

Integration of refugees: Germans in east and west show similar willingness to help

October 15 2019



The researchers deposited a total of 800 stamped letters with two different addressees. Credit: Jens Hellmann

In discussions in Germany on immigrants, particularly eastern Germany

is often associated with attacks on foreigners and hate crimes against refugees. Research data and surveys also indicate that prejudices against immigrants are often stronger in the east of the country than in the western half. But are these differences also reflected in small acts of everyday help? This question was looked at in detail by German researchers. They carried out two field studies in which they compared the behaviour of people in eastern and western Germany as far as helping was concerned.

For this purpose, the team of psychologists led by Dr. Jens H. Hellmann from the University of Münster opted for a rarely used method. They deposited stamped envelopes over the street: half of the letters were addressed to a project on the [integration](#) of refugees, and the other half were addressed to a project working to stop immigration. The researchers checked to see how many of the letters were sent back, taking the particular region into account: urban and rural, East and West Germany. The result was that there were no significant differences between eastern and western Germany. Overall, the percentage of letters posted to the integration project was around 45 percent, and the figure for the letters to the stop-immigration project was around 25 percent. The study has been published in the journal "*Social Psychology*".

The results contradict the usual assumptions and [survey results](#), which suggest that people in eastern Germany are less in favour of refugees being integrated than those in the west are. "Even though there is more right-wing violence in the east than in the west, we shouldn't generalise such cases and apply them to the whole of eastern Germany," says Jens H. Hellmann, who led the study. "Of course, every one of these acts is to be condemned, and on no account must they be trivialised, but to make generalisations for the whole of eastern Germany would be wrong—and fatal. Such generalisations would also stigmatise the people who are glad to help in the integration of refugees when they have the opportunity."

In their article, the researchers argue that only some of the results of surveys permit predictions regarding everyday behaviour. Accordingly, it can be assumed that not all of the people who reject refugees leave a letter addressed to the integration project lying on the ground. And not everyone who has a positive attitude to refugees provides everyday help.

On the method:

The researchers deposited a total of 800 stamped envelopes on the street, all far enough away from each other so that potential finders would not find more than one [letter](#), if possible. The locations the researchers chose were Dresden, Bremen, and [rural areas](#). The response rates showed that more letters for the integration project were returned overall than for the stop-immigrants project—in particular from the cities in east and west. As regards the letters from the more rural areas, there was no majority for the stop-immigration [project](#) in either western or eastern Germany.

More information: Jens H. Hellmann et al, Support for Refugee Integration in West and East Germany, *Social Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1027/1864-9335/a000397](#)

Provided by University of Münster

Citation: Integration of refugees: Germans in east and west show similar willingness to help (2019, October 15) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-10-refugees-germans-east-west-similar.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--