Refugee personality is one of the factors determining how successful integration is

21 May 2019

According to the study, refugees who are more willing than others to take risks, for example, find work faster and have more social contacts with local residents. Those who are more strongly convinced that they are in control of their lives and who reciprocate the friendliness shown by other people find it easier to make inroads into society than others do. They have more friends and are more self-confident, more contented and healthier.

The—frequently traumatic—experiences undergone while fleeing, and the unfamiliar circumstances in the new country, place a heavy burden on refugees. "But if people are convinced that they can influence their fate," explains SOEP researcher David Richter, "they have a far greater scope for action than if they think they are at the mercy of their circumstances." "Also, a general tendency to take the occasional risk, and to reciprocate people's friendliness, seem to be helpful in the difficult process of integration," adds Münster University's Mitja Back, an author of the study.

The study also confirms a series of findings arrived at in earlier studies on the integration of immigrants—findings which also hold true for refugees who have recently arrived in Germany: "People who have been living in Germany for a longer period of time find it easier to integrate than others," says Jürgen Schupp, Deputy Director of the SOEP. A better knowledge of German and a good level of education acquired in their home country also help decisively in making integration succeed. Gender also evidently plays a role: Female refugees are less frequently employed and they have fewer social contacts.

"Religious affiliation of the participants—whether Islam or Christian—was not related to the extent to which refugees are integrated," adds Mitja Back.
"This contrasts with the prejudices commonly found in host societies." Refugees who wish to live in Germany permanently currently find support in various areas of life—for example, in acquiring language skills or in looking for work. Based on the findings, the authors of the study also call for refugees' individual personality traits to be taken into account in integration programmes. "Help for refugees should also include supporting and encouraging the personal resources and social skills which these people bring with them—for example, the ability to make new contacts with other people," says Elisabeth Hahn.


Provided by Saarland University