The third wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees: Refugees are improving their German language skills and continue to feel welcome in Germany

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Third wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey

Refugees are improving their German language skills and continue to feel welcome in Germany

by Cristina de Paiva Lareiro, Nina Rother and Manuel Siegert

AT A GLANCE

- The self-assessed German language skills of refugees who entered the country between 2013 and 2016 continue to improve in 2018: 44% said they had (very) good German language skills.

- Over the reviewed period, persons with an intermediate level of education have made significant progress in the last year. Yet, the German language skills of women with children are only progressing slowly.

- Participation in various language courses is progressing. Only 15% have not yet taken part in any course. Persons with a low level of education and women with older children have begun to show signs of catching up in terms of participation in language courses, however this does not apply to women with young children.

- On average, refugees are mostly satisfied with their lives – only slightly less so than members of the host society. Three-quarters felt welcome in Germany. These figures have been stable since 2016.

- The economic situation is a source of concern for 75% of refugees. Satisfaction with the employment and income situation varies, as expected, depending on individual employment.

- Refugees are proportionally less likely to worry about xenophobia in Germany than people in the host society. Yet refugees more frequently feel that they have already been disadvantaged because of their origin.

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At the end of 2018, there were about 1.8 million people living in Germany who had come here as asylum seekers. The majority of them entered the country between 2013 and 2016 and have thus only been living in Germany for a comparatively short period of time (Federal Statistical Office 2019). Although the residence permits of most refugees are limited, the situation in many countries of origin currently suggests that the majority of refugees who presently have a limited residence permit will remain in Germany in the long term, meaning their integration will play an important role. This also reflects the wishes of refugees: at the end of 2016, in the first wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, around 95% of respondents said they would like to stay in Germany for good (Scheible et al. 2016: 36).

Learning German as quickly as possible is a key prerequisite for the successful social participation of refugees in Germany (for instance, for labour market participation: Brücker et al. 2019: 14, developing social relationships: Siegert 2019: 8, contact with authorities or search for housing: Baier/Siegert 2018: 6). Previous studies have shown, however, that a large proportion of refugees arriving between 2013 and 2016 faced unfavourable conditions for

successfully learning the German language: most of the languages of origin were linguistically quite

different to the German language and in some cases refugees were totally unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet and were not at all accustomed to learning (Scheible 2018, Tissot et al. 2019). In addition, it seems that women with small children in Germany have difficulty learning the German language, which is apparently linked to them having to look after their children (Brücker et al. 2019: 9, Tissot et al. 2019). Although women are in the minority among refugees, unlike male refugees, most of them are married and live with their children in one household. Of the cohort of refugees under review in this study, who entered the country between 2013 and 2016, 70% were male. 65% of women, but only 38% of men are married. 71% and 34% of women, respectively, have children or children under the age of 4 living in their household (men: 30% have children and 15% have children under the age of 4).

Against this backdrop, this brief analysis will use the data gathered in the third wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey in 2018 to analyse the trends regarding refugees' learning of the German language since 2016 and specifically since 2017 (see Box 1 for more information about the study). As such, it will, in particular, also examine the question of whether refugee women and mothers are still taking longer to learn the language than refugee men or whether there are signs that they are beginning to catch up.

Box 1: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is a nationwide longitudinal survey of persons who came to Germany and filed an asylum application between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2016 inclusive, irrespective of the course and outcome of the asylum procedure. In addition, the members of these persons' households were also interviewed. The Central Register of Foreigners (AZR) provided the basis for the sampling. When statistical weighting methods are used, the results obtained on the basis of the data are representative of the households of the above-mentioned members of the population (for a detailed description of the sampling, see: Kroh et al. 2017a and Jacobsen et al. 2019, for further information on the study and the questionnaire, especially for the first two waves, see Kroh et al. 2017b).

For the year 2016, information is available for 4,465 adults, for 2017, information is available on about 5,668 adults, and for 2018, information is available on 4,321 adults.

The sample now comprises a total of 7,950 adults who were interviewed at least once. Of these, 4,465 persons participated in the first survey wave in 2016, 1,761 of whom were interviewed again in both 2017 and 2018. 2,064 persons were monitored over two survey waves.

When comparing the three years covered by the survey, it is important to note that the study population changed slightly between 2016 and 2017. In 2016, the study population comprised households of persons who had come to Germany in the years 2013 to January 2016 inclusive and had applied for asylum here (Kroh et al. 2017a). Since 2017, the study also includes households of persons who came to Germany and applied for asylum here between February 2016 and December 2016 inclusive (Jacobsen et al. 2019). Due to this expansion of the study population as a whole, the results for 2016 can only be compared to the results of the following years to a limited extent.

However, it is not just the conditions for social participation of refugees that are the focus of politicians, the public and academics, but also participation itself. Accordingly, several publications have been released in the meantime, offering insight into the current living situation of refugees (education, employment and income situation: Brücker et al. 2020, the housing situation: Baier/Siegert 2018, the healthcare situation: Metzing et al. 2020, social integration: Siegert 2019, specifically the situation of refugee families: Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 2019). The majority of these studies focus on the respective objective situation. By contrast, few studies have been carried out on refugees' subjective assessment of their own circumstances. However, a comprehensive and detailed description of refugees' circumstances can only be provided if, in addition to examining the objective situation, the "Subjective View" (Innenseite des Geschehens) (Simmel 1923: 68) is also taken into account. For this reason, in addition to the analyses of the objective situation that are already available, the second part of this brief analysis will focus initially on general life satisfaction as an indicator of the summary subjective assessment of the living conditions of refugees by refugees themselves. It will also show how refugees assess their economic situation and their relationship with the majority society – two aspects that play an important role not only for general life satisfaction but also for the development of further (objective) social participation.

What are the trends regarding German language skills and participation in language courses among refugees?

German language skills continue to improve among refugees in 2018

In the 2018 survey period, 44% of the refugees surveyed assessed their German language skills as good or very good (Box 2 for measuring German language skills). This represents a further increase, since almost all of the refugees had no knowledge of German whatsoever when they entered the country, and in 2016, 22% and in 2017, 35% of the refugees interviewed said they had a (very) good command of German (Brücker et al. 2016: 37). In 2018, the proportion of persons who had no knowledge of German fell further to 5%. Two-thirds of the refugees, and thus the majority, have a mediocre to good knowledge of German (Figure 1).

An examination of the individual language skills speaking, reading and writing also shows a steady improvement in the level of knowledge, with all three language skills improving by and large simultaneously (not illustrated).

Box 2: Measuring German language skills in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey

Within the framework of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, refugees assess their level of German language proficiency in the skills of reading, writing and speaking. The respondents are given a scale from 1 ("very proficient") to 5 ("no knowledge at all"). The subjective assessment of knowledge of German is available for four points in time: upon entry (retrospectively) and for the three survey periods 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Two parameters are used for the analyses: a sum index summarises the (recoded) subjective assessments and assumes values between 0 and 12, with 0 standing for the worst value, namely no knowledge whatsoever of German, and 12 for the best value, i.e., very good knowledge of all the above-mentioned skills. By dividing this by the number of variables used (3) and rounding up the

figures so obtained to the nearest whole number, the sum index is standardised again to the value range from 1 to 5 (**rounded mean values**).

