

Attitude toward diversity contributes to helping refugees become productive members of a host nation, study finds

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John Schaubroeck, a professor of management at the University of Missouri, believes hiring refugees can boost the economies of host

countries. In fact, research has shown that assimilation is easier for refugees who work, making it more likely that they will contribute to their new communities.

But a new study by Schaubroeck found refugees benefit most from a workplace that values diversity and avoids stigmatizing people new to the community.

"The idea is that if you are in a favorable work environment, you will feel less 'othered.'" However, there are factors that can amplify or mitigate that effect," Schaubroeck said.

While most previous research shows that refugees being employed increases their productivity and assimilation into society, Schaubroeck wanted to understand what about these work environments made refugees feel more included.

"It's not just about being employed," Schaubroeck said. "It's the extent to which one perceives one really belongs in that organization that really matters. Do they see themselves as real members? Our findings suggest that's the first step to feeling like a member of the society in which they have relocated."

Schaubroeck's findings also suggest that when people are different from others, as with refugees, believing one's leaders and the organization overall strive to treat all members fairly and respectfully goes a long way in making [refugee](#) employees feel included.

Schaubroeck said it all comes back to diversity.

"While there's not much the organization can do about an internal belief of stigma in a society, our research showed that having a favorable diversity climate—at all levels—renders that belief much less relevant,"

he said.

The researchers sampled 389 Syrian refugees in 88 different organizations. The refugees were asked to take 30 minutes off from their jobs to complete a survey. They were given three questionnaires over two months to measure their insider status and what prompted these feelings. The researchers only talked with refugees who were employed.

Refugees are becoming increasingly relevant in the U.S. as the number of refugees in the country are skyrocketing. For instance, in May 2021, the U.S. saw its number of accepted refugees more than triple from the months prior, admitting 915 refugees compared to only 272 in February.

The nation has steadily increased its refugee acceptance since the beginning of the year, and the government has promised to increase the admittance even more as the year moves on. Schaubroeck believes these findings can help businesses adjust their environment to be more accommodating to refugees and help them learn to contribute to their host society. He said this improved quality of employment will not only benefit the refugees, but the communities they settle in as well.

"'I' Am Affirmed, but Are 'We'? Social Identity Processes Influencing Refugees' Work Initiative and Community Embeddedness" is published in the *Academy of Management*.

More information: John M. Schaubroeck et al, "'I' Am Affirmed, but Are 'We'? Social Identity Processes Influencing Refugees' Work Initiative and Community Embeddedness, *Academy of Management Journal* (2021). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2020.0033](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2020.0033)

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