



**119 Report** by Adriana Cardozo Silva, Christopher Prömel, and Sabine Zinn

## Refugees in Germany perceived higher discrimination in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic

- Refugees perceived discrimination due to their country of origin much more in 2020 than in 2019
- Increase in perceived discrimination highest for refugees looking for employment or attending educational institutions
- In 2020, four and three out of ten respondents, respectively, perceived discrimination during the employment search and at educational institutions

## LEGAL AND EDITORIAL DETAILS

---



DIW Berlin — Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung e.V.  
Mohrenstraße 58, 10117 Berlin

[www.diw.de](http://www.diw.de)

Phone: +49 30 897 89-0 Fax: -200

Volume 12 May 6, 2022

### Publishers

Prof. Dr. Tomaso Duso; Sabine Fiedler; Prof. Marcel Fratzscher, Ph.D.;  
Prof. Dr. Peter Haan; Prof. Dr. Claudia Kemfert; Prof. Dr. Alexander S. Kritikos;  
Prof. Dr. Alexander Kriwoluzky; Prof. Dr. Stefan Liebig; Prof. Dr. Lukas  
Menkhoff; Prof. Karsten Neuhoff, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Carsten Schröder;  
Prof. Dr. Katharina Wrohlich

### Editors-in-chief

Prof. Dr. Pio Baake; Claudia Cohnen-Beck; Sebastian Kollmann;  
Kristina van Deuverden

### Reviewer

Clara Schäper

### Editorial staff

Marten Brehmer; Rebecca Buhner; Dr. Hella Engerer; Petra Jasper;  
Sandra Tubik

### Layout

Roman Wilhelm, Stefanie Reeg, Eva Kretschmer, DIW Berlin

### Cover design

© imageBROKER / Steffen Diemer

### Composition

Satz-Rechen-Zentrum Hartmann + Heenemann GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin

ISSN 2568-7697

Reprint and further distribution—including excerpts—with complete  
reference and consignment of a specimen copy to DIW Berlin's  
Customer Service ([kundenservice@diw.de](mailto:kundenservice@diw.de)) only.

Subscribe to our DIW and/or Weekly Report Newsletter at

[www.diw.de/newsletter\\_en](http://www.diw.de/newsletter_en)

## AT A GLANCE

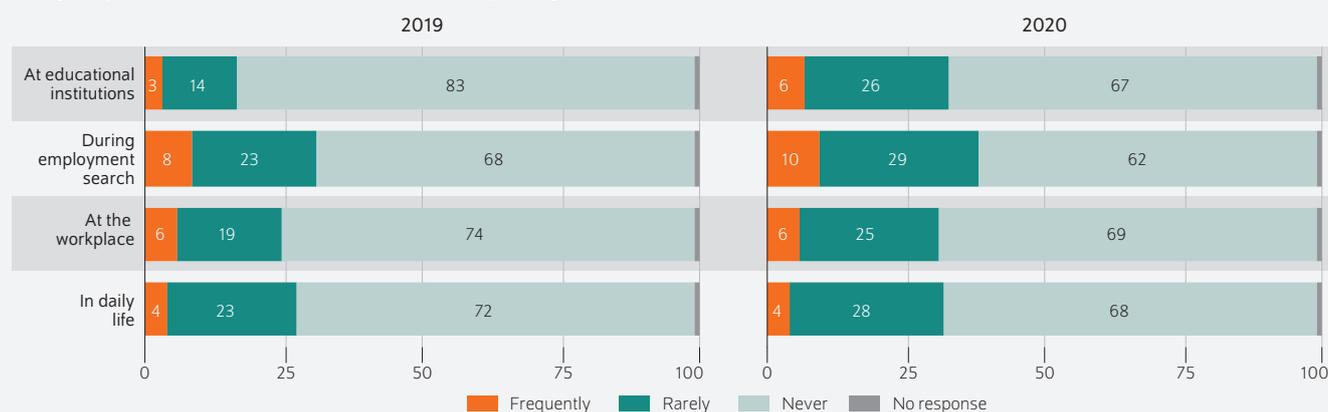
# Refugees in Germany perceived higher discrimination in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic

By **Adriana Cardozo Silva, Christopher Prömel, and Sabine Zinn**

- Refugees perceived discrimination due to their country of origin much more in 2020 than in 2019
- Perceived discrimination increased significantly in the employment search and at educational institutions, but also slightly at the workplace and in daily life
- In 2020, four out of ten respondents perceived discrimination when looking for employment; in all other dimensions, three out of ten respondents perceived discrimination
- Refugees who are living in eastern Germany, are younger than 40, or have poorer language skills perceived more discrimination than others
- Integration measures that were interrupted or canceled because of the pandemic must be resumed as quickly as possible