As is customary in empirical social research surveys, the data on German language skills is based on subjective assessments when there is no objective test data available. Comparisons of the subjective assessments with interviewer data confirm adequate validity (internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.708)). However, the German language skills surveyed only provide a very rough estimate of language proficiency in everyday life, which does not allow any conclusions to be drawn about a specific level of proficiency (e.g., B1) or grammatically correct use of the language.

Figure 1:   Development of self-evaluated German language skills (rounded average values) over time (in percent)
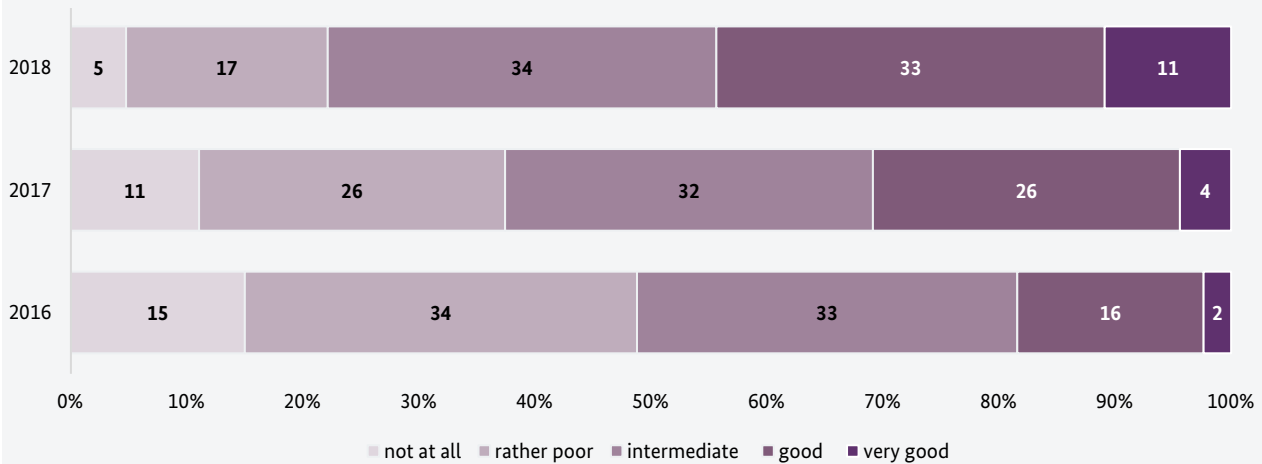
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

In principle, the mechanisms for learning German are the same for refugees as they are for other migrants (Tissot et al. 2019 or Brenzel et al. 2019 for the years 2016 and 2017). Here too, language acquisition is influenced by factors that can be assigned to the three areas of motivation, opportunities and efficiency (Chiswick/ Miller 2001; Esser 2006). These include, for instance, the length of stay, contacts with German-speaking persons, language course participation and learning behaviour. In addition, there may be refugee-specific characteristics such as traumatic experiences, a separation from the core family or unfavourable housing conditions, which can make it more difficult to learn the language.

As in previous years, female refugees' subjective assessment of their knowledge of German in 2018 is more negative than male refugees'. This is still almost exclusively due to their family situation and the presence of young children in their household. In 2018, for instance, only 22% of women who had at least one small child under the age of 4 living in their household said they had a (very) good knowledge of German (Figure 2). This percentage of 22% in 2018 also applies to women who have children aged 4 and over. For women who do not have any children living in their household, on the other hand, the proportion is 15 percentage points higher at 37%. The presence of children of any age has significantly less influence on male refugees' subjective assessment of their German language skills: 51% of men without children and 44 percent of men with children said they had a (very) good command of German (not illustrated).

There is a positive correlation between the length of time refugees have been residing in Germany and their command of the German language: the highest proportion of (very) good German language skills in 2018 is reported by refugees who entered Germany in 2014 (54%) and 2013 (52%). Respondents who entered Germany later lagged on average 9 (entry in 2015) or 20 percentage points (entry in 2016) behind them.

There is also a clear correlation between refugees' current level of education and their knowledge of German. 64% of all persons with a high level of education, i.e., a university degree, attest to having a (very) good knowledge of German, compared to 28% of persons with a low level of education who never attended school or have only attended primary school.

Finally, there is a positive correlation with participation in a language support measure (Box 3 on the language measures surveyed): 46% of refugees who had already taken part in at least one measure said they had a (very) good knowledge of German. For those who had not yet participated in any measure, the proportion was 11 percentage points lower at 35%. As expected, persons who have completed a language course have the best knowledge of German[1] – more than half of them saidthey had a good or very good command of German. Against this backdrop, it is encouraging that in 2018 only a few respondents said they had not yet taken part in any language support measure (see Table 1 on page 8).

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1   In the absence of more specific dates, a course is considered to have been completed when the respondents say that they have participated in the course and indicate the date of completion. Completion of a course does not exclusively mean successful completion in terms of passing a final test, but basically refers to the fact that the participants were no longer attending the course when the respective survey was carried out.

Box 3: Language courses

Participation in four different types of language courses is assessed as part of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey.

Integration course

The integration course is the central integration measure of the Federal Government that is part of the "Comprehensive Language Programme". The aim of the integration course, which consists of a language course (usually comprising 600 teaching units or 900/1200 lesson units for special courses) and an orientation course (100 lesson units), is to impart knowledge of German as well as information on the legal system, culture and history of Germany, so that the participants can deal independently with all aspects of everyday life. The standard course is the general integration course, but there are also special courses tailored to the needs of different target groups (e.g., literacy course).

In addition to opportunities of voluntary participation, participation is compulsory for certain groups of persons, e.g., recipients of unemployment benefit II and new immigrants with residence permits who do not have sufficient knowledge of German. Refugees who have been granted protection status as well as asylum applicants from countries offering good prospects of remaining (until 7/2019, Syria, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia; since 8/2019, Syria, Eritrea) can also be admitted to an integration course. This also applies to persons whose removal has been suspended and who have access to the labour market and entered the country before 1 August 2019.

ESF-BAMF course/vocational language courses

The survey period includes the transition from the ESF-BAMF programme to vocational language courses, which is why both types of course were examined in one category. Vocational language courses within the ESF-BAMF programme were funded by the European Union from 2009 to 2017. They were targeted at persons who spoke German as a second language and required language support, who were available on the labour market and/or were receiving unemployment benefit II. The language admission levels range from A1 to

C1. From 2016, there was a gradual transition to the job-related promotion of German language skills pursuant to Section 45a of the Residence Act, also known as "vocational language courses".

