

Family context of refugees: Comparing Iraqi and Syrian men and women in Austria and Germany

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Extended abstract

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Introduction

In recent years, large numbers of asylum seekers arrived in Europe, many originating from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Austria and Germany turned out to be important countries of destination of refugee-seeking persons around the years 2014-2017. The political, societal and scientific discourse focused mainly on the effects on the economies and welfare systems of the receiving countries in Europe (Clemens and Hunt 2019; Hainmüller et al. 2016; Dustmann et al. 2017; Borjas and Monras 2017). The wellbeing of unaccompanied refugee children (Tangermann and Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018; Oppedal and Idsoe 2015; Keles et al. 2018) and of refugee children in general (Berthold 2014; Fritsche et al. 2019) constitutes a further branch in research on displaced persons. However, less attention has been paid to refugees' family context. This is surprising, since family migration – i.e. family reunification and formation, or accompanying family members – was one of the most important channels of migration to OECD countries (UNHCR 2019). Furthermore, the familial situation is assumed to be crucial for migration and return decisions (González-Ferrer et al. 2014; Müller-Funk 2019), as well as migrants' integration (Rumbaut 1997), and well-being (Gambaro et al. 2018) in the destination country. Up to now, few studies examine the family arrangements and spousal migration practices of recently arrived refugees in Europe. To fill this gap in current research, we study the family context and arrangements of newly arrived Iraqi and Syrian nationals. In particular, we focus on the determinants for leaving back a spouse and/or children and possible differences between two of the major destination countries in Europe, Austria and Germany.

Both Austria and Germany faced large numbers of asylum applications from persons originating from Iraq and Syria in the last years and the share of persons born in Iraq or Syria and residing in both destination countries increased substantially. Whereas in 2002, about 3,000 persons originating from Iraq and 2,000 persons originating from Syria were living in Austria, numbers increased to 6,000 and 12,000 by the end of 2014 and to 15,000 and 48,000 by the beginning of 2019 (Statistik Austria 2019). These numbers correspond to 0.2% and 0.5% of the population currently residing in Austria. Also in Germany, the number of persons originating from Iraq and Syria increased sharply and changed the composition of the population with foreign nationality. In 2002, approximately 83,000 Iraqi and nearly 29,000 Syrians were living in Germany. By the end of 2014, these numbers rose to about 89,000 and 118,000 for Iraqis and Syrians, respectively, and to approximately 248,000 and 746,000 by the end of 2018 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019). This corresponds to 0.3% and 0.9% of the population currently residing in Germany.

Despite these similarities regarding the increasing numbers of refugee inflows from the two countries of origin across both destinations, Austria and Germany show different patterns with regard to national asylum policies, the socio-demographic composition of refugee inflows, as well as differences in their structural integration into the host society (Konle-Seidl 2017). These diverse contexts of destination

are likely to influence and shape refugees' family migration practices across the two destination countries.

Data

This study makes use of two so far unique datasets that allow studying the characteristics of married refugee men and women's family contexts. The Austrian data source is a quantitative survey among displaced persons arriving in Austria in 2015 (called DiPAS: Displaced Persons in Austria Survey¹), carried out in November and December 2015 as CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviews) in Arabic, Farsi/Dari and English. This survey – the first of its kind among refugee-seeking persons arriving in Europe in this specific year – focused on human capital, attitudes and values, and comprised 514 adult asylum seekers (Buber-Ennsner et al. 2016). Furthermore, the survey includes not only information on the respondents themselves, but also on spouses and children, so that in total 1,391 individuals were captured, either living in Austria at the time of the interview or abroad (Buber-Ennsner et al. 2016).

The German data source is the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees², collected as part of the German Socio-Economic Panel and addressing people who seek asylum in Germany. The first wave was carried out in Germany in 2016, the second wave in 2017. The sample was drawn from the German Central Register of Foreigners (*Ausländerzentralregister*), which covers all non-German nationals who have settled in Germany for longer than three months (Kroh et al. 2018). The sampling frame covered all adult individuals (aged 18 or older) who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016 and who filed an asylum application at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) or were hosted as part of specific programmes of the federal government or of a federal state (Kühne et al. 2019). Interviews were conducted as CAPI in Arabic, Kurmanji, Farsi/Dari, Urdu, Pashto, German, and English. The total sample over the two waves includes more than 7,400 refugee men and women who participated in the survey at least once. The survey provides rich information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, on various aspects of integration, their migration history, their family members and place of residence.

