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Social Integration of Refugees Is Improving
Refugees’ High Employment Expectations: Partially Met
By Daniel Graeber and Felicitas Schikora

- In 2016, two in three refugees reported that the probability they would find employment within two years was high.
- Male refugees had higher expectations than their female counterparts; refugees with higher education and better mental health had higher expectations than others.
- Although expectations were met for around half the refugees, about one-third did not find a job despite their high expectations.
- Female refugees, refugees with poor mental health, or with primary education, in particular, had high expectations that were not met.
- Poor mental health or structural variables such as a lack of childcare may have impacted the refugees’ entry into employment.

Most refugees reported a high probability of finding employment within two years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2016 Employment expectations</th>
<th>2018 Actual employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67% of refugees had high employment expectations</td>
<td>32% of refugees had high employment expectations and found a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33% of refugees had low employment expectations</td>
<td>11% of refugees had low employment expectations, yet found a job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018 Actual employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35% of refugees had high employment expectations, yet found no job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22% of refugees had low employment expectations and found no job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, v.35.

FROM THE AUTHORS
“The majority of refugees reported that the probability they would find employment within two years was high. Refugees should receive sufficient information on the German labor market and the necessary qualifications in order to avoid disappointment, which can hamper their integration.”

— Felicitas Schikora ——

MEDIA
Audio Interview with C. Katharina Speiß (in German)
www.diw.de/mediathek
Refugees’ High Employment Expectations: Partially Met

By Daniel Graeber and Felicitas Schikora

ABSTRACT

This report compares employment expectations among refugees in Germany in 2016 with their actual employment situation in 2018, using the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany. In 2016, the majority of refugees reported that the probability they would find employment within two years was high. Employment expectations were met by 54 percent of all refugees; yet 35 percent of refugees who articulated high expectations in 2016, had no job in 2018. The findings show that both structural factors, such as a lack of childcare, and individual level characteristics, such as mental health, impacted entry into employment. Extra support for refugees seeking employment—the provision of information and advice on the German labor market, better childcare options, or support for those with mental health issues, for example—could help ensure that employment expectations are met more frequently. Further studies are needed to provide a better understanding of the different mechanisms at play here.

The number of refugees and displaced persons worldwide has increased markedly over the past ten years. These people leave their homes expecting to find safety and security in the receiving country. Besides safeguarding their physical integrity, refugees also hope to obtain greater financial security and have the chance to build a new life in the host country, including having a good education and gainful employment.

At the same time, refugees find themselves facing very many uncertainties in the receiving country, for example they lack knowledge of the local labor market and face uncertain prospects of staying. These uncertainties cause refugees to form expectations on which they base their actions. Examples include expectations regarding future employment and earnings. Unlike other immigrant groups, in the majority of cases, refugees are unable to access information on the current labor market or on whether they will be able to have their qualifications or degrees recognized. If refugees’ expectations are not met, this directly impacts on their material welfare. This can also negatively affect their sense of well-being that, in turn, can hamper their further integration. For instance, qualitative studies in Germany show that disappointment over unsuccessful integration can cause refugees to have psychological problems, which in turn correlate with a deceleration of the integration process. Other studies have found that the high level of motivation among children with a migration background often goes hand in hand with better academic achievement. In light of this, it is vital to know which individual characteristics impact expectation formation among refugees and what


2 This fundamental right is also expressed in the 1951 Refugee Convention in Geneva 1951. According to this, refugees shall be accorded in the host country as favorable as possible and, in any event, not less favorable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, as regards the right to education and employment. See UNHCR, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951, Articles 17–19, Article 22 (1951) (available online).


DOI: https://doi.org/10.18723/diw_dwr:2020-34-1
groups of refugees gauge their chances of finding employment wrongly.

At the same time, the host society often articulates high expectations of the refugees. This Weekly Report switches the perspective, analyzing for the first time refugees' employment expectations in 2016, their actual employment in 2018, and the extent of associated expectation errors, i.e., the deviations from the articulated expectations. The study specifically examines what individual characteristics are linked with expectation errors. 

A unique data source is used for the analysis: the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany. With the same refugees being surveyed over a number of years here, it is possible to compare the refugees' subjective employment expectations in 2016 with the actual employment situation in 2018.

This Weekly Report thus identifies sub-groups of refugees which are frequently prone to expectation errors. The findings of this report are a useful starting point for politicians to identify refugees with unmet employment expectations, enabling them to develop targeted policy measures. Interviews with refugees conducted as part of the asylum process, for example, could be used to inform refugees better about their prospects on the German labor market. This form of expectations management could reduce the occurrence of false expectations among refugees and would at the same time provide concrete proposals as to how to facilitate integration into the labor market (e.g., language courses for refugees, training or career reorientation programs, alternative training options). It could also help remove any obstacles that make it hard for refugees to enter the German labor market.

**Refugees' expectations about future employment high in 2016**

In the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees conducted in 2016, refugees were asked how likely they feel it is that they will have a job in Germany in two years' time (Box 1).

On the whole, the refugees’ responses in 2016 about their employment situation in 2018 were optimistic (Figure 1). Around one-third of the respondents said it was “definitely likely” (“100 percent”) they would have a job in 2018. The median of the distribution of responses is “80 percent;” in other words, exactly 50 percent of the respondents answered with “80 percent” or more. Around two-thirds answered “60 percent” or more, i.e., two in three refugees articulated high employment expectations. Only seven percent of the refugees said it was not likely at all that they would have a job in 2018.

**Women refugees feel they are less likely to find employment in future**

Employment expectations differ between men and women, however (Figure 2, Gender). Male refugees generally expressed higher subjective expectations in 2016 than their female counterparts, with 34 percent of male respondents stating in 2016 that it was “definitely likely” that they would have a job in 2018 compared with as little as 23 percent of female refugees who gave the same response—this is

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6 To differentiate by individual characteristics, we use every variable from 2016 without exception. This approach serves to prevent biases arising from the correlation between individual characteristics and expectation errors. Expectations that are not met can impair mental health, for instance. In this case, we would overestimate the correlation between expectation errors and mental health.

7 “IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany,” DIW Berlin (available online).

8 The median or middle score splits a dataset, sample or distribution into two equal parts such that the values in one half are not greater and those in the other half are not smaller than the median.
Refugees’ expectations in 2016 regarding their employment in 2018, by subgroups

Median as well as the lower and upper quartile of answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household type</td>
<td>Child present</td>
<td>No child present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>Secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Better</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In no case (0) | Lower quartile | Upper quartile | In any case (100)


Male refugees generally expressed higher expectations in 2016 than they would have a job in 2018 than their female counterparts.

Refugees’ employment expectations also differ depending on their level of education. Refugees with a secondary school or university education have slightly higher expectations than those with primary school education only (see Figure 2, Education). While the median for all educational groups is “80 percent,” refugees with school education, whether primary or secondary, however, report lower employment expectations more frequently than those with university qualifications. The lower the level of education, the lower the quartile, for example.

This study also shows that refugees with poor mental health had lower employment expectations in 2016 than refugees with better mental health (Figure 2, Mental Health). Here, a distinction is made between refugees whose Mental Component Summary Score (MCS), an index-based measure of mental health, is below the median and those whose score is above it. The median of employment expectations for refugees with a low MCS is “70 percent” compared with “80 percent” for those with a high MCS.

Integration into labor market continues to make progress

A transnational comparison shows that in the first years after arrival, refugees have far lower employment rates and wages than other migrant groups. In line with these findings, the labor force participation (rate) of refugees in Germany is lower than for other immigrants, although it has grown continually over the years. While in 2016, the labor force
participation of refugees was 14 percent, it had increased by 29 percentage points to an average of 43 percent until 2018.

