

Place of residence does matter for educational integration: The relevance of spatial contexts for refugees' transition to VET in Germany

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Abstract

With the large influx of refugees to Germany around 2015/16, the integration of the mostly young refugees into education and employment has become a major challenge for German politics and economy. Since formal qualification and labor market outcomes are strongly coupled in Germany, an important foundation for professional and social integration is the completion of vocational education and training (VET). Although access to VET is formally open to both people with no school-leaving certificate and those with a refugee background, actual access opportunities are characterized by strong spatial inequalities: The German districts vary considerably according to aspects such as the labour market structure, economic productivity and demographic development, that constitute the supply and demand for training places in the dual VET sector, to which refugees predominantly have access. Since the placement of refugees upon their arrival in Germany is primarily based on population figures, largely disregarding further spatial contextual factors, the question of the dependence of refugees' transition chances to VET on their place of residence gains particular relevance. In our study, we address this issue by asking: which spatial characteristics of the place of residence are associated with an increased likelihood of refugees to transition to VET.

For this purpose, we analyse the *IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees* using multi-level discrete time event history analysis. In our sample, we focus on young adults who are aged between 18 and 30 years (with additional robustness checks for individuals aged 15 to 30 + individuals aged 18 – 30 who have no higher education aspirations). Our observation time is five years (2016-2020), within which we analyse the time to transition to VET i.e., the *duration time*. To test our hypotheses, we use annual administrative data on the district level (NUTS-3) that are provided by the Federal Statistical Office and the statistical offices of the federal states of Germany. We test the direct effect of the district-specific variables and unobserved characteristics on the district-level on the time to transition to VET.

Descriptively, 14% of the sample start VET during the five-year observation time. Multivariate analyses show that mechanisms of both the supply and demand side of a region are associated with the chances of refugees finding a training place. On the supply side, it is a higher economic productivity as measured by GDP, a low unemployment rate, and a greater number of small versus large businesses in the district that are positively associated with the corresponding chances. On the demand side, an increasing number of school leavers with no school-leaving certificate and of people with a refugee background decrease refugees' transition chances.

Based on these preliminary results, we conclude that refugees' place of residence is associated with their chances and opportunities of taking up VET and thus of taking a first step toward integration into the labor market of the host country. The spatial placement of asylum seekers in Germany is subject of controversial debates in asylum policy. Our results support recommendations to reform distribution policies (e.g. Brücker et al., 2022) since spatial placement can be related to the employment outlooks of refugees.

Literature

Brücker, H., Dauth, W., Haas, A., Jaschke, P., Kosyakova, Y., Mense, A., Moritz, M., Hong, V. P. thi, & Wolf, K. (2022). *Ein Vorschlag zur Verteilung von Geflüchteten aus der Ukraine* (Research Report Nr. 5/2022). IAB-Forschungsbericht. <https://doi.org/10.48720/IAB.FB.2205>