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**Article**

## Integration of refugee children and adolescents in and out of school: Evidence of success but still room for improvement

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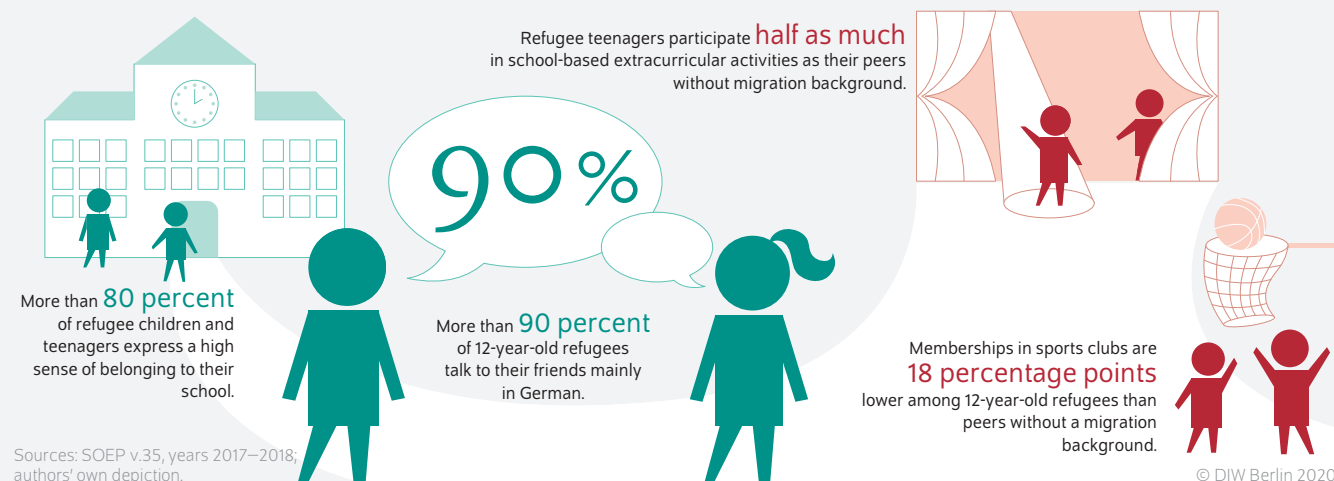
AT A GLANCE

## Integration of Refugee Children and Adolescents In and Out of School: Evidence of Success but Still Room for Improvement

By Ludovica Gambaro, Daniel Kemptner, Lisa Pagel, Laura Schmitz, and C. Katharina Spieß

- Extracurricular activities, whether school-based or out-of-school, can help refugee children and adolescents to integrate in German society
- Representative IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees shows that most children and adolescents with a refugee background feel a high sense of belonging to their schools
- They often attend after-school programs
- Targeted offers in this area can further promote the integration of refugee children and adolescents
- Participation in school-based extracurricular activities and in out-of-school sports clubs is lower for refugees than for their peers without a migration background

Measured by some indicators, the integration of refugee children and adolescents has been successful; more work is needed in other areas



### FROM THE AUTHORS

*“Many schools have managed to successfully integrate refugee children and adolescents into daily school life, to the extent that most of them feel at ease at school and are able to establish positive social contacts. That said, more targeted activity programs are needed to encourage young refugees to participate, especially in school-based extracurricular activities and out-of-school recreational programs, such as sports clubs.” — Laura Schmitz —*

### MEDIA



Audio Interview with C. Katharina Spieß  
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# Integration of Refugee Children and Adolescents In and Out of School: Evidence of Success but Still Room for Improvement

By Ludovica Gambaro, Daniel Kempfner, Lisa Pagel, Laura Schmitz, and C. Katharina Spieß

## ABSTRACT

Germany has seen the arrival of a large number of displaced children and adolescents in recent years. Integration is vital for their lives today and in the future. Key indicators of successful integration are a sense of belonging to school, participation in extracurricular activities, both within school and outside it, and social contacts. The present report examines these indicators based on data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples, and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees. The findings show that the integration of 12-, 14-, and 17-year-old refugees who came to Germany with their families is essentially moving in the right direction: These young people feel a sense of belonging to their school community and are increasingly attending after-school programs (provided by the school). This gives them the opportunity to spend the whole day with peers who have lived in Germany for longer. The relatively low levels of participation in school-based extracurricular activities among young refugees, however, shows that these programs are not being fully exploited. In this context, further efforts should be made to increase participation. Similarly, there is also untapped potential when it comes to organized leisure and sport activities outside school. Sports clubs, for example, should actively reach out to refugee children and adolescents encouraging them to participate.

Integrating refugee families that have come to Germany is one of the key tasks of German integration policy. However, to successfully achieve this objective, it is necessary to implement measures that are tailored to the specific needs of each respective age group. Ten percent of people who applied for asylum between 2015 and 2016 were aged between 11 and 18.<sup>1</sup> This report analyzes the level of integration of this age group based on their take-up of school-based extracurricular activities and out-of-school recreational programs.

Successfully integrating adolescents comes with its own particular set of challenges. For example, they need to learn German very quickly to be able to understand the lessons in schools where German is the language of instruction. Not only is this important in the short term, for their school careers, but also for the transition to vocational training and ultimately living an independent life. Out-of-school leisure activities, such as sports clubs, are an accessible way for young people to establish social contacts and interact with others; for instance, to exchange information about future job prospects.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this universe of activities—attending regular classes, staying at school in the afternoon, and extracurricular activities both on- and off-campus—are jointly important for increasing the integration of adolescents. Such activities provide additional opportunities for young people to hear and speak the German language and also to familiarize themselves with German culture.

The present report analyzes participation in these programs and activities among refugee children and adolescents aged 12, 14, and 17, who live with at least one adult family member. In this report, we refer to 12-year-old refugees as children, while we refer to the two older age groups as adolescents. We also compare refugees' participation in these activities with

<sup>1</sup> See BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2015. Asyl, Migration und Integration* (Nuremberg: 2016) (in German; available online, accessed August 14, 2020; this applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise) and BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2016. Asyl, Migration und Integration* (Nuremberg: 2017) (in German; available online). This also includes children and adolescents who came to Germany unaccompanied, however. These are not part of the data basis of the current report. This does not imply, however, that their integration is any less important. It simply means that this subject would require its own dedicated analysis.