**Lower employment among female refugees, refugees with children in the same household, and refugees with primary education**

In 2018, similar to employment expectations, the refugees’ actual employment situation also displays considerable heterogeneity. First, there is a clear gender gap in refugee employment, with 52 percent of male refugees in employment compared to just 14 percent of female refugees. A further crucial characteristic is the refugees’ school education: Some 33 percent of refugees with primary school education were in gainful employment in Germany in 2018. In contrast, 49 percent of refugees with secondary or tertiary education had found employment by 2018. Furthermore, 26 percent of refugees with at least one child living in their household had entered employment in 2018. Of those refugees with no children living in their household, 56 percent were employed in 2018. Refugees’ mental health in the reference year 2016 was also found to play an important role, with 32 percent of refugees with poor mental health in employment in 2018—23 percent points higher for those with good mental health in 2016.

**35 percent of refugees had high employment expectations in 2016, yet no job in 2018**

A comparison of refugees’ subjective employment expectations and actual employment in 2018 shows to what degree these expectations were met. There are four possible scenarios (Table). Expectations are considered positively met if, in 2016, a refugee responded there is a high probability (more than 50 percent) of having a job in 2018 and then actually does have a job, whereas expectations are considered negatively met if, in 2016, a refugee responded there is a low probability (less than or equal to 50 percent) of having a job and then does not have one in 2018. The expectation is considered surpassed (positive deviation) if a refugee is employed in 2018 despite having had low employment expectations in 2016. In contrast, expectations are considered negatively met (negative deviation) if a refugee is not employed in 2018 and had high employment expectations in 2016.

In 2016, 32 percent of refugees expected to have employment in future and did in fact have a job (positively met), while 22 percent of refugees had low expectations of having future employment in 2018 and were not in employment (negatively met). Overall, 11 percent of all refugees surveyed had low employment expectations in 2016, but actually had a job in 2018 (positive deviation). A total of 35 percent of refugees had high employment expectations in 2016, but did not have a job in 2018 (negative deviation).

All in all, the expectations of 46 percent of all refugees were not met. Of those refugees who had made an expectation error, 24 percent had responded too pessimistically and 76 percent too optimistically. The latter are consequently in the clear majority. Since disappointment and unsuccessful integration often correlate with mental health problems, this group warrants particular attention from stakeholders and politicians. In light of this, it is important to understand

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15 Herbert Brücker et al., “IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees”.
16 The labor force participation rate includes those in full- and part-time employment, self-employed, trainees, and those in internships. In our analysis, no distinction is made between different types of employment. The IAB Brief Report 04/2020 specifies a labor force participation rate of 35 percent. Here, only refugees with a job and a positive income are regarded as gainfully employed. This Weekly Report does not factor in remuneration. Including remuneration in the evaluation would reduce the percentage of employed in our sample specification from 43 to 35 percent. See Herbert Brücker, Yuliya Kosyakova, and Eric Schuß, “Fünf Jahre seit Fluchtmigration 2020, Integration in Arbeitsmarkt und Bildungssystem macht weitere Fortschritte,” IAB Brief Report, no. 04 (2020) (in German; available online).
17 Bundesforum Männer e.V., “Male Refugees in Germany.”
EMPLOYMENT EXPECTATIONS

to what extent the different expectation errors are associated with individual refugee characteristics (Figure 3–6).18

Generally speaking, the expectations of male and female refugees regarding their employment prospects for 2018 are equally likely to be wrong, with 47 percent of male and 44 percent of female refugees making expectation errors (Figure 3). Strikingly, female refugees articulated expectations that were too high more often than their male counterparts (40 compared with 34 percent). In addition, 39 percent of male refugees had high employment expectations in 2016, which were met, in contrast to the mere 9 percent for female counterparts.

Of the refugees with children living in the household, 47 percent had expressed high employment expectations in 2016 but had no job in 2018 (Figure 4), compared to 27 percent for refugees with no children living in their household.

Expectation errors were observed in 52 percent of refugees with children living in the household, compared to 42 percent of refugees with no children living in the household. This is particularly interesting given that barely any difference was observed in the employment expectations of these two household types in 2016. This suggests that children living in the household played no more than a minor role in the formation of employment expectations, although differences were found when it came to taking up employment. Consistent with this observation is the hypothesis that structural reasons that were not anticipated in 2016 made it more difficult for the respondents to take up employment. Structural reasons include, for instance, inflexible work arrangements or a lack of childcare. In fact, existing empirical evidence already shows that childcare makes it easier for displaced or refugee parents to integrate into the host society. In the case of mothers of children under six years, for example, the employment expectations were higher if the child or children had a place in a day care establishment.19

A look at the different educational biographies shows that the positive expectations of refugees with a university or secondary education are met far more often than those with primary education only (Figure 5). A further observation is that of the refugees with a university education as little as five percent expressed too low expectations, while those with primary or secondary education expressed too low expectations more frequently (11 and 12 percent, respectively).

As regards mental health, the expectations expressed in 2016 by refugees with good mental health were found to be met

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18 Of those whose expectations were not met and who did not have a job in 2018, some are in trainee programs or are taking part in an integration course (14 percent for those with a negative deviation, 19 percent for those whose expectations were negatively met). What is not known is whether these are lock-in effects (the person postpones entering the job market because they want to invest in education), or these individuals start training or an integration course because they have failed to find employment. Further studies into causality are needed.

more often: Expectation errors were observed in around 40 percent of refugees with better mental health compared to 52 percent with poor mental health. This difference is especially evident for refugees whose expectations were too high (Figure 6). Better mental health was also found to correlate with the positive fulfilment of expectations: While among refugees with better mental health, 44 percent articulated high expectations and had a job in 2018, the equivalent share for those with poor mental health was just half as high (at 22 percent). Finally, of the refugees with poor mental health, the share who had expressed negative expectations about finding a job and actually failed to find a job was also higher.

**Conclusion: Measures needed to help refugees form rational expectations**

The formation of realistic expectations is instrumental in situations of uncertainty. This is especially important for migrants whose decision to migrate is usually based on a cost-benefit analysis. At the same time, when expectations are not met, the result is often disappointment and mental health problems.

In this context, this report analyzes employment expectations of refugees for the first time. This study looks at employment expectations of refugees in Germany in 2016, the actual employment situation in 2018, and the associated expectation errors. This report shows that in 2016 refugees generally had high expectations with regard to their employment situation in 2018. These high expectations, however, were only partially met. The employment expectations of female refugees, refugees with poor mental health, and refugees with primary school education, in particular, were not met in 2018.

The findings of this report suggest that the role played by individual and structural variables such as children living in the household or work-family balance were underestimated. Mental health would also appear to play an important role: The better the mental health in 2016 the more likely it is for the refugees’ expectations to be positively met. This is particularly relevant given that, on average, refugees have poorer mental health than German nationals.

The findings of this *Weekly Report* propose measures in the following three areas: First, when they arrive, refugees should receive sufficient information on the German labor market and the necessary qualifications. This would guarantee more accurate management of expectations from the very beginning. Second, the low expectations of female refugees and the discrepancy between the expectations and actual employment situation of households with children suggest that these groups of refugees have to be given greater consideration and/or that additional support measures or services are needed for these groups. The bivariate analyses in this *Weekly Report* are somewhat limited in the conclusions that can be drawn from them. In combination with other empirical findings, however, these findings show the importance of facilitating access to employment for these groups through more flexible working hours or suitable childcare options, for example. Third, refugees with poor mental health need additional support.

![Figure 6: Fulfilment of refugees' employment expectations, by mental health](image)

The expectations expressed in 2016 by refugees with better mental health were found to be met more often.