For reasons of comparability, empirical analyses are restricted to married persons, with citizenship from Syria or Iraq, who arrived in 2015 in Austria/Germany, and who were aged 18 to 59 years at the time of the interview. The final samples include 269 and 1,341 persons for Austria and Germany, respectively, who are married and living at the respective destination country at the time of the interview. For our analyses on leaving back children, we further restricted the sample to married persons with at least one child (159 in Austria and 686 in Germany).

Preliminary results

First, descriptive results are presented. By taking a closer look at the place of residence of the spouse at arrival in Austria/Germany, important differences between men and women in both destination countries appear (Figure 1). The share of persons arriving in Austria/Germany together with their partner is larger among women compared to men. Men more often had left their spouse in the origin country or another country. The data also show that this proportion is greater for Germany than for Austria. When focusing on parents only and combining the place of residence of the spouse and children, results indicate that 53 per cent and 39 per cent of married men in Austria and Germany, respectively, arrived at destination without their spouse and children (Figure 2). On the contrary, the

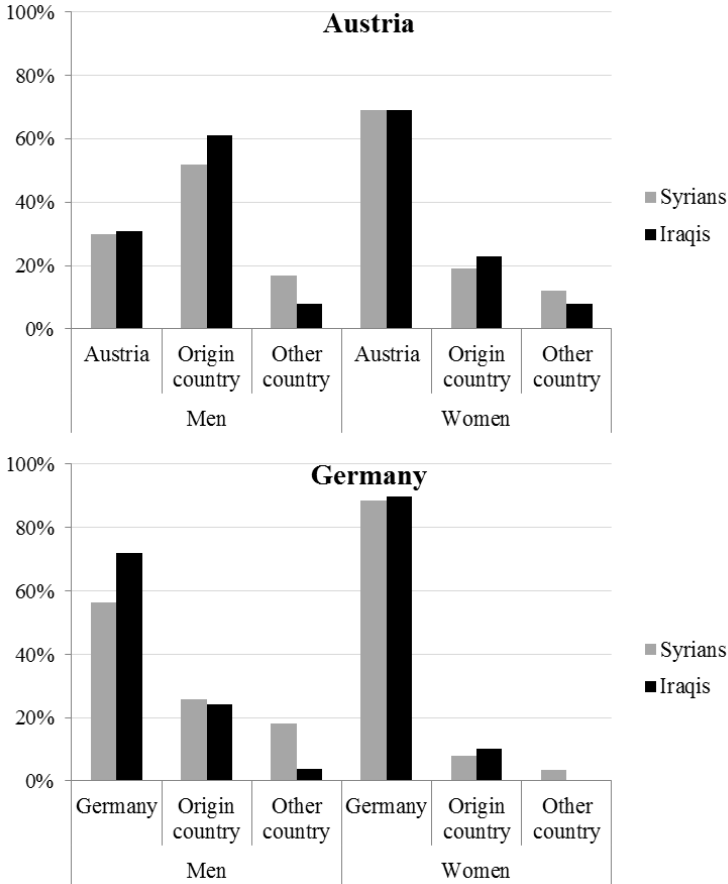
¹ <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/vid/research/research-projects/dipas/>

² https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.538695.en/projects/iab_bamf_soep_survey_of_refugees_in_germany.html

majority of married women – almost three out of four – arrived with their husband and children in Austria/Germany, to approximately the same extent in both destinations.