<sup>2</sup> See Bundesregierung, *Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration. Zusammenhalt stärken – Teilhabe verwirklichen* (Berlin: 2011) (in German; available online).

that of their peers, both those with a migration background and those with native parents who do not have a migration background.<sup>3</sup> This is intended to show whether, in terms of integration, refugee children and adolescents exhibit any specific characteristics compared to their peers with a migration background but without a specifically refugee background. Comparing young refugees with their non-migrant peers also provides information as to whether we can anticipate a process of convergence with mainstream society. Our analysis is based on the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and, in particular, the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees (Box 1).

Differences between these groups of children and adolescents can—but do not always—point to a lack of integration. These differences can, however, also be attributed to the socio-economic characteristics of the families. It is well documented, for example, upon arrival, refugees have a lower level of education and a lower employment rate than the resident average.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence that the children of the first generation of migrants, in particular, are often affected by a combination of cultural, social, and financial hardships.<sup>5</sup> Bearing this in mind, the comparisons in the present report also take into account the socio-economic characteristics that other studies show are relevant for differences in the participation in extracurricular and leisure activities (Box 2).<sup>6</sup>

### Around two-thirds of refugee children and adolescents attended separate classes

A variety of organizational models are used by schools to help young refugees integrate into the German education system. Besides immediately enrolling them in mainstream classes (generally with additional language support), many arrivals are initially taught, either entirely or partially, in separate classes.<sup>7</sup> Different regions give these classes different names (welcome class, transitional class, intensive class, language-learning class, etc.) but the objective is always to facilitate rapid language acquisition for school-age children who have recently arrived in Germany and lack adequate German

<sup>3</sup> All children and adolescents in the comparison group with a migration background live in households with a direct migration background. The children and adolescents themselves foreign-born (around one-quarter) or native-born (around three-quarters). A comparison of only first-generation migrant children and adolescents would not be meaningful due to the small number of cases.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Herbert Brücker et al., "Language skills and employment rate of refugees in Germany improving with time," *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 4 (2019): 49–61 (available online). See also the report in this issue: Daniel Graeber and Felicitas Schikora, "Refugees' High Employment Expectations: Partially Met," *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 34 (2020) 337–343. These low employment rates are due to the employment restrictions refugees are subject to in the recipient country, however.

<sup>5</sup> See Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., Susanne Lochner and Alexandra Jähner, eds., *DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport 2020 – Datenanalyse zur Situation junger Menschen in Deutschland* (Munich and Halle an der Saale: 2020) (in German; available online).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Jan Marcus, Janina Nemitz, and C. Katharina Spieß, "Ausbau der Ganztagschule: Kinder aus einkommensschwachen Haushalten im Westen nutzen Angebote verstärkt," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 27 (2013): 11–23 (available online, in German) and also Adrian Hille, Annette Arnold, and Jürgen Schupp, "Freizeitverhalten Jugendlicher: Bildungsorientierte Aktivitäten spielen eine immer größere Rolle," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 40 (2013): 15–25 (in German; available online).

<sup>7</sup> See Mona Massumi et al., *Neu zugewanderte Kinder und Jugendliche im deutschen Schulsystem* (Cologne: 2015) (in German; available online).

#### Box 1

### Data and Definition of Comparison Groups

Data from the Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), which includes the IAB-SOEP Migration Samples and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, serves as the basis for our report.

In the SOEP, respondents were asked about their country of birth and their nationality. Foreigners and other respondents who were not born in Germany were also asked when they immigrated to Germany or which country their parents migrated from and what their legal status was on arrival. Households and the young people living in these households are divided into three comparison groups according to the response given by the adult household member answering the SOEP questionnaire (referred to as head of household; in most cases the mother or father): (1) The adult household member immigrated to Germany after 2013 and arrived as a refugee; (2) the adult household member and, where applicable, their partner immigrated to Germany but not as refugees; or (3) the adult household member and, where applicable, their partner were born in Germany and have no migrant background.

In the SOEP, defined cohorts were asked to complete age-specific questionnaires, which children who turned 12 in the survey year completed themselves. Likewise, adolescents who turned 14 or 17 in the survey year answered specific questions. Since the children and adolescents in these age groups could provide information about their schools and extracurricular activities themselves, the analyses in the current report are based on this self-reporting. However, not all three age groups were asked questions about all three subject areas, meaning that some of the figures are only based on partial samples. These are specified accordingly in the figure headings.

language skills.<sup>8</sup> Separate classes should, however, only be a temporary solution (for no more than one or two years). Which form of provision is most beneficial for integrating refugees is a controversial topic of debates. Separate classes are frequently criticized because of the limited opportunities they provide for contact with other peers and the considerable risk of exclusion and stigmatization. At the same time, separate classes can be a more targeted way of meeting the needs of young refugees.<sup>9</sup>

Regional studies show that virtually all school-age children who have recently arrived in Germany are initially taught

<sup>8</sup> See Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, eds., *Bildung in Deutschland 2016: Ein indikatorengeprägter Bericht mit einer Analyse zu Bildung und Migration* (Bielefeld: 2016).

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the arguments for and against separate classes, see Aladin El-Mafaalani and Mona Massumi, "Flucht: Forschung und Transfer," *IMIS und BICC State-of-Research Papier 08a* (2019) (available online).

Table

**Attendance in separate classes by refugees (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds)**

In percent

Type of schooling at start of school	Age group				Percentage of those who stayed in a separate class for more than 12 months <sup>1</sup>
	12-year-olds	14-year-olds	17-year-olds	Average	
Regular class	30	40	38	36	
Separate and regular classes	23	22	18	20	18
Exclusively separate class	47	38	45	44	22

1 Average across all age groups. After being taught in a separate class, pupils usually switch to a regular class.

Note: values based on 677 interviewed refugee children and adolescents aged 12, 14, and 17 who provided information on their schooling.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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**Box 2**

**Methodology**

Multivariate regression models were used to examine differences in the participation in school-based and out-of-school extracurricular activities between refugees and their peers living in Germany, both with and without migration backgrounds. The least squares method was used to generate estimates from two different types of regression models.

