

Same, but different? A comparison of the integration experiences of refugees and guest worker migrants in Germany

Abstract

The increasing number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany over the past years have not only sparked an emotional public debate on immigration and societal membership, but have also proven to be a major challenge for policy-makers. Although the volume of refugee migration is indeed unprecedented in Germany, the country has had significant experience with receiving and integrating newcomers in its recent past: the post-war economic boom has led to the recruitment of millions of foreign workers, so-called *Gastarbeiter*. A non-negligible share ultimately settled permanently, but their integration process was not without its challenges. This paper argues that Germany's guest worker experience offers valuable insight into current integration processes in the German context. To make this existing knowledge accessible, this work uses a historical approach to identify the main elements that have shaped the integration experiences of guest workers in Germany, tied in with an econometric examination assessing the main factors in turn associated with the economic integration of the current refugee cohort. Comparison of the results suggest that a range of obstacles faced by guest workers and their descendants are also in the way of refugees today. Both groups face legal insecurity as an obstacle to socioeconomic integration. The legal status, in turn, proves relevant for human capital investments for both populations under review. Finally, a strong link between societal segregation and socioeconomic marginalization is found for the *Gastarbeiter*, and the analysis of labor market outcomes of refugees provides initial evidence that similar tendencies are observable for refugees in the German labor market

Keywords

refugee migration, labor market integration, ethnic segregation, human capital investment, German immigration history, guest workers