

RESPOND

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Global Migration: Consequences and Responses

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Integration Policies, Practices and Experiences

Germany Country Report

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RESPOND: Multilevel
Governance of Migration in
Europe and Beyond (770564)



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Glossary and Abbreviations

AnKER Centre	Center for Arrival, Decision Making and Return <i>Zentrum für Ankunft, Entscheidung und Rückführung</i>
Arrival Centre	Centre where registration and security checks take place prior to distribution to a federal state <i>Ankunftszenrum</i>
Arrival Certificate	Certificate received upon arrival in the arrival centre, attesting registration of the intention to apply for asylum <i>Ankunftsnachweis</i>
Initial Reception Centre	Reception centre where a branch office of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is located and where asylum seekers are generally assigned to reside for up to six months <i>Aufnahmeeinrichtung</i>
Transit Centre	Initial reception centre hosting asylum seekers for a period of up to 24 months, in application of Section 47(1b) of the Asylum Act. <i>Transitzentrum</i>
AIDA	Asylum Information Database
AfD	Alternative for Germany <i>Alternative für Deutschland</i>
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees <i>Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge</i>
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany <i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i>
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
DRK	German Red Cross <i>Deutsches Rotes Kreuz</i>
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EASY	Initial Distribution of asylum seekers <i>Erstverteilung der Asylbegehrenden</i>
EC	European Commission
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
GU	Accommodation Centre <i>Gemeinschaftsunterkunft</i>
LGBTQ or LGBTQIA	Queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany <i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VG	Administrative Court <i>Verwaltungsgericht</i>
ZAB	Central Aliens Office <i>Zentrale Ausländerbehörde</i>
WP	Work Package

About the project

RESPOND is a Horizon 2020 project which aims at studying the multilevel governance of migration in Europe and beyond. The consortium is formed of 14 partners from 11 source, transit and destination countries and is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden. The main aim of this Europe-wide project is to provide an in-depth understanding of the governance of recent mass migration at macro, meso and micro levels through cross-national comparative research and to critically analyse governance practices with the aim of enhancing the migration governance capacity and policy coherence of the EU, its member states and third countries.

RESPOND studies migration governance through a narrative which is constructed along five thematic fields:

- (1) Border management and security,
- (2) Refugee protection regimes,
- (3) Reception policies,
- (4) Integration policies, and
- (5) Conflicting Europeanization.

Each thematic field between (1) and (5) is reflecting a juncture in the migration journey of refugees and designed to provide a holistic view of policies, their impacts and responses given by affected actors within.

In order to better focus on these themes, we divided our research question into work packages (WPs). The present report is concerned with the findings related to WP5, which focus specifically on the Germany's integration system.

Executive Summary

- Germany is a “reluctant” immigration country. Despite its post-World-War-II history of immigration, Germany has never adopted a coherent strategy or policy of integration. Immigration was considered a transitory phenomenon as the notorious term “guest workers” suggests. Considering the expected return of immigrants to their countries of origin, integration policy making has long remained implicit.
- Recent processes of refugee immigration have opened a policy window for a more proactive approach to immigration and integration. However, the formulation and implementation of integration policies are situated in a setting of double complexity. First, integration is a cross-cutting policy issue which connects to the responsibilities of various federal ministries. Second, it is a multi-level system in which policy making and monitoring largely take place on the federal level. However, the actual implementation is mainly realized on the level of regional states and municipalities.
- At least since 2016, integration measures (as those stipulated on Asylum Package II for example), point to the competing and paternalistic logic of retaining control over refugees. This is accomplished by the imposition of restrictions on movement and the expansion of value education as part of the integration courses. It is also supported by a logic of human capital, which privileges refugees as to their economic value whilst restricting basic rights, such as the freedom of movement. Individuals applying for asylum in Germany live highly restricted lives subject to accountability, compliance and punitive measures.
- While the “Asylum Packages” and the “Integration Act” have mainly focused on structural integration through labour market inclusion, the “Migration Masterplan” has emphasized sociocultural aspects, such as identification and acculturation. It’s obvious that most initiatives respond to an alleged public expectation of refugees smoothly fitting in the society rather than to the actual demands of support and participation which they may have.
- Civil society actors seem to fill the gaps left by the policy field regarding the sociocultural but also some elements of structural immigration. This happens, for instance, in the education of refugee children, with regards to language learning and health care (e.g. the provision of counselling for those with mental health issues). Volunteers also give a human face to the German system through the development of local actions based on welcoming and pastoral care of refugees. Nevertheless, sometimes these actions take on a paternalistic tone that tend to infantilize asylum seekers. In some cases, instead of helping remove adaptive barriers, we observe that certain initiatives tend to demarcate or reinforce cultural boundaries.
- We note that the German asylum regime is coated in protectionist rules regarding German employees vis-à-vis the potential hiring of refugees from the part of labour unions, associations and guilds, which may severely curtail refugees labour market integration.
- While the rate of unemployment among refugees is still quite high, recent studies show that half of the refugees who arrived in 2013 have found some sort of employment. Women with children were more likely to be unemployed than men. In comparison to earlier cohorts, refugees who arrived in 2013 had a slightly higher chance to find a job. This is mainly a consequence of structural factors, such as the robust German labour market and the skills shortage in many areas.
- One of the most important individual factors for (un)employment of refugees are lacking German language skills. Consequently, most of them were pushed towards occupations in the areas of cleaning services, logistics and kitchen assistance. Between 2017 and 2018, almost 100.000 people from the eight most prevalent countries of origin of refugees were incorporated into the first labour market, yet almost a third of them in the domain of subcontracted labour.

- Our findings also underline the enormous impact of reception conditions for the integration of refugees.
 - First, the new reception policy paradigm of “integrated refugee management” builds on strategies of isolation and deterrence, which impede sociocultural and structural integration.
 - Second, the policies of dispersal of refugees across regional states and municipalities has gone hand in hand with frequent relocations and hence hindered efforts of sustainable integration.
 - Third, the overall protraction of the reception phase, which was mentioned by many of our interlocutors, along with the absence of early integration measures during the reception period, proved to be a severe challenge to the accomplishment of structural and sociocultural integration.
- Whereas centralized accommodation seems to offer the advantage that refugees can be easily addressed by social workers, administrators and NGOs, our results clearly point to the advantages of decentral accommodation in terms of integration.
 1. Decentral housing can increase the opportunities for contact with German natives or established immigrants who can provide all sorts of support.
 2. Decentral housing allows for an everyday life outside of the imposed routines of accommodation centres and hence may enhance experiences of self-efficacy and self-worth.
 3. Decentral housing enables a sense of being at home which can facilitate both sociocultural and structural integration.
- Through the interviews we conducted with refugees, we see clear links between spatiality, geography, and the chances of a refugee to adapt and integrate into German society. Education, employment, and mental health issues are all intrinsically connected to the type of accommodation and the location of such accommodation, whether it is in a rural or more urban area. The quality and frequency of transportation links and even whether there are supermarkets or places of worship nearby or leisure spaces such as football fields, parks or playgrounds all play a role
- Mental health turns out to be an especially important factor for sustainable integration. Our interviews with refugees clearly show some of the causes and many of the effects of lack of appropriate mental health treatment. Our data also shows the impact this has on their chances of both structural and sociocultural integration.
- It is true to say that little is still known about the civic engagement of refugees and their sense of belonging and citizenship. In line with recent quantitative studies, our evidence suggests that civic engagement of refugees is mainly being performed through sports associations (European football) and faith-based initiatives, programs, and charities. Furthermore, civic engagement was highly dependent on demographic (refugees of middle-class origin more likely to engage due to cultural capital) and geographical factors (refugees in urban areas more likely to engage due to opportunity structures). At the same time, our interviews with administrators and social workers indicate that they do not actively empower asylum seekers to mobilize their interests.
- There is a notable absence in our data of a more prominent role for social workers. This absence, we argue, is a problem that could be turned into an opportunity regarding many of the problems refugees have regarding integration. We argue that social workers could perform a more prominent role in the asylum regime as facilitators who would help smooth the transition between the *reception phase of asylum application* and *integration processes*.

Introduction

Refugee Integration in Germany: Current Context and Basic Facts

Since 2015, when the number of refugees coming into the country reached its peak, Germany has increasingly attempted to halt additional refugee and migrant inflows by tightening its asylum regulations. In June 2019, the German parliament passed legislation that facilitates and expedites the detention and deportation of denied asylum applicants. However, despite such restrictive and punitive measures, the total number of humanitarian migrants is in fact increasing. Indeed, Germany continues to receive the highest number of asylum applications in the European Union. While the number of new asylum applications in 2018 has considerably decreased (to numbers last seen before 2015), the total number of people seeking asylum or other forms of protection increased by 5% in 2017 and reached 1.7 million¹. Of these 1.7 million, 1.2 million had been granted permission to stay in Germany as of December 2017. Most of them are from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Basic demographic data on refugees coming to Germany reveal that they are in their majority young men.

Recently, there have been important debates about the “usefulness” of asylum seekers that have threatened to weaken the humanitarian argument for international protection (“Spurwechsel”). These arguments evoke a market logic on the necessity of immigration to prevent skills shortage (“Fachkräftemangel”). The German asylum regime in its current form, envisages integration mainly as a necessary means to compensate for the alleged weaknesses of immigrants.

The presence of the refugees has been closely aligned with an intense political backlash. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision in 2015 to keep Germany’s borders open was met with high approval at the time, but it also added to the ongoing rise of the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) as well as anti-EU populist movements across Europe. In France, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Denmark and the UK, for example, a rise of anti-EU and right-wing populism could be found before 2015. Pegida and the AfD also had their first successes well before the “Wir schaffen das” decision. However, the political backlash suffered by Merkel went hand in hand with the electoral successes of these populist movements in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Consequently, since 2015 even Merkel’s own tone has changed since she has recently vowed that the situation of 2015 “cannot, should not and must not be repeated.”

This is the context, the backdrop, against which Germany has developed much of its recent integration policies and efforts. The main aim of the so-called “Asylum Packages”, a recent set of legislation, has been to prevent the perpetuation of what is considered the “social problem” of refugee reception and integration in Germany. Since this is seen as a “problem”, the issue of refugee protection in Germany has been constantly confused with the issue of immigration at large whilst fanning the flames of xenophobia, nativism and nationalism in smaller communities. Still, we note that refugees in Germany are attending university and working in greater numbers. Efforts to train asylum seekers have increased, and some commentators in the private and public sectors seem to appreciate the “economic benefits” of the refugee influx, even when this also represent a certain level of exploitation of cheap labour. It is also notable that Germany has since 2015 enjoyed substantial economic growth, record low unemployment rates, as well as record federal budget surpluses, notwithstanding the costs of absorbing more than a million newcomers. And despite the high number of refugees—most of whom are entitled to public welfare payments—the number of welfare recipients in Germany has progressively dropped in more recent years.

¹ BAMF publishes statistical reports every month. For more accuracy on number of asylum cases in Germany visit <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/AsylinZahlen/aktuelle-zahlen-april-2020.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020.

However, the structural and social integration of refugees remains a thorny issue with many of the discussions being fed by economy-based discourses on the “benefits” of refugee integration for the economy or society at large. On the demographic/statistical side, the inflow of humanitarian migrants is affecting the greatest population increase in Germany in several decades. According to World Education Services (see Trines 2019), “Population growth in cities like Berlin is now driven almost exclusively by citizens of other countries, including large numbers of Syrian newcomers” (n.p). Many of the new arrivals are expected to stay in Germany for a longer time. Asylees and other humanitarian migrants can apply for permanent residency permits after three to seven years in the country, depending on their legal protection status.

The Idea of “Integration”: A Multifaceted Concept

One main problem when trying to study “integration” is that there tends to be confusion on what it is meant by “integration”. Two different aspects of the matter seem at times to be conflated. The first refers to what we call “structural integration”. In a nutshell, this term refers to the material conditions, which allow for a person to live in a society, such as employment, education, freedom of movement, etc. The second meaning of integration refers to the emotive/personal connection immigrants “should” feel towards the new country and its citizens. The second is that integration has a loaded meaning inferring an emotive/personal connection to people and land. We can call this “sociocultural integration”, a more subjective, way of thinking about integration. Hence, for the purposes of this report, we operationalized a system in which we look at some basic structural elements whilst not forgetting the subjective side. RESPOND’s country reports on integration are structured around the EU’s principles and its key policy priorities on integration as well as the categorizations made in recent academic studies on migrant and refugee integration. We mainly follow the analytical framework developed by Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) and use it to study our empirical material. These different elements composing our idea of what constitutes “integration” have then been used to frame the report into sections (see below for the overall structure of the report).

By integration, therefore, we mean a composite of structural elements made up of laws, policies and practices encompassing employment, housing, education, health, citizenship and culture and the responses or reactions from refugees themselves. Of course, the “feeling” of “being integrated”, the emotive connection a person may or may not develop towards a surrogate country like Germany is also addressed through the narratives of refugees themselves, whom we give full voice through our in-depth anthropological gaze at the conditions of life of refugees in Bavaria, Lower Saxony, Berlin and Brandenburg, the regions we have chosen to focus our attention. These case studies are exemplary for the variety of forms integration measures can take amongst the 16 regional states since they mirror relevant contextual factors (such as the rural-urban divide and different patterns of regional economies, see below).

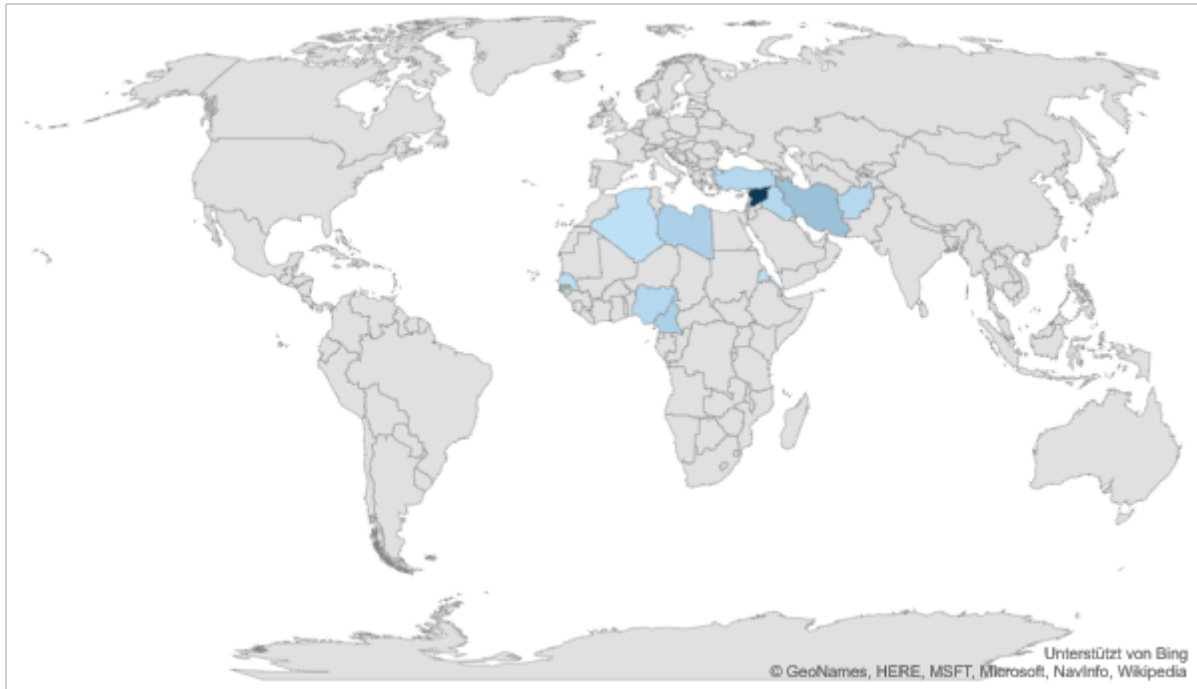
Methods: Data Collection, Sampling and Terminology

This report is based on original empirical data as well as desk research. For the macro-level of integration regulation and policies as well as implementation of integration measures, we mainly relied on desk research which involved the analysis of official papers, legislation, policy briefs, official data drawn from relevant ministries and public institutions, reliable survey results, expert interviews, and scholarly work. For the meso- and micro-level of experiences and evaluations of integration politics, we conducted interviews with officials and NGO workers and organizers and 60 individual interviews with refugees in four different regions in Germany.

The sample of our micro-level interviews included 60 asylum seekers, the majority of whom were men (63%). The average age of participants was 30,2 years (youngest was 19, the oldest 68). Our interlocutors came from 12 countries from the African continent and the Middle East (Afghanistan, Algeria, Cameroon, Eritrea, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Senegal, Syria

and Turkey). However, most of our interviewees were from Syria. We did not aim at any sort of random sample. Instead, we sought to reflect the overall demography of asylum seekers in Germany in the period 2011-2017.

Figure 1: Refugee sending countries included in the sample



Source: Own Illustration

We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews in four regions in Germany: Lower Saxony in the city of Göttingen, Bavaria (Munich), in the city-state of Berlin and in the state of Brandenburg (in the municipality Teltow Fläming). These locations were selected using two criteria. The first refers to the need to study both rural and urban areas and more and less populated parts of the country. The second criteria is that the selection of location should also favour the mobility of researchers and easy access to interlocutors as well as to take advantage of the familiarity of researchers with the areas to be studied, their knowledge of the communities and their gate keepers. Furthermore, meso-level interviews were conducted with administrators and NGO representatives, mainly in Lower Saxony, as well as with federal representatives in Berlin.

In our micro level analysis, we included a temporal aspect or temporal “categorization”. This simply means that, following our sampling criteria, we focus on **1)** Early arrivals in Germany (2011-2014), and **2)** Late arrivals (2015-2017/18). Our starting premise was to assume that “early arrivals” have had more experience and interaction with different aspects of German integration policies and practices. We do so, however, with a cautionary note. That is, even though integration is a processual phenomenon, it would be wrong to understand the outcomes of integration in a linear fashion. In our analysis of interview material, we also included another differential, namely legal status. Here we have three status-based categories for structuring our analysis at micro level: **1)** asylum applicants who have acquired “residence/work permit”; **2)** those still in the asylum application phase, and **3)** those whose asylum applications have been rejected and living illegally in the host country. Another important but often implicit aspect found in our data relates to age. In our case, we found important to show the generational differences in refugee experiences and for that, we used a rough guide based on age groups 18-26, 27-50, 51+. Of course, we also paid attention to differences in experiences that were more explicitly gender-based and tried to hold a yardstick to our analysis of newcomers to

Germany by comparing the situation of asylum applicants with native populations. This we have achieved by with the help of secondary sources (e.g. Eurostat, OECD, European Social Survey). We attempted this comparison in each theme, whenever it was possible, for example, in the sub-section named 'unemployment'. Finally, we also paid attention to what we describe in our project as 'vulnerability'. This is however not found in individual sections or sub-sections but more as a cross sectional topic since it is a notion that permeates for instance the situation of asylum applicants regarding employment opportunities or health, for instance. A similar approach has been taken for analysing experiences of individuals belonging to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, and gender/age).

According to their own accounts, our interlocutors used four main routes into Europe: **1)** from North and East Africa through Libya and across the central Mediterranean by boat into Malta or Italy and surrounding Islands; **2)** the East Mediterranean route through Turkey and by sea to Greece or Italy; **3)** the land route from the Middle East through to the Balkans (mainly Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary and Austria) and from there to the North of Europe. There were also those who **4)** arrived through airports directly from the country of origin or after a short stop in either Turkey, Italy, or France, legally as tourists, only to later apply for asylum a few months after arrival in Germany.

It is important to emphasize that these routes each imposed hardships on refugees and in some cases included long-term stays between the point of departure and their arrival in Germany. Some asylum seekers from the African continent for example have lived in long states of protracted migration lasting years, have crossed many borders, and endured the reception policies of a variety of countries before applying for asylum in Germany. Other refugees have had a much shorter migratory route into Europe, but not necessarily less perilous or traumatic, such as Syrians being stranded several times between borders and almost drowning at sea. As the current report concentrates on integration in Germany but it is important to keep this background in mind as we attempt to describe the interaction of refugees with the German system of immigrant integration. We use the terms "asylum applicant", "asylum seeker" and "refugee" interchangeably to denote *the experience of displaced individuals who have sought refuge in Germany* in general, rather than the legal categories in which the German system places them according to the result of their asylum claims.

The structure of this report

This country report is structured in **seven sections**. Section I seeks to outline laws and policies that in a broad sense aim at defining parameters for the integration of asylum applicants into German society. Here we pay attention to legal, political, and institutional frameworks. The last part of Section I is dedicated to covering the analysis of the recent developments in the field of integration in Germany in the last decade. More specifically, it comprehends the period covered by RESPOND (2011–2017/18). **Section I** is primarily based on desk research and secondary sources.

The following five sections discuss thematic topics. **Section II** is dedicated to **labour market**, **Section III** discusses **education**, **Section IV** focuses on **housing and space**, **Section V** deals with the **psychosocial health and the role of religion**, and finally, **Section VI** discusses **citizenship, belonging and civic participation**. The report ends with a conclusion where we highlight the most important findings and suggest some policy recommendations for each thematic field. In line with the framework RESPOND, sections II to V encompass macro, meso- and micro-level interviews and data analysis as subsections. For meso- and micro level sections, we make use of primary interview material that is supported by secondary sources whenever necessary or appropriate. For the meso-level, we have found important to show and explain the governance of integration at different levels. For the micro level, we attempt to explain how refugees/migrants negotiate their position in a new society and how they respond/interact with policies aiming at their integration at legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural levels.

1. Legal, Political and Institutional Framework

In this section, we address some basic questions regarding the integration of refugees into the German society. We ask: What is Germany's integration policy and how has it evolved, particularly after 2011? How have integration policies in Germany changed since 2011? What are the key narratives associated with these changes? How are they framed (problem definition)? Which governance actors were/have been the main drivers of such changes? What are the key events that triggered and paved the way for these changes? To reach some answers we start with a short historical background of the development of Germany's integration policies.

Brief Historical Context

It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted history of Germany with the incorporation of immigrants (see Chemin et al 2018). Some important migratory movements include the immigration of Huguenots in the 17th century as religious refugees, the early large-scale labour migration of Polish workers to support the coal and steel industry in the Ruhr-Area during the 18th century, the incorporation of several Million Germans in and after the end of World War II from the formerly German territories in the East, labour migrants from Southern Europe, Turkey and North Africa who arrived in the 1960s as so called "guest workers" in the course of what has become known as Germany's "economic miracle". Thirty years later, the Yugoslav Wars caused more than one million people from former Yugoslavia to seek refuge in Germany. Today, most immigrants come from other EU countries, mainly from Romania and Bulgaria, making use of the free movement of labour. Even in the year 2015, which was widely perceived as the peak of the recent refugee immigration, only 40% of immigrants were refugees whereas 60% were workers from other EU countries (Grote 2016)².

Even though its immigration history makes Germany a *de facto* immigration country, policy making concerning immigration and integration has long been rather defensive and erratic. The very term "guest workers" indicates that the right to stay is transitory and based on appropriate behaviour. It purports an asymmetric understanding of hospitality and stands exemplary for a human capital centred strand of the public discussion of immigration, which is also prevalent in actual debates on refugees compensating for a lack of skilled workers. Consequently, immigration policy measures have so far been defensively aimed at keeping (potential) immigrants in their countries of origin (or other countries) or at convincing (actual) immigrants to voluntarily return. The so-called repatriation grant (Rückkehrprämie) and other monetary incentives to leave, as well as the development of incorporating migration as an issue of foreign and developmental policy may serve as paradigmatic examples of this strategy. At the same time, the strong federal structure of Germany fosters an incoherence of migration policies and practice within and across different levels of migration governance (national, regional, municipalities). Border management and protection (e.g. Asylum application) are national responsibilities, whereas many aspects of reception and integration are in the general responsibility of the regional states and fall to the organizational responsibility of the municipalities.

Recent processes of refugee immigration, however, have opened a *new policy window* for a more proactive approach to immigration and integration. In 2018 the Cabinet agreed on a new Professional Immigration Act ("Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz"), which regulates the immigration of academic and vocational experts from third countries. The new law allows professionals from non-EU countries to work in Germany without priority examination ("Vorrangprüfung", i.e. proof that no EU citizen can do the job) or to search for employment if they have a basic command of German and enough money to live on. The press release of

² More recent statistics can be found here: www.bamf.de. Accessed 13/05/2020

the federal government put it quite bluntly that the initiative was mainly based on instrumental rationales as it quotes the Minister for Domestic Affairs: “We do not want immigration into the social security system, but into employment; that is our goal. Furthermore, we will thus be able to push back illegal migration.” (translation AKN/EC).³ The underlying assumption is that – for the lack of an immigration law – people who want to come to Germany in order to work, are forced to immigrate on the ‘ticket’ of asylum. In the same breath, the issue of an increasing shortage of skilled labour is brought up (“Fachkräftemangel”) to underline that an immigration of qualified workers is in the public interest. In terms of integration the new law shows a tendency to externalize integration measures and make them a matter of personal responsibility: e.g. immigrants will have to ensure that they either have an employment contract or at least acquired the German language skills which are necessary for a job search.

Parallel to these endeavours to open new pathways for labour immigrants the policy window was used to introduce some more restrictive measures for asylum seekers in order to cope with what was perceived by some as a loss of control of the situation since 2015. To this aim, the two so called Asylum Packages, which will be outlined in more detail in the following section, sought not only to speed up the asylum decision making, but also to keep applicants in so called arrival centres for up to 18 months. Given the remote location of many of these centres this approach was heavily criticized for promoting isolation and hindering the social as well as structural integration of refugees (Chemin and Nagel 2020).

Residential Status and Refugee Integration

The measures of and opportunities for structural and social integration of asylum seekers are closely related to their residential status. The different forms of protection afforded by the German Federal State are based on provisions stipulated in the Asylum Act, the Residence Act as well as the German Basic Law. According to these, an asylum seeker coming to Germany may be granted one of the following four forms of protection⁴ after his or her case is assessed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF):

Entitlement to Asylum: The Right of Asylum is a basic right stipulated in Art. 16a of the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz - GG). Art. 16a I specify that “Persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of Asylum” and is therefore the oldest form of protection. Since the concept of asylum is not defined in the law, the content and scope of application are primarily a result of the jurisprudence by the German Constitutional Court. Hence, a person is considered to be experiencing political persecution if he or she is suffering from infringements of his or her rights by the state or third persons, measures that can be attributed to the state, because of religious or political convictions or other inaccessible attributes.

Refugee Protection/Non-Refoulement: Refugee Protection is granted to foreigners who are threatened with persecution in their country of origin. According to Section 3 I of the Asylum Act (see also Section 60 I of the Residence Act) a foreigner is regarded as a refugee if he/she has left his/her country of origin for a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. The prohibition of rejection of foreigners who face persecution in their country of origin is also known as the “Non-Refoulement-Principle”. Therefore, this form of protection is causally linked to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention), which is valid in Germany since 24. December 1953. Foreigners awarded with a refugee protection

³ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/mehr-fachkraefte-fuer-deutschland-1563122>. Accessed 13/05/2020

⁴ This is only a simplified version of protection in Germany. For instance, there is also a deportation ban (Abschiebestopp) and a temporary suspension on deportation (Duldung) following the termination of residence and eventual forced return to country of origin. For more details, see https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/AsylFluechtlingsschutz/Asylverfahren/das-deutsche-asylverfahren.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=12. Accessed 13/05/2020

have no disadvantages compared to people entitled with the Right of Asylum according to Art. 16a GG.

Subsidiary Protection: Subsidiary protection is granted without the need of individual persecution. Instead, Section 4 I of the Asylum Act states that a foreigner shall be eligible for subsidiary protection if he/she has shown substantial evidence that he/she will face a substantial risk of suffering serious harm in the country of origin. In this vein, serious harm includes the threat of death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

National ban on Deportation: The Ban on Deportation (“Abschiebestopp”) applies when neither of the other measures outlined above is applicable. Since this regulation is not based on European Law it’s also known as “national subsidiary protection”. In Germany a ban on Deportation can be provided in two cases: According to Section 60 V and VII of the Residence Act a foreigner may not be deported if deportation is inadmissible under the terms of the European Convention of Human Rights or when he/she faces a substantial concrete danger to his/her life and limb or liberty.

