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Article

Refugees in Germany with children still living abroad have lowest life satisfaction

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AT A GLANCE

Refugees in Germany with children still living abroad have lowest life satisfaction

By Ludovica Gambaro, Michaela Kreyenfeld, Diana Schacht, and C. Katharina Spieß

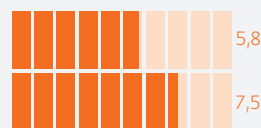
- Study based on IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees examines family structures and well-being of refugees in Germany for the first time
- Nine percent of refugees aged 18 to 49 who came to the country between January 2013 and January 2016 have minor children living outside Germany
- Twelve percent of refugees have a spouse living outside Germany
- Refugees whose nuclear family lives in Germany are measurably more satisfied with their lives than others
- Policy debate should take these findings into account, especially in the debate on family reunification

A significant proportion of the refugees had to leave their spouse or children behind abroad. They are considerably less happy with their lives than other refugees

23 percent of refugees with minor children had a child abroad

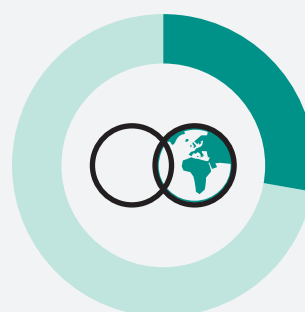


Life satisfaction of refugees whose children live abroad in points



Life satisfaction of refugees whose children live in Germany

27 percent of married refugees had a spouse who lived abroad



Life satisfaction of refugees whose spouse lives abroad in points



Life satisfaction of refugees whose spouse lives in Germany

Source: Authors' own calculations.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“More has to be done to prevent the absence of refugees’ next of kin turning into an obstacle to integration and, for those who do have their closest relatives here, to reap the potential this represents. Simple measures of support for refugees and their families in their everyday life are called for, beyond mere language classes.”

— Diana Schacht, study author —

DATA

The refugee sample the study is based on comprises **3386 persons.**

Refugees in Germany with children still living abroad have lowest life satisfaction

By Ludovica Gambaro, Michaela Kreyenfeld, Diana Schacht, and C. Katharina Spieß

ABSTRACT

Family strongly influences personal well-being—especially in the case of refugees, whose family members often remain in their homeland. This report is the first to closely examine the well-being and family structures of refugees who came to Germany between January 2013 and January 2016. It uses data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany. Among individuals aged between 18 and 49, nine percent have minor children living outside Germany, whereas twelve percent have a husband or wife living abroad. If the nuclear family is living in Germany—which is more often the case for women than men—refugees are measurably more satisfied with their lives. These findings are also confirmed when accounting for other potential factors for well-being. These findings should be given greater consideration—not least in the debate on family reunification—to enable successful migration, integration, and family policies.

The American sociologist Rubén Rumbaut (1997)¹ once stressed that migration is a family affair, with the family being particularly important in the migration process. Familial ties can improve the well-being and social participation of individuals with migration background. However, familial ties sometimes are an obstacle to integration if families as a whole are not regularly in contact with and participating in society. Once again, the latest migration report by the Academic Advisory Council on Family Matters (*Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Familienfragen*) has shown² that integration and social participation are always a family affair—for example, efforts to integrate children must also address their parents' situation and possible problems. These findings from general migration research should also apply to refugees and their families.

Countless individuals, especially from war-torn and crisis regions, have migrated to Germany over the past years. Many were unable to take their families with them but generally aim to bring them over later. According to German law, those with a right to asylum or recognized refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention have a right to the subsequent immigration of their spouse and minor children (Box 1). For refugees with subsidiary protection status³ different rules applied until July 2018, as family reunification had not been possible for this group for three years. However, since August 2018, 1,000 family members of refugees with subsidiary protection have been allowed to move to Germany every month.⁴ According to a European Commission directive, family reunification is “a necessary way of making family life possible. It helps to create socio-cultural stability facilitating the integration

¹ Cf. Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Ties that bind. Immigration and immigrant families,” in *Immigration and the family. Research and Policy on U.S. Immigrants*, ed. Alan Booth et al. (Mahwah, 1997), 3–46.

² Cf. Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Familienfragen beim Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Migration und Familie. Kindheit mit Zuwanderungshintergrund* (2016) (in German; available online, accessed October 4, 2018; this applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

³ Individuals are entitled to subsidiary protection if the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF) recognizes that they are threatened with serious harm in their country of origin, for example as a result of an armed conflict (§ 4 para. 1 Asylgesetz).

⁴ Cf. Bundesregierung, *Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Neuregelung des Familiennachzugs zu subsidiär Schutzberechtigten (Familiennachzugsneuregelungsgesetz)* (2018) (in German; available online).

Box 1

Legal regulations on family reunification in Germany

In Germany, refugees' right to family reunification is based on the protection of marriage and the family enshrined in the Basic Law for the Federal Republic (Basic Law, Article 6 para. 1 and para. 2 p. 1). It is also affirmed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the directives of the Council of the European Union, which emphasize the important role family reunification plays in the social integration of third-country nationals in EU member states.¹ The right to family reunification is regulated in § 29 of the Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*). Family reunification is possible when a refugee files an application within three months after her refugee status has been granted. No other condition needs to be met, other than that the family cannot be reunited in a third country outside the EU. Other third country nationals have to meet more stringent conditions for family unification, such as proving sufficient living space and secure income.

