

### Literacy training and German language acquisition among refugees: Knowledge of German and the need for support among integration course attendees learning a second alphabet and those with no literacy skills

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# Brief Analysis

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Literacy training and German language acquisition among refugees:

## Knowledge of German and the need for support among integration course attendees learning a second alphabet and those with no literacy skills

Von Jana A. Scheible

### AT A GLANCE

- This Brief Analysis is based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016 and aims to determine the literacy skills (in both Latin and other writing systems) of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2016, and to analyse their success in learning German in relation to their literacy skills. The analyses are based on the respondents' self-assessed knowledge of German.
- At the time of their arrival to Germany, roughly 34 % of the refugees were able to read and write the Latin alphabet, 51 % had learned to read and write in another writing system and are now learning a second alphabet, and 15 % had no literacy skills in any alphabet.
- Knowledge of written or spoken German was virtually non-existent among all three groups on arrival.
- At the time of the survey in the second half of 2016, less than one-fifth of the people with no literacy skills in any alphabet had participated in an integration course. The share rose to 33 % for people learning a second alphabet and to 39 % for those who were literate in the Latin alphabet.
- The greatest growth in self-assessed knowledge of German was recorded by those who had skills in the Latin alphabet, and the least by those who had no literacy skills in any alphabet.
- The majority of the integration course graduates who were able to read and write the Latin alphabet at the time of their arrival to Germany indicated that their knowledge of German was good at the time of the survey. People without literacy skills in the Latin alphabet had acquired a basic knowledge of German, but it seems important that people without literacy skills in any alphabet in particular receive additional support after the integration course in order to enable them to use the language freely.
- Taken together, the share of people without literacy skills in the Latin alphabet or any alphabet among those who had not (yet) participated in an integration course in the second half of 2016 amounted to almost two-thirds. Thus, the results of the study suggest that there is a significant further need of courses including literacy training, in particular for people learning a second alphabet.

How to teach migrants German has been a key topic in the discussions about how to best integrate refugees who have come to Germany in the past few years. The integration courses by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) play an important role in this context. Not only has the number of integration course participants increased considerably in the past few years, the structure of participants has changed as well. This becomes evident if we look at the participants' main countries of origin: In the past few years, the share of EU citizens has declined and that of migrants from third countries, in particular Arab-speaking countries, has risen. Since 2015, Syrian nationals have clearly been the largest group of new participants. In 2016, almost half of all new integration course participants (46.9 %) were Syrians, followed by Iraqis (8.2 %) and Eritreans (5.2 %) (BAMF 2017a).

This shift in the countries of origin has repercussions on the language background and the educational history of the participants. Many of the new participants have attended school and can read and write in their native language, but are not literate in the Latin alphabet. Others cannot read or write in any alphabet and have not received any or only rudimentary education. They will therefore need to learn how to read and write for the first time; learning the Latin alphabet in the context of learning German will also help them to become literate. Box 1 contains a detailed definition

### BOX 1: DEFINITION OF LITERATES IN THE LATIN ALPHABET, PEOPLE WITHOUT LITERACY SKILLS IN ANY ALPHABET AND PEOPLE LEARNING A SECOND ALPHABET

**Literates in the Latin alphabet** are functionally literate in the Latin alphabet, i. e. can fluently and easily read and write in the Latin alphabet. They have usually attended school for several years and have acquired learning strategies.

**People learning a second alphabet** are functionally literate in one or more non-Latin alphabets, but not in the Latin alphabet. They, too, have usually attended school for several years and acquired learning strategies.

**People without literacy skills in any alphabet** cannot read or write sufficiently well in either the Latin or any other alphabet to be regarded as functionally literate. Learning to read and write the Latin alphabet will thus help them to become literate. This group includes primary illiterates who have not gone to school and cannot read or write at all, functional illiterates who have attended school, but whose reading and writing skills in their native language are limited, and secondary illiterates who have forgotten much or all of the literacy skills they had acquired at one point in their lives.

Source: based on BAMF 2015: 40 et seq.

of people learning a second alphabet, those with no literacy skills in any alphabet and literates in the Latin alphabet.

How people learn a second language and how successful they are at it depends on numerous factors (see Scheible/Rother 2017 for an overview). (Language) Learning experience and literacy play a major role in this context, seeing that they form the basis for understanding written language and for the systematic acquisition of a new language by textbooks. People learning a second alphabet and those without literacy skills in any alphabet are therefore in different starting positions, both in comparison to each other and in comparison to literates in the Latin alphabet. In contrast to people without literacy skills in any alphabet, those learning a second alphabet can fall back on learning strategies and writing skills they have acquired before. Thus, they usually learn German more quickly, provided they receive the necessary support (Schuller et al. 2012).

This Brief Analysis uses the data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016 (Kroh et al. 2017) to determine the literacy skills of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2016 and to examine how well they have learned German. The refugee survey took place in the second half of 2016 and did not exclude participants by their current residence status (see Box 2 for more details on the survey). The analyses focus particularly on people without literacy skills in any alphabet and people learning a second alphabet, who are thus the main target groups for courses including literacy training. First, we will use migrants' reading and writing skills in Latin and non-Latin alphabets to define people without literacy skills and those learning a second alphabet in contrast to those who are literate in the Latin alphabet. Then, we will take a more detailed look at the three groups' participation in integration courses and their progress with learning German between the time of entry and the date of the survey. We will analyse these developments in general and with a focus on migrants' completion of or potential participation in integration courses. This will help to determine a) whether integration course participants require additional assistance after the completion of the course and what type of additional assistance they may need and b) whether there is a further need for courses including literacy training among those who have not (yet) participated in an integration course but may do so in the future.