These courses are aimed at persons with a migration background who are registered as job seekers and/ or are receiving unemployment benefits, employees requiring language support as well as persons who need a certain level of language skills to have their qualifications recognised or for access to vocational training. Admission requirements are generally completion of an integration course or proof of German language skills at language level B1. Basic courses are available with a general professional orientation (from B1 to B2, from B2 to C1; 400-500 lesson units each), supplemented by special courses (300-600 lesson units) with a professional focus, e.g., for persons in the recognition process (academic healthcare professionals and non-academic healthcare professionals) as well as special courses for former integration course participants who have not reached language level B1.

Federal Employment Agency measures with language support components

The Federal Employment Agency also offers measures that include language support as part of labour market integration measures. The questionnaire asked about the following measures: prospects for female refugees, prospects for young refugees, prospects for refugees, the "KompAS" (competence check, early activation and language acquisition) measure and other Federal Employment Agency measures, such as the entry course organised by the Federal Employment Agency in accordance with Section 421 of Social Code Book III.

Other language courses

The survey does not cover details of participation in other courses. They include a wide variety of courses offered by the Länder, municipalities, welfare organisations, volunteers and other private actors – from short online courses to integration courses and C1 courses for university courses. These courses differ greatly in terms of goal, scope and quality. In this respect, this category is to be understood above all as a "residual category", which should be interpreted with caution.

The bivariate relationships shown are also evident when multivariate, i.e., simultaneous consideration of possible relevant factors (Table A1 in the Annex). As in previous years, factors that have the greatest influence on the level of language proficiency relate to the level of education and literacy and, in respect of female refugees, having children under the age of 4 living in their household. Participation in a language course also has a highly significant influence on the German language skills reported. Other factors that have less of an influence but are nevertheless significant are age, length of stay, employment, satisfaction with health – as an indicator of the subjective assessment of one's own health – and contacts with Germans.

Different subgroups learn German at a different pace

In addition to different levels of language proficiency in 2018, it has become apparent over the period

reviewed that some groups learn German faster than others – demonstrated here by the proportion of respondents with (very) good German language skills in the respective year under review (Figure 2). Over the last three years, persons with an intermediate level of education have managed to improve their German language skills more than persons with a high or low level of education. In 2018, persons with an intermediate level of education are therefore gradually reaching the level of German skills of highly educated persons. Despite making significant learning progress, refugees with a low level of education show a much slower progression. This shows the huge effort that has to be undertaken by persons who are unaccustomed to learning and who may not yet be able to read and write compared to persons who are more accustomed to learning and who find it much easier to learn German. The slightly higher rate of increase last year among refugees with a low level of education could

Figure 2:   (Very) good German language skills (rounded average values), by different characteristic values (in percent)
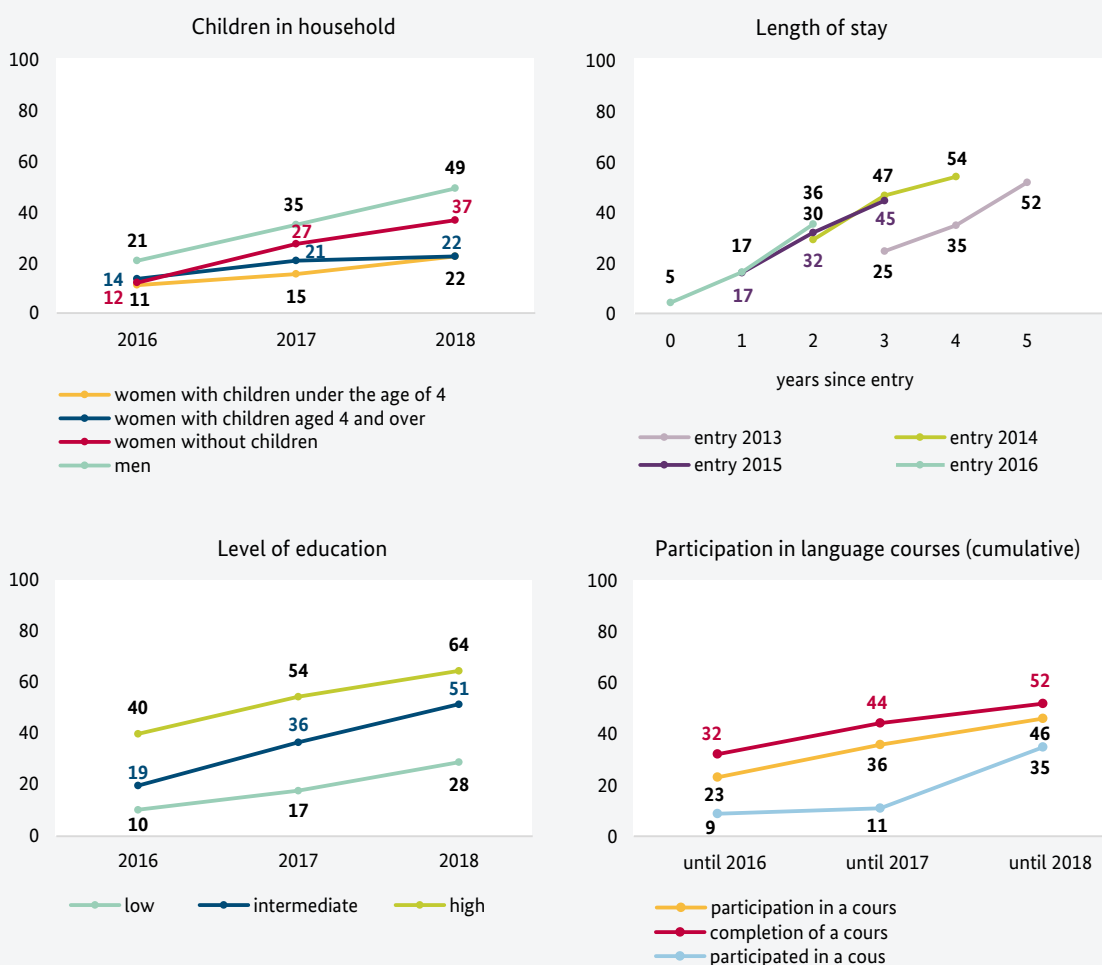
Legend: 10% of all refugees with a low level of education interviewed in 2016 stated good or very good knowledge of German language. 36% of all refugees who attented a language course until 2017 stated (very) good knowledge of German language. 17% of all refugees who entered in 2016 stated (very) good knowledge of German in the year after their entry (2017).

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

indicate that they are beginning to catch up with the more highly educated refugees.

By contrast, the duration of a person's stay is having the expected impact on their knowledge of German: regardless of the respective year of entry, refugees' knowledge of German increases almost linearly with each year of residence. However, refugee cohorts who entered the country in 2013 form an exception. This is not due to the pace at which refugees learn German, but rather to the fact that they lag behind the level of the other cohorts surveyed, which could be attributable, among other things, to the improvement in participation opportunities and the range of language support measures available in recent years.