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**Keywords:** refugees, expectation formation, integration, expectation error

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**References:**


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**JEL:** D84, F22, J61

**Keywords:** refugees, expectation formation, integration, expectation error
Integration of Refugee Children and Adolescents In and Out of School: Evidence of Success but Still Room for Improvement

By Ludovica Gambaro, Daniel Kemptner, Lisa Pagel, Laura Schmitz, and C. Katharina Spieß

- Extracurricular activities, whether school-based or out-of-school, can help refugee children and adolescents to integrate in German society
- Representative IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees shows that most children and adolescents with a refugee background feel a high sense of belonging to their schools
- They often attend after-school programs
- Targeted offers in this area can further promote the integration of refugee children and adolescents
- Participation in school-based extracurricular activities and in out-of-school sports clubs is lower for refugees than for their peers without a migration background

Measured by some indicators, the integration of refugee children and adolescents has been successful; more work is needed in other areas

FROM THE AUTHORS

“Many schools have managed to successfully integrate refugee children and adolescents into daily school life, to the extent that most of them feel at ease at school and are able to establish positive social contacts. That said, more targeted activity programs are needed to encourage young refugees to participate, especially in school-based extracurricular activities and out-of-school recreational programs, such as sports clubs.” — Laura Schmitz —
ABSTRACT

Germany has seen the arrival of a large number of displaced children and adolescents in recent years. Integration is vital for their lives today and in the future. Key indicators of successful integration are a sense of belonging to school, participation in extracurricular activities, both within school and outside it, and social contacts. The present report examines these indicators based on data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples, and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees. The findings show that the integration of 12-, 14-, and 17-year-old refugees who came to Germany with their families is essentially moving in the right direction: These young people feel a sense of belonging to their school community and are increasingly attending after-school programs (provided by the school). This gives them the opportunity to spend the whole day with peers who have lived in Germany for longer. The relatively low levels of participation in school-based extracurricular activities among young refugees, however, shows that these programs are not being fully exploited. In this context, further efforts should be made to increase participation. Similarly, there is also untapped potential when it comes to organized leisure and sport activities outside school. Sports clubs, for example, should actively reach out to refugee children and adolescents encouraging them to participate.

Integrating refugee families that have come to Germany is one of the key tasks of German integration policy. However, to successfully achieve this objective, it is necessary to implement measures that are tailored to the specific needs of each respective age group. Ten percent of people who applied for asylum between 2015 and 2016 were aged between 11 and 18. This report analyzes the level of integration of this age group based on their take-up of school-based extracurricular activities and out-of-school recreational programs.

Successfully integrating adolescents comes with its own particular set of challenges. For example, they need to learn German very quickly to be able to understand the lessons in schools where German is the language of instruction. Not only is this important in the short term, for their school careers, but also for the transition to vocational training and ultimately living an independent life. Out-of-school leisure activities, such as sports clubs, are an accessible way for young people to establish social contacts and interact with others; for instance, to exchange information about future job prospects. Thus, this universe of activities—attending regular classes, staying at school in the afternoon, and extracurricular activities both on- and off-campus—are jointly important for increasing the integration of adolescents. Such activities provide additional opportunities for young people to hear and speak the German language and also to familiarize themselves with German culture.

The present report analyzes participation in these programs and activities among refugee children and adolescents aged 12, 14, and 17, who live with at least one adult family member. In this report, we refer to 12-year-old refugees as children, while we refer to the two older age groups as adolescents. We also compare refugees’ participation in these activities with

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1 See BAMF, Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2015. Asyl, Migration und Integration (Nuremberg: 2016) (in German; available online, accessed August 14, 2020); this applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise and BAMF, Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2016. Asyl, Migration und Integration (Nuremberg: 2017) (in German; available online). This also includes children and adolescents who came to Germany unaccompanied, however. These are not part of the data basis of the current report. This does not imply, however, that their integration is any less important. It simply means that this subject would require its own dedicated analysis.

that of their peers, both those with a migration background and those with native parents who do not have a migration background.

This is intended to show whether, in terms of integration, refugee children and adolescents exhibit any specific characteristics compared to their peers with a migration background but without a specifically refugee background. Comparing young refugees with their non-migrant peers also provides information as to whether we can anticipate a process of convergence with mainstream society. Our analysis is based on the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and, in particular, the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees (Box 1).

Differences between these groups of children and adolescents can—but do not always—point to a lack of integration. These differences can, however, also be attributed to the socio-economic characteristics of the families. It is well documented, for example, upon arrival, refugees have a lower level of education and a lower employment rate than the resident average.\(^3\) There is evidence that the children of the first generation of migrants, in particular, are often affected by a combination of cultural, social, and financial hardships.\(^3\) Bearing this in mind, the comparisons in the present report also take into account the socio-economic characteristics that other studies show are relevant for differences in the participation in extracurricular and leisure activities (Box 2).\(^5\)

Around two-thirds of refugee children and adolescents attended separate classes

A variety of organizational models are used by schools to help young refugees integrate into the German education system. Besides immediately enrolling them in mainstream classes (generally with additional language support), many arrivals are initially taught, either entirely or partially, in separate classes.\(^7\) Different regions give these classes different names (welcome class, transitional class, intensive class, language-learning class, etc.) but the objective is always to facilitate rapid language acquisition for school-age children who have recently arrived in Germany and lack adequate German language skills.\(^8\) Separate classes should, however, only be a temporary solution (for no more than one or two years). Which form of provision is most beneficial for integrating refugees is a controversial topic of debates. Separate classes are frequently criticized because of the limited opportunities they provide for contact with other peers and the considerable risk of exclusion and stigmatization. At the same time, separate classes can be a more targeted way of meeting the needs of young refugees.\(^9\)

Regional studies show that virtually all school-age children who have recently arrived in Germany are initially taught

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{box1.png}
\caption{Data and Definition of Comparison Groups}
\end{figure}

Data from the Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), which includes the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, serves as the basis for our report.

In the SOEP, respondents were asked about their country of birth and their nationality. Foreigners and other respondents who were not born in Germany were also asked when they immigrated to Germany or which country their parents migrated from and what their legal status was on arrival. Households and the young people living in these households are divided into three comparison groups according to the response given by the adult household member answering the SOEP questionnaire (referred to as head of household; in most cases the mother or father): (1) The adult household member immigrated to Germany after 2013 and arrived as a refugee; (2) the adult household member and, where applicable, their partner immigrated to Germany but not as refugees; or (3) the adult household member and, where applicable, their partner were born in Germany and have no migrant background.

In the SOEP, defined cohorts were asked to complete age-specific questionnaires, which children who turned 12 in the survey year completed themselves. Likewise, adolescents who turned 14 or 17 in the survey year answered specific questions. Since the children and adolescents in these age groups could provide information about their schools and extracurricular activities themselves, the analyses in the current report are based on this self-reporting. However, not all three age groups were asked questions about all three subject areas, meaning that some of the figures are only based on partial samples. These are specified accordingly in the figure headings.

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3. All children and adolescents in the comparison group with a migration background live in households with a direct migration background. The children and adolescents themselves foreign-born (around one-quarter) or native-born (around three-quarters). A comparison of only first-generation migrant children and adolescents would not be meaningful due to the small number of cases.

4. See, for example, Herbert Brücker et al., “Language skills and employment rate of refugees in Germany improving with time?" DIW Weekly Report, no. 4 (2011): 49–61 (available online). See also the report in this issue Daniel Gräber and Felicitas Schikora, “Refugees’ High Employment Expectations: Partially Met?” DIW Weekly Report, no. 34 (2020): 337–343. These low employment rates are due to the employment restrictions refugees are subject to in the recipient country, however.