### Integration courses with literacy training

Since 2005, the integration courses offered by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) have been the main official instrument to help migrants with learning German (see Table 1 for an overview of different course types). The general integration course consists of 600 language lessons (language course) and 100 lessons about German history, politics, culture and law (orientation course).

## Box 2: THE IAB-BAMF-SOEP REFUGEE SURVEY

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is a representative longitudinal study, which was first conducted in 2016 in the framework of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). The survey was conducted among persons who came to Germany between 1 January 2013 and 31 January 2016, filed an asylum application and were therefore registered in the Central Register of Foreigners. Additionally, the members of their households were interviewed.

The current residence status did not play a role for the selection of the sample. The survey was conducted among persons undergoing an asylum procedure (asylum applicants) as well as those who already were granted protection, in particular persons entitled to asylum pursuant to Art. 16a of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of

Germany, recognised refugees under the Geneva Refugee Convention, and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. It also included persons whose asylum applications had been rejected, but whose return or deportation had been suspended for different reasons (Kroh et al. 2017).

The following analyses are based on the data of the first survey phase, which included roughly 4,500 individuals aged at least 18 at the time of the survey and took place between June and December 2016 (Kroh et al. 2017). Disproportionalities in the sample, esp. due to the sampling procedure, are offset by weights so that the results can be interpreted as representative. Table 3 contains an overview of the average time of residence and the breakdown of the survey participants by the year of entry.

**Table 1: Language lessons in the general integration course, the course for illiterate people and people learning a second alphabet**

	General integration course	Course for people learning a second alphabet	Course for illiterate people
<b>Legal pre-conditions</b>	For <b>foreign nationals with a permanent residence status</b> and <b>German nationals with particular integration needs</b> and a migrant background; since 24 October 2015 also for <b>asylum applicants with good prospects to remain</b> (currently from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia), <b>persons whose removal has been suspended</b> pursuant to Section 60a subs. 2 sentence 3 of the Residence Act, and holders of a residence permit pursuant to Section 25 subs. 5 of the Residence Act.		
<b>Language course</b>			
<b>Target group: linguistic preconditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functionally literate in the Latin alphabet</li> <li>Have reading, writing and learning experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People learning a second alphabet, i. e. who can read and write one or more languages which do not use the Latin alphabet</li> <li>Acquire additional literacy in the Latin alphabet</li> <li>Usually have substantial reading, writing and learning experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People without literacy skills in any alphabet, i. e. who are not or insufficiently literate in either the Latin or another alphabet Usually have no or only rudimentary reading, writing and learning experience</li> </ul>
<b>Goal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language level <b>B1</b> (speaking, understanding, writing and reading): people can manage everyday situations and are able to express themselves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language level <b>B1</b> (see general integration course)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall target: level B1</li> <li>For most, level <b>A2.2</b> is realistic</li> <li>For <b>primary illiterates</b>, the minimum goal is level <b>A2.1</b></li> </ul>
<b>Extent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>600 lessons</b> (additional special courses, for example an intensive course with 400 lessons)</li> <li><b>300 lessons may be repeated</b> if participants attend regularly and do not achieve level B1 in the test</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>900 lessons</b> (standard 600 lessons, plus a further 300 lessons if participants attended regularly)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1,200 lessons</b> (standard 900 lessons, plus a further 300 lessons if participants attended regularly)</li> </ul>
<b>Course structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic: 300 lessons</li> <li>Advanced: 300 lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic: 300 lessons</li> <li>Advanced A: 300 lessons</li> <li>Advanced B: 300 lessons</li> </ul> <p>Intensive introduction to the Latin alphabet, followed by the language course</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic: 300 lessons</li> <li>Advanced A: 300 lessons</li> <li>Advanced B: 300 lessons</li> <li>Advanced C: 300 lessons</li> </ul> <p>Make participants functionally literate as far as possible, teach them German at the same time</p>
<b>Assessment test</b>	Uniform assessment test at the beginning of the course with integrated alpha component		
<b>Final examination</b>	Completion of language course by graded language test “German test for immigrants”(DTZ)		
<b>Orientation course</b>			
<b>Extent</b>	<b>100 lessons in politics and culture</b>		
<b>Final examination</b>	Completion of orientation course by the “Life in Germany” test		

Source: based on BAMF 2015/BAMF 2017b

The general integration course aims to enable migrants to acquire language skills equivalent to level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For a successful completion of the general integration course and the acquisition of level B1 language skills participants need to be functionally literate in the Latin alphabet and have basic learning experience before they embark upon the course.

Since this may not be the case and participants may have specific needs due to their living situation, the range of integration courses has been extended since 2005 and includes other, more specific courses tailored to particular target groups. Among these are courses for illiterate people and, since February 2017, courses for people learning a second alphabet (see Table 1 for an overview of the different course types).

The courses including literacy training include more lessons than the general language course (up to 900 or, for the course for illiterate people, up to 1,200 lessons). Participants of the course for people learning a second alphabet will first receive intensive instruction in the Latin alphabet and then start their German lessons, with the aim of achieving language skills equivalent to level B1 (BAMF 2017b). The course for illiterate people will focus on basic competences. In small groups, participants will learn basic learning strategies. The course aims to make them functionally literate and teach them some German at the same time. The (realistic) goal of the course for illiterate people is therefore to help the majority of participants to acquire language skills equivalent to level A2.2 (BAMF 2015).

