

# Do refugees converge to local culture? Evidence from German regions

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## Abstract

This paper studies the adoption of local preferences and norms by refugees over time. Exploiting plausibly exogenous variation in the allocation of refugees across German regions between 2013 and 2018, we examine the path of refugees' convergence towards local culture in the short-run. We assemble a novel data set on values, habits, and preferences for 8,000 refugees, and combine it with local information on more than 34,000 natives from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) survey. We find strong evidence that refugees converge to local culture and do so differentially for prevailing social norms at the local- rather than the national-level. This process is faster for more “malleable” norms and preferences such as leisure activity or interest in politics, and more sticky for deeper cultural traits, like religion or moral values. We also document that the process of cultural convergence is non-linear, and slows down over time. Moreover, our findings suggest that refugees adopt local culture faster when living in more culturally homogeneous environments and when the threat resulting from lack of assimilation is stronger.

**Keywords:** migration, refugees, culture, values, assimilation

**JEL classification:** F22, Z10

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