

IAB-Colloquium

zur Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung

Einladung
16/2018

Cross-national differences in the economic integration of immigrants with different admission statuses – examining the progressive dilemma thesis for 18 European countries

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Admission status plays an important role for immigrants' labor market outcomes. Immigrants who moved for study or work reasons face significantly fewer challenges at the labor market than family reunification and refugee immigrants. In this context, critical questions from a policy perspective are i) whether the economic disadvantage of refugee and family reunification versus economic immigrants varies across European countries, and ii) whether this disadvantage is weakened or strengthened by country-specific integration-inclusive policies and the level of welfare support.

To answer these questions, this paper examines in how far cross-national difference in employment rates of economic, family reunification and refugee immigrants can be attributed to compositional differences of these groups and to institutional factors, such as presence of a strong welfare state and integration-inclusive policies. Using two recent European Union Labour Force Surveys ad hoc modules on migrants and their descendants (EULFS 2008, 2014) for 18 countries

Datum:

Dienstag,
5. Juni 2018

Uhrzeit:

10:00 Uhr

Ort:

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augmented with macro-level indicators of welfare state generosity and integration-inclusive policies (i.e., decommodification index, Migration Integration Policy Index), we apply a two-step multilevel approach.

We find that the lower employment rates of refugee and family reunification immigrants versus economic immigrants vary substantially across European countries. Compositional differences among them only partly explain cross-national variation in employment rates. Moreover, the preliminary results regarding integration-inclusive policies, show that the gap between the employment rates of refugee versus economic immigrants tend to be smaller in countries supporting more strongly such policies and immigrants' access to the labor market in particular.