Until the launch of the special course for people learning a second alphabet, people learning a second alphabet and those without literacy skills in any alphabet were taught together in the course for illiterate people. People learning a second alphabet were encouraged to switch to the general integration course as quickly as possible. Course switching was sometimes difficult, however, and participants had to wait until they could do so. The course for people learning a second alphabet will hopefully resolve this problem so that the courses can run more smoothly overall (BAMF 2017b).

### Literacy among refugees

In order to determine the three groups – people without literacy skills in any alphabet, people learning a second alphabet and those literate in the Latin alphabet at the time of entry – we focused on the degree of literacy in all languages mentioned in the survey and differentiated between Latin and non-Latin alphabets. Box 3 contains more information about how language skills and the degree of literacy are determined.

## BOX 3: DETERMINING LANGUAGE SKILLS AND THE DEGREE OF LITERACY

In order to **determine their language skills** respondents were asked to rate their knowledge of their native language, of the official language of their country and of English, French and German on a five-point scale from “very good” to “not at all”. They were asked to differentiate between their speaking, writing and reading skills. The survey focused on the language skills at the time of the survey and, for German, additionally any knowledge of the language obtained before coming to Germany. Self-assessments of language skills are a subject of controversial academic discussions. However, objective tests (which might be an alternative) are very time-consuming, which is why it is usually impossible to use them for large questionnaire-based surveys (Edele 2015: 110 et seq.). Nevertheless, subjective assessments may be subject to some distortions.

With regard to the **degree of literacy**, people are categorised as functionally literate if they claim their writing and reading skills in a language are “good” or “very good”. If they put their writing and reading skills in one of the lower three categories (“average”, “not very good”, “not at all”), they are regarded as illiterate or functionally illiterate. However, the threshold between being functionally literate and functionally illiterate is not clear, particularly not in the average category. Since this study focuses on a successful completion of integration courses (including or excluding literacy training), we decided to use a more restrictive approach and categorise those with “average” skills as functionally illiterate, since we assume that people need to have a good knowledge of the Latin alphabet to participate successfully in the general integration course.

Moreover, as the survey asks for current language skills at the time of the survey (and only for German also at the time of arrival), it is quite possible that participants acquired their literacy skills, particularly in English or French, during their time in Germany. This means that the ratios of people without literacy skills and those learning a second alphabet at the time of entry might be underestimated. Other language skills were not taken into account, as the survey asked only whether the respondents knew any other languages, but did not ask in detail about the extent of their knowledge. Migrants might have acquired language skills in their transit countries, which means that in this case the ratios of people without literacy skills and those learning a second alphabet might be overestimated.

The categorisation described above resulted in the following breakdown: Roughly 34 % of the immigrants were literate in the Latin alphabet, 51 % were learning a second alphabet and 15 % had no skills in any alphabet. Table 2 shows the ratios of the three groups at the time of entry by their degree of literacy in Latin and non-Latin alphabets.

**Table 2: Literates in the Latin alphabet, people learning a second alphabet and those without literacy skills in any alphabet at the time of entry by their degree of literacy in Latin and non-Latin alphabets**

Degree of literacy in non-Latin alphabets	Degree of literacy in Latin alphabet	
	Functionally literate	Illiterate or functionally illiterate
Functionally literate	Literates in the Latin alphabet	Learning a second language 51%
Illiterate or functionally illiterate	34%	Without literacy skills in any alphabet 15%

Note: n = 4,417, of which: literates in the Latin alphabet: n = 1,288; people learning a second alphabet: n = 2,435; people without literacy skills in any alphabet: n = 694.

Please see Box 3 for more details about how the degree of literacy was determined. How to read the table: 51 % of those surveyed are learning a second alphabet, which means that they can read and write in a non-Latin alphabet, but not in the Latin alphabet.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016; weighted figures.

A more detailed look at the reading and writing skills shows that the majority of refugees (84 %) claim that they have a good or very good written knowledge of their native or official languages, regardless of the type of alphabet. One-fifth (21 %) said that they also had a good or very good knowledge of written English. Only a small number (2 %) claim that they have a good or very good knowledge of written French at the time of survey, and only a very small share (1 %) claimed that they had a good or very good knowledge of written German at the time of entry.<sup>1</sup>

One could argue that the following overview of German language skills and integration course participation ratios in the second half of 2016 may be distorted by the fact that the survey participants had been staying in Germany for different periods of time. As shown in Table 3, two-thirds (66 %) came to Germany in 2015, and a majority had been resident in Germany for up to two years (81 %). On average, respondents had been staying in Germany for 16 months.

**Table 3: Year of entry of the survey participants**

Year of entry	2013	2014	2015	2016
Share	7 %	18 %	66 %	9 %

Note: n = 4,393

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP refugee survey 2016; weighted figures.

