

PRESS RELEASE

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German Firms Pass Over Refugees for Apprenticeships, Study Shows

- Survey experiment among 797 employers that train apprentices in Southern Germany
- Signals of reliability help refugees to overcome entry hurdles
- EPOS Economic Research Center at Bonn and Mannheim publishes results

Bonn, Mannheim, 12. October, 2026 - **Germany is short of apprentices: 49 percent of all firms were not able to fill all open vacancies in 2025. At the same time, the country hosts the largest refugee population in the EU, sometimes described by politicians as an untapped reserve that could fill the gap. However, a study reveals that refugees are systematically passed over for apprenticeships, and better formal qualifications barely help. The study reveals that signs of reliability matter more to employers. For the study, economists surveyed 797 firms in Southern Germany. The research is based on refugees from the Middle East who arrived in 2015/2016 and have recognized asylum status or a toleration permit (Duldung). The EPOS Economic Research Center at the Universities of Bonn and Mannheim publishes the findings in the discussion paper "Hiring Refugees as Apprentices: The Role of Skills, Signals, and Policy Interventions".**

"Our results show that many employers in Germany are reluctant to take on refugees as apprentices," says Max Müller from the EPOS Economic Research Center. "Surprisingly, we found that firms are the least willing to hire refugees in regions and industries, where training places are hardest to fill."

Signals of reliability and job-related language skills matter

According to the study, even refugees with a university degree acquired abroad and advanced German language skills lose out to German applicants holding only the lowest school-leaving certificate. "What does convince employers to hire refugees as apprentices, are credible signals of reliability," says Max Müller. "These signals could be completed internships or records of regular course attendance in Germany." Applicants can also increase their chances by acquiring the German language skills they actually need on the job, the researchers find.

While an automatic right to stay in Germany for two more years after successful completion of an apprenticeship made no difference to employers surveyed, some measures showed an effect: For example, a preparatory year combining German language courses with work in the company raised employers' willingness to hire refugees by 8 percentage points relative to a baseline with no supporting policy in place. In addition, companies that had already employed non-EU workers were 5 percentage points more likely to take on refugees as apprentices than companies without non-EU workers in the workforce.

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“We conclude that the labor shortage alone is unlikely to open the doors of the German labor market for refugees,” says Max Müller. “According to our study, employers are looking to reduce the level of uncertainty as to their choice of the right candidate and value credible signals of reliability.”

About the survey

The economists conducted a survey experiment with 797 firms that train apprentices in Southern Germany between August and October 2021, in cooperation with five Chambers of Industry and Commerce and two Chambers of Crafts. Respondents – HR staff, managers or owners – made hiring decisions between two applicant profiles. The profiles were calibrated on the BA/BIBB Fluchtmigrationsstudie, a representative survey of refugees registered as seeking vocational training in Germany. The refugees in question are the 2015–16 arrival cohort, mainly from the Middle East.

The presented discussion paper is a publication without peer review of the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS. Access the full discussion paper here:
<https://www.crctr224.de/research/discussion-papers/archive/dp778>

Find the list of all discussion papers of the CRC here: <https://www.crctr224.de/research/discussion-papers>.

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The Collaborative Research Center (CRC) Transregio 224 EPoS

Established in 2018, the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS, a cooperation of the universities Bonn and Mannheim, is a long-term research institution funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). EPoS addresses three key societal challenges: how to promote equality of opportunity; how to regulate markets in light of the internationalization and digitalization of economic activity; and how to safeguard the stability of the financial system.

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