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Article

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AT A GLANCE

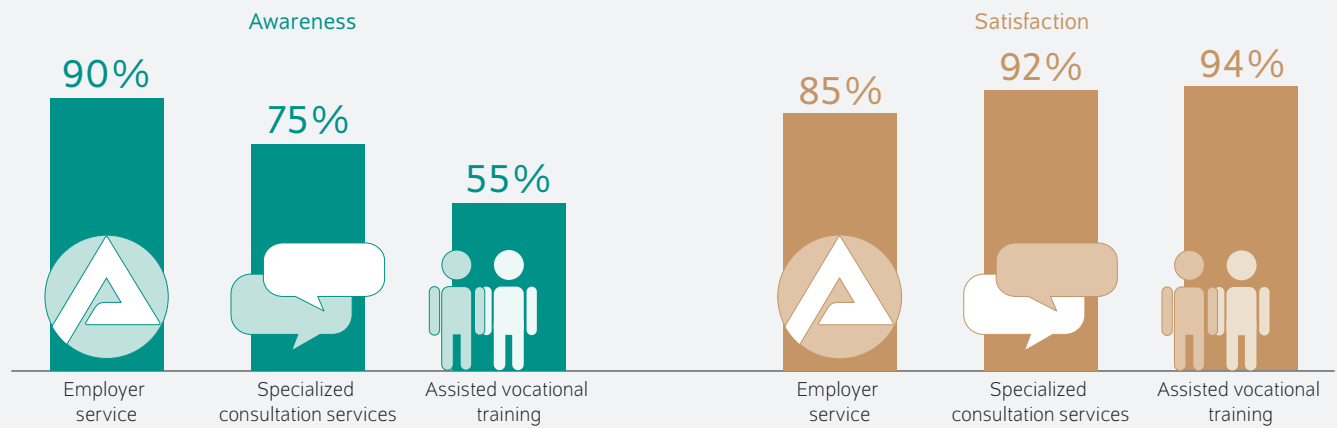
Companies contribute significantly to the integration of refugees in Germany

By Alexander S. Kritikos, Maximilian Priem, and Anne-Christin Winkler

- Integration of refugees is successful in dependent employment; the potential for self-employment remains almost entirely untapped
- The challenges and impact of integrating refugees into the labor market are identified by a survey of 100 medium-sized and large companies
- Companies use a combination of public, private, and internal measures to recruit and integrate refugees
- Public support measures are usually well-known, largely rated as satisfactory, and viewed as helpful

When hiring refugees, companies are also satisfied with the less well-known public support measures

In percent of companies surveyed



Source: DIW Econ survey.

Note: Number of observations: 100.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“During the coronavirus pandemic, the hiring and integration of refugees stalled. Targeted public relations highlighting support measures would encourage more companies to hire refugees once again.”

— Alexander S. Kritikos —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with Alexander S. Kritikos (in German)
www.diw.de/mediathek

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ABSTRACT

Following the 2015 refugee influx, recent studies have found that around one in four companies have hired refugees. A survey of 100 companies that hired refugees shows that hiring refugees can increase employee satisfaction, improve reputations, and positively affect corporate developments. At the same time, hiring refugees also poses challenges for employers. These include barriers in the hiring process, poor language skills, and their foreign qualifications not being recognized. To solve these problems, firms use both public and private support instruments alongside internal measures. While integrating refugees into the workplace using these instruments has been successful, the potential of self-employment remains untapped: refugees launch new businesses much less often in Germany than in their countries of origin. Accordingly, there should be an increased focus on measures supporting refugees interested in self-employment.