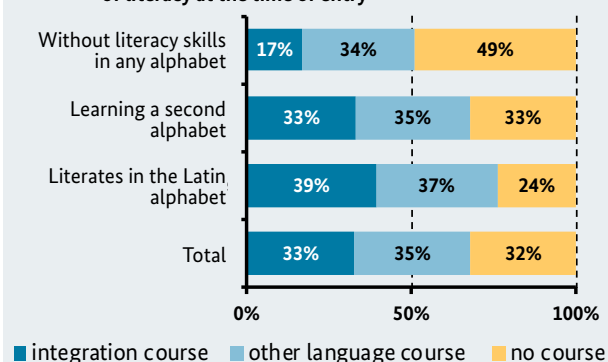
1 Former publications based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016 used preliminary weights or partial samples (for example Rother et al. 2017, Romiti et al. 2016), which is why these figures may slightly deviate from former analyses.

The average times of stay of the three literacy groups did not differ much. For people without literacy skills in any alphabet and those learning a second alphabet, the average residence periods were almost identical (15.5 and 15.3 months, respectively). Literates in the Latin alphabet had, on average, been staying in Germany for two months more (17.4 months). The length of stay in Germany is apparently not or only a minor reason for the differences between people without literacy skills in the any alphabet, people learning a second alphabet and those literate in the Latin alphabet.

## Participation in integration courses

Overall, one-third of the survey respondents had already attended or were attending an integration course at the time of the survey in the second half of 2016. Another 35 % indicated that they had attended another language course organised by an institution or by volunteers (Figure 1; see also Romiti et al. 2016).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Participation in a language course since entry, by degree of literacy at the time of entry**



Note: n = 4,407 (for the size of the different groups see Table 2).

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016; weighted figures.

The number of integration course participants is considerably lower among people without literacy skills in any alphabet (17 %) than among those learning a second alphabet (33 %) and literates in the Latin alphabet (39 %). If we include other language courses, in addition to the official integration course, we find that half of the people without literacy skills in any alphabet (49 %) have not attended a language course at all, compared to 24 % of literates in the Latin alphabet and 33 % of those learning a second alphabet. There may be several reasons for the lower participation rates of people learning a second alphabet and, above all, those without literacy skills in any alphabet. Their right to attend an integration course may be restricted due to their residence status

2 The survey only asked for participation in an integration course, but not for the specific type of integration course. The course for people learning a second alphabet was not introduced until February 2017, i.e. after the survey. This means that the participants cannot yet have participated in a course for people learning a second alphabet.

or country of origin, or they may be unable to attend because of their living circumstances. In particular, female illiterates may find it difficult to participate in an integration course or their attendance may be delayed, for example because they have to follow traditional role models or lack childcare options (Worbs/Baraulina 2017; BAMF 2015: 37).

44 % of the survey respondents who had already participated in an integration course had completed the course at the time of the survey. The remaining 56 % said that their course was ongoing.<sup>3</sup> Of those who had participated in an integration course, literates in the Latin alphabet had completed the course more often (49 %) than people learning a second alphabet (40 %) and those without literacy skills in any alphabet (39 %). The lower completion numbers for those without literacy skills in the Latin or any alphabet may be due to the different length of the courses. Courses including literacy training take longer than general integration courses. Thus, the lower completion ratios do not necessarily mean that those who had not yet completed their courses at the time of the survey will not do so in the future.

## Development of German language skills

A look at the development of German language skills from the time of entry up until the date of the survey, broken down by the three literacy groups, shows that both oral and written knowledge of German rises steeply in all three groups. However, people without literacy skills in any alphabet make considerably less progress than those learning a second alphabet or literates in the Latin alphabet at the time of entry. The latter achieved the greatest progress and gave the most optimistic assessments of their knowledge of German at the time of the survey. Figure 2 underlines this; it shows how many members of the three groups claim that they have a good or very good knowledge of German.

## Speaking, reading and writing skills at the time of the survey

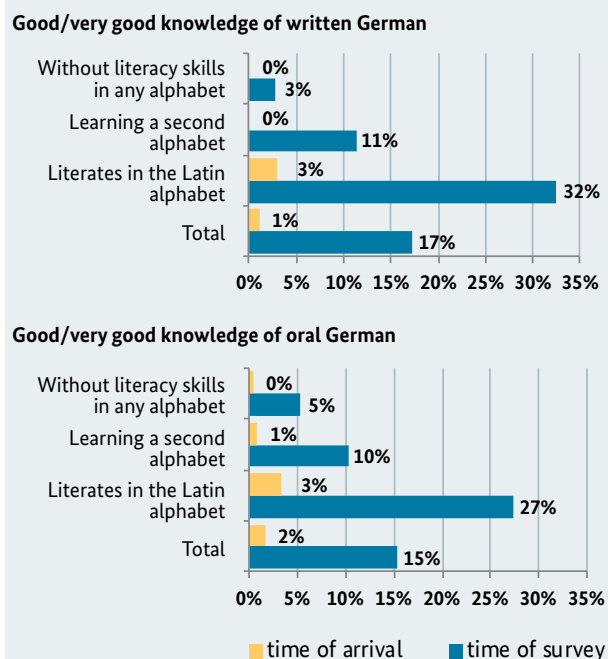
In order to provide a more differentiated overview of the language skills acquired in Germany, we will distinguish between speaking, reading and writing skills in the following analysis. For this analysis, we differentiate between the three groups according to their degree of literacy at the time of entry, in contrast to the categorisation used for the knowledge of German at the time of the survey (see Table 2, p. 5).

