugees: insights from the past

By Philipp Eisnecker, Johannes Giesecke, Martin Kroh, Elisabeth Liebau, Jan Marcus, Zerrin Salikutluk, Diana Schacht, C. Katharina Spieß, and Franz Westermaier

According to current estimates, more than one million refugees arrived in Germany between 2014 and 2015. Their integration into German society and the labor market is now one of the most pressing policy issues. How can the various challenges be met? A look into the past can help provide some answers.

This special issue of the *DIW Economic Bulletin* analyzes survey data on refugees who arrived in Germany mainly between the years 1990 and 2010. Most of them came from the Western Balkans and from Arab and Muslim countries—regions that play a major role in the current immigration wave. These empirical findings may allow us to draw conclusions about how refugees in the recent past can be successfully integrated into Germany's education system and labor market.

The primary data basis is the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample, a joint initiative of the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). Most of our analyses are based on results from surveys conducted in 2013. We compare refugees to non-refugee migrants who entered Germany during the same time period.

This issue of the *EB* investigates five different aspects of integration: the qualifications refugees brought with them to Germany, as well as their educational backgrounds and professional qualifications from abroad; language acquisition; labor market participation; the process of finding a first job in Germany; and the use of voluntary educational programs by children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds.

A mixed picture emerges overall, with some striking differences between refugees and other migrants: refugees

arrived with lower educational and professional qualifications, and were less likely to obtain recognition from German authorities of the educational and vocational certificates that they had received abroad (see the first report in this issue).¹ However, the majority of refugees had already gained work experience before arriving in Germany (acquired, for instance, through on-the-job training). These findings point to the need for better and more targeted provision of information for refugees on the recognition procedure and suggest the importance of expanding recognition to cover informally acquired qualifications in order to provide refugees with better job market prospects.

At the time of their arrival, refugees had lower German proficiency on average than did other migrants—yet their language skills improved more rapidly over time than did those of other migrants (see the second report in this issue).² Enrollment in the German education system and the use of German in various everyday situations are positively correlated with language acquisition among both refugees and other migrants.

Entry into the labor market took longer for refugees—especially for women from refugee backgrounds—than it did for other migrants. Although the employment rates between the two groups converged over time, employment structures and income levels of refugees still differed from those of other migrants and non-migrants, even years after the refugees' arrival (see the third report in this issue).³

¹ Liebau, E., Salikutluk, S. (2016): Many refugees have work experience but a smaller share possess formal vocational qualifications. *DIW Economic Bulletin* 35/2016, 392–399.

² Liebau, E., Schacht, D. (2016): Language acquisition: refugees nearly achieve proficiency level of other migrants. *DIW Economic Bulletin* 35/2016, 400–406.

³ Salikutluk, Z. et al. (2016): Refugees entered the labor market later than other migrants. *DIW Economic Bulletin* 35/2016, 407–413.

Box

Data and definitions

The Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and the IAB-SOEP Migration Survey

The Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) is an annual follow-up survey of German households conducted by *TNS Infratest Sozialforschung* on behalf of DIW Berlin. The SOEP has been active in West Germany since 1984 and in East Germany since 1990.¹ The survey, which is based primarily on personal interviews with all adult household members, focuses on topics such as income, labor market participation, education, quality of life, life satisfaction, social participation, and health. In addition, adult respondents provide a range of information about the children living in the household, and adolescent household members also begin participating in the survey after the age of 16.

Since the first survey in 1984, the SOEP has included special samples of individuals with migrant backgrounds. This provides an important data base for analysis of the integration process.² For example, the 1984 sample (Sample B) focused on people from countries like Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, and Portugal – individuals who, between the 1950s and 1970s, were recruited to work in Germany. The immigration of (late) repatriates, especially during the 1990s, was the focus of a special sample from 1994³ (Sample D). The SOEP boost samples, which were added between 1998 and 2012 in order to maintain the overall sample size, also included a large number of households in which people with migrant backgrounds were living.