The right to family reunification applies to the nuclear family. In the case of minors, this refers to their parents or other guardians if no other guardians are located in Germany; in the case of adults, this refers to their spouse or registered partner and unmarried minor children. In exceptional cases (as to "avoid exceptional hardship" in the sense of § 36 para. 2 Residence Act), other family members such as grandparents, nephews, nieces, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, adult children, or siblings may be granted reunification. In practice, however, family reunification beyond the nuclear family is rare. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF),² the share of non-nuclear family members being granted the right to move to Germany based on the grounds of family reunification is only one percent.

As part of the second asylum policy package, the right to family reunification for individuals under subsidiary protection (§ 25 para. 2 sentence 1.2 Residence Act) who received a residence permit after March 17, 2016, was restricted.³ The right to family reunification was originally suspended until March 16, 2018 (§ 104

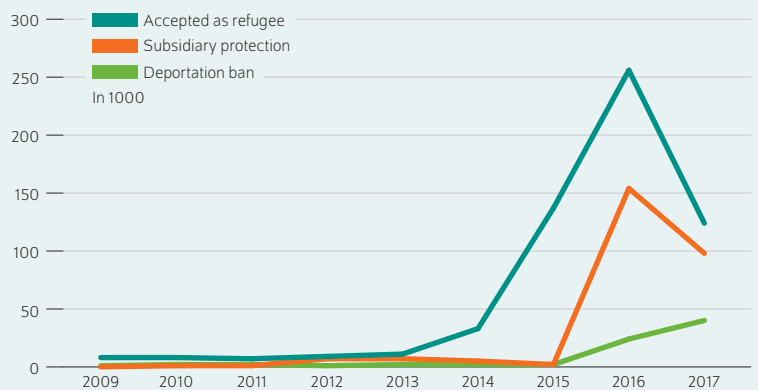
para. 13 Residence Act), and later extended to July 31, 2018, by the Act to Prolong the Suspension of Family Reunification (*Gesetz zur Verlängerung der Aussetzung des Familiennachzugs*). Since August 1, 2018, family reunification for individuals under subsidiary protection on humanitarian grounds has been granted for up to 1,000 family members per month to ensure a balance between "the establishment of familial relationships," which is required on humanitarian grounds, and the "absorption capacity of the Federal Republic of Germany."⁴

Since the second asylum package was implemented, the share of individuals who were granted subsidiary protection has risen sharply and currently accounts for almost half of all accepted asylum applications (Figure).

⁴ See the Federal Government's draft of the new regulation for family reunification for individuals under subsidiary protection, Bundestag-Drucksache 19/2438 (in German; available online).

Figure

Refugees in Germany by outcome of asylum procedure



Note: Without refused applications and formal decisions

Source: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF); authors' own representation based on the decisions of asylum procedures.

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The number of refugees who only received subsidiary protection has risen sharply since the introduction of the second asylum policy package.

¹ See Directive 2003/86/EC of the Council of the European Union from September 22, 2003, regarding the right to family reunification (available online).

² Cf. BAMF, *Familiennachzug von Drittstaatsangehörigen. Fokusstudie der deutschen nationalen Kontaktstelle für das Europäische Migrationsnetzwerk (EMN) (2017)* (in German).

³ Bundesregierung, *Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Neuregelung des Familiennachzugs zu subsidiär Schutzberechtigten (Familiennachzugsneuregelungsgesetz)* (in German).

of third-country nationals in the Member State, which also serves to promote economic and social cohesion."⁵

Although refugee family reunification has long been a topic of discussion in Germany, there is hardly any empirical evidence on refugees' families, their composition and characteristics, or on the significance of family for refugees. This

⁵ Cf. Supplementary grounds in paragraph 4 of Directive 2003/86/EC of the European Commission.

is also due to the fact that a reliable database for investigating the family structures of refugees was not available until recently. However, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees enabled the creation of a database with such information (Box 2). The database contains representative survey data of individuals who applied for asylum in Germany between January 2013 and January 2016. In an initial analysis of this data, the Institute for Employment Research (*Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, IAB*) in Nuremberg

Box 2

Data

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees is based on a random sample taken from the Central Alien Register (*Ausländerzentralregister*). The sample consists of individuals who migrated to Germany between January 1, 2013, and January 31, 2016, and submitted a formal asylum application to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF).¹ These data have been integrated into the Socio-Economic Panel (*Sozio-ökonomische Panel*, SOEP).² The sampling was a two-step process with 170 sample regions randomly selected in the first stage. The sample regions contained addresses of one or more foreigners' offices from which a random sample was drawn in the second stage. Certain subgroups, such as recognized refugees, women, and individuals who were over 30 during the sample drawing, were oversampled. This is taken into account by a corresponding weighting in the analyses.

In the first survey wave, data were collected via in-person interviews from June to December 2016. The selected individuals received an invitation to the interview in the mail. The survey was translated into a total of six languages (Arabic, Northern Kurdish, Farsi/Dari, Urdu, Pashto, and English) and conducted by trained interviewers. The response rate was 51 percent.

The present analyses include refugees who took part in the personal interview (4,424 respondents). Excluded were individuals who did not provide valid answers to the questions (570 individuals), respondents who did not arrive in Germany between 2013 and 2016 (116 individuals), and those who were not between 18 and 49 years of age in 2016 (352 individuals). The final sample for the analyses comprises 3,386 individuals.