With regard to **speaking German** (Figure 3, p. 7), the percentage of those who said they could not speak German

at all was highest among people without literacy skills in any alphabet (24 %). Only one-quarter of this group rated their own speaking competence as average or better. Those learning a second alphabet were considerably more optimistic about their speaking skills, but many of their answers were still in the lower to intermediate categories. Almost half claimed their speaking skills were average or better. The shift towards better skills continues for refugees who were literate in the Latin alphabet at the time of entry. More than one-quarter (27 %) claim that their spoken German is good or very good, while one-third said their speaking skills were average and another third said they did not at all or not very well speak German.

The patterns for **writing and reading skills** (Figure 3) are similar across the groups. Still, a closer look reveals some differences. The percentage of those who have no reading or writing skills at all is larger than that of those who cannot speak German. This applies to all groups, but particularly to those without literacy skills in any alphabet. While the distribution is similar in the intermediate category, the patterns for the upper levels of competence (good/very good) show that literates in the Latin alphabet at the time of entry are often more confident about their written than about their oral language skills. This pattern is visible in the means for the individual groups, too. People without literacy skills in any alphabet rated their speaking skills considerably better than their reading or writing skills at the time of the survey, those learning a second alphabet claimed roughly the

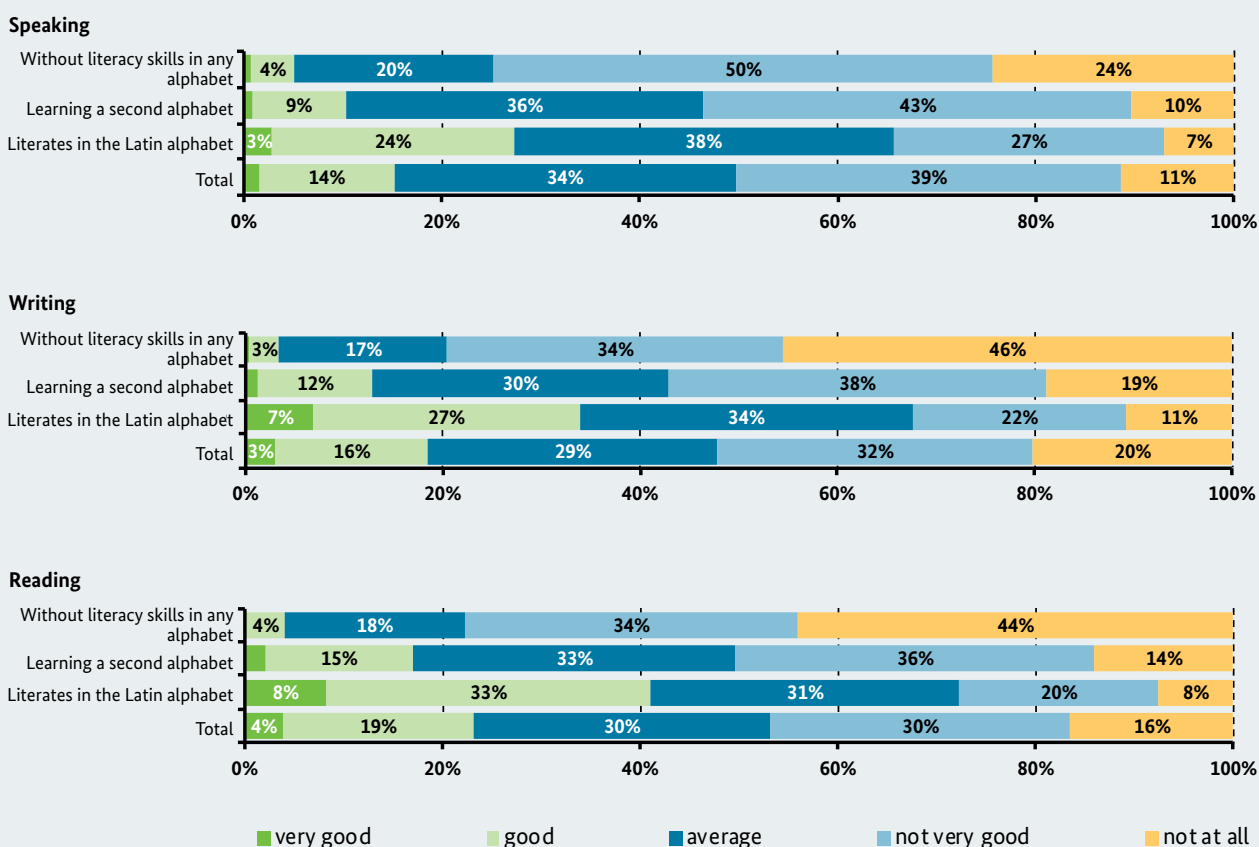
**Figure 2: Good or very good written and oral knowledge of German at the time of entry and the time of the survey, by degree of literacy at the time of entry**



Note: n = 4,416 (for the size of the different groups see Table 2)  
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016; weighted figures.

<sup>3</sup> 14 % of all survey respondents had attended and completed an integration course. 18 % of all survey respondents had attended, but not (yet) completed an integration course. Taken together, a total of 33 % (rounded) had attended an integration course (see Figure 1).

Figure 3: Speaking, writing and reading skills in German at the time of the survey, by degree of literacy at the time of entry



Note: n = 4,415 (for the size of the different groups see Table 2); percentages below 3% not included

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016; weighted figures.

same competence in both areas, and literates in the Latin alphabet tended to say their knowledge of written German was better than their knowledge of oral German, probably because they had better access to written German and lacked conversation practice.