Model 1 determines the statistical significance of the differences between the groups of children and adolescents. To achieve this, participation in activities is regressed on group belonging: (1) children and adolescents with a migration but not a refugee background and (2) children and adolescents without a migrant background compared to (3) children and adolescents with a refugee background. Indicators for the 12-, 14-, and 17-year age groups are also included. The estimated coefficients for the first two groups, corrected for differences in the age composition of the two groups, show the differences between the refugee group and the respective comparative group. Here we are particularly interested in whether this difference is statistically significant or not.

Model 2 additionally considers whether a part of the difference can be explained by the family background of the children or adolescents. To achieve this, indicators of the family's socio-economic characteristics were included in the regression as additional explanatory variables. These included years of education of the household head, net equivalized household income,<sup>1</sup> household size, household type (single-parent or couple household) as well as an indicator of whether neither the main adult nor his or her partner is gainfully employed. In this way, we factor out the share of the differences that is correlated with socio-economic differences between the refugee children and adolescents and their comparison groups.

<sup>1</sup> Net equivalized household income is based on the OECD equivalence scale, which, by weighting members within a household, makes it possible to compare the income situation of households of different sizes and compositions, see glossary (available online, in German).

in separate classes.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the empirical findings outlined in this report indicate that more than one-third of refugees aged 12, 14, and 17 went straight into mainstream classes upon starting school in Germany (Table)<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, the fear that refugees will be permanently segregated also appears to be unfounded as only around one-fifth of refugees reported having spent more than a year being schooled in a separate class before moving into a mainstream class. That said, almost half (44 percent) of all refugee children and adolescents initially had all their lessons in separate classes and were thus taught completely separately from their native peers. This form of teaching has been particularly heavily criticized because of the lack of connection with a mainstream class and the difficulties it causes when transitioning to mainstream schooling.

**Most refugee adolescents have a sense of belonging to their school**

Irrespective of whether taught in a separate or a mainstream class, attending school can have a stabilizing effect on refugee children and adolescents and provide structure to their daily lives. Young people who feel accepted and supported by their school community show higher levels of motivation to learn and are more self-confident.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, devel-

<sup>10</sup> See Juliane Karakayali et al., "Die Kontinuität der Separation: Vorbereitungsklassen für neu zugewanderte Kinder und Jugendliche im Kontext historischer Formen separierter Beschulung," *DDS – Die Deutsche Schule* 109, no. 3 (2017): 223–235 (in German; available online) and also Argyro Panagiotopoulou, Lisa Rosen, and Stefan Karduck, "Exklusion durch institutionalisierte Barrieren. Einblicke in die pädagogische Praxis einer sogenannten Vorbereitungsklasse für geflüchtete Kinder und Jugendliche in einem marginalisierten Quartier von Köln," in *Neue Mobilitäts- und Migrationsprozesse und sozialräumliche Segregation*, eds. Rauf Ceylan, Markus Ottersbach, and Petra Wiedemann (Wiesbaden: 2017), 115–131 (in German; available online).

<sup>11</sup> Based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, the DJI Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport 2020 states that in 2017 almost one-third of refugee schoolchildren attended a separate class (see page 211). The analyses presented in the report are based on the 2017 survey wave and include all school-age refugees, while the present report evaluates the information on the type of schooling received by 12-, 14-, and 16-year-olds at the start of their education in Germany. This might explain any discrepancies in the findings, see DJI, Lochner et al., *DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport*.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview, see Karen F. Osterman, "Students' need for belonging in the school community," *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 3 (2000): 323–367 (available online).



oping a sense of belonging to their school can make it easier for refugees to integrate into school life.<sup>13</sup>

The majority of the 12-, 14-, and 17-year-old refugees surveyed had a strong sense of belonging to their school. On average, refugees' responses to the six statements concerning sense of belonging to school showed that they had a statistically significantly stronger sense of belonging than the comparison group of 15-year-olds responding to the same statements in the 2018 German PISA study (Figure 1).<sup>14</sup> In response to each of the aforementioned six statements, between 80 and 90 percent of refugees surveyed indicated that they (strongly) agreed with the statement or, in the case of the negatively formulated statement, (strongly) disagreed. Refugees agreed considerably more frequently with the statements "I feel I belong to this school" and "I find it easy to make new friends in school" than participants in the PISA test conducted in Germany.

This shows that many schools have successfully managed to integrate recently arrived refugee children and adolescents into school life to the extent that most feel at ease in the school environment and are able to establish positive social contacts with others. Given that the sense of belonging to school among children with a migration background is typically lower or the same as their peers without a migration background,<sup>15</sup> this finding is particularly positive.<sup>16</sup>

### A particularly large share of refugee children and adolescents attend school for the whole day

Attending school in the morning only (as is typical in Germany) allows young refugees to come into contact with their German peers and non-refugee children with a migration background being taught in mainstream classes. If refugee children and adolescents have the opportunity to interact with peers who have lived in Germany all their lives, or at least for a long time, in the afternoon as well, this can further support integration efforts. All-day schooling and after-school programs provide young refugees with precisely this opportunity. As a rule, they attend every day of the school week both in the morning and in the afternoon, thus being able to interact with their peers for longer hours. However, extracurricular activities, whether at the school or elsewhere,

<sup>13</sup> See Maryam Kia-Keating and B. Heidi Ellis, "Belonging and Connection to School in Resettlement: Young Refugees, School Belonging, and Psychosocial Adjustment," *Clinical Child Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2007): 29–43 (available online).

<sup>14</sup> The mean difference was calculated using data on 3,939 participants in the 2018 PISA Study conducted in Germany. See Julia Mang et al. (forthcoming): *PISA 2018 Skalenhandbuch. Dokumentation der Erhebungsinstrumente*. The difference between this and the data used for the present study is statistically significant at the one percent level.

