



Three out of four children and adolescents in favour of taking in refugees But misconceptions and fears increase during 2016

The IZI and the LfM have released the first wide-ranging series of studies on children, adolescents and refugees. Their findings: the majority of children and adolescents have a positive attitude to refugees, but very few have had personal contact with them. Knowledge about “the refugees” has increased over the course of 2016, as has children’s and adolescents’ overestimation of the numbers of arrivals. Particularly in the case of adolescents, fear of the dangers posed by terrorism has risen.

Munich, 30 November 2016. The cooperative investigation by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) and the Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia (LfM) has produced a wide-ranging series of studies on adolescents and refugees. In March (n= 741) and September 2016 (n= 1,448) a survey examined six- to nineteen-year-olds’ knowledge and attitudes concerning refugees and how their responses correlated with media use.

77 % think it is good or very good that Germany is taking in refugees

For the majority of the children and adolescents surveyed in 2016, their emotional attitude to refugees is distinctly positive. While the figure has dropped from 84 % in March to 77 % in September, a clear majority still considers it “good” or “very good” that Germany is taking in refugees. In the case of respondents who have got to know a refugee, this more positive attitude is much more pronounced.

Only two in five have actually had contact with refugees

On average, only two in five, or, in the case of primary school children, three in ten, have personally spoken with refugees or done something with them. Hardly any of the respondents surveyed in Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern had had any contact with them. Hence for the majority of children and adolescents, knowledge and ideas about refugees are primarily based on media discourses.

When children relate what they know about refugees in qualitative interviews, the focus is usually on war, destruction and fleeing, for instance in overloaded dinghies. These are the images they know from the media. However, they are unaware of many aspects of their refugee peers’ direct experience of violence.¹

The number of refugees arriving in Germany is often grossly overestimated

Many children and adolescents have a basic knowledge of the situation, such as the fact that most refugees in 2015 came from Syria or countries in the Middle East. In other areas, however, incorrect information has been retained: many of the respondents vastly overestimate the number of refugees that have arrived, a tendency that increased during the course of 2016. Over a third of seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds consider the number to be too high, in comparison to a fifth in March. In the East, particularly in Saxony, overestimates are particularly high; only 16 % of respondents know the correct answer.

¹ 40 interviews were conducted with refugee children and adolescents on their image of Germany, their experiences, desires and future prospects.

Adolescents' fear of terrorist attacks by refugees on the rise

Only a small percentage of children and adolescents are afraid of refugees. Fears that more refugees in Germany will mean less to go round or that their parents will lose their jobs, for instance, have barely changed throughout the course of 2016. The most significant increase is registered for fear of terrorist attacks by refugees. In March, 30 % of children and adolescents reported this fear; in September the figure had risen to over four in ten (43 %). It is not children who fear that refugees bring the threat of terrorism to Germany, but adolescents, an over-proportional number of whom have never had any contact with refugees.

Knowledge about refugees mainly comes from television

Children and adolescents mainly obtain their knowledge on refugees from the media, television being by far the most-used source of information, followed by newspapers, the internet and radio. The best knowledge was shown by respondents who gained their information from *Tagesschau*, *logo!* or *heute*. Children who obtain their knowledge from state television stations have significantly fewer fears regarding future coexistence with refugees.

Where media reports become problematic

Children and adolescents mainly develop fears when they are exposed to sensationalist media reports; here they primarily recall the spectacular images and the emotive tone, but not the facts of the report. The most lasting impression is made by reports of violence committed by refugees and by reports that often there are terrorists among them. The children and adolescents came into contact with xenophobic rumours, sometimes of explicitly criminal provenance, via social networks such as facebook. They are seldom able to distinguish between these rumours and serious news reporting.

Active discussion of the topic needed

Overall, the studies' findings clearly demonstrate the need for targeted discussion of the subject of refugees in schools, educational institutions and children's and youth media. "We urgently have to find concepts for the communication of facts and active discussion of prevailing worries, fears and prejudices," says Dr. Maya Götz, who led the study. Prof. Dr. Jürgen Brautmeier, director of the Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia (LfM), calls for targeted information skills training for adolescents. "It is same here too: it is all a question of knowledge, education, upbringing," he said.

The studies' findings will be presented at the IZI's annual conference "Umwelt, Flucht und Ankommen – Jungen Zielgruppen globale Themen vermitteln" (Environment, Refugees and Arrival – Communicating Global Topics to Young Target Groups) in Munich on 6.12.2016.

For more information on the study, advance copies of the research articles and to register for the conference, please contact: Dr. Maya Götz, Director, Internationales Zentralinstitut für das Jugend- und Bildungsfernsehen, tel.: 089/5900-42264, website: www.izi.de, www.maya-goetz.de; email: Maya.Goetz@br.de

A selection of drawings by children and adolescents on the subject of refugees and war in Syria is available for journalists to reprint free of charge.

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