It is important to note that all these forms of protection have different implications in terms of reception and integration. First and foremost, this refers to the general planning horizon: it is difficult to require long-term integration efforts from someone whose perspective to stay in Germany is temporary. Second and more concretely, recent legislative changes have paved the way to pay refugees with subsidiary protection a smaller allowance and to restrict the freedom of movement of those under a ban on deportation (Chemin and Nagel 2020). Given the recent dynamics regarding integration policy in Germany, the following paragraphs will highlight some legislative initiatives and political programmes which were prevalent in the reporting period.

Integration Legislation: Recent Trends and Changes

In Germany, integration is considered a cross-sectional topic, which makes it difficult to delineate two or three central legislative acts or programmatic documents or to provide any sort of comprehensive overview. In the following we will focus on the so-called Asylum Packages I and II, the Integration Act of 2016 and the Masterplan Migration that was intensively discussed in 2018.

The *Asylum Packages* contained several amendments and changes in existing laws, such as the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act. Asylum Package I (2015) added Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro to the list of safe countries of origin, enabled a longer period of residence in reception centres, abolished the previous announcement of deportations and introduced the concept of a “prospect to stay” (Bleibeperspektive) which opens up a number of early integration measures for asylum seekers from particular countries, such as Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Syria. Asylum Package II (2016) laid the ground for quicker asylum procedures, the cutting of benefits and the suspension or limitation of family reunion for persons with a “subsidiary protection” status. While the basic rationale of the asylum packages to enhance the reliability of expectation through quicker decision procedures and to provide refugees with a good prospect to stay with early integration measures, such as language classes, it met “vehement rejection” of many human rights organizations as they restrict basic rights, such as the freedom of movement⁵.

Like the Asylum Packages, the so-called *Integration Act*, which was passed in 2016, represents a legislative emergency reaction to the experiences of large-scale refugee immigration since 2015, rather than an integrated strategy for the social and structural integration of refugees. In line with a general trend of privatization and self-reliance in the wider

⁵ See Refugee Council NRW website: <https://www.fnrnw.de/de/themen-a-z/asylpakete.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020

domain of social policy, it is based on the paradigm of 'demand and promote' (Fördern und Fordern) which relies on accountability and compliance. It allows requiring refugees who arrived in Germany after December 1st, 2016 to stay in a regional state for up to three years (Wohnsitzauflage)⁶. Furthermore, refugees must prove integration progress (e.g. language skills and employment) in order to receive a residence permit (Niederlassungserlaubnis). On the other hand, the access to early integration measures (integration courses) and work opportunities is facilitated for applicants with a good prospect to stay. An important measure in this regard has been the so called '3+2 rule' (also known as "Ausbildungsduldung") which enables a status of toleration for the duration of vocational training (usually three years) and another two years of employment in this field. These measures point to the competing logics underlying the Integration Act, namely a paternalistic logic of retaining control over refugees by restrictions of movement and the expansion of value education as part of the integration courses, and a logic of human capital which privileges refugees according to their economic value.

In 2018 the Federal Ministry for Domestic Affairs fuelled the debate on immigration and integration with the so-called *Masterplan Migration*, which was based on a highly restrictive doctrine of migration politics called "Asylwende" (asylum turnaround). This doctrine was mainly promoted by the Christian Socialist Union, which had discovered migration politics to regain voters from the right-wing-populist party "Alternative for Germany" (AfD). Whereas the main emphasis of the Masterplan was to implement a rigid European border regime, it also formulated measures to ensure "successful integration" within Germany. It is stated that people who reside in Germany "for a longer period of time" with a status of international protection should "integrate into our society and value system". All immigrants are expected "to identify with our country and to recognize our way of life" (Masterplan 2018, 19; translation AKN/EC). On a programmatic level, this understanding of integration highlights dimensions, such as acculturation and identification whereas the Integration Act focused more on structural integration through labour market inclusion. On a practical level the integration measures mentioned in the Masterplan exclusively relate to obligatory Integration Courses which combine language training with basic information about Germany's political system, culture and society. Most of the measures focus on sanctions for non-attendance or the control and evaluation of the course providers (ibid. 19-20).

All in all, recent initiatives of integration politics exhibit a strong understanding of integration being first and foremost an obligation of the immigrants as well as a tendency to externalize and privatize integration measures. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the policy field of integration is reflected by the absence of an integral understanding of integration as well as relevant policy goals and means. While the Asylum Packages and the Integration Act have mainly focused on structural integration through labour market inclusion, the Masterplan Migration has emphasized sociocultural aspects, such as identification and acculturation. It is obvious that most initiatives respond to an alleged public expectation of refugees smoothly fitting in the society rather than to the actual demands of support and participation, which they may have (see micro-level analysis).

Governance of Integration policies: Policymaking and Implementation level

As mentioned earlier, the field of integration politics and governance in Germany is highly complex in two dimensions: first it is a *cross-cutting policy issue* which connects to the responsibilities of various federal ministries, and second it is a *multi-level system* in which policy making and monitoring largely take place on the federal level whereas the actual implementation is mainly realized on the level of regional states and municipalities.

The cross-sectional nature of the policy domain of integration can well be illustrated through a thematic homepage published by the German government under the programmatic headline

⁶ <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/muenster-wohnortauflage-101.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020

“Germany can do it. Integration that helps everyone”, which provides links to the integration strategies and measures of eight federal ministries, namely the Ministries for the Interior, Economic Affairs, Labour and Social Affairs, Family Affairs, Economic Cooperation and Development, Health and Research and Education. In addition, the thematic homepage refers to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, which is a division of the Ministry for the Interior, as well as the Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration.⁷

Instead of digging deeper in the meshwork of formal competences and responsibilities we will take a closer look at the position of the *Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration* because it is particularly relevant for matters of refugee integration and in many ways exemplary for the challenges of the cross-sectional approach. Formally, the Commissioner is appointed as a so-called state minister (“Staatsminister”) in the rank of a secretary of state. In the reporting period the office was first held by Aydan Özoğuz, a Social Democrat who served as a Commissioner between 2013 and 2018 and had a strong account in migration and integration politics. After the massive losses of the Social Democratic Party in the Federal election in 2017, the new government appointed Annette Widmann-Mauz, who is a member of the Christian Democratic Union and has gathered political experience in the domains of family and health. The official mission of the commissioner is to “support the federal government in the further development of integration politics and to foster the peaceful cohabitation of all people in the country”.⁸ Special emphasis is put on promoting the integration of immigrants, enhancing mutual understanding and countering xenophobia. Although the office has grown considerably in terms of personnel and material resources since its establishment in 1978 (and in particular after the large-scale immigration of refugees in 2015), it is still quite small compared to the ministries, which suggests that the nature of this action field is more coordinative than truly conceptual.

The conceptual matters of federal integration policy have taken shape in a number of so called *Integration Summits* in the years 2006 and 2007 which resulted in the *National Integration Plan*, a compendium of more than 200 pages which reflects on the division of responsibilities between the federal, regional and municipal level and elaborates on challenges in 10 thematic fields, namely: “Improving Integration Discourses”, “Fostering German language from the beginning”, “Securing good education, improve chances for employment”, “Improving life chances of girls and women”, “Supporting integration on a local scale”, “Culture and Integration”, “Integration through sports”, “Media: Making Use of Diversity”, “Integration through civic engagement” and “Cosmopolitan Science” (Integrationsplan 2007, 4-5, translation AKN/EC). The document begins with a brief introductory address by the German chancellor Angela Merkel, who holds that “Germany is an open-minded country with roundabout 15 Million people with an immigration background. Most of them have found their place in our society. Yet, we also know about significant integration deficits” (ibid, 7). The tone of the introduction stands exemplary for the *deficit-oriented approach*, which has for long guided integration politics in Germany, which envisages integration measures to compensate for specific weaknesses of immigrants.

The new Commissioner for Integration is aiming at a new National Integration Plan with an integral perspective on all immigrant groups, such as asylum seekers, immigrants from within the EU, professionals from third countries and people with a migration history who have lived in Germany for a long time.⁹ In contrast to the thematic structure of the previous version, the new Integration Plan is conceptually organized around five “*Phases of Immigration and Cohabitation*” each of which is associated with certain policy themes: The *first* phase

⁷ <https://www.deutschland-kann-das.de/dekd/themenseiten-der-ressorts>. Accessed 13/05/2020

⁸ <https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/ib-de/amt-und-person/amt-und-aufgaben>, translation AKN/EC. Accessed 13/05/2020

⁹ <https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/ib-de/amt-und-person/aktionsplan-integration>. Accessed 13/05/2020

(“Managing expectations, providing orientation”) refers to the individual decision making on migration. It is related to measures, such as information campaigns or language classes within the country of origin. The *second* phase (“Facilitating arrival, Communicating values”) refers to issues of early integration (“Erstintegration”) and includes measures of language training and counselling, early access to the education system as well as the acknowledgement of educational certificates from the country of origin. The *third* phase (“Enabling participation, demanding achievement”) refers to the incorporation (“Eingliederung”) of immigrants and is associated with measures to foster structural integration (e.g. inclusion into labour market and education system as well as fostering the civic participation of immigrants). The fourth phase (“Shaping Diversity, securing unity”) is marked by the term “coalescence” (“Zusammenwachsen”) and associated not so much with concrete measures, but with sectors of society, which could play a role in the process of coalescence, such as “sports, health, urban planning, culture and media”. Finally, the fifth phase (“Strengthening cohesion, shaping the future”) is concerned with pluralism and social cohesion and associated with more systemic themes, such as intercultural opening of enterprises and public administration, countering discrimination and political participation.¹⁰

All in all, the five-phase scheme strongly resembles the so-called *Race Relation Cycle* which was an integral part of the sociology of migration as promoted by the Chicago School of Sociology. Park and Burgess (1969) distinguished four stages of intercultural relations, namely Contact, Conflict, Accommodation and Assimilation. It should be noted that this model has received substantial criticism for its unidirectional and teleological pattern and for neglecting the agency of immigrants (see Schunck 2014, 14-15). Meanwhile, several analyses have addressed refugee and integration politics on the *subnational level*. In a recent comparative study, Bogumil and Hafner (2017) focused on the actors and institutions of regional integration politics. They observed a rising importance of integration as a policy field which is also reflected in increased funding and differentiation (ibid, 5). As far as the structural embeddedness of integration politics is concerned, they hold that the majority (12 out of 16) regional states have allocated integration in the ministry of social affairs (ibid, 8) and underline that Lower Saxony, the focal region of this report, exhibit’s the highest internal variation if integration political responsibilities across ministries (ibid, 12). Last, but not least, the authors emphasize the agency and degrees of freedom of regional states when it comes to the implementation of federal integration measures. They reassure that implementation is a governance mechanism and reflects regional priorities and mentalities as well as constellations of policy domains (ibid, 6-7).

As mentioned above, the *implementation* of integration measures is mainly up to the regional and municipal level. On the federal level detailed statistics are available for *integration courses*. These courses are an early integration measure and combine language training with an overall introduction into the German political system. Persons who have been granted asylum and who cannot prove enough German language skills are obliged to participate in an integration course whereas asylum seekers with a good prospect to stay can but need not participate. As the statistics are very comprehensive, this report will focus on several core results. In the reporting period the number of persons who are eligible for an integration course increased from about 120.000 in 2011 to 535.000 in 2016. In 2017 about 377.000 asylum seekers were eligible. As a matter of fact, the eligibility figures reflect the overall numbers of asylum seekers and closely with national statistics of asylum seekers benefits statistics (reference WP 4 report). At the same time, it is remarkable that the proportion of persons who are obliged to participate in an integration course increased from 48 % in 2011 to 69 % in 2017. Another shift over time concerns the different forms of integration courses: while between 2005 and 2015 an average of only 10 % of attendants would participate in the Alphabetization Course (for

¹⁰ <https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/re-source/blob/72490/1141868/665fa8126ed4d8d4947fd1f71e19dcf4/nationaler-aktionsplan-juni2018-data.pdf> (translation AKN/EC). Accessed 13/05/2020

persons who have no command of the Latin alphabet) the proportion rose to more than 26 % in 2017. These differences reflect changes in the countries of origin of the participants: In the years 2016 and 2017 almost half of all attendants came from Syria or Iraq. The recent introduction of a comprehensive statistical monitoring of asylum seekers benefits (“Asylbewerberleistungsstatistik”) and integration courses (“Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik”) can in itself be seen as part of a broader policy trend to take stock of refugees in Germany and to account for the expenditures they bring along.

In contrast, on the *regional and municipal level* reliable statistical data on the implementation of integration measures is hard to obtain. In a recent study (Gesemann and Roth 2017) have explored *success factors* for reception and integration of refugees in German municipalities. Asked for their needs for support (e.g. by the federal or regional level) municipal leaders pointed to early integration measures, such as language classes, the extension of educational measures in schools and daycare as well as measures for labour market inclusion. Furthermore, three out of five municipal leaders agreed that better procedures of remuneration of costs by the federal or regional level as well as a better coordination of refugee politics on the regional level had become more important. Furthermore, two out of three municipalities positively evaluated the quality and degree of networking between different local actors (ibid, 25). Most municipal leaders accounted for a high or extremely high level of volunteering although their proportion has decreased considerably from almost 80 % in early 2016 to 60 % in late 2016 (ibid, 26).

Some of these findings resonate strongly with observations of our interviews with administrative professionals on the regional and municipal level. E.g., a leading administrator responsible for refugee housing emphasized the importance of *local intersectional networks*: “As far as accommodation centers are concerned, collaboration is really good since we meet and exchange on a regular basis: ‘What does the refugee need now?’ ‘what’s happening?’”, things like this. Then we have regular meetings with all these integration organizations, such as adult education centers, employment promotion, and Lutheran adult education. Hence, we have good networks. In the area of health as well, we have good contacts with the German Red Cross and the municipal health department” (translation AKN/EC). The idea of integration on the ground being a networking task is widespread among state and societal actors. In some cases, these networks are rather general in scope (see example above) and discuss a variety of topics depending on their actuality. Other networks are more specific and focus, for instance, on violence protection or coping with trauma. Yet another branch of networks has been set up in order to facilitate the inclusion of refugees into the labour market or vocational training. These networks often include regional small and medium enterprises (see section labour market for details).

Without doubt, the network structure of the regional and municipal implementation of integration measures has *various advantages*: it does justice to the crosscutting nature of the policy field and brings in the expertise of a broad variety of state and societal actors. Furthermore, it is flexible and allows for demand-tailored solution on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, some of the structural features of these networks may turn out to be *disadvantages*: e.g. their polycentric constellation and the variety of different actors involved can cause irritation on the side of the clients and evoke the impression of contingency and shifting responsibility. Furthermore, some of these networks rest on interpersonal relationships of collaboration and trust, which may enhance their effectiveness, but also makes them vulnerable to the dropout of focal actors. Last, but not least, given the marketization of local welfare production in Germany, the networks may also become platforms for the protection of vested interests as many of the actors involved rely on project grants covered by federal or regional ministries

Summary

In this section, we have provided some basic information on the German immigration regime and integration politics. We have discussed the evolution of policy after 2011.

In the first part, we focus on the political narratives and relevant actors guiding these changes. Our short historical overview shows that even though Germany's immigration history makes it a de facto immigration country, policy making concerning immigration and integration has long been rather defensive and erratic. Following the most recent events in 2015, the policy window caused by the „refugee crisis“ has been used to introduce restrictive measures for asylum seekers in order to cope with what has been perceived by some as a loss of control of the situation.

An important recent development has been the two “Asylum Packages”, which are passed not only to speed up asylum decision making, but also to keep applicants in so-called arrival centres for up to 18 months. This approach has been heavily criticized for promoting isolation and hindering the social as well as structural integration of refugees. Overall, these new set of legislation, together with recent initiatives of integration politics exhibit a strong understanding of integration being first and foremost an obligation of the immigrants as well as a tendency to externalize and privatize integration measures.

We have also pointed out that the field of integration politics and governance in Germany is complex. It is a crosscutting policy issue, which connects to the responsibilities of various federal ministries, and it is also a multi-level system in which policy making and monitoring largely take place on the federal level whereas the actual implementation is mainly realized on the level of regional states and municipalities. Finally, multi-level governance regarding integration in Germany takes the shape of networks that clearly has advantages and disadvantages for refugees as well agencies and citizens providing services to them.

2. Labour Market

Labour market integration is a central factor for refugee welfare. In this section, we give a brief overview of the legislation and regulations, opportunities and challenges, regarding the employment of refugees in the German territory. What kinds of jobs are available for refugees? How does the German market create or fail to create opportunities for asylum seekers? How do refugees circumvent barriers such as lack of qualifications, limited language skills and geographic isolation in order to have an income in Germany? What are the legal, political, economic and personal barriers preventing refugees from entering the job market?

Employment in the formal labour market

It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive overview of the German labour market and its transformation during the last decades. Therefore, it may suffice to hold that recent labour market research has concentrated on the (alleged) resilience of the German system against global economic crises (Möller 2010; Burda & Hunt 2011). In the reporting period the unemployment rate has decreased from seven per cent in 2011 to nearly six per cent in 2017¹¹ which resonates with an *increased workforce demand* in branches, such as elderly and medical care, but also, for instance, logistics (e.g. train drivers). As a matter of fact, the scope and kind of workforce demand vary considerably across different regions although the main line of *regional disparities* still is between the Western and the Eastern regional states. As a result of a massive restructuring of the economy in the aftermath of the German reunification in 1991, the unemployment rate is still slightly higher in the Eastern parts of Germany. At the same time, it should be noted that economic disparities between German regional states are at least partly compensated by federal fiscal equalization (“Länderfinanzausgleich”). Regarding the overall economic structure of the country, urban-rural disparities do exist but are less prevalent than in other countries due to the “decentralized industrial order” of the German economy and the high density of family owned SME.

A valid *statistical monitoring of the employment rates of refugees* is only available since 2016 (see also AIDA/ECRE 2020). The following diagram shows the numbers of unemployed refugees (i.e. those who are able and allowed to work, but do not have a job) and of refugees who take part in employment promotion measures:

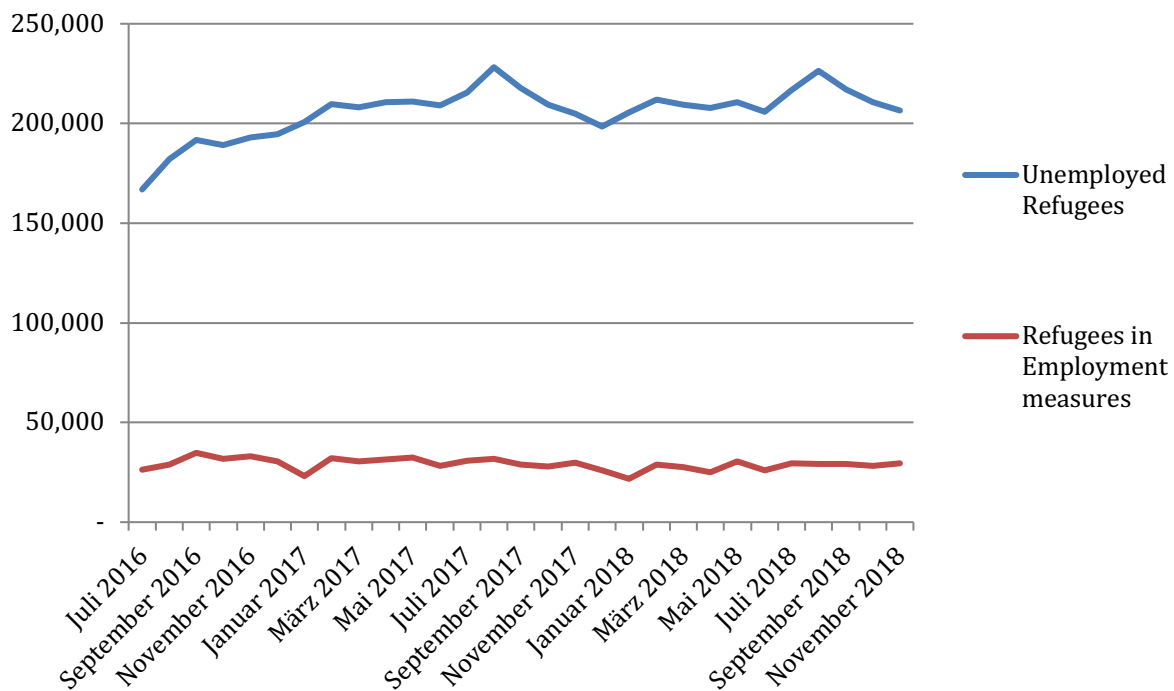
The diagram (below) shows that the absolute numbers of unemployed refugees and those who took part in employment promotions measures have largely remained stable between 2016 and 2018. A fact sheet by the Federal Agency for Work provides *three potential explanations* for the stable numbers of unemployed refugees, namely the decrease of overall numbers of asylum applicants, the high proportion of refugees who are occupied with integration courses and the increase of refugees who are employed or begin vocational training.¹² The fact sheet also contains information about *demographic patterns* and employment chances of refugees: First, most unemployed refugees were male and rather young which reflected the overall demographic pattern of refugee immigration. Second, one of the most important factors for (un) employment of refugees are lacking German language skills. Therefore, most of them were looking for occupation in the areas of cleaning services, logistics and kitchen assistance. Between 2017 and 2018 almost 100.000 people from the eight most prevalent countries of origin of refugees were incorporated into the first labour market, yet almost a third of them in the domain of subcontracted labour (“Arbeitnehmerüberlassung”, *ibid.*, 9).

¹¹ See: <https://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61718/arbeitslose-und-arbeitslosenquote>. Accessed 13/05/2020

See also: <https://www.bpb.de/politik/innenpolitik/arbeitsmarktpolitik/178757/fachkraeftemangel?p=all>. Accessed 13/05/2020

¹² <https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/Statistischer-Content/Statistische-Analysen/Statistische-Sonderberichte/Generische-Publikationen/Fluchtmigration.pdf> S. 8. Accessed 13/05/2020

Figure 2: Unemployed refugees



Source: data obtained from the statistical service of the Federal Labour Office

In a recent longitudinal study, the Institute for Employment Research found that almost half of the refugees who arrived in Germany in 2013 had found some sort of employment in 2018 (Brücker et al 2020). Compared to earlier cohorts of refugees, the newcomers were more successful in terms of labour market integration, which the authors attribute to the robust shape of the labour market as well as higher investments in labour market inclusion measures (ibid, 8). More than half of the refugees who had found a job reported to be employed as professionals (“Fachkraft”) whereas forty-four per cent were employed on an assistant level (“Helfer- und Anlemtätigkeiten”, ibid, 9). At the same time, there was a considerable mismatch between the level of employment in the countries of origin and in Germany, i.e. half of the refugees who had found a job were employed below the level of their previous employment in the country of origin (ibid, 10). Finally, the study pointed to a significant gender bias: The proportion of women among those refugees who were neither employed nor taking part in any sort of education measure was much higher (56 %) than of men (33%), which was mainly due to family work and childcare duties (ibid, 14-15).

These preliminary observations underline the significance of *language skills* and the *acknowledgement of educational certificates* for an appropriate and sustainable integration of refugees into the labour market. In the same vein, a recent quantitative survey of refugees has revealed that 97 % of men and 85 % of women are willing to work whereas only 14 % of the respondents were actually employed at the date of the interview (IAB-BAMF, 9). Furthermore, the authors hold that the “[p]atterns of job market integration among recently arrived refugees correspond closely to the process and timing of job market entry for past waves of refugees [...]. To understand this development, it is important to keep in mind that 55 % of the respondents were still awaiting a decision on their asylum claim at the time of the survey and only had limited access to the job market” (ibid.). The same study also analysed the *impact of early integration measures*, such as language classes and employment promotion on the employment chances of refugees and found “that those who had completed a language course have a significantly higher probability of employment than people who had not participated in one”. The authors also account for positive effects of career counselling measures but are careful to interpret these effects as an indicator for their general success due to a self-selection

bias: “Since those with greater proximity to the job market and skills that are relevant for job market integration are also more likely to participate in these types of programs, the effects cannot be interpreted as causal proof of their effectiveness” (ibid., 11).

According to article 17 of the Geneva Convention countries of residence should not prevent refugees from wage earning employment in order to protect their own workforce. In the German context the access of refugees to the labour market depends on their legal status. The following diagram by the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs illustrates the process and conditions for refugees to obtain a work permit:

Figure 3: Diagram showing the pathways to Employment for Refugees



Source: <http://www.integral-online.de/images/koordinierungsstelle/grafik-arbeitsmarktzugang-fluechtlinge.jpg>. Accessed 13/05/2020

After a general *waiting period of three months*, asylum seekers and refugees with a toleration status can apply for a work permit at the immigration authority (“Ausländerbehörde”). In most parts of Germany no *proof of precedence* (“Vorrangsprüfung”) is required anymore; furthermore the Federal Employment Office (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) is supposed to check that there is no disadvantage of refugees compared to domestic employees.¹³ If refugees are eligible for a EU Blue Card or have been in Germany for more than 15 months, there is generally no proof of precedence required. Finally, no approval is required if a person is eligible for the Blue Card, has entered a vocational training measure or has been in Germany for more than four years.

Based on Section 5 AsylbG reception centers should provide *work opportunities* (“Arbeitsgelegenheiten”) for asylum seekers to contribute to the maintenance of the facilities or to work for other municipal or public-interest organizations. In contrast to regular employment the basic rationale of these measures seems to be the occupation and utilization

¹³ <https://www.bmas.de/DE/Themen/Arbeitsmarkt/Infos-fuer-Asylsuchende/arbeitsmarktzugang-asylbewerber-geduldete.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020

of asylum seekers, which is reflected in the symbolic allowance of 80 cents per hour (reduced from 1,05 EUR by the Integration Law in 2016). Persons who can work and are not subject to compulsory education can be obliged to work or to participate in early integration measures, such as so-called integration courses or preparatory language or vocational training or internship¹⁴.

In terms of employment, it is also important to note that asylum seekers with an income or financial assets must use their own resources before they can receive social benefits. Financial assets are protected until an amount of 200 EUR and a certain proportion of the income can be kept in addition to the regular benefits. If the income is higher than the subsistence limit asylum seekers can be asked to contribute an “appropriate amount” to the costs of their residence in an accommodation center.

For the time being there is no reliable data on the participation of refugees in the *informal labour market*. However, some of our interlocutors mentioned forms of precarious employment as well as informal recruitment in the framework of ethnic economies which will be outlined below in more detail. A recent study of employment promotion measures of the federal, regional and municipal level has argued for the implementation of a “*social labour market*” for refugees marked by low-threshold work opportunities and job-related language training in order to prevent refugees from sliding into the informal labour market for a lack of better chances (Aumüller 2016, 51). In a similar vein, other authors have emphasized two scenarios of labour market inclusion, i.e. *cooperative incorporation* vs. *segmented assimilation* into the lower strata of the labour market (Struck 2017: 9-11). In social scientific debates there has emerged a strong consensus that the structural integration of refugees is strongly associated with the acknowledgement, monitoring and development of their informal competences and qualifications (see section on education).

As far as the *implementation* of employment promotion is concerned, it is beyond the scope of this report to provide a detailed synopsis of measures and initiatives. Based on a thorough investigation of various programs, Aumüller (2016: 36-37) has identified six general *types of measures* in the wider realm of employment promotion, namely 1) qualifying and empowering labour market actors, such as employment agencies, employer associations or labour unions, 2) implementing intersectional networks in order to dovetail existing approaches by different actors, 3) fostering early labour market inclusion, 4) fostering qualified employment by a more proactive acknowledgement, monitoring and development of existing competences, 5) including refugees into regular employment promotion programs as far as possible and 6) concentrating employment promotion on refugees with a good prospect to stay.

