
Inhabitants of foreign origin in Akureyri 2012

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Introduction

Akureyri has a small but growing foreign population. Between 2000 and 2013, the number of individuals with a non-Icelandic citizenship living in Akureyri increased from 170 to over 450 (Statistics Iceland, 2013). This is a significant change in a town with little more than 17 thousand inhabitants but in line with development in Iceland as a whole which saw the number of individuals with non-Icelandic citizenship increase from only around 3% in the year 2000 to around 9% in 2008 (Statistics Iceland, 2013).

The National register (Þjóðskrá) holds information on both citizenship and country of birth but neither of these can be seen as a reliable indicator of a person being of foreign origin. Many foreigners are eventually granted Icelandic citizenship and many 'native' Icelanders are born in foreign countries (e.g. to parents who are studying abroad). Information on the situation of foreigners (as defined by ethnic background) would in many countries be available through census information but regular censuses have not been carried out in Iceland since 1960 (Statistics Iceland, 1958, 1969; Ómar Harðarson, 2008). Furthermore, looking only at the kind of information available in the National register provides a very limited view of the overall situation of foreigners. The aim of this study is to look at the general situation of foreigners living in Akureyri who participated in a survey in the fall of 2012 and answered a range of questions on their living conditions and attitudes.

About the study

The survey was done by a small research group from the University of Akureyri in collaboration with the town of Akureyri. The target population of the study were individuals, 18 years or older, living in Akureyri at the time of the study (fall 2012) and who regarded themselves as being foreigners in Iceland. A complete list of foreigners is not available, neither from Statistics Iceland nor the municipality of Akureyri. Statistics Iceland distinguishes between "foreigner" as not having an Icelandic passport and immigrant of foreign origin which includes as well the group of naturalized immigrants. According to Statistics Iceland in the year 2013 the number of individuals with non-Icelandic citizenship in Akureyri was 452 on the 1st of January (roughly the same number as in January 2012) (Statistics Iceland, 2013). This number includes also 79 children 17 years or younger. At the same time Statistics Iceland counted 711 immigrants in Akureyri. This means over 250 of people from foreign origin have received an Icelandic passport. Receiving an Icelandic passport indicates a certain level of integration and the foreign community in Akureyri displays a significant higher percentage of integration compared to other communities in the North. In Akureyri 36% of the immigrants hold an Icelandic passport compared to 17% in Dalvík or 15% in Fjarðabyggð or 10% in Norðurþing for example.

Neither of the definitions available in the National register can be seen as adequately identifying the

target population of the study (individuals who regarded themselves as being foreigners in Akureyri). Thus, instead of drawing a sample from an incomplete list of potential participants the study relied on a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling. Individuals that the researchers knew and who fitted the inclusion criteria were contacted and asked to participate and also asked to identify other individuals who might also fit the criteria. In this way 194 respondents were recruited. In the recruitment process it was made clear however that the study was not aimed at adopted children over 18 years or individuals of Icelandic origin who had foreign partners. Based on these numbers and comparing them with the numbers obtained by Statistics Iceland perhaps it can be estimated that the survey has reached approximately one third to half of all eligible respondents.

Data was collected in the period from August to October 2012 in face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was composed in English and then translated into both Polish and Icelandic. The face-to-face setup was chosen to minimize the burden on respondents, increase item response rates and to allow respondents to ask for clarifications on individual questions (Bowling, 2005; Tourangeau, Rips & Rasinski, 2000). However the respondents could choose to what extent they wanted the interviewer to assist them with answering the questionnaire.

The introduction stressed that participation was entirely voluntary, they were by no means obliged to participate and if they chose not to participate this would have no consequences for them. Those who agreed to participate were given the offer that the researcher would wait while they answered the survey (thus having the possibility to ask for clarifications and assistance) or they

would answer the questionnaire by themselves and it would be picked up later. The respondents were instructed not to write their name on the questionnaire (or in other way identify it) and it was also made clear that even though they had agreed to answer the questionnaire they were not obliged to answer all of the questions.

Table 1 shows the countries represented in the survey. The largest group of respondents comes from Poland and five other countries are represented in the survey by five or more respondents. But in addition to the six countries with five respondents or more there are 28 other countries of origin.