### Refugees in Germany perceived discrimination in all observed dimensions much more during the coronavirus pandemic than previously

Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin in 2019 and 2020, shares in percent



### FROM THE AUTHORS

*“It is important to continue investing in state measures to improve refugees’ integration into German society, including in-depth measures such as language courses and counseling to help refugees compensate for a lack of social networks and experience in the German labor market.”*

— *Adriana Cardozo Silva* —

### MEDIA



**Audio Interview** with Adriana Cardozo Silva (in German)  
[www.diw.de/mediathek](http://www.diw.de/mediathek)

# Refugees in Germany perceived higher discrimination in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic

By Adriana Cardozo Silva, Christopher Prömel, and Sabine Zinn

## ABSTRACT

Refugees in Germany perceive discrimination due to their country of origin in various life dimensions, which can negatively affect their integration into society. Using IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey data, this report analyzes to what extent refugees perceive discrimination on the labor market, at educational institutions, on the housing market, with public authorities, and in daily life. The results show that perceived discrimination increased in all observed dimensions between 2019 and 2020, especially on the labor market and at educational institutions. In 2019, refugees living in eastern Germany, refugees below 40 years old, refugees with poorer German language skills, and employed refugee women felt more discriminated against than other groups of refugees. This increase is most likely related to the abrupt changes to the labor market and to the discontinuation of important integration measures due to the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, it is essential to resume these integration measures, such as language and integration courses, as soon as possible to mitigate refugees' exclusion and marginalization.

The high influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016 triggered still-on-going political and academic discourse about the integration of refugees in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Existing studies show that discrimination is an obstacle for immigrants' integration into a host society, with refugees more affected by discrimination compared to most other immigrant groups.<sup>2</sup>

Using new data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, this report analyzes the perceived discrimination of refugees in Germany in 2019 and 2020 (Box). The survey is the first in Germany to survey a comprehensive and representative sample of refugees on their perception of discrimination due to their country of origin. Seven dimensions are considered: while searching for employment, at the workplace or at internships, at school or another educational institution, while searching for housing, in interactions with public authorities, in interactions with the police, and in daily life.

Two samples are used for the analyses: Cross-sectional data from 2019 containing the full sample of 3,993 individuals is used to examine how perceived discrimination differs by personal and household characteristics while longitudinal data is used to examine perceived discrimination over time (between 2019 and 2020) in the employment search, workplace, educational institutions, and daily life dimensions. In total, 2,455 people who reported their experiences with discrimination over time were analyzed. Experiences of discrimination during the housing search, interactions with public authorities, and interactions with the police dimensions are considered exclusively before the onset of the pandemic, as these areas were not covered in the 2020 survey.

<sup>1</sup> Susanne Worbs, Eva Bund, and Axel Böhm, "Asyl – und dann? Die Lebenssituation von Asylberechtigten und anerkannten Flüchtlingen in Deutschland," BAMF Forschungsbericht 28 (2014) (in German).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Diekmann and Karim Fereidooni, "Diskriminierungs- und Rassismuserfahrungen geflüchteter Menschen in Deutschland: Ein Forschungsüberblick," *Zeitschrift für Flüchtlingsforschung* 3, no. 2 (2019): 343–360 (in German).

### Refugees perceive discrimination differently

Analyzing discrimination is particularly important when it comes to refugees' integration into society, as discrimination influences their employment opportunities as well as access to health services, education, and housing. Discrimination on the labor market often results in lower wages, fewer job offers, and employment in low-qualification occupations. Thus, discrimination can affect labor force participation and refugees' motivation for pursuing education and training.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, research in the field of psychology also shows that higher levels of discrimination are associated with higher levels of psychological stress and can be hazardous to individuals' mental health.<sup>4</sup> However, perceived discrimination is different from actual discrimination. Actual discrimination is difficult to measure, as it is often hidden or occurs in a subtle manner.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, despite its subjective nature, perceived discrimination is the most frequently used measure in scientific studies. Although it does not necessarily reflect actual discrimination, the two are strongly correlated. Moreover, whether actual or not, people respond to and are affected by perceived discrimination as if it were real.<sup>6</sup> However, studies on perceptions of discrimination due to the country of origin—including those based on SOEP data for other immigrant groups—urge caution in interpreting the results: Perceptions vary widely from person to person and may also include various factors not directly related to country of origin. Furthermore, discrimination can occur due to a combination of reasons (multiple discrimination). For example, refugee women can experience discrimination due to their gender and country of origin simultaneously.<sup>7</sup> There is also supporting evidence that younger refugees experience more discrimination<sup>8</sup> and that more highly educated individuals with stronger language skills can better recognize discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