For many Germans, 2015 was a significant political milestone. That summer, a large number of refugees arrived in the European Union. The Dublin Agreement, which established country-specific rules for reviewing asylum applications and receiving applicants in the European Economic Area (including Switzerland), was repealed. Not bound to the initial country of entry, many refugees headed to Central and Northern Europe. As of the end of 2021, around 2.1 million refugees have applied for asylum in Germany; of these, 1.2 million applied in 2015 and 2016.¹

This large influx of refugees to Germany, primarily in 2015 and 2016, triggered a heated debate on whether it was possible to integrate this many refugees into German society. There were concerns that increased social spending on refugees would burden the social systems, leading to tax increases.² Further debate focused on how much and how quickly refugees could live as independent, tax-paying residents in Germany. However, the influx of refugees also offered considerable potential: Their integration in the labor market would reduce the (skilled) labor shortage in the medium term.³

This report first provides a brief overview of the employment rates of refugees in dependent employment and self-employment. Building on this, the core of the report examines the experiences companies have had with hiring refugees and how their employment has in turn affected the companies. In addition, the report outlines which public and private measures have been used to support companies in hiring refugees since 2015. To do so, 100 companies with reliable experience integrating refugees into their workforces were surveyed. Of those surveyed, one half is made up of medium-sized (50 to 249 employees) and the other half of large

¹ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, *Aktuelle Zahlen* (2022) (in German; available online. Accessed on April 21, 2022. This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

² Hans-Werner Sinn, "So kann es nicht weitergehen," *ifo Schnelldienst* 69, no. 4 (2016): 3–6 (in German; available online).

³ For a discussion on the risks and opportunities that come with an influx of refugees, see Marcel Fratzscher and Simon Junker, "Integration von Flüchtlingen – eine langfristig lohnende Investition," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 45 (2015): 1083–1088 (in German; available online) as well as Enzo Weber, "Szenarien zur Prognose von Flüchtlingseffekten auf die Arbeitslosigkeit," *Aktuelle Berichte* 15 (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung: 2015) (in German; available online).

Box

Survey of companies

Company data

One hundred companies were surveyed, one half of them made up of medium (50 to 249 employees) and the other half of large (at least 250 employees) companies. To be considered in the survey, medium-sized companies must have hired at least five refugees and large companies at least ten refugees in the past five years.

On average, about 120 employees work at the medium-sized firms and 5,310 at large firms. Women, on average, make up 42 percent of the company workforce and one fifth of the employees have a migration background. At the time of the survey in summer 2021, 883 refugees worked in medium-sized firms and 3,313 in large firms.

Overall, companies with headquarters in all federal states participated with the exception of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. They are from a wide variety of industries, including manufacturing; social services; trade and logistics; the public sector; the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector; energy; and arts, entertainment, and recreation. Thirty-eight percent of the companies generated an annual revenue between ten and 50 million euros, while 29 percent generated an annual revenue between two and ten million euros.

Due to the selective sampling, the present evaluations are not representative. In particular, it must be taken into account that the companies surveyed are likely generally open to refugees and that they were likely to give socially acceptable answers despite the anonymous nature of the surveys.

Survey design

The survey interviews were conducted online and by telephone between July and October 2021 by INFO GmbH on behalf of DIW Econ with management-level individuals who are significantly involved in the hiring process. In addition to the basic company information, information was surveyed on the following topics:

- The refugees' type of employment relationship
- Recruitment process and experiences with the hiring strategy used
- Barriers to the hiring process and use of support measures
- Impact of hiring refugees on the company and overall reputation

(at least 250 employees) companies. To be selected for the survey, medium-sized firms must have hired at least five and large firms at least ten refugees in the past five years. The companies were surveyed between July and October 2021 on various topics including challenges related to hiring refugees, support measures used, and advice to other firms (Box).⁴

Companies are not the only ones who can benefit from these reported experiences: Government agencies are able to incorporate them into future concepts and expansions of public and private measures that support the integration of refugees. This is gaining relevance in light of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

Integration of refugees in the German labor market: notable increase in dependent employment, untapped potential in self-employment