In the following, the project “*FairBleib*” may serve as an example for a variety of projects which were recently set up to foster the employment of refugees. The consortium has a regional scope on the Southern parts of Lower Saxony, namely the municipalities of Goslar, Göttingen, Northeim and Osterode. It was funded for four years (2015-2019) through the Federal Integration Directive, a funding scheme, which aims at a sustainable incorporation of persons with special needs into the labour market and supported by the European Social Fund. The directive includes one field of action, which is explicitly dedicated to the “Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees” and funds measures of counselling, activation and qualification for refugees regardless of their age, which are complimentary to the regular work of employment agencies. Furthermore, consortiums are supposed to increase the employment chances and

¹⁴ https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Thema-Arbeitsmarkt/richtlinie-fluechtlingsintegrationsmassnahmen.pdf;jsessionid=74DB5DF14E9D92377AF236E2175B1ABC?_blob=publication-File&v=2. Accessed 13/05/2020

to stabilize existing working relationships by educating and creating awareness among the relevant stakeholders, be it employers or public administrators.¹⁵

The project “FairBleib” is one out of forty-one measures funded through this scheme. The consortium consists of a *variety of actors*, such as the Cooperative for Education, an association of educational providers, Youth Welfare Services, municipal and urban administrators and NGOs, such as the Institute for Applied Cultural Research (IFAK) and the Refugee Council of Lower Saxony. The Refugee Council is also part of three other consortiums in the same funding scheme, such as AZF3 (Labour Market Access for Refugees). While the compositions and particular emphasis of these consortiums may differ slightly, their overall *goals and instruments* are more or less the same: apart from actual job placement they include measures of counselling on labour market access and vocational training depending on the legal status, the placement of refugees in language classes and vocational qualification measures, counselling regarding the recognition of previous educational achievements as well as support in terms of job search and application practice.¹⁶

As a matter of fact, projects, such as Fairbleib, are exemplary for the implementation of integration measures not only in terms of labour market inclusion, but also in other dimensions of structural integration. They exhibit a multi-level constellation *par excellence* reaching from the supranational level (European Social Fund) over the national level (Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs) to the municipal level. From a governance perspective, it is remarkable that integration measures are being implemented by regional consortiums which bring together societal actors, such as NGOs, education providers and welfare associations as well as public administrators from the municipal or city level. For the time being, the effectiveness and sustainability of this multilevel network approach are difficult to assess. As mentioned earlier local employment support networks may have a capacity to combine various institutional responsibilities and measures in a more synergetic approach and to come up with demand-tailored solutions for a wide variety of refugees. At the same time, they introduce a system of multiple referrals and a certain lack of transparency and accountability. Most of the local stakeholders we interviewed were highly confident and optimistic about the impact of ‘their’ networks; however, an official evaluation of the funding stream mentioned above is still to be performed.

The Experiences of Refugees in the German Labour Market

Structural and sociocultural Integration

The experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in the formal and informal labour market in Germany are varied and contentious. They are varied because each individual case differs concerning its circumstances. The manner in which refugees arrive in Germany, their legal status, their social and cultural background, nationality, language proficiency, gender, age, degree of formal education, religion and even the geographical location they come to be in Germany, all affect their chances of employment. Experiential accounts are also contentious because their experiences can differ from the statistically backed narratives the federal and local governments produce. Refugees rely primarily on the settlement of their legal status in order to find employment and this liminal period can take much longer than usually admitted by authorities. Both groups, refugees with high and low prospects to stay, may experience long waiting periods comprised of many months or years for the resolution of their legal status. This situation translates into long periods of unemployment or low-paid informal labour, which allows for only a basic living. The situation is even more precarious for those who have families. A man from Cameroon in his mid-thirties describes how much his chances of employment are

¹⁵ <https://www.esf.de/portal/DE/Foerderperiode-2014-2020/ESF-Programme/bmas/2014-10-21-ESF-Integrationsrichtlinie-Bund.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020

¹⁶ <http://www.ifak-goettingen.de/migration-und-bildung/fairbleib> Accessed 13/05/2020

tied to his status as an asylum applicant. He also describes the effects this situation has had on his life in Germany.

*...so, every time you go to apply for work they check your status and if you don't have a good status, if you're stuck with Dublin (your procedure is still in court maybe and they know that in court they can take time), they can't allow you to work. For me, the first time I wanted to apply for work it was not easy, because I was still waiting for the court to decide, so the main difficulty is that you can't do what you know how to do. You cannot do what you want to do, you have to do what "they" want you to do...but by doing what you know, the salary will not be the same, and maybe then they will not want to reduce your money the way they try to reduce you
(CAM-M-BRA-0707)*

As many West Africans, the person quoted above had a low perspective of having his asylum case accepted because his country is considered a "safe country of origin". In such cases, if one counts the process of appealing and court appearances and changes of legal representation, one will find that many refugees like him must wait many months if not years for a decision on their asylum claim. Meanwhile, these circumstances can force asylum seekers into restrictive working and living conditions. Initially, the man quoted applied for a work permit and, eventually, he was granted one. However, in Brandenburg where he is supposed to live while his asylum application is still pending, the number of hours of work and potential earnings are capped for refugees in his legal circumstances and hence his options were limited severely. This is aggravated by geographical restrictions: In the countryside of Brandenburg where he lives in a Wohnheim close to a small village with weak transport links jobs are difficult to find except for loading boxes in a logistics hub nearby.

As we have suggested in the policy section, in Germany, the decentralized industrial order and abundance of family-owned SMEs can, in principle, provide ample opportunity for refugees to find employment also in the more rural areas. However, even these smaller local businesses have certain standards for employment that are rarely met by refugees, such as: language fluency and formal technical education in their line of work. The man quoted above is a good example of that since he is a professional who cannot find work in Germany in his profession due to his lack of formal vocational education and his limited grasp of German. He is a mechanic specialized in diesel engines. However, since his arrival in Germany (almost four years before we interviewed him), he had never been able to find a suitably paid position or even an apprenticeship as a mechanic.

Another conundrum presented to anyone analysing the impact of integration measures – vis-a-vis reception conditions – is that the reception period can become protracted for such a long time that refugees undergoing this process feel they are "integrated" into German society even though their legal status is unclear. We can say that in such cases, although lacking in structural integration (suitable employment, appropriate housing, settled legal status), the individual is already advancing many aspects of sociocultural integration. Often, people stuck in these protracted states of "inbetweenness" will speak a reasonably good level of German and be somehow employed. They may in some cases even volunteer in local organizations, start a university course, sing in choirs, help elderly ladies carry their shopping home, contributing in many ways to the wellbeing of his community. On the other hand, their most basic freedoms are curtailed such as the choice of where to live and work. With threat of deportation being always eminent they live highly uncertain lives that often give way to anxieties and fears.

Informal Employment, Co-Ethnic Networks & the Importance of Language

Partly because of these difficulties and other barriers such as lack of German language skills, some refugees have found comfort in co-ethnic networks of solidarity between older generations of immigrants. The case of a woman from Syria who found work on behalf of her husband by contacting an Arabic-speaking employer, offers an illustration of this process.

My husband thought that it was impossible to find a job because he didn't speak any other language except Arabic. So, I didn't think it was impossible. "We will try", I said... So, one day, I found on a newspaper about a Syrian looking for someone to do an Ausbildung (vocational training, EC/AKN). So, I phoned the man and he said they were looking for an electrician even if he did not speak German...The guy spoke Arabic because he was from Lebanon...so the next day he [my husband] went to him and the guy said my husband was very good. So with time, my husband told his boss his problem about housing and that he could not see the family and the boss said "ok, you will work full time and I will help you to find an apartment for you". (ALG-W-BER 0208)

The man in question was an electrician in Syria who had plenty of previous work experience in his home country. However, he spoke no German at all and was unfamiliar with the process of how to search for a job in his profession in Germany. In any case, his experience would not qualify him to work as an electrician in German companies. Still, his wife, a very proactive person, searched the Internet and local newspapers for adverts in Arabic from employers who were seeking people for various construction jobs. Eventually, she found a man from Lebanon, as she describes, who owned a small construction company. After she put her husband in contact with the employer, he was offered an "Ausbildung", which was quickly upgraded to full-time employment considering his working experience. However, in order for the husband to work full-time, they were forced to move their family to de-central housing since the Wohnheim in which they lived in east Berlin was much too far away for him to commute to and from work and still be able to help his wife at home, whom had to take care of three small children, one of which was autistic. The couple had been fighting to move out of the Wohnheim for quite some time at that point. However, it was largely through their own efforts and the help of co-ethnic networking that they were able to find better employment and housing.

The previous example illustrates the important role of language and co-ethnic or refugee communities in allowing people from different origins to access otherwise closed job markets and reach some level of professional advancement. It also shows how important language is in the process of integration to the job market. There is little chance for a professional like him to find the same level of employment in a strictly German-speaking environment. Also, the fast progression from Ausbildung to full employment would be unlikely in the German formal employment structure, especially for highly technical jobs such as electricians, who under normal conditions, must go through rigorous training and acquire certifications and degrees in order to perform such work in Germany. Informal networking, as this example shows, provides a solution to the problem of language and certifications as a barrier for employment whilst also allowing for an intra-generational transfer of knowledge and resources (economic, social and cultural capital) to occur between older and newer generations of asylum seekers.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence collected during fieldwork that strengthens this point: A refugee from Iraq in his 30s for instance took one of the researchers to a modest restaurant in Berlin where he went to eat regularly. The restaurant was "Middle Eastern" and served many varieties of Iraqi, Afghan and Syrian foods. *"I love coming here because I can hear them talking. It feels like home. If I need something I do not know how to get, I ask around when I'm here. They know what I need,"* he confided (IRAQ-M-BER1-3007). A woman from Nigeria mentioned visiting a church in Berlin a few times a week where she worshipped as part of a small congregation of expatriates. She often mentioned the value of doing that not only for her spiritual needs but also because she gained valuable insights from others about life in Germany and in Berlin specifically, from older fellow expatriates (NIG-W-BRA-2011).

Decentralized Industry, Local SMEs and the role of Cities in Structural Integration

Although there is no reliable data to date on the participation of refugees in the informal labour market, several of our respondents have indicated participating in activities, which can be described as "informal employment". The reasons are rather clear by now. For instance, the two examples we gave here bring to the surface two important differentiations with respect to geography and the advantages and disadvantages of being placed in an urban centre vis-à-

vis the countryside. The Syrian/Algerian refugee (she was born in Algeria but has Syrian citizenship through marriage) whose husband can find work in Berlin benefits from a great pool of job opportunities the city offers both in the formal, but crucially, in the informal market. It is a city where a good amount of jobs is in fact produced by ethnic businesses that purposefully look for people who can speak their own language given the profile of their customers. The previous example of the Cameroonian refugee who was placed in Brandenburg on the other hand, shows a limitation on the possibility of employment because that ethnic market is simply either too small or non-existent in certain parts of the country, in particular in rural and less cosmopolitan areas.

Again, to reinforce the point we made earlier, the decentralized nature of German industry and local SMEs have little impact in employment of refugees overall (given certain small number of exceptions) as far as they follow a formalized recruiting process. Cities like Berlin or Munich are multicultural hubs, which attract enough people and investment to produce ethnic markets that often skew these more formalized labour market. The placement of refugees in the far corners of the German countryside produces a situation where the demand for these important co-ethnic jobs cannot be sufficiently addressed. The imposition of a residence obligation deeply affects refugees since the cost and distance of commuting to the great centres sometimes make it highly impractical to try and work there whilst being obliged to live in more distant rural areas. Since their life is limited to where they are registered, the conditions for them to find employment that suits their skills, training or personal ambitions is severely limited by geography. These situations force people into (sometimes) precarious working conditions and this ties in nicely with studies (cited in the previous section), which suggest that a third of all employed refugees work as subcontracted labour.

Initiatives from Civil Society, Clientelism and Loss of Status

There are instances when special programmes, be it governmental and non-governmental initiatives or civil society initiatives can have a positive effect on the access of refugees to employment. Often, however, opportunities seem to appear by chance encounters with agents in civil society who are willing to help. A 35-year-old woman from Syria describes how a random occurrence helped her to land in an apprenticeship in an architect's office in a small town in Lower Saxony.

[After] I finished learning the language, I started searching for an internship for four months, it is not considered a long period [here]. [But] what really helped is that...I sent my CV to many offices, but they did not even reply...it is a funny story... I went to the bank in the village, and there was a post that someone is travelling and wanted someone to take care of his pet...I love cats...so I decided to call the girl...she asked about my status and promised to ask her friends at school as she is a teacher, if they knew an office for architecture [I could apply/send my cv] to. So, the principal of the school said he knew someone in [small town in Lower Saxony]. He communicated with the architect...if he would give a Syrian woman a chance to do her internship at his office, and he accepted it and asked that I send my CV. So, I sent the application, and I had an interview. If I sent the CV on my own nothing would have happened...but because he [the principal] is a German connection, [then] it happened. I am satisfied with the work, but I wish that I reached a full-time contract (SYR-M-LSAX-2610)

Here we see an example of the “refugee welcome” culture where civil society mobilizes its resources in order to accommodate the needs of refugees. On the other hand, the person quoted is a fully formed professional in her own country and must submit herself to the position of an apprentice for an undetermined period in order to continue working in her field. However, even this outcome was a consequence of serendipity. She was replying to an advert placed

by a person wanting someone to care for her pet. These are often the kind of jobs available to refugees, even when they are qualified in their own profession and speak German well. Also interesting in this passage is the woman's realization that access to employment is about learning how to navigate the clientelism involved in searching for work in Germany; that is, it is not solely a matter of meritocracy where qualifications, language skills, willingness to work and experience becomes secondary to knowing the right person, who must be German. As one other refugee mentioned during an interview precisely on possibilities of better employment: "Germans only trust other Germans. If one German trust you, the others will follow." (CAM-M-BRA-2307). Of course, this is a type of value judgement loaded with overgeneralized perceptions. However, it does give us an insight into how also refugees perceive their hosts.

Still, the loss or devaluation of social and cultural capital caused by forced migration and the idea that if you know a German person, if you have better contacts, your chances of finding suitable employment grow, is something we see also in other interviews. A 32-year-old Turkish academic currently working for a university in a two-year research contract financially backed by a foundation explains how she feels that "luck" played a greater part in her access to employment than anything else. She also describes how she felt an inevitable loss of status when she joined the program.

Everyone in my position right now does the same job, so... this job yes, as I understand, it is already our standard work almost. I even feel myself luckier because we made a two-years contract and it is an employment contract, which was completely done under random circumstances. So, there is something more about random conditions than my skill, so what to do as a researcher...so I don't feel any discomfort in terms of qualification, though I think that we do this with a loss of status or qualifications. Because many people among us are PhD students, people who are graduate students and so on...the people I work with are relatively egalitarian and in solidarity...but I know via other friends that it can turn into something a bit stressful, or a process that doesn't fit their qualifications (TUR-M-LSAX5-2310)

A palpable industriousness and ability to learn from change and adapt to the environment is also found in many other accounts. For instance, a 38-year-old Syrian woman from Aleppo worked with her father in a family business manufacturing and selling clothes. They had a secure income and a reasonably stable life in a middle-income neighborhood of the city. She left it all behind and fled to Germany when bombs started falling too close to her home. Once in Germany, her life reality had to be adjusted.

I am planning to work as a seller in any shop after finishing my language classes. I really like the process of selling and buying. I want to work on the cashier in a grocery shop or any other shop like DM or Rossmann. Once when I finish my B1 language course, I will start looking for [that kind of] work (SYR-W-BAV-1408)

Although programs are certainly available and in some parts of the country rather widespread (as those described in Lower Saxony in the policy section), it is a common occurrence that in order to work in Germany in one's own profession, one must also accept a loss of status. Refugees who are highly qualified but who find it difficult to access the German job market with the qualifications they held in their country, often resort to menial labour. Despite being under great pressures to flee their countries, refugees often acknowledge being more productive in their countries of origin – professionally speaking. Part of the problem relates directly to the situation which refugees find themselves regarding the unrecognition of their formal education certificates. A 34-year-old man from Syria living in Lower Saxony explains his situation in those terms:

I was more active in Syria. Even I was living in a war, I was doing so much... working, giving courses and volunteering. That was good. When I arrived here, I needed to start

all over again because my degrees in English and Mathematics did not count in Germany (SYR-M-LSAX-2810)

A 56-year-old ex-general from Libya only spoke a basic level of German. He expected to be recognized by the German state as an ally in Libya and to have his status recognized in Germany somehow, his history valued, and his skills formally recognized. He hoped for a diplomatic job in association with the German security forces. Instead, he now works for a logistics company in Brandenburg where he does not need to speak German since he is only required to perform purely manual and monotonous tasks. As he explains, “[the work] is very physical and not complicated. Just scanning packages and sorting them by weight and size so I don’t really need a lot of German to work there” (LIB-M-BRA 22/04). He applied for the job and received a positive answer the same day. At the weekends, he complements his income working as a gardener for cash in hand at the local lodge and for private individuals who own houses in the neighbourhood. With the extra income, he can afford regular remittances to his family in Tripoli, a wife and 7 children some of whom are still financially dependent on him. Despite this, he wants to leave Germany and return to Libya in order to, in his own words, “use my brain” again. However, being a high-ranking officer in the Libyan military, it is a rather difficult decision to make since he is under severe threat of persecution in his country of origin.

Financial Integration, Living Costs and Imposed Idleness

Finding work is important. However, refugees are also aware that increased working hours could mean increased expenses. For instance, as mentioned before in the policy analysis, when a refugee has an income higher than the subsistence limit asylum seekers can be asked to contribute an “appropriate amount” to the costs of their residence in an accommodation center. In Brandenburg for example, a single bed in a shared room in a centralized accommodation unit can cost as much as 200 Euros. Refugees working more than 30 hours a week are obliged to pay that amount monthly. For those whose asylum process has resulted in a positive outcome and the geographical limitation has been lifted, it could also mean having to move closer to work and renting a room or apartment in a more central and therefore more expensive part of the city, or to incur larger costs for commuting with trains or buses to work. Therefore, having reached refugee status does not guarantee a better financial situation. It simply means that one is now able to move more freely within the German territory and look for work opportunities further afield.

Idleness is also a big barrier for the structural (and subjective) integration of refugees into German society, a situation that is often brought about by the intricacies of the asylum system itself. A young and fully trained airline pilot from Libya, for instance, describes how not only he is prevented from working in his profession until his legal status is fully settled (even though his work is truly international in character) but he also struggles to find permanent employment of any kind.

I’m sitting here for more than a year and I’m still waiting for an answer for the appeal. The Ausländerbehörde was ok with me and they did give me a permit to stay for 6 months, which needs to be renewed. And they also told me that if I found a job that I should give them some forms to sign and then I would be able to work there. You know, they give you this stamp on your documents and they allow you to work only in that place where they sign the forms. And that would be full-time employment. Problem is that many companies here would not do that they don’t want to sign anything because they feel like they are responsible for you. You know, they make it as hard as they can for us to work and to be independent because they can keep us under their watch. They want us to be always at their feet. They make it so hard for us to do anything...So I found employment eventually, because of my English, I found employment in a call centre. So, I worked there for 6 months and that was that because there was a contract, they would not renew it afterwards. Because our work permits are only valid for 6 months than it needs to be renewed so the contracts [we get] are also only for 6 months.

So, you need to repeat the same process again to renew your contract so now I'm unemployed. I'm unemployed since December (LIB-M-BER 27/04)

Some refugees are qualified and trained professionals who face barriers to find even the most basic type of employment. Restrictions based on legal status often imposed on employment are hard to overcome and the result is often idleness followed by a sense of worthlessness and in many cases, depression – a common sequence that is easily identified during the analysis of our in-depth interviews. The man in question, for example, complained repeatedly of having episodes of depression. He also described self-medicating as a result of unemployment. Indeed, here are countless initiatives from civil society actors and institutions (such as universities and private businesses alike) to accommodate the needs of refugees through special language training programs, recognition of certificates and more direct entry points into qualified employment. However, the actual asylum process cannot be overcome without the person going through the procedures one step at a time. That is to say, just because a refugee may have a good prospect of employment or a good educational opportunity in sight, they still must go through the rigours of the bureaucracy involved in seeking asylum in Germany and the long periods of waiting involved. That means that often refugees are set back in their path to employment even when they are qualified and job positions are available to them.

The progressive decline in unemployment in Germany for the past five years is associated with an increasing demand for workers in the service and construction industries. Refugees are progressively being driven to these jobs, not necessarily by their own ambition to perform them but for lack of better options. In our interviews we find ample examples of asylum seekers working in gastronomy, cleaning services and construction, to site a few, and some are more qualified than the jobs they perform. However, some of the most persistent problems include the lack of command of the German language, lack of or non-acceptance of existing qualifications, and the lack of formal education, which is the topic of the next section.

Summary

In this section, we have given a brief overview of the legislation and regulations, opportunities, and challenges regarding the employment of refugees in Germany. We have shown that despite article 17 of the Geneva Convention, which states that countries of residence should not prevent refugees from wage earning employment in order to protect their own workforce, in Germany the access of refugees to the labour market depends on their legal status.

We have also noted that the scope and kind of workforce demand vary considerably across different German regions and it is still marked by an East/West divide following the changes occurring before and after 1991. Differences between rural and urban regions exist but are less significant than in other EU member states as a result of Germany's decentralized industrial order. At present, the adaptation of refugees to the job market seems to correspond to a demand for workers; for example, in the care industry, catering and logistics (e.g. drivers/menial labour)

An important finding from our investigation is that valid statistical monitoring of the employment rates of refugees is only available since 2016. The numbers of unemployed refugees have largely remained stable between 2016 and 2018. Most unemployed refugees are male and rather young which reflects the overall demographic pattern of refugee immigration. In terms of barriers to employment, we have pointed to the significance of language skills and the acknowledgement of educational certificates for an appropriate and sustainable integration of refugees into the labour market.

We have shown that the structural and sociocultural integration of refugees in Germany may be asynchronous. For instance, a refugee may be „structurally“ integrated (e.g. job, residence, car, children attending schools), but not socioculturally integrated (e.g. no German friends,

lacking language skills, little interest in German culture and politics, little social contact beyond ethnic in-group.) or vice-versa.

We have also argued that the experiences of refugees in the formal and informal labour market in Germany are *varied* and *precarious*. They are varied because individual cases differ on account of their particular circumstances. The manner in which refugees arrive in Germany, their legal status, their social and cultural background, nationality, language proficiency, gender, age, degree of formal education, religion and even the geographical location they come to be in Germany, all affect their chances of employment. They are precarious because certain standards for employment in Germany are rarely met by refugees, such as language fluency and formal technical education in their line of work. Thus refugees spend a long time either studying the language or in under low-paid apprenticeships. Partly because of these difficulties, some refugees find comfort in co-ethnic networks of solidarity by older generations of immigrants.

3. Education

Along with employment, education is a crucial factor for both structural and socio-cultural integration. How do refugees access education in Germany? What is the situation of refugee children in the education system? What are the challenges and opportunities for educators and for asylum seekers themselves regarding children education and adult learning? What are the challenges for both German schools and universities and how are they coping, adapting and responding to the new demands put on them by higher asylum applications? These are some of the important questions we will address in this section.

Formal and informal education for Refugees

It is certainly beyond the scope of this report to provide a thorough introduction to the German education system (see Vogel and Stock 2017 for a concise overview). Therefore, we will restrict ourselves to the important figures and policy issues. In the school year 2017/18 there were 32.995 schools in Germany. Almost half of those were elementary schools (in Germany, primary education usually starts at the age of six and involves the grades 1 – 4). For secondary education there are several options, namely 4.200 (lower) secondary schools (“Haupt- und Realschulen”, grades 5 to 9/10, lead to secondary school certificate, similar to GCSEs), 3.100 upper secondary schools (“Gymnasium”, grades 5 – 12/13, leads to university entrance qualification (“Abitur”), as well as 2.100 integrated comprehensive schools and 1.860 schools with several tracks of secondary education. It is important to mention that schooling is compulsory in Germany. It starts at the age of six or seven and covers up to 12 years, depending on the regional state. In the school year 2017/2018 The Federal Statistical Office accounted for some 11 Million pupils in Germany, 1.2 Million of whom were not German citizens.¹⁷ According to the *Mediendienst Integration*, the number of “recently arrived pupils” increased from 68.000 in 2013 to 200.000 in 2015 with a considerable decrease in 2016 (137.000). Although not all of these pupils were refugees, almost half of them came from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁸

Recent education policy issues in Germany have included educational inequality (underperformance of youths from low-income families and/or with an immigration background¹⁹) and vigorous debates on the “inclusion” of pupils with specific demands into regular schooling rather than schooling them in special schools (“Förderschulen”). Some of the basic arguments of the inclusion debates have also been voiced in the discussion on the schooling of refugee children, namely the costs and benefits of separation: arguments in favor of separation emphasize the challenges of inclusion for ‘regular’ schooling and pupils as well as the positive effects of demand-tailored education for those with special needs. In contrast, arguments against separation underline the risk of segregation, the danger of segmented assimilation and the lack of opportunities for social integration.²⁰

¹⁷ https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2018/03/PD18_089_211.html Accessed 13/05/2020

¹⁸ <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/bildung-schule-neuzugewanderte-fluechtlinge-auslaendische-kinder.html> Accessed 13/05/2020

¹⁹ Immigration background is an official category of statistical monitoring which denotes a person who (or at least one parent) has not acquired the German citizenship by birth. It has become contested for its stigmatizing impact. See: <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/alternativen-zum-migrationshintergrund.html> Accessed 13/05/2020

²⁰ <https://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/fluechtlinge-an-schulen-das-problem-heisst-segregation-a-1194851.html>; <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article173995846/Integration-in-Gefahr-Fuer-viele-Fluechtlinge-wird-die-Schule-zur-Sackgasse.html> Accessed 13/05/2020

As far as the implementation of schooling for refugee minors is concerned, Vogel and Stock (2017) have provided a great overview across all 16 regional states. About the access of refugees to schooling they hold:

The right of refugee minors to school education [...] is uncontested in Germany, although it is not always interpreted as a right to attend a general public school. In general, the right to education is often only granted when education becomes compulsory, which may involve a waiting time of several months. There is no regular education in preliminary reception centres. Waiting times for regular school places differ – they have reduced with declining numbers of newcomers, but they still exist. Moreover, access to education before and after the age of compulsory schooling is characterized by multiple barriers. (Vogel & Stock 2017, 33)

The authors point out that there may be exemptions from compulsory schooling during the reception phase, particularly if potential pupils stay in reception centers. As a result, there is a certain waiting time for practically all refugee minors as well as various forms of provisional education (see below for an example).

In terms of the actual organization of school integration, Vogel and Stock point out that “There is no systematic assessment of the competences and learning needs of students before they are allocated to schools” and that usually “preparatory German classes of varying length precede school integration in regular classes (except for early primary school entrants)” (ibid, 34). Within regular classes “teachers often make great efforts to help all students to participate in their lessons. However, they are often not well prepared to teach their subject in a group that includes German language learners” (ibid, 35), a challenge which is aggravated by general staff shortages.

While the integration or inclusion of refugee minors at schools has received a lot of scholarly interest, there is only anecdotal evidence on the access of refugees to *higher education*. The German Academic Exchange Service has laid up support measures with three components, namely “Recognising skills and qualifications”, “Ensuring academic qualification: Language and subject-related preparation” and “Supporting integration at universities”²¹ and launched an information portal.²² Apart from that several research funding agencies have designed special funding schemes for “scholars at risk”. E.g., the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation grants fellowships of 3.500,- EUR to “threatened researchers” for a period of up to 24 months. Furthermore, many universities have acted themselves. For instance, the University of Göttingen offers special office hours and contact persons, language education, e.g. by enrolling as a guest student to learn German, and work space.²³ In addition, there are numerous student initiatives, such as Conquer Babel, which has developed from a translation and language learning service into a comprehensive mentoring measure²⁴ or the so-called “Refugee Law Clinic”, which offers legal advice and administrative support.²⁵

At the same time, an article by the German Science Magazine “Forschung und Lehre” on the “hurdles” refugees must face when trying to get access to tertiary education suggests that there are also fundamental systemic impediments. Although refugees whose asylum application has been accepted are entitled to receive funds under the German Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) if they have German language skills at level C1 and an own health insurance, there is an administrative period of several months that needs to be bridged.