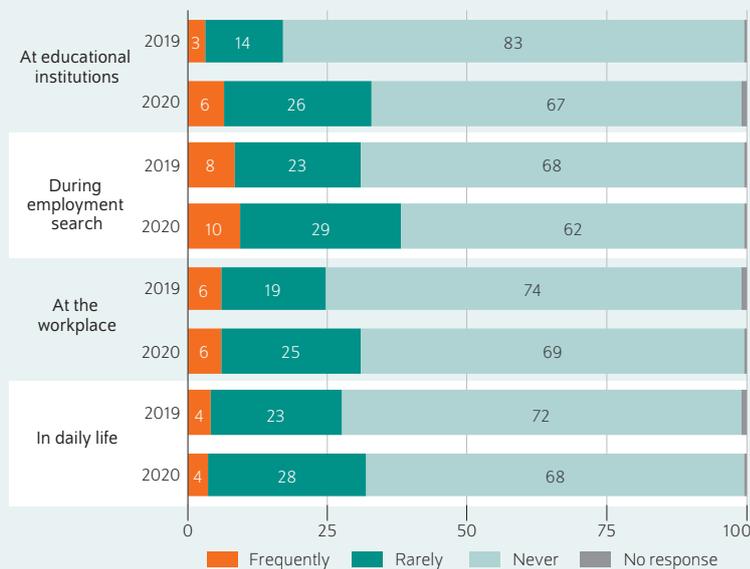
To capture contextual factors such as the profound economic and social changes that occurred following the coronavirus pandemic, perceived discrimination in 2019 is compared to perceived discrimination in 2020. Especially in the first months of the pandemic, refugees in Germany faced extreme

<sup>3</sup> Christian Dustmann, Uta Schönberg, and Jan Stuhler, "The Impact of Immigration: Why Do Studies Reach Such Different Results?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (2016): 31–56.  
<sup>4</sup> Kimberly Matheson et al., "Traumatic experiences, perceived discrimination, and psychological distress among members of various socially marginalized groups," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, no. 416 (2019): 1–16.  
<sup>5</sup> Claudia Diehl, Elisabeth Liebau, and Peter Mühau, "How Often Have You Felt Disadvantaged? Explaining Perceived Discrimination," *Köln Z Soziol* 73 (2021): 1–24.  
<sup>6</sup> Jan-Philip Steinmann, "The paradox of integration. Why do higher educated new immigrants perceive more discrimination in Germany?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 9 (2019):1377–1400.  
<sup>7</sup> Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei, "Refugees, Race, and Gender: The Multiple Discrimination against Refugee Women," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 19, no. 6 (2001): 21–32.  
<sup>8</sup> Merlin Schaeffer, "Social Mobility and Perceived Discrimination: Adding an Intergenerational Perspective," *European Sociological Review* 35, no. 1 (2019): 65–80.  
<sup>9</sup> Steinman, "The paradox of integration."

Figure 1

### Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin, 2019 and 2020

Shares in percent



Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019 and 2020).

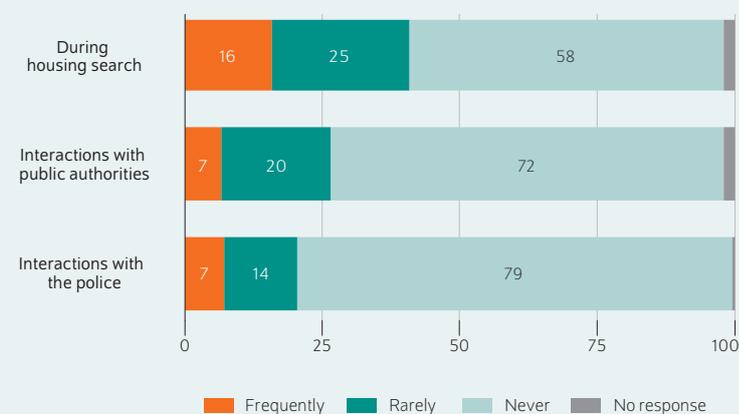
© DIW Berlin 2022

Perceived discrimination increased noticeably from 2019 to 2020.

Figure 2

### Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin, 2019

Shares in percent



Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

© DIW Berlin 2022

Refugees perceived discrimination on the housing market particularly frequently.