Since 2015, around one in four companies in Germany has hired refugees as dependent employees.⁵ According to

the latest calculations by the German Federal Employment Agency, as of January 2022, about 35 percent of employable people from countries with the highest number of asylum seekers have found a job. According to the SOEP Survey of Refugees, the figure is about 40 percent (Table 1),⁶ while other estimates even report half of all refugees are already employed.⁷ These results are reflected in the overall decreasing unemployment rate of refugees. In January 2022, the unemployment rate of persons from the countries with the highest number of refugees was at 31 percent, 23 percentage points below the record high from August 2016.⁸

The development toward self-employment, on the other hand, is quite different. Refugees in Germany pursue self-employment much less often than they did in their home countries. According to the SOEP Survey of Refugees, only a little over one percent of refugees are self-employed with an annual start-up rate of less than one percent (Table 1). In contrast, 27 percent of respondents were self-employed

⁴ For more information on the data, see DIW Econ, Von der „Flüchtlingskrise“ zum Jobmotor: Eine Analyse der Erfahrung von deutschen Unternehmen bei der Integration Geflüchteter (2022) (in German; available online). The study was commissioned by Tent Partnership.

⁵ Sarah Pierenkemper and Christoph Heuer, *Erfolgreiche Integration. Mehr Geflüchtete in Ausbildung und Beschäftigung. KOFA Study 2* (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln: 2020) (in German; available online).

⁶ This corresponds to 460,326 people. The countries with the highest number of refugees are Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Syria. See Tables 1.1 and 1.3 in Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit, *Migrationsmonitor (Monatszahlen): Deutschland März 2022* (2022) (in German; available online). The employment rate is based on the Central Register of Foreigners.

⁷ Herbert Brücker, Yuliya Kosyakova, and Eric Schuß, „Integration in Arbeitsmarkt und Bildungssystem macht weitere Fortschritte,“ *IAB-Kurzbericht 04* (2020) (in German; available online).

⁸ Table 1.4 in Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit, *Migrationsmonitor*.

Table 1

Employee rates, self-employment rate, and start-up rate of refugees

In percent

Year	Full employment rate	Employee rate ¹	Self-employment rate	Start-up rate
2016	7	7	0	0
2017	18	18	0.3	0.5
2018	33	32	0.5	0.3
2019	41	40	0.7	0.4
2020	42	41	1.3	0.6

¹ Only including employees subject to social security contributions.

Notes: Number of observations (18- to 64-year-old refugees who came to Germany in 2015): 2016: 2,538; 2017: 3,220; 2018: 2,551; 2019: 2,304; 2020: 2,471. All results are weighted.

Quelle: SOEP v37.

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before coming to Germany.⁹ Moreover, earlier studies have shown that there is a significantly higher entrepreneurial propensity among migrants than among Germans.¹⁰ Thus, there is great potential to expand self-employment activity among refugees. However, in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment and hiring in companies have also stagnated since 2020 (Table 1); accordingly, there is likely further employment potential here too.¹¹

Companies rate the employment of refugees positively

This report focuses on companies' motivation for hiring refugees, the experiences with the recruitment and hiring processes, and the effects of these hires on further corporate developments. In the survey, respondents in leadership positions who were significantly involved in the hiring process initially state that by hiring refugees and integrating them into their workforce, they are "fulfilling their social duty" and "providing support to the refugees."¹² In the long term, however, hiring refugees is able to counteract the labor shortage that has been increasingly challenging companies.¹³ In addition, firms report further positive effects in the short and medium terms.

According to them, hiring refugees results in an increase in employee satisfaction, which is reflected in the form of

higher engagement at 68 percent of the firms and greater acceptance of refugees among all employees at 83 percent of the firms (Figure 1).

At the same time, company attractiveness increases: Eighty percent of the companies report an improved reputation as a desirable employer, which is reflected in a higher number of applications from other refugees. Sixty percent also report that hiring refugees has made them more appealing to international clients.