²¹ <https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/infos/en/43153-refugees-at-universities-how-the-daad-is-helping/> Accessed 13/05/2020

²² <https://www.study-in-germany.de/en/> Accessed 13/05/2020

²³ <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/540426.html> Accessed 13/05/2020

²⁴ <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/538310.html> Accessed 13/05/2020

²⁵ <https://rlc-goettingen.de/> Accessed 13/05/2020

Refugees with a status of toleration must wait for 15 months until they are entitled to BAföG funding.²⁶

Given that most refugees are (young) adults, access to *adult education/life-long learning* is of key importance. The main instruments are the official integration courses (see above), which are complemented by several other formal and informal education measures. On the formal side so called community colleges ("Volkshochschulen") offer language classes and special preparatory classes (e.g. to prepare for enrollment in a university). On the more informal side there are numerous volunteers helping refugees to learn the language and to find their way through everyday life in Germany. The information portal of the German Institute for Adult Education underlines the need to train and professionalize these volunteers and to make the registration of informal competencies of refugees a core part of all consulting measures.²⁷

More concrete insights on the non-formal education measures can be obtained from our meso-level interviews with integration officers, social workers and administrators of refugee accommodation centers. First, in some of the bigger accommodation centers, non-formal schooling is organized on the premises of the centers. In a so-called Arrival Center in Lower Saxony there are language classes for children, but no measures of regular schooling, e.g. in collaboration with neighboring schools. The administrators acknowledge that the lack of schooling violates the principle of compulsory schooling ("Schulpflicht"). They point out that it constitutes a major problem if the asylum procedure takes more time. In another big accommodation center, there has been established a staffed playing room ("Spielzimmer") for children aged 3 to 6 and a preparatory school with three teachers who were delegated by the regional State Board of Education ("Landesschulbehörde"). The administrators explicitly welcome that reception centers are exempted from compulsory schooling because they fear that regular schooling could not be organized within the center.

A significant non-formal educational scheme which was frequently referred to is the *Intercultural Learning Workshop* ("Interkulturelle Lernwerkstatt"), which is coordinated by the regional state admission authority of Lower Saxony. It aims at developing language skills and intercultural competences of children and youths in refugee reception centers and to reacquaint them with an everyday school routine (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2017, 3). It involves at least two teachers who are delegated by the State Board of Education (see above) as well as social workers and translators. Didactically, it seeks to provide highly individualized support and to document the skills of the participants in order to facilitate their incorporation into the regular education system. While the administrators and social workers in our sample embraced the idea of the Intercultural Learning Workshop, the Refugee Council of Lower Saxony took a more critical stance:

We welcomed the Intercultural Learning Workshop as a practice of playful way of imparting communication and accommodation to children who have just arrived. And this is what it does quite well. For all who do not speak German this is a sensible measure. However, after three months at the latest it does not make sense anymore. After that it just goes around in circles. After that it does not comply with the educational mandate ("Bildungsauftrag") of the state. (translation AKN/EC).

The Refugee Council acknowledged the basic value of the Learning Workshop as an interim provisional measure; it made clear that it cannot by any means replace regular schooling. Whereas the Learning Workshop is organized on the regional state level, most other non-formal learning opportunities for refugees are based on the engagement of volunteers. A municipal administrator describes the situation as follows:

²⁶ <https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/integration-mit-huerden-159/> Accessed 13/05/2020

²⁷ <https://wb-web.de/dossiers/fluechtlinge.html> Accessed 13/05/2020

We have volunteers who help children with their homework or offer German tutoring to adults. Or they just meet and speak German along with cooking or other activities. We have volunteers who offer sewing courses for women. We also have godparents ("Paten"), that is someone who agrees to look after a particular person. (translation AKN/EC).

The statement stands exemplary for a spectrum of low-threshold voluntary services that combine aspects of non-formal education, leisure activities and an overall value-educational approach, which can easily turn rather paternalistic as the very term of "godparents" suggests. Such paternalism was also prevalent in initiatives by migrant self-organizations. E.g., the spokesperson of a mosque in Göttingen emphasized the necessity to acquaint the newly arrived immigrants "with our way of life" and held that topics that he deemed relevant for integration (mainly the avoidance of deviant behavior, such as illegal employment) were also included in the *hutba* (sermon). This approach reflects fears among established immigrants in Germany that the recent arrival of refugees may trigger xenophobic attitudes, which turn out to their own disadvantage.

Education in Germany from the Perspective of Refugees

In this sub-section, we explore opportunities and barriers (including a discussion of the urban/rural dimension) in the experiences of refugees regarding formal and non-formal school education, adult, and tertiary education, and most importantly perhaps, language learning. These aspects affect one another and cannot always be exemplified separately. For example, tertiary education is intrinsically related to the level of language learning achieved by a person. On the other hand, having never had previous formal education can have an impact on the quality of language learning which in turn produces ripple effects in terms of better job prospects, better access to mental health care and socialization, amongst others. Still, in the interest of clarity, we have divided these issues in separate clusters that we hope will allow for a more in-depth analysis.

Language learning

There is no specific trend running through our interviews that we could identify regarding differences between men and women vis-à-vis their enthusiasm for starting and finishing German language courses or even regarding specific advantages or disadvantages faced by either gender. In effect, however, some women seem to accomplish a higher level of formal language learning in a shorter period, even when under severe constraints such as child rearing. A Nigerian woman in her early 30s living in Brandenburg demonstrates this aspect rather clearly. Whilst her partner, a man from Cameroon in his late 30s who had arrived in Germany almost two years before her, could barely understand basic German, she was able to achieve a formal B1 level at the local "Volkshochschule" within six months of her arrival whilst caring for two children and having to deal with a very complicated asylum case where she fought back two deportation orders. Despite the bureaucratic and technical barriers, her positive attitude towards learning is remarkable if we consider that her chances of staying in Germany are much lower in comparison to, say, a refugee from Syria. Undeterred by her undefined status, she was noticeably clear on the importance of educating herself.

I don't see it as difficult for me at all to integrate. I am the kind of person who wants to learn new cultures. I want to learn the language. I want to be well integrated and know what and how it is done in the country. So, I am very interested...even when I was living in [the first accommodation centre] I was already learning the language and so the social worker advised me to fill in a form and they said I already had a good level. So, I filled the form to begin an integration course. You know, me here in Germany, I must be, you know, be integrated, do the course (NIG-W-BRA-2011)

Another woman, this time from Syria, in her 20s, gives an example of determination and resilience about learning. She took initiative and searched for ways to make it possible to learn German despite initial impediments and barriers.

I started [learning German] with “Alpha Beta” after going out of the hospital and now I am doing A1. The Sozialamt is paying for it and I will continue till B1. The Sozialamt told us to search for a school and the son of my sister in law took us to register in the language school where he did his language classes. It was called “München für Menschen” or something like that, I don’t remember. We all registered there: my sons and me (SYR-W-BAV-2308)

Refugees who had had some level of access to higher education in their own countries or who were used to a more middle class standard of living tended to show a more robust drive towards continuing their education or starting a university program afresh. They seem to be able to transfer their cultural capital to the German context more easily than others. On the other hand, we note that often the discourses of refugees regarding work and education seem to play along certain expectations and pressures from the German society. Refugees understand almost intuitively what is wanted from them and their narratives often conform to the “good guest” mentality where it is expected that they become “productive” and show “results” without creating “problems” or being unruly. As we have discussed in the previous sections on policy, often we find a paternalistic attitude towards refugees that permeates the policy level all the way down to the social worker and even volunteers – despite their best intentions.

For many asylum seekers, the issue of language learning is tied to three basic pragmatic and structural aspects that have serious repercussions for sociocultural integration: 1) location of residence, 2) costs and 3) employment. By that we mean that often refugees live in remote accommodation centres where transport links are weak, and the nearest language school can be hard to reach. Until a first decision is made on the asylum case, it is not guaranteed that the person will receive free language classes. Being limited to financial help does not allow a refugee to have available income to pay for extra expenses except from those to cover their most basic needs and in that sense; language learning becomes a “luxury” they cannot always afford. It also takes a considerable amount of their time, which could be used to work in the informal labour market and supply them with additional income. It may happen that a refugee finds employment before he or she finds a place in a German language course. Since, for many, finding paid employment is the priority, they will work full time in places like logistic hubs in jobs consisting of menial labour where it is not a required to know how to speak German. Another problem some refugees face (in particular those from sub-Saharan Africa) is that they are not considered “priority” in terms of free tuition; with Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis and Eritreans taking most of the allocated places in the courses offered at community colleges and other language schools. A man from Cameroon in his 30s describes his situation in some detail whilst exemplifying these aspects of language learning.

I did go to a language school and told them I was a refugee. But they said that they only give language courses to people from four countries: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea. For you we cannot do anything. I was in the Volkshochschule in Berlin, in [district of Berlin], and I also tried to register in a school in Potsdam, but they don’t let you study. But I continued to search, and I found a course in the Euro Schule in Potsdam but that was private. The EU finances it though, so I could study there a few days a week. I needed to get a B1 level because that would help me to get a job. Now, although I have yet not received a decision on my application, I have been allowed to work and I got a job at a logistics firm and I work there 40 hours per week (CAM-M-BRA-2307)

Through these interviews, we get a sense of some of the difficulties faced regarding the extreme necessity of learning the language and the problem of having the resources or even time to do so. As a matter of fact, refugees are not blank slates. When they arrive in Germany,

their biography, their history, is often helping them make decisions. Hence, for those who for instance, need to support families back in their home countries, employment is much more important than language learning even though language learning would surely improve one's prospects of finding better paid and more secure forms of employment. It is a cycle that is difficult to break. When language learning is indeed prioritized that is often because there is a view that by learning German, employment prospects are increased. Hence, for refugees, learning German is not so much a matter of learning another culture but a prerequisite to improve their financial conditions. However, there are major systematic differences based on the country of origin. As our respondents recognized themselves, some populations faced fewer obstacles in terms of language learning due to their status as asylum seekers with a "good prospects of staying" as their countries are recognized as being "unsafe third countries". Often refugees complain of the seemingly "unfair system" since it privileges certain groups over others. Our field work suggests that this comparative "advantage" of Syrians, Afghans and Eritreans within the German asylum system is well understood to the extent that some refugees from Africa will go to the extreme of buying fake Syrian passports in the black market in order to facilitate their asylum process.

There are other structural dimensions, which seem important in terms of being successful in learning German. Refugees who are married with children find it somewhat more difficult to learn the language. They also find it rather difficult to administer the education of their children. Another insight which has gone rather unnoticed are age differences, or at least the perception that one is too old to learn something new like a new language. There may also an element of cultural resistance to learning German partly because of wanting to maintain one's cultural identity.

We can compare the narratives of two refugees to illustrate some of these points. The first is a 34-year-old woman from Syria living in Munich at the time of the interview. She is married and has two sons. Although by no means an "old" person, she finds herself "too old" to learn and this inability to come to terms with the language also makes it very difficult for her to help her children who are undergoing a critical phase in their education. We quote her at length since she discusses many of the points we wish to illustrate.

I wish I did not come. I don't know how to tell you. The language here is a barrier and we are not able to develop because of that. For example, in my case, I cannot work in my field and I am not able to learn the language in a perfect way to start something new. Because I am not young anymore. I don't think I know the language well until now. If I knew the language, I could continue my career here. But I don't think it's possible. Impossible. I am not able to develop my German. I don't know why. May be because we are so attached to our Arabic language or maybe because we don't have German friends, we have Arab and Syrian friends and we are so happy when we see them. Maybe because of that (SYR-M-BAV-0809)

And regarding her children's education, she says:

...we have problems with the kids. In Syria, I used to teach my kids at home after school; but here I am not able to do so. It is not because of a harder curriculum but because I need to translate everything when I am teaching my son in the first grade. And when you do the translation, the ideas become silly. I think there is a problem in making the kids study. I also feel that the kids took so much time to integrate with the German language. In the beginning they were sent to a school to learn the language, other Syrian kids were there as well, so they all start to speak together in Arabic. (Ibid).

What our sample seems to suggest is that success in language learning is not a simple matter of availability of financial resources or time or other structural elements such more schools, more teachers or better transportation, but rather a confluence of factors both internal and external to the person. In other words, measures focusing on structural integration alone will not solve the problem unless sociocultural elements are considered. Age, or a feeling that one

is too old to learn is a difficult attitudinal barrier to overcome. A sense of loss of home culture when learning a new language can lead to a certain resistance to the language from which it is not easy to break free. For those refugees who are parents, these difficulties can become intensified since their children's difficulties in learning exacerbate their own feelings of powerlessness. Despite the many good initiatives available to refugees in Germany, there are barriers that are cultural, political, psychological, and economic all of which converge, in some cases, into a state of personal helplessness. Still, it must be said that most refugees in our sample have achieved an intermediate (B1/B2) level of German, which enables them to communicate well in most day-to-day circumstances. At the same time, it is important to make a distinction between passing a formal community college exam and being able to understand and communicate effectively and to gain fluency. The former requires literacy, the latter interaction with the majority society. Both are crucial elements of language learning and in a wider context, to integration.

Integration Courses

Most refugees whose asylum claim was accepted are obligated to attend the so-called "integration courses", an early integration measure which combines language training with an overall introduction into the German political system. Persons who have been granted asylum and who cannot prove that they possess sufficient German language skills, are obligated to participate in an integration course whereas asylum seekers with a good prospect to stay can, but need not, participate. Thus, while accepted refugees are obliged to take an integration course, asylum applicants are only allowed to attend one as far as they have a "good perspective of staying". For those who do not gain access to these courses, it is important to emphasize the role of NGOs or civil society in providing quality education in the time the asylum applicant is stuck in legal limbo. These courses are often the first time a refugee encounters the German language. As such, they are important as a first step towards integration. Many refugees found the experience of integration courses to give them a good basis for further learning. Others, however, manifest also common critiques of the format of these courses. A 37-year-old man from Iran (he identified himself as being from "Kurdistan") describes his impressions.

The course was mandatory. The stories from the books are very discriminatory, but I had to attend... so... Above all, they discriminate against transsexuals and many more. The organization is also very stupid. The participants are from different age groups and this does not help the language [learning] process at all (IRA-M-BER-2410)

Once again, we see the perception that age differences in language learning causes problems for learning. Some have also complained about the idea that the textbooks used are not as inclusive of populations as they should and that the content and examples often used represent a rather white, male, European view of Germany and the world. Another problem identified by asylum applicants in our sample is that the process of asylum itself may significantly delay the language learning process. For instance, a man from Syria in his 20s explains that was it not for his contact with German hosts, he would not have learned German at all during the asylum process.

It took me six months to do the first interview and then one year and two months to get the residence permit. If I were not living with a German family, I would not have learned German until two years later (SYR-M-BAV-0412)

This substantial length of time for processing the asylum application can have dire consequences for the future livelihood of an applicant since there is a constant preoccupation being displayed throughout these narratives with the speed of language learning. Another Syrian man in his early 20s "started with language courses and work before getting the protection" only because of the help of "NGOs and not official schools" (SYR-M-BAV-1512) Yet another Syrian in his early 20s was "doing German courses [that were] given by students. They were not official courses" (SYR-M-LSAX-0412) One other Syrian man describes his

experience as follows: *“I don’t know how things are now but back then we were not allowed to take courses before having the residence permit. You could only visit free volunteering classes”* (SYR-M-LSAX-3010).

Adult and Tertiary Education: The Struggle for Life-long learning

Many of the refugees we have interviewed aspired to either continue their education, interrupted by their displacement, or to join an academic study program for the first time in their lives since being Germany affords them that. Some asylum seekers saw an academic degree as a way forward, something onto which concentrate their energies. Indeed, some of those we interviewed were clearly making enormous efforts to study whilst pointing to the obstacles they faced when attempting to gain an education in Germany, one of the greatest challenges being learning the language. A 34-year-old Syrian man married with four children offers a good illustration of the latter.

I did one year of language courses and they were paid by the jobcentre. Then I did training for social and intercultural work. That was for three months. Now I am enrolled in Göttingen University and I am doing a bachelor’s [in economics]. It is very hard. The students are much younger than me and we do everything in German (SYR-M-BER2-0308)

We could question whether fifteen months of language learning, no matter how intensive the courses may have been, can possibly prepare a potential university student who had never spoken German before to follow a degree such as economics, not to mention that to adjust to the higher education culture of a German university can take time. The highly technical language of some of the material taught may add further difficulties for the aspiring graduate who is not a native German speaker. Another interesting dimension introduced to us by this respondent is the age or generational factor. Many refugees have passed the “normal” university entry age most associated with young adults in their twenties. This is yet another source of anxiety and fear of stigma. The awareness of looking physically different than most students, not speaking fluent or grammatically correct German, being older, are all factors that aggravate the state of insecurity and can impact on the chances of succeeding in the German higher education system.

If we define adult education as a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values, then the very practice of immigration could be considered, in itself, an informal way of education. It is clear in our interviews that refugees develop new skills and knowledge of the society they move to at different levels and at different depths. From basic language skills to another profession altogether, when given a chance, refugees tend to adapt to their new circumstances and new realities in the host country rather quickly, and adaptation almost always imply some form of learning. In that regard, refugees have shown a remarkable capacity to be open to new experiences and learn new skills as they navigate the difficult processes involved in integrating to a new society. Most of those whom we interviewed showed a preoccupation with learning German and a means to continue formal education. For example, a former government worker who had never done any other type of work except studying for a degree in economics and then working for the government in Libya, once in Berlin, sought part-time employment in a restaurant as a kitchen assistant whilst he studied to improve his German literacy. He declared himself to be “optimistic” and used these new skills to pay for his living expenses as he plans to study for a master’s degree in a German university (LIB-M-BER 28/04)

Adult education becomes important for many whose dreams were broken by war and conflict and whose lives must be reconstructed from the leftover realities of tragic events. A refugee from Syria, for example, explains how he had to find a new direction and give up on a dream after his life was brutally disrupted.

In Syria, I knew that I only have to study and play football on the side. I wanted to become a football player. I was one of the young players in the “Etihad” team... Their trainer told me that when I become older, I would be playing in that team. That was my dream for my entire life. I lost that dream when I came to Germany. I still play football here but it is too late to become a professional player, I was supposed to start training here before I turned 18 years of age. Now I want to work and have my own independent business here (SYR-M-BAV-2711)

A Syrian man in his 20s describes how he circumnavigated the difficulties he faced to continue learning and to complete the formal education he had begun in Syria.

I learned German until the B2 level in the technical school. It was not a course; it was in the school program. It is called “Berufsvorbereitungsprogramm”. It was paid by the school. Now I am in my second year of my Ausbildung and I have Bafög [public student loan]. It is in technical medical assistant. I wanted to study medical engineering, but I had a technical high school certificate from Syria, so I could not. I thought of another way to get a certificate and then continue with medical engineering and I found this Ausbildung. It was my own effort to search for this and do it (SYR-M-BAV-2811)

The lack of recognition of foreign certificates and educational qualifications is a problem we encountered throughout the interviews we conducted. Many participants have mentioned this aspect and how they have been negatively impacted. However, there are many efforts being made by universities and volunteer organization to overcome these barriers and to smoothen the process of integrating refugees with potential into the education system. In the next section, we point to some examples.

The Role of Civil Society and Universities in Integration

It is important that we place some emphasis on the initiatives – be them free online resources or other more conventional learning methods – available to refugees through civic initiatives or through governmental and universities that facilitate language learning. It is also important to mention how co-ethnic networks (i.e. relatives, friends, etc...) are of great importance in the initial stages of education. These networks provide help with finding the right course, registrations, and even some initial basic understand of the language, those facing difficult asylum processes. For example, a 35-year-old Syrian woman describes how she was helped by some of these programs where she lived, in Lower Saxony.

Göttingen University provided me with the language courses. It was a scholarship, before getting the legal residency. It all depends on how hardworking the person is, I started with school courses, then I got a contact with an active woman who works a Christian NGO, she gives a lot of information about scholarships. She told us about the scholarship of DAAF. They ask for your legal documents, university degree. That's it. It is for the people who want to continue their studies in the university. It covers all levels until C1 and the DSH. I got in the beginning a one-year protection, so I submitted an appeal and Göttingen city was paying for that. The housing was paid by the “Sozial” [municipal Social Service Department] (SYR-W-LSAX-1412)

Indeed, some universities and higher education institutions have opened themselves up to welcoming asylum applicants, to allow them to use their facilities and to try and integrate those with academic potential amongst their own students. As we have mentioned in the macro level section, many universities have come up with their own initiatives geared towards inclusion of refugees by offering more flexible, skills-based entry requirements, free quality language learning or even spaces for interaction between and use of rooms and computers.

For instance, there are many initiatives offered by universities designed to help refugees to continue, or join for the first time, a higher education program in Germany. A man from Syria living in Munich explains how he was able to do that.

I did the German courses in the University of Augsburg. The university was giving scholarships for refugees. Everyone was doing a placement test and the students with the highest degrees, let's say the 25 students with the highest degrees were getting the scholarship. The student can also do an entrance exam and continue his studies in the same university. The course was a "Vorbereitung" ["preparation"] course. (SYR-M-BAV-0312)

Some universities offer generous and uncomplicated application channels that allow refugees, particularly those of university age, sometimes without proof of previous education, to develop the basic education tools necessary to continue higher education in Germany. Many of the bursaries and scholarships are offered by individual universities but also by foundations such as the Humboldt Foundation or other federal agencies such as DAAD (see our previous discussion on such programs). Nevertheless, sometimes the process of joining a German university can be slow and it requires a certain level of initiative and positive mental attitude from the part of the applicant. Often, refugees are directed into apprenticeships, internships or preparatory courses and experiences that eventually may result in a placement at a higher education institution. Germany is well structured in this sense and there is plenty of opportunity for access to such programs, as an enthusiastic Iranian living in Berlin describes:

I did an internship as an operating room technician. My internship lasted one and a half months. I plan to do an apprenticeship in the same direction and go to school on the side. I go to high school and I'm in 10th grade. I was in school in Iran and also studied at the university, but I have no connection from the university. I had my high school diploma recognized here and had to start here in middle school. I want to do my Abitur here because I want to go to university and do an apprenticeship. Both are difficult but possible. If you want to start with a good subject at university, you have to wait until it's your turn. If I have already completed an apprenticeship after graduation, I can already work and earn money during this waiting period. I got my driver's license. I have been living in my apartment for six months. I slowly want to have a car too (IRA-M-BER-1812)

A common theme amongst refugees is the problem of documents not being accepted or recognized by the German educational boards or higher education institutions. Often, refugees feel that they are set back in terms of their education for this reason. Some complain that they must repeat courses and revisit content they had already studied in their country of origin. Much of this is often regarded as unnecessary and wasteful in terms of time and resources. However, the German system is rather strict and recognition of qualification from outside of the EU is often a complicated process requiring costly official translation of documentation, much of which cannot be provided due to complicated personal circumstances resulting in the loss of such documents during transit. In some cases, even, the actual universities or schools have been destroyed by bombing or are under tight control of militias or were simply closed by the government, which makes it practically impossible to retrieve the necessary documentation. Still, for those refugees who can prove their status, many opportunities are available. Another Iranian living in Berlin describes the ease with which he was able to continue his studies in Berlin.

I am currently studying for a master's program in Social Work and Human Rights. My master's degree in law gave me easier access to the university. At first, I was very sad that I studied for years so that I could not start with my degree in the end, but then I saw that in addition to the German courses I had completed, I was able to study faster at a German university thanks to my degree in Iran, than without it (IRA-M-BER-2011)

Adult and higher education may help to keep a focus but as it is often the case with the bureaucracies involved in asylum processes, even the simplest aims can be frustrated. A 25-year-old man from Syria shows how a focus on his studies and the help of civil society helped him re-constitute his life.

Coming to a new country and not knowing anything...not knowing what to do...the most important thing was to continue my studies. When I arrived in Munich, I heard that the procedure in Bavaria are very complicated and it is true. We are seeing until now, the difficult procedures they have here. I was having the decision to leave it but then I stayed. I didn't know where else to go and what to do. To stay here or leave. What to do...But the behaviour of some Germans here, not all but a lot of them...they helped me so much. Not only financially but also psychologically. They were families who were coming and saying that I want to help someone Syrian. I met a lot of people like that. They were helping people who they can communicate with. They were coming and asking who speaking English for example (SYR-M-BAV-0312)

Even if his previous academic achievements were not recognized in Germany, he was able to use his experience and familiarity with the topic to “study faster”. This shows the high level of resilience refugees often display when faced with bureaucratic obstacles and their focus on getting an education as well as the portability of non-formal cultural capital. All in all, it is impossible to dismiss the efforts by the civil society and higher education institution in Germany to accommodate the needs of refugees. Universities have mobilized individually to create opportunities for asylum seekers who otherwise would not be able to enter tertiary education that easily. However, these efforts are neither systemic nor based on an integral strategy. Often, it is a question of chance encounters good Samaritans from civil society and a superhuman drive to succeed.

Summary

In this section, we have investigated how refugees (including minors) can gain access to education opportunities in Germany. First, we note that it is compulsory to attend school in Germany and that out of the 11 Million pupils in the country 1.2 Million are not German citizens. Approximately five per cent of the pupils are or have been refugees at some point. Although, the right of refugee minors to school education is, in principle, unquestioned in Germany, it is not always interpreted as a right to attend a public school. Furthermore, there is a lack of systematic assessment of the competences and learning needs of students before they are allocated to schools. Although teachers (and volunteers) often make great efforts to help refugee students participate in their lessons, they are often not well prepared to teach their subject in a group that includes German language learners.

Whereas the integration or inclusion of refugee minors at schools has received a lot of scholarly interest, there is only anecdotal evidence on the access of refugees to higher education. We have pointed to various support schemes by individual universities, foundations and federal agencies designed to accommodate for instance “scholars at risk” or refugees with an academic background who would like to continue their studies in Germany. However, there are fundamental systemic impediments. Although refugees whose asylum application has been accepted are entitled to receive funds under the German Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) if they have German language skills at level C1 and health insurance, there is an administrative period of several months that needs to be bridged. Refugees with a status of toleration must wait for 15 months until they are entitled to BAföG funding.

For refugees who are not able to access formal education (at any level), there are volunteers and civil society agencies that organize informal educational spaces. In some of the bigger accommodation centres, informal schooling is organized on the premises. However, although there may even be regular language classes for children, there are no measures of regular schooling, e.g. in collaboration with neighbouring schools. Thus, such schemes should be interim provisional measures and not a replacement for regular schooling.

Language learning is fraught with difficulties and barriers created by the asylum system itself. For instance, placing refugees in remote and low populated areas with little contact to the local people impedes effective language learning and social integration in general. Sometimes refugees are barred from attending language schools due to their status. The so-called

“integration courses” have been criticized for being stereotypical and non-representative of the populations who attend them.

4. Housing and Spatial Integration

In this section, we are concerned with several important questions regarding housing and the spatial integration of refugees in Germany. What is the role of the place of residence in integration? Are there differences between cities and rural areas regarding refugee accommodation, and if so: how do these differences relate to structural and social integration? What are the advantages and disadvantages of centralized accommodation for instance as opposed to de-central housing, and how do these different types of accommodation influence the way refugees live and their chances of integrating into German society? Before we address these questions in more detail, however, it is necessary to recall some of the most basic aspects of the *reception phase* of asylum in Germany since it has an important bearing on spatial integration (for more on reception see Chemin and Nagel 2020).

Refugee Housing: from Reception to Integration

After crossing the German border, asylum applicants are subject to registration. Once this phase is complete, applicants are assigned to a reception centre (*Aufnahmeeinrichtung*) where the BAMF branch office is located and where asylum seekers are assigned to reside. Asylum seekers are obliged to stay in the district of the regional state where they have been assigned for a maximum period of 6 months, pursuant to Section 56 Asylum Act. This geographical restriction is known as the “residence obligation” (*Residenzpflicht*). Additionally, there are so called “transit centres” (*Transitzentrum*) or “special arrival centres” (*besondere Aufnahmeeinrichtungen*) that combine reception and deportation facilities and where asylum seekers have to stay for a period of up to 24 months. This applies to refugees with a “low perspective to stay”. As a rule, the obligation to reside in a reception centre or another accommodation centre ends if the application for asylum is granted by the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees (Sections 48 and 53 Asylum Act). However, residence in an accommodation centre can of course be prolonged if no alternative housing space is available (see below for some examples).