Box

**The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey**

The survey consists of several subsamples drawn from the Central Register of Foreigners.<sup>1</sup> The target population is asylum seekers who came to Germany between January 2013 and January 2016 and applied for asylum by the end of June 2016 as well as asylum seekers who arrived in Germany between February 2016 and the end of December 2016 and applied for asylum by January 2017.<sup>2</sup>

The refugees surveyed are comparatively young, live predominantly in western Germany, and are around two-thirds men (Table). Over half came to Germany in 2015 and 45 percent are of Syrian origin. The shares of basic characteristics for 2020 are not significantly different from those in 2019, with two exceptions: The share of families with children increased from 39 to 44 percent between 2019 and 2020, while the share of those living alone decreased. Moreover, as expected, refugees' language skills improved with the length of their stay in Germany, which is reflected in a larger share of refugees who evaluate their German skills as high (4.4 percentage points higher than in 2020).

Data from 2019 and 2020 was analyzed to investigate discrimination experiences. In 2020, the survey was conducted mainly following the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and mostly during the second half of the year. Therefore, it includes the perceptions of refugees during the pandemic. Respondents could rate perceived discrimination as occurring "frequently," "rarely," or "never." The analysis included the following questions from the survey:

- Have you looked for a job, apprenticeship, or internship in the last two years? If yes, how frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin? (Employment search)
- Have you attended school, college, or another type of educational institution in the last two years? If yes, how frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin? (Educational institutions)
- Did you have a job, apprenticeship, or internship in the last two years? If yes, how frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin? (Workplace)
- How has your daily life been in the last two years? How frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin, such as while shopping or on public transportation? (Daily life)
- Have you looked for housing in the last two years? If yes, how frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin? (Housing search)
- Have you interacted with government offices or authorities in the last two years? If yes, how frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin? (Interactions with public authorities)
- Have you interacted with the police in the last two years? If yes, how frequently did you experience discrimination due to your country of origin? (Interactions with the police)

Persons who have experienced discrimination are those who answered "rarely" or "frequently."

**1** The survey is financed from funds of the budget of the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) allocated to the research budget of the Institute for Employment Research (*Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, IAB*) and from funds of the budget of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*).

**2** Simon Kühne, Jannes Jacobsen, and Martin Kroh, "Sampling in Times of High Immigration: The Survey Process of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees," *Swiss Foundation for Research in Social Sciences* (2019) (available online, accessed on January 6, 2022).

psychological stress:<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, they often had a higher risk of infection due to precarious work and living situations<sup>11</sup> and on the other, they became targets of xenophobic discourse and violence.<sup>12</sup> According to the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (*Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes*), for example, there was an unprecedented increase in inquiries about racial discrimination over the course of the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

**10** Eva Spiritus-Beerden, et al., "Mental Health of Refugees and Migrants during the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Role of Experienced Discrimination and Daily Stressors," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 12 (2021): 1–14.

**11** Theresa Entringer et al., "Refugees' Mental Health during the Coronavirus Pandemic: Psychological Distress and Continued Loneliness," *DIW Weekly Report* 12 (2021): 103–109 (available online; accessed on March 10, 2022).

**12** Petra Bendel, Yasemin Bekyol, and Marlene Leisenheimer, *Auswirkungen und Szenarien für Migration und Integration während und nach der COVID-19 Pandemie* (Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg: 2021) (in German; available online, accessed on April 21, 2022).

**13** Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, *Jahresbericht 2020* (2019) (in German; available online, accessed on April 21, 2022).

Thus, it is expected that perceived discrimination has increased, although it remains difficult to verify to what extent actual discrimination accompanies this increase.

**Refugees perceived discrimination more in 2020**

Perceived discrimination increased noticeably in 2019 and 2020 for refugees while searching for employment, attending an educational institution, working, and in their daily life activities (Figure 1). The increase was strongest for those enrolled in educational institutions, where the share of refugees who perceived discrimination almost doubled.

These experiences are very likely due to the very restrictive pandemic containment measures enacted at educational institutions in 2020. Classroom teaching was discontinued almost entirely and language and integration courses were put on hold. While learning materials were digitalized and made available online to some extent, many refugee

Table

**Refugee respondents by various characteristics**  
Longitudinal data from 2019; shares in percent

	Share	95-percent confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
<b>Gender</b>			
Man	68.2	65.9	70.5
Woman	31.8	29.6	34.1
<b>Residence</b>			
Western Germany	85.6	83.7	87.3
Eastern Germany	14.4	12.7	16.3
<b>Age</b>			
Below 30	48.8	46.3	51.4
30 to 39	30.6	28.3	32.9
40 and older	20.6	18.9	22.5
<b>Year of arrival</b>			
Before 2015	17.4	15.5	19.4
2015	56.2	53.7	58.8
After 2015	26.4	24.1	28.8
<b>Country of origin</b>			
Syria	45.4	42.9	47.9
Other countries	54.6	52.1	57.1
<b>Household type</b>			
Single	37.7	35.1	40.3
Couple with child(ren)	39.4	37.1	41.8
Other	22.9	20.8	25.1
<b>German skills</b>			
Poor	21.4	19.5	23.5
Average	35.6	33.2	38.1
Good	42.9	40.4	45.5