¹ Cf. Martin Kroh et al., "Sampling, Nonresponse, and Integrated Weighting of the 2016 IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees (M3/M4) – Revised Version," *SOEP Survey Paper 477* (2018) (available online).

² Cf. Jürgen Schupp et al., Socio-economic Panel (SOEP), data from 1984-2016 (in German; available online).

estimated the number of spouses and children of refugees in Germany who are living abroad.⁶ The result indicated a rather low number of potential family reunions, as many refugees were single, childless, or their spouse and children were already living in Germany.

This report describes in detail the family structures and family characteristics of refugees in Germany using the same database. Moreover, the report analyzes to what extent the familial situation is related to the well-being of those surveyed. The analysis is restricted to refugees between the ages

⁶ Cf. Herbert Brücker, "Familiennachzug: 150000 bis 180000 Ehepartner und Kinder von Geflüchteten mit Schutzstatus leben im Ausland" in *IAB Forum* (2017) (available online).

of 18 and 49 who moved to Germany between 2013 and 2016. With this age restriction, the analysis thus concentrates on adults who potentially have minor children. The analysis is based on the first survey wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees; further survey waves are currently not available for scientific analysis (Box 2).

Women more likely to have fled with family

The sample used in the analyses includes a high percentage of men (76 percent), who are mainly from Syria (46 percent) or other countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, or Pakistan (28 percent) (Table 1). Therefore, it was primarily men who migrated to Germany in the age group surveyed. On average, sample respondents had lived in Germany for a little over a year at the time the survey was conducted. On average, male refugees were 27 years old upon arrival in Germany while female refugees were 30 years old. Men mostly migrated alone (53 percent) or with friends and acquaintances (15 percent) while the majority of women came to Germany with family⁷ (81 percent); only 32 percent of men came with family. At the time the survey was conducted, around 56 percent of respondents had a temporary residence permit (most either with their case still being processed or with temporary suspension of deportation status). Approximately half lived in private accommodations with the other half in shared accommodations, whereby a differentiation shows that the share of individuals in private accommodations was significantly higher among women (64 percent) than men (44 percent). Sixteen percent of women and eleven percent of men had an education qualification at tertiary level.⁸ At the time of the survey, fifteen percent of men and five percent of women in the age group analyzed were employed, completing training, or pursuing other educational opportunities such as language courses.

Female refugees have significantly more children with them than men

The family structure of the refugees in the age groups examined here differed significantly by gender. Women rarely migrated alone; rather, they generally made the journey with their family. Accordingly, the vast majority of the female refugees surveyed were married at the time of the survey while the majority of men were still single (Table 2). Differences in marital status were reflected in childlessness and the number of minor children. On average, female refugees had 1.6 minor children and men 0.7 at the time of the survey. The differences were smaller between married women and men (2.0 and 1.9 minor children, respectively). Since the sample here

⁷ Individuals from the sample were asked if they came to Germany alone, with family members, with friends or acquaintances, or others. Among those coming with family members, it cannot be further distinguished who exactly is considered a family member by the respondent.

⁸ To generate the variables on refugees' highest educational and vocational qualifications, information on both the years of school attendance and the type of school last attended were used. This allowed accounting for school interruptions, as detailed in Herbert Brücker, Nina Rother, and Jürgen Schupp, "IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten 2016: Studiendesign, Feldergebnisse sowie Analysen zu schulischer wie beruflicher Qualifikation, Sprachkenntnissen sowie kognitiven Potenzialen," *DIW Politikberatung kompakt* no. 123 (2017) (in German; available online).

Table 1

Refugees in Germany - Selected characteristics of those who fled to Germany between 2013 and 2016

	Total	Men	Women
Female	24		
Country of origin*			
Syria	46	46	45
Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan	28	28	26
Subsaharan Africa	14	15	11
Others	12	10	18
Duration of stay (in years)	1,3	1,3	1,2
Age at immigration (in years)	28	27	30
Age at interview (in years)	29	28	31
Arrival			
Alone	43	53	13
Family	44	32	81
Friends or others	13	15	6
Residence status			
Recognized	44	45	43
Application pending	41	42	41
Other (toleration, deportation)	15	14	16
Private accommodation	49	44	64
Highest level of education			
None or primary education	38	37	39
Secondary education	50	51	45
Tertiary education	12	11	16
Employed or in training at interview	12	15	5
N	3,386	2,147	1,239

Notes: * Subsaharan Africa: Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kamerun, Kenia, Congo, Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Uganda, Ruanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tschad; Others: mostly (former) Jugoslawia and Russia.

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016).

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consists of individuals who recently migrated to Germany, it is not surprising that, so far, only a small share of children were born the year their parent(s) migrated or thereafter⁹ (see also Box 3).

Almost ten percent of refugees have minor children living abroad

The share of refugees who indicated they had a spouse still living abroad is overall low, at 12 percent (Table 2).¹⁰ In the majority of cases, the category “abroad” refers to the country of origin. In some rare instances, the spouse was living in a country other than the one of origin. Ten percent of all married women had their husband abroad. The share is significantly higher for married men, 38 percent of whom had spouses abroad.