The family situation also impacts the speed at which refugees learn German. Men learn the German language quite rapidly over the course of time: the proportion of male refugees with (very) good German language skills increases by almost 30 percentage points. However, women who have no children living in their household also show a great improvement in German language skills over time by around 25 percentage points, while women with children, regardless of their age, show the lowest increase at around 10 percentage points. There was no improvement in the unfavourable conditions for learning the language associated with the time-consuming task of looking after young children, but also children above the age of 4, at least not between 2016 and 2018, because it is (still) too soon to assess catch-up effects in respect of German language skills.

There is a close connection between participation in a language course and knowledge of German: over the years, language course participants who actually completed the course have achieved higher proficiency in German. In the first two years of the survey, refugees who did not take part in a language course very seldom said they had a good or very good command of the German language – very few refugees learned the language in an uncontrolled setting, i.e., in everyday life without specific support.

Even the small group of refugees who did not participate in any language course managed to greatly improve their German, presumably because they had been living here for an extended period in 2018 and had found other ways of learning the German language. One of the particular advantages of taking part in a course – in addition to the targeted acquisition of written language skills and grammatical structures – is the time factor: refugees who participate in a course learn the language faster, meaning that the founda-

tions for successful integration are laid at an earlier stage.

Participation in language support measures continues to rise

Due to the great importance of German language skills for further integration processes, persons with a migration background, and thus also refugees, have access to a large number of language courses (Box 3 on the language measures surveyed). All in all, it can be observed that by the time the survey was carried out in 2018, 85% of the refugees had taken part in at least one language support measure or were still taking part in one when the survey was conducted (Table 1).[2] Conversely, only 15% have not attended any language course at all. In 2018, almost two-thirds of refugees had completed a language course.

Integration courses showed the most frequent participation: in 2018, 65% had taken part in one and 47% had completed one. Over the course of time, there was a significant increase of 20 percentage points in participation year on year. By 2018, 14% of the refugees interviewed had taken part in a language course based on the integration course that focuses on professional language (ESF-BAMF course or a language course for professional purposes in accordance with Section 45a of the Residence Act), and 8% had also completed one. Here, too, significant rates of increase can be observed over time, which are likely to continue in the future as the number of participants completing an integration course rises and with the establishment and expansion of language courses for professional purposes. In 2018, 12% said they had participated in, and 7% said they had completed, a course run by the Federal Employment Agency with language support modules. Here, growth rates are less pronounced over time, which could be due to the special orientation and the corresponding prerequisites of these courses. 52% of the refugees took part in other, unspecified German courses, and 31% completed them.

Men participated in and completed all types of courses surveyed more frequently than women on all three survey dates. In 2018, 88% of the men attended a course, and 71% completed one compared to 77% of women who attended a course and 52% who completed one. For 2018, however, the reverse is true, showing for the first time that the number of women attending a course was higher than the number of men

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2   It is not possible to indicate the extent to which any legal requirements for participation in a course are met on the basis of the data available. The following analyses are therefore not to be understood as "participation rates" but refer to the population surveyed.

Table 1: Participation in and completion of various language courses by survey year (in percent)

		Course participation / Course completion		
		Total	Male	Female
Total	2018	85 / 65	88 / 71	77 / 52
	2017	79 / 50	85 / 56	65 / 36
	2016	68 / 34	73 / 37	54 / 26
BAMF integration course	2018	65 / 47	70 / 52	55 / 36
	2017	52 / 32	57 / 36	40 / 22
	2016	33 / 14	36 / 15	24 / 10
Vocational/ESFBAMF course	2018	14 / 8	16 / 10	9 / 5
	2017	8 / 4	9 / 5	5 / 2
	2016	2 / 1	3 / 1	1 / 1
Measures by the Federal Employment Agency with language support	2018	12 / 7	15 / 9	7 / 4
	2017	11 / 6	12 / 7	6 / 3
	2016	10 / 6	12 / 6	7 / 4
Other German course	2018	52 / 31	55 / 35	43 / 23
	2017	48 / 26	52 / 28	38 / 18
	2016	38 / 18	41 / 20	30 / 13

Legend: 65% of all the refugees interviewed in the 2018 survey stated that they were participating, or had participated, in an integration course.
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

at the time the survey was carried out. In 2018, 17% of men compared to 25% of women were still attending a course. The clear gap between men and women now appears to be gradually closing. This trend is particularly evident for integration courses and other courses, but not (yet) for language courses for professional purposes and measures implemented by the Federal Employment Agency with language support components. The latter are linked closely to the labour market, which explains why they may not yet be significant for women as the number of women refugees in employment is lower.

Some refugees gain access to an integration course sooner than others

For the survey years 2016 and 2017, Tissot et al. (2019) show that access to an integration course depends not only on the legal framework but also on individual factors. This also applies to 2018: by 2018, 80% of refugees with a high level of education had attended an integration course, whereas 60% of refugees with a low level of education had attended one (Figure 3 left). Approximately 70% of the men and 65% of the women with or without children over the age of 4 had attended or were currently attending an integration course in 2018. By contrast, this is only true of around 40% of women with small children under the age of 4 (Figure 4 left).

With regard to the cohort of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2016, as considered in this brief analysis, these influencing factors meant some refugees gained access to integration courses sooner than others. Whereas in 2016 and 2017, the subgroup of refugees with a high and intermediate level of education attended integration courses much more frequently, and hence, over time, sooner overall than persons with a low level of education, the proportion of refugees with a low level of education attending an integration course increases significantly in 2018. Accordingly, refugees with a low level of education account for 41% of all refugees who started an integration course in 2018, this figure having risen by 11 percentage points since 2016 (Figure 3 right). Persons with less favourable learning conditions now seem to access courses more often. At the same time, a certain saturation effect can be observed in respect of persons with a high level of education – with nearly all of those who were entitled to participate in a course and were interested in doing so likely to have already attended one.

A similar effect can be seen among the women with childcare responsibilities surveyed in the study, who in 2016 and 2017 came to the integration course much less frequently and thus more slowly. This applies, in particular, to mothers of young children. By contrast, the starting level among women with older

Figure 3:   Frequency of participation in the integration course and composition of course beginners by level of education (in percent)