Notes: The sample contains 3,993 people. The shares do not differ significantly for 2020. German skills are based on the refugees' self-assessments and are calculated as the average of their assessments of their speaking, writing, and reading skills. The confidence interval indicates the range that includes with a certain probability the parameter of a distribution of a random variable. A commonly used confidence level is 95 percent.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

© DIW Berlin 2022

households lacked the required technology to access the materials.<sup>14</sup> Language barriers and a lack of interaction with course organizers exacerbated the problem, possibly making it even more difficult for refugees to continue with educational opportunities during the pandemic.

The second-largest increase in perceived discrimination was in the employment search dimension (eight percentage points), followed by the workplace (six percentage points). This is probably due to the fact that refugees are more likely than Germans to work in precarious jobs and that a larger share of them are employed in sectors that were hit hard by the pandemic. Many of their jobs were eliminated over the course of the coronavirus measures and layoffs occurred,

for example, in the food service and tourism industries.<sup>15</sup> This affected refugees more than it affected locals—who were more likely to remain on short-time work—because refugees' often have temporary employment contracts, less work experience, and fewer qualifications. In addition, the pandemic limited access to internships as well as to career counseling centers and job fairs. Those unfamiliar with the German labor market and without sufficient social networks were affected disproportionately.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the cancellation of integration and language courses led to an increase in unemployment among refugees, as refugees are not considered unemployed while participating in these courses.<sup>17</sup>

Perceived discrimination also increased by five percentage points in the daily life dimension. Refugees faced greater barriers to integration in 2020 than they did in 2019: Shopping access was restricted and use of public transportation was possible only under certain conditions (wearing a mask and social distancing). With only limited language skills, limited social contacts, and/or a lack of local social support, many constraints on daily life during the pandemic likely proved more difficult for refugees than locals.

Of the dimensions surveyed only in 2019, perceived discrimination on the housing market is particularly high (Figure 2). This is possibly due to the tight housing markets, especially in urban areas, which make it difficult to find housing. In contrast, perceived discrimination in the other two dimensions, i.e., in interactions with public authorities and in interactions with the police, was lower, although still substantial.

**Women perceive more labor market discrimination**

Perceptions of discrimination can vary widely among refugees, due to major influencing factors such as gender, residence, age, and German skills, among others, which are included in the following analysis. Data from 2019 are particularly suitable for this purpose, as they include a broader set of dimensions on how refugees perceived discrimination.

The data shows that refugee men and women in Germany engage in significantly different activities: In 2019, men were much more frequently employed (54 percent vs 17 percent), looking for employment (62 percent vs 26 percent), or attending an educational institution (25 percent vs 15 percent). They also were searching for housing more frequently than women (58 percent vs 48 percent) and had interactions with authorities (84 percent vs 77 percent) or the police (18 percent vs 15 percent) more often (Table).

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Brücker et al., "Die Arbeitsmarktauswirkungen der COVID-19-Pandemie auf Geflüchtete und andere Migrantinnen und Migranten," *IAB-Forschungsbericht*, no. 5 (in German; available online, accessed on March 3, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Bendel, Bekyol, and Leisenheimer, "Auswirkungen und Szenarien für Migration und Integration."

<sup>17</sup> Brücker, "Die Arbeitsmarktauswirkungen der COVID-19-Pandemie."

<sup>14</sup> The UN Refugee Agency, *Coming Together For Refugee Education. Education Report 2020 (2020)* (available online, accessed on March 18, 2022).

Table

**Refugees by dimension and selected characteristics**

Longitudinal data from 2019; shares in percent

	Gender		Residence		Age			German skills		
	Men	Women	West	East	< 30	30–39	40+	Poor	Average	Good
<b>Employed</b>										
Yes	54	17	45	32	48	44	29	21	39	57
No	46	83	55	68	52	56	71	78	61	43
<b>Seeking employment</b>										
Yes	62	26	54	39	59	50	37	30	50	63
No	38	73	46	61	41	49	63	69	50	37
<b>Attending an educational institution</b>										
Yes	25	15	22	20	33	13	9	5	13	38
No	75	85	78	80	67	86	91	94	87	62
<b>Seeking housing</b>										
Yes	58	48	58	35	55	59	49	52	57	55
No	42	52	42	64	45	41	51	47	43	45
<b>Interaction with public authorities</b>										
Yes	84	77	81	87	84	81	79	78	81	84
No	16	23	18	13	16	18	21	21	18	15
<b>Interaction with the police</b>										
Yes	18	15	16	20	18	16	15	14	18	17
No	82	85	83	80	82	83	85	86	82	83

Note: The share attributable to "no answer" is close to zero in all cases and is therefore not included in the table.