Whether or not minor children were living abroad also depends greatly on the respondent’s gender. Ten percent of men had children living abroad. When the figures are

9 The average number of children is somewhat higher (2.3) for individuals living in private accommodations than those living in shared accommodations.

10 See also Brücker, “IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten 2016.”

Table 2

Marital status and number of minor children

	Total	Men	Women
Spouse			
Single	54	64	21
Married	43	35	69
Divorced	3	1	7
Widowed	1	0	3
Average number of minor children: Whole sample			
All	0.9	0.7	1.6
Births abroad	0.8	0.6	1.3
Births in the year of migration or thereafter	0.2	0.1	0.3
Average number of minor children: Married persons			
All	1.9	1.9	2.0
Births abroad	1.6	1.6	1.6
Births in the year of migration or thereafter	0.3	0.3	0.3
Average number of minor children: Private accommodation			
All	2.3	2.4	2.3
Births abroad	2.0	2.0	1.9
Births in the year of migration or thereafter	0.4	0.4	0.4

Notes: *Minor children (under the age of 18 in 2016); respondents with more than eight children were not questioned with regards to the children’s place of birth/year of birth.

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016).

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restricted to men with children, a third of fathers were living without their children. In other words, every third father of a minor child who has migrated to Germany was living in a different country than his child(ren) (and generally, in a different country than his spouse as well). In contrast, only five percent of all women and eight percent of all mothers were living in a different country than their child(ren).

African refugees most often have children living in their home country

To be able to make more differentiated statements about which factors were related to refugees being in Germany without their spouse or children, multivariate models which consider many characteristics simultaneously were estimated (Table 4).

As previous analyses have shown, it was primarily men who were separated from their children. However, there were differences between countries of origin. In particular, individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa reported more frequently than others that they had left at least one child in their country of origin or another country.

A similar pattern emerged for the chances that the spouse was still in the country of origin. Men who migrated to Germany had much more frequently left a spouse behind than women. Compared to Syrian refugees, refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa also reported more frequently that their spouse lived abroad.

There is no significant difference between refugees who arrived in Germany in 2013 or at a later time. It can therefore

Box 3

Indications and estimations on the refugees' final number of children

Statements about the sample respondents' final number of children cannot yet be made, as the respondents in the sample were on average only 30 years old at the time of the survey. In general, the total fertility rate in the refugees' countries of origin is higher

than the current German birth rate of 1.6 children,¹ so it can be assumed that the birth potential among the refugees is higher than among the local population. Conclusions on the fertility behavior of refugees based on the birth rates in the countries of origin can, however, only be drawn to a very limited extent since the refugees are a selective group. They differ, for example, in their educational structures and attitudes from individuals who remained in their country of origin. Moreover, there are large differences in the birth rates and birth trends between the individual countries of origin. While Syria, Iran, and Iraq have been recording a significant decline in their birth rates since the 1990s, the birth rate in Afghanistan is currently six children per woman, with only a slight downward trend according to UN estimates.

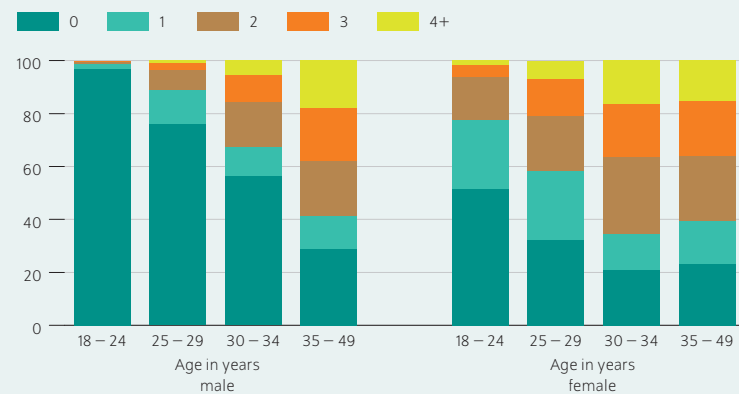
A closer look at the number of children reveals a large share of individuals with several children, especially in the older age groups (Figure). Around 37 percent of respondents between 35 and 49 years old have three or more minor children (no figure). The large differences in childlessness between younger men and women are striking. While approximately 97 percent of men aged 18 to 24 are still childless, only 51 percent of 18- to 24-year-old women are.

How the younger respondents' number of children will develop in the future depends—in the case of men in particular—on their chances of finding a partner. In the case of the small group of men who are already married, it is also important whether their spouses are already in Germany or, if not, if they can bring them to Germany.

¹ Cf. Statistisches Bundesamt, *Die Statistik der Geburten* (in German; available online).

Figure

Distribution of the number of children by age
In percent



Note: Different from previous analysis all children, and not only minor children, are included in this figure.

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016).

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Many refugees, especially among the older ones, have more than one child.

be assumed that only a few people succeed in bringing their children over to Germany. This emphasizes both the difficulties of reuniting families in the new country, as repeatedly emphasized by the UNHCR and other organizations,¹¹ and the fact that successful family reunification often takes several years.¹²

The respondents' educational background did not seem to be related to whether or not their children lived abroad. Nor were there notable differences between refugees with and without a secure residence status.

