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235 Report by Jörg Hartmann

Refugees want to stay in Germany long term and become German citizens

- Report investigates how naturalization of refugees who came between 2013 and 2019 has developed
- The majority (98 percent) intend on staying in Germany long term
- Dual citizenship is widespread among refugees



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AT A GLANCE

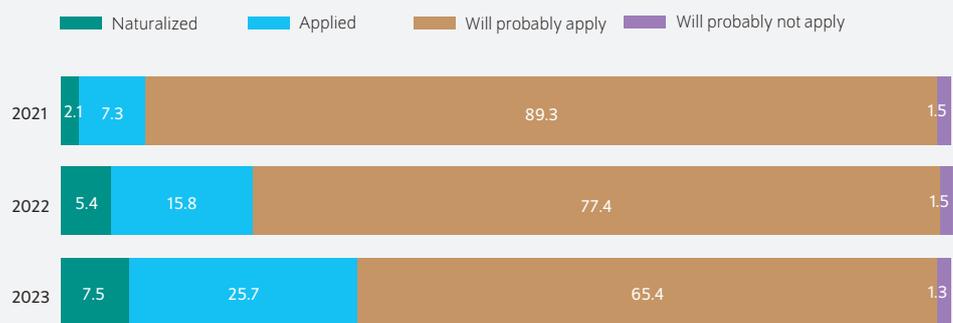
Refugees want to stay in Germany long term and become German citizens

By Jörg Hartmann

- Using current SOEP data, this Weekly Report investigates how the naturalization of refugees who came between 2013 and 2019 has developed
- Over 98 percent plan to naturalize, have applied, or have already naturalized, a clear sign of a long-term intention of staying in Germany
- Syrian refugees have been naturalized much more often than immigrants from other countries
- Many naturalized immigrants retain their original citizenship; dual citizenship is widespread among refugees
- Good German skills and relationships with others already naturalized considerably increases probability of naturalizing successfully

More and more refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 are naturalizing or applying to naturalize

In percent



Source: Authors' calculations using Socio-Economic Panel data (SOEP v40), weighted data.

Notes: Only including refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iran.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“The new nationality law shortened the required residency period for naturalization to five years, thereby eliminating a key hurdle. However, stricter rules regarding financial self-sufficiency could disadvantage vulnerable groups, such as single parents, the elderly, and the less qualified—and lose valuable integration opportunities.”

— Jörg Hartmann —

Refugees want to stay in Germany long term and become German citizens

By Jörg Hartmann

ABSTRACT

Becoming a German citizen marks a key step in the integration process of immigrants. An analysis of data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) shows that more and more refugees from six main countries who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 were already naturalized or had applied to naturalize. The share of immigrants who had already naturalized increased from 2.1 percent in 2021 to 7.5 percent in 2023, and the number of applications tripled to 25.7 percent in the same time period. Over 98 percent of the respondents hope to naturalize. Syrian refugees naturalize more frequently than immigrants from other countries. Dual citizenship is widespread: In 2023, around 88 percent of naturalized immigrants retained their original citizenship. Good German skills and naturalized partners play a key role in naturalizing successfully. In 2024, German nationality law underwent reforms. While these reforms will likely increase the number of naturalization applications by decreasing the required residency period, they are likely to also increase selectivity and disadvantages among vulnerable groups due to the stricter requirements.

Becoming a German citizen is a key indicator of immigrants' political and social integration. Naturalizing requires a considerable degree of integration, such as language acquisition and being financially self-sufficient. Becoming a German citizen also places immigrants on an equal footing with native Germans in both the legal and political sense. At the same time, naturalization promotes further integration: It increases identification with the host country¹ and eases social and economic integration, especially the earlier an immigrant naturalizes or for immigrants from more disadvantaged groups.²

Naturalization is a significant step for refugees in particular: It protects them from deportation to their country of origin, even if the legal situation in Germany changes or the political situation in their home country changes. At the same time, naturalization grants the unlimited right to residence in the European Union (EU), active and passive suffrage, and access to certain careers in the public sector or security-relevant sectors.