Legend: In 2019, of the refugee men in the sample, 54 percent were employed and 46 percent were not employed.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

© DIW Berlin 2022

Nevertheless, it is evident that refugee women who are active on the labor market experience discrimination more frequently than employed refugee men. For example, around 35 percent of the refugee women reported discrimination at the workplace, while only 25 percent of men did (Figure 3). Women also experienced discrimination much more frequently than men while looking for employment (41 percent vs 32 percent).

There are fewer marked differences in perceived discrimination between men and women when searching for housing, in interactions with public authorities, in interactions with the police, and in daily life activities. For example, women report discrimination during interactions with the police more frequently, while men report discrimination by public authorities. In the housing search and daily life dimensions, there are no significant, gender-specific differences.

**Refugees in eastern Germany perceive more discrimination than refugees in western Germany**

In 2019, refugees living in western Germany were employed much more frequently compared to those living in eastern Germany (45 percent vs 32 percent). Similarly, they were also more frequently looking for employment (54 vs 39 percent).

The weaker labor market in eastern Germany is presumably the cause of this imbalance. In contrast, there are no significant differences for refugees enrolled in educational institutions. Refugees in eastern Germany who are employed, looking for employment, or attending an educational institution perceive significantly more discrimination compared to refugees in western Germany (Figure 4). This is particularly evident in the employment search dimension, where, in 2019, over 50 percent of refugees in eastern Germany perceived discrimination due to their country of origin compared to only slightly over 30 percent in the west. The differences at the workplace (33 vs 25 percent) and at educational institutions (26 vs 18 percent) are much smaller, but still substantial. Outside the labor market and educational institutions, there are further clear differences in perceived discrimination between eastern and western Germany, especially in the daily life dimension. Here, 55 percent of refugees in eastern Germany reported experiencing discrimination in 2019, while the share of refugees experiencing discrimination in western Germany that same year was significantly smaller at only 24 percent. Refugees in eastern Germany also perceived more discrimination when looking for housing (49 vs 41 percent) and in interactions with authorities (36 vs 27 percent) than those in western Germany. The differences in interactions with the police were small and insignificant. However, the data shows that generally, refugees in eastern Germany experience more discrimination than those in western Germany.

**Younger refugees perceive discrimination more often**

Overall, the group of refugee respondents is quite young: In 2020, almost half were under 30, while only a little over 20 percent were 40 or older. The age groups differ primarily in the extent they participate in the labor market. For example, a significant share of refugees under 30 were looking for employment (59 percent), employed (48 percent), or attending an educational institution (33 percent). The shares of the other age groups in these areas, especially those over 40, were considerably lower in some cases. This is likely because older refugees have more difficulties getting a foothold in the German labor market: It is harder for them to learn German or they face more challenges to get their qualifications recognized. Although younger refugees are also more strongly represented in the other dimensions (searching for housing, interactions with authorities, interactions with the police), the differences here are smaller.