Recognized refugees more often have family in Germany

At 41 percent, a large share of refugees had still their application pending at the time of the interview—therefore no information can be given about their status (Table 5). Forty-four percent of respondents were recognized refugees and 15 percent had either a temporary suspension of deportation status for humanitarian reasons or were awaiting deportation. Individuals with minor children or a spouse abroad are particularly seldom represented in the latter group (16 percent and 10 percent, respectively). However, it should also be noted that the information used in the analysis is from 2016. Since then, the proportion of asylum applications granted only subsidiary protection has risen sharply (Box 1). Against this background, it can be assumed that among those individuals whose application was still pending in 2016, a relatively large number received subsidiary protection and thus have limited opportunities to bring their family to Germany. Otherwise, there were no major differences in the family

¹¹ Cf. for example UNHCR, *Refugee Family Reunification. UNHCR's Response to the European Commission Green Paper on the Right to Family Reunification of Third Country Nationals Living in the European Union Directive 2003/86/EC* (2012); Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, *Realising the right to family reunification of refugees in Europe* (Strausbourg, 2017) (available online).

¹² Cf. for example Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, *Realising the right to family reunification of refugees in Europe*.

Table 3

Spouses and children: Family structure and location of residence
In percent

	Whole sample			Married persons		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Residence of spouse						
No spouse	57	65	31	0	0	0
Spouse abroad	12	13	7	27	38	10
Spouse in Germany	31	21	62	73	62	90
Minor children						
No children	60	70	29	21	23	17
At least one child abroad	9	10	5	17	25	4
(All) children in Germany	30	20	65	62	51	79

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016).

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Table 4

Determinants of at least one child or a spouse living abroad
Logistic regression

	At least one child living abroad		Spouse living abroad	
Year of immigration (reference: 2013)				
2014	0.18	(0.49)	0.02	(0.39)
2015	0.54	(0.45)	0.40	(0.33)
2016	0.73	(0.70)	0.82	(0.44)
Gender (reference: male)				
Female	-2.06***	(0.26)	-1.80***	(0.18)
Highest level of education (reference: secondary)				
None or primary education	-0.20	(0.23)	-0.27	(0.19)
Tertiary education	0.36	(0.31)	-0.07	(0.25)
Country of origin (reference: Syria)				
Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan	0.01	(0.34)	-0.21	(0.26)
Subsaharan Africa	1.55***	(0.36)	0.98**	(0.36)
Others	-0.70	(0.52)	-1.51**	(0.55)
Residence status (reference: application pending, or others such as toleration, deportation)				
Recognized	0.11	(0.30)	0.06	(0.23)
Constant	-1.57**	(0.51)	-0.65	(0.37)
N	2,013		2,186	
Pseudo R ²	0.192		0.159	

Notes: The table displays the regression coefficients of a logistic regression and standard errors in brackets. Statistical significance* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, controlled for federal states.

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016, only persons with children/spouse).

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structure according to protection status. It is noteworthy, however, that the shares of those who had family members in Germany were similarly high in the group of refugees with granted status and the group whose asylum applications were still being processed.

Extended family mostly lives abroad

The majority of refugees in Germany—around 94 percent—had siblings (Figure 1). On average, those with siblings had five brothers and/or sisters, most of whom lived abroad (around 86 percent). Only eight percent of cases had siblings who also lived in Germany. Similarly, refugees’ parents

mostly lived abroad (74 percent of the mothers and 59 percent of the fathers). In addition, 59 percent of refugees in Germany had close contact with other relatives—on average 13 individuals, most of whom live abroad (52 percent, no table).

Female refugees have higher life satisfaction in Germany than male refugees

Migration research has amply shown the particularly important role that family plays for refugees. For those with migrant background, contact with the nuclear family (spouse and children) is often even more important than for individuals

Table 5

Protection status according to whereabouts of spouse and children
Percentage of rows and columns

	Application pending	Recognized	Others (toleration, deportation)	Total
Residence of spouse				
No spouse	44	41	15	100
	61	53	60	57
Spouse abroad	38	53	10	100
	11	14	8	12
Spouse in Germany	38	47	15	100
	28	33	33	31
Total	41	44	15	100
	100	100	100	100
Minor children				
No child(ren)	41	45	14	100
	60	61	59	60
At least one child abroad	40	44	16	100
	29	30	34	30
(All) children in Germany	47	41	12	100
	11	9	8	9
Total	41	44	15	100
	100	100	100	100

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016).

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without migrant background.¹³ Therefore, it is expected that individuals who have family already living in Germany will have higher well-being than refugees whose families are still living abroad.

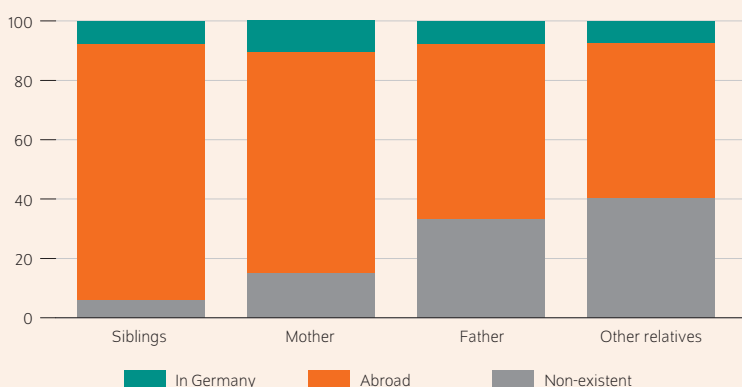
The well-being of refugees can be measured using the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey on general life satisfaction. The survey uses a construct frequently utilized in international and national literature to record individuals' well-being and mental health.¹⁴ Satisfaction is rated on a scale of zero (absolutely not satisfied) to ten (completely satisfied). Refugees were also surveyed on their life satisfaction from before they migrated—however, this finding must be interpreted with caution as many people do not reliably assess their life satisfaction in retrospect.