5. See Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., Susanne Lochner and Alexandra Jähnert, eds., Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport 2020 – Datenanalyse zur Situation jüngerer Menschen in Deutschland (Munich and Halle an der Saale: 2020) (in German; available online).

6. See, for example, Jan Marcus, Janna Nemitz, and C. Katharina Spieß, “Ausbau der Ganztagsschule: Kinder aus einkommensschwachen Haushalten im Westen nutzen Angebote verstärkt,” DIW Wochenbericht, no. 07 (2015): 11–23 (available online); in German and also Adrian Hille, Annechule: Kinder aus einkommensschwachen Haushalten im Westen nutzen Angebote verstärkt,” DIW Wochenbericht, no. 27 (2013): 11–23 (available online, in German).

7. See Mona Massumi et al., “Neu zugewanderte Kinder und Jugendliche im deutschen Schulsystem (Cologne: 2015) (in German; available online).
REFUGEE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Table

Attendance in separate classes by refugees (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds) In percent

| Type of schooling at start of school | Age group          | Percentage of those who stayed in a separate class for more than 12 months
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12-year-olds</td>
<td>14-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular class</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate and regular classes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusively separate class</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Average across all age groups. After being taught in a separate class, pupils usually switch to a regular class.

Note: values based on 677 interviewed refugee children and adolescents aged 12, 14, and 17 who provided information on their schooling.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors’ own calculations.

Box 2

Methodology

Multivariate regression models were used to examine differences in the participation in school-based and out-of-school extracurricular activities between refugees and their peers living in Germany, both with and without migration backgrounds. The least squares method was used to generate estimates from two different types of regression models.

Model 1 determines the statistical significance of the differences between the groups of children and adolescents. To achieve this, participation in activities is regressed on group belonging: (1) children and adolescents with a migration but not a refugee background and (2) children and adolescents without a migrant background compared to (3) children and adolescents with a refugee background. Indicators for the 12-, 14-, and 17-year age groups are also included. The estimated coefficients for the first two groups, corrected for differences in the age composition of the two groups, show the differences between the refugee group and the respective comparative group. Here we are particularly interested in whether this difference is statistically significant or not.

Model 2 additionally considers whether a part of the difference can be explained by the family background of the children or adolescents. To achieve this, indicators of the family’s socio-economic characteristics were included in the regression as additional explanatory variables. These included years of education of the household head, net equivalized household income, household size, household type (single-parent or couple household) as well as an indicator of whether neither the main adult nor his or her partner is gainfully employed. In this way, we factor out the share of the differences that is correlated with socio-economic differences between the refugee children and adolescents and their comparison groups.

Most refugee adolescents have a sense of belonging to their school

Irrespective of whether taught in a separate or a mainstream class, attending school can have a stabilizing effect on refugee children and adolescents and provide structure to their daily lives. Young people who feel accepted and supported by their school community show higher levels of motivation to learn and are more self-confident. Consequently, devel-
opining a sense of belonging to their school can make it easier for refugees to integrate into school life.\textsuperscript{13}

The majority of the 12-, 14-, and 17-year-old refugees surveyed had a strong sense of belonging to their school. On average, refugees’ responses to the six statements concerning sense of belonging to school showed that they had a statistically significantly stronger sense of belonging than the comparison group of 15-year-olds responding to the same statements in the 2018 German PISA study (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{14} In response to each of the aforementioned six statements, between 80 and 90 percent of refugees surveyed indicated that they (strongly) agreed with the statement or, in the case of the negatively formulated statement, (strongly) disagreed. Refugees agreed considerably more frequently with the statements “I feel I belong to this school” and “I find it easy to make new friends in school” than participants in the PISA test conducted in Germany.

This shows that many schools have successfully managed to integrate recently arrived refugee children and adolescents into school life to the extent that most feel at ease in the school environment and are able to establish positive social contacts with others. Given that the sense of belonging to school among children with a migration background is typically lower or the same as their peers without a migration background,\textsuperscript{15} this finding is particularly positive.\textsuperscript{16}

**A particularly large share of refugee children and adolescents attend school for the whole day**

Attending school in the morning only (as is typical in Germany) allows young refugees to come into contact with their German peers and non-refugee children with a migration background being taught in mainstream classes. If refugee children and adolescents have the opportunity to interact with peers who have lived in Germany all their lives, or at least for a long time, in the afternoon as well, this can further support integration efforts. All-day schooling and after-school programs provide young refugees with precisely this opportunity. As a rule, they attend every day of the school week both in the morning and in the afternoon, thus being able to interact with their peers for longer hours. However, extracurricular activities, whether at the school or elsewhere, can also offer exposure to the German language as well as the chance for refugees to become more familiar with the everyday life of children and adolescents in Germany.

In terms of whole-day school attendance, the data show that refugee children and adolescents aged 12 and 14 are more likely to be in school mornings and afternoons or attend an after-school program (Figure 2). Participation among refugees is 51 percent, while among their peers with a migration background, the corresponding share is 41 percent, and for those without a migration background, it is just 32 percent. The difference between the high participation rate among refugees and the rate among children without a migration background is statistically significant (Figure 3, Model 1).

However, this difference can be explained by parental and household characteristics, i.e. the family background of the children and adolescents (Figure 3, Model 2). If a multivariate regression is used to factor out the share of the difference that is explained by family characteristics, the difference becomes smaller and statistically insignificant. These findings therefore suggest that the family background of refugee children and adolescents contributes to whether or not they attend all-day schooling, although it is not the only factor.

Regardless, attending all-day schooling makes integration easier. Studies suggest that participation in all-day schooling

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Sense of belonging to school by refugee children and adolescents (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds) in percent}
\end{figure}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Approval or strong approval & Other pupils seem to like me & I feel uneasy or out of place in this school \\
\hline
At school, I find it easy to make new friends & I have a sense of belonging to this school & I feel like an outsider (or excluded from things) in this school \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Sense of belonging to school by refugee children and adolescents (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds) in percent}
\end{table}

\begin{note}

\textsuperscript{14} The mean difference was calculated using data on 1,819 participants in the 2018 PISA Study conducted in Germany. See Julia Mang et al. (forthcoming): PISA 2018 Skalenhandbuch: Dokumentation der Erhebungsinstrumente; authors’ own calculations.


\textsuperscript{16} In contrast to this finding, the 2018 IQB-Bildungstrend indicates that, although young refugees demonstrate a high degree of social integration and school satisfaction, this is significantly less pronounced than for comparable schoolchildren with a migration but no refugee background and those without a migration background. See Sofie Henschel et al., “Zuwanderungsbezogene Dis-paritäten,” in IQB-Bildungstrend 2018: Mathematische und naturwissenschaftliche Kompetenzen am Ende der Sekundarstufe I im zweiten Ländervergleich, eds. Petra Stianat et al. (Münster, New York 2019), 326–330 (in German; available online).
\end{note}
programs can have a positive impact on social skills, particularly for children with a migration background. All-day schooling programs, therefore, have enormous potential for integrating children and adolescents with a migration or refugee background, although there is still room for improvement.

The situation is similar regarding the use of after-school programs by 12-year-olds. The share of refugee children attending after-school is around 22 percent, while the corresponding share among children with a migration background is only 11 percent, and among those without a migration background, it is a mere eight percent (Figure 2). Again, the difference in the take-up rates between the refugee children and the children from a migration background is statistically significant (Figure 3, Model 1). Yet again, the difference becomes smaller and statistically insignificant once socio-economic characteristics of the family are taken into account (Figure 3, Model 2).