## German language skills of integration course graduates and additional needs

As mentioned above, roughly 14 % of all refugees surveyed had completed an integration course at the time of the survey. We will now focus on the German language skills the integration course graduates claimed to possess at the time of the survey in order to gauge the need of additional language lessons after the integration course. Figure 4 (p. 8) gives an overview of the reading, writing and speaking skills of those who had completed an integration course, by degree of literacy at the time of entry.

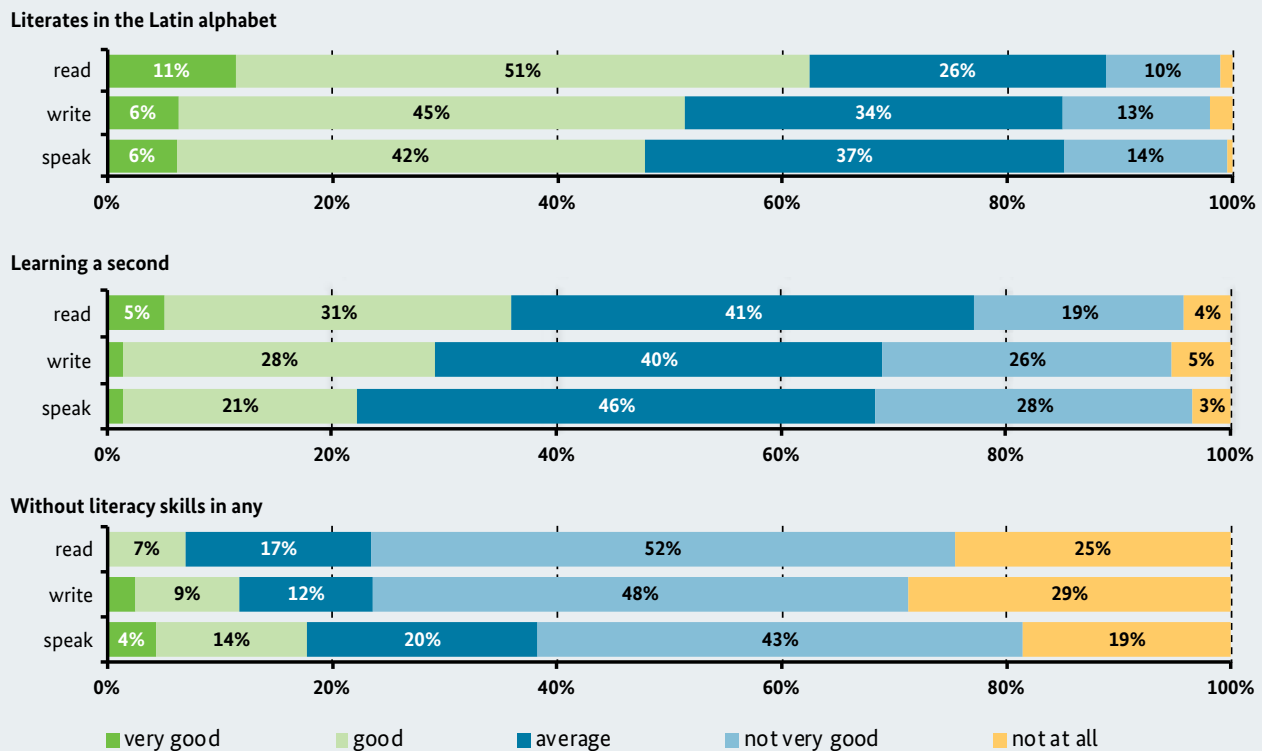
More than half of the **literate in the Latin alphabet at the time of entry** rated their knowledge of German as good or very good at the time of the survey. They claimed that their reading skills were somewhat better than their writing and speaking skills. With respect to further support needs this

suggests that a large part of integration course graduates in this group has a good or very good knowledge of German and should therefore be able to interact in everyday situations and learn more German, either in subsequent courses or by themselves. However, the fact that almost half of the literates in the Latin alphabet still rate their knowledge as average or worse suggests that there is a need for further training, particularly with a view to labour market participation or vocational training.

More than 40 % of those **learning a second alphabet** said that their knowledge of German was average. Almost one-third rated their knowledge of German as good or very good. Overall, people learning a second alphabet have done less well than literates in the Latin alphabet in terms of learning German, but they have acquired basic language skills and can extend them, either by practising German in everyday life or by attending further courses. A look at their reading, writing and speaking skills shows that they rate their writing and speaking skills slightly less good than their reading skills. Since the ability to speak freely and spontaneously is particularly important in everyday life and at work, programmes for people learning a second alphabet should focus on writing and speaking German.



**Figure 4: Speaking, writing and reading skills of integration course graduates at the time of the survey, by degree of literacy at the time of entry**



Note: integration course participants: n= 696, of which literate in the Roman alphabet: n= 287; second-literacy learners: n= 364; first-literacy learners: n= 45. Percentages below 3 % not included.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016; weighted figures.

**People without literacy skills in any alphabet** who had completed an integration course had learned considerably less German by the time of the survey than members of the two other groups. About half of them claimed that their knowledge of German was not very good, another quarter said they did not speak German at all. The question concerning writing skills particularly polarised the group. While more than 10 % claimed their writing skills were good or very good, almost 30 % said they were not able to write at all. The data suggest that, while the people without literacy skills in any alphabet who have attended an integration course have made considerable progress overall, only a minority achieved linguistic skills which go beyond “not so good”. This applies particularly to written German. Obviously, there is a need for further assistance with this issue. More than 70 % claimed that their reading skills were “not so good” or non-existent – and this group will probably find it difficult to manage everyday life. They should receive systematic further assistance, particularly in the field of written German, in order to strengthen and extend their skills.