In 2013, the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample—a joint project between the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) of the Federal Employment Agency and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin—was conducted for the first time.⁴ This survey, which is also made available in an integrated form as Sample M1 in the SOEP's dataset and doubles the number

of migrant respondents in the SOEP, focuses on households of migrants who came to Germany in or after 1995 and either took a job that is subject to social insurance contributions or received transfers of the Federal Employment Agency.⁵

The reports in this issue of the *Economic Bulletin* are based primarily on data from the 2013 SOEP survey (SOEP.v31). This includes the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample, in which 30,956 adults and 13,933 children in 16,975 households participated. Nearly 10,000 adults and 5,000 children and adolescents in the 2013 survey reported a migrant background, which corresponds to roughly one third⁶ of all household members who took part in the SOEP survey that year.

The definition of refugees

In the SOEP, foreigners and other persons who were not born in Germany are asked when they immigrated to Germany and what kind of legal status they had at arrival. Altogether, 751 respondents (SOEP.v31, Table 1) reported entering Germany as asylum-seeker or refugee. A group of 5,612 individuals with migrant background was primarily made up of repatriates (i. e., ethnic Germans), labor migrants, and EU citizens as well as family migrants – for example, the spouse and children of a legal resident of Germany (this group is referred to here as “other migrants”). Among all migrants, 1,616 did not provide information on their status upon arrival and are therefore excluded from the analyses.

Minor children of immigrants who did not answer this question themselves were assigned the parents' legal status. For the years 1994 to 2014, there were 806 children of refugees and 6,370 children of other migrants in our sample. The sample also contains adolescents (aged 17), 101 of whom were categorized as refugees and 823 as other migrants.

The number of cases referred to in the different reports in this issue of the *Economic Bulletin* vary. Among other reasons, this is because the various analyses deal with different topics and use data on varying population groups (for example, employed persons in 2013).

1 Wagner, G. G. et al. (2008): Das Sozio-oekonomische Panel (SOEP): Multidisziplinäres Haushaltspanel und Kohorten Studie für Deutschland – Eine Einführung (für neue Datennutzer) mit einem Ausblick (für erfahrene Anwender). Allgemeines Statistisches Archiv 2 (4): 301–328.

2 Liebau, E. und Tucci, I. (2015): Migrations- und Integrationsforschung mit dem SOEP von 1984 bis 2012: Erhebung, Indikatoren und Potenziale. SOEP Survey Papers 270: Series C. Berlin: DIW/SOEP.

3 Schupp, J. und Wagner, G. G. (1995): Die Zuwanderer Stichprobe des Sozio-oekonomischen Panels (SOEP). In: Vierteljahrshefte zur Wirtschaftsforschung, Jg. 64, Heft 1, S. 16–25.

4 Brücker, H. et al. (2014): The new IAB-SOEP Migration Sample: an introduction into the methodology and the contents. SOEP Survey Papers 216: Series C. Berlin: DIW/SOEP.

5 Kroh, M. et al. (2015): The 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (M1): Sampling Design and Weighting Adjustment. SOEP Survey Papers 271: Series C. Berlin: DIW/SOEP.

6 This represents more than a quarter in the weighted case.

The reports on language skills, qualifications, and job acquisition are based solely on the 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample. The report on the labor market integration of refugees and other migrants is based on SOEP data up to 2013 as well as the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample. The report on participation in voluntary educational programs is based on data from the SOEP of all first interviewees from 1994 onwards, as well as data from the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample. Data on "children" refer to individuals who met the corresponding age criterion between 2006 and 2014, while those on "adolescents" refer to those who met the corresponding age criterion between 2000 and 2014.

Immigration year and regions of origin

The present studies are based on interviews with refugees who, for the most part, arrived in Germany between 1990 and 2010; these individuals are thus *not* part of the recent major immigrant influx that began in 2014 and peaked in 2015. No data are available yet for these years. Refugees who arrived in Germany after 2013 are currently taking part in a survey conducted by the IAB and the SOEP in cooperation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, or BAMF). The purpose of this issue of the *Economic Bulletin* is to provide insight into the integration process of past refugees and migrants, which can be used to help the migrants of today as well as in the future.

