



Philipp Eisnecker, Research Associate and Ph.D. Student at the Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) at DIW Berlin

EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR PHILIPP EISNECKER

»The higher educated, the more optimistic about the consequences of refugee immigration«

1. Mr. Eisnecker, have the population's concerns about refugee migration grown or declined? We can conclusively say that in 2015 and 2016, the population was markedly more concerned about migration – and xenophobia as well. This statement is based on data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a longitudinal survey, which has collected data on the population's concerns on a range of topics for years.
2. Which aspects of refugee migration concern the population the most and which the least? We collected data from the respondents regarding their attitudes toward refugee migration in five areas. Overall, I must say that in 2016, the respondents were very skeptical in all five areas. They were still the least skeptical with regard to the economy; whereas we saw the most skeptical responses on general short-term effects. The other areas, "Germany as a place to live," cultural life in Germany, and long-term effects, were in the middle range.
3. Does skepticism outweigh perceived opportunities? We saw that unequivocal optimists were clearly in the minority. The majority of the population was composed of either unequivocal skeptics or ambivalent and undecided persons. This order remained the same throughout 2016.
4. Which groups of persons tended to be skeptical of refugee migration and which were more optimistic? The higher people's education level, the more optimistic they are. We also saw relatively unambiguous east-west differences. People who live in eastern Germany are more likely to be skeptical than those in western Germany. And it was also relatively clear that people who consider themselves "working class" are more skeptical than salaried employees or civil servants.
5. Is there any differentiation based on political party affiliation? Followers of the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) much more frequently active for refugees and were also more optimistic about the effects of refugee immigration. At the opposite pole are followers of the Alternative for Germany party (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), who seldom volunteer to help refugees and view the effects of refugee immigration with great pessimism. The remaining party followers are in the middle range with regard to both their social support for refugees and their assessment of the effects of refugee migration.
6. Has the population's level of social support for refugees increased or decreased? Because we asked about the past 12 months, we cannot currently determine any conclusive trends. However, we did ask respondents if they planned to volunteer to help refugees in the future. From January to November 2016, we saw a decrease in the intention to support refugees actively in the future.
7. How large is the gap between those in favor and the skeptics? Is the issue of refugee migration dividing German society? Interestingly, we found that both skeptics and more optimistic persons volunteered to help refugees or at least indicated that they intend to in the future. Overall, we saw that active volunteers or those prepared to actively support refugees view the effects of refugee migration more optimistically. At the same time, there was no evidence of a great divide separating the attitudes of engaged and inactive persons.
8. The Bundestag election is this year. What political priority did the respondents assign to the issue of refugee migration? Based on the SOEP data, we saw that concerns about both migration and xenophobia have increased sharply. And from other surveys we also know that migration and refugees have become the most important issue. In view of this, we can expect this issue to play a role in the outcome of the election.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg



DIW Berlin – Deutsches Institut
für Wirtschaftsforschung e.V.
Mohrenstraße 58, 10117 Berlin
T +49 30 897 89 -0
F +49 30 897 89 -200

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