The most recent development in terms of integration and housing are the so-called *AnKER-institutions*, i.e. “Centers for Arrival, Decision making, Return” which were an integral part of the coalition agreement between the Christian and the Social Democrats in 2018. In theory, these centers are to combine different parts of the reception procedure at one spot in order to speed up the decision-making process. In addition, AnKER-Centers are supposed to maintain control over the applicants and to enforce the return of those who are bound to leave the country. Applicants can be made to stay in an AnKER-Center for up to 18 months (families with minor children up to six months). They have a residence obligation, which allows them to leave the center itself, but not the respective city or municipality without permission (Schader et al 2018, 94). It is important to note that the idea of AnKER-Centers has been contested from the very beginning on many different levels: while a union of policemen voiced objections against plans to make use of the federal police (*Bundespolizei*) to guarantee security in the centers, welfare associations and refugee councils heavily criticized the detention aspect of the concept and articulated severe concerns that the isolation of asylum seekers would not only be an obstacle to integration, but could lead to stigmatization and re-traumatization.

Out of 16 regional states only Bavaria has so far adopted the AnKER model and established seven AnKER-Centres, mainly in former American barracks complexes. In Lower Saxony, another focal region of this report, two so-called Arrival Centers were established in Bad Fallingb. and Bramsche. Arrival Centers resemble AnKER-Centers as they are meant to implement what is called an “integrated management of refugees” in administrative language. As a matter of fact, a number of critical media reports have pointed to major problems in the launch phase of arrival centers, such as overstrained staff as well as a lack of medical

treatment or trained interpreters.²⁸ In terms of integration, it is important to note that the underlying rationale of isolation severely compromises the chances of social and structural integration: Not only do the centers offer limited access to education and work opportunities (see above), but they impede all chances of interaction with German society. In this regard, a social worker of the Arrival Center in Bad Fallingbommel critically noted “that there is no connection to public transportation (and that) the residents have to walk three kilometers to the station or to town”. This observation is matched by complaints of refugees who live in areas such as those we have researched. For instance, in Brandenburg, some of the accommodation centres we visited are located far from any village or town and are isolated to the point that refugees have difficulties even accessing transport links. This is an aspect that is well reflected in our interviews with refugees (see section of refugee experiences below).

Apart from the bigger Arrival and Reception Centers there are several smaller accommodation centers, many of which are run in the responsibility of the municipalities and subcontracted to welfare associations or (sometimes) private enterprises. For instance, in Göttingen, district organizations of five welfare associations (two of them confessional) have formed a consortium, which has run most of the municipal accommodation centers and emergency shelters. In an interview one of the social workers underlined the *chances of central accommodation* for the allocation of social services:

Here, they learn a lot and this is why the accommodation center is incredibly valuable for families and singles during the time of arrival. Many (German) citizens always struggle with the accommodation centers. Some say: ‘they have to be private, private, private!’ but particularly for families it is so important that the children can enjoy pedagogical assistance. So, one year of accommodation center is just perfect. (translation AKN/EC).

The statement points to potential positive effects of central accommodation for social and structural integration due to the better availability of assistance measures. It is rooted in a pessimistic narrative on the inability of refugees to lead a life on their own in Germany. E.g., the same interview partners noted that some refugees had lost their apartments again because of their incapacity to have a household on their own and mentioned that several of the refugees in private apartments were complaining about the ethnic segregation of their environment and the lack of opportunities to interact with Germans.

Nevertheless, there has been a broad consensus that in terms of reception and integration refugees would profit most from *decentral accommodation*, i.e. housing in separate apartments. In a policy paper the Network for Reception Management and Counsel for Asylum Seekers in Lower Saxony held that “only decentral accommodation grants refugees the possibility of a self-determined life and the opportunity for social, cultural and political participation.”²⁹ As a consequence, municipalities are called upon to make decentral accommodation of all asylum seekers a central goal of their concepts of refugee housing and to flank it with appropriate measures of community organizing. In a recent explorative study Hess and Elle noted that the proportion of decentral accommodation in Lower Saxony has been quite high until 2015 (with more than 80 %) which may reflect the rural shape of the state, but has come down to less than 70 % since then (Hess & Elle 2018, 4). They also conclude that decentral housing in conjunction with intensive outreach social work would be the preferred option vis-à-vis central accommodation (ibid, 38).

²⁸ <https://www.giessener-allgemeine.de/regional/stadtgiessen/Stadt-Giessen-Heftige-Kritik-an-Ablaeufen-im-BAMF-Ankunftszentrum;art71,114555> Accessed 13/05/2020

²⁹ https://www.nds-fluerat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018_01_AMBA_Unterst%C3%BCtzen_Beraten_St%C3%A4rken.pdf. Accessed 13/05/2020

In practice, however, access to adequate and affordable housing for refugees remains difficult given the tense situation of the free housing market as well as the crisis of social housing, which has become the most pressing social policy issue within the last years. In this regard refugees without an own income directly compete with other welfare recipients. Those, who do have an income, compete with all other demanders on the free housing market. In principle, it is the task of social workers to assist acknowledged refugees to find a private apartment. The spokesperson of a counselling center, which is run by a Protestant Welfare Association, gave some insights from her work:

Well, there are people who feel discriminated because they do not get that apartment; because they think that the landlord does not want an asylum applicant from Iraq or Syria to live there [...] That is our job that we also counsel these people in the sense that German people also get rejected when applying for a job or an apartment. You don't have to relate each rejection to discrimination or racism. (translation AKN/EC).

The quotation exhibits a remarkable rhetorical twist from structural conditions to individual responsibility: Instead of analyzing the condition of the housing market (here: in the town of Göttingen) and developing strategies (e.g. to find accommodation in the rural environment), the counselor addressed psychological coping mechanisms for dealing with rejection and alleged discriminatory experiences. The passage is part of a broader narrative of hospitality and assimilation, which suggests that success (in terms of integration) in the majority society is mainly a matter of the right mindset. In contrast, a municipal administrator pointed out some of the structural conditions of the housing market in Göttingen, namely the competition with students who have similar demands (smaller low-budget apartments) and the high rents within the urban area. It is important to note that the housing allowance depends on the municipality. For instance, the maximum rent ("Mietstufe") for a single household in the city of Göttingen has been 434, - EUR since 2016 whereas the maximum rent in the broader district ("Landkreis") of Göttingen is 312, - EUR.

Therefore, many refugees have been looking for affordable housing in the neighboring municipalities. In this regard, a social worker that assists refugees in Hannoversch Münden, a small town of 23.000 residents, mentioned that the housing prices had increased considerably and that there had emerged an ethnic economy of refugee housing which was dominated by established immigrants. The situation was further aggravated by a temporary repeal of allocation of refugees ("Zuweisungsstop") to the city of Göttingen, which involved sending refugees to other municipalities in the wider districts of Göttingen and Hameln-Pyrmont.³⁰ Given the tense situation of the lower segments of the housing market and a certain stigmatization of refugees it seems likely that there is a grey market emerging where gate keepers charge high commissions for arranging a rental contract. We will come back to this issue in the following sections.

The Role of the Place of Residence in Refugee Integration

As seen in the previous sections, housing is an issue that allows for a substantial level of overlapping between the reception and integration stages of asylum seeking in Germany. This happens partly because of the often-lengthy reception phase that allows for some elements of sociocultural integration to start before the person is structurally integrated (by the objective measures the EU offers: housing, employment, education, etc.). In this sub-section, we focus on the important structural distinction between central and de-central housing and their effects on socio-cultural integration. A small part of the data presented here has been extracted from interviews with refugees in the regions of competence of this study, some of which have already been discussed on our report on reception policies (Chemin and Nagel 2020).

³⁰ <https://www.hna.de/lokales/goettingen/goettingen-ort28741/fluechtlingsunterkunft-auf-siekhoehe-schliesst-ende-monats-12371797.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020

Central Accommodation as an Obstacle to Integration

Our basic argument here is that the location of refugees in isolated accommodation centre during the reception phase has a profound impact on their chances of both structural and social integration. Although some accommodation centres are in the larger cities (i.e. Berlin), a good number of those visited by our research teams are in remote rural areas. Some of these places allow for little interaction between refugees and the local community. Some are repurposed old GDR buildings (in the case of Berlin and Brandenburg for example) located in forest areas with weak transport links in the outskirts of towns or in between small villages. A refugee from Libya, an ex-government worker in his early 30s, who at the time of the interview had already been living in Germany for more than a year (in “temporary” accommodation) describes some of his experiences:

The village where I stayed, in Brandenburg... It's basically in the middle of nowhere, in the forest. The last bus to pass through the place is at 17:00, so you are stuck there, you can't go out and if you want to leave the place if you want to go out you can only visit families and people like that. They allow you three days, and if you don't come back after 3 days, they don't pay you for many weeks, so the rules make the place quite like a prison. You know what I mean? (LIB-M-BER 28/04)

A woman from Syria and her husband living in the outskirts of Munich for more than three years describes how little options she has in terms of where to live.

I live in a one-room apartment in a [refugee] camp. It is the third camp we move to and we live there now for the third year. I don't live there by choice, it is obligatory. However, I do not have any other option. At least this apartment is nice and clean. My husband and I have our private bathroom within and a shared kitchen on the floor. If we did not have our own bathroom, I would not stay any additional day in the camp. Now we are trying with the Wohnamt [Housing Office] to find for us a two-room apartment outside the camp. Since it will be for two persons, my husband and I, we are allowed to have 60m². The Wohnamt found for us a one-room apartment in a hotel, but we refused to have it. So now we are just waiting, because if we decide to find and pay an apartment privately it will be very expensive for us. We will not be able to afford it. Especially in Munich, this is very expensive. We count on the jobcentre because they give us cheaper deals. (SYR-W-BAV-0911)

The passage is interesting in several respects: First, there is a notion of competition for housing among asylum seekers in which Syrians have a “better deal” because they are almost automatically recognized as “legitimate” refugees based on their good perspective of staying. As we laid out in the policy section, the social housing market is saturated and is becoming more expensive and disputed. This is a systemic situation that affects all refugees and all German citizens on the lower half of the socio-economic ladder. Second, the long waiting time this couple has been submitted to regarding their asylum case, places them in a precarious situation of having no choice but to remain living for three years in a camp. This case brings to light how and to what extent the social integration of asylum seekers is compromised by the isolation and a denial of self-determination.

In a similar vein, another refugee from Libya, in his mid-twenties explains, that the allocation of refugees into remote areas can produce a profound sense of alienation from wider society. He was in Germany for more than two years before we interviewed him in a secluded refugee camp in a remote location in Spree Wald, an hour by car from Berlin.

...the place is not in society it is outside of society so how can you possibly integrate if you live in a place that is outside of society? You're only connected to the trees, to the sky to nature, but you can only stay in nature for so long... you need people you need civilisation around you, you need society around you...that place is completely isolated. Nature itself is not enough. Sometimes you need some time alone. But that is not that.

Ok, so I have a pillow and a blanket. So, you can sleep there. But you cannot live there. It's a forest. There is no society you are not connected to the world. You know what I mean? People who should not connect to society... who are those people? Prisoners! Criminals! People like that, if they get connected to society, they will harm us. So they are kept outside. So why do you harm us? At least put us in a place where the buses pass through every hour (LIB-M-BER 27/04)

The sense of isolation of this asylum seeker is completely justified given that for two years he has not been able to live with his wife and daughter who were transferred to Lower Saxony during their asylum application. The strong comparison he makes between refugees and prisoners, both unwanted and excluded from society, has been voiced in other accounts as well. Refugee accommodation centres are often associated with prisons and some even suggest ironically that there are more benefits in being a prisoner in Germany than in becoming a refugee.

Besides the fact that there is little autonomy regarding where a refugee may end up living or working, during the reception phase of asylum seeking, asylum seekers are often obligated to move multiple times around the German territory from temporary accommodation (which are often not that temporary but may in fact result in many months of precarious living – i.e. a school building or sports halls) to the “reception centres” (Aufnahmeeinrichtung) to “transit centres” (Transitzentrum) to more permanent though still centralized and highly controlled residential units or housing facilities (Wohnheim). This can occur over a space of years, as the first respondent we quote described earlier. This process makes social integration almost impossible.

Life in de-central housing

The housing market situation emerging in the interviews we conducted with service providers is clearly reflected in the interviews with refugees. The struggle for a self-sufficient living is palpable and the obstacles are often numerous. Even refugees with a better prospect to stay, such as Syrians or Eritreans, express dissatisfaction with their living arrangements and some will try anything in their power to overcome the geographical limitations imposed on their freedom of movement. One father of four from Syria in his mid-30s for instance, explains the efforts he had to make in order to provide a more private life to his family in Berlin given the saturated housing market and the opportunists who take advantage of the situation.

I moved from Marzahn in November 2017 and moved to this place. I met a guy and he said that he could find me a house if I could give 8,500 Euros. So, I saved and I paid the guy, who said the money was going to a state agent who would then give me and my family preference in the queue. After he took the money, he said that we were lucky to get the house. This is how it is now. Refugees now pay this kind of money to people they do not know in the hope of getting a place to live with their families. 8 or 9 months later, after I paid, we found this place. But the place is now very good. We have now four rooms and two bathrooms and I am very happy with this place. But I paid 8,500 Euros for this person to find me this place... and that money is gone. But we have 112 m2 and the Jobcentre pays the rent for us. So, the money was just for someone to find the apartment – nothing else. The Jobcentre pays about 1,000 Euros in rent and some of the living costs. I pay only for the electricity, water and the Internet. Also, I pay for the maintenance of the building the cleaning of staircases, that stuff (SYR-M-BER2-0308)

As we have seen in the policy section, this type of brokerage is becoming increasingly common, especially in larger urban centers such as Berlin where the deficit of affordable housing has grown considerably over the past twenty years. This phenomenon is tied to larger socio-economic trends such as higher levels of immigration from the EU and North America into Berlin (students, artists, musicians all of whom find the low rents in Berlin attractive),

gentrification, new urban developments, to cite a few issues all of which affect both natives and new comers alike.

Most refugees seeking to leave centralized accommodation and who have received a positive outcome of their asylum claim will have to find a local person or a more experienced asylum seeker, or, as the example above shows, a “broker” who will charge substantial sums of money to help them locate a property and then convince the proprietor to rent them the place. This is an issue no doubt affected and fueled by some level of stigma, but also by simple practicalities. For instance, many asylum seekers will not have the necessary proven income to rent a property or to provide the necessary deposit, or they will lack many of the essential documents usually demanded by a proprietor in order to draft a contract between the two parts including a credit rating check or the availability of a guarantor, a valid passport or other ID, a previous private address, a reference from an employer, even a bank account with a recognizable financial institution. This emerging brokerage system is also a result of the local market forces in place in German towns and cities as we explained previously including the competition with other lower income populations such as students, retirees, German citizens who depend on benefits and even other types of immigrants from overseas or other EU Member States. This situation in the lower segments of the housing market, this competition for housing resources, exacerbates the already existing problem of stigmatization of asylum seekers with some landlords preferring not to rent their properties to them.

Proponents of the benefits of de-central living by various actors and observers active in the German asylum regime seem to have a point. Our analysis of interviews with asylum seekers shows that letting refugees choose their own accommodation helps with integration primarily because it allows for a sense of independence and self-determination that seems to have a positive impact on integration.

A young woman in her early 20s, living in Munich, expresses how she feels about her life in de-central housing.

...now I live in an apartment. The job center pays the monthly rent... [but] I found it myself. I live there with other friends. I am happy and comfortable in it. Everything is accessible to us after a 5 min walk from it. The advantages are that we are living in an independent place and everyone has his own room in the apartment. This is very good. I don't think there are many disadvantages (SYR-W-BAV-0309).

It is not only the regaining of privacy; the very location of the property, its surroundings, the connections with other people and businesses, the opportunities for sharing an experience and to feel one is in command of one's own life is of crucial importance for a feeling of integration. It is therefore clear that structural improvements in living conditions are positively associated with social integration.

A Turkish man in his mid-twenties living in Berlin explains what he believes to be the advantages of an independent life in the city.

I am very happy with this neighborhood because it is such a hipster neighborhood. That is, it is a newly formed neighborhood. There are actually gentrification projects here, but here are some bars here and there...and cafes and they are all cute. Therefore, there is everything you can do in the neighborhood, so there is not much need to get out of the neighborhood and I enjoy using my bike because I live here. Especially in summer, I can go everywhere by bike, I can reach everywhere in a half an hour and this was a great advantage for me. And I love my neighbors here...for example, we had a party once and there was no problem. They even greeted very well, relaxed us even...I know that my neighbor are Lebanese, Muslim families and so on...But there is no ghetto in Berlin (TUR-M-BER2-2312)

This interviewee shows great awareness of his surroundings and the changes occurring to his neighborhood. His place of residence allows him to have better contact with other immigrant

families and it is interesting that he is aware of the idea or fears of some parcels of society regarding ghettoization or the appearance of “immigrant” neighborhoods. The mention of gentrification is pertinent in particular because it is one of the reasons why rents and property prices in cities like Berlin have been raising steeply, pushing lower income families to less populated areas, as a Syrian man in his early twenties explains:

I live in a very calm apartment in a very calm city. I live with my parents in Donauwörth. It is almost one hour and a half away from Munich. I could not find a place in Munich. My parents and I are out of the jobcenter. We all work and I have the student loan, so we all pay the rent. The city is perfect, it has everything: doctors and a hospital. The only problem is that it doesn't have a university. All the transportations are available including fast trains (SYR-M-BAV-1512)

It is clear how important the infrastructure around a place of residence is for the feeling of inclusion of asylum seekers. Being able to access hospitals, universities easily through good transport links, allows for a sense of integration even when living outside of the larger cities.

At the same time, the experience of de-central housing does not necessarily equal to more interaction and integration with the majority society as some detractors of de central housing for refugees have argued. A 56-year-old Turkish man describes his living conditions. His account offers us a more nuanced view of de-central housing. When asked if he had received help to find his new home, he answered:

No, I rented it completely on my own. I live in a house of 87 m2... but our dream is to have a garden where there will always be a family like this, a house where children will play in the garden. But now that is an apartment, those kids are deprived of most things. Yes, the majority [of kids] in the neighbourhood are foreigners and asylum seekers like us, so I do not know whether it is true that this is the choice of them or the state directed them [here]. But I do not think that this is right. Because we cannot be integrated, our children encounter foreigners at school mostly. Most of the neighbourhood we come from is foreigners. That is to say, of course, we learn a lot later on integration or the conditions of life here or the rules of life here, and we become more integrated very late. The circles are all foreigners, that is, everyone wants to live their own culture and wants to carry it there, and naturally everyone is building on the old culture. I don't think it is right, so I think it would be better if they are distributed randomly more, in terms of the integration of the other communities (TUR-M-LSAX1-1808)

The statement addresses the connection between decentral housing and self-reliance, ghettoization, and integration. It expresses a stance of many refugees we have spoken to, i.e. to argue for policies that respect individual choices only so that more interaction with locals can be achieved. It appears as if refugees themselves problematize that living amongst fellow countrymen or other immigrants will not deliver the type of integration that the German state, regions and localities promote as an ideal. However, some of our interview partners have emphasized the importance of having neighbors with an own immigration experience. A 37-year-old man from Iran living also in Berlin also found that his experience of de-central housing afforded him valuable experiences.

I live in a big city and have some contact with my neighbours. An Iranian lives opposite. He has been here for 27 years, but does not have the right to stay ... I learn from the experiences I have gained here in an alternative district. I didn't particularly like the other cities (IRA-M-BER-0911)

The mention of an Iranian neighbor who after 27 years still had no formal status echoes the developing situation where many asylum seekers may face long term uncertainty regarding their asylum status. This example also offers an important contrast to other interlocutors who were critical of life in immigrant neighborhoods. Whilst some found it harder to integrate to the wider German society because they felt isolated within immigrant neighborhoods, others may

find in these same neighborhoods, a place of respite from wider society where conviviality with others from one's own cultural background may in fact help long-term settlement. Even when living in small spaces not necessarily appropriate to accommodate larger families, refugees find comfort in the privacy of decentral housing, when they have children, as a 38-year-old Syrian woman living in Munich tells us.

After spending three months in the camp, we found an apartment and moved to it. It is so small; it has only two and a half rooms. But I prefer that than on staying in the camp. The first room is a bedroom, the second room is a living room and in the very small room I put a table with chairs, like a small dining room. The father sleeps in the living room and I sleep with the kids in the bedroom. I, of course, would prefer to move to a bigger place, but thank God I am comfortable in this one. I designed and arranged it from inside the way I like it (SYR-W-BAV-0309)

The act of choosing their own furniture and decorating the place is instrumental in producing a feeling that one is settled and at home. The making of a home can be seen as the material expression of sociocultural integration. Here we can observe a clear contrast to the impossibility of sociocultural integration in central accommodation precisely because simple but crucial choices such as basic furniture or decoration are inconceivable within a space where there are no real choices to be made, only rules to be followed.

All in all, our results confirm the consensus amongst academics, practitioners and many policy makers that decentralized accommodation from the very beginning is beneficial for the integration of refugees. At the same time, our evidence underlines that despite informal support structures and immigrant self-help networks refugees in decentral accommodation may still need competent assistance by social workers. Despite the stance of some social workers in our meso-level sample that aiding refugees in accommodation centres was more effective and efficient, this must not be read as an argument against decentral housing. If social work with refugees is to be led by a paradigm of self-efficacy, then it is necessary to combine decentral accommodation with an outreach approach of social work.

Summary

In this section, we have discussed an important element in the whole process of asylum seeking in Germany: housing. There are primarily two types of accommodation, central and decentral. Centralized refugee housing is often associated with highly controlled environments that in some cases are placed in remote areas. Geography becomes crucial in this case since remoteness impinges peoples' ability to have easy access to services and to wider society. De-central accommodation refers to the ability of refugees to have a house or apartment of their own, even if partially or wholly subsidised by the government. There has been a broad consensus amongst practitioners and policy makers that, in terms of reception and integration, refugees profit most from decentral accommodation. In practice, however, access to adequate and affordable housing for refugees remains difficult given the tense situation of the free housing market as well as the overall crisis of social housing, which has become the most pressing social policy issue within the last years. In this regard refugees without an own income directly compete with other welfare recipients.

In our interviews, immigration professionals and refugees alike emphasized the tense situation on the housing market. The struggle for a self-sufficient living is palpable and the obstacles are often numerous. Even refugees with a better prospect to stay, such as Syrians or Eritreans, expressed dissatisfaction with their living arrangements and some would try anything in their capacity to overcome the geographical limitations imposed on their freedom of movement. Hence, it suffices to say that most issues referring to housing revolve around refugees' constant struggle to be able to choose where, how and with whom they want to live. In terms of social and structural integration, housing and spatial conditions have had considerable impacts on the attainment of education, employment and very importantly, on the psychosocial health of refugees.

5. Psychosocial Health and the Role of Religion

In this section, we analyze the experiences of refugees in Germany with respect to psychosocial health and the role of religion. Since many refugees come from countries where religion is an important part of daily life, we ask: is there a link between how refugees cope with the stresses of forced migration and their religious belief and practice? Also, since confessional charities are an important part of the third sector in Germany and many volunteers we have encountered have a religious background, we pursue the question: which role does religion play in supporting refugees who do not find the support they need through the German health care system? Furthermore, we ask: how accessible are mental health treatments for refugees in Germany? Are refugees screened for mental health problems in a regular and systematic fashion? What are the challenges regarding mental health treatment under conditions of forced migration? How do professionals and refugees overcome the language barrier? These are only some of the questions we attempt to answer in this section.

Access to Health Care for Refugees in Germany

The structure of the German Health Care system as well as recent changes have been discussed elsewhere in due depth (Busse et al 2014). For the sake of this report it may suffice to hold that a) the health care system is marked by a complex governance structures which involves the regional states as well as societal bodies, such as sickness funds and b) health insurance is mandatory and divided into state health insurance and private health insurance which both rely on contributions (paid by employers and employees); for welfare recipients and special groups, such as asylum seekers, the costs of health care are remunerated by the respective social welfare office (ibid, xxiv). In a country-comparative perspective the authors conclude that:

...the German health care system has a generous benefit basket, one of the highest levels of capacity as well as relatively low levels of cost-sharing. Expenditure per capita is relatively high but expenditure growth since the early 2000s has been modest in spite of a growing number of services provided both in hospital and ambulatory care, an indication of technical efficiency. In addition, access is good – evidenced by low waiting times and relatively high satisfaction with out-of-hours care. However, the German health care system also shows areas in need of improvement if compared with other countries. This is demonstrated by the low satisfaction figures with the health system in general; respondents see a need for major reform more often than in many other countries. Another area is quality of care, despite all reforms having taken place. Germany is rarely placed among the top OECD or EU15 countries, but usually around average, and sometimes even lower (Ibid, xxvii).

It is important to note, however, that asylum seekers are not entitled to make comprehensive use of the “generous benefit basket”. According to Section 4 AsylbG asylum seekers are entitled for *medical treatment* in case of acute illness and pain. Pregnant women and women in childbed are entitled for medical and nursing care. As emphasized in a guideline of the Refugee Council of Berlin the distinction between acute and chronic disease can be complicated in practice, e.g. in case of Diabetes (Classen 2018, 11).³¹ Hence, the Social Court (Landessozialgericht) of Hessen has granted a therapy of Hepatitis C and argued for a wide interpretation of Section 6 AsylbG which states that specific measures can be taken to secure subsistence and health, based on a case-by-case decision.³² In the interpretation of the Refugee Council Berlin, Section 6 AsylbG entitles asylum seekers for various measures of medical assistance, such as psychotherapy, interpreter costs for diagnoses and psychotherapy, contraceptives and integration support for disabled children (ibid.).

³¹ http://www.fluechtlingsinfo-berlin.de/fr/asylblg/Leitfaden_AsyblLG.pdf Accessed 13/05/2020

³² LSG Hessen, 11.07.2018 - L 4 AY 9/18 B ER.

A recent report provides more insights on the *administrative procedures* of health care for asylum seekers and calls to mind that after the acceptance of the asylum application or after a period of 15 month from their arrival refugees are entitled for health (and other welfare services) just like German welfare recipients (Wächter-Raquet 2016: 13-14). The main emphasis of the report is on the introduction of the so-called electronic health card ("elektronische Gesundheitskarte"), which was introduced in the majority of regional states (including three of the focal regions of this report: Berlin, Brandenburg and Lower Saxony) in order to facilitate the access of asylum seekers to medical treatment. In contrast to apprehensions from the municipal level that the electronic health card would lead to a lack of control and to an increase of health expenditures, the report underlines the actual cost neutrality and the positive long-term effects of an easier access to health services (ibid, 28). In terms of multilevel governance, the report concludes that health expenditures of asylum seekers should be covered by the federal state to reduce the financial risk of the municipalities (ibid, 31).

The access to health care has also played a major role in reception policy debates on Arrival and so called AnKER centers (see section on housing for more details). As a matter of fact, the basic idea to concentrate refugee related services under one roof also included measures of medical screening and medical treatment. In the interest of public health, asylum seekers are not only entitled, but obliged to undergo a *health check* for infectious diseases, including an X-ray of the respiratory organs to examine for Tuberculosis. This health check is to be performed immediately after reception.³³

Given the traumatic experiences of many refugees there is a considerable demand for psychological treatment. A report on psychotherapeutic care for refugees has reviewed several surveys and held that up to 40 % of refugees show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Wächter-Raquet 2016, 32). At the same time, "for refugees the access to psychotherapist services is associated with very many hurdles. Psychosocial care for refugees is almost exclusively covered by Psychosocial Centers for Refugees and Victims of Torture (PSZ) apart from the regular health system" (ibid, translation AKN/EC).

