

Who migrates why?

The public discourse on migration is usually simplified and limited to the potentially large migration flows that are triggered by armed conflicts and wars, and economic deprivation. However, migration is a highly complex social phenomenon, and migration decisions depend on a variety of social, political and economic factors. Mobility includes flight, voluntary migration, systematic resettlement, and immobility. For a social and political debate, it is necessary to understand the reasons for migration, to know the socio-demographic characteristics of the population groups that migrate, and to analyze the consequences of migration flows on the societies in the country of origin and destination.

Migration in the EU

From a demographic perspective, is there a need for migration in the EU? Today, the EU member states have to deal with the long-term consequences of a changing population structure, above all aging societies and the resulting decline in the working population. Without immigration from third countries, the population in the EU would decline to 466 million by 2060 due to low birth rates, i.e. to the level of the 1980s. Migration can affect the size of the total population and the labor force, but it has only a limited effect on the age structure in the EU. This is partly due to the fact that migrants settle permanently in the destination country and thus, age just like the local population. Even if a high level of immigration increases the overall size of the working

population, this does not automatically result in a more balanced ratio between the working and non-working population. To achieve that, the effective economic integration of migrants is crucial.

Migrants in Austria

At the beginning of 2022, 1.8 million people were living in Austria who had been born abroad. The largest group of people with a country of birth other than Austria comes from Germany (2.8 %). Bosnia-Herzegovina (1.9 %), Turkey (1.8 %), Serbia (1.6 %), Romania (1.5 %), Hungary (1.0 %) and Poland (0.9 %) are also relatively frequent countries of origin. People born in Afghanistan and Syria currently represent 0.5 % and 0.7 %, respectively, of the population living in Austria. At the beginning of 2022, there were almost 16,500 people living in Austria who were born in Ukraine – most of them in Vienna (57 %).

Refugees in Austria

Who are the people seeking refuge in Austria?
In a scientific survey conducted by the Wittgenstein Centre at the end of 2015, refugees who had recently come to Austria were interviewed. This was the first social survey in Europe in the context of the much-cited "refugee crisis" of 2015. Rather than merely "counting heads", the aim was to reveal what is in those people's minds, what education they bring with them, what their values and attitudes are, and what their health status is. The responses resulted in a differentiated picture of migrants.

- Refugees from Syria and Afghanistan are far better educated than the average population in their country of origin.
- While nine out of ten refugees in Austria rated their health as good or very good, in Germany it was only around seven out of ten. Overall, refugees recorded a high level of satisfaction with the Austrian health system and low barriers to health care access.
- Women, the elderly and people from Afghanistan are particularly vulnerable groups with poorer health on average.

What is the situation of refugee women in Austria?

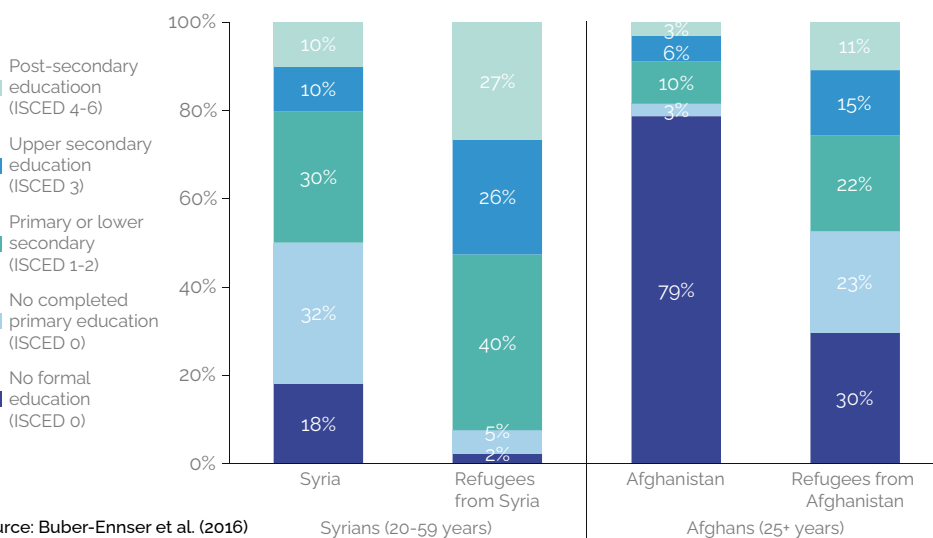
The studies conducted by the Wittgenstein Centre generate a comprehensive picture of the perceptions, realities and challenges of female refugees who came to Austria from Syria and Afghanistan in the context of the refugee movement in 2015/16.

- Refugees – especially women – rate their health worse than the Austrian population of the same age. As a result, not only health inequalities remain, but there are also considerable follow-up costs in the area of secondary and tertiary care.
- Many women who fled to Austria in 2015/16 gave birth to a child soon after their arrival. Very high birth rates among refugees shortly after their arrival that gradually decline again, were also reported in other countries and have been labelled with the term "arrival effect". This was also evident from 1992 onwards among refugees from Bosnia.
- Caring for (small) children while lacking social and family networks constitutes a major challenge for refugee women.
- Many refugee women view their lives in Austria as an extension of their personal options for action, their educational and professional opportunities, both for themselves and for their children.

Consequently, some important conclusions can be drawn for political decisions that are also relevant for other migration groups and movements:

- Physical and mental health are key for a successful inclusion into society and the labor market. Hence, target-group-specific care and prevention are needed for female refugees.
- Unrestricted access to health care – as is the case in Austria – is crucial for the health of refugees.
- Participation in informal, low-threshold integration activities offered by civil society associations and organizations, such as language cafés, neighborhood meetings and training opportunities, are particularly conducive to the social integration of women.