Participation in an integration course cumulative, by level of education

Level of education of course beginners by year
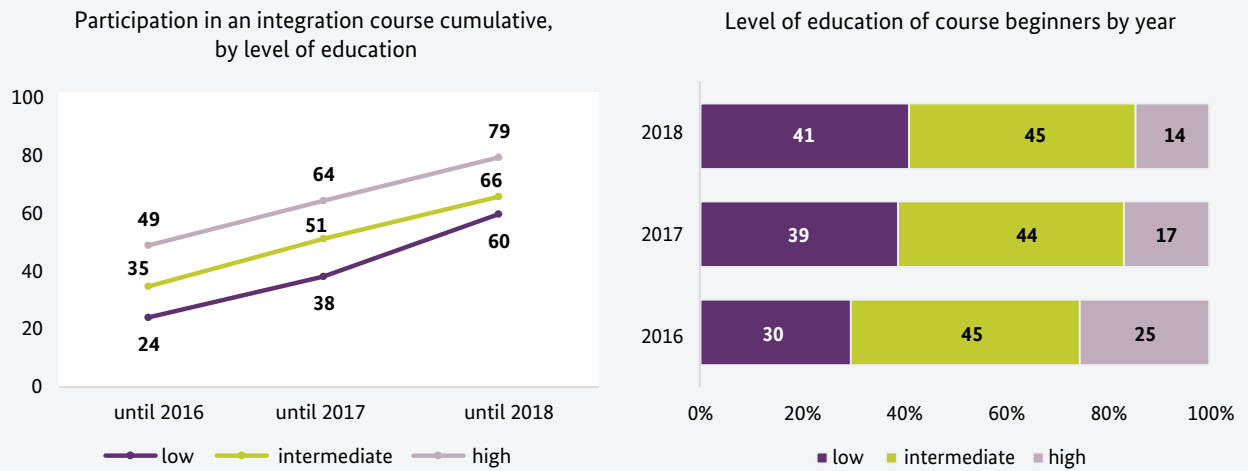
Legend: 60% of all refugees with a low level of education interviewed in 2018 stated that they participated in an integration course by 2018 (on the left). Of all refugees who started an integration course in 2018, 41% had a low level of education.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

children is not just similar to 2016, but also shows a trend similar to that of women without children. For women with young children, a very small increase of 11 percentage points compared to the previous year was observed from 2016 to 2017, though there was a somewhat higher increase from 2017 to 2018 (Figure 4 left). Likewise, the proportion of women with children commencing an integration course rose sharply from 2016 to 2018 – women with children account for 25% of participants starting a course in 2018. Particularly women with children over 4 years of age successfully access an integration course, while the rate of increase is slower for women with very young children. A certain saturation effect has probably set in for men with and without children, similar to refugees with a high level of education; in 2018, they account for 66% of persons starting the integration course compared to 80% in 2016.

Figure 4:   Frequency of participation in the integration course and composition of course beginners by gender and by number of children in the household (in percent)

Participation in integration courses cumulative, by family situation

Family situation of course beginners by year
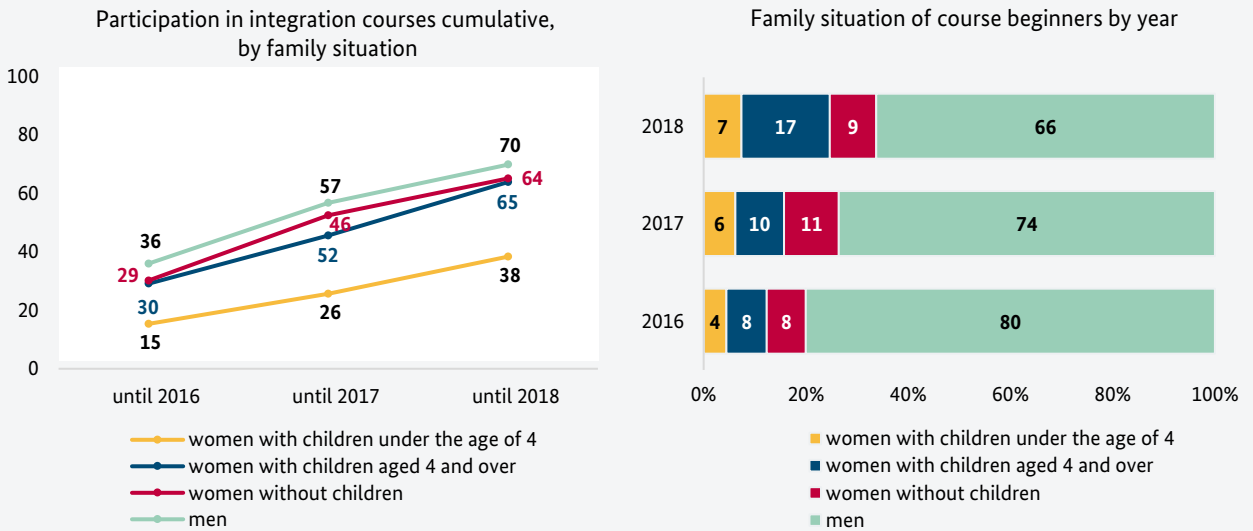
Legend: 38% of all female refugees with children under the age of four interviewed in 2018 stated that they had participated in an integration course by 2018 (on the left). Of all refugees who started an integration course in 2018, 7% were women with children under the age of 4.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

How do refugees evaluate their living conditions?

In order to provide as comprehensive an overview as possible of refugees' living conditions, the following section goes beyond language acquisition and initially shows refugees' level of satisfaction with their life in Germany in 2018.

Refugees were generally satisfied with their lives in 2018

General life satisfaction can be used as a summary indicator of how refugees assessed their living conditions in 2018. It shows that they were moderately satisfied with their lives (mean value of 6.99 on a scale of 0 to 11 with 0 indicating "totally dissatisfied" and 10 "totally satisfied" – see Figure 5). Satisfaction has been rising slightly but steadily since 2016, although the increases cannot be statistically verified, i.e., they cannot be generalised for the population as a whole.

A comparison with persons in the host society shows that they were slightly more satisfied than refugees: in 2018,[3] persons without a migration background indicated an average satisfaction level of 7.35 on the scale of 0 to 11 and persons with a migration background a satisfaction level of 7.4.

As regards influences on life satisfaction in general, it is immediately apparent that couples with or without

children are more satisfied than singles (see Table A2 in the Annex). However, gender and age as additional demographic characteristics do not play a key role.

With regard to the socio-structural situation, refugees whose removal had been suspended were less satisfied with life than refugees whose protection status had been granted. Furthermore, refugees in full-time employment were more satisfied with life than the unemployed, and refugees in shared accommodation were less satisfied with life than those living in private accommodation. There was no significant correlation between the level of education and subjective assessment of German languageskills and general life satisfaction. However, there was a clear correlation with the (subjective assessment of the) health situation: the poorer the health of refugees, the less satisfied they were with life (a detailed analysis of the health situation of refugees can be found in Metzing et al. 2020).

Finally, it can be seen that satisfaction with life is also higher the more welcome a person felt in Germany and the less concerned he or she was about the possibility of staying and about hostility towards foreigners in Germany. By contrast, the frequency of perceived disadvantages due to an individual's origin did not play a significant role. Moreover, satisfaction with life increased the more time refugees spent with Germans.

This shows that refugees' life satisfaction is linked to their family situation, their legal residency status, their employment and housing situation, their healthcare situation, their feeling of being welcome in Germany and the extent of their social contacts with Germans.

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3   These and the following figures on the majority population come from the Socio-Economic Panel's (SOEP) own analyses (Göbel et al. 2019).