Our interviews helped to shed further light on the actual implementation and practice of psychosocial health measures (including trauma therapy) in Lower Saxony. First of all, early diagnostics for psychosocial challenges are increasingly being included in the overall health check in form of the so-called "Protect"-questionnaire (LAB 00:14).³⁴ If psychosocial or mental health problems are detected there are different strategies and institutions to ensure appropriate treatment: All of our interlocutors referred to the Network for Traumatized Refugees in Lower Saxony (NTFN), an association which offers acute interventions in events of psychosocial crisis and helps refugees with obtaining a long-term therapy place.³⁵ The network is jointly funded by the UN Refugee Aid Organisation, the European Union as well as the federal and the regional Ministries for Family Affairs. Structurally, it consists of eight psychosocial centers in various parts of Lower Saxony. While many of our interlocutors were positive about their collaboration with NTFN, it was occasionally noticed that psychosocial support of minors needed further improvement. Furthermore, it is striking from a human rights perspective that these sensitive and integral tasks are delegated to an intermediary body, based on project funding instead of constituting a systematic action field of the public health administration.

³³ <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/416274/1c209778acafc85d6238e7e8232c5290/wd-6-009-16-pdf-data.pdf> Accessed 13/05/2020

³⁴ The acronym PROTECT stands for "Process of Recognition and Orientation of Torture Victims in European Countries to facilitate Care and Treatment". For the project website see: <https://www.ueberleben.org/en/home-en/> For the questionnaire: bit.ly/Fragebogen_dt_englisch Accessed 13/05/2020

³⁵ <https://www.ntfn.de/> Accessed 13/05/2020

Apart from the NTFN there are collaborations between municipal authorities and NGOs and local hospitals or individual psychotherapists as well as qualification schemes for volunteers to enable an early detection of psychosocial challenges along with a referral to competent and professional contact persons. Although the practical value of these efforts is undisputed, there remain a couple of structural impediments to an appropriate psychotherapeutic care for refugees, including a general scarcity of and competition for long-term therapy spaces, particularly in more rural areas. The challenges of communication and translation are, however, crucial prerequisites of psychotherapy. One of our interlocutors from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) discussed the necessity of proper translation for a sustainable integration of refugees with psychosocial issues:

In relation to the integration process we were aiming to have translation costs in the context of psychotherapy and trauma therapy covered. But not from our [responsibility] although you can argue that traumatized people cannot be included into the labour market, but the problem is much more fundamental as it concerns all aspects of integration and this is where we met such fierce resistance of the Federal Ministry of Health that the claim did not make it into the Integration Act (BMAS 00:41)

The statement illustrates, based on the specific issue of translation, how the crosscutting nature of integration politics can lead to policy outcomes to the disadvantage of the recipients, namely refugees. At the same time it underlines the instrumental understanding of policy makers regarding the relationship between psychosocial health and integration, i.e. asylum seekers should receive support in order to be able to productively participate in the labour market and not to cause any further problems.

On another note, a social worker employed by a local consortium of welfare associations pointed to the risk of refugees taking advantage of psychosocial issues in order to ameliorate their own conditions:

So, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a magic word. They know it in German. You need headache, sleep disorder and weak concentration ("Konzentrationsstörung"). And this is quite helpful for the Job Center when you need a certificate that you cannot work, for instance (Social Worker, 00:34).

In the further course of the statement our interlocutor continues criticizing this "abuse" ("Missbrauch") of psychosocial diagnostics and points out that there are refugees who are "really ill" which would lead to numerous suicide attempts since the accommodation centers are competing against each other and therefore do not want to expose themselves. It must be noted that this is a unique observation, which cannot be reproduced from other stakeholders in our sample who were in a similar position. Furthermore, from a human rights perspective, the risk of abuse (of psychosocial health measures) must by no means lead to a restriction of these measures, but rather casts light on the miserable reception conditions which encourage psychosocial self-pathologizing. Hence, it is important to complement these observations with the experiences of refugees as we do in the following subsection.

Mental Health and its Impact on Integration

Healthcare is generally accessible to asylum seekers in Germany even for those going through the reception stages of their claim. Most procedures from simple consultations at the local GP to surgery are covered by the national health system, which asylum seekers contribute to once they are employed. However, there are limitations in terms of mental health care provision. Many refugees have told us about PTSD symptoms or instances of depression and other mental disorders such as anxiety and panic attacks, however only very few have sought professional help. This corresponds closely with the studies that found a predominance of disorders associated with trauma amongst asylum seekers. During our interviews, various refugees have inquired about where to get professional advice showing that the sources of

information for such cases is not, in many cases, readily available or obvious. But even those who have found such information often have not followed through with treatment.

Besides the financially based fears or anxiety regarding approaching a mental health professional, we also see how language barriers may impede people from seeking advice. The sheer lack of available mental health professionals or even a fear from the part of refugees to be stigmatized also reduces the chances of treatment. A political activist from Turkey explains his situation:

I don't have any health problems, but I want to be treated psychologically. In fact, I'm afraid, but in the sense that I do not know the language and I know that psychologists are very busy, to get an appointment is possible after 6 months or 1 year, and they call you then. Ah, until a year passes, my psychology will be broken already. I mean, until a year waiting for a doctor there. In this sense, we tried to get one or two appointments, but we couldn't. Now, if there's a doctor I don't know, I might have trouble describing myself. When I have a doctor, I know the language, the term is usually 1 year later, or even if you don't know it, it gives you the "termin" [appointment] or puts you in the queue after 1 year. This distress is huge (TUR-M-BER2-2312)

The sense of urgency is palpable in accounts like this and, unfortunately, they are rather common amongst our data. Many of our respondents have expressed concerns with their ability to cope with not only what they had gone through before arriving in Germany, but more pressingly, what they have to endure once they cross the German border and seek asylum. A Turkish male living in a big Arrival Center in Lower Saxony for example, explains his situation:

I experienced this [depression] while I was staying at my brother's, because I was constantly in a university environment [before] where people continuously discuss things with each other. When I came to my brother's, it is a restaurant environment. People are not in the same... It made me really bored. You cannot go out from home, because you have no identity. I missed the environment of friends and being in the community, when I was alone with myself; I thought where my friend was. He was also taken into custody. He was the last person I knew in Turkey; everyone was gone – one by one. You also feel it; one of your friends is arrested every day, you check their WhatsApp, no news. So, I started to take medication at this point. Here, I said I was on medication, but I avoided it a bit because people say it to take residence permit [you need to look good] ... I said I want to visit the doctor because this medication should be used under control. They told it was not possible at that time. We waited. I arrived in [name of Arrival Center], but just as they were trying to find an appointment, they transferred me here. I arrived here, but I did not want to visit the doctor here. With the help of my brother, I am going to use it [the antidepressant medication] for six months by lowering the dosage and then cut it. Now, I have the thought of cutting the drug slowly, but being in the camp makes it difficult. I am scared of it a bit; I do not want to discontinue medication in the camp. When I am in a quieter environment, I will do it (TUR-M-LSAX2-2008)

We quote this participant at length since he exemplifies well the struggles between being medicated for depression, living in the uncertainty of life in camps and between temporary accommodation, trying hard to live a normal existence, a life with meaningful social and personal connections. Boredom is also a prevalent theme in our interviews with most participants worrying about how little they can do, how little interaction they have with locals and others, including other refugees, their relatives and friends. These may seem at first issues more connected to the reception stage. However, these participants had been in Germany for many years at the time we interviewed them and were "integrated" in other ways – i.e. some of them spoke German fluently and were even attending university or college. In this sense, it is important to put emphasis once again on the differentiation between sociocultural integration and structural integration.

An asylum seeker from Iraq living in a camp in Berlin poignantly describes his isolation.

[When I arrived here], I felt really bad. I'm not used to talking about it. If I feel very bad, I [try] to calm down. I don't want to talk to anyone about it and get reassured by the person. That tends to be the case. When I came here, I felt very bad, but I could handle it myself...Nothing made me happy or sad. In time, I talked to myself, listened to music, read, wrote. I wrote about everything...so I felt better. But I didn't talk to anyone about it. When I came here, I realized I had a problem, I got a feeling like depression...[hallucinations]. But slowly I was able to deal with it (IRAQ-M-BER2-0208)

Some of the asylum seekers to whom we spoke displayed a resourceful and resilient attitude. They identified that they had a problem and tried to address it through various methods (e.g. writing, listening to music, etc.). Others, however, felt victim of circumstances beyond their control. Like an Iranian man living in Berlin who was wrongly accused of being some sort of drug dealer, by his own fellow countrymen:

When I arrived, I didn't have that many problems because I could just apply. I didn't have to go to another city. My problems started when an Iranian person told me outside the home that I was using and selling drugs and then with the police, etc. It's a long story and I'm not going to talk about it anymore here. Then there was the interview and then one problem after another without breathing (IRA-M-BER-0911)

Situations like this challenge idealizations of refugees being a united, coherent, group governed by solidarity and goodwill. All too often, conflicts between refugees inhabiting the same camp or even the same room occur, and the result is more psychological hardships. Other pressures mount to the discomfort and even one's own family can cause further negative psychological symptoms, deepening the crisis and hindering the possibility of transitioning from one cultural sphere to another. A woman from Afghanistan describes how she suffered for years with depression and how her condition was exacerbated by a combination of different factors.

I have had nervous problems for about five years. I got headaches. I took medication in Afghanistan for two years. Because of the nerve we were also in Iran and India. We had no result. When I came here (to Germany) I went to the doctor and they examined me...[but] too little has changed. For some time I was under a lot of pressure from everywhere...[eventually] I felt a little better...[but] I was threatened by my husband's family that I have to come back to Afghanistan and why I came here? They said to my partner: "You have to get a divorce." Others thought I was unhappy because I didn't have a child... I also had pressure from the social welfare office and said: "You have to leave the apartment and go to the camp." I was so (bad) that I had no hope that I would be fine. That's why I stayed in the hospital (AFG-M-LSAX-1110)

The woman in question was able to access hospital treatment and eventually felt better after 15 days hospitalized. However, the mental health issues of many others remain untreated, in some cases for several years, until substantial damage to their personal lives is done. Negative mental health impacts on learning outcomes, on work-related tasks and even on the perception of refugees by outsiders who may label them as lazy, uncooperative, rude or uninterested when in fact they may well be suffering from the symptoms of fairly treatable conditions that unfortunately are all too often not effectively diagnosed. Mental health problems amongst refugees seem to be so widespread that refugees themselves exchange medication they are able to get without prescription and some will resort to illegal substances and alcohol in order to curtail symptoms such as insomnia, stress, anxiety, acute sadness, helplessness, anger and fear. The cramped situation in accommodation centers does not help and conflict is common amongst people living in this type of centralized accommodation. But it is often the powerlessness before the asylum system that drives many to resort to the consumption of substances they had never used before coming to Germany. A Senegalese man living in Brandenburg describes his situation.

[Upon arrival here] I was really depressed... I was smoking even weed, yeah, I never smoke weed before. Here, I started to smoke marijuana, and get high. Because I couldn't do nothing. All my thoughts was going to family, problems with my asylum, and I go to the Ausländerbehörde, I got work, then they refuse me, they take my work, I get work again, they refuse my work again, I am allowed to work, I make protocol for universities, I get Ausbildung, I have a chance to make it – they refuse that too. And on and on... they bring me down. Yeah. Because it was too much...after six months in my room, not going outside, not doing anything. Yeah... I never forget that it nearly broke my mind. After that, I started again contacting my mum, then after everything started to get me down, everything... This is not good for your mental life... (SEN-M-BRA-0807)

One Nigerian woman echoes the idea that depression comes mostly from the idleness imposed on people by the asylum process. *"It is a lot of stress. Sometimes I'm very depressed because you can't be seating there doing nothing. As a human being you are just there sleeping and eating. It is depressing."* (NIG-W-BRA 1107)

Once again, mental health issues are found in the narratives of many refugees we interviewed, indiscriminatory of gender, age group or nationality. It is quite widespread and although the causes depend on complex contextual experiences, many refugees point to the situation they face being stuck for so long in limbo between reception and integration. As a man from Iraq living in Lower Saxony explains.

I'm better [now], but a few months ago I couldn't have controlled my emotions, but today I feel stronger.

You were looking for a doctor yourself when you were not feeling well?

Yes, I also received medication that I had just taken, but then I stopped taking it. I want to be myself and heal myself and not have to take medication because I know the reason is just the new life here and I just have to get used to it.

What did you think made you so depressed?

To be alone, far away from all the people I love and learning from a new world. I have to deal with the handling here. Once I went to my clerk for something, without an appointment. So I sat down in front of her office in the hallway so that I wouldn't disturb her and she would see me sometime when she left the room, but she came out and put me down. She screamed at me because I would always do that, to come by without an appointment, and that I should leave. I felt so small and just thought that I shouldn't cry now. Not here in front of her.

Have you had or do you have support now if you are not feeling well?

Yes, my family in Iran. I speak to them. Even the partner I had here didn't do me any good here. Now that he's no longer there, I'm doing so well that I don't even need any more medication (IRA-M-LSAX-0908)

In this poignant description of struggle against a deteriorating mental health, the man quoted above shows just how impactful negative experiences with clerks, officers and officers dealing with asylum cases can be to the psychology of asylum seekers. Refugees we have interviewed have reported many forms of personal abuses against them, verbal aggressions and attitudes that deepen an already difficult psychological context formed of insecurity, self-doubt and a sense of worthlessness that is typical of individuals going through depression and other forms of mental illness. All this affects integration in various levels. For example, it affects the perception of locals vis-à-vis asylum seekers. Many of the symptoms described in our data can often be confused with cultural predispositions, or labelled as "ethnic" or as a lack of education or German language skill, etc. Meanwhile, mental health issues can affect the outcomes of education, it makes long-term employment more difficult and, in some cases, socialization becomes almost impossible.

Psychosocial Health and the Role of Religion

Religion is present in the narratives of many of our interlocutors. For instance, a woman from Nigeria in her mid-thirties told us that she was “a true believer of the Pentecostal Church. I am a committed Christian in that I put it in practice. So that is what I have to say about that” (NIG-W-GRO-20/11/18). The woman attends a church in Berlin and goes there at least twice a week. Most of the refugees from sub-Saharan Africa we interviewed displayed similar patterns of religious engagement. Many are members of Pentecostal churches and some were Catholics. There are many churches and mosques that welcome refugees through various programs and activities, many of which tend to have components of psychosocial support embedded in their practices. They can advise and guide, refugees towards psychosocial services, but they can also themselves, help those who need treatment through ritual and pastoral care. We further describe the more structural role of religion in supporting refugees, in the next section (Section VI: Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation).

However, there were not many instances during the interviews where we could safely establish a strong link between the role of religion as a coping mechanism and the betterment of the mental health of our interlocutors. For this, we believe a more focused study aimed exclusively at establishing these parameters would have to be undertaken. That said, we can surely report on a few instances where refugees indicated that religion was an important part of overcoming the hurdles imposed on them by the German asylum system or by the very act of fleeing their countries of origin in the first place. For instance, a man in his mid-fifties from Libya, although clearly a religious person, a practicing Muslim, did not attribute his capacity to overcome his troubles to his religious belief. Rather, he found strength in his family, in the belief that everything he was doing was simply part of life. When asked if he was religious, he replied:

I am 56 years old, I am married and I have seven children: three male and four female. My family is still in Libya. They live all together in my house. I am a Muslim but I don't have a problem with anyone: Christians, Jews or anyone else. I belong to a tribe (as most of us do in Libya) but my leader is a peaceful man and we do not wish any harm on anyone. (LIB-M-GRO 22/04/19)

However, when asked what gave him meaning in life, he replied:

So, I just hope that one day I can go back and live with my friends and my family so I am just following this kind of hope. So I worked for 37 years in Libya and so I have a lot of experiences so I know that I must carry on in this life. So I must go on...this life this is not our choice. (LIB-M-GRO 22/04/19)

There are many examples such as this which we could quote where interview partners indicate being religious, but when explaining what gives them meaning, religion is not mentioned explicitly. In general, many of our interlocutors are rather hesitant to talk about their beliefs. When they did comment on religious matters, it was mostly in passing and to explain that in spite of their religion, they were tolerant and peaceful. This apologetic stance is remarkable as refugees themselves seem to adhere to media and political narratives that are very present in the European context in which they now live, where religion (notably Islam and some forms of Pentecostalism) has become at times synonymous with irrationality, violence and discriminatory behaviours, with stagnation or lack of perspective. A young man in his early thirties from Senegal shows this clearly. For him, religion was not a source of meaning but rather something to keep away from:

I see religion as a kind of problem, yeah. I see it like that. I learned a lot about religion... for me, I think religion is just for crazy things... people (who are religious) don't progress, something like this. For instance my father [...] and the boys I knew before, they are always there sitting and waiting for God. But, with movement you can get something

done. Yeah. But always sitting and praying for something... Yeah. I learned, I learned a lot. (SEN-M-GRO-0807).

In this case, religion is envisaged as an impediment rather than a means of personal flourishing. Instead of religious coping mechanisms, many of our interview partners referred to the family as a source of consolation or to the wellbeing of their children as a source of motivation to move forward.

As a young refugee from Syria living in Munich described in one line: *"My mom gives me the meaning. A lot of people question my dreams and tell me that I cannot do what I want"* (SYR-M-MUN-28/11). Yet another young Syrian living in Bavaria told us: *"What gives me meaning now is work. It was different when I was in Syria. I had my fixed job and workshop there and I could think of other stuff. Here I need to start from the beginning"* (SYR-M-MUN-08/09)

A woman from Syria, married with children in her mid-thirties, also emphasizes the role of work as a coping strategy.

Before coming, my kids were giving my life a meaning. After arriving here, my kids then work give my life a meaning. Work makes you feel that you are doing something good in life. No one affects this idea. This is my idea and I want to apply it. (SYR-F-MUN-23/08)

Meaning was attributed to many things, including a mundane driving license. We could speculate that meaning seems to be associated with concrete, day to day activities and objects that bring a sense of normality to lives that have been scattered and chaotic. These things give people a sense of place, a sense that life is moving somewhere "normal". A man from Iran living in Lower Saxony describes this well.

What do I want? First of all, I would like to move to a big city, go to work or start an apprenticeship and I would like to have my dog with me again. I would also very much like to get my driver's license here. I had a driver's license in Iran. Yes, I even drove to the supermarket on the next street, so you can imagine what it's like now. That gives me hope to keep going and to do things. (IRA-M-GOE-11/10).

Many of our interlocutors underlined the importance of children. A couple from Serbia (he a Muslim and she an Orthodox Christian) who were interviewed together, explained what gave them meaning and what was their strategy for coping with the hurdles experienced.

Well, the children. The children, we only look out for their future. We try to make life better for us as well but we mainly look out for our children. Everything we do, we do for them, so they're not stuck in Serbia without anything to eat or anything, it's winter, there's no work. It's much better to come here, it's not about food, if you're really in need you'll go through trash to feed the kids. But firewood and all that is expensive back home right now isn't it? When you come here you have heating, it's peaceful, safe, your children can eat. That's the main thing – children. We're married for 10 years now. We only have two children, there was a four-year gap between them, we didn't want to make any more children because you need to provide for them, same as my mother and father did not provide for me. I wouldn't want something like that for my children. (BL-M-F-GOE-18/01)

Once again, it may well be that their respective religions allowed for them to have a more resilient approach to their circumstances, however, with the methodology at our disposal, this could not be investigated to that extent. None of this is a form of denying the importance of religion in meaning making of course. A woman from Iran in fact even describes a conversion experience occurring during transit, between her fleeing Iran and her arrival in Germany. She converted from Islam to Christianity.

Before I came here I honestly had nothing to do with religion and the reasons why I left the country were not due to a conversion. It was different things. I may have been to

Croatia, where I myself discovered faith in Christianity. Before that, I always thought, if necessary, I will give a conversion as a reason for flight in Germany. But then I discovered faith. Last week I even gave a testimony in the church. (IRA-W-Berlin 05/12)

Likewise, a man from Cameroon in his mid-forties describes how his religion was a source of meaning to him in times when he felt he could no longer cope.

Yeah, actually I'm – in time I became so dispirited, I remember that I was attending a Pentecostal church, I attempted to join a church here, but I could not find a church because the way I used to go to Church (back in my country) is different, different from the way they do church here. I wanted to attend, and (eventually) I found the one I am going to, about a month ago. It is a Church from Togo, it has a Togo action, in Frankfurter Allee, it put me in contact with one woman and she put me in the choir. So now I attend the choir, the choir group here in our village. So we have a choir on Tuesday, on Friday was yesterday. Me personally, I do pray, yeah, I'm a Christian, I pray, I have faith. I believe that my faith will make me be stand. Yeah. (CAM-M-BRA-0707).

Indeed, we have found evidence to suggest that the work of confessional organizations and volunteers have offered refuge to many refugees who found themselves in need of some form of comfort or psychosocial support.

Religion plays an important role both in the structural and sociocultural integration of refugees in Germany. It is not a topic that is overtly discussed in the literature on forced migration and few scholars have addressed this with much vigour. However, it is clearly an important element that plays a part in facilitating certain aspects of life in Germany for asylum seekers. It can also alter the perception that others have of refugees as in the more obvious case of girls wearing a hijab or Muslim men fasting during Ramadan. For instance, a Syrian woman from Munich was somewhat surprised with the discrepancy she felt between living in what she considered to be a liberal, cosmopolitan city and the responses she received vis-à-vis her religious practices.

I don't allow the negative stuff to affect me and cause me an internal problem, but I was subjected to many negative stuff. For example, once I applied for a job and I was rejected because of my hijab. I was shocked. I was questioning myself: could this happen to me in Germany? Can still people living here think like that? And in Munich? One of the best cities in the world? (SYR-W-BAV-0309)

In the same vein, a man from Syria describes his and his wife's experience of being a Muslim in Berlin after their arrival in 2015.

I practice my religious beliefs but sometimes because my wife wears the hijab. Sometimes we feel we are discriminated/humiliated by people here and there because of that. But I practice my beliefs and I go to the mosque. (SYR-M-BER2-0308)

Similarly, a Syrian woman attending university in Göttingen felt her clothes made her stand out, attracting unwanted negative attention.

I was the only foreigner in class. I felt not accepted especially that I have the hijab. They had a different perception regarding me and they were not even talking to me. You know? I was having a bad feel. Like seeing a German guy laughing with his friend and laughing and stopping when I came [close]. He tried to hide it but I could see that he is conservative when dealing with me. Even the way I look. The only pressure I have other than my studies, is the way I look (SYR-W-LSAX-0812)

A Muslim man from Iraq describes his difficulty in continuing his religious practice in Berlin.

[I don't go to the mosque] regularly like in Iraq. Here, what I feel here is that life is work, work, work. You always have to be innovative and if you have to go to a mosque you

need time. Because if I want to go to a mosque I have to spend two hours and then wait and then come back so I haven't been to a mosque here other than two or three times especially in Ramadan actually and for example, if I want to pray it is difficult to do this in the university because there is no space for Muslims and I feel shy to do it in the middle of it in front of people. I feel shy. So it is quite difficult for me. In Iraq that's no problem. But here...I have to do my praying inside my room where no one sees me (IRAQ-M-BER1-3007)

This interlocutor points to an important element of sociocultural integration, which is the ability of a person to be able to practice their religious beliefs in the country of arrival. In Germany it is not that common to find chaplaincy and/or “prayer rooms” in university or other public buildings. People who find the need to pray in such environments may indeed find it awkward or embarrassing to practice their religious rituals in these spaces, which in turn can induce a lack of routines and eventual sense of disconnection. The important message to convey is that even in cosmopolitan centres such as Berlin and Munich, refugees who attempt to practice their religious beliefs often encounter resistance from outsiders in the form of unwanted negative remarks often in the shape of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours on the verge on xenophobia and racism.

On the other hand, and on a more positive note, various other examples in our data, both in the Christian and Muslim traditions, show the impact of the important pastoral role created by small congregations of local religious groups who actively support refugees in all their needs. In our sample, these are predominantly Christian (Lutheran) communities as well as, diaspora congregations from Africa and the Middle East, both Christian and Muslim, who are active in urban environments with a pluralistic religious market. When asked about whether her transition from Nigeria to Germany changed her perceptions or her beliefs, a Nigerian woman living in Brandenburg explains.

For me, no, not really. I have been a true believer back in Nigeria. I came and made a choice. In Berlin there is a pastor and his wife and they welcomed me and...when I had just arrived here in Germany I was going to an Evangelische Kirche in [town in Brandenburg]. When I was in [village in Brandenburg] I also attended an Evangelische Kirche there of which I attended for three weeks to a month, something like that, until I got the contact of this church in Berlin. I am a full member in that church now. Yeah, so nothing negative, only positive changes (NIG-W-BRA-2011).

The woman in question is somewhat representative of a parcel of our interviewees who took shelter in the traditional European Evangelical communities in Germany and who tried to adapt to a new religious context where their ethnic churches are not necessarily available to them. Even though, contact with diasporic religious communities is made. Refugees gain an immediate boost of support and the churches gain new members.

In general, our interlocutors have been positive about the role of local faith-based (and secular) volunteers and organizations. There is also some distinction made between Germany as a state and its citizens and between state officials and those who work at the accommodation centres and with whom refugees have a more flexible, day to day relationship. Religious communities, both Christian and Muslim, as well as private volunteers and volunteers' associations, secular or religiously oriented, are making a positive impact on the lives of refugees in the country. Many others use the openness of some religious institutions to try to feel more integrated. A local Evangelical community in Brandenburg, as many others in Berlin and all over Germany, invites refugees to be part of their local choir and this has now become a common practice. Local football clubs open their training grounds for refugees and often invite them to be part of their league teams. Such opportunities for exchange and dialogue, for sharing common interests, usually produce important connections between guest and host communities. However, it is not an easy task to assess whether these well-intended practices can have a significant effect on the integration of refugees into local society. Well intentioned as these programs may be, through football or choir music, differences can in fact be

exacerbated, spaces demarcated (ethnic, linguistic, cultural religious lines are drawn) and power relations established (we describe some of these initiatives in more depth in WP4 – see Chemin and Nagel 2020).

Summary

In this section, we have approached the issue of the psychosocial health of refugees and how they cope with the difficulties emerging from forced migration and life in Germany. We also briefly touched on the potential role of religion in helping refugees develop coping mechanisms to deal with the barriers they encounter, may they be physical or psychosocial.

We began by pointing out that the German health care system is marked by a complex governance structure, which involves the regional states as well as societal bodies, such as sickness funds. We also noted that health insurance is mandatory and divided into state health insurance and private health insurance, which both rely on contributions (paid by employers and employees); for welfare recipients and special groups, such as asylum seekers, the costs of health care are remunerated by the respective social welfare office. However, much of this does not include provisions for mental health treatment. During our interviews with refugees, we have not found evidence that there had been a systematic screening for PTSD or any other mental disorder. Given the traumatic experiences of many refugees, there is a considerable demand for psychological treatment. It has been estimated that up to 40 % of refugees show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. However, the access to psychotherapist services is associated with very many hurdles. Psychosocial care for refugees is almost exclusively covered by Psychosocial Centers for Refugees and Victims of Torture (PSZ) apart from the regular health system.

We note that some regional states have proactively concerned themselves with the issue of psychosocial health of refugees. If psychosocial or mental health problems are detected, there are different strategies and institutions to ensure appropriate treatment through a network of organizations some of which are jointly funded by the UN Refugee Aid Organisation, the European Union as well as the federal and the regional Ministries for Family Affairs. However, the psychosocial support of minors needs further improvement and it is striking from a human rights perspective that these highly sensitive and integral tasks are delegated to an intermediary body, based on project funding instead of constituting a systematic action field of the public health administration.

Our interviews with refugees clearly indicate the negative impact of untreated mental health issues on the livelihoods of refugees in the areas we studied. For instance, depressive episodes have prevented some of our interlocutors from being able to improve their living conditions. We have also noted how refugees experience language to be a barrier in terms of finding appropriate treatment and how the restrictions of free movement imposed on them have helped exacerbate their mental health problems as many are forced into idleness and to live a life without privacy and often in isolation from wider society.