Interestingly, the integration of refugees is also reflected in corporate development: Fifty-six percent of the firms surveyed state that by hiring refugees, they have been able to increase the average length of employment duration across all employees. Sixty-one percent benefit from increased creativity and 57 percent report overall higher productivity. According to other studies, these gains can, among other reasons, be attributed to the refugees' different cultural backgrounds, which means they are able to tackle problems differently, question processes, and develop alternative solutions.¹⁴

Challenges for firms

In practice, hiring refugees poses a not insignificant risk for many companies, especially when they have no prior experience recruiting refugees. Challenges in the hiring process for refugees differ significantly from those for non-refugees. First, when searching for suitable employees, employers are unsure of the best recruitment channels to reach refugees. When potential candidates are identified, their qualifications must then be assessed and a potential employment relationship explored. Finally, once contracts have been concluded, the employers must train and integrate the new employees.

In the time period before and after recruitment, the majority of companies is faced with relatively similar issues (Table 2). More than three quarters report a lack of language skills, while over half of the firms report that refugees either have insufficient qualifications for the position or are unable to provide proof of qualification. Over half of the firms also had issues verifying foreign qualifications or comparing them with domestic qualifications.

To combat these difficulties, firms employ a variety of public, private, or internal measures. By combining such measures, the firms surveyed are able to address company-specific concerns.

Public measures are mainly used during the recruitment process

For many companies, the beginning of the recruitment process is characterized by uncertainties regarding procedures for hiring refugees, their integration into the company, and differences to non-refugee employees. In this phase, firms

⁹ Herbert Brücker, Nina Rother, and Jürgen Schupp, *IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten: Überblick und erste Ergebnisse* (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge: 2016) (in German; available online).

¹⁰ Alexander S. Kritikos and Anselm Mattes, "In Deutschland sinkt die Zahl der Betriebsgründungen, nicht aber in Berlin," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 26 (2017): 539–547 (in German; available online).

¹¹ For possible reasons for this stagnation, see Adriana Cardozo Silva, Christopher Prömel, and Sabine Zinn, "Refugees in Germany perceived higher discrimination in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic," *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 17/18 (2022) (available online).

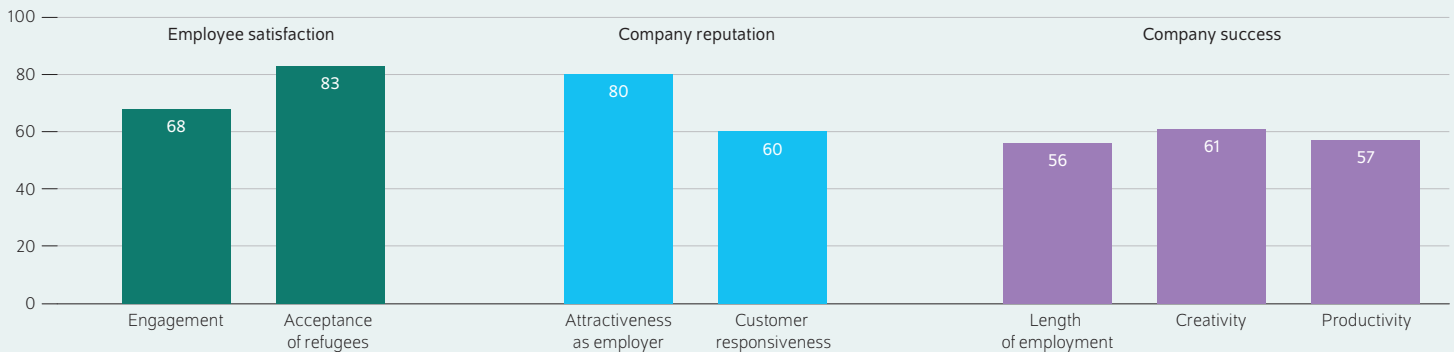
¹² Company survey (see Box); excerpts from the free-text answers to the question "What is your advice to other companies that want to hire refugees?"

¹³ Lutz Bellmann et al., *Der Mangel an Bewerbungen bremsst die Erholung am Ausbildungsmarkt*, (IAB-Forum: 2021) (in German; available online).