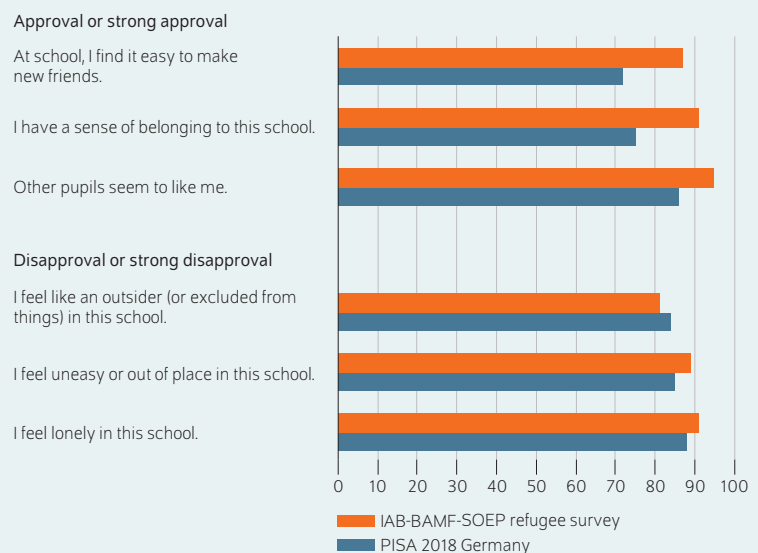
<sup>15</sup> OECD, "Students' sense of belonging at school and their relations with teachers," in *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, ed. OECD (Paris: 2017) (available online).

<sup>16</sup> In contrast to this finding, the 2018 IQB-Bildungstrend indicates that, although young refugees demonstrate a high degree of social integration and school satisfaction, this is significantly less pronounced than for comparable schoolchildren with a migration but no refugee background and those without a migration background. See Sofie Henschel et al., "Zuwanderungsbezogene Disparitäten," in *IQB-Bildungstrend 2018. Mathematische und naturwissenschaftliche Kompetenzen am Ende der Sekundarstufe I im zweiten Ländervergleich*, eds. Petra Stanat et al. (Münster, New York: 2019), 326–330 (in German; available online).

Figure 1

### Sense of belonging to school by refugee children and adolescents (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds)

In percent



Note: IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey: refugees at the age of 12, 14 and 17 (depending on the statement, N= 606–614). PISA 2018 survey: students aged 15 (depending on the statement, N = 3,870–3,939).

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; Julia Mang et al. (in preparation): PISA 2018 Scale Manual. Documentation of the survey instruments; authors' own calculations.

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Most refugees show a (strong) sense of belonging to their schools.

can also offer exposure to the German language as well as the chance for refugees to become more familiar with the everyday life of children and adolescents in Germany.

In terms of whole-day school attendance, the data show that refugee children and adolescents aged 12 and 14 are more likely to be in school mornings and afternoons or attend an after-school program (Figure 2). Participation among refugees is 51 percent, while among their peers with a migration background, the corresponding share is 41 percent, and for those without a migration background, it is just 32 percent. The difference between the high participation rate among refugees and the rate among children without a migration background is statistically significant (Figure 3, Model 1).

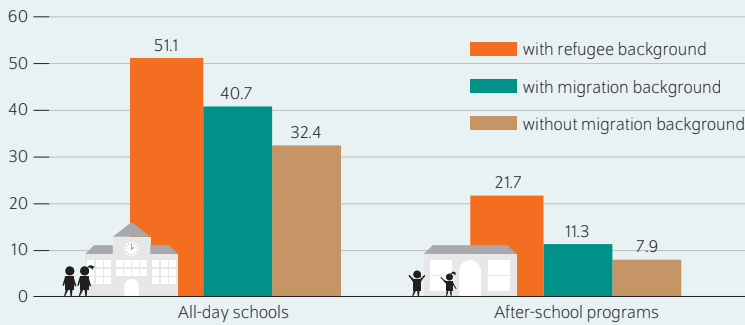
However, this difference can be explained by parental and household characteristics, i.e. the family background of the children and adolescents (Figure 3, Model 2). If a multivariate regression is used to factor out the share of the difference that is explained by family characteristics, the difference becomes smaller and statistically insignificant. These findings therefore suggest that the family background of refugee children and adolescents contributes to whether or not they attend all-day schooling, although it is not the only factor.

Regardless, attending all-day schooling makes integration easier. Studies suggest that participation in all-day schooling

Figure 2

**Participation rates in all-day schools (12- and 14-year-olds) and after school programs (12-year-olds)**

In percent



Notes: Attendance rates in all-day school were reported by the head of household (N = 2,221). The use of after school programs refers to information provided by the 12-year-olds themselves (N = 996).

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Children and adolescents with a refugee background are more likely to attend all-day schools and after-school programs.

programs can have a positive impact on social skills, particularly for children with a migration background.<sup>17</sup> All-day schooling programs, therefore, have enormous potential for integrating children and adolescents with a migration or refugee background, although there is still room for improvement.<sup>18</sup>

The situation is similar regarding the use of after-school programs by 12-year-olds. The share of refugee children attending after-school is around 22 percent, while the corresponding share among children with a migration background is only 11 percent, and among those without a migration background, it is a mere eight percent (Figure 2). Again, the difference in the take-up rates between the refugee children and the children from a migration background is statistically significant (Figure 3, Model 1). Yet again, the difference becomes smaller and statistically insignificant once socio-economic characteristics of the family are taken into account (Figure 3, Model 2).