However, we also have also found that many refugees have found comfort in meaning making systems that may or may not be influenced by their religious belief and practice. Many mentioned how they have been able to cope with emotional burdens by focusing on their children, by being supported by family and friends and even the value of mundane things, such as being able to drive a car or do some shopping. Hence, what refugees seem to crave the most is a sense of normality in life. That said, religious communities and belief systems could make an important impact in the lives of refugees in Germany. We have seen numerous cases where confessional organizations and volunteers provided individual support and filled some of the hole of the official reception system. Furthermore, some of our interview partners who suffered from the effects of mental health issues, have found comfort in activities and the pastoral care of these people and organizations.

6. Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation

Recently, there has been a growing body of research on the civic participation and social engagements vis-à-vis refugees. However, little is still known about the civic engagement of refugees and their sense of belonging and citizenship. For this reason, in this section we are interested in the perceptions of refugees regarding their sense of belonging and participation in Germany. Do refugees actively seek to engage with German society, its culture, and politics? If so, to what end or intent? How do refugees feel about their place in German society? Do they engage politically with issues related to their situation or even more broadly with issues beyond that scope? Do they remain connected to issues back “home”? These are not exhaustive questions of course and since this is a relatively new field, in this section we hope to instigate even more questions than we answer.

We begin with a very brief description of the modalities of naturalization and citizenship in Germany whilst quickly reviewing some existing quantitative data before we turn to the experiences of our interlocutors in terms of belonging and civic engagement.

Modalities of Naturalization and Citizenship in Germany

It is beyond the scope of this report to provide an in-depth discussion of the process of naturalization, its legal underpinnings and (substantial) transformation within the last decades.³⁶ In principle, there are three ways to acquire German citizenship: by descent (at least one parent is German), by birth on German territory (if at least one parent has been legally in Germany for at least eight years and has the right to permanent residence) or by naturalization.³⁷

According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, in order to be naturalized as a German citizen,

a person has to have lived legally in Germany for at least eight years and possess the appropriate residence permit. Foreigners who have successfully completed an integration course are eligible for naturalization after seven years. Persons wishing to become naturalized citizens must also declare their allegiance to our constitution and have a sufficient command of the German language. Knowledge of German is an essential prerequisite for integration into our society. Candidates for naturalization must be familiar [sic] with the legal system, society and living conditions in the Federal Republic of Germany (naturalization test) and be able to support themselves without recourse to social assistance, unless this is due to circumstances beyond their control; nor can they have committed any serious criminal offences. In addition, they must give up their previous citizenship.³⁸

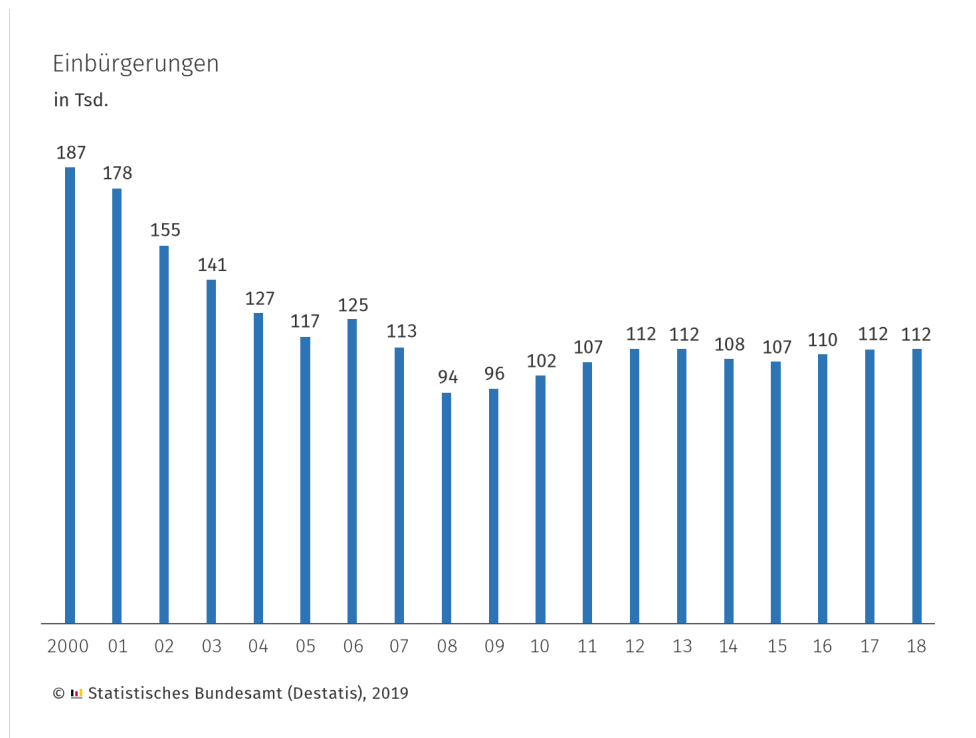
The Federal Office of Statistics has shown the number of naturalizations has remained quite constant during the reporting period of this report:

³⁶ A detailed overview can be found here: https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/faqs/EN/themen/migration/staatsang/Erwerb_der_deutschen_Staatsbuergerschaft_durch_Eingbuengerung_en.html. Accessed 13/05/2020

³⁷ <https://mediendienst-integration.de/migration/staatsbuergerschaft.html>. Accessed 13/05/2020

³⁸ https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/faqs/EN/themen/migration/staatsang/Erwerb_der_deutschen_Staatsbuergerschaft_durch_Eingbuengerung_en.html Accessed 13/05/2020

Figure 4: Number of Naturalizations



Source: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2019/05/PD19_203_12511.html
Accessed 13/05/2020

Since the introduction of a new citizenship law in 2000 more than 2.3 Million people have been naturalized as German citizens, around one out of three applicants in this timeframe were from Turkey. According to estimations by the *Mediendienst Integration*, there are about 5 Million people in Germany who would fulfill the formal requirements for naturalization, which leads to an annual realized potential of naturalization of around two per cent.³⁹

Within the scope of this report, it should be clear that for newly arrived refugees, naturalization is a long-term perspective since they must document several years of legal residence in Germany. All the more it is important to explore their informal sense of belonging and being welcome. According to the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, a majority of the German population supports the view that refugees will on the longer run enrich the country both culturally and economically. While around three out of five persons agree that Germany should continue receiving refugees, a majority of respondents would like to delimit the numbers of incoming refugees.⁴⁰ While several independent opinion polls have confirmed the overall pattern of cautious optimism combined with more restrictive stances for the future handling of refugee reception, there are hardly any studies on the perceptions of the refugees themselves. An earlier study on recognized asylum seekers who arrived between 2008 and 2012 showed that four out of five refugees were aiming at permanent residence and naturalization in Germany (BAMF 2014, 8). At the same time, a substantial minority of the respondents reported experiences of discrimination, particularly on the real estate market (ibid, 195-196). In terms of civic engagement, 17 % of the recognized refugees were members of an association or organization, a lower rate than other persons with

³⁹ See footnote 37.

⁴⁰ https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SVR_Integrationsbarometer_2018.pdf#page=15 Accessed 13/05/2020

a migration background (ibid, 201-202). The most important sectors of engagement were sports and religion.

Based on our interviews with local administrators and NGO representatives we understand that, by and large, they do not actively empower asylum seekers to mobilize their interests. In one case, a social worker provided an extensive account of what was supposed to be a democratic education measure:

We tried to train political participation by appointing a spokesperson for each corridor ("Flursprecher"), so we organized election so that each corridor could vote a spokesperson. It has not worked out. Since the people do not know how to do this yet. That is a long process, which has taken us 500 years as well (Social Worker, 00:14).

The statement should be read on two layers: on the one hand, it describes an initiative of political mobilization, which obviously did not have the desired effects. On the other, it points to the inherently paternalistic nature of this and other endeavors of value education as it generously attributes the alleged democratic deficit of refugees to an overall backwardness. In the further course of the quotation, our interlocutor seriously calls into question the acceptance of democratic procedures by refugees and draws a caricature of (Arab) refugees being stuck in conspiracy theories. On a more encouraging note, another interlocutor who is working for a consulting body for refugees told us about an initiative of refugees to be elected for the local integration council, a municipal measure to ensure the political participation of immigrants.

Living and Belonging in the Context of Asylum Seeking in Germany

In this section, we will explore some of the perceptions of refugees regarding what it means to them to be integrated and what the strategies are they use to make Germany their "home". The following section on the topics of citizenship, civic engagement and the feeling of belonging will be centred predominantly on the sociocultural, rather than the structural elements of refugee integration in Germany. That is because the narratives of refugees themselves tend to be framed in a more emotive and affective manner.

Political Engagement and Interest in the News

Some of our interlocutors, those who had access to higher education and benefited from a middle-class position in their countries of origin, displayed more interest in political engagement when in Germany. For instance, a 40-year-old man from Cameroon, a former literature student, was overtly seeking to engage German students into discussions regarding cross-country comparative talks on politics and asylum rights.

...last year we got organized with a political group in Potsdam with some students from the university. We discussed different political points of view and we discussed about the differences about the politics in Cameroon and here in Germany, how we can have our voices heard here and I participated in these discussions in Potsdam. Also, in Berlin. But then I started to work, and I didn't have more time for that...we don't have a political group where I live now [a small village in Brandenburg]. In Potsdam and Berlin yes, even some political group asked me to come and talk to them. I even went to Hamburg to meet with some political groups there. I travelled to some other city in Germany for some political meetings as well. So, I am kind of involved. (CAM-M-BRA-2307)

Our data indicates that refugees living in more populated urban areas seemed to be more politically engaged than those living in the countryside. One explanation could be that geography limits the level of engagement one can have with wider society since opportunities for engagement in urban centres are abundant whereas in smaller communities, access to like-minded individuals, protest groups, politically motivated organizations, etc. are for most part either non-existent or not open to foreigners. Here we see once again how deficits in

elements of structural integration (housing, for example) can have a direct impact on elements of sociocultural integration (political participation and civic engagement, in this case).

Some refugees report that they often search the media for news about changes in asylum laws. Equally important seems to be information on their home countries. This is often linked to a desire to return but also to learn more about what their families and friends, those left behind, are going through and whether there is hope of improvement so that a possible return can be contemplated. Again, context and positionality matter and as such, it really depends on the history of the person and how they see their place (or lack of a place) in German society. For example, when asked about whether he followed the news on politics and society in Germany, an Iraqi Kurdish man living in Berlin replied:

Yes, and I found out here that Germany, with its arms deliveries, co-finances most of the wars [in the Middle East]. I know that their tanks are there. I keep the news going... if you as a Kurd see German tanks in Syria, you cannot integrate yourself here, but only become another Turk who lives here in a parallel society. Every German who can understand this will be able to be close to me (IRAQ-M-BER2-0208)

The man in question seems to link the capacity to feel integrated in Germany with what Germany does abroad as a political entity. This highly moralistic way of thinking creates for him a situation where he feels he is behind enemy lines somewhat – living with those who help cause the chaos that led him to flee his country in the first place. Despite its critical tone the statement underlines how politically minded and engaged refugees can be and how this heightened awareness to what is happening at state level, economics, geopolitics can interfere with their personal sense of belonging in German society. When asked the same question (whether she follows the news in Germany or elsewhere), a woman from Iran says:

I am interested. Because of the language, I don't follow the news closely. However, I always keep up to date somehow. Sometimes I also check news websites in Persian, which discuss "Mutti" [Angela] Merkel. I also know that my status here does not yet play a role in society, but I think it is important to inform yourself (IRA-M-LSax-1110)

Despite language barriers, the easy access to news from around the world allows for people to remain connected. In our data, a particular focus on Angela Merkel was prevalent. Perhaps it is her attitude towards refugees, and perhaps it is a more pragmatic way to look at the direction to which asylum policies are moving. Merkel's speeches tend to set the tone of what is to come, and refugees seem very aware of that. On the other hand, it is interesting how our interlocutor perceives that her status as a refugee does not allow her to participate fully in German society. She cannot see how her person, ideas, or even her presence can have an impact on the social context, which surrounds her. It shows a feeling of disconnection from the German society that is also present in some of the other interviews we conducted. A Syrian woman living in Munich expresses a similar disconnection whilst emphasizing the language barrier.

I would like to know about these issues in Germany, but I can't because of the language. We even got a television, but I only get the information through the pictures. I cannot understand. I follow all the news in Syria through my parents and the Internet and any possible other way. I would like to know about anything happening there. I would not like to be involved in any political activities in Germany. I ran away from politics in Syria and all these issues. What should I do with the politics in Germany? (SYR-W-BAV-0309)

Others have taken the opposite view or feel rather differently. It is imperative to be connected *only* to the most immediate surroundings and not think or react to news from elsewhere. A Turkish man living in Berlin for example keeps an eye on the situation in Turkey. However, he feels that his time is better spent focusing on issues he can have an impact on. As he explains:

I follow Turkish politics...I participated in the protests against Erdogan ... [but] I want to do something related to the city, so it's a little something for me to get involved in the city. Of course, I am aware of Turkish politics, of course I follow it, but I do not establish my life upon Turkish politics. I am establishing my life from the general world agenda, so I'm establishing it upon the current situation in Berlin. I want to join when there's a protest against rents for example. I mean that (TUR-M-BER2-2312)

Other refugees are specific about searching for news related to changes in asylum policies, as a man from Eritrea living in Brandenburg explains:

Actually, we Google what's new. What new law is coming now, we actively search for these things. Sometimes we get shocked because we hear some new law is coming...so unless you are accepted, that is a big relief. But unless you get that paper, you always live in fear. Because you get papers now and then you hear something about people thinking that we (refugees) should get out so this impacts us even to learn the language very well (ERI-M-BRA-0907)

This is a common narrative we encounter throughout the interviews. The state of being constantly anxious regarding one's status makes it feel like deportation is perhaps just around the corner. As the man in question explains, this has an impact on life in general including language learning and overall living conditions.

Volunteers who help Refugees, Refugees who are Volunteers and Government Officials

Many refugees have showed wide engagement with local society whenever the opportunities appear and there are numerous anecdotal cases, we could include here of locals seeking to support refugees. Despite the eminent problem of raising conflictual attitudes and behaviours, perhaps because of the larger context of the shared experience of flight, some refugees show solidarity to other asylum seekers through volunteering. Some mentioned how they turn their attention to helping other refugees in need through German-organized charity organizations as "a way to give something back". A man from Cameroon in his early 40s, when living in an accommodation centre in Potsdam, felt compelled to join one of these initiatives.

...we were in a camp and many people came there and spoke with us and gave us some basic things and helped us with the language, with German. In one month there I was able to learn the basics of the language: the alphabet, some basic words: table, book, etc...[with the help of] some volunteers. Now, some months I work there like a volunteer myself. You know, I like to help, when I have the possibility to help someone. I help the other refugees, I give information and some basic things like that – where to go, what to do. That's why I worked last year also with BFD; it was a program from the German "Bundesfreiwilligendienst" (federal volunteer service). I have now a volunteer's card (CAM-M-BRA-2307)

Refugees who turn volunteers are not uncommon. In fact, volunteering is often a fulfilment of religious or spiritually guided ethical or moral codes displayed by some of the asylum seekers we interviewed. There is often a close correspondence between the individualized experience of being a refugee and feeling the need to show solidarity with others undergoing the process of asylum. It goes beyond ethnic or religious affinity and it is particularly noticeable amongst refugees living in central accommodation due to physical closeness and daily contact. Sometimes this solidarity is mediated through Christian or Muslim charity organizations or, as is the case of the man quoted above, through secular volunteer organizations. More often, however, it is an individual expression based on gratuitous empathy.

One other consistent theme running through our interviews is the recognition of the value of volunteers as facilitators of integration. Usually, the overwhelmingly positive narratives about volunteers and NGO's are defined in contrast to discourses projecting the federal government

as inefficient regarding the reception and integration of refugees into German society. For instance, a 33-year-old filmmaker from Turkey describes some of her experiences with volunteers whilst criticizing what she perceives to be as an uncaring government.

I can never forget the labour of the volunteer people...coming to the Wohnheim every day. For example, there was a woman, 90 years old, coming every day, and tried to teach German, even if there was only one person there. Or helped people who cannot go to the doctor...People who embrace kids and provide education and moral and material support totally, and I can never forget them...NGOs are more interested in refugees more than the state. I can say that (TUR-W-BER3-2412)

The difference in attitudes should perhaps be placed within the context of the personalized contact volunteers are able to offer as opposed to impersonal positions officers and government workers must necessarily adopt in their positions of authority. Another reason for these differences in perception is found in the many stories of abuse of power, maltreatment, racism and other negative behaviour and attitudes reported by refugees during the asylum process, all of which leave a negative impression of the work of government with regards to asylum even if in practice it is the government who provides for most of the basic needs of refugees. When asked about how he felt during his interactions with officials, a Syrian man in his mid-20s living in Berlin replied:

It makes me angry. It makes me really angry because I can see it that they don't care about it. They are just using us for their...like, just trying to use us for their benefits, you know. All of them to be honest. And that makes me feel like: "come on, I am not an object, I am a person. You know? (SYR-M-BER-2807)

It seems that the very objectivity needed from the part of officers to perform their work is also the cause of most of the discomfort felt by refugees. Refugees are often treated as cases, which must be scrutinized and tested through a triage where one's identity, health, gender, cultural background, linguistic abilities, education, religiosity, psychology are all questioned and tried. Sometimes, the unbalanced power relations between refugees and those assigned to preside over their interests translate into both physical and verbal abuse. Many refugees for instance have had their belongings searched through without a warrant or simply been thrown out of centralized residential units without warning or real explanation, as a woman from Afghanistan describes:

I got a lot of pressure from the social services office for a while and that was negative for me. They took my room away and sent me to a camp. They cleared everything in my room, and I had to leave the room, otherwise they said the police were coming. [they were] from the social welfare office. She said, "You have to leave the room. You came here for business; you came here from this way and you must go back like that. We will not give you any money. You must go to camp." That was a very bad situation (AFG-W-LSAX-1710)

While this often happens during the reception period where refugees are frequently moved from place to place as their asylum cases are tried and re-tried, it forms part of a more general notion of power asymmetry which is associated with experiences of being labelled and treated. Throughout the process of asylum in Germany, there is a systemic attempt to identify and categorize people into those whose asylum claim are deemed valid and those who supposedly use the right to asylum to emigrate. We shall not comment on the merits of this process at this point. Rather, we simply argue that these are some of the reasons why refugees tend to have such negative experiences when interacting with local and federal officials and governments. Another reason for this could be misunderstandings based on the lack of German language proficiency as well as profound cultural differences in behaviours and attitudes. When referring to her interactions with people around the area where she lives, a woman from Cameroon in her early 30s described some negative episodes whilst pointing to the possible cause of those experiences.

When you cannot express yourself, well, then people are not very open [to you] or show empathy, because of a lack of language skills, then there is too much space for misunderstanding. Africa and Europe are two different worlds. And it is not simple to explain so when you have no language...it is very difficult. Europeans and Africans are very different people and as we say in French, "things can get rather confused" (CAM-W-BRA-1007)

Overall, it would perhaps be premature to attribute all maltreatment or negative experiences reported by refugees as cases of discriminatory behaviour and attitudes. Accounts of discrimination and racism may also be evoked out of frustration with the inertia of administrative procedures for example, in particular because of the language barrier and the particularly complex nature of interactions between refugees and government officials or even local civilians who are not involved in any way with the asylum process. This disclaimer, however, is not a denial that refugees in Germany suffer from racism and other forms of discrimination since there are various explicit and unambiguous accounts of these negative experiences, which we describe in the following section.

Xenophobia, Racism & Discrimination

None of this disqualifies reports of blatant discrimination and racism towards asylum seekers of course. For instance, a young medical student from Syria who was accepted for an *Ausbildung* in a clinic in Lower Saxony describes how she suffered being harassed at work based on her religion.

...once I got rejected because of my hijab. But that was a minor incident. The majority were positive. It is nice that the doctors accepted me, especially that I have to communicate with the patients. Only once a patient did not accept me because of my hijab and he said that he will not enter the room if I don't exit it. It was a shared clinic and a doctor was always coming to me and saying: Hey Burqa!" I was pretty new and I didn't know how to go into discussions. But I was understanding everything. I was not comfortable in dealing with him (SYR-W-LSAX-0712)

The headscarf is of course a salient issue in public debates on Islam in Germany and throughout Europe. Hence, the episode registered here is part of a wider context in which to adhere to Islamic traditions is to betray "European" (in this case German) "values". A man from Syria in his early 20s also thinks that *"The obstacle is when I apply for a job and they don't want to meet me because I am born in Damascus or I have a migration background or something. But when they meet me everything turns ok"* (SYR-M-LSAX-2710). In both cases, we see two different aspects of discrimination. The first is the overt case where pejorative comments or clear non-verbal signs are made vis-a-vis another person. The other is perceived or subjective discrimination by the refugee who believes the rejection was based on his or her origin rather than qualification. The latter case is the more common form of reported discrimination in our sample. At the same time, a good number of refugees have reported feeling isolated and have little contact with their German colleagues or neighbours. A 34-year-old Syrian man believes that

...That's life in Germany. Sometimes we smile at each other on the bus stop. There is one neighbour who is aggressive and shows that she is unhappy when she sees us. I try to focus on my family and sometimes have social relations with friends... [but]... We don't have any contacts with neighbours (SYR-M-LSAX-2710)

One woman from Nigeria for instance reports on what she sees as clearly overt forms of racist behavior and attitudes toward her daily:

The racism is too much. I don't know, maybe because I'm living in a village also, I know that the German people are so racist, they are very, very racist, like where I live, people

used to look at you like there's not even – like they never even hear that there is black race. Sometimes you pass people who spit, sometimes you pass people who throw things at you. So that aspect alone is really, really bad (NIG-W-BRA 1107)

A woman from Syria reports similar racist behavior suffered in public.

...sometimes when you are walking in the street old people start looking at you. They are racist and sometimes they even start talking to you. They don't like refugees. For example, they approach you and ask you about something specific. You don't know the answer, so they start saying: yes anyway you came here just to eat, sleep and get money from the job center (SYR-W-LSAX-0712)

Many of our interlocutors pointed to instances of structural racism in the German refugee bureaucracy, be it the BAMF, the "Ausländerbehörde" (foreigners' registration office) or the "Sozialamt" (social assistance office) and attribute many of the difficulties they face to these discriminatory attitudes. At the same time, the previous examples underline the scope and quality of discriminatory experiences in the everyday life of refugees in Germany. These negative and sometimes traumatic incidents may add to a general sense of not being welcome which may have severe consequences in terms of sociocultural integration such as deepening a sense of alienation from German society whilst creating a barrier to learn the German language, to become interested in German culture or politics more broadly or even to feel inclined to engage with their hosts in day to day interactions.

Cultural Barriers and Limits to Adaptation: Individuals and Community

The situations described before happening in the reception phases of the asylum process, (see Chemin and Nagel 2019) as well as during the integration period, where adaptation to the new society and culture takes shape. While many of our interlocutors faced the challenges of acculturation and assimilation, they found it hard to detach themselves from their cultural upbringing. A 30-year-old man from Iraq explains the problem:

In the first few months [in Germany] I was astonished by how the relationship between people are [here]. So, for instance, I spent 30 years in Iraq and I never slept with a woman. That's because if I wanted to have sexual intercourse, I'd have to marry and this was impossible because if you marry [in Iraq] you will be responsible for the living of your wife and family. And you can't do that actually because you don't have a job...So when I came here, it was difficult for me, yes...But I saw that...everyone is responsible for him or herself. It was a strange feeling. But at the same time, I don't have the courage to do it like they do. Because I spent 30 years in a culture, a very different culture and here... yes, it is free but there is something inside that tells me I can't do that because of the ethics of the past...so I can understand the situation here, the culture is open, but I still feel the presence of my past, of my culture (IRAQ-M-BER1-3007)

Apart from cultural differences, which can make intimate relations or overall social relations difficult to navigate, the ways in which familial ties are enacted can both be beneficial and detrimental to integration. For instance, the same refugee from Iraq quoted above describes how different he perceives family life to be in Iraq as opposed to Germany: "You know, in Iraq your nieces, your cousins...family life is larger than this so one person might have hundreds of relatives so yeah, they are my relatives and friends".

In his understanding, life in Germany means being an individual person who is responsible for his own acts, associated with a deeply privatized sense of self. However, this comes at the cost of a loss of a sense of community. We note that there are negative feelings of disconnection reported by refugees, feelings of alienation from German society. Isolation and lack of "integration" is explained in terms of a lack of deeper, more meaningful, interactions between strangers in the public sphere.

“Too much Integration”: Acculturation, Assimilation and Ethnic Animosity⁴¹

Often refugees who could be “integrated” from outside have still a difficult time in feeling completely settled in Germany. As a Syrian man, a father of four, explains, sometimes the problem is precisely that one is too well integrated.

So, the only thing that always affects me psychologically is that every day I hear the news concerning our situation, with regards to protection... “we will protect you for a certain amount of time but then when things get better in your country you will go back”. Even if it is getting better in my country, the regime will be the same and they know everything about us, and we don’t feel comfortable. If the regime changes, maybe its ok. But if the regime is the same then the problem is same... than...so this kind of news that makes us unsure of whether we can stay here or not makes us concerned. So I spent a lot of money trying to get the apartment and the children also they don’t even speak Arabic now that they learned German so what I was thinking was that I thought that I got a place and now I got a life to live and I can stay forever ...so I spent a lot of time and I worked and I put a lot of effort and time and still I don’t feel comfortable because I feel that maybe there will be one day when I have to leave the country (SYR-M-BER-2807)

When the children of refugees can no longer speak their mother tongue because they have been perfectly assimilated into the German educational system, in the event of them returning to Syria, it is to their own country of birth to which they will struggle to integrate. Although such repatriation may never become a reality, the fear of this happening is very real amongst even the most integrated and settled refugees. Here we do well to be alert to the fact that there is another side of integration according to the perspective of refugees. Some have argued that there can also be “too much integration” as in the case of children who are so well integrated that they no longer identify with their parents’ culture, language or traditions.

Another aspect of integration worth mentioning is the relationship *between* refugee communities. When life in Germany takes the shape of communal, shared, living amongst populations of immigrants, the result can be conflicting attitudes and behaviours based on cultural differences, e.g. between Middle Eastern and African refugees. We can expect such animosities to occur just as regularly as animosity between refugees and native German citizens. A refugee from Libya in his mid-fifties explains some of the difficulties arising in shared spaces as well as tensions between people from different backgrounds and generations:

Well, I find it difficult. I suffered a lot so far. Much discrimination from Germans but also from other refugees. In the Wohnheim, a Cameroonian man attacked me with a knife just because I am Libyan. Also, Syrians don’t like me because they were badly treated

⁴¹ *Acculturation* is a process of social, psychological, and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society. Acculturation is a process in which an individual adopts, acquires, and adjusts to a new cultural environment. Individuals of a differing culture try to incorporate themselves into the new more prevalent culture by participating in aspects of the more prevalent culture, such as their traditions, but still hold onto their original cultural values and traditions (Berry & Sam 1997). By *assimilation* we are referring to cultural assimilation or more precisely, the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a dominant group or assume the values, behaviours, and beliefs of another group. There are obvious similarities between acculturation and assimilation of course, however, that does not mean they mean the same thing for assimilation could also involve the so-called additive acculturation wherein, instead of replacing the ancestral culture, an individual expands their existing cultural repertoire (Spielberger 2004; Abe 2017). When we propose the usage of the term *ethnic animosity* we do not mean “ethnic conflict”, since ethnic conflict occurs between two or more contending ethnic “groups” (Kaufmann 2001). Rather, ethnic animosity here is meant to refer to forms of abuse or violence occurring between individuals who base their reasoning for doing so on the ethnicity of the other person: “you are a lazy Senegalese” or “you Muslims stink of garlic” for instance (both are real life examples we encountered).

in Libya. So, they all think they can mistreat me because of the experiences they had in the past in my country. But also, I am older and sometimes the other younger people living in my room do a lot of noise, they play videogame until 5 in the morning and use drugs and I say: "stop that now" and they tell me to shut up and things like that. But the Africans are the worst. They drink and fight and sell drugs in Berlin and I must sit there and watch all that. I have had many problems like that with people ... I do have some friends but my life here is not easy (LIB-M-BRA 2204)

Other refugees also touched on the issue of the integration of older refugees into German society. A young (23 years) Syrian man living in Lower Saxony makes the point that, for him

Integration should be linked to age. A man who is 50 or 60 years cannot integrate in this German society. Their traditions and ideas are different, and we have some traditions that are not in common. Some age groups cannot integrate. The younger age groups who go to the kindergartens and schools and have German friends integrate very easily. The middle age group who is doing language courses needs to work on its own integration. With the age of 20 and above. I should go within the Germans and have contact with them and not wait them to come to us, because they will not. It is different in schools and kindergartens because the kids are equal: Arabs, Chinese, Germans...all together. But let's say someone who finished his school and wants to enter the university here. He cannot be integrated until he enters the university. It is not like he can't of course, but his chances are very low (SYR-M-LSAX-2710)

There are plenty more examples of this ethnic, linguistic dynamic within and without centralized accommodation centres as a 30-year-old Iranian man living in Berlin recollects.