Naturalization is granted by legal entitlement or at discretion

People residing in Germany permanently who want to naturalize may be legally entitled to do so under certain, clearly defined conditions.³ Foreigners may apply once they have been living in Germany for eight continuous years (can be shortened to seven or six if the applicant completes an integration course), have attained B1 level German proficiency, and can prove they can financially support themselves.⁴

¹ Patrick Fick, "Does Naturalization Facilitate Integration?" *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 45 (2016): 107–121.

² Jens Hainmueller, Domink Hangartner, and Giuseppe Pietrantonio, "Catalyst or Crown: Does Naturalization Promote the Long-Term Social Integration of Immigrants?" *American Political Science Review* 111 (2017): 256–276; Jens Hainmueller, Dominik Hangartner, and Dalston Ward, "The effect of citizenship on the long-term earnings of marginalized immigrants: Quasi-experimental evidence from Switzerland," *Science Advances* 5 (2019); Christina Gathmann and Julio Garbers, "Citizenship and integration," *Labour Economics* 82 (2023): 102343.

³ This Weekly Report uses data from 2021 to 2023 and describes the state of nationality law at the time. On June 27, 2024, the Act to Modernize Nationality Law came into force, bringing with it a number of changes, such as shorter minimum residency periods and permitting multiple citizenships.

⁴ Receiving social benefits under SGB II or SGB XII is an impediment to naturalizing. Exceptions apply to people who are claiming social benefits through no fault of their own.

Furthermore, they must provide proof of identity, declare a commitment to the German constitution, and, as a rule, renounce their previous citizenship. Another exclusion criterion is a criminal record: Convictions exceeding 90 daily fines or three months' probation are an issue, and applicants with a history of anti-Semitic or racist crimes are generally rejected. Living conditions must also comply with German legal standards, so polygamy, for example, would present a problem.

If a person does not fulfill the requirements for naturalization by legal entitlement, nationality law offers an alternative: naturalization by discretion.⁵ For naturalization by discretion, officials have more leeway and can consider extraordinary conditions, such as people with disabilities or hardship cases. The basic requirements are similar to those of naturalization by legal entitlement, but are somewhat more flexible. For example, recognized refugees may apply after six years, while partners of German citizens may apply after three to four years. However, the financial requirements are stricter: Even theoretical entitlement to benefits can be problematic. Applicants must also show proof of comprehensive health and pension insurances as well as proof of housing, whether rented or owned. While naturalization by entitlement is automatic if all requirements are met, the authorities decide on naturalization by discretion on a case-by-case basis. This way, they can take individual circumstances into consideration while having stricter requirements.

Willingness for long-term integration increases through naturalization

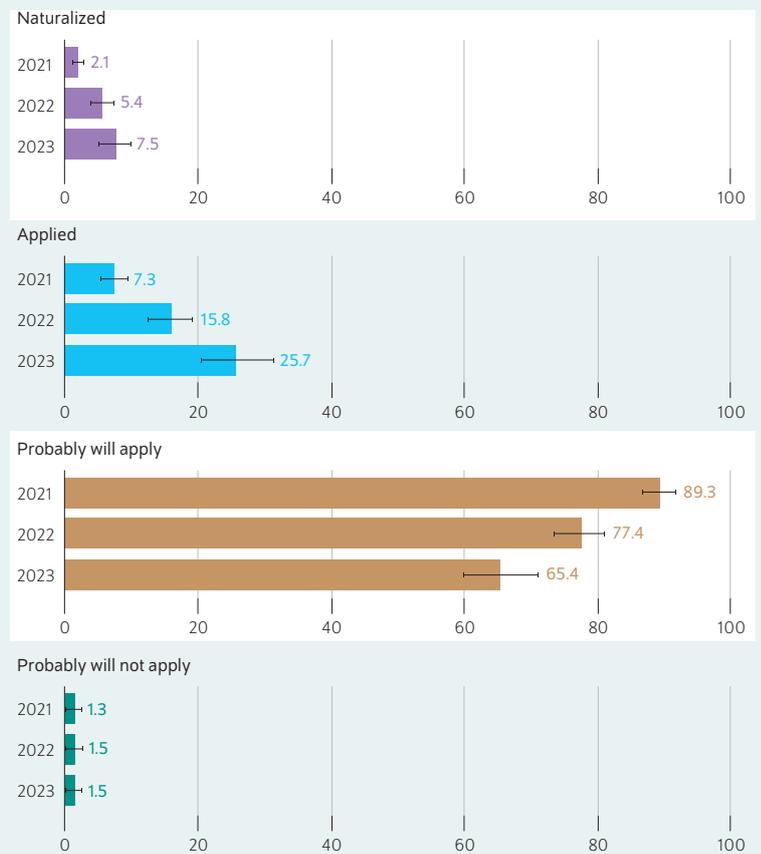
An analysis of Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data shows a high rate of naturalization (Box). The share of naturalized refugees increased considerably from 2021 to 2023, from 2.1 percent in 2021 to 5.4 percent in 2022 and, finally, to 7.5 percent in 2023 (Figure 1). This development reflects the gap expected between arrival and the fulfillment of all naturalization requirements.