**Refugee adolescents participate less frequently in school-based extracurricular activities**

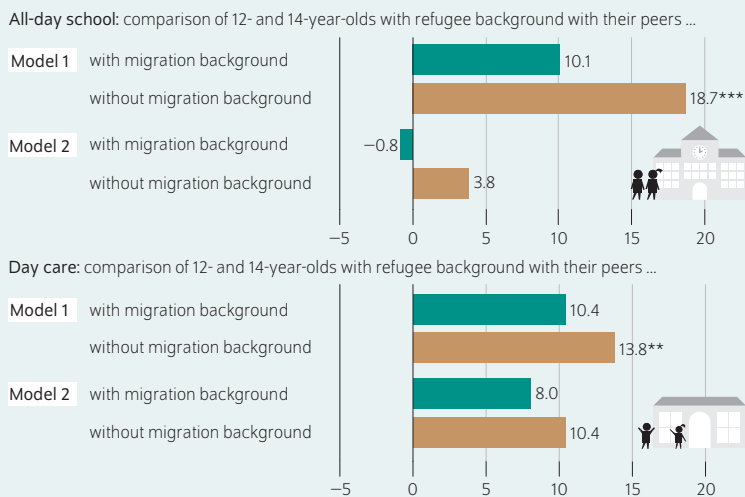
Besides all-day schooling and after-school programs, in the afternoon schoolchildren also frequently take part in school-based extracurricular activities. In this setting too, children and adolescents who have come to Germany as refugees can interact with peers with different backgrounds and this interaction can positively influence their integration.<sup>19</sup> The data show how frequently respondents participate in school-based activities that take place in the afternoon, after regular classes, for example music or dram clubs, sports, the school newspaper, but also activities related to school-life such as class or school council representative. Where adolescents indicated that they participated in one or more of these activities, this is defined as participation in extracurricular school activity. Data is available for 14- and 17-year-olds.

Overall, the participation rate among refugee adolescents is 32 percent, while the corresponding figure for adolescents with a migration background is 51 percent, and for those without a migration background, it is 63 percent (Figure 4). The difference between the participation rates of the refugees and the adolescents without a migration background is statistically significant (Figure 5, Model 1). The other multivariate estimates indicate that around half of these differences can be explained by family characteristics. If we remove the

Figure 3

**Use of all-day schools and after school programs by children and adolescents with refugee background compared to their peers**

In percentage points



Notes: Participation rates in all-day school were reported by the head of household (N = 2,221). The use of after-school programs refers to information provided by the 12-year-olds themselves (N = 996). Model 1 determines the statistically significant differences between children and adolescents with a migration background and those without a migration background compared to those with a refugee background. Model 2 additionally controls for a number of socio-economic characteristics (Box 2). Statistical significance levels of the differences compared to the group with a refugee background: \*\*\* 1 percent, \*\* 5 percent, \* 10 percent. Significance tests are based on standard errors clustered at the household level.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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The increased use of all-day schools and after school programs by refugees can be explained to large parts by socio-economic characteristics of the families.

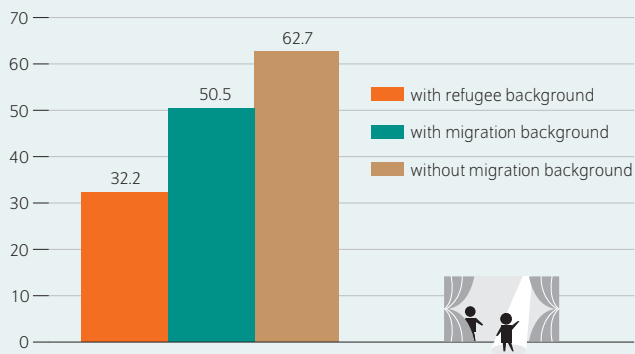
<sup>17</sup> Natalie Fischer, Hans Peter Kuhn, and Ivo Züchne, "Entwicklung von Sozialverhalten in der Ganztagschule," in *Ganztagschule: Entwicklung, Qualität, Wirkungen. Längsschnittliche Befunde der Studie zur Entwicklung von Ganztagschulen (StEG)*, eds. Natalie Fischer et al. (Weinheim: 2011), 246–266 (in German; available online).

<sup>18</sup> For example, less than half of all primary schools, one-third of secondary schools (excluding academic-track schools), and only 11 percent of academic-track secondary schools (*Gymnasium*) have educational concepts that explicitly refer to promoting inclusion and integration through targeted all-day schooling programs. See StEG-Konsortium, ed., *Ganztagschule 2017/2018. Deskriptive Befunde einer bundesweiten Befragung* (Frankfurt am Main, Dortmund, Gießen, München: 2019) (in German; available online).

<sup>19</sup> Marta Kindler, Vesselina Ratcheva, and Maria Piechowska, "Social networks, social capital and migration integration at local level. European literature review," *IRIS Working Paper Series 6* (2015) (available online).

Figure 4

**Participation rate of adolescents (14- and 17-year-olds) in school-based extracurricular activities**  
In percent



Note: N = 2,163.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Adolescent refugees are less likely to take part in school-based extracurricular activities.

share of the difference that can be explained by the adolescents' family background, then the differences also become statistically insignificant (Figure 5, Model 2). This therefore shows that the differences can be entirely explained by the socio-economic characteristics of the young refugees rather than by the refugee background *per se*.<sup>20</sup> This finding should be taken into account when planning integration policy measures.

Participation in sport can be particularly beneficial for refugees, as stated in the German government's National Integration Action Plan.<sup>21</sup> Bearing this in mind, we examined participation in school-based sports clubs separately. While just nine percent of young refugees take part in school-based sports clubs, the corresponding figure for young people with a migration background is 17 percent and, for those without a migration background, it is 18 percent (Figure 6). This shows that more still needs to be done to promote the integration of young refugees through participation in school sport activities. This is illustrated even more clearly when we look at the share of girls in the group of refugees taking part in school sport clubs.<sup>22</sup> Girls account for only a very small share of those participating in this type of extracurricular activity. This shows that the stated aim of the German government's National Integration Action Plan to increase the

<sup>20</sup> This differs from the group of adolescent refugees in: C. Katharina Spieß, Franz Westermaier, and Jan Marcus, "Children and adolescents with refugee background less likely to participate in voluntary educational programs—with exception of extracurricular school activities," *DIW Economic Bulletin*, no. 35 (2016): 422–430 (online available).

