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Article

Social integration of refugees is improving

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AT A GLANCE

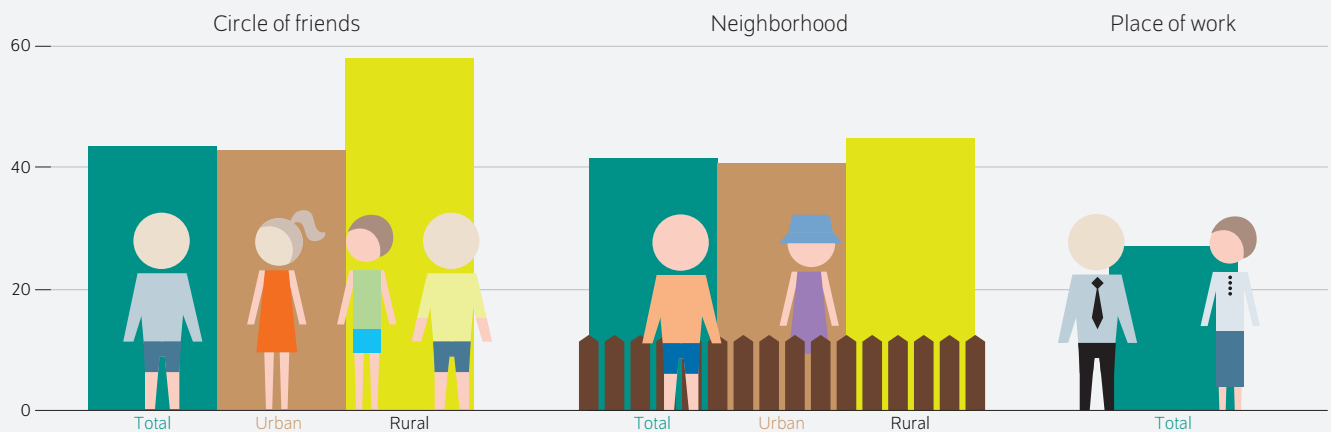
Social Integration of Refugees Is Improving

By Katja Schmidt, Jannes Jacobsen, and Magdalena Krieger

- Evaluation of data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) indicates that concerns about immigration among the population are declining, while refugees' concerns about xenophobia are growing
- Effects of refugee immigration are viewed with more skepticism in rural regions than in urban areas
- Refugees have less trust in public administration than they do in the police and the courts
- Around half of refugees have regular contact with the local population; these contacts are less common among female refugees
- Particularly for female refugees integrational efforts should be intensified—interethnic networks could be widened

Most contact between refugees and the local population comes via their circles of friends

Refugees in percent



Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 4,391; authors' own calculations.

Notes: In relation to contact at work only; rural and urban areas cannot be compared due to the low number of cases.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

"The findings of the report show that refugees and the host society are growing closer together. Yet, further efforts are needed to address current concerns and skepticism on both sides."

— Katja Schmidt —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with C. Katharina Spieß
www.diw.de/mediathek

Social Integration of Refugees Is Improving

By Katja Schmidt, Jannes Jacobsen, and Magdalena Krieger

ABSTRACT

Five years ago, almost a million people came to Germany seeking refuge. Chancellor Angela Merkel responded to public concern over such a large influx of refugees with her well-known saying, "Wir schaffen das" (We can do this!). Much has happened since then. As this report shows, the German population's concerns over immigration have been decreasing since 2016. Nevertheless, refugees are increasingly concerned about xenophobia. At the same time, although their trust in key state institutions is high, they are less trusting of Germany's public administration system. One way of building mutual reliance might be to foster personal contact between refugees and local populations. However, the present study indicates that, so far, only around half of refugees have regular contact with Germans. Female refugees, in particular, have less contact with Germans. Government initiatives to create diverse social networks could be an important step toward greater integration.