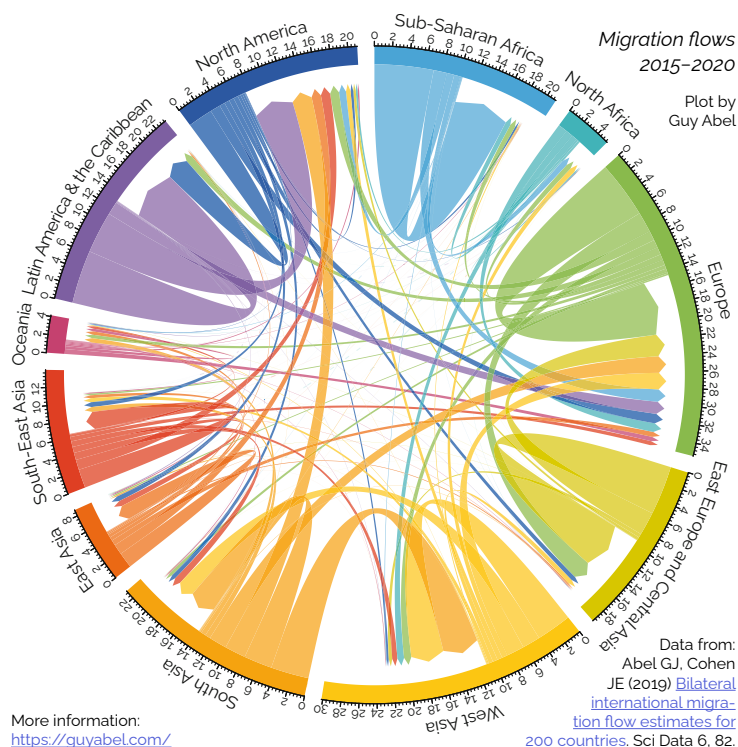
Educational attainment of the general population in the country of origin and among refugees



Source: Buber-Ennser et al. (2016)

Some facts and numbers

- A 2017 estimate by the International Fund for Agricultural Development states that one in nine people worldwide relies on remittances from international migrants to secure their livelihood.
- Despite the Covid-pandemic, the financial transfers of migrants to their countries of origin have barely collapsed and are many times higher (about a factor of 3.8) than the official development assistance.
- There is ample evidence of the importance of migration as adaptation: 40% of the studies included in a review by Burnham et al. (2015) on the adaptation of smallholder farmers to climate change in Asia, Africa and South America mentioned migration as a risk mitigation strategy. In a meta-analysis of adaptation in sub-Saharan African arid regions by Wiederkehr et al. (2018), which analyzed 63 studies with more than 6,700 rural households, it was reported that a quarter of rural households rely on migration as an adaptation strategy.
- In a study on the resilience of households in Thailand, we have shown that the potential for migration as an adaptation is unevenly distributed between different socio-economic groups: households with a better socio-economic situation benefit more from migration than poorly off households.
- In recent decades, there have been strong population shifts within the EU, especially towards the west. The EU as a whole benefits economically from this mobility. However, many Eastern European member states have experienced a sharp decline in population due to considerable emigration (Bulgaria and the Baltic States, for example, between 16% and 26% respectively), which is exacerbated by low birth rates. This deepens structural challenges, such as in the areas of infrastructure, education and aging.



Environment and migration

Research at the Wittgenstein Centre takes a differentiated look at the relationship between environment and migration. Therefore, the focus is on both the question of how environmental and climate change affect migration decisions and flows, and how migration can contribute to improved adaptation to climate change. Studies have shown that environmental hazards affect migration, albeit with contextual differences. Migration in the context of environmental and climate change is socially differentiated and takes place mainly within a country or towards low- and middle-income countries. International migration is the exception.

Migration as adaptation

Can migration contribute to the adaptation to climate change? On the one hand, migration in the context of environmental and climate

change can be a sign of a failure of adaptation if households' risk reduction strategies fail or the livelihood collapses. If the last resort that households can fall back on is (the then involuntary) migration, this often leads to a reduction of livelihood security and well-being. On the other hand, migration in the context of environmental and climate change can also be a form of successful adaptation: households can take advantage of migration to diversify risks and maintain well-being during a crisis. In the event of a drought, for example, individual household members may temporarily go to urban areas for work to compensate for the loss of agricultural income through remittances.

The mechanisms for the success of migration as adaptation and the question of the circumstances under which migration as an adaptation has reached its limits have not yet been well studied. However, existing studies allow some conclusions. On the one hand, the goal of development and adaptation policy must be to reduce vulner-

ability to climate change and thus, to increase the freedom of choice to migrate or not to migrate. On the other hand, the living and working conditions of migrants should be improved – not only in migration destinations such as Austria, but especially when migrants move within their country. The living and working conditions of migrants also have an impact on the potential of migration as an adaptation – and thus, on the need for further migration – as this influences, for example, the ability of migrants to support their households of origin with remittances.

PUBLICATIONS

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RESEARCH PROJECTS

- Displaced Persons in Austria Survey (DiPAS): <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/research/research-projects/dipas>
- Future Migration Scenarios for Europe (FUME): <https://futuremigration.eu/>
- Linking Climate Change, Habitability and Social Tipping Points: Scenarios for Climate Migration (HABITABLE): <https://habitableproject.org/>
- Population Dynamics under Global Climate Change (POPCLIMA): <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101002973>
- Quantifying Migration Scenarios for Better Policy (QuantMig): <http://quantmig.eu/>
- Refugee Health and Integration Survey: Mental Health and Health Access of Refugees in Austria (ReHIS): <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/research/research-projects/dipas/rehis-project>
- Women's Integration Survey: Inclusion, Participation and Enablement of Refugee Women in Austria (WIN): <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/research/research-projects/dipas/win-project>