There has also been a considerable increase in naturalization applications: In 2021, only 7.3 percent of respondents had applied. This share nearly doubled to 15.8 percent in 2022 and rose to 25.7 percent by 2023.

The share of refugees planning to apply was 89.3 percent in 2021. In 2022, it declined to 77.4 percent and even further to 65.4 percent in 2023.⁶ This decline can be explained by the growing share of those who have already applied.

Figure 1

Naturalization status of refugees by year In percent



Notes: The data only include refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iran who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019.

Source: Authors' calculations using Socio-Economic Panel data (SOEP v40), weighted data.

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Over 98 percent of refugees plan to naturalize, have already applied to do so, or have already naturalized.

At 1.3 to 1.5 percent, the share of refugees not planning to naturalize remained low. This reflects the advantages of naturalizing for immigrants from non-EU countries. While EU citizens living in Germany already enjoy comprehensive freedom of movement, labor rights, and residency rights, the rights of immigrants from non-EU countries are considerably more limited. With German citizenship, they gain more legal security, freedom to travel, professional opportunities, and possibilities to reunite their family.

These findings indicate a growing willingness to integrate in the long term via naturalizing, a gradual process that starts with the intent to apply and ends with becoming a German citizen.

⁵ Of the 284,190 naturalizations in 2024, 212,615 were by legal entitlement and 71,575 were discretionary: Statistisches Bundesamt, *Einbürgerungen nach Rechtsgründen der Einbürgerung und ausgewählten bisherigen Staatsangehörigkeiten* (2025) (in German; available online, accessed on June 26, 2025. This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

⁶ Wenke Niehues and Kerstin Tanis, *Einbürgerungspotenziale bei Geflüchteten in Deutschland* (Nuremberg: Bundesamt für Migration, 2023) (in German; available online); Kerstin Tanis, *Einbürgerung und politisches Interesse von Geflüchteten* (Nuremberg, Bundesamt für Migration: 2024) (in German; available online).

Box

Data and methodology

Data and samples

This Weekly Report uses data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP),¹ the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples,² and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees.³ The latter uses data on asylum seekers who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019. Most refugees came to Germany in 2015 or 2016 and have been living here since then.

The analyses include all refugees surveyed in SOEP who were identified as asylum seekers based on their immigration history, residence status, country of birth, and their own statements. The focus is on refugees from six main countries of origin⁴ (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iran) who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 and were at least 18 years old at the time of the survey. After filtering out minor refugees as well as 17 invalid surveys, the analysis sample contained 2,701 people and 4,508 observations.

The analysis period is limited to 2021 to 2023, as comprehensive information on naturalization will only be available in the data from this period onwards. Due to the required minimum residency period, barely any naturalizations were expected before 2021.

¹ Jan Goebel et al., *Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), data from 1984–2023, (SOEP-Core, v40, EU Edition)* (2025: German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)) (available online).

² ¹⁸ The IAB-SOEP Migration Samples are a joint project of the Institute for Employment Research (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, IAB) and SOEP. Herbert Brücker et al., "The new IAB-SOEP Migration Sample: an introduction into the methodology and the contents," *SOEP Survey Papers Series C* no. 1217 (2022) (available online).

³ This is conducted by SOEP together with the IAB as well as the BAMF-FZ Research Data Center. Herbert Brücker et al., "Exploring Integration and Migration Dynamics: The Research Potentials of a Large-Scale Longitudinal Household Study of Refugees in Germany," *European Sociological Review* (forthcoming) (available online).