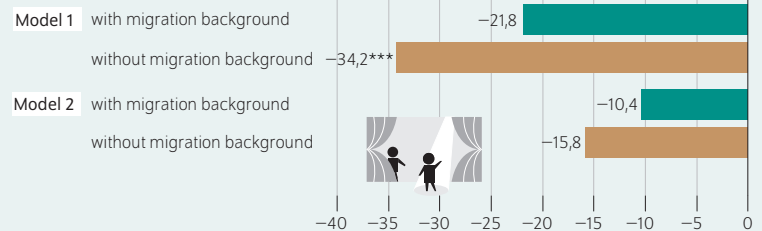
<sup>21</sup> See Bundesregierung: *Nationaler Aktionsplan*.

<sup>22</sup> The share of girls in the group of refugees participating in an after-school sports club is just under 17 percent. This means that, in total, a mere four percent of girls with a refugee background participate a club of this kind, while overall participation among boys is still 12 percent.

Figure 5

**Participation in school-based extracurricular activities by adolescent refugees in comparison to peers**  
In percentage points

Comparison of 14- and 17-year-olds with refugee backgrounds to their peers ...



Notes: N = 2,163. Model 1 determines the statistically significant differences between children and adolescents with a migration background and those without a migration background compared to children and adolescents with a refugee background. Model 2 additionally controls for a number of socio-economic characteristics (Box 2). Statistical significance levels of differences compared to the refugee group: \*\*\* 1 percent, \*\* 5 percent, \* 10 percent. Significance tests are based on standard errors clustered at the household level.

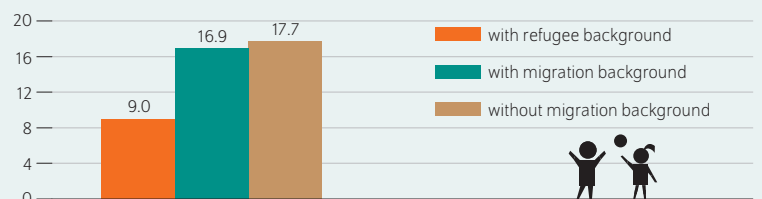
Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Differences in participation in school-based extracurricular activities can largely be explained by socio-economic background of families.

Figure 6

**Participation rate of young people (14- and 17-year-olds) in school-based sports**  
In percent



Note: N = 2,163.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Adolescents with a refugee background use sports clubs less frequently.

participation of girls and women in sport activities has not yet been adequately achieved.<sup>23</sup>

**Refugee children less frequently members of sports clubs than children with no migration background**

As well as school-based activities, there are also a variety of out-of-school activities and programs that have the potential of contributing to the integration refugee children and

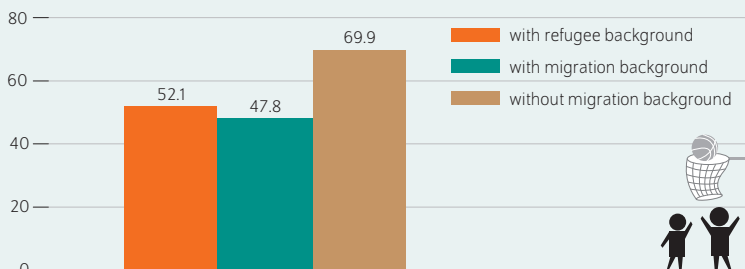
<sup>23</sup> See Bundesregierung: *Nationaler Aktionsplan*.



Figure 7

**Membership of children (12-year-olds) in out-of-school sports clubs**

In percent



Note: N = 1,049.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Regarding memberships in sports clubs, there is no noticeable difference between children with refugee and migration backgrounds.

However, when it comes to membership of a sports club among 12-year-olds, the picture is more nuanced (Figure 7). The share of refugee children who are members of such organizations is 52 percent, with the corresponding figure for children with a migration background just marginally lower at 48 percent. For children with no migration background, however, this figure is considerably higher. In fact, it is statistically significantly higher at almost 70 percent (Figure 8, Model 1).<sup>25</sup>

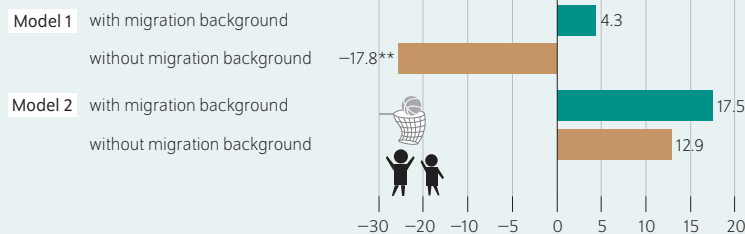
The more detailed analyses show that around two-thirds of this difference can be explained by family characteristics: when accounting for these, the difference in participation rates between the two groups is no longer statistically significantly different (Figure 8, Model 2). There is also evidence of a gender gap in the detailed analyses, which could be linked to different cultures in refugees' country of origin. Nevertheless, the share of refugee girls who belong to a sports club outside school is still higher than the share who take part in school-based sports clubs.<sup>26</sup> This might suggest that, recent policy initiatives aimed at promoting sport participation among migrants such as "migration mainstreaming"<sup>27</sup> is at least moving in the right direction and has been more successful than school-based sports clubs. That said, it should be noted that the data basis does not allow us to analyze adolescents, for whom a different picture might emerge.

Figure 8

**Membership in out-of-school sports clubs of children with refugee background compared to peers**

In percentage points

Comparison of 12-year-olds with refugee background to their peers ...



Notes: N = 1,049. Model 1 determines the statistically significant differences between children and adolescents with a migration background and those without a migration background compared to children and adolescents with a refugee background. Model 2 additionally controls for a number of socio-economic characteristics (Box 2). Statistical significance levels of differences compared to the refugee group: \*\*\* 1 percent, \*\* 5 percent, \* 10 percent. Significance tests are based on standard errors clustered at the household level.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Family background explains the difference in sports club membership for children with and without refugee background.

**Refugee children and adolescents more frequently attend youth groups**

Apart from sport activities there are also other programs and services that give young people the opportunity to meet and interact with peers in the afternoons—youth groups, for example. Other young people reported doing voluntary work in the afternoons.