Figure 5:   Average general life satisfaction
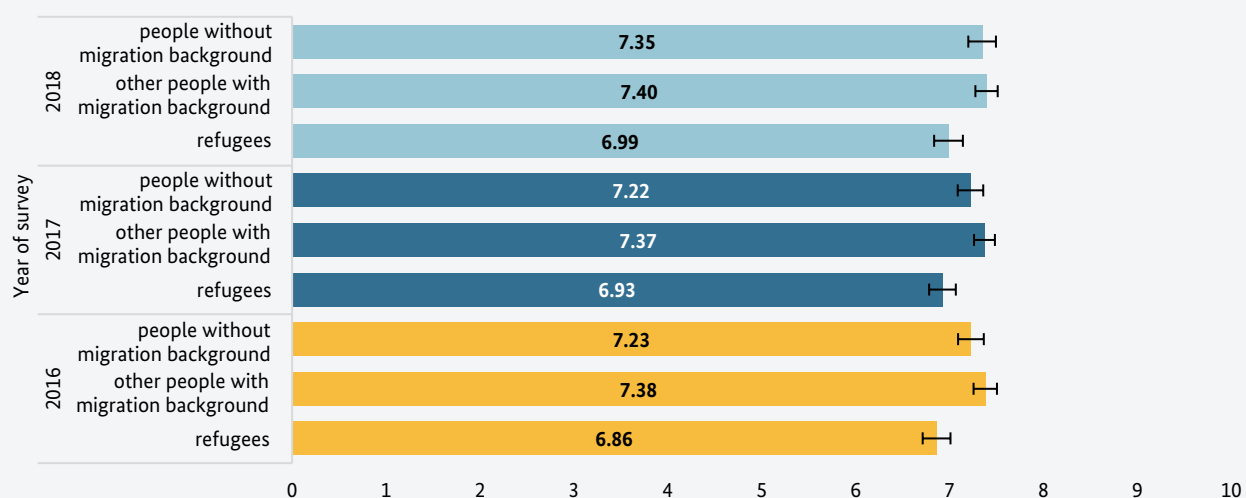
Note: The scale for measuring life satisfaction ranges from 0 „completely dissatisfied" to 10 „completely satisfied"..
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

Publications that provide insight into the respective objective circumstances have been published in the meantime for most of these aspects (for their family situation: e.g., Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 2019, for their employment situation: Brücker et al. 2020, for their housing situation: Baier/Siegert 2018, and for their social integration: Siegert 2019). However, it has hardly been investigated how refugees themselves assess their own living conditions, with the exception of the health-related circumstances (Metzing et al. 2020) and the housing situation (Baier/Siegert 2018). In the following, we will therefore focus on the areas for which the relevant information is available: key aspects of economic living conditions – concern about one's own economic situation and satisfaction with the income and professional situation – as well as the assessment of the relationship with the majority society – the extent of the sense of welcome, concerns regarding hostility towards foreigners in Germany, the intention to stay and attachment to the country of origin.

Around three-quarters of refugees felt welcome in Germany in 2018

In 2018, the clear majority of the refugees surveyed (74%) felt that they were still very or extremely welcome in Germany (Table 2). By contrast, the proportion of those who did not feel welcome or who felt most unwelcome was significantly lower at around 6%. Male refugees felt slightly less welcome than female refugees.

The first survey conducted in 2016 showed that the vast majority of the refugees surveyed, around 80%, felt welcome in Germany (Scheible et al. 2016: 36). Although the data can only be compared to a limited extent, given that the response categories[4] and to a limited extent the respective population (see Box 1) were not identical in the two survey years, the similarly high proportions still suggest that refugees in Germany felt as welcome in 2018 as they did in 2016.

As might be expected, the sense of being welcome is related in particular to concerns about xenophobia and the frequency of having felt at a disadvantage because of one's origin (not illustrated). Against this backdrop, it is evident that in 2018 around 35% of refugees had some to major concerns about xenophobia in Germany – correspondingly, around 65% were not concerned at all – and that around 43% rarely too often – correspondingly, around 57% never – felt disadvantaged because of their origin. It is evident that the longer

Table 2: Feeling of being welcome in Germany (in percent)

	Total	Women	Men
Extremely	37	41	35
Very	37	37	37
In some respects	21	18	21
Hardly	5	3	5
Not at all	1	1	2
Number (unweighted)	3,834	2,372	1,462

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

refugees stay, the more concerned they slowly but steadily become about xenophobia and the more they feel disadvantaged. However, it was not possible to develop any clear, statistically validated trends over the years covered by the survey.

Comparisons to persons in the host society show that in 2017, around 90% of persons without a migration background and around 85% of persons with a migration background had some to major concerns about xenophobia in Germany, indicating that the proportions were far greater than among refugees. The situation is different when it comes to the feeling of having been disadvantaged on the basis of origin: in 2017, around 33% of the other persons with a migrant background felt that they had been disadvantaged on the basis of their origin; in 2018, the figure among refugees was 43%.

Strong attachment to Germany and intention to remain – but concerns about the possibility of remaining

Studies based on data from 2016 showed that a very large proportion of refugees wanted to stay in Germany permanently (Scheible et al. 2016: 35). However, a large proportion of refugees seem to fear that this will not be possible. In 2018, slightly more than two-thirds of refugees had some to major concerns that they would not be able to stay in Germany (not illustrated). Persons whose asylum procedures were still pending and persons whose removal had been suspended were particularly concerned (not illustrated). By contrast, there were no systematic differences according to the year of entry and no systematic and statistically validated differences between the survey years.

In connection with the frequently expressed intent to stay in Germany permanently, it should also be noted that in 2017 around 79% of refugees said they felt a

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4   In 2016, the answer categories were: "completely", "predominantly", "In some respects", "hardly" and "not at all".

strong or very strong attachment to Germany (not illustrated). By comparison, around 43% of refugees in 2018 said they felt a strong to very strong attachment to their country of origin, whereas around 28% said they felt little or no attachment to their country of origin (Figure 6). This shows that some refugees' sense of attachment to Germany seems to be stronger than their attachment to their country of origin. In addition, the attachment refugees had to their country of origin between 2016 and 2018, although not statistically significant, tended to decrease steadily.

Refugees are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their professional situation

In addition to the feeling of being welcome in Germany, the level of employment also proved to be significant for respondents' general life satisfaction (Table A2 in the online Annex). According to Brücker et al. (2020), in 2018, a good third (35%) of the refugees who had arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016 inclusive were gainfully employed. It also shows that slightly more than half of the employed refugees were employed at least as skilled workers and around 46% were employed as assistants and trainees. If both formal and informal skills and abilities acquired through professional experience in the country of origin are taken into account, almost one-third (about 30%) of refugees were employed in jobs that were not commensurate with their original level of qualification.

Although this shows that the integration of refugees into the labour market is clearly progressing – indeed somewhat faster than for refugees who moved to Germany from the early 1990s onwards (Brücker et al. 2020: 7) – there is still room for further improvement. This is also reflected in refugees' satisfaction with their current job situation, which indicated an average value of 4.9 on the scale of 0 to 11 in 2018 (not illustrated). As expected, there were very marked differences

between refugees in full-time employment, who were the most satisfied, and unemployed refugees, whose average satisfaction was the lowest at 2.96.