Table 1: Country of origin

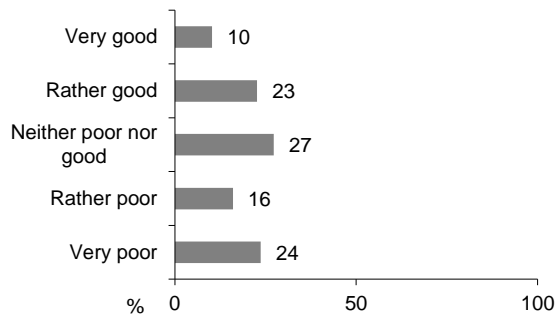
| Respondents from... | % |
|---------------------|----|
| Poland | 29 |
| Philippines | 12 |
| Thailand | 7 |
| Germany | 6 |
| Latvia | 5 |
| Finland | 4 |
| Lithuania | 3 |
| Other countries | 34 |

The sample size limits the analysis in terms of breakdown of individual responses using cross tabulation. To compensate for this logistic regression analysis is used to simultaneously estimate the effect of more than one independent variable.

Knowledge of Icelandic

An indicator that is often associated with successful integration of foreigners is the knowledge of Icelandic. The participants were asked how they evaluate their knowledge of Icelandic. The answers are shown in figure 1.

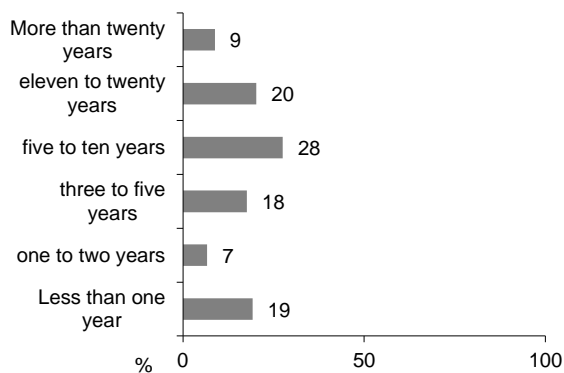
Figure 1 – Knowledge of Icelandic



Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

The relatively high number (24%) of respondents who say that their knowledge in Icelandic is very poor knowledge of Icelandic may be surprising. It might however also be related to the length of stay (see figure 2).

Figure 2 – Length of stay in Iceland

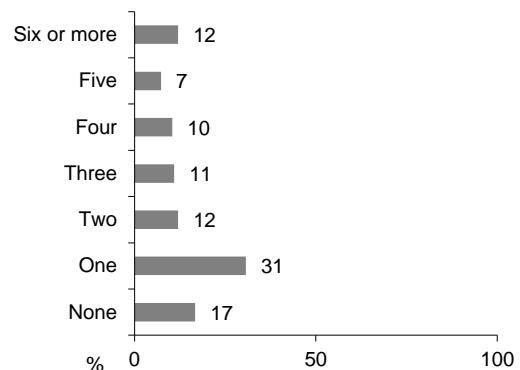


Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

As it appears, some 26% of the foreigner population participating in the survey have in fact stayed less than 2 years in Iceland. It is to some extent debatable whether individuals who have been in Akureyri less than one year for example should be thought of as foreigners living in Akureyri. However including this group also reflects the diversity in the group of foreigners which at any time will include individuals who are either temporarily staying in Akureyri or have been there a relatively short time.

We were then interested in trying to find out what improves the knowledge of Icelandic. The most obvious way improving your Icelandic would be taking Icelandic courses and many of the foreigners have invested time in it as the answers asking after how many courses have been visited are showing:

Figure 3 – Number of course in Icelandic

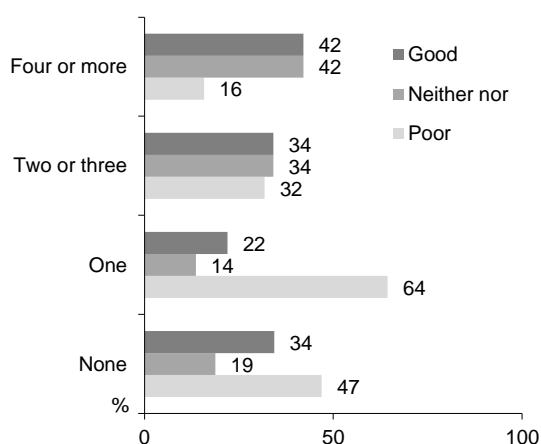


Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

However estimating to what extent taking courses in Icelandic improves proficiency in speaking the language is not straight forward. To make such a judgement some knowledge of proficiency in speaking Icelandic prior to taking a course would be necessary. Figure 4 shows answers to the

question on proficiency in speaking Icelandic (as estimated by the respondent) by the number of courses in Icelandic. As it turns out taking more language courses seems to reduce the probability of respondents saying that their spoken Icelandic is poor but at the same time taking language courses does not seem to be clearly linked with respondents saying that their spoken language is good.