There are two important aspects to note in the public debate on refugee immigration since 2015. The first aspect is the response from the population living in Germany to the increased influx of refugees and the second is refugee integration into the labor market and into the educational system. While the reaction of the resident population has so far been mixed—marked on the one hand by voluntary engagement for refugees, on the other hand by great concerns about immigration¹—refugees were found to have integrated relatively quickly and successfully.²³ However, there are other, subjective, aspects that play an important role in integration. These include, for example, the extent of refugees' concerns about xenophobia, whether they feel discriminated against, their trust in institutions, and opportunities for them to interact with members of the host society. These aspects need to be considered in relation to the attitudes, expectations, and feelings of the members of the host society.

Based on data collected by the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)⁴ in collaboration with Kantar, this report sheds light on the communal life of refugees and members of the host society in 2018. The present report examines the subjective and social factors influencing refugee integration. These are then compared with the attitudes of the members of the host society; our understanding is deepened by examining urban and rural areas as two distinct areas (Box 1).

The variety of and access to social opportunities in urban areas differs from that of rural areas. These differences allow conclusions to be drawn about possible access barriers that the local population are faced with. For example, urban and

¹ Jannes Jacobsen, Philipp Eisnecker, and Jürgen Schupp, "In 2016, around One-Third of People in Germany Donated for Refugees and Ten Percent Helped out on Site – yet Concerns Are Mounting" *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 17 (2017): 347–358 (in German; available online; accessed July 20, 2020. This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

² Herbert Brücker, Johannes Croisier, Yuliya Kosyakova, Hannes Kröger, Giuseppe Pietrantuono, Nina Rother, and Jürgen Schupp, "Language skills and employment rate of refugees in Germany improving with time," *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 4. (2019): 50–61 (available online).

³ Herbert Brücker, Yuliya Kosyakova, and Eric Schuß, "Integration in Arbeitsmarkt und Bildungssystem macht weiter Fortschritte," *IAB-Kurzbericht*, no. 4. (2020): 1–16 (in German; available online).

⁴ The Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) is a representative annual survey of private households that has been conducted since 1984, beginning in former West Germany only. Since 1990, it has also included former East Germany. See Jan Goebel et al., "The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)," *Journal of Economics and Statistics* 239, no. 29 (2019): 345–360 (available online).

Box 1

Differentiating between urban and rural areas

Our distinction between urban and rural area is based on the definition of rural areas taken from the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (*Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt und Raumforschung*, BBSR).¹ Accordingly, municipalities are classified based on their size, population density, and central-local function as either agglomeration areas, urbanized areas or rural areas. We consider agglomerations and urbanized areas to be urban areas and contrast them with rural areas.

¹ See Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (in German; available online).

rural areas currently have not only different integration concepts, but differing availability of language and integration courses. Furthermore, refugees use mainly public transport, which significantly restricts their mobility in rural areas. Personal relationship structures also differ between rural and urban areas; while in rural areas you know your neighbors, there is more anonymity in urban areas. These and other differences may affect opportunities for refugee integration.⁵ Since refugees have little autonomy in choosing their place of residence due to residency requirements and because they are allocated accommodation in accordance with the Königstein Key (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*),⁶ this report expects there to be differences in the integration process between urban and rural areas (Box 2).

Concerns about immigration have been receding since 2016

Successfully integrating immigrants depends, among other things, on prevailing attitudes within the host society.⁷ When immigrants experience rejection, for example in the form of social separation or discrimination, it becomes more difficult for them to participate in society. For this reason, the first step is to examine sentiments in the host society. The annual SOEP survey asks respondents how concerned they are about immigration. Response categories are “not concerned at all,” “somewhat concerned,” and “very concerned.”

⁵ Tabea Rösch, Hanne Schneider, Johannes Weber, and Susanne Worbs, “Integration von Geflüchteten in ländlichen Räumen,” *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge Research Report*, no. 36 (2020) (available online).

⁶ The distribution of asylum seekers throughout the federal states is based on the Königstein Key (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*). The Königstein Key determines the distribution quota and is based on tax revenues and the population of the federal states (available online). Refugees who receive social benefits are also subject to a residence requirement, meaning their place of residence is specified (available online).