In the context of family relationships, life satisfaction is not only important because it improves personal well-being but also because parental life satisfaction affects children's development:¹⁵ for example, the higher the mother's life satisfaction, the higher the socio-emotional stability of her children. An analysis of refugees' well-being must also be seen in relation to the experiences they have had—often traumatic ones as they migrated to Germany. After arriving in Germany, refugees are frequently faced with other potentially stressful situations that make it difficult to process their traumatic experiences: living in shared accommodations, uncertainty regarding the outcome of their asylum procedure and the future, discrimination and xenophobic threats, and problems with the German language.¹⁶

Yet it turns out that refugees were rather satisfied with their current life situation. The average value (on a scale of zero to ten) was 6.9 (Figure 2).¹⁷ Respondents retrospectively rated their life satisfaction from before the crisis, war, or conflict in their country of origin lower on average (6.3). Women were more satisfied with their lives than men—especially in the present (7.2 and 6.8) but also before the crisis, war, or conflict (6.5 and 6.2). A more differentiated analysis shows that in the high satisfaction range particularly (completely satisfied), the proportion of women was higher than the proportion of men at 21 percent (compared to 18 percent). However, this also applies to the share of those completely dissatisfied (Figure 3).

Figure 1

Location of residence of other relatives



Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey date 2016).

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When refugees have siblings, in most cases these live abroad.

¹³ Cf. for example Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Familienfragen beim Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Migration und Familie. Kindheit mit Zuwanderungshintergrund*.

¹⁴ For more on measuring life satisfaction in the SOEP, cf. for example Frank Fujita and Ed Diener, "Life satisfaction set point: Stability and change," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88 (2005): 158-164 and Martin Kroh, "An experimental evaluation of popular well-being measures," *DIW Discussion Papers* no. 546 (available online).

¹⁵ Cf. for example Eva Berger and C. Katharina Spieß, "Maternal life satisfaction and child outcomes: are they related?" *Journal of Economic Psychology* 31 (2011): 142-158.

¹⁶ Cf. for example Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Familienfragen beim Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Migration und Familie. Kindheit mit Zuwanderungshintergrund*.

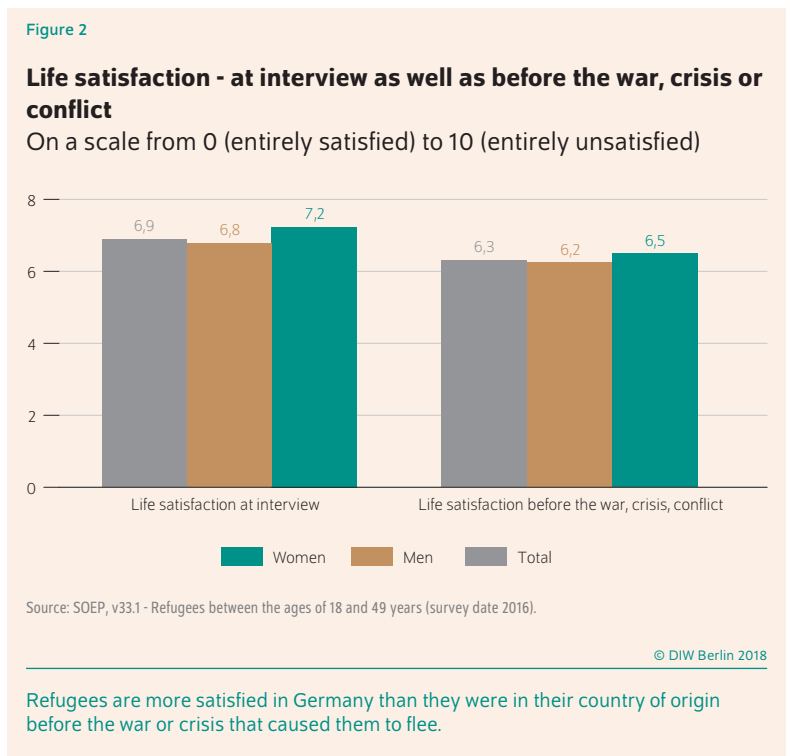
¹⁷ An analysis based on the SOEP data from the 2013 survey year, which are not included in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP sample, shows that both individuals without a migration background and migrants and their descendants indicate an average life satisfaction value of between 7.4 and 7.5, cf. Ingrid Tucci, Philipp Eisenecker, and Herbert Brücker, "Wie zufrieden sind Migranten mit ihrem Leben?" *DIW Wochenbericht* no. 43 (2014): 1152-1158 (in German; available online). However, this study takes into account the fact that the values in the SOEP survey are queried annually, which can lead to distortions, making the two values not fully comparable.