Figure 4 – Proficiency in speaking Icelandic by number of Icelandic courses taken



Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

A logistic regression analysis was used to measure the effect of these and other background variables (age and country of origin) on the likelihood of a respondent saying that he or she has good proficiency in speaking Icelandic.

Table 2 shows the results of a logistic regression analysis where speaking good Icelandic is the dependent variable. In addition to control measures such as age, gender and country of origin, the model also looks at length of stay and whether being married to an Icelandic partner is related to perceived proficiency in speaking Icelandic.

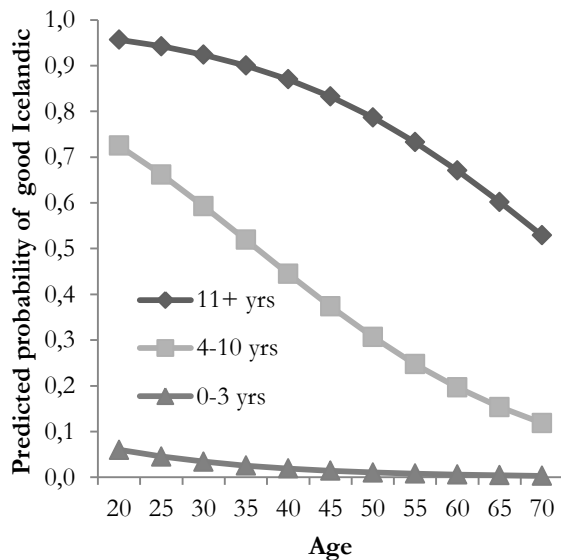
Table 2 – Logistic regression model for the probability of a foreigner in Akureyri speaking good Icelandic.

| | EXP(b) | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------|--------|------|
| Women (vs. men) | 2,51 | 0,06 |
| Age | 0,95 | 0,02 |
| Has an Icelandic partner | 1,04 | 0,93 |
| Has a university entrance diploma | 1,65 | 0,29 |
| Eastern (vs. W-Europe) | 0,71 | 0,58 |
| Other areas (vs. W-Europe) | 0,63 | 0,42 |
| Short (vs. medium stay) | 0,03 | 0,00 |
| Long (vs. medium stay) | 8,02 | 0,00 |
| Constant | 0,25 | 0,02 |
| -2 Log likelihood | 155 | |
| Cox & Snell R Square | 0,33 | |
| Nagelkerke R Square | 0,45 | |

As it turns out gender does have an effect on the likelihood of speaking Icelandic well, even when age, having an Icelandic partner, general education, country of origin and length of stay are controlled for. Taking these factors into account women are still around two and a half times more likely than men to say that their proficiency in speaking Icelandic is good. Having an Icelandic partner is not related to speaking Icelandic well. The measured effect of having an Icelandic partner is only around four per cent and not statistically significant in this sample. Older respondents are on average less likely to say that they speak good Icelandic. For every ten years a respondent gets older the likelihood of claiming to speak good Icelandic is reduced by around 45%. Country of origin (coded into three regions) does not show a statistically significant effect either. However, the measured effect is rather big (with respondents outside W-Europe being around 30 to 40% less likely to speak good Icelandic). Length of stay has by far the strongest correlation with proficiency in Icelandic. Compared with those who have stayed between 4 and 10 years

the group that has stayed for 11 years or more is eight times more likely to say that their proficiency in Icelandic is good. On the other hand, the likelihood of a respondent who has stayed for three years or less describing his or her proficiency in Icelandic as good is very small.

Figure 5 – Effect of age and length of stay on the probability of speaking good Icelandic.



The most dramatic difference is between those who have stayed 3 years or less and those who have stayed longer. However, it is also worth keeping in mind the different characteristics of the groups. An individual who is for example between 20 and 30 years old and has already stayed in Iceland for 11 years or more has a different background than the one who is perhaps between 40 and 50 years old and has stayed in Iceland for between 4 and 10 years.