⁷ See also Christian S. Czymara and Alexander W. Schmidt-Catran, “Wer ist in Deutschland willkommen? Eine Vignettenanalyse zur Akzeptanz von Einwanderern,” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, no. 68 (2016): 193–227; M. Verkuyten, “Emotional reactions to and support for immigrant policies: Attributed responsibilities to categories of asylum seekers,” *Social Justice Research* 17, no. 3 (2004): 293–314.

Box 2

Questions from the SOEP survey questionnaire

Population

This was a survey of members of the host society rather than refugees.

Concerns

Are you concerned about immigration to Germany?

1. Yes, very concerned
2. Yes, somewhat concerned
3. No, not concerned at all

Attitudes to refugees

The questions evaluated here focus on personal, subjective assessments of five areas, each with eleven possible ratings, where one was the most negative and eleven the most positive: The issue of refugees is controversial in Germany. What would you personally say to the following questions?

1. In general, is it bad or good for the German economy that refugees are coming here?
 - Bad for the economy (1)
 - Good for the economy (11)
2. In general, will refugees erode or enrich cultural life in Germany?
 - Erode (1)
 - Enrich (11)
3. Will refugees make Germany a worse or better place to live?
 - A worse place (1)
 - A better place (11)
4. Does a high influx of refugees mean more risks or more opportunities in the short term?
 - More risks short term (1)
 - More opportunities short term (11)
5. Does a high influx of refugees mean more risks or more opportunities in the long term?
 - More risks long term (1)
 - More opportunities long term (11)

In order to simplify interpretation, the responses are divided into three categories: 1–4 “rather negative,” 5–7 “ambivalent,” and 8–11 “rather positive.”

Engagement

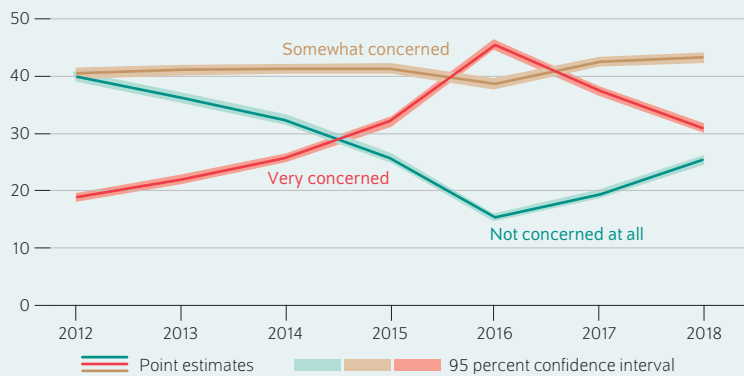
The following question is aimed at the respondents’ engagement with the refugee issue. Respondents were asked “Which of the following activities have you done in connection with the refugee issue since last year and which do you intend to do (again) in the future?” The present report only examines work already carried out locally with refugees, such as visits to authorities or language training:

- Since last year (yes/no)

Figure 1

Concerns about immigration between 2012 and 2018

Members of the host society in percent



Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), waves 2012 to 2018; authors' own calculations.

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Percent of host society who are very concerned about immigration has decreased significantly since 2016.

The share of respondents who were “very concerned” about immigration increased significantly between 2013 and 2016 (Figure 1). After the peak of refugee immigration to Germany in 2015/16, this share then fell over the next two years. While almost half of those surveyed (46 percent) were very concerned about immigration in 2016, this figure fell to just under one-third (32 percent) in 2018. However, if we include those respondents who were at least “somewhat concerned” about immigration, it becomes apparent that, in 2018, the issue of immigration still concerned the majority of respondents in Germany. Taken together, around three-quarters of the population (74 percent) were somewhat or very concerned about immigration. By comparison, this figure was around ten percentage points lower (63 percent) in 2013. The

share of respondents who were “not concerned at all” about immigration developed accordingly. While this figure fell to 16 percent in 2016, the lowest value in the surveyed categories, it rose again by ten percentage points over the course of two years, with around one-quarter of those surveyed saying they were not concerned about immigration at all in 2018.

In summary, concerns have decreased overall since 2016, but are still above 2013 levels.