Refugees are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their personal income – but many are concerned about their economic situation

With regard to income from gainful employment, Brücker et al. (2020) can show that, although refugees' income has been rising steadily since 2016, it still lags noticeably behind the income of the German-born population: in 2018, the average gross monthly income of refugees in full-time employment was 54% of the income of full-time workers born in Germany (Brücker et al. 2020).

On average, refugees were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their personal income (mean value of 5.3 on the scale of 0 to 11 – not illustrated). As expected, non-employed refugees were the least satisfied with their income (mean value: 5.08), while fully employed refugees were the most satisfied (mean value: 6.28). However, the latter were still less satisfied with their income than fully employed persons in the majority society (with or without a migration background), whose average satisfaction in 2017 reached a value of 7.01 on the scale of 0 to 11 (not illustrated). This difference is probably due to the lower average income of refugees in full-time employment (Brücker et al. 2020).

Increasing labour market integration and rising incomes from employment suggest that the economic situation of refugees will continue to improve in the future. However, as some refugees are not yet successful on the labour market and income levels are still comparatively low, it can be assumed that many refugees will continue to find the current economic situation difficult.

Figure 6:   Extent of feeling of attachement to the country of origin by year of survey (in percent)
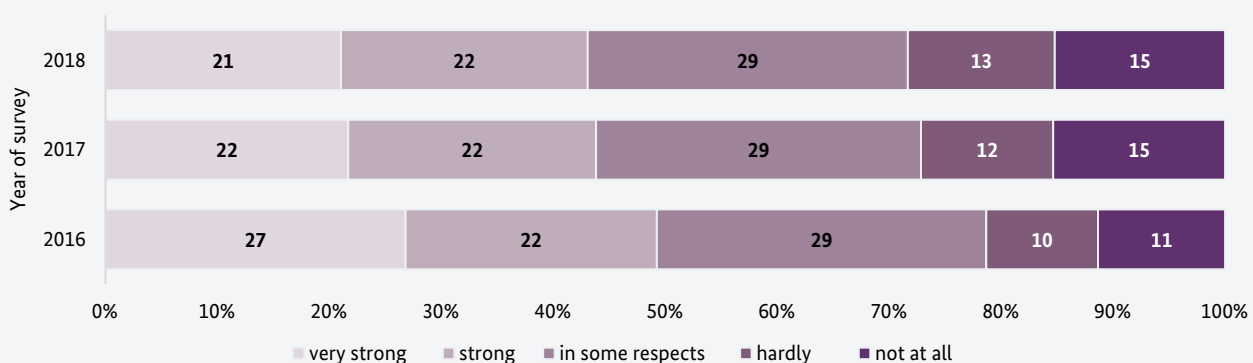
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016, 2017, 2018, weighted.

Figure 7: **Proportion of refugees who had some or major worries about their economic situation in 2018, by status of employment (in percent)**
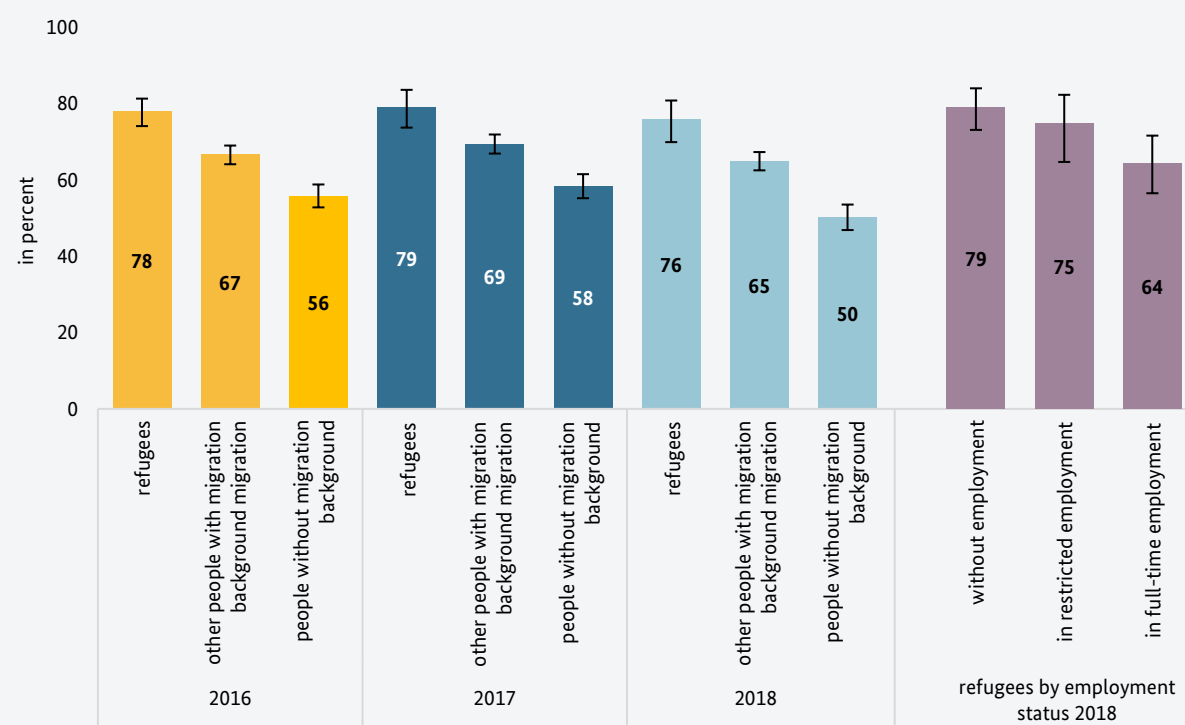
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2018, weighted.

In actual fact, three-quarters of the refugees in 2018 had some to major concerns about their own economic situation (Figure 7), although the proportion remained largely stable over the three years covered by the survey, 2016 to 2018. The proportion was also noticeably higher than among persons without a migrant background, around 50% of whom had some to major concerns in 2018, and also slightly higher than among other persons with a migrant background in Germany, for whom the proportion was around 65%.

The intensity of concerns is clearly correlated to the current employment situation: among unemployed refugees, the proportion of those who were worried about their own economic situation was significantly higher than among refugees in full-time employment (Figure 7). However, almost two-thirds of the latter still had some to major concerns about their own economic situation.

Summary and conclusion

On the basis of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, it is evident that in 2018 the integration of refugees in terms of language proficiency continued to progress, and the integration process in Germany is becoming increasingly stable.

Refugees are gradually improving their knowledge of the German language. In spite of the universal mechanisms of language acquisition, special conditions must be taken into account for refugees learning the language. Less favourable learning conditions, such as a low level of education, young children to be looked after, the lack of course participation or living in shared accommodation, not only make it more difficult for these subgroups of refugees to learn German but in some cases actually exacerbate the unequal development between refugees with different learning requirements over time.