¹⁴ Philippe Legrain, *Refugees Work: A Humanitarian Investment that Yields Economic Dividends* (Tent Partnership: 2016) (available online).

Figure 1

Reported effects of hiring refugees In percent of companies surveyed



Notes: Number of observations: 100; the values 1 and 2 are rated as applicable on a scale of 1 (fully applies) to 4 (does not apply at all).

Source: DIW Econ survey.

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According to the companies surveyed, hiring refugees has many positive effects on the companies.

operate in close exchange with public institutions, whose services they use, especially until the contract is signed.¹⁵

The public measures provide assistance with various issues. They provide financial support or professional expertise, partly targeting these measures towards specific forms of employment, such as apprenticeships. In particular, public measures include an institutional employer service and financial support from employment agencies and job centers via the integration subsidy. Moreover, the public sector offers support for refugees in apprenticeship programs or in the preparation for them. Such offers include, for example, the introductory training program, assistance provided during the apprenticeship, assisted vocational training, and consultations by welcome and integration guides as part of state-specific programs.

The most widely used measure is the employer service operated by the Federal Employment Agency and the Job Center, of which 90 percent of the companies are aware and 88 percent make use of, as well as the integration subsidy, of which 83 percent of the firms are aware and 77 percent make use of (Figure 2).¹⁶

The widespread use of the employer service is also evident in the analysis of the most frequently used recruitment channels. When searching for suitable employees, companies work closely together with the Federal Employment Agency. In fact, for those surveyed, it is the most important recruitment channel with three quarters of the companies using it to contact refugees. Directly contacting refugee organizations

and NGOs (71 percent) and online job portals (66 percent) were reported to be the second and third most frequently used recruitment channels, respectively.

The companies were also asked about their satisfaction with the services used¹⁷ and report a high level of satisfaction with public services: The firms that use them rate both well-known services as well as less well-known services very positively. Of the less well-known resources, specialized consulting services offered by integration guides or through tailored consultant services stand out, as do apprenticeship-related programs, such as the introductory training program and assisted vocational training.¹⁸ Over 90 percent of the firms surveyed that had used these services indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services.

Supplementary measures to combat company-specific challenges

Companies supplement public measures with various internal or third-party initiatives. Ninety-five percent of the firms use at least three different public and private measures. This combination allows them to address company-specific needs, especially in the period after hiring refugees. Considering this, the most popular measures can therefore be seen as immediate responses to frequently occurring problems (Table 2).

¹⁵ DIW Econ, Von der „Flüchtlingskrise“ zum Jobmotor.

¹⁶ This result is also confirmed in Sarah Pierenkemper and Christoph Heuer, *Erfolgreiche Integration*.

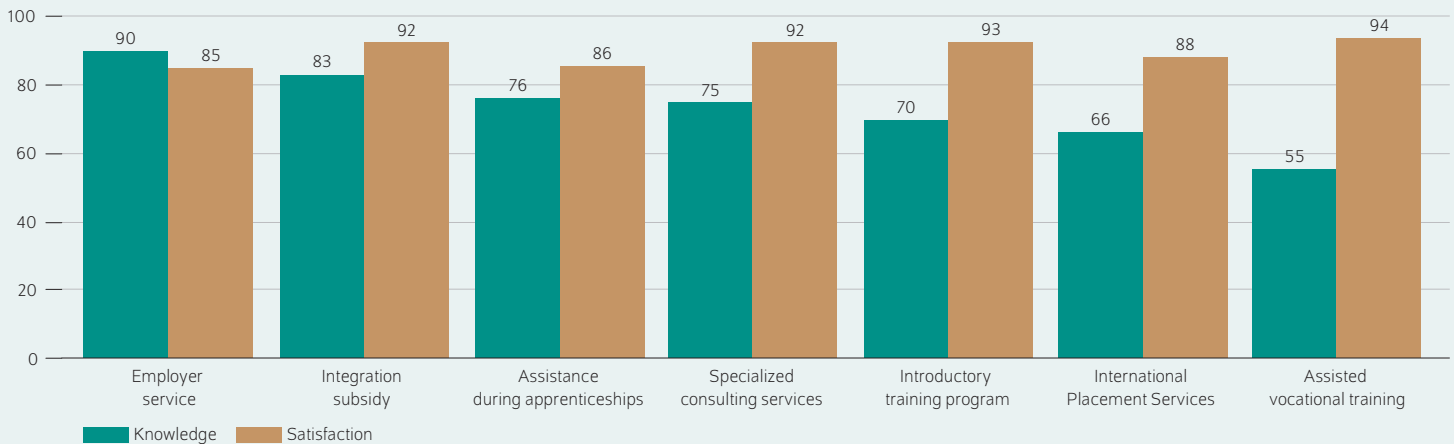
¹⁷ The following answer options were available: Which of the following services for the recruitment and integration of refugees 1) are you aware of? 2) [If already aware] ...have you used already? 3) [If used already] ...How would you evaluate these offers from very satisfied (1) to unsatisfied (4)? The values 1 and 2 are considered satisfactory.