**Refugee adolescents participate less frequently in school-based extracurricular activities**

Besides all-day schooling and after-school programs, in the afternoon schoolchildren also frequently take part in school-based extracurricular activities. In this setting too, children and adolescents who have come to Germany as refugees can interact with peers with different backgrounds and this interaction can positively influence their integration. The data show how frequently respondents participate in school-based activities that take place in the afternoon, after regular classes, for example music or drum clubs, sports, the school newspaper, but also activities related to school-life such as class or school council representative. Where adolescents indicated that they participated in one or more of these activities, this is defined as participation in extracurricular school activity. Data is available for 14- and 17-year-olds.

Overall, the participation rate among refugee adolescents is 32 percent, while the corresponding figure for adolescents with a migration background is 51 percent, and for those without a migration background, it is 63 percent (Figure 4). The difference between the participation rates of the refugees and the adolescents without a migration background is statistically significant (Figure 5, Model 1). The other multivariate estimates indicate that around half of these differences can be explained by family characteristics. If we remove the

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**Figure 2**

**Participation rates in all-day schools (12- and 14-year-olds) and after school programs (12-year-olds)**

In percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All-day schools</th>
<th>After-school programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with refugee background</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with migration background</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without migration background</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Attendance rates in all-day school were reported by the head of household (N = 2,221). The use of after school programs refers to information provided by the 12-year-olds themselves (N = 996).

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors’ own calculations.

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**Figure 3**

**Use of all-day schools and after school programs by children and adolescents with refugee background compared to their peers**

In percentage points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All-day school: comparison of 12- and 14-year-olds with refugee background with their peers...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1 with migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2 with migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day care: comparison of 12- and 14-year-olds with refugee background with their peers...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1 with migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2 with migration background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without migration background</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Participation rates in all-day school were reported by the head of household (N = 2,221). The use of after-school programs refers to information provided by the 12-year-olds themselves (N = 996). Model 1 determines the statistically significant differences between children and adolescents with a migration background and those without a migration background compared to those with a refugee background. Model 2 additionally controls for a number of socio-economic characteristics (Box 3). Statistical significance levels of the differences compared to the group with a refugee background: *** 1 percent, ** 5 percent, * 10 percent. Significance tests are based on standard errors clustered at the household level.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors’ own calculations.

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17 Natalie Fischer, Hans Peter Kuhn, and Ivo Züchne, “Entwicklung von Sozialverhalten in der Ganztagsschule,” in Ganztagsschule: Entwicklung, Qualität, Wirkungen. Längsschnittliche Befunde der Studie zur Entwicklung von Ganztagsschulen (StEG), eds. Natalie Fischer et al. (Weinheim: 2011), 246–266 (in German; available online).

18 For example, less than half of all primary schools, one-third of secondary schools (excluding academic-track schools), and only 11 percent of academic-track secondary schools (Gymnasium) have educational concepts that explicitly refer to promoting inclusion and integration through targeted all-day schooling programs. See StEG-Konsortium, ed., Ganztagsschule 2017/2018. Deskriptive Befunde einer bundesweiten Befragung (Frankfurt am Main, Dortmund, Gießen, München: 2019) (in German; available online).

share of the difference that can be explained by the adolescents’ family background, then the differences also become statistically insignificant (Figure 5, Model 2). This therefore shows that the differences can be entirely explained by the socio-economic characteristics of the young refugees rather than by the refugee background per se. This finding should be taken into account when planning integration policy measures.

Participation in sport can be particularly beneficial for refugees, as stated in the German government’s National Integration Action Plan.21 Bearing this in mind, we examined participation in school-based sports clubs separately. While just nine percent of young refugees take part in school-based sports clubs, the corresponding figure for young people with a migration background is 17 percent and, for those without a migration background, it is 18 percent (Figure 6). This shows that more still needs to be done to promote the integration of young refugees through participation in school sport activities. This is illustrated even more clearly when we look at the share of girls in the group of refugees participating in this type of extracurricular activity.22 Girls account for only a very small share of those participating in this type of extracurricular activity. This shows that the stated aim of the German government’s National Integration Action Plan to increase the participation of girls and women in sport activities has not yet been adequately achieved.23

Refugee children less frequently members of sports clubs than children with no migration background

As well as school-based activities, there are also a variety of out-of-school activities and programs that have the potential of contributing to the integration refugee children and

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20 This differs from the group of adolescent refugees in C. Katharina Spieß, Franz Westermaier, and Jan Marcus, “Children and adolescents with refugee background less likely to participate in voluntary educational programs—with exception of extracurricular school activities,” DIW Economic Bulletin, no. 35 (2016): 422–430 (online available).
21 See Bundesregierung: Nationaler Aktionsplan.
22 The share of girls in the group of refugees participating in an after-school sports club is just under 17 percent. This means that, in total, a mere four percent of girls with a refugee background participate a club of this kind, while overall participation among boys is still 12 percent.
23 See Bundesregierung: Nationaler Aktionsplan.
Regarding memberships in sports clubs, there is no noticeable difference between children with refugee and migration backgrounds.

The more detailed analyses show that around two-thirds of this difference can be explained by family characteristics: when accounting for these, the difference in participation rates between the two groups is no longer statistically significantly different (Figure 8, Model 2). There is also evidence of a gender gap in the detailed analyses, which could be linked to different cultures in refugees’ country of origin. Nevertheless, the share of refugee girls who belong to a sports club outside school is still higher than the share who take part in school-based sports clubs. This might suggest that, recent policy initiatives aimed at promoting sport participation among migrants such as “migration mainstreaming” is at least moving in the right direction and has been more successful than school-based sports clubs. That said, it should be noted that the data basis does not allow us to analyze adolescents, for whom a different picture might emerge.

### Refugee children and adolescents more frequently attend youth groups

Apart from sport activities there are also other programs and services that give young people the opportunity to meet and interact with peers in the afternoons—youth groups, for example. Other young people reported doing voluntary work in the afternoons.

Refugee children and adolescents show above average participation in youth groups (Figure 9). A total of 41 percent of refugee adolescents attended a youth club, while only 14 percent of young people with a migration background, and 28 percent of those without a migration background reported doing so. These differences are statistically significant and cannot be explained by other family characteristics (Figure 10).

25 Other studies (see Lochner et al., DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport) show that 39 percent of young people with a migration background and 57 percent of those with no migration background mainly play their preferred sport in clubs outside the school setting. However, these figures relate to 17-year-olds and not 12-year-olds as in the present study. The corresponding information for refugee adolescents is not available. Moreover, the analyses also differ in how they define “migration background”. In the Lochner study people are referred to as having a migration background when either they themselves or at least one of their parents has not been a German citizen since birth.

26 The share of girls in the group of 12-year-old refugees is just over one-third. This means that 43 percent of girls and 60 percent of boys with a refugee background regularly attend a sports club.

27 By “migration mainstreaming” we mean the promotion of equal opportunities to participate in the structures of organized sports, see Bundesregierung, Nationaler Aktionsplan, 249.

28 Other recent study (Lochner et al., DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport) found no differences between children with and without a migration background with regard to participation in youth groups. Refugee children were not included in these analyses. The discrepancy between these analyses and the findings of the present study might be due to the different definitions of migration background (Box 1).
Moreover, we must continue to monitor developments over time, as the integration of children and adolescents who came to Germany with their families as refugees is a key component of German integration policy. As measured by participation in a range of school-based and out-of-school activities, regular contact with German-speaking peers also plays an important role in integrating refugee adolescents. Thus, friendships with adolescent members of Germany’s majority population can enhance the social capital of adolescents with experience of migration. In this context, the 12-, 14-, and 17-year-olds were asked about their social contact. With a share of around eight percent, refugee children and adolescents reported not having met any friends at all over the course of a month much more frequently than their peers without a migration background (Figure 11). That said, the share of refugees who met with friends on a daily basis was 81 percent, putting them on a par with the other groups. It therefore appears that there is a small sub-group of refugees who are in danger of being socially isolated from their peers.