Self-assessed German language skills improve over the period reviewed, both in a controlled language course environment and in uncontrolled settings without targeted language support. Although proficiency in German has improved greatly, even among those who are not learning German in a controlled language course setting, (former) language course participants show higher levels of proficiency, having learnt German much more quickly after entering the country. It is therefore encouraging that participation in language support measures increased further in 2018. Only 15% of the refugees who entered the country between 2013 and 2016 had not yet participated in any such measure in 2018. With regard to the integration course as the Federal Government's key integration measure,

it is evident that over the past year, slightly higher participation rates have been recorded among this group and even among persons who are more accustomed to learning. It is also clear that women with older children (aged 4 and over) are attending the integration course more frequently than in the past. By contrast, the integration course participation rate for women with very young children still remains low.

Thus, within the cohort of refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2016, there are initial signs that persons with less favourable learning conditions, whose progress should be more closely examined in further series of interviews, are gradually starting to catch up. It should be noted that this means the trend among the group of refugees participating in integration courses is moving in the direction of more slow learners. This means it is likely to take longer for refugees to achieve the language target level of the integration course (B1 in the general integration course or A2 in the literacy course) than in the past. At the same time, the challenges are increasing for language course teachers, who have to adapt to the different and often more heterogeneous participant structure. It is becoming increasingly important to find customised courses that take participants' different levels of education into account (as is the case, for example, in the integration course system).

With regard to the assessment of their own living conditions, it has become apparent that, all in all, the refugees interviewed are fairly positive about their living conditions in Germany. Their satisfaction level has been quite stable since 2016, even though there are signs of a slow but steady increase. However, the general life satisfaction of refugees is (still) lower than the satisfaction of persons in the host society. General life satisfaction is diminished above all by concerns about their personal economic situation. On average, refugees are not satisfied with their employment and personal income situation – but they are not explicitly dissatisfied either. These results indicate that, despite the improvements in the employment and income situation that have already occurred (Brücker et al. 2020), a large proportion of refugees are not satisfied with what they have already achieved and would like to achieve more. In order to do so, it is essential that they become more proficient in the German language.

The feeling of being welcome in Germany also plays an important role in general satisfaction. Against this backdrop, the fact that refugees feel most welcome, and have done consistently since 2016, should be seen in a positive light. This was not necessarily to be expected, since the public discourse on refugees

and migration in general has become more critical in the meantime. However, although the proportion of respondents who are concerned about xenophobia in Germany has increased slightly since 2016, it is still significantly below the level of concern among persons in the host society. This could indicate that some of the refugees are not (yet) following, or are unable to follow, the public debate aired by the media.

At the same time, the number of refugees who feel that they have been disadvantaged on account of their origin is proportionately higher than the number of persons with a migrant background. Some of the refugees thus seem to occasionally experience rejection in everyday life but do not generalise these individual experiences.

With regard to the importance of the feeling of being welcome for general life satisfaction, it should also be noted that there is a positive correlation between having contacts with Germans and satisfaction. Adequate German language skills among refugees are a key prerequisite for establishing and developing contacts between refugees and persons in the host society. However, this means opportunities also need to be created to enable them to make these contacts. Contexts in which contacts are unavoidable to a certain extent have proven to be helpful in this respect, such as contacts at the workplace or the training provider (Siegert 2019: 5). This in turn highlights, on the one hand, the fact that integration into the labour market is important not only for the individual economic situation but also for social integration. On the other hand, it becomes clear how important it is to take a holistic view of refugees' living conditions since the different areas are not independent of one another but rather mutually interdependent.

Annex

Table A1: Factors influencing German language skills – linear regression

Influencing factors	Coefficient	Sig.
Motivation		
Residence status (ref: procedure pending)		
Protection status granted	-.0330	
Removal suspended	.0162	
Other	-0.045	
Employment	0.264	*
Opportunities		
Participation in a language course	1.098	***
Length of stay in months	0.415	***
Length of stay in months squared	-0.019	***
Contact with Germans (1 "never" to 6 "daily")	0.542	***
Shared accommodation	-0.204	
Children in the household (ref: no children in the household)		
Children under the age of 4 in the household	0.278	
Children over the age of 4 in the household	0.204	
Children in the household x gender (ref: man with no children in the household)		
Woman x children under the age of 4 in the household	-1.334	***
Woman x children over the age of 4 in the household	-.336	
Efficiency		
Age at entry in years	-0.252	***
Age at entry in years squared	0.002	***
Woman	-0.048	
Education (ref: low level of education)a		
Intermediate level of education	1.011	***
High level of education	1.505	***
Primary and functional illiteracy	1.550	**
Satisfaction with health (0 "very poor" to 10 "very good")	0.103	***
Constant	6.538	***
R2	0.46	
Total	3.093	

Comments: Unstandardised regression coefficients, data weighted. Dependent variable: sum index of German language skills from 0 to 12; a Classification based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011: ISCED categories 0 and 1 = low level of education, categories 2 to 4 = intermediate level of education, categories 6 to 8 = high level of education; significances: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$. Other variables not shown here but used are: country of origin. The complete results can be obtained from the authors.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2018.

Table A2: Factors influencing general life satisfaction (0 "completely dissatisfied" to 10 "completely satisfied") – linear regression

Influencing factors	Coefficient	Sig.
Demographics		
Woman	0.120	
Age in years	-0.025	
Age in years squared	0.000	
One-person household (reference)		
Couple with one child/several children	0.532	***
Couple with no children	0.638	**
Single parent	0.069	
Social structure		
Protection status granted (reference)		
Procedure pending	-0.266	
Removal suspended	-0.755	**
Other	-0.273	
Intermediate level of education (reference)a		
Low level of education	0.145	
High level of education	-0.098	
Knowledge of Germanb (index – 1 "none at all" to 5 "very good")	0.093	
Not gainfully employed (reference)		
Partially employed	0.054	
Working full-time	0.435	**
Living in shared accommodation	-0.548	**
Feeling of being welcome		
Feels welcome in Germany (1 "not at all" to 5 "extremely welcome")	0.587	***
Concerned about xenophobia in Germany	-0.319	**
Feeling of never having been disadvantaged	0.133	
Social integration		
Time spent with Germans (1 "never" to 6 "daily")	0.119	***
Time spent with persons from the country of origin (1 "never" to 6 "daily")	0.077	
Time spent with persons from other countries (1 "never" to 6 "daily")	-0.080	**
Constant	8.927	***
R2	0.17	
Total	3.413	

Comments: Unstandardised regression coefficients, data weighted; a Classification based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011: ISCED categories 0 and 1 = low level of education, categories 2 to 4 = intermediate level of education, categories 6 to 8 = high level of education; b Sum index of subjective assessment of speaking, writing and reading skills; significances: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Other variables not shown here but used are: country of origin and year of entry. The complete results can be obtained from the authors.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2018.

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