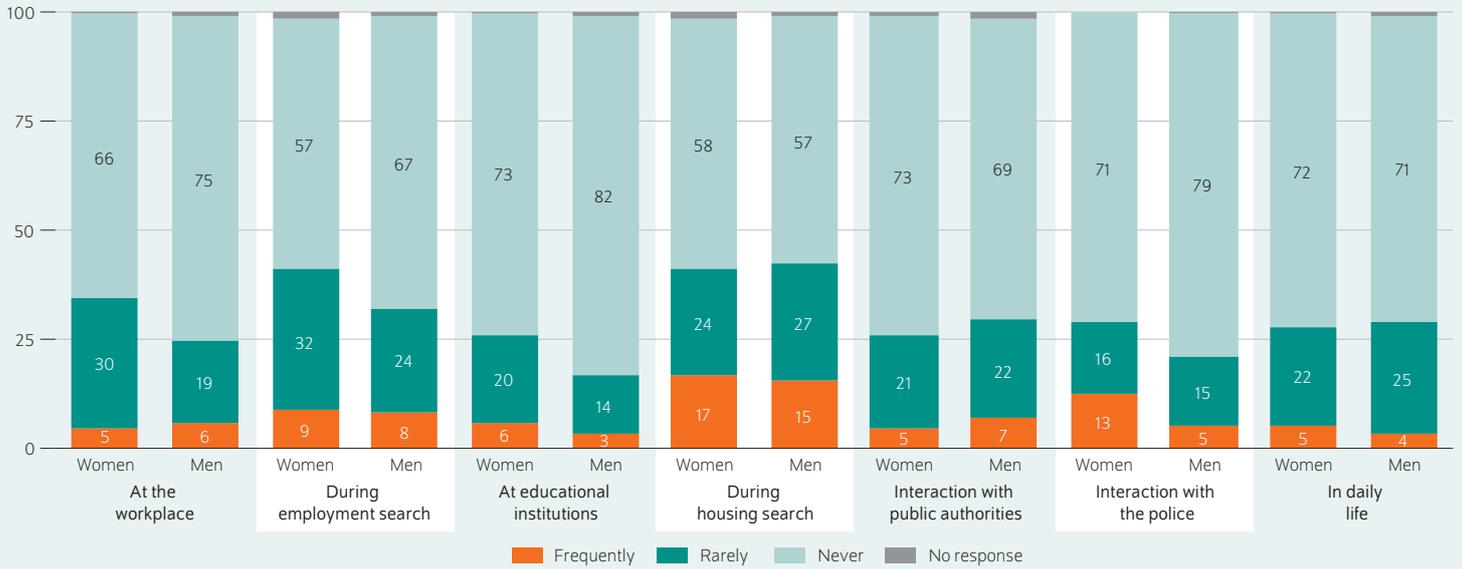
Younger refugees were more likely to perceive discrimination, especially in the daily life dimension, but also when looking for employment, at educational institutions, when looking for housing, and when interacting with public authorities (Figure 5). Thus, in all five dimensions, there is a downward trend in perceived discrimination by age. At the workplace and in interactions with the police, these patterns are less clear. Nevertheless, an age effect in perceived discrimination is indicated here as well.

## PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION

Figure 3

### Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin by gender, 2019

Shares in percent



Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

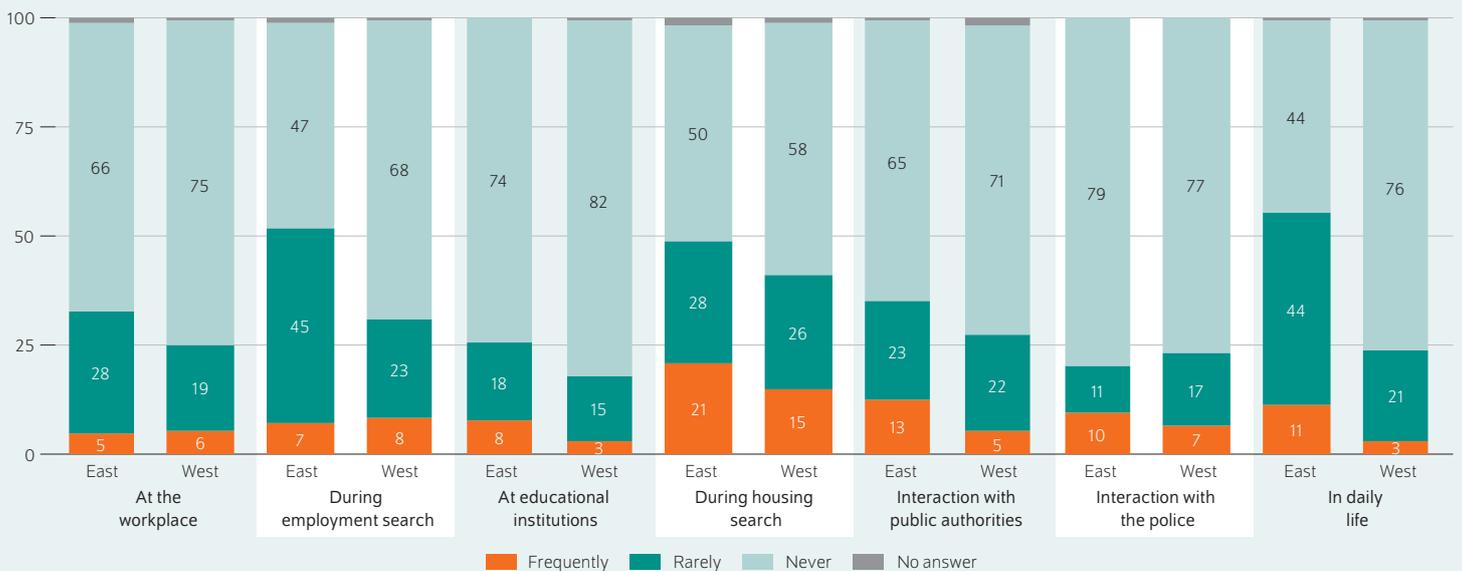
© DIW Berlin 2022

Refugee women perceived more discrimination than refugee men, especially on the labor market.