Communicating with friends in German can be very important for the acquisition or consolidation of German language skills. If refugee children and adolescents meet with their friends they mainly speak German (Figure 12). The figure for the 17-year-olds is 70 percent, and 66 percent of the 14-year-olds speak German, as well as other languages, with their friends. In comparison, 90 percent of 12-year-olds also talk to their friends in German.

**Conclusion: Although a lot of progress has been made, particularly for younger refugees, there is still a long way to go**

The integration of children and adolescents who came to Germany with their families as refugees is a key component of German integration policy. As measured by participation in a range of school-based and out-of-school activities this integration has, in many respects, been a success. This is shown when we compare the participation of young refugees with that of their peers in the host country. For example, refugee children and adolescents express a stronger than average sense of belonging to their school. This is an important finding that can be used to promote further integration. However, the share of refugee children and adolescents who do not feel as though they belong should not be overlooked. Moreover, we must continue to monitor developments over time.

**Refugee adolescents in particular often communicate with friends in German**

Apart from participation in extracurricular leisure and sport activities, regular contact with German-speaking peers also plays an important role in integrating refugee adolescents. Thus, friendships with adolescent members of Germany’s majority population can enhance the social capital of adolescents with experience of migration. In this context, the 12-, 14-, and 17-year-olds were asked about their social contact. With a share of around eight percent, refugee children and adolescents reported not having met any friends at all over the course of a month much more frequently than their peers without a migration background (Figure 11). That said, the share of refugees who met with friends on a daily basis was 81 percent, putting them on a par with the other groups. It therefore appears that there is a small sub-group of refugees who are in danger of being socially isolated from their peers.

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REFUGEE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

DIW Weekly Report 34/2020

Figure 11

Frequency with which children and adolescents (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds) meet their friends per month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without migration background</th>
<th>With migration background</th>
<th>With refugee background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily or once a week</td>
<td>Daily or once a week</td>
<td>Daily or once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 2,341.
Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors’ own calculations.

Refugee children and adolescents are more likely to meet no friends at all compared to their peers with and without a migration background.

Figure 12

Approval to statement “spoken language with friends is mostly German”

In percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children and adolescents with refugee background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 436.
Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors’ own calculations.

The next few years to ascertain whether this strong feeling of belonging also facilitates integration in other areas, or whether it reflects an initial sense of optimism triggered by having a new, secure, and settled daily life.

Further efforts are needed, particularly with a view to increasing the participation of children and adolescents with a refugee background in school-based extracurricular activities. In this context, schools could do more to raise awareness about the activities that are available and other students could encourage their refugee classmates to take part.

Refugees are increasingly taking part in after-school programs. This also offers an opportunity for social interaction and helps refugees familiarize themselves with the language and everyday life of children and adolescents living in Germany. Sport is another important vehicle for promoting integration. Although more than half of all children with a refugee background are already members of sports clubs, more could still be done here. Sports clubs could be made more attractive to refugees. This could be achieved by organizing more targeted activities or reducing membership fees, if these measures are not already being implemented.

A remarkably high share of refugees attend youth groups. Similarly, they also reported being just as frequently involved in voluntary work as their peers. With regard to social contact with peers, it is evident that, in many cases, the 12-year-olds choose to talk to their friends in German. They appear to be more integrated than the older adolescents—at least if this is judged on use of the German language. In any event, it is clear that the efforts made by the municipalities, federal states, and national government to integrate refugees, also by means of non-formal extracurricular activities, both inside and outside school, have, in many cases, been successful.

Further efforts are needed, particularly with a view to increasing the participation of children and adolescents with a refugee background in school-based extracurricular activities. In this context, schools could do more to raise awareness about the activities that are available and other students could encourage their refugee classmates to take part.

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90 percent of the 12-year-old refugees talk to their friends mainly in German.

JEL: I24, I28, J15, Z18

Keywords: refugees, children, youth, social integration, non-formal activities

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Social Integration of Refugees Is Improving

By Katja Schmidt, Jannes Jacobsen, and Magdalena Krieger

- Evaluation of data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) indicates that concerns about immigration among the population are declining, while refugees' concerns about xenophobia are growing.
- Effects of refugee immigration are viewed with more skepticism in rural regions than in urban areas.
- Refugees have less trust in public administration than they do in the police and the courts.
- Around half of refugees have regular contact with the local population; these contacts are less common among female refugees.
- Particularly for female refugees integrational efforts should be intensified—interethnic networks could be widened.

**FROM THE AUTHORS**

"The findings of the report show that refugees and the host society are growing closer together. Yet, further efforts are needed to address current concerns and skepticism on both sides."

— Katja Schmidt —

**MEDIA**

Audio Interview with C. Katharina Spieß

www.diw.de/mediathek
Social Integration of Refugees Is Improving

By Katja Schmidt, Jannes Jacobsen, and Magdalena Krieger

ABSTRACT

Five years ago, almost a million people came to Germany seeking refuge. Chancellor Angela Merkel responded to public concern over such a large influx of refugees with her well-known saying, "Wir schaffen das" (We can do this!). Much has happened since then. As this report shows, the German population’s concerns over immigration have been decreasing since 2016. Nevertheless, refugees are increasingly concerned about xenophobia. At the same time, although their trust in key state institutions is high, they are less trusting of Germany’s public administration system. One way of building mutual reliance might be to foster personal contact between refugees and local populations. However, the present study indicates that, so far, only around half of refugees have regular contact with Germans. Female refugees, in particular, have less contact with Germans. Government initiatives to create diverse social networks could be an important step toward greater integration.

There are two important aspects to note in the public debate on refugee immigration since 2015. The first aspect is the response from the population living in Germany to the increased influx of refugees and the second is refugee integration into the labor market and into the educational system. While the reaction of the resident population has so far been mixed—marked on the one hand by voluntary engagement for refugees, on the other hand by great concerns about immigration1—refugees were found to have integrated relatively quickly and successfully.2 3 However, there are other, subjective, aspects that play an important role in integration. These include, for example, the extent of refugees’ concerns about xenophobia, whether they feel discriminated against, their trust in institutions, and opportunities for them to interact with members of the host society. These aspects need to be considered in relation to the attitudes, expectations, and feelings of the members of the host society.

Based on data collected by the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)4 in collaboration with Kantar, this report sheds light on the communal life of refugees and members of the host society in 2018. The present report examines the subjective and social factors influencing refugee integration. These are then compared with the attitudes of the members of the host society; our understanding is deepened by examining urban and rural areas as two distinct areas (Box 1).

The variety of and access to social opportunities in urban areas differs from that of rural areas. These differences allow conclusions to be drawn about possible access barriers that the local population are faced with. For example, urban and

1 Jannes Jacobsen, Philipp Ennecker, and Jürgen Schupp, “In 2016, around One-Third of People in Germany Donated for Refugees and Ten Percent Helped out on Site – yet Concerns Are Mounting” DIW Weekly Report, no. 17 (2017): 347–358 (in German; available online; accessed July 20, 2020). This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise.
4 The Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) is a representative annual survey of private households that has been conducted since 1984, beginning in former West Germany only. Since 1990, it has also included former East Germany. See Jan Goebel et al., “The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP),” Journal of Economics and Statistics 239, no. 29 (2019): 345–360 (available online).
Our distinction between urban and rural area is based on the definition of rural areas taken from the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt und Raumforschung, BBSR). Accordingly, municipalities are classified based on their size, population density, and central-local function as either agglomerations, urbanized areas or rural areas. We consider agglomerations and urbanized areas to be urban areas and contrast them with rural areas.