Effects of refugee immigration are viewed with more skepticism in rural regions than in urban areas

In sociological research, among other things, the increased rejection of immigrants is believed to be attributable to the host society’s perceived cultural and economic threats.⁸ For example, it has been shown that people who perceive refugees as a threat to German society are more likely to identify with the right-wing populist AfD party, which rejects refugee immigration.⁹

The SOEP data indicates how pronounced such perceived threats were among respondents in the resident population in 2018. SOEP respondents were asked to rate the influence of refugees on the “economy,” “culture,” and “Germany as a place to live,” as well as the short- and long-term effects of refugee immigration, using an 11-point scale where one is most negative and eleven is most positive. In order to simplify interpretation, the responses are grouped into three categories: 1–4 “rather negative,” 5–7 “ambivalent,” and 8–11 “rather positive.”

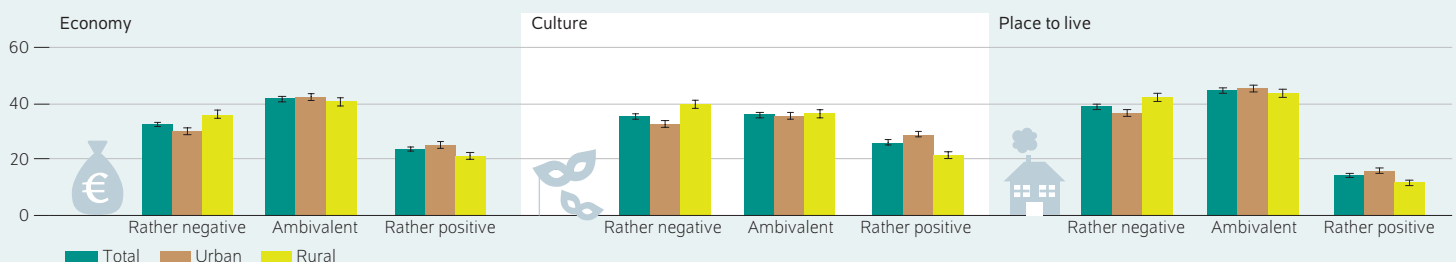
⁸ Christian S. Czymara and Alexander W. Schmidt-Catran, “Wer ist in Deutschland willkommen? Eine Vignettenanalyse zur Akzeptanz von Einwanderern,” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, no. 68 (2016): 193–227.

⁹ Holger Lengfeld and Clara Dilger, “Kulturelle und ökonomische Bedrohung. Eine Analyse der Ursachen der Parteiidentifikation mit der „Alternative für Deutschland“ mit dem Sozio-ökonomischen Panel 2016,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 47, no. 3 (2018): 181–199.

Figure 2

Assessment of the effects of refugee immigration on various areas

Members of the host society in percent



Note: the vertical lines indicate the 95-percent confidence interval.

Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 25,682; authors' own calculations. The share of individuals who provided no information was less than two percent and is included in N.

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In rural areas, the impact of refugees on the economy, culture, and living space is generally viewed with significantly more skepticism.

In 2018, most respondents (40 percent) expressed ambivalent attitudes toward the effect of refugees on the German economy, while around one-quarter thought it was rather good and one-third thought it was rather bad (Figure 2). Over one-third of respondents thought that refugee immigration had an ambivalent effect on cultural life in Germany, while over one-third thought it would erode German culture and more than one-quarter thought it would enrich German culture. At the same time, as little as 14 percent of respondents thought that refugees would make Germany a better place to live, while almost 40 percent expected a rather negative impact. Most respondents (45 percent) expressed ambivalent attitudes. When asked whether a large influx of refugees would mean more risks or more opportunities in the short and long term (Figure 3), only around eight percent of respondents said they saw short-term opportunities, while almost two-thirds thought there would be risks in the short term. In the long-term assessment, these figures were significantly lower, at 40 percent. At the same time, however, around one-quarter of respondents thought that the opportunities from refugee immigration would outweigh the risks in the long term.