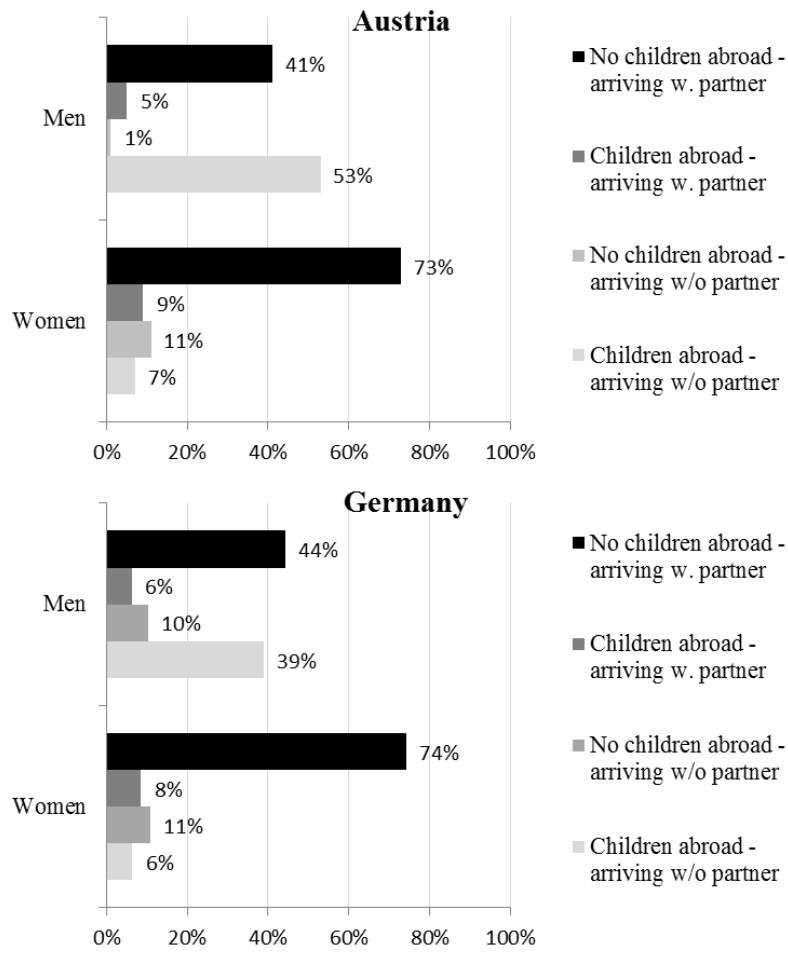
Second, multivariate logistic regression models were estimated for both migratory settings separately and distinguishing between men and women, to predict the joint arrival of both partners (versus leaving the spouse behind). Independent variables cover basic socio-demographic characteristics: age, education, citizenship, and the number of children. Results indicate that the age of both, men and women, has a significant effect on fleeing as a couple in both countries (table not shown). Furthermore, the educational level of the wife seems important only for Germany, indicating that higher educated women are more likely to leave their husband behind. In a second set of models (Table 1), we estimated whether there are differences between Austria and Germany in leaving back at least one child (versus living with all children in Austria/Germany). Logistic regressions reveal that having children left behind is significantly associated with the number and the age of the children, as well as the couple context, showing similar patterns for Austria and Germany. Not surprisingly, adult children (aged 18+) are more likely to stay behind in the country of origin or another country, while children at preschool age (aged < 6) more often reside with their parents in the destination country. Moreover, spouses who arrive alone in the destination country are significantly more likely to leave at least one of their children behind, with a stronger effect for men compared to women. In further analyses, we will assess the differences and similarities between Austria and Germany in more detail, accounting also for the diverging policy contexts across both destinations.

Figure 1: Place of residence of spouse when arriving at destination, married Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers



Data: DiPAS for Austria; IAB-BAMF-SOEP for Germany.

Figure 2: Place of residence of spouse and children when arriving at destination, married Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers with children



Data: DiPAS for Austria; IAB-BAMF-SOEP for Germany.

Table 1: Logistic regression models for leaving back at least one child (versus living with all children in Germany)

	Austria	Germany
Partner context		
Man migrated alone	9.87***	2.96***
Both (ref.)	0	0
Woman migrated alone	2.05*	1.43***
Parity		
1 or 2 children (ref.)	0	0
3+ children	2.73**	0.69***
Age of youngest child		
0-2	-2.05	-1.04***
3-5	-2.29+	-0.53*
6-17 (Ref.)	0	0
18+	1.67	2.06***
Citizenship		
Iraq (Ref.)	0	0
Syria	0.88	-0.04
Duration of journey		
up to 9 days (ref.)	0	0
10-16 days	1.39	0.22
17+ days	-0.09	0.06
Constant	-4.97**	-2.56***
Pseudo R ²	0.7680	0.30
N	159	686

Note: In the German model we additionally control for survey sample

+ p < 0.15, * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Data: DiPAS for Austria; IAB-BAMF-SOEP for Germany.

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