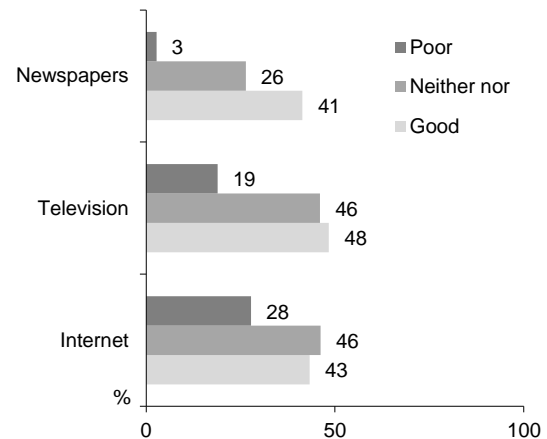
Media consumption

Another indicator that might be associated with integration of foreigners into society in Akureyri is to what extent they follow Icelandic

Use of Icelandic media

For media use a distinction was made between watching television, reading newspapers and browsing Icelandic material on the internet. Only a minority of the respondents spends more than half an hour on any of these activities. A third say they regularly spend half an hour or more watching Icelandic television and a similar group (38%) say that they spend half an hour or more browsing Icelandic content on the internet. A fourth of the respondents say that they for half an hour or more read Icelandic newspapers.

Figure 6 – Respondents who spend 2 hours or more on a regular day reading, watching or browsing material in Icelandic by proficiency in speaking Icelandic



Income and work

The majority of the immigrants work in low income jobs. When asked on the family income the numbers are well below the average Icelandic income. To estimate income the respondents were asked about their family income (before tax). The six answer categories were recoded to distinguish between those who say that their family income is below 300 thousand ISK per month and those who say that it is 300 thousand or more. This applies to 20% of the respondents. Looking at personal income the majority (76%) of respondents have an income below this threshold. Table 3 shows a logistic regression model for the probability of a foreigner in Akureyri having a low family income.

Table 3 – Logistic regression model for the probability of a foreigner in Akureyri having a low family income

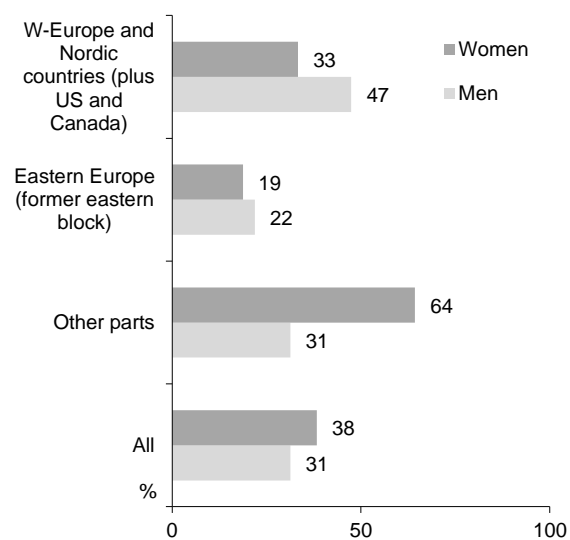
| | EXP(b) | Sig. |
|----------------------------|--------|------|
| Age | 1,02 | 0,39 |
| Women (vs. men) | 1,62 | 0,30 |
| Eastern (vs. W-Europe) | 1,88 | 0,29 |
| Other areas (vs. W-Europe) | 2,85 | 0,09 |
| Speaks good Icelandic | 0,42 | 0,09 |
| Constant | 0,13 | 0,00 |
| -2 Log likelihood | 131 | |
| Cox & Snell R Square | 0,05 | |
| Nagelkerke R Square | 0,08 | |

As it turns out, none of the predictors (see table 3) have a statistically significant correlation with the likelihood of having low family income. In a bigger sample it is however not unlikely that at least country of origin and proficiency in speaking Icelandic would turn out to be of importance for family income given the size of the parameter estimates in this sample.

Happiness and general satisfaction

Despite the low income of many foreigners in Akureyri the foreign community is to biggest part very satisfied with their lives in Akureyri. Over 80% of the foreign population say that they are either very satisfied or satisfied with living in Akureyri. Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents who say that they are very satisfied with living in Akureyri by gender and region of origin. Here we can see that overall women seem to be somewhat more satisfied than men (38% compared with 31%) but in particular women that are not from Europe or northern America seem to be likely to say that they are very happy with living in Akureyri.