More than half of the refugees surveyed here immigrated in the 1990s (Table 2). 8 percent of the other migrants have been living in Germany for several decades. Hence, the analyses are based on individuals who immigrated to Germany and remained long-term.

The refugees of the 1990s came primarily from civil war-torn regions such as the former Yugoslavia. There is also a higher percentage of individuals from Arab and Muslim countries (30 percent) in the group of refugees than in the group of other migrants. Refugees and other migrants reported, on average, similar ages at the time of the survey (43 years old) as well as at the time of entry (23 years old). The percentage of women was lower among refugees (44 percent) than among other migrants (56 percent).

Even though the survey did not include refugees who have arrived to Germany since 2014, many of the 2013 survey respondents came from comparable countries of origin (Western Balkans as well as Arab and Muslim countries).

Table 1

Respondents in SOEP and the IAB-SOEP Migration Survey

	Refugees ¹	Other migrants ²
Adult migrants		
Cumulative number of respondents (1994-2014)	751	5,612
Of that: Respondents in 2013	578	4,520
Children and adults with refugee background		
Cumulative number of respondents (1994-2014)	806	6,370

¹ Persons who report having entered Germany as asylum-seeker or refugee.

² Persons who report having entered Germany as immigrants, labor migrants, and EU citizens, as well as dependents of migrants.

Source: SOEP.v31

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Table 2

Age, gender, and migration experience

	All respondents 1994-2014 Refugees		All respondents 1994-2014 Other migrants	
		Of that: respondents 2013		Of that: respondents 2013
Women (in percent)	44	44	54	56
Age (average in years)				
Age of respondents 2013	-	43	-	42
Age at immigration	-	23	-	24
Immigration period (share in percent)	100	100	100	100
1949-1979	2	2	8	8
1980-1989	10	9	10	10
1990-1999	55	59	37	38
2000-2009	30	28	40	39
2010-2014	3	2	5	5
Region of origin (in percent)	100	100	100	100
EU-28	6	6	37	37
South-east Europe ¹	39	42	16	16
Post-Soviet States ²	17	17	36	37
Arab/Muslim countries ³	33	30	4	4
Other countries	6	6	6	6

¹ Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey.

² Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Belarus.

³ Afghanistan, Egypt, Algeria, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Indonesia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Malaysia, Mali, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Chad, Tunisia.

Source: SOEP.v31 (unweighted analyses).

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Any institutional obstacles hindering refugees' swift integration into the labor market should therefore be eliminated as quickly as possible. It is also critical that refugees find jobs that match their qualifications.

Half of the refugees in the sample found their first job in Germany informally through friends, acquaintances, and relatives (see the fourth report in this issue).⁴ This was particularly the case for refugees who already had contacts in Germany but spoke no German upon arrival. But overall, those refugees who were working in Germany were somewhat more likely than other migrants to have found their job through formal means like job advertisements or job agencies.

Children of refugees, as well as children and adolescents who were refugees themselves, took advantage of volun-

tary educational programs as often, or more often than did other children—primarily when it came to extracurricular school activities (see the fifth report in this issue).⁵ However, refugee children under the age of three were less likely to attend day care centers and were in later ages significantly less likely to take part in some of the non-formal educational activities held outside of school. This appears to indicate that voluntary educational programs outside of school and non-formal offerings for toddlers and preschoolers are not yet being utilized by refugee children as extensively as they could be. To promote wider use of these programs, it would be helpful to expand intercultural exchange through training and increased recruitment of volunteer and full-time staff with migrant or refugee backgrounds.

⁴ Eisnecker, P., Schacht, D. (2016): Half of refugees in Germany found their first job through social contacts. DIW Economic Bulletin 35/2016, 414–421.

⁵ Spiess, C. K. et al. (2016): Children and adolescents with refugee background less likely to participate in voluntary educational programs - with exception of extracurricular school activities. DIW Economic Bulletin 35/2016, 422–430.

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