¹⁸ Specialized consulting services include various government programs, for example, integration guides, individualized consulting, welcome guides, or caretakers.

Figure 2

Awareness of and satisfaction with public measures for the integration of refugees

In percent of companies surveyed



Notes: Number of observations: 100; the values 1 and 2 are rated as applicable on a scale of 1 (fully applies) to 4 (does not apply at all). Satisfaction data is based on responses from companies that have already used the measures.

Source: DIW Econ survey.

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Less well-known support measures are also rated positively by the companies.

Although the supplementary measures are comparable across the companies surveyed, their specific implementation varies significantly for each firm. For example, around three quarters of the companies surveyed offer extra-occupational German courses to help refugees improve their language skills, as they are a vital factor for a further integration.¹⁹ However, the format of the language support varies from company to company: For example, to teach technical terminology or ensure language learning fulfills a social function, alternatives to traditional language classes, such as language-learning apps or tandem partnerships, can be used. Tandem partnerships can also increase refugees' participation in German society.²⁰

As part of a skills analysis, companies may offer refugees a trial period at the workplace before any contract is signed. This way, companies can address issues related to missing certificates and comparability of foreign degrees. These issues also played a significant role in the development of the 2020 Skilled Immigration Act for Qualified Professionals.²¹ A trial period also offers applicants the opportunity to get to know management staff and colleagues, align their mutual expectations, and identify where further support is needed. With individualized training and accompanying education opportunities, refugees are able to acquire new skills

and qualifications. The educational opportunities focus on a range of topics, such as knowledge relevant for everyday work, refugees' further integration through language courses, or preparation courses to pursue further education or higher-level positions.²²

Less widespread challenges firms face depend more strongly on characteristics such as location, company size, industry, internal processes, and the workforce composition. To tackle these specific challenges, companies provide a number of internal or third-party measures that are tailored specifically to the firm's processes and the needs of refugee and non-refugee employees.

For example, at every third company, the distance to the workplace is a problem for refugees, who are often dependent on public transportation.²³ This can pose an issue—specifically for refugees working irregular hours or at companies in rural areas with poor public transportation—that can be mitigated by arranging adequate carpooling options among staff. Furthermore, companies attempt to reduce any reservations their employees may have about refugees through diversity training and by supporting interactions between refugee and non-refugee employees with buddy programs and work events. These examples show that firms play a

¹⁹ Cornelia Kristen, Yuliya Kosyakova, and Christoph Spörlein, "Deutschkenntnisse entwickeln sich bei Geflüchteten und anderen Neuzugewanderten ähnlich – Sprachkurse spielen wichtige Rolle," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 5 (2022): 64–69 (in German, available online).

²⁰ Magdalena Krieger et al., "Mentoring programs support the integration of refugees," *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 49 (2020): 458–465 (available online).

²¹ Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz (2019) (in German, available online).