Figure 7 – Respondents who say that they are very satisfied with living in Akureyri by gender and region of origin



Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

Table 4 shows a logistic regression model where being very satisfied with living in Akureyri is the dependent variable. The results show that only country of origin has a statistically significant

correlation with the likelihood of being very satisfied with living in Akureyri. Thus respondents coming from countries in Eastern-Europe are much less likely than respondents from Western-Europe or other areas to say that they are very happy with living in Akureyri. Gender however does not have a statistically significant effect, neither on its own nor in combination with having an Icelandic partner.

Table 4 – Logistic regression model for the probability of a foreigner in Akureyri being very satisfied with living there

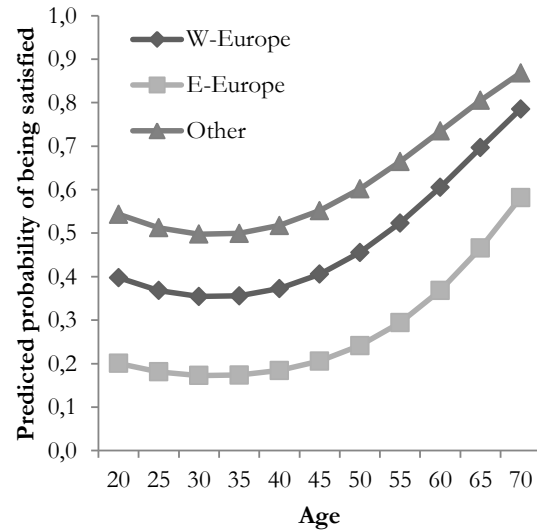
| | EXP(b) | Sig. |
|---|--------|------|
| Women (vs. men) | 1,49 | 0,35 |
| Has an Icelandic partner | 2,77 | 0,25 |
| Interaction between gender and having Icelandic partner | 0,32 | 0,25 |
| Age | 0,99 | 0,51 |
| Curvilinearity of age | 1,00 | 0,10 |
| Eastern (vs. W-Europe) | 0,35 | 0,03 |
| Other areas (vs. W-Europe) | 1,45 | 0,42 |
| Short (vs. medium stay) | 0,39 | 0,08 |
| Long (vs. medium stay) | 1,19 | 0,68 |
| Constant | 0,50 | 0,16 |
| -2 Log likelihood | 208 | |
| Cox & Snell R Square | 0,15 | |
| Nagelkerke R Square | 0,20 | |

The age effect, although not statistically significant, is in line with studies on well-being and happiness in general where it is common to find a u-shaped correlation with live satisfaction taking a dip in mid-adult years (see: Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008).

Figure 7 shows the country and age effects for the likelihood of being very satisfied with living in Akureyri. First of all it shows the tendency for satisfaction to increase after the age of 45 and

also it shows the difference in satisfaction between regions.

Figure 7 – Effect of age and country of origin on the probability of being very satisfied with living in Akureyri



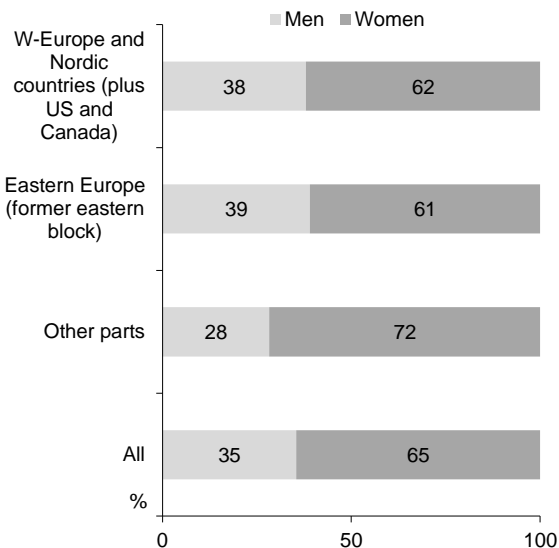
In the group of people being very satisfied there are differences. People from Eastern Europe are less likely to be very satisfied compared to Western Europe and outside Europe. As longer people are staying in the country as more likely they are satisfied.

In terms of satisfaction with living in Akureyri it is also worth pointing out that being able to speak good Icelandic was not a significant predictor. In other words respondents who said they had a good proficiency in speaking Icelandic were not more likely to say that they were very satisfied with living in Akureyri.

Gender differences

There are more foreign women than men living in Akureyri. According to Statistic Iceland 56% of the immigrants in Akureyri are female. In the survey some 65% of the respondents are women. Figure 8 shows the gender of respondents by which region in the world they come from. For all regions women are in majority.