Refugee immigration was consistently viewed with significantly more skepticism in rural regions than in urban areas. The most obvious difference relates to cultural impact. In rural areas, 22 percent perceived the influence of refugees as culturally enriching, while in urban areas this figure was seven percentage points higher (29 percent). When it comes to how respondents see the risks and opportunities related to refugee immigration, in contrast, there are only slight differences between urban and rural areas: In the short term, eight percent of urban dwellers and seven percent of rural dwellers said there were clear opportunities from refugee immigration. However, looking long term, their views of the future diverge somewhat: for 29 percent of those living in urban areas, the opportunities are greater, while this figure is only 24 percent among respondents living in rural areas.

Overall, opinions in the host society have become more positive. This trend is compared with the refugee perspective below.

Refugees are increasingly concerned about xenophobia, yet experiences of direct discrimination are less common

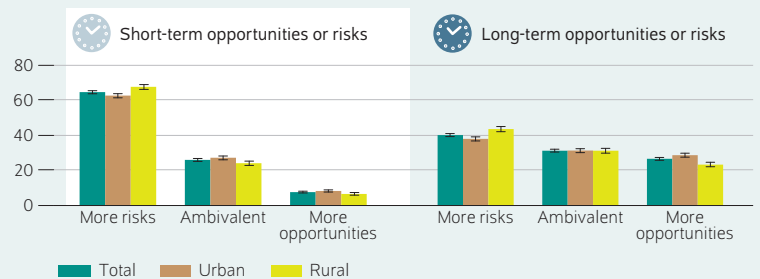
The refugee perspective was examined using the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany (Box 3). The data generally show that refugees' concerns about xenophobia increased slightly between 2016 and 2018. In 2018, more than one in three adult refugees reported that they were somewhat (26 percent) or very concerned (12 percent) about xenophobia. This implies a statistically significant increase of around five percentage points for those refugees who were somewhat or very concerned in the two years since 2016.

With regard to specific experiences of xenophobia, however, the survey data show that concerns might stem from more

Figure 3

Assessment of the short- and long-term effects of refugee immigration

Members of the host society in percent



Note: the vertical lines indicate the 95-percent confidence interval.

Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 25,682; authors' own calculations. The share of individuals who provided no information was less than two percent and is included in N.

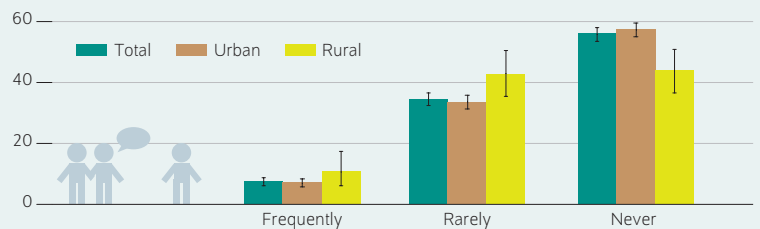
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The local population believes that immigration brings more risks than opportunities.

Figure 4

Perceived discrimination based on origin

Refugees in percent



Note: the vertical lines indicate the 95-percent confidence interval.

Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 4,256; authors' own calculations. The share of individuals who provided no information is around three percent and is included in N.

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The majority of refugees do not feel discriminated against.

than the direct experiences of the refugees themselves. For example, fewer than one in ten adult refugees reported that they often feel discriminated against because of their origin (Figure 4). Around one in three feels they have rarely been discriminated against and more than half feel they have not been discriminated against at all. The differences between urban and rural areas are not significant.

Similarly, in-depth analyses by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees show that refugees have continued to feel welcome in Germany in recent years.¹⁰ A look at the

¹⁰ Christina de Paiva Lareiro, Nina Rother, and Manuel Siegert, "Geflüchtete verbessern ihre Deutschkenntnisse und fühlen sich in Deutschland weiterhin willkommen," BAMF-Kurzanalyse, no. 1 (2020): 1–19. (in German; available online)

Box 3

Questions from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in Germany 2018**Concerns**

Are you concerned about xenophobia and hatred towards foreigners in Germany?

1. Yes, very concerned
2. Yes, somewhat concerned
3. No, not concerned at all

Perceived discrimination

How often have you personally had the experience of being disadvantaged here in Germany because of your origin?