Across the groups, 25 % of the respondents said that their reading as well as writing and speaking skills were good or very good.

### Future course participants – degree of literacy and knowledge of German among those who have not (yet) attended integration courses

Apart from integration course attendants, there is a second important group: those who have not (yet) attended an integration course. 67 % of the respondents belong to this group. Since many of them will participate in integration or other German language courses in the future, it is important to know how much progress they have already made with learning of German or becoming literate by the time of the survey. Some refugees have been staying in Germany for several years and may have been able to improve their knowledge of German via other language courses or by themselves to a degree that no literacy training or, ideally, no further language courses are necessary.

That is why it makes sense to take a closer look at how well non-participants in integration courses speak, read or write German. First, we need to determine how many of the non-participants are learning a second alphabet, have no literacy skills in any alphabet or are literate in the Latin

alphabet at the time of the survey.<sup>4</sup> Second, we will analyse the individual reading, writing and speaking skills in more detail in order to see whether the current types of integration courses are still adequate and useful and whether certain skills should receive particular attention.

The breakdown of those who have not (yet) participated in an integration course by the **degree of literacy at the time of the survey** was very similar to the percentages for all refugees at the time of entry (see Table 2). At the time of the survey, the percentage of people without literacy skills in any alphabet who had not yet participated in an integration course was four percentage points higher (19 % vs. 15 %), that of people learning a second alphabet was four percentage points lower (47 % vs. 51 %) and that of literates in the Latin alphabet was roughly the same (35 % vs. 34 %).

In order to identify particular support needs in the three target groups we determined their reading, writing and speaking skills of German (Figure 5). **Literates in the Latin alphabet**, i.e. the target group of the general integration course, say their knowledge of German was quite good. Roughly 40 % claim their reading and writing skills are good or very good, while about two-thirds say they are at least average. Overall, they rate their speaking skills somewhat lower, which means

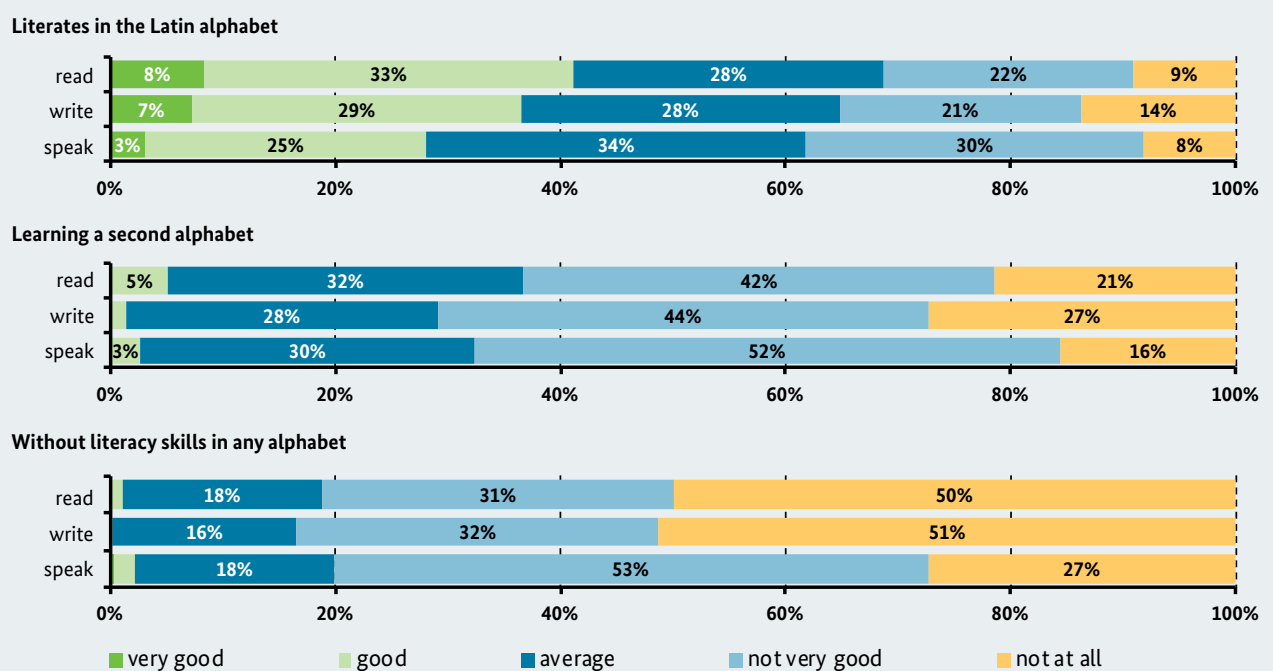
once again that the language lessons for this target group should focus on oral skills. 8 % of those who have not (yet) participated in an integration course rate their skills in all three areas as good or very good. Those who already possess a good or very good knowledge of German may start directly at a higher level or attend an advanced course, which focuses on conversation or on work-related language skills (depending on the results of the assessment test).