⁴ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge und Bundesministerium des Inneren, für Bau und Heimat, *Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung. Migrationsbericht 2016/2017* (2019) (in German; available online).

Variables

The key variable here is the naturalization status, which is divided into the categories of "naturalized," "applied," "probably will apply," and "probably will not apply." The categories are based on SOEP data. The category "naturalized" is generated from information on the respondents' citizenship. A person is considered to be naturalized if they have acquired German citizenship. The data also includes information on the intent to naturalize. Respondents can indicate if they have already submitted an application. If they have not but they indicate if they will "definitely" or "probably" apply," they are categorized as "probably will apply." People who respond with "probably not" or "definitely not" are grouped into the category "probably will not apply." Information on the intent to naturalization is not available for all respondents in the observed years. These respondents could thus not be included in the analyses.⁵

The respondents could also indicate if they have any other citizenships in addition to German citizenship. If they have multiple citizenships and the second corresponds to the citizenship the person had when they came to Germany, they are put in the "retained original citizenship" category.

For the multivariate analyses, additional information on biological sex, age, education, German skills, employment status, naturalization status of the partner, and number of children are included. One quarter of the respondents are missing values for at least one of these variables. This group tends to be younger with better German skills and more frequently already naturalized. To avoid distorting the results by excluding these cases, the missing values in the multivariate analyses are replaced using multiple imputation in ten imputed data sets.⁶

⁵ This applies to 10.2 percent of cases in 2021, 4.8 percent in 2022, and 9.7 percent in 2023. The excluded cases do not differ in characteristics from the other cases. Thus, no bias due to missing values can be assumed.

⁶ Donald B. Rubin, *Multiple Imputation for Nonresponse in Surveys* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

Syrian refugees more likely to naturalize than other groups

An evaluation of naturalizations by country of origin for 2023, the most recent available survey year, shows significant differences: 13.1 percent of Syrian refugees have already naturalized. In contrast, only 0.9 percent of refugees from other countries (Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, and Somalia) have naturalized (Figure 2).⁷

⁷ Due to the low number of immigrants who have already naturalized in the sample, refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, and Somalia are grouped together.

The naturalization figures from the 2022 and 2023 migration reports confirm the SOEP findings: Between 2021 and 2023, 142,885 Syrians naturalized, or 13.7 percent of the 1.04 million Syrian immigrants living in Germany in 2023. These figures are consistent with the SOEP data.⁸ For other countries of origin, the migration report indicates higher naturalization shares, such as 7.3 percent for Iranians. These deviations occur because the official statistics include groups such as labor migrants.

⁸ Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat und Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, *Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung 2022 (1. aktualisierte Fassung)* (2024) (in German; available online); Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat und Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, *Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung 2023* (2025) (in German; available online).

There are also differences in naturalization applications: Syrian refugees apply more rarely (22.5 percent) than asylum seekers from other countries (29.4 percent). However, a disproportionately large share of Syrian refugees has already naturalized.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents are planning to apply but have not yet done so. Here, the figures are flipped: The largest share, 67.9 percent, of those planning to apply are among refugees from other countries, while 62.3 percent of Syrian refugees plan to apply. The share of refugees not planning to apply for citizenship is low, from 1.2 to 1.7 percent.

Many naturalized Germans retain their original citizenship

Until recently, German nationality law required applicants to renounce their original citizenship when naturalizing as a German. However, there were already many exceptions before the 2024 reform. These exceptions applied to recognized refugees, people with a risk of being persecuted in their country of origin, and people from countries that do not permit renunciation, make it unreasonably difficult, or only allow it after the new citizenship has been obtained. These exceptions under the old law already applied to many refugees from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, or Syria.

Many refugees who have already naturalized, thus primarily Syrian refugees, retained their original citizenship. In 2023, 88.4 percent of successful applicants retained their original citizenship (Figure 3). Studies indicate that permitting multiple citizenships does not only increase refugees' willingness to naturalize, but also promotes their further social, economic, and political integration.⁹