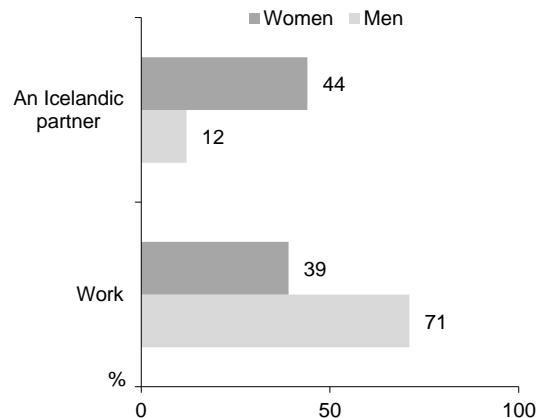
Figure 8 – Gender of respondents by region of origin



Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

In the survey respondents were asked about the main reason for coming to live in Iceland. Mainly the answers fall into two categories, work and having an Icelandic partner. Men and women give however quite different answers to this question (see figure 9). The majority of men say that they live in Iceland because of work whereas a much bigger proportion of women than men say that the main reason is an Icelandic partner. It is worth noting perhaps that in the biggest group of foreigners (Polish) not a single man says that the reason for living in Iceland is an Icelandic partner.

Figure 9 – Main reason for living in Akureyri by gender



Base: Individuals 18 years or older living in Akureyri in the fall 2012 and who see themselves as being foreigners.

The women in our sample are on average three years older than the men with 43 per cent of the women being 41 years or older compared to only 25 per cent of the men (see table 2). The women have also on average spent more time in Iceland than the men. Some 35 per cent of the women have spent 11 years or more in Iceland compared with 18 per cent of the men.

Around one in four respondents in our sample comes from the Nordic countries, Western-Europe, US or Canada. This is similar for both men and women. A marginally higher proportion of men than women come from Eastern-European countries whereas the women are more likely than the men to come from countries outside of Europe, US and Canada.

Men and women give very different reasons for living in Iceland. Almost three in four men say that work is amongst the reasons they live in

Iceland. This applies to less than half of the women (39%). Having an Icelandic partner is however stated as a reason by almost half of the women but only one in ten men.

The women in our sample are much more likely than the men to have a university entrance diploma (equivalent to stúdentsspróf). This does not however mean that the men are uneducated. Rather the men are much more likely than the women to have some kind of vocational training. Also it should be kept in mind that education systems differ between countries and the terminology used in some countries can be hard to translate to a comparable scale.

The women in the sample rate their proficiency in speaking Icelandic considerably higher than the men. Thus a half of the men say that their proficiency in speaking Icelandic is poor or very poor whereas this applies to a third of the women. Only a fifth of the men say that their proficiency in speaking Icelandic is good or very good compared with 40 per cent of the women. Perhaps related to this, the women are more likely than the men to say that they spend half an hour or more on a normal day reading Icelandic newspapers.

The women are only marginally more likely than the men to say that their family income is 300 thousand ISK or less (this is less than 2.000 Euro) before taxes and other deductions. The women are however more likely than the men to say that they are not in employment. This applies to 10 per cent of the women but only 3 per cent of the men. The unemployment rate in Iceland at the time of the survey (October 2012) was estimated to be 5,2% (Vinnumálastofnun, 2012).

Looking at satisfaction with living in Akureyri the women are both marginally more likely than the

men to say that they are very satisfied and less likely to say that they are not satisfied (very dissatisfied, rather dissatisfied or neither nor dissatisfied combined).

The fact that more women than men claim good proficiency in speaking Icelandic is interesting but the question remains if this is a matter of gender or if this is a result of the women having spent on average more time in Iceland, being better educated or having Icelandic partners. A logistic regression analysis was used to measure the effect of these and other background variables (age and country of origin) on the likelihood of a respondent saying that he or she has good proficiency in speaking Icelandic.

Conclusions

Immigrants are to a very large extent satisfied with their lives in Akureyri. Over 80 % answered that they are very satisfied or rather satisfied. The survey was able to show that no clear indicator exists for determine a high risk group among the foreigners. In other words, the study does not point to a specific group which has limited proficiency in speaking Icelandic, does not follow Icelandic media, has low income and is likely to be unhappy with their stay in Akureyri.

This does not mean that there are no individuals who have problems or are unhappy with their life in Akureyri. Thus it is not clear from our data that there are specific characteristics associated with not being happy.

References

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