²² An example of this is the case study with Deutsche Post DHL Group in the report by DIW Econ, Von der „Flüchtlingskrise“ zum Jobmotor.

²³ Wido Geis et al., *Integrationsmonitor. Beschäftigungsentwicklung und regionale Verteilung von Flüchtlingen* (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln: 2016) (in German, available online; Tabea Rösch et al., "Integration von Geflüchteten in ländlichen Räumen," *Forschungsbericht 36* (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge: 2020) (in German, available online).

significant role in the integration of refugees: The workplace can serve as a social space where there is regular contact and exchange between refugees and non-refugees. According to the contact hypothesis, this exchange increases the integration of refugees into society overall.²⁴

Conclusion: adequate assistance supports companies in integrating refugees

The survey of 100 companies in Germany with experience in integrating refugees shows that hiring refugees has a positive impact on companies measured in various dimensions. Due to their experiences, 88 percent of the firms surveyed plan to hire more refugees in the coming years. However, the recruitment and hiring period of refugees, as well as the initial phase after hiring, are associated with uncertainties for many companies. Due to a lack of language skills and certified qualifications, these uncertainties are much more pronounced when hiring refugees than non-refugees and require firms to adapt their measures accordingly.

Consequently, firms use a multitude of public, internal, and third-party measures when hiring. They take advantage of the highly rated public offerings, such as the employer service of the Federal Employment Agency and the Job Center, as well as skills analyses or language courses, especially before concluding the contract. Following a successful recruitment, they use supplementary measures more frequently, which take the individual needs of the employees into account and are embedded into company processes.

Although the survey only includes companies that have already hired and integrated refugees in the workplace, the different public measures are not equally well known. For example, one in two companies is unaware of assisted vocational education and training and one in four is unaware of the introductory training program and of the specialized consulting services offered by integration guides. Considering the recent stagnation in employment rates among refugees, targeted information about these programs can help more companies benefit from the highly rated services in the future. Furthermore, by demonstrating the diverse support options available, more firms could be convinced to hire refugees—which is an increasingly relevant topic in light of the Ukrainian refugees already in and coming to Germany. Accordingly, existing offers should not only remain available,

²⁴ Michael Bailey et al., "The social integration of international migrants: Evidence from the networks of Syrians in Germany," *Working Paper*, no. 29925 (2022) (available online).

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Table 2

Major challenges and most important solutions when integrating refugees

In percent of companies surveyed

Challenge	Share	Ranking	Solution	Share	Ranking
Insufficient language skills	76	1.	Extra-occupational language classes	74	2.
Insufficient qualifications for the prospective job	58	2.	Further education/training	67	3.
Lack of proof of qualifications	57	3.			
Problems with the recognition/comparability of foreign degrees	56	4.	Skills analysis (brief trial period)	80	1.

Notes: Number of observations: 100.

Source: DIW Econ survey.

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but be expanded when possible. Most crucial are language courses, which companies themselves view as essential components for successful integration. When developing measures, the organizational effort required for firms should be kept as low as possible so that the integration of refugees remains attractive and does not become an additional burden. Building on the previous, often ad hoc solutions and experiences of companies, public and private measures should be evaluated and brought into better alignment.

Unused potential continues to be identified with respect to self-employment for refugees. The very low start-up rates among refugees indicate bureaucratic obstacles as well as financing difficulties. Therefore, in addition to supporting their integration into companies, it should be investigated to what extent expanding support measures contributes to motivate and increase self-employment among refugees. If refugees are given better access to capital, social networks, and knowledge, their labor market integration through self-employment as an important alternative to dependent employment can be far more supported.

Overall, firms in Germany are making an active contribution to the integration of refugees—not just by hiring them, but also by offering various internal measures that increase employee acceptance of refugees. In this respect, companies are fulfilling an important social function. At the same time, firms are benefiting from the increased diversity in their businesses, while the employed refugees are contributing positively to the development of the German economy, both as taxpayers and as consumers.

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