Individual resources can increase the probability of naturalizing

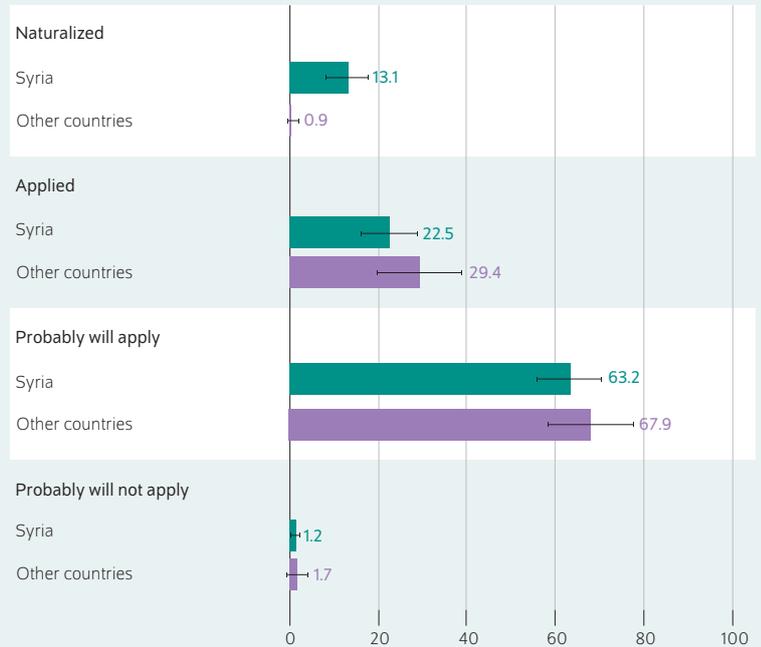
To naturalize, refugees must fulfill certain requirements, including a minimum residency period, being able to support themselves financially, and sufficient German skills. Studies emphasize how important individual resources such as education, language skills, and income are for successful integration.¹⁰ Refugees with more resources are more likely to consult lawyers, pay fees, have access to information, and acquire the knowledge and skills they need. It is to be expected that better educated and more well-off refugees will complete the naturalization process more successfully than less well-off refugees, especially during the phase in which many refugees are reaching the minimum required residency period.

9 Gathmann und Garbers, "Citizenship and integration."

10 Yuliya Kosyakova et al., "Determinants of Refugees' Identification with Country of Origin and Host Country and Their Naturalization Intentions: Evidence from Germany," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 1–19 (forthcoming); Irene Bloemraad, *Becoming a citizen: Incorporating immigrants and refugees in the United States and Canada* (University of California Press: 2006); Sofya Aptekar, "Making Sense of Naturalization: What Citizenship Means to Naturalizing Immigrants in Canada and the USA," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17 (2016): 1143–1161.

Figure 2

Naturalization status of refugees by country of origin In percent



Notes: The data only includes refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iran who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019.

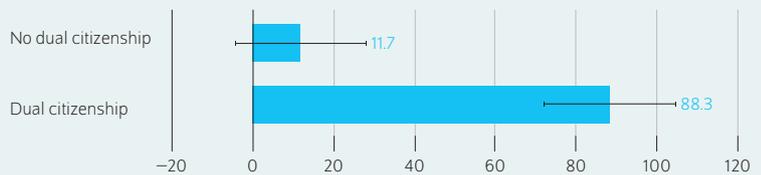
Source: Authors' calculations using Socio-Economic Panel data (SOEP v40), weighted data.

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Syrian refugees have naturalized much more frequently than refugees from other countries.

Figure 3

Share of naturalized refugees with dual citizenship, 2023 In percent



Notes: The data only includes refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iran who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019.

Source: Authors' calculations using Socio-Economic Panel data (SOEP v40), weighted data.

