

Poorly qualified workers with a migration background have income advantages in Germany

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They are often regarded as cases of failed integration and as social losers, but a new study conducted at the University of Cologne shows that immigrants with a low professional qualification level tend to have a higher income than workers of the same qualification level without a migration background. Very often they work in jobs they are not formally qualified for. "Employers value employees with a migration background because they tend to be ambitious, resilient and reliable," says Merlin Schaeffer, professor for demography and social inequality at the University of Cologne's Institute for Sociology and Social Psychology.

Together with Jutta Höhne (head of division at the Institute of Economics and Social Research of the Hans Böckler Foundation), and Céline Teney (Professor of Sociology at the University of Bremen), Merlin Schaeffer compared the incomes of native Germans and children of immigrants who had gone to school in Germany. In their study, they relied on the data provided by the micro-census 2005-2011. In order to ensure the comparability of the results, they only considered those parts of the income that do not vary according to age, gender and family status, regional income differences and other factors relevant in the context of the labor market.

The study clearly shows that poorly qualified workers with a migration background have income advantages, particularly groups that typically

come from families with a low educational level. According to the scientists' statistical models, school drop-outs of Turkish origin who were born in Germany earn approximately 2.20 euros more per hour than native Germans without a school degree. They earn more because they often perform tasks that theoretically demand a higher qualification level, for example as machine or computer operators, or as construction plant operators. People of Italian or Greek background attained similar results. Poorly qualified workers without a migration background, in turn, only rarely succeed in securing a more demanding job.

"Our results underline that the potential of people with a migration background in Germany is underestimated in public debates," Merlin Schaeffer concludes. "Particularly school-dropouts often achieve much more than society expects."

The findings of the three sociologists must be understood in the context of the research on the educational achievements of children with a migration background. "Even though their school achievements are often below average, the children of immigrants tend to have ambitious educational goals. They are highly motivated to improve their social status," Merlin Schaeffer explains. Immigrants are highly aspiring, strong-willed and ambitious. Those who decide to take on the difficulties of migrating to a different county usually do so with the firm purpose of building a better life for themselves. The high aims of children often reflect the ambitions of their parents. At the same time, in many cases immigrants cannot adequately help their children with their homework or with decisions regarding their school careers. They lack language skills, education and material resources. Moreover, the German school system is unfamiliar to them.

Based on this disadvantage, the children of [immigrants](#) often cannot attain the educational certificates that would match their high ambitions, their diligence and their perseverance. The formal degrees of poorly

qualified workers with a migration background are thus less an expression of lacking motivation, commitment and reliability than among their native German peers.

The results also show that a country like Germany, which is strongly affected by demographic change and an increasing shortage of skilled labor, should create better conditions to recognize the potential of children from migrant families early on and remedy disadvantages in its educational system.

Provided by University of Cologne

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