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Trust in institutions

How much trust do you personally have in the following German institutions?

1. Public administration
2. Legal system
3. Police

In order to simplify interpretation, the responses are divided into three categories: 0–2 "low level of trust", 5–7 "medium level of trust", and 8–11 "high level of trust."

Contact with Germans

How often do you spend time with Germans?

1. Daily
2. Several times a week
3. Every week
4. Every month
5. Rarely
6. Never

We have summarized the responses "daily" to "every week" as "regular contact" and placed the remaining responses in the category of "rarely in contact."

How often do you have contact with Germans in your circle of friends / in your neighborhood / at your place of work?

1. Daily
2. Several times a week
3. Every week
4. Every month
5. Rarely
6. Never

We have summarized the responses "daily" to "every week" as "regular contact" and placed the remaining responses in the category of "rarely in contact."

concerns and the perceived discrimination reveals a dichotomous landscape. Although refugees are increasingly voicing their concerns about xenophobia, the data suggest that these concerns might not stem solely from their own experiences. It is believed that media reports may also be influencing their concerns about xenophobia. Against the background of anti-migration and racist protests, following the incidents in Kandel, Rhineland-Palatinate in summer 2015, for example, this interpretation seems probable. As a result of the attacks in Hanau and Halle, which occurred after the survey, this report can still assume that refugees' concerns might continue to grow.

In addressing these concerns, one important step could be to listen to those affected by such attacks. Following the attack in Hanau, for example, there was frequent criticism that minorities were not adequately protected from attacks.¹¹ On the political side, the development of concepts for more proactive protection of minorities could be an important step.

Refugees' trust in key state institutions is high

Another indicator of how immigrants are settling in and acclimatizing to their new surroundings is the level of trust they have in key state institutions, such as public administration, the police, and the courts. This is highly relevant from two perspectives. First, due to their immigration history and asylum applications, refugees will regularly come into contact with the government's administration apparatus and possibly the police and the courts as well. A high level of trust in these institutions is therefore also an indicator of the acceptance shown for the way these institutions operate. Second, having trust in these institutions also means having trust in the just functioning of the rule of law. Ideally, this should be high.

When asked about public administration, the legal system, and the police, refugees generally said they had a high level of trust in them. On a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being a high level of trust), around 60 percent of refugees said their trust in the police was high. Around half of all respondents had a high level of trust in the legal system. However, a less homogenous picture emerges in the case of public administration, with only one in three indicating a high level of trust in this institution.

If the respective gradations of the 11-point scale up to a value of 8 are also included as indicators of a high level of trust, the level of trust in the three institutions each rises substantially to over 60 percent (Figure 5 shows examples of aggregate values for trust in public administration). With regard to differences between urban and rural areas, the data show that levels of trust tend to be lower in rural areas, although this disparity cannot be statistically confirmed.

In summary, it can be seen that trust in key state institutions is generally high, but there is still room for improvement,

¹¹ See also a press release from the Central Council of Muslims in Germany dated February 20, 2020: available online.

especially in public administration. Trust in public administration could be strengthened by making its decision-making processes more transparent so that the work of this institution is more comprehensible for refugees.

From a sociological perspective, another important factor for increasing trust and reducing concerns is access to social networks. Social networks can act as bridges between otherwise separate groups, facilitating refugee access to societal institutions and information.¹²

The next section examines two questions relating to this aspect. First, to what extent are refugees already integrated into social networks and, second, what determines refugee access to interethnic networks?

Around half of refugees have regular contact with Germans, particularly among their circles of friends

In the IAB-SOEP-BAMF survey conducted in 2018, refugees were asked how often they spent time with Germans. Possible answers were “daily”, “several times a week”, “every week”, “every month”, “rarely”, and “never” (Box 3). The survey data show that 57 percent of refugees surveyed regularly spent time with Germans, i.e., daily to weekly. For refugees who live in rural areas of Germany, this figure was even higher at two-thirds. This difference of around ten percentage points compared to refugees living in urban areas is not statistically significant.