Refugee children and adolescents show above average participation in youth groups (Figure 9). A total of 41 percent of refugee adolescents attended a youth club, while only 14 percent of young people with a migration background, and 28 percent of those without a migration background reported doing so.<sup>28</sup> These differences are statistically significant and cannot be explained by other family characteristics (Figure 10,

adolescents.<sup>24</sup> Here too, sport deserves particular attention. Sport, and team sports in particular, offers an opportunity for social interaction which is less reliant on language and can thus promote integration.

<sup>24</sup> Participation in after-school clubs is shown to have educational effects for all children and adolescents, see, for example Charlotte Cabane, Adrian Hille, and Michael Lechner, "Mozart or Pelé? The effects of adolescents' participation in music and sports," *Labour Economics* 41(C) (2016): 90–103 (available online).

<sup>25</sup> Other studies (see Lochner et al., *DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport*) show that 39 percent of young people with a migration background and 57 percent of those with no migration background mainly play their preferred sport in clubs outside the school setting. However, these figures relate to 17-year-olds and not 12-year-olds as in the present study. The corresponding information for refugee adolescents is not available. Moreover, the analyses also differ in how they define "migration background". In the Lochner study people are referred to as having a migration background when either they themselves or at least one of their parents has not been a German citizen since birth.

<sup>26</sup> The share of girls in the group of 12-year-old refugees is just over one-third. This means that 43 percent of girls and 60 percent of boys with a refugee background regularly attend a sports club.

<sup>27</sup> By "migration mainstreaming" we mean the promotion of equal opportunities to participate in the structures of organized sports, see Bundesregierung, *Nationaler Aktionsplan*, 249.

<sup>28</sup> Another recent study (Lochner et al., *DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport*) found no differences between children with and without a migration background with regard to participation in youth groups. Refugee children were not included in these analyses. The discrepancy between these analyses and the findings of the present study might be due to the different definitions of migration background (Box 1).

Model 2). This suggests a direct correlation between participation in youth groups and refugee status. This could be because some youth groups specifically target refugee children and adolescents.

The share of refugee children or adolescents who reported doing voluntary work was 25 percent, while the corresponding share for their peers with a migration background was 22 percent, and for those without a migration background it was 32 percent (Figure 9). This is not a statistically significant difference (Figure 10).

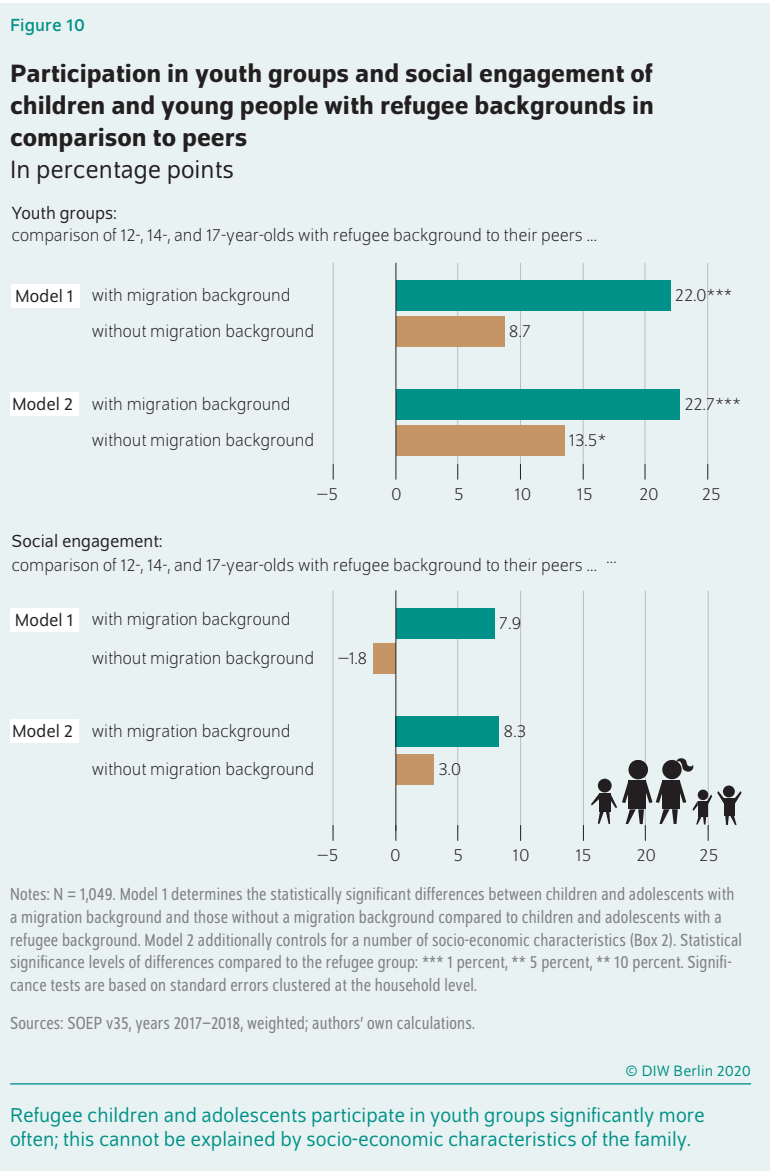
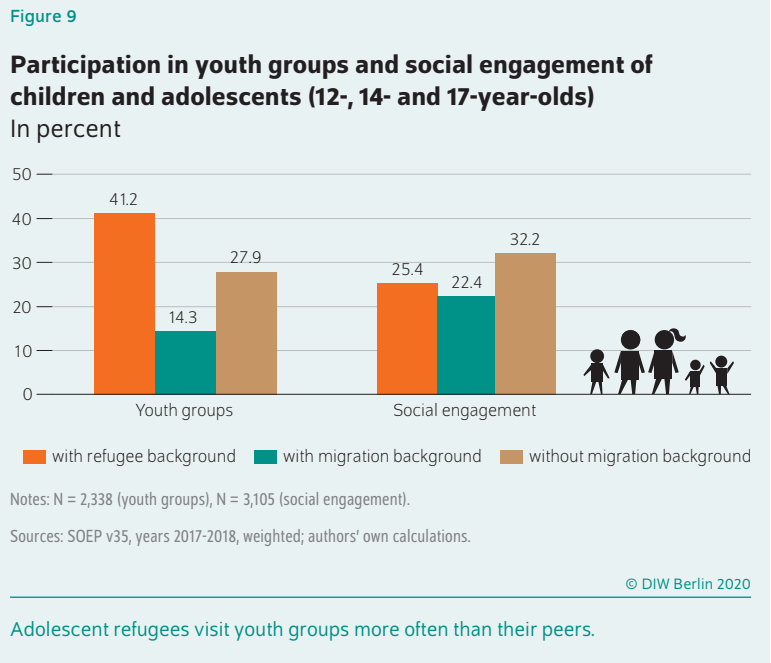
**Refugee adolescents in particular often communicate with friends in German**

