

Refugees arriving in fall 2015 in Austria: Insights on their human capital

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Extended Abstract

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For months, people from the Middle East have been fleeing to Europe. Many of them have searched refuge from war, terror and persecution in Austria. Given the large number of persons applying for asylum in Austria in summer and fall 2015 and the societal relevance of the latest migration flows to Austria, it is of utmost importance to not only determine how many persons are seeking asylum, but to investigate who these refugees are. In other words, not counting the heads but uncover what these heads can offer in terms of human capital for Austrian society. To help with their inclusion it is important to know more about their educational background and their professional qualifications, and also about their hopes and expectations for the future.

A recent study in Vienna has gathered this information for the first time in the German-speaking area. More than 500 interviews were conducted in English, Arabic and Farsi at various NGO-run refugee accommodations in and around Vienna by a team including the Syrian statistician Zakarya Al Zalak, Arabic-speaking refugees, volunteer Arabic and Farsi translators, as well as by students of a master program at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. The development and implementation of the multilanguage questionnaire on tablets using survey software, the recruitment of Arabic-speaking refugees for interviewing, interviewer training (including methodological aspects, content of the survey, intercultural training and psychological support for interviewers) and field phase management were

provided by researchers at the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, a cooperation of the Vienna Institute of Demography (VID) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (IIASA) and the Institute for Human Capital and Development at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU).

The questionnaires designed by the project team is based on existing items in international surveys like LFS (Labor Force Survey), WVS (World Value Survey), SHARE (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe) und GGS (Generations and Gender Survey). Overall, the survey included (1) demography, (2) human capital, (3) employment, (4) health, (5) attitudes and norms, as well as (6) perceptions of the situation in the home country and information on the journey to Austria.

Preliminary results:

The analyses focuses on asylum seekers who arrived in Austria between September and November 2015. Analyses focus on their education, their family context and their work. Moreover, we analyze attitudes and norms regarding e.g. women's position in the labor market or religiousness. We distinguish between Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan and other citizens. First results indicate a rather high level of education and a high willingness to participate in the labor market. Moreover, it turned out that the majority of asylum seekers arrived with their family, indicating that for this latest wave of asylum seekers further immigration due to family reunification is expected to be rather modest. As the field phase was finished by the beginning of December 2015, we are not able to submit elaborated analyses. But our first results indicate that the current project can be regarded as a spearhead study on the large flows of asylum seekers to Austria – and possibly also to Germany. The project will be of utmost societal importance, as its findings will contribute to an improvement of the evidence base for the social debate on refugees and their inclusion in society.