Refugees with minor children abroad have significantly lower life satisfaction

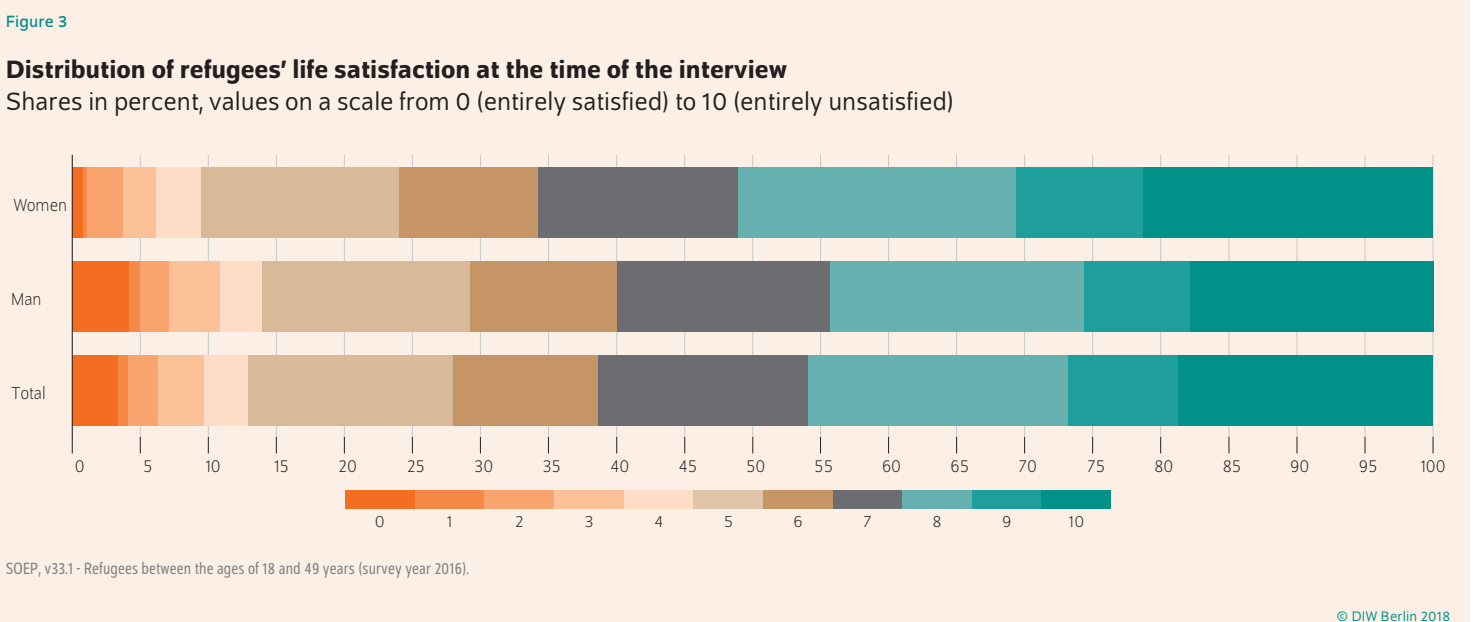
The current level of life satisfaction differed depending on family structure and the location of family members. Refugees whose family members lived in Germany had higher life satisfaction (Figure 4). The difference in average life satisfaction between refugees with children in Germany (7.5) and children abroad (5.8) was very pronounced. The 5.8 rating by parents with children abroad was the lowest measured in this analysis. Life satisfaction was lower if siblings or parents lived abroad compared to if they lived in Germany, but the absolute values were not quite as low and differences in satisfaction not quite as large.

Gender differences in life satisfaction are mainly due to differences in the family situation

As many other studies have shown, life satisfaction correlates with numerous other characteristics. A further analysis examines which factors these are. Regression models show that there are no differences according to the year in which the individuals migrated to Germany (Table 6, all models). It is notable that the difference in life satisfaction between the genders (Model 1) disappeared as soon as the existence and location of the nuclear family were accounted for (Model 2). Refugees who migrated at a young age were generally more satisfied with their lives than those who migrated when older. The country of origin also influenced life satisfaction. Refugees from Sub-Saharan African countries had the highest levels of satisfaction whereas Syrian refugees were relatively unsatisfied. Recognized refugees were by far the most satisfied. Additionally, refugees living in private accommodations and those who had already found a job or



apprenticeship training position were generally much more satisfied with their lives than refugees in shared accommodations or without a job or apprenticeship. As other studies on life satisfaction have shown, satisfaction decreases with higher education. If individuals were already more satisfied than others before their migration to Germany, this remained the case after arriving.

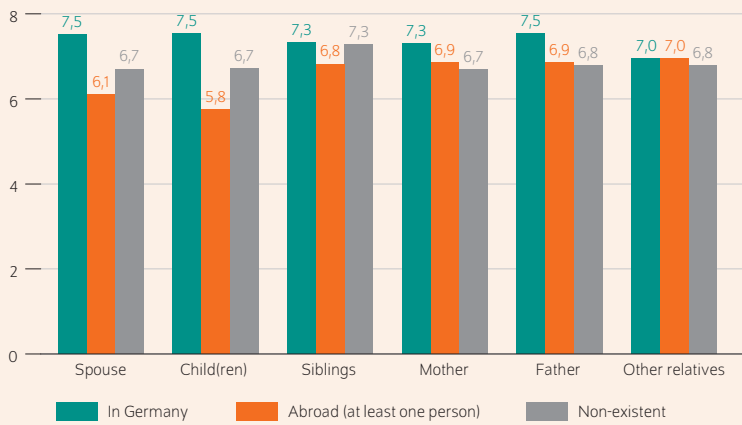


Women are more satisfied if one focuses on the higher scores of life satisfaction.