Refugees who have not (yet) attended an integration course and were **learning a second alphabet** at the time of the survey were much more cautious about their knowledge of German in all three fields. More than 40 % regard their own competence as “not very good”, and almost one-third as average. While the majority of the people learning a second alphabet have a rudimentary knowledge of German, they will require additional support to reach a level that allows them to interact smoothly in everyday life and become integrated in the labour market or the education system. Even though the members of this group have a basic knowledge of German, making them literate in the Latin alphabet is necessary in order to enable them to rely on a solid basis of written German for their further studies. It is therefore important to put people learning a second alphabet in a suitable course.

The answers of **people without literacy skills in any alphabet** show that, while they have improved their knowledge of spoken German to a much larger extent than their knowledge of written German during their period of residence,

4 The degree of literacy at the time of the survey was determined in the same way as at the time of entry (see Box 3 and Table 2).

Figure 5: Reading, writing and speaking skills of those who have not (yet) participated in an integration course, by degree of literacy at the time of the survey



Note: Respondents who have not (yet) attended an integration course: n = 2,838; of which: literates in the Latin alphabet: n = 867; learning a second alphabet: n = 1,429; without literacy skills in any alphabet: n = 544. Percentages below 3 % not included.

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey 2016; weighted figures.

even their oral skills are still in the lower range. Most of them (roughly 80 %) say that their skills are “not very good” or non-existent in all three fields. For example, circa 50 % claim that they have no reading or writing skills at all and a further 30 % state that their reading and writing skills are “not very good”. This is different for oral skills, with circa 30 % saying they do not speak German at all and 50 % say their German is “not very good”. While the knowledge of spoken German among people without literacy skills in any alphabet is not that different from that of those learning a second alphabet, there is a significant discrepancy in the field of reading and writing. Overall, people without literacy skills in any alphabet who had not (yet) attended an integration course had no or very limited language skills at the time of the survey. They will therefore need systematic support in all fields, including efforts to make them literate in the Latin alphabet and introducing them to learning a language in general. This is what the course for illiterate people sets out to do.

## Summary and conclusion

In order to adapt to the rising number of people learning a second alphabet among integration course participants, the range of integration courses was extended by a course for people learning a second alphabet in February 2017. Before, this group of people was grouped together with people without literacy skills in any alphabet in the course for illiterate people. This Brief Analysis aimed to determine the share of people without literacy skills in any alphabet and those learning a second alphabet among the refugees and take a closer look at their integration course attendance and knowledge of German in order to identify further assistance needs.

According to our analysis, about half of the refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2016 belonged to the group of people learning a second alphabet at the time of their entry. The share of those learning a second alphabet among those who had not participated in an integration course by the time of the survey in the second half of 2016 also amounted to almost 50 %. This confirms that the launch of a course for people learning a second alphabet was an important step. Moreover, there is obviously a significant further need for courses for people learning a second alphabet. Participation in such a course also appears to be useful and important for those learning a second alphabet who have not yet participated in an integration course but started to learn German in another way. However, the available knowledge of German should be taken into account as much as possible during the course and included in the language lessons.

The number of people without literacy skills in any alphabet is considerably smaller than that of people learning a second alphabet. However, at 15 % (of all refugees at the time of en-

try) and 19 % (of those who have not yet participated in an integration course) this group is not negligible, particularly since these refugees need intensive German lessons and a systematic literacy training. The fact that the percentage of people without literacy skills in any alphabet who have not yet participated in an integration course is higher than that of people learning a second alphabet and that of literates in the Latin alphabet at the time of entry raises the question of why their integration course participation is so low. Several factors may play a role, for example restricted participation rights or difficult family circumstances or role models (BAMF 2015: 37); this topic warrants further analysis. The results of this research may help to efficiently increase the participation ratio. People without literacy skills in any alphabet should benefit from the launch of the course for people learning a second alphabet, too, as the learning groups will become more homogeneous and the needs of people without literacy skills in any alphabet will be met more fully. The second round of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey in 2017 (see Box 2) will provide a better empirical basis for these important topics.

A look at the German language skills of those who have already completed an integration course shows that, while a majority of the people without literacy skills in the Latin or any alphabet have acquired basic knowledge, further (job-related) language courses should be offered in order to achieve a good integration into the labour market or the education system. A large share of those with no literacy skills in any alphabet in particular rated their reading and writing skills still as not very good after an integration course. It is therefore important to extend their current knowledge of German in future lessons in order to help them arrive at an advanced level and ensure that acquired skills are not forgotten again just because participants do not have a chance to use them.

Integration course attendants who are literate in the Latin alphabet claim that their German language skills are mostly good at the time of the survey and appear to be in a good position for further integration. Their oral skills in particular would benefit from further conversation courses, for example in the framework of a job-related language course which prepares migrants for the labour market. This also applies to those literates in the Latin alphabet who have not (yet) participated in an integration course. While some of them have been able to learn German by other means, the majority should benefit from advanced language courses for their integration.

Overall, the results show quite clearly that people with no literacy skills in any alphabet, those learning a second alphabet and those literate in the Latin alphabet learn the language at very different speeds. This applies to both refugees who have completed an integration course and refu-

gees who have not (yet) attended an integration course. The differences between the groups show clearly that learning the Latin alphabet while trying to learn German is a major endeavour, which takes time. The different learning progress of people learning a second alphabet and those without any literacy skills in any alphabet also show that it helps if people have learning experience and have learned how to read and to write in a non-Latin system. Nevertheless, most people without literacy skills in the Latin or any alphabet have acquired basic German language skills (via an integration course or via other means) which they can build on their further learning efforts.

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