Concerns about immigration have been receding since 2016

Successfully integrating immigrants depends, among other things, on prevailing attitudes within the host society. When immigrants experience rejection, for example in the form of social separation or discrimination, it becomes more difficult for them to participate in society. For this reason, the first step is to examine sentiments in the host society. The annual SOEP survey asks respondents how concerned they are about immigration. Response categories are “not concerned at all,” “somewhat concerned,” and “very concerned.”

Concerns

1. In general, is it bad or good for the German economy that refugees are coming here?
   - Bad for the economy (1)
   - Good for the economy (11)

2. In general, will refugees erode or enrich cultural life in Germany?
   - Erode (1)
   - Enrich (11)

3. Will refugees make Germany a worse or better place to live?
   - A worse place (1)
   - A better place (11)

4. Does a high influx of refugees mean more risks or more opportunities in the short term?
   - More risks short term (1)
   - More opportunities short term (11)

5. Does a high influx of refugees mean more risks or more opportunities in the long term?
   - More risks long term (1)
   - More opportunities long term (11)

In order to simplify interpretation, the responses are divided into three categories: 1–4 “rather negative”, 5–7 “ambivalent”, and 8–11 “rather positive.”

Engagement

The following question is aimed at the respondents’ engagement with the refugee issue. Respondents were asked “Which of the following activities have you done in connection with the refugee issue since last year and which do you intend to do (again) in the future?” The present report only examines work already carried out locally with refugees, such as visits to authorities or language training:

- Since last year (yes/no)
The share of respondents who were “very concerned” about immigration increased significantly between 2013 and 2016 (Figure 1). After the peak of refugee immigration to Germany in 2015/16, this share then fell over the next two years. While almost half of those surveyed (46 percent) were very concerned about immigration in 2016, this figure fell to just under one-third (32 percent) in 2018. However, if we include those respondents who were at least “somewhat concerned” about immigration, it becomes apparent that, in 2018, the issue of immigration still concerned the majority of respondents in Germany. Taken together, around three-quarters of the population (74 percent) were somewhat or very concerned about immigration. By comparison, this figure was around ten percentage points lower (63 percent) in 2013. The share of respondents who were “not concerned at all” about immigration developed accordingly. While this figure fell to 16 percent in 2016, the lowest value in the surveyed categories, it rose again by ten percentage points over the course of two years, with around one-quarter of those surveyed saying they were not concerned about immigration at all in 2018.

In summary, concerns have decreased overall since 2016, but are still above 2013 levels.

Effects of refugee immigration are viewed with more skepticism in rural regions than in urban areas

In sociological research, among other things, the increased rejection of immigrants is believed to be attributable to the host society’s perceived cultural and economic threats. For example, it has been shown that people who perceive refugees as a threat to German society are more likely to identify with the right-wing populist AfD party, which rejects refugee immigration.

The SOEP data indicates how pronounced such perceived threats were among respondents in the resident population in 2018. SOEP respondents were asked to rate the influence of refugees on the “economy,” “culture,” and “Germany as a place to live,” using an 11-point scale where one is most negative and eleven is most positive. In order to simplify interpretation, the responses are grouped into three categories: 1–4 “rather negative,” 5–7 “ambivalent,” and 8–11 “rather positive.”

The share of individuals who provided no information was less than two percent and is included in N.

In rural areas, the impact of refugees on the economy, culture, and living space is generally viewed with significantly more skepticism.
In 2018, most respondents (40 percent) expressed ambivalent attitudes toward the effect of refugees on the German economy, while around one-quarter thought it was rather good and one-third thought it was rather bad (Figure 2). Over one-third of respondents thought that refugee immigration had an ambivalent effect on cultural life in Germany, while over one-third thought it would erode German culture and more than one-quarter thought it would enrich German culture. At the same time, as little as 14 percent of respondents thought that refugees would make Germany a better place to live, while almost 40 percent expected a rather negative impact. Most respondents (45 percent) expressed ambivalent attitudes. When asked whether a large influx of refugees would mean more risks or more opportunities in the short and long term (Figure 3), only around eight percent of respondents said they saw short-term opportunities, while almost two-thirds thought there would be risks in the short term. In the long-term assessment, these figures were significantly lower, at 40 percent. At the same time, however, around one-quarter of respondents thought that the opportunities from refugee immigration would outweigh the risks in the long term.

Refugee immigration was consistently viewed with significantly more skepticism in rural regions than in urban areas. The most obvious difference relates to cultural impact. In rural areas, 22 percent perceived the influence of refugees as culturally enriching, while in urban areas this figure was seven percentage points higher (29 percent). When it comes to how respondents see the risks and opportunities related to refugee immigration, in contrast, there are only slight differences between urban and rural areas: In the short term, eight percent of urban dwellers and seven percent of rural dwellers said there were clear opportunities from refugee immigration. However, looking long term, their views of the future diverge somewhat: for 29 percent of those living in urban areas, the opportunities are greater, while this figure is only 24 percent among respondents living in rural areas.

Overall, opinions in the host society have become more positive. This trend is compared with the refugee perspective below.

Refugees are increasingly concerned about xenophobia, yet experiences of direct discrimination are less common

The refugee perspective was examined using the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany (Box 3). The data generally show that refugees’ concerns about xenophobia increased slightly between 2016 and 2018. In 2018, more than one in three adult refugees reported that they were somewhat (26 percent) or very concerned (12 percent) about xenophobia. This implies a statistically significant increase of around five percentage points for those refugees who were somewhat or very concerned in the two years since 2016.

With regard to specific experiences of xenophobia, however, the survey data show that concerns might stem from more than the direct experiences of the refugees themselves. For example, fewer than one in ten adult refugees reported that they often feel discriminated against because of their origin (Figure 4). Around one in three feels they have rarely been discriminated against and more than half feel they have not been discriminated against at all. The differences between urban and rural areas are not significant.

Similarly, in-depth analyses by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees show that refugees have continued to feel welcome in Germany in recent years.10 A look at the

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10 Christina de Paiva Lareiro, Nina Rother, and Manuel Siegert, “Geflüchtete verbessern ihre Deutschkenntnisse und fühlen sich in Deutschland weiterhin willkommen,” BAMF-Kurzanalyse, no. 1 (2020): 1–19. (in German; available online)
concerns and the perceived discrimination reveals a dichotomous landscape. Although refugees are increasingly voicing their concerns about xenophobia, the data suggest that these concerns might not stem solely from their own experiences. It is believed that media reports may also be influencing their concerns about xenophobia. Against the background of anti-migration and racist protests, following the incidents in Kandel, Rhineland-Palatinate in summer 2015, for example, this interpretation seems probable. As a result of the attacks in Hanau and Halle, which occurred after the survey, this report can still assume that refugees’ concerns might continue to grow.

In addressing these concerns, one important step could be to listen to those affected by such attacks. Following the attack in Hanau, for example, there was frequent criticism that minorities were not adequately protected from attacks. On the political side, the development of concepts for more proactive protection of minorities could be an important step.

Refugees’ trust in key state institutions is high

Another indicator of how immigrants are settling in and acclimatizing to their new surroundings is the level of trust they have in key state institutions, such as public administration, the police, and the courts. This is highly relevant from two perspectives. First, due to their immigration history and asylum applications, refugees will regularly come into contact with the government’s administration apparatus and possibly the police and the courts as well. A high level of trust in these institutions is therefore also an indicator of the acceptance shown for the way these institutions operate. Second, having trust in these institutions also means having trust in the just functioning of the rule of law. Ideally, this should be high.