Figure 4

Life satisfaction of refugees in Germany: Family structure and location of residence

Scale from 0 (entirely satisfied) to 10 (entirely unsatisfied)



Notes: Life satisfaction is measured by a 11-point Likert scale (0=completely dissatisfied until 10= completely satisfied).

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 (survey year 2016).

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Refugees whose child or children live abroad are the least satisfied.

In relation to the family situation (Model 2), the result described in the less complex analyses is also confirmed here: individuals whose spouse lived in Germany were much more satisfied than individuals whose spouse lived abroad. If at least one child was living abroad, life satisfaction dropped by almost one point, the largest drop in satisfaction among all characteristics. In particular, having

one or all children abroad substantially and statistically reduced refugees’ well-being. The above findings remained valid even if the locations of other family members were considered (Model 3). However, there was no difference in life satisfaction depending on the country in which family members live.

Conclusion

This report examined the family structure of 18- to 49-year-old refugees who migrated to Germany. The analysis showed that women in particular migrated to Germany together with their family (spouses and children). Nine percent of all refugees had minor children living abroad. A significantly large share of refugees left parents and/or siblings behind in their home country.

Whether or not refugees’ spouses or children are living in Germany appeared of central importance for refugees’ well-being. If their family was with them in Germany, they were substantially and statistically significantly more satisfied with their lives. Being separated from the nuclear family is thus demonstrably associated with greater dissatisfaction for many refugees. This in turn can be detrimental to, for example, their integration into the new society and labor market as well as participation in public life.

Policies regarding family reunification should take this information into account. Refugees living in Germany should be supported in a variety of ways so they can successfully integrate without their (missing) family hampering this process. Refugees and their families need support measures that are easy to achieve; such measures are to be found in the realms of family policy and many other policy fields, especially migration and integration policy.

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JEL: H31, I31, J12

Keywords: Refugees, family structure, family reunification, children, well-being

FAMILY STRUCTURES AND WELL-BEING OF REFUGEES

Table 6

Determinants of current life satisfaction

OLS regression

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Year of immigration (reference: 2013)						
2014	-0.21	(0.15)	-0.24	(0.14)	-0.25	(0.14)
2015	-0.15	(0.14)	-0.11	(0.14)	-0.10	(0.14)
2016	-0.18	(0.27)	-0.13	(0.26)	-0.13	(0.26)
Female (reference: male)	0.24**	(0.08)	0.01	(0.08)	-0.01	(0.08)
Age at immigration	-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.04***	(0.01)	-0.04***	(0.01)
Country of origin (reference: Syria)						
Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan	0.38**	(0.12)	0.35**	(0.12)	0.35**	(0.12)
Subsaharan Africa	0.22	(0.17)	0.46**	(0.17)	0.51**	(0.17)
Others	0.62***	(0.16)	0.50**	(0.16)	0.49**	(0.16)
Residence status (reference: recognized)						
Application pending	-0.52***	(0.11)	-0.53***	(0.11)	-0.53***	(0.11)
Others (toleration, deportation)	-0.53***	(0.15)	-0.54***	(0.14)	-0.55***	(0.15)
Private accommodation	0.79***	(0.11)	0.58***	(0.11)	0.55***	(0.11)
Employed or in training at the moment	0.27*	(0.13)	0.37**	(0.13)	0.37**	(0.13)
Highest level of education (reference: none/primary)						
Secondary	-0.28**	(0.09)	-0.19*	(0.09)	-0.18*	(0.09)
Tertiary	-0.60***	(0.13)	-0.46***	(0.13)	-0.45***	(0.13)
Life satisfaction before crisis/war/conflict		(0.02)	0.05**	(0.02)	0.05**	(0.02)
Spouse (reference: in Germany)						
Single			-0.50***	(0.14)	-0.53***	(0.14)
Abroad			-0.48*	(0.20)	-0.48*	(0.20)
Number of children			0.11**	(0.03)	0.11**	(0.03)
Children (reference: children in Germany)						
No child(ren)			-0.15	(0.16)	-0.16	(0.17)
At least one child abroad			-1.11***	(0.26)	-1.11***	(0.26)
Siblings (reference: in Germany)						
Non-existent					-0.02	(0.23)
Abroad					-0.10	(0.16)
Mother (reference: in Germany)						
Deceased					-0.01	(0.18)
Abroad					-0.15	(0.16)
Father (reference: in Germany)						
Deceased					-0.11	(0.18)
Abroad					0.00	(0.19)
Other relatives (reference: in Germany)						
Non-existent					0.08	(0.16)
Abroad					0.03	(0.16)
Constant	7.18***	(0.28)	8.24***	(0.32)	8.38***	(0.36)
N	3,386		3,386		3,386	
R ²	0.068		0.103		0.105	

Notes: The Table displays the regression coefficients of an OLS-regression, clustered standard errors for households are in brackets. Statistical significance* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, controlled for federal states.

Source: SOEP, v33.1 - Refugees between the ages of 18 and 49 years (survey year 2016)

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