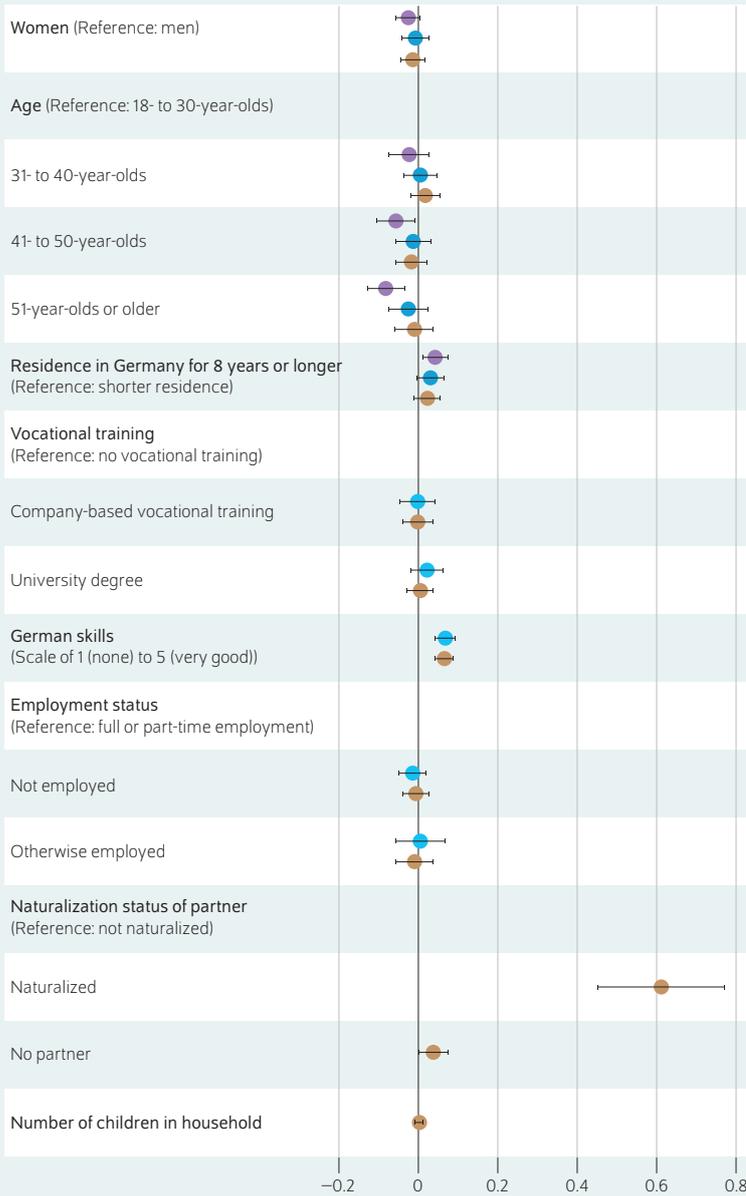
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Many naturalized refugees retain their original citizenship.

Figure 4

Influence of different factors on the probability of naturalizing
Change in probability on a scale of -1 to +1

- Model 1 includes gender, age, and duration of stay
- Model 2 also includes vocational training, German skills, and employment status
- Model 3 also includes the naturalization status of the respondent's partner and number of children in the household



Notes: "Otherwise employed" refers to those who are engaged in paid employment, such as mini-jobs, midi-jobs, student jobs, short-term employment, training, freelance work, or contract work. The horizontal lines indicate the 95-percent confidence interval. This means that in 95 percent of cases, the actual value is within this interval. The smaller the interval, the more exact the estimated value. If the confidence interval does not reach or cross the zero line, the coefficients are statistically significant at least at the five percent level. Logistic random effects model. The data only includes refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Iran who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019.

Source: Authors' calculations using Socio-Economic Panel data (SOEP v40), weighted data.

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Refugees with a naturalized partner have an over 60 percentage point higher probability of naturalizing.

In addition to individual resources, research has identified further factors that facilitate naturalization, including naturalized family members,¹¹ a naturalized partner,¹² or living in wealthy regions with low unemployment.¹³ In addition, it is argued that contact with people who have already naturalized provides refugees with valuable information and experiences. In more affluent regions, refugees also have access to more employment and language learning opportunities and other forms of assistance that facilitate naturalization.

Previous studies on the intent to naturalize among refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 confirm these assumptions: Syrians, higher educated people, healthier people, and people with contact to Germans fulfill the naturalization requirements more frequently.¹⁴

This Weekly Report investigates if these findings also apply to actual naturalizations.¹⁵ One model shows that the probability of naturalizing differs by age and gender (Figure 4). Refugees 40 or older are less likely to successfully naturalize than 18- to 30-year-olds. Refugee women and men are similarly likely to naturalize.

Another model investigates to what extent access to individual resources influences the chance of naturalization. The results show a differentiated picture: While vocational training does not have a significant influence, better German skills increase the probability considerably. Surprisingly, refugees without or with another type of employment are not any less likely than those employed in full or part time. Furthermore, age loses its effect when considering individual resources. This indicates that the age differences are mainly due to unequal resources.