If we have an Arab social worker, the person will be more concerned about the problems of Arab people. We had some time a Russian social worker. If I had a Russian roommate and knew that the person was doing something wrong and complaining to the social worker, the person still would not have said anything. Maybe because the person could not or was embarrassed, but in the end the social worker was kicked out. There is still discrimination. Look, there is always this problem in the home. You have to unintentionally live with people, because you have no choice with whom you want to live. Unintentionally you live with a person. You have to deal with them for a while. That does not have to be a conflict. But some argue about that (IRA-M-BER-0512)

Living with strangers can naturally develop into contentious relationships, especially in these confined environments as when rooms must be shared between two or more individuals. All too often, however, disputes are "ethicised" in the sense that perceived negative behaviours are attributed to one's nationality or religion rather than to one's personality or individual tastes. Comments such as "he is a dirty Arab" or "you can't trust Muslims" or "Eritreans are violent" were not uncommon in conversations we witnessed during fieldwork. Frequently, these qualifications are softened by the "I am only joking" type of justification, however, for those who are already feeling discriminated, it is yet another form of aggression they must endure.

A 26-year-old Syrian man living in Brandenburg also expresses a concern about what he sees as sometimes irreconcilable differences in cultural understanding of social life.

Let us say that I visited you at home. You didn't drink alcohol. It wouldn't be nice to bring a beer with me when I come to you. Right? You have your own culture and I am here, I'm your guest. It's not my country – I know that. I'm a guest here. Maybe I will stay, maybe I will leave... nobody, knows. So, you are accepting me as a guest, I need to respect that, I need to try a little bit to integrate in this culture. Like just do the normal things here, you know. Just be a normal person and to respect people and know about how they live. Know more about how they think and where are you and what's going on around you...I am not talking about the language, I am not talking about anything else, I am not talking about integration the way they are talking about on TV or

something – this is not my thing. It is just that I am here to visit, I am a visitor, I am a guest, so I need to respect the feelings of the people who are accepting me. I need to know what they don't like. Of course, my personal freedom is my freedom to do whatever I want. I am doing whatever I want but there are some things that are not accepted here (SYR-M-BER-2807)

What is interesting is how these cultural and social differences are placed by this refugee within the wider context of guest-host relations. The idea of refugees being guests and not permanent residents who must obey a code of conduct the same way guests in someone's house must respect the rules of the house act as a metaphor for how some refugees see their life in Germany. This is something we observe amongst Syrians more than perhaps other populations, refugees from Africa who seem to have a more established view of permanent settlement. In a way, we could say that the last commentator quoted incorporates the narratives spun by certain groups in German society who place emphasis on the temporary nature of asylum seeking in Germany. As we have argued elsewhere, this is not a recent phenomenon in a country that, historically, has not seen itself as a nation of immigrants but a host to small migrant populations who are invited (e.g. the "guest workers" of the 1950s).

Changes regarding gender roles

It is not unreasonable to have expectations about changes in gender roles amongst refugees as a result of their displacement to countries where society, culture and laws can be profoundly different from their countries of origin. Changes in customs and legal frameworks can and do impact on gender relations and we see some instances of this in our interviews. For example, a 38-year-old Syrian woman believes that

The freedom that is available here is of course affecting the social relationship of refugees. Here, women and children have rights that no one can surpass. This thing is excellent. Women do not have rights in Arabic countries and their lives became better in Germany. I think is very positive. I don't think this can have a negative effect, at least it did not happen with me (SYR-W-BAV-0911)

Whilst some women saw their lives in Germany as profoundly different from their lives back in the Middle East for example, others found that the change in fact consolidated traditional ways of life that simply transposed the cultural and religious structures in which they already lived. An equally poignant statement in this regard comes from a young Afghan woman in her mid-20s. When she was asked about what was positive about being in Germany, she replied:

The freedom of a woman. Freedom for a woman is very important. In terms of studying and the rest. My wish and my father and mother's wish was that I study in the future. But because of the bad situation, I could not. Three things that play a big role in my life are: first, study. Second, calm. Third, to help people. And I have seen them (the three points) in Germany. I wanted to have the three in my life. Freedom for me means that you are not threatened by your husband, brother, father, husband and family. You can study with calm and ease. And you can just do your own thing freely. You cannot do that in Afghanistan. If you want to go somewhere in Afghanistan, you must go with your husband or brother. What should that? What is this life? That's why I'm glad for it and I do everything myself. There (in Afghanistan) you must wait for a man to take you to the doctor, to the city or to your friends. But here I am at one, two or three nights I was traveling too. In Afghanistan you cannot leave the house as a woman during the day so 10 or 12 o'clock in the morning (AFG-M-LSAX 1110).

The statement emphasizes the cultural differences of gender roles between Afghanistan and Germany and underlines that Germany offers more freedom and possibilities for women. Other interlocutors refute the idea that moving to Germany may necessarily represent significant changes to the way they lived before their arrival in Germany or that this change is something positive. Some women in fact see their new environment as detrimental to their way of life and

the way they previously constructively engaged with their partners. A married woman in her mid-30s from Syria did not think Germany gave her more freedom than she had before and sees little change in her relationship with her husband for instance.

I don't think that Germany gave us freedom. We stay the same and don't change wherever we go. Women think that here they can get their freedom, but this causes problems. For me, I am here like I was in Syria, the same life. Because if you treat the man differently and change with him compared to Syria, he will change as well, and problems will be caused. When it comes to me, that's me and my husband: we fight for one day, not even a day, an hour, and then we solve it. I don't think Germany gave me more freedom; all is the same (SYR-W-LSAX-0812).

Another Syrian woman in her early 40s shares a similar perspective.

In Syria, men always pay the bills and the women support them. This generates intimacy and familiarity between the couple since they help each other without official requirements. However, here in Germany, women and men have forced financial duties towards each other. If the woman does not pay 50% of the bills, the men don't pay and vice versa. I don't like this at all. When it comes to me, I always like to do the household work at the apartment. I feel that it is my own space and want to arrange it in the way I Like. However, my husband always helps me in cooking, especially when I am pressured because of my work. I cannot do everything alone. He understands that. And now since he is working as well, we need to help each other and make everything together (SYR-W-LSAX-1412)

In contrast, a 20-year-old man from Syria believes that

The relationship between Syrians changed here [in Germany] to the worse. The way they treat each other. I heard many cases where the wife and the husband tell each other that they don't want to be together anymore. Or where the kids go and call the police if their parents shout on them. This was a normal thing in Syria...a lot of women left their husbands immediately after fleeing. This was not the case in Syria (SYR-M-BER-2807)

The statements exhibit some remarkable variation. Much of the difference in opinion between the two older respondents and the last (the 20-year-old) is characteristic of a generational difference in behaviours and attitudes through our sample. Our interviews with mainly young Syrians in Bavaria pointed to some important differences in opinion regarding the effects of moving to Germany on family life: Younger respondents tended to emphasize that things had changed (for better or worse) whilst older respondents (though not all) were more resistant to this idea. In fact, some even advocated a deeper immersion into one's own cultural traditions as a shelter against the threats they perceived whilst living in Germany.

Overall, our data does not indicate any changes in behaviour or attitudes of the type "before and after" in the case of gender dynamics in the context of displacement since every person reacts to novelty in rather different ways. For example, some women may in fact become more conservative in their allegiance to a partner and to her "house duties" than she was in her country of origin rather than more liberal or detached from tradition. We see conflicting voices trying to make sense of a complex social and cultural adaptation that may or may not add up to changes in behaviour and attitudes over time. Hence, no such changes should be assumed. In fact, these conflicting voices should be part of a wider conversation about how the normative narratives of the country of arrival put pressures on female immigrants to change and to be more like the women there even when they do not see the benefit of these transformative impulses for their own life.

A woman from Turkey explains some of the dynamics involved in moving to Germany and how she does not feel any different from the life she had before, save some obvious rules which one must adapt to in order to not overstep certain taboos.

In Turkey, nudity was never a taboo for me. When I came here [to Germany] going naked to sauna, swimming in the sea naked or something, this is no problem for me, and I am happy to live this way here. I really like to live in an environment that will not condemn this lifestyle and I am actually like that...So the only thing that changed here as different from Turkey, is that there is no person around me here that finds me odd when I express something like that (TUR-W-BER1-0311)

Here we see that it is not so much the behaviour or attitude that changes but the context in which these are performed. The very idea that one can express an opinion about nudity is the change, not necessarily nudity itself. At the same time, this change of perception or behaviour is highly relational depending on the social environment. A woman from Iran describes her experience of meeting other women from Iran and Afghanistan and how their very presence makes her feel constrained.

Although there is less restriction here [in Germany], it is not completely free of condemnation. I can give you an example like the swimming pool here in Göttingen. I would never go back in there. The one time was enough for me. Since I have seen many familiar faces, I mean Iranians and Afghans. How those women look at you is exhausting. I do not feel well with this bad looks. The foreigners feel that they are back in Iran. That's why the only freedom I feel here is that I do not have to put on a headscarf (IRA-W-LSAX-0908)

Refugees are often treated as groups of people: Syrians, Eritreans and Iranians, for example. Naturally, there is merit in asserting that people fleeing conflict and persecution, people who speak the same language, and grown up in the same land, will inevitably share some characteristics and have to some extent, similar needs. The example above (and there are numerous similar examples in our sample) shows the other side of diaspora. Precisely because there are commonalities between people who share the same origin, their relations in the host country can be rather tense or at the very least contentious at times. There is much collaboration between those who share social, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious ties. However, disagreements or mistrust are also common. Those more traditional may disapprove of the behaviour of the more liberal and the liberal disapprove of the conservatism of the more traditional. The religious may find the secular disrespectful or shallow, and the secular may want to distance himself or herself from any religious label or association. The older generation may wish to impose their will on the younger and the younger to rebel against the old. Men and women alike may find themselves in an altogether different social environment where unthinkable choices are presented to them. Couples may find they need to protect their way of life, to pass on their children their traditions and culture. Others may want a complete break from their origins and immerse themselves and their children in the German way of life. Educated middle class refugees may find themselves in advantage vis-à-vis their potential to learn the new language or to commit to political engagement or "to be more like the Germans". To dress like them, to eat like them. The labourer used to hardships in his own country, may find it easier to adapt to the stringent circumstances of asylum seeking. To overcome the degrading attitudes of others and to find courage and resilience, to persist, even when all seems lost. In sum, there is no formula as to how an individual or a family of refugees will respond to the demands and opportunities presented to them in the host country. Categories are useful as sociological shortcuts that facilitate our understanding. However, we must be careful not to generalize or to reify these scientific props as if they are solid three-dimensional objects; since they are in fact fluid social relations, processes that are dependent on time, context and the arbitrariness of the human will.

Summary

In this section, we have addressed modalities of civic engagement, feelings of belonging and the possibility or aspirations towards German citizenship.

We have briefly discussed the modalities of the naturalization process in Germany. For newly arrived refugees, naturalization clearly is a long-term perspective spanning almost a decade. Also a citizenship test must be passed where questions about German law, culture, politics and society must be correctly answered. Notably, the applicant's previous citizenship must be abdicated. Thus, pursuing the German citizenship is a long and demanding process. Despite that, a good number of refugees in our sample feel positively towards acquiring it.

We found that, in terms of civic engagement and political participation, a sizeable minority of refugees are associated with some form of interest group. In most cases, these were either related to sports or religion. Based on our interviews with local administrators and NGO representatives we understood that they rather do not actively empower asylum seekers to mobilize their interests. We have described some instances where initiatives for political mobilization in central accommodation were implemented. However, we also pointed to an inherently paternalistic nature of such endeavors that tend to attribute the alleged democratic deficit of refugees to an overall backwardness. In terms of political engagement and interest in the news for example, we found that some of our interlocutors, in particular those who had access to higher education and benefited from a middle-class position in their countries of origin, displayed more interest in political engagement when in Germany. We also found that refugees living in more populated urban areas seemed to be more politically engaged than those living in the countryside.

We discussed how many refugees have shown willingness to engage with the local society whenever the opportunities appear and there were numerous cases in our sample of locals seeking to support refugees. On the other hand, we encountered several reports of blatant discrimination and racism towards asylum seekers. For sub-Saharan Africans, discrimination happens mostly in relation to their skin colour. Practicing Muslims suffer from their characteristic clothes, for instance, women wearing the hijab.

In this section we also reported on the many cultural barriers faced by refugees and what we called the „limits to adaptation“ in particular regarding the notion of German individualism vs. the communitarianism refugees from the Middle East and Africa tend to carry with them when they leave their countries of origin. However, we also pointed out the opposite problem, that is, those cases of “too much integration”, for instance when the children of refugees are assimilated to an extent that their parents have a difficult time following or understanding them. Another important issue we have found is related to changes regarding gender roles. It is not unreasonable to have expectations about changes in gender roles amongst refugees as a result of their displacement to countries where society, culture and laws can be profoundly different from their countries of origin. Changes in customs and legal frameworks can and do impact gender relations and we have many instances of this in our interviews. For example, a Muslim woman from Syria (though born in Algeria) finds it difficult to accept her husband's resistance to her wanting to have a driver's license and to be able to drive a car in Germany. She emphasized that in Germany “man and women are equal” and that she had the right to do that. This has created animosity in their relationship to the extent that she wondered whether it was a good thing to remain married. A Christian woman from Nigeria also questioned her Cameroonian partner's lack of commitment to their newly born child citing how in Germany, “fathers also change diapers”.

Finally, we also discussed the negative and positive role of religion in integration. Religion plays an important role both in the structural and sociocultural integration of refugees in Germany. It is clearly an important element that plays a part in facilitating certain aspects of life in Germany for asylum seekers. Volunteers and organizations of a confessional kind tend to step in and provide services and advice that the system is unwilling or incapable of offering.

7. Conclusions & Recommendations

This conclusion must necessarily begin with a disclaimer. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive overview of the German labour market and its transformation during the last decades. It was also not our aim to offer intricate details of the German health system, nor how the education system is framed in its entirety or how it operates in more detail. We also did not seek to explain how the German housing market has developed in the past decades and its current state. Instead, we have set out to show the various levels or layers of policies, practices, and individual perceptions that, in their totality, constitute the German regime of refugee integration.

We started out from the idea that “integration” has two different dimensions. First, there is a *structural* dimension, which includes participation in various systems of the country of residence, such as employment, education, housing, and health. The second dimension is integration as an emotive/personal connection to people and land. We have called this *sociocultural integration*. It involves interaction with German natives and established immigrants, religious affiliations, and practice as well as benefits of being associated with institutions of the country of residence.

Drawing on document analysis and interviews with stakeholders, we sought to reconstruct some of the most important policy and legal developments since 2011 to the present. However, the main emphasis of this report clearly was on our micro-level data, i.e. the perspectives and experiences of refugees. Our in-depth interviews in Brandenburg, Bavaria, and Lower Saxony provided many insights into different aspects of asylum seeking. These interviews are particularly valuable to elucidate the modalities and mechanisms of sociocultural integration, but they also offered a response to the political reforms we have seen being put into practice by the German state since 2015.

Above all, our interviews with refugees in Germany showed the difficulty of demarcating with clear lines the end of reception and the beginning of integration. An important reason is the high degree of protraction, which many refugees must endure during the asylum procedure. The idea of a living in a liminal state, neither here nor there, with few concrete options and rights, is a recurrent theme that makes itself felt throughout the interviews and the text more broadly.

In the following, we will briefly sum up the main results and, against that backdrop, formulate several policy recommendations:

Legal, Political and Institutional Framework

With regards to *the legal, political and institutional framework* of the German integration regime vis-à-vis refugees, we can hold that for the last decades Germany has been a *de facto immigration country* which received large numbers of immigrants, but never developed a coherent set of immigration and integration politics. This reluctance was associated with a human capital-based notion of immigration as a temporary boost of the German workforce, which manifested in the term “guest worker”. On a structural level, the fragmentary character of the German regime of immigration and integration is reflected in the *crosscutting nature of “integration” as a policy domain* as well as the considerable variation of integration policy and practice across the 16 regional states (Bundesländer). While these structural features pay tribute to the complexity of integration processes and to the federal nature of the German polity, they entail substantial risks of unequal treatment, opacity, and institutional inertia.

Labour Market Integration

With regards to *labour market integration*, the German economy and labour market proved to be in a robust shape within the reporting period. This has facilitated the access of refugees to employment. At the same time, we found little proof that the decentralized nature of German industry and local SMEs does enhance the prospects of refugees to find a job. Our results

confirm the evidence of a recent survey study that German language skills are crucial for labour market inclusion and that there has been a certain gender gap with higher employment rates among male refugees. At the same time our evidence suggests a substantial trend of segmented assimilation, i.e. refugees are mainly being included into the lower strata of the labour market, often regardless of their previous education and training. In close connection to other dimensions of integration, our data underlines that spatial isolation in the reception process along with a lack of freedom of movement and protectionist measures impedes early employment. Given the importance of mobility for better job placements, we recommend that freedom of movement within the German territory be allowed for refugees who are guaranteed a work placement that falls outside of the borders of their designed residential obligation. This would allow for better matching between individual skills and the needs of employers for qualified workers among the refugees.

Education

With regards to *education* almost all our interlocutors had participated in some sort of language class and acquired an intermediary level of German (B1/B2). Several persons problematized the “unfair system” of language and integration courses, which grants early access based on a good prospect of staying associated, with a limited number of countries of origin. Others criticised the “discriminatory” shape of some textbooks and the heterogeneity of the learning group in terms of skill and motivation, which was not balanced by the instructors. Since our sample did not include minors, we have no individual accounts on formal school education. However, our data suggests that reception facilities only implement informal “Learning Workshops” even though schooling is mandatory in Germany. Whereas this may be a feasible solution for a rather short phase, our interviews indicate that (at least in the first part of the reporting period) protracted states of reception are the rule rather than an exception. As far as higher education is concerned, our data reflects a positive impact of initiatives by universities and foundations to facilitate access and to support academics at risk although it has yet to turn out if these campaigns lead to sustainable and appropriate employment. We recommend that learning facilities/programs be implemented in arrival and accommodation centers where those who must wait can meanwhile learn and gain formal qualifications that can later be converted into school and university credits. At present, the program aims at developing language skills and intercultural competences of children and youths in refugee reception centers and to reacquaint them with an everyday school routine.

On the informal side, there is a need for more education measures designed to reach refugees who fall through the net and are not able to access formal education channels. There are numerous volunteers helping refugees to learn the language and to find their way through everyday life in Germany. However, we identify a need to train and professionalize these volunteers and to make the registration of informal competencies of refugees a core part of all consulting measures. Hence, volunteers who are involved in education should receive systematic training and appropriate financial compensation from the Federal government. At the same time, we recommend a more concerted effort to recognize foreign educational qualifications. Informal skills should be allowed to serve as part of an application for formal education when these are clearly relevant.

Housing

With regards to *housing and spatial integration* we found a strong trajectory between the phases of reception and integration. It turned out that the remote location of accommodation centres does not only prevent early integration due to a lack of opportunities of employment, education and interaction with locals, but that they also purport forms of emotional and psychosocial deterioration which impede both structural and social integration even after a positive decision on the asylum application. At the same time, our findings support the positive evaluation of decentral housing by many scholars, professionals and policy makers. Several of our interlocutors emphasized the empowering effect of “having one’s own place” as a crucial part of homemaking as a prerequisite of social integration. During the reporting period, the

housing market was tense and some of our interview partners reported difficulties in finding an apartment as well as experiences of discrimination. It is no surprise that these conditions nourish grey markets and costly brokerage structures. Several persons reported to live in a multicultural neighbourhood. While some were concerned that this might decrease their long-term chances of social integration, others emphasized the importance of co-ethnic networks and support structures.

In our interviews, we see clear links between spatiality, geography, and the chances of a refugee for social and structural integration. Education, employment and mental health issues are all intrinsically connected to the type of accommodation and the location of such accommodation, whether it is in a rural or urban area, the quality and frequency of transportation links and even whether there are supermarkets or places of worship nearby or leisure spaces such as football fields, parks or playgrounds. In the reporting period central accommodation occurred to be the only means to handle emergency situations such as periods of high influx of asylum seekers in a short period of time (as in the summer of 2015). However, for a better integration of refugees, our results underline the necessity of a faster transition from initial stages of reception into decentralized accommodation for early integration. Along with the declining numbers of asylum applicants since 2016, a push for more suitable decentral accommodation should be favoured. Our in-depth interviews suggest that this would be the preferred living arrangement for refugees and might diminish the risk of psychosocial health risks we see being associated with the lack of privacy in accommodation centres. Although social workers in our sample have argued that central accommodation facilitated the allocation of refugees, decentral housing clearly is an important source of self-efficacy which was among the most persistent themes running through our interviews.

Psychosocial Health

With regards to psychosocial health, our research brings to attention that many refugees struggle with psychosocial problems of various intensity and origins. Apart from traumatizing experiences during travel, many of our interlocutors point to their experience of reception in Germany as a psychosocial challenge of its own kind. Since professional treatment is difficult to obtain (depending on the location) and the costs for an interpreter are usually not covered, several people reported self-medication, self-isolation (to avoid stigmatization) and substance abuse. As a matter of fact, these psychosocial conditions have severe repercussions on the chances of both structural and social integration. This was mirrored by a somewhat instrumental view of professionals in terms of psychosocial support for refugees: while some of them underlined that psychotherapeutic interventions were in order to enable refugees to work, others speculated that asylum applicants might pretend PTSD in order to ameliorate their reception conditions.

Although often neglected, mental health is an extremely important issue. Our micro-level data point to some of the causal mechanisms between psychosocial health challenges of refugees and their capacity for structural and sociocultural integration. One of the most-cited causes of mental health problems associated with forced migration to Germany is the condition of submission and helplessness vis-à-vis the asylum system to which refugees feel subjugated. Idleness and uncertainty, both of which are at least partly produced by an overly bureaucratic asylum system that is often perceived as impractical and contradictory, are other important factors.

Based on these observations, we recommend that more attention be paid to the screening of mental health issues amongst refugees' populations, those individuals who are "stuck in reception" (see Chemin and Nagel 2020). We also encourage to improve the accessibility of psychosocial health services for refugees, including culturally sensitive approaches to diagnoses and treatment of mental illnesses and trained interpreters. Last, but not least, we strongly emphasize the significance of free movement during the reception phase. The lack of freedom of movement has been a persistent theme throughout our in-depth interviews, often

identified as a source of anxiety and the cause of many problems faced by refugees regarding work and study

Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation

With regards to *citizenship, belonging and civic participation* we found that many of our interlocutors were interested in German and international politics and tried to follow the news as far as their language skills allowed it. Several of them became active as volunteers and in some cases, this paved the way for an internship, vocational training, or other forms of labour market inclusion. At the same time, several of our interlocutors articulated concerns with the lack of feedback channels for them to express the conditions to which they must submit for instance with regards to their living conditions, most notably (central) housing, employment and education. In terms of belonging, many interview partners took an ambiguous stance between their eagerness to be part of and contribute to the German society, experiences of discrimination - including verbal and even physical assaults - and the desire to maintain certain aspects of their previous way of life. As far as civic engagement is concerned, we found that demographic and geographical factors matter, i.e. refugees from an educated middle-class background and those living in an urban environment were more likely to engage.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of Interlocutors

Number	ID	Duration/hr	Language
1	ALG-W-BER 0208	02:00	English
2	CAM-M-BRA-0707	01:28	English
3	CAM-M-BRA-2307	02:05	English
4	CAM-W-BRA-2411	01:04	English
5	CAM-W-BRA-1007	01:19	French/English
6	ERI-M-BRA-0907	02:56	English
7	GAM-M-BER-0607	01:01	English
8	IRAQ-M-BER1-3007	01:26	Arabic/English
9	IRAQ-M-BER2-0208	02:02	Arabic/English
10	NIG-W-BRA 1107	00:44	English
11	NIG-W-BRA-2011	01:04	English
12	SEN-M-BRA-0807	01:36	English
13	SYR-M-BER-2807	01:06	English
14	SYR-M-BER2-0308	02:14	Arabic/English
15	IRA-M-LSAX-0908	00:31	Farsi/Dari
16	IRA-W-LSAX-0908	00:31	Farsi/Dari
17	IRA-M-LSax-1110	01:11	Farsi
18	SYR-W-LSAX-0712	01:00	Arabic
19	SYR-W-LSAX-0812	01:00	Arabic
20	SYR-W-LSAX-1412	01:00	Arabic
21	SYR-W-LSAX-2710	00:45	Arabic
22	SYR-W-BAV-0512	00:30	Arabic
23	SYR-M-LSAX-2610	01:30	Arabic
24	SYR-M-LSAX-2710	00:15	Arabic
25	SYR-M-LSAX-2810	00:40	Arabic
26	SYR-M-LSAX-3010	00:30	Arabic
27	SYR-M-LSAX-0412	01:00	Arabic
28	SYR-M-BAV-0312	00:45	Arabic
29	SYR-M-BAV-0412	00:45	Arabic
30	SYR-M-BAV-1512	00:40	Arabic
31	SYR-W-BAV-0309	01:20	Arabic
32	SYR-W-BAV-0911	01:00	Arabic

33	SYR-W-BAV-1408	01:15	Arabic
34	SYR-W-BAV-2308	00:45	Arabic
35	SYR-M-BAV-0809	01:20	Arabic
36	SYR-M-BAV-2711	01:00	Arabic
37	SYR-M-BAV-2811	00:40	Arabic
38	AFG-M-LSAX 11.10	01:10	Farsi
39	AFG-M-LSAX 17.10	01:07	Fari/Dari
40	IRA-M-LSAX 1909	01:56	Farsi
41	IRA-M-BER-2410	01:25	Farsi
42	IRA-M-BER-1812	01:00	Farsi
43	IRA-M-BER-2011	01:28	Farsi
44	IRA-M-BER-0911	01:09	Farsi
45	IRA-M-BER-0512	01:26	Farsi
46	TUR-M-LSAX5-2310	01:11	English
47	TUR-M-BER2-2312	01:27	Turkish
48	TUR-M-LSAX2-2008	01:30	English
49	TUR-W-BER3-2412	1:38	Turkish
50	TUR-W-LSax1-2308	2:16	English
51	TUR-M-LSAX1-1808	01:37	Turkish
52	TUR-W-BER1-0311	01:38	Turkish
53	TUR-M-LSAX4-1109	01:43	English
54	BL-M-LSAX-1801	01:30	Bosnian/Croatian
55	BL-W-LSAX-1801	01:30	Bosnian/Croatian
56	BL-M-LSAX-0702	01:00	Bosnian/Croatian
57	BL-W-LSAX-0702	01:00	Bosnian/Croatian
58	LIB-M-BER 27/04	01:37	English
59	LIB-M-BER 28/04	01:24	Arabic (Translator)
60	LIB-M-BRA 22/04	01:53	Arabic (Translator)