Apart from participation in extracurricular leisure and sport activities, regular contact with German-speaking peers also plays an important role in integrating refugee adolescents. Thus, friendships with adolescent members of Germany’s majority population can enhance the social capital of adolescents with experience of migration.<sup>29</sup> In this context, the 12-, 14-, and 17-year-olds were asked about their social contact. With a share of around eight percent, refugee children and adolescents reported not having met any friends at all over the course of a month much more frequently than their peers without a migration background (Figure 11). That said, the share of refugees who met with friends on a daily basis was 81 percent, putting them on a par with the other groups. It therefore appears that there is a small sub-group of refugees who are in danger of being socially isolated from their peers.

Communicating with friends in German can be very important for the acquisition or consolidation of German language skills. If refugee children and adolescents meet with their friends they mainly speak German (Figure 12). The figure for the 17-year-olds is 70 percent, and 66 percent of the 14-year-olds speak German, as well as other languages, with their friends. In comparison, 90 percent of 12-year-olds also talk to their friends in German.

**Conclusion: Although a lot of progress has been made, particularly for younger refugees, there is still a long way to go**

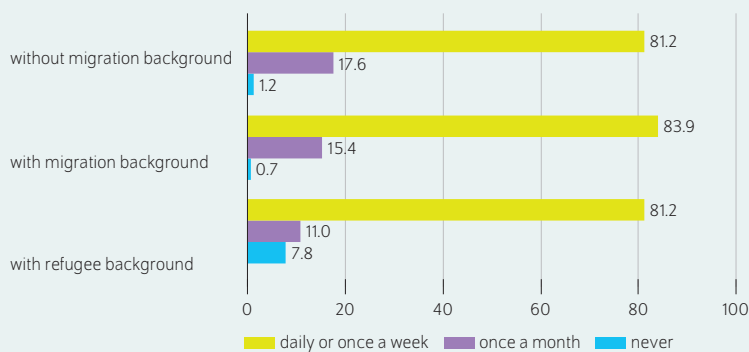
The integration of children and adolescents who came to Germany with their families as refugees is a key component of German integration policy. As measured by participation in a range of school-based and out-of-school activities this integration has, in many respects, been a success. This is shown when we compare the participation of young refugees with that of their peers in the host country. For example, refugee children and adolescents express a stronger than average sense of belonging to their school. This is an important finding that can be used to promote further integration. However, the share of refugee children and adolescents who do not feel as though they belong should not be overlooked. Moreover, we must continue to monitor developments over



29 See Lochner et al., *DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport*.

Figure 11

**Frequency with which children and adolescents (12-, 14- and 17-year-olds) meet their friends per month**  
In percent



Note: N = 2 341.

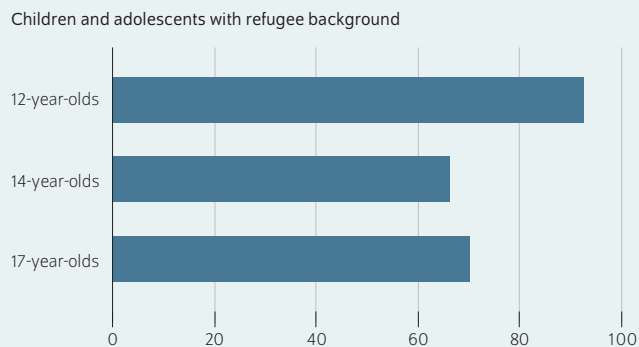
Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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Refugee children and adolescents are more likely to meet no friends at all compared to their peers with and without a migration background.

Figure 12

**Approval to statement “spoken language with friends is mostly German”**  
In percent



Note: N = 436.

Sources: SOEP v35, years 2017–2018, weighted; authors' own calculations.

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90 percent of the 12-year-old refugees talk to their friends mainly in German.

the next few years to ascertain whether this strong feeling of belonging also facilitates integration in other areas, or whether it reflects an initial sense of optimism triggered by having a new, secure, and settled daily life.

Further efforts are needed, particularly with a view to increasing the participation of children and adolescents with a refugee background in school-based extracurricular activities. In this context, schools could do more to raise awareness about the activities that are available and other students could encourage their refugee classmates to take part.

Refugees are increasingly taking part in after-school programs. This also offers an opportunity for social interaction and helps refugees familiarize themselves with the language and everyday life of children and adolescents living in Germany. Sport is another important vehicle for promoting integration. Although more than half of all children with a refugee background are already members of sports clubs, more could still be done here. Sports clubs could be

made more attractive to refugees. This could be achieved by organizing more targeted activities or reducing membership fees, if these measures are not already being implemented.

A remarkably high share of refugees attend youth groups. Similarly, they also reported being just as frequently involved in voluntary work as their peers. With regard to social contact with peers, it is evident that, in many cases, the 12-year-olds choose to talk to their friends in German. They appear to be more integrated than the older adolescents—at least if this is judged on use of the German language. In any event, it is clear that the efforts made by the municipalities, federal states, and national government to integrate refugees, also by means of non-formal extracurricular activities, both inside and outside school, have, in many cases, been successful. The most important thing now is to ensure that these efforts are sustained and that the requisite public funding is made available to allow this to happen. In the end, the individual and social costs of unsuccessful integration are considerably higher than the costs of a proactive integration policy.

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## LEGAL AND EDITORIAL DETAILS

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