The survey data further suggest that refugees mainly spent time with Germans who were in their circles of friends. 43 percent of respondents stated that they regularly maintain friendly contact with Germans (Figure 6). This is particularly true of refugees in rural areas. In addition, neighborhood contact plays an important role in both urban and rural areas. A total of 40 percent of those surveyed reported that they had regular contact with their German neighbors. In contrast, comparatively few refugees were in contact with Germans at their places of work. Looking at the group of refugees who were employed in 2018, only one in four stated that he or she regularly interacted with Germans at work. This shows that refugees and members of the host society do not necessarily encounter each other at their places of work.

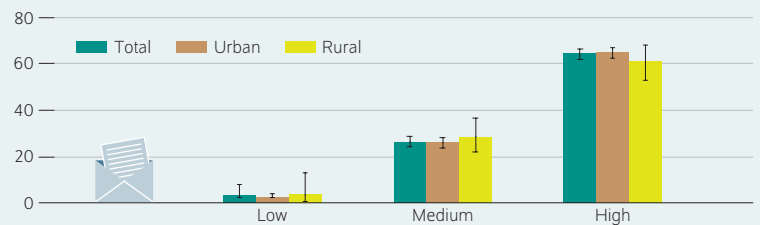
Another important point of contact between refugees and locals is voluntary work, which many people did after the migration influx in summer 2015. The resident population was also asked about voluntary work in the SOEP study. The results showed that in 2016, around one-third of the German population made donations in cash or in kind to refugees, and six percent volunteered locally to help refugees.¹³ In 2018,

¹² Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–1380.

¹³ Jannes Jacobsen, Philipp Eisnecker, and Jürgen Schupp, “In 2016, around One-Third of People in Germany Donated for Refugees and Ten Percent Helped out on Site – yet Concerns Are Mounting” *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 17 (2017): 347–358 (in German; available online).

Figure 5

Trust in public administration in Germany Refugees in percent



Note: the vertical lines indicate the 95-percent confidence interval.

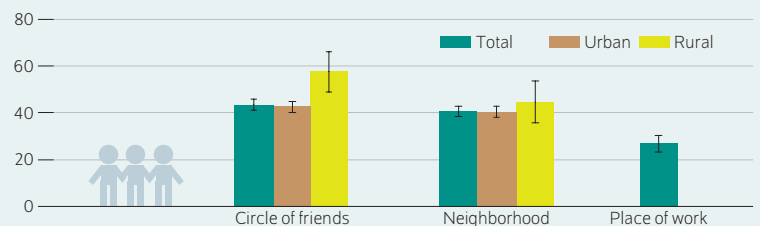
Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 3,834; authors' own calculations. The share of individuals who provided no information is between six and seven percent and is included in N.

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Refugees' trust in public administration is mostly high.

Figure 6

Regular contact between refugees and Germans by sphere of life Refugees in percent



Notes: Contact at work refers to N = 1,170 refugees who were gainfully employed in 2018. In relation to contact at work only; rural and urban areas cannot be compared due to the low number of cases.

The vertical lines indicate the 95-percent confidence interval.

Sources: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 4,391; authors' own calculations. The share of individuals who provided no information was between six and nine percent and is included in N.

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Most regular contact between refugees and the local population comes via their circles of friends

seven percent of SOEP respondents stated that they were involved in helping refugees in their local area, for example by helping them with visits to the authorities. Consequently, volunteer work also offers a platform for refugees and locals to experience direct contact with one another. There were no differences between voluntary work in the urban and rural regions of the host society.

Overall, this indicates a mixed picture of contact between refugees and Germans. While more than half of refugees were already in regular contact with Germans, 43 percent of refugees surveyed had no regular access to such social networks. This raises the question as to which factors promote contact between refugees and the host society.

Table 1

Determinants of time refugees and Germans regularly spent together (multivariate linear regression analysis).