A third model also includes the family situation. Refugees with a naturalized partner have over a 60-percentage-point higher probability of being naturalized themselves. In contrast, the number of children in the household does not have any significant influence on the probability of naturalizing.

Conclusion: Advantages of naturalizing unavailable to people who would benefit the most

Observing the naturalizations of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 shows significant growth: The share of naturalized refugees increased from 2.1 percent in 2021 to 7.5 percent in 2023. At the same time, the share of those who applied for naturalization almost tripled:

11 Thai V. Le and Manuel Pastor, "Family Matters: Modeling Naturalization Propensities in the United States," *International Migration Review* 57 (2023): 1427–1455.

12 Le and Pastor, "Family Matters," Jonas Helgertz and Pieter Bevelander, "The Influence of Partner Choice and Country of Origin Characteristics on the Naturalization of Immigrants in Sweden: A Longitudinal Analysis," *International Migration Review* 51 (2017): 667–700.

13 Nadwa Mossaad et al., "Determinants of refugee naturalization in the United States," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(2018): 9175–9180.

14 Niehues und Tanis, *Einbürgerungspotenziale bei Geflüchteten in Deutschland*.

15 To consider the household context, logistic random effects models were calculated. Average marginal effects are reported.

from 7.3 percent in 2021 to 25.7 percent in 2023. These figures make it clear that nearly all refugees in Germany intend on staying there permanently: Over 98 percent either have applied to naturalize, have already naturalized, or plan to apply to naturalize.

The study reveals significant differences between the groups by country of origin: 13.1 percent of Syrian refugees are naturalized while only 0.9 percent of refugees from other countries are naturalized. Conversely, the share of those who have applied but are not yet naturalized is larger for non-Syrian refugees (29.4 percent) than for Syrian refugees (22.5 percent). These differences reflect both different arrival times as well as different legal and practical conditions.

Notably, dual citizenship is common: 88.4 percent of the immigrants who naturalized in 2023 kept their original citizenship. This figure shows that even under the old nationality law, extensive exceptions applied to refugees, thereby overriding the principle of avoiding multiple citizenships.

The multivariate analysis confirms previously known factors for naturalizing successfully: Better German skills increase the probability of naturalizing significantly. Interestingly, the citizenship held by an immigrant's partner plays the most important role. This suggests that, in the phase after reaching the minimum residency period, it is primarily individuals with greater personal resources and easier access to experiential knowledge about naturalization who successfully complete the process. One possible explanation for this is that people who fulfill the naturalization requirements tend to have partners who are similar to them in this respect.

Under the updated nationality law from June 27, 2024, the number of naturalizations of refugees should increase. For example, the required residency period was reduced to five years, thereby removing a major hurdle. Immigrants who

arrived between 2013 and 2019 have thus reached the minimum required residency period.¹⁶ In light of the large share of refugees who intend to naturalize, an increase in applications can be expected.

At the same time, the new nationality law has stricter requirements for applicants' ability to financially support themselves. Previously, naturalization by legal entitlement generally permitted the applicants to be receiving social benefits (provided it was not self-inflicted). The updated law, however, does not allow applicants to be receiving social benefits (SGB XII) or basic income support for job seekers (SGB II). Exceptions apply only to a few groups, such as full-time workers who have been employed full time for at least 20 months in the last 24 months or vulnerable individuals who have made every reasonable effort to secure their subsistence.

Thus, the reforms are likely to not only increase the number of naturalization applications, but also reinforce selectivity based on education and employment status. Higher-skilled refugees with good German skills and stable employment are likely to benefit in particular. For less qualified refugees, the requirements make naturalization more difficult or delay it, as they take longer to integrate into the labor market.

The advantages of naturalization—planning security, professional mobility, a stronger sense of belonging, and political participation—remain denied to precisely the refugees who would benefit from them the most. The stricter requirements for ensuring a secure subsistence systematically exclude vulnerable groups such as single parents, older people, and the low-skilled. Given their long-term prospects of remaining in Germany, it is worth asking if the state is not wasting valuable opportunities for integration.

¹⁶ Niehues und Tanis, *Einbürgerungspotenziale bei Geflüchteten in Deutschland*.

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