When asked about public administration, the legal system, and the police, refugees generally said they had a high level of trust in them. On a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being a high level of trust), around 60 percent of refugees said their trust in the police was high. Around half of all respondents had a high level of trust in the legal system. However, a less homogenous picture emerges in the case of public administration, with only one in three indicating a high level of trust in this institution.

If the respective gradations of the 11-point scale up to a value of 8 are also included as indicators of a high level of trust, the level of trust in the three institutions each rises substantially to over 60 percent (Figure 5 shows examples of aggregate values for trust in public administration). With regard to differences between urban and rural areas, the data show that levels of trust tend to be lower in rural areas, although this disparity cannot be statistically confirmed.

In summary, it can be seen that trust in key state institutions is generally high, but there is still room for improvement.

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11 See also a press release from the Central Council of Muslims in Germany dated February 20, 2020 available online.
especially in public administration. Trust in public administration could be strengthened by making its decision-making processes more transparent so that the work of this institution is more comprehensible for refugees.

From a sociological perspective, another important factor for increasing trust and reducing concerns is access to social networks. Social networks can act as bridges between otherwise separate groups, facilitating refugee access to societal institutions and information.\(^1\)

The next section examines two questions relating to this aspect. First, to what extent are refugees already integrated into social networks and, second, what determines refugee access to interethnic networks?

**Around half of refugees have regular contact with Germans, particularly among their circles of friends**

In the IAB-SOEP-BAMF survey conducted in 2018, refugees were asked how often they spent time with Germans. Possible answers were “daily”, “several times a week”, “every week”, “every month”, “rarely”, and “never” (Box 3). The survey data show that 57 percent of refugees surveyed regularly spent time with Germans, i.e., daily to weekly. For refugees who live in rural areas of Germany, this figure was even higher at two-thirds. This difference of around ten percentage points compared to refugees living in urban areas is not statistically significant.

The survey data further suggest that refugees mainly spent time with Germans who were in their circles of friends. 43 percent of respondents stated that they regularly maintain friendly contact with Germans (Figure 6). This is particularly true of refugees in rural areas. In addition, neighborhood contact plays an important role in both urban and rural areas. A total of 40 percent of those surveyed reported that they had regular contact with their German neighbors. In contrast, comparatively few refugees were in contact with Germans at their places of work. Looking at the group of refugees who were employed in 2018, only one in four stated that he or she regularly interacted with Germans at work. This shows that refugees and members of the host society do not necessarily encounter each other at their places of work.

Another important point of contact between refugees and locals is voluntary work, which many people did after the migration influx in summer 2015. The resident population was also asked about voluntary work in the SOEP study. The results showed that in 2016, around one-third of the German population made donations in cash or in kind to refugees, and six percent volunteered locally to help refugees.\(^1\) In 2018, seven percent of SOEP respondents stated that they were involved in helping refugees in their local area, for example by helping them with visits to the authorities. Consequently, volunteer work also offers a platform for refugees and locals to experience direct contact with one another. There were no differences between voluntary work in the urban and rural regions of the host society.

Overall, this indicates a mixed picture of contact between refugees and Germans. While more than half of refugees were already in regular contact with Germans, 43 percent of refugees surveyed had no regular access to such social networks. This raises the question as to which factors promote contact between refugees and the host society.

\(^{12}\) Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” American Journal of Sociology 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–1380.

\(^{13}\) Jannes Jacobsen, Philipp Essecker, and Jürgen Schupp, “In 2016, around One-Third of People in Germany Donated for Refugees and Ten Percent Helped out on Site – yet Concerns Are Mounting” DIW Weekly Report, no. 17 (2017): 347–358 (in German, available online).
Reports show that the process of integrating refugees into their host society is still ongoing. Although the concerns of the local population are receding and are slowly approaching 2013 levels, the host society’s skepticism surrounding the short- and long-term effects of refugee migration to Germany persisted in 2018, as well. In contrast, refugees’ concerns about xenophobia are growing, there partly is a lack of trust in some key German state institutions, and access to interethnic networks remains limited.

The social and subjective integration of refugees, therefore, seems to be an ongoing long-term social project that continues to require public attention. This applies in particular to rural areas. The local populations here are especially skeptical of refugees, even though regular contact with Germans in their circles of friends is more common than in urban areas. One key priority of state intervention should be to allay concerns about immigration and xenophobia. To achieve this, the government should look to strengthen interethnic social networks in order to initiate positive narratives between newcomers and longer-term residents. In addition to creating new, positive narratives, which could alleviate concerns on both sides, such networks also have an important bridging function between otherwise separate social groups. Going forward, it will therefore be important to offer more than integration courses. The civil society tandem projects that have developed since 2015 could be further consolidated and brought to rural areas, for instance, thus making them sustainable. Special focus should be placed on female refugees here. In line with earlier analyses of structural integration, it can be shown that women are also disadvantaged in terms of access to interethnic networks. In order to build bridges for women to access local society, too, special attention must be paid to their needs, for example with regard to childcare.

Furthermore, the analyses indicate that the work of public administration, in particular, should be made more transparent. As a general rule, refugees have a high level of trust in the police and in the rule of law, but less so in public administration. However, something that could be problematic is the fact that around one-third to one-quarter of refugees do not have the same trust in key democratic institutions. Their trust must be further strengthened by means of transparent procedures so as not to jeopardize the existing legitimacy of this institution for refugees.

**Female refugees have less contact with Germans**

The findings of a multivariate regression analysis show that female refugees are significantly less likely (16 percent) than male refugees to have regular, i.e., daily or weekly, contact with Germans (Table 1). Living in shared accommodation is also associated with a significantly lower probability of regular interaction with Germans. In contrast, regular contact between Germans and refugees is more likely the longer refugees have been resident in Germany.

Over time, refugees and Germans will probably meet more regularly in their social networks. However, that female refugees had less regular contact with Germans suggests they face particular obstacles that require political attention.

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**Table 1**

Determinants of time refugees and Germans regularly spent together (multivariate linear regression analysis).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time with Germans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (reference: male)</td>
<td>−0.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since arrival</td>
<td>0.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of origin (reference: Syria)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration course (reference: no)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared accommodation (reference: no)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−0.10***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (reference: no)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City (reference: no)</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4,178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < 0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Controlled for federal states. Reduced number of cases due to missing values for the dependent variable as well as for information about living in a shared accommodation, about children and about federal state. Dependent variable: time with Germans (1 = regular contact, 0 = irregular contact). Regression method: linear regression, unstandardized coefficients, robust standard errors.

Source: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 4,178, authors’ own calculations.

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**Conclusions: Interaction between refugees and members of the host society should be further encouraged**

The present report shows that the process of integrating refugees into their host society is still ongoing. Although the concerns of the local population are receding and are slowly approaching 2013 levels, the host society’s skepticism surrounding the short- and long-term effects of refugee migration to Germany persisted in 2018, as well. In contrast, refugees’ concerns about xenophobia are growing, there partly is a lack of trust in some key German state institutions, and access to interethnic networks remains limited.

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Over time, refugees and Germans will probably meet more regularly in their social networks. However, that female refugees had less regular contact with Germans suggests they face particular obstacles that require political attention.

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14 In the multivariate regression analyses, we do not consider the gainful employment of refugees and their language skills as explanatory factors for the frequency of interethnic contact, since interactions may exist: if a refugee is gainfully employed, it can be assumed that he or she also has more regular contact with Germans. At the same time, regular contact with Germans can also be a stepping stone to gainful employment (Verena Seibel and Frank von Tubergen, “Job-search methods among non-western immigrants in the Netherlands,” Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies 11, no. 3 (2013): 241–258). A similar logic can be applied to language skills. The causal direction of the effects cannot, therefore, be determined and could lead to misinterpretations.


SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

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