	Time with Germans
Gender (reference: male)	-0.16*** (0.02)
Age	-0.01*** (0.00)
Years since arrival	0.04*** (0.02)
Region of origin (reference: Syria)	
Afghanistan	0.01 (0.03)
Iraq	0.02 (0.04)
Rest of the world	0.03 (0.03)
Integration course (reference: no)	-0.04 (0.02)
Shared accommodation (reference: no)	-0.10*** (0.03)
Children (reference: no)	0.02 (0.02)
City (reference: no)	-0.04 (0.04)
N	4,178

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Controlled for federal states. Reduced number of cases due to missing values for the dependent variable as well as for information about living in a shared accommodation, about children and about federal state. Dependent variable: time with Germans (1 = regular contact, 0 = irregular contact). Regression method: linear regression, unstandardized coefficients, robust standard errors.

Source: SOEP v.35 (weighted), wave 2018, N = 4,178; authors' own calculations.

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Female refugees have less contact with Germans

The findings of a multivariate regression analysis¹⁴ show that female refugees are significantly less likely (16 percent) than male refugees to have regular, i.e., daily or weekly, contact with Germans (Table 1). Living in shared accommodation is also associated with a significantly lower probability of regular interaction with Germans. In contrast, regular contact between Germans and refugees is more likely the longer refugees have been resident in Germany.

Over time, refugees and Germans will probably meet more regularly in their social networks. However, that female refugees had less regular contact with Germans suggests they face particular obstacles that require political attention.

¹⁴ In the multivariate regression analyses, we do not consider the gainful employment of refugees and their language skills as explanatory factors for the frequency of interethnic contact, since interactions may exist: if a refugee is gainfully employed, it can be assumed that he or she also has more regular contact with Germans. At the same time, regular contact with Germans can also be a stepping stone to gainful employment (Verena Seibel and Frank von Tubergen, "Job-search methods among non-western immigrants in the Netherlands," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 11, no. 3 (2013): 241–258). A similar logic can be applied to language skills. The causal direction of the effects cannot, therefore, be determined and could lead to misinterpretations.

Conclusions: Interaction between refugees and members of the host society should be further encouraged

The present report shows that the process of integrating refugees into their host society is still ongoing. Although the concerns of the local population are receding and are slowly approaching 2013 levels, the host society's skepticism surrounding the short- and long-term effects of refugee immigration to Germany persisted in 2018, as well. In contrast, refugees' concerns about xenophobia are growing, there partly is a lack of trust in some key German state institutions, and access to interethnic networks remains limited.

The social and subjective integration of refugees, therefore, seems to be an ongoing long-term social project that continues to require public attention. This applies in particular to rural areas. The local populations here are especially skeptical of refugees, even though regular contact with Germans in their circles of friends is more common than in urban areas. One key priority of state intervention should be to allay concerns about immigration and xenophobia. To achieve this, the government should look to strengthen interethnic social networks in order to initiate positive narratives between newcomers and longer-term residents. In addition to creating new, positive narratives, which could alleviate concerns on both sides, such networks also have an important bridging function between otherwise separate social groups. Going forward, it will therefore be important to offer more than integration courses. The civil society tandem projects that have developed since 2015 could be further consolidated and brought to rural areas, for instance, thus making them sustainable.¹⁵ Special focus should be placed on female refugees here. In line with earlier analyses of structural integration, it can be shown that women are also disadvantaged in terms of access to interethnic networks. In order to build bridges for women to access local society, too, special attention must be paid to their needs, for example with regard to childcare.¹⁶

Furthermore, the analyses indicate that the work of public administration, in particular, should be made more transparent. As a general rule, refugees have a high level of trust in the police and in the rule of law, but less so in public administration. However, something that could be problematic is the fact that around one-third to one-quarter of refugees do not have the same trust in key democratic institutions. Their trust must be further strengthened by means of transparent procedures so as not to jeopardize the existing legitimacy of this institution for refugees.

¹⁵ Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, *Flüchtlingspolitik und Integration – Menschen stärken Menschen* (2020) (in German; available online).

¹⁶ Ludovica Gambaro, Guido Neidhöfer, and C. Katharina Spieß, "Kita-Besuch von nach Deutschland geflüchteten Familien verbessert die Integration ihrer Mütter," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 44 (2019): 805–812. (in German; available online)

SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

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