Figure 4

### Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin by residence, 2019

Shares in percent



Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

© DIW Berlin 2022

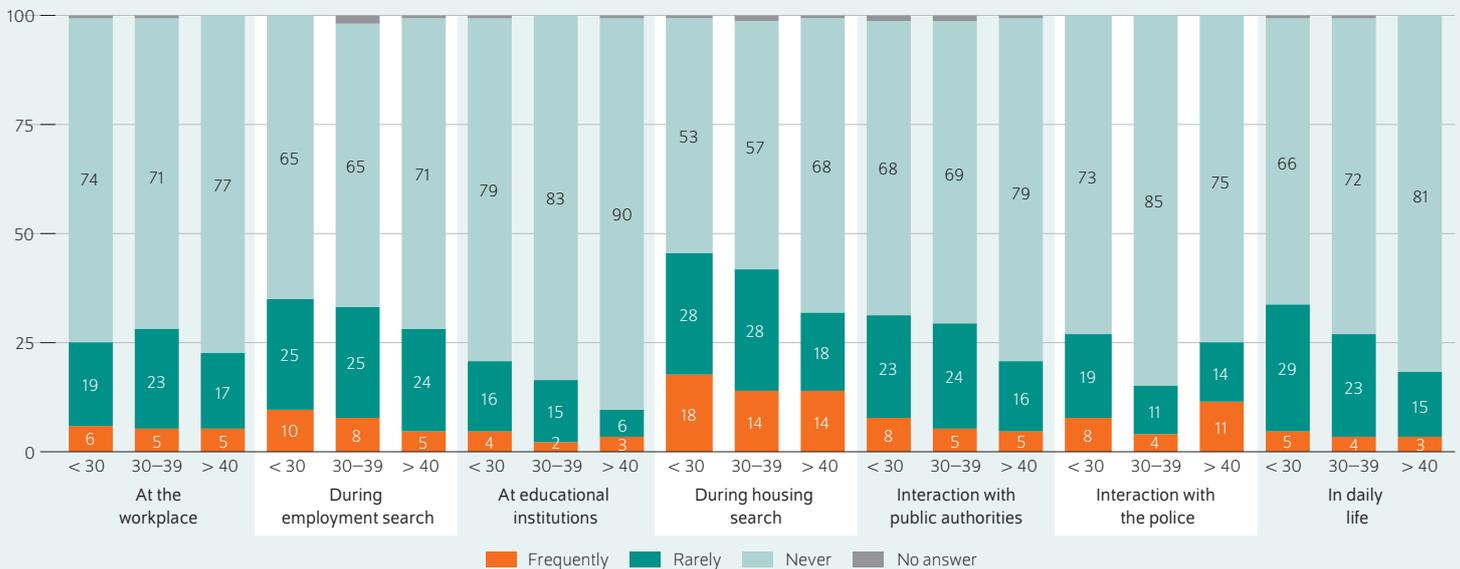
Perceived discrimination was significantly more pronounced in eastern Germany than in western Germany.

## PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION

Figure 5

### Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin by age, 2019

Shares in percent



Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

© DIW Berlin 2022

Younger refugees perceived discrimination more than the two other age groups.

### Refugees with better German skills perceive less discrimination

An important criterion for refugees' successful integration in Germany is learning German. Language skills facilitate access to the labor market, participation in society, and social interaction. This is reflected in the data: Refugees with better (self-reported) language skills are much more frequently employed, looking for employment, or attending an educational institution than those who have poor German skills. In contrast, differences in participation in other dimensions, such as finding housing and interactions with public authorities, are smaller, although refugees with good German skills are also more likely to be represented there.

It can also be seen that refugees with poorer German skills were more likely to experience discrimination in most of the dimensions analyzed than those with good German skills (Figure 6). This applies to the labor market and educational institutions in particular: In 2019, 45 percent of refugees with poor language skills who were looking for employment reported experiencing discrimination. On the labor market, 33 percent reported discrimination and 50 percent at educational institutions. For groups with average or advanced language skills, in contrast, the share of those experiencing discrimination was much lower. It is also evident in the other dimensions that refugees with poorer German skills tended to be more likely to report discrimination. Only in daily life did all groups report roughly similar levels of perceived discrimination.

### Conclusion: Increase in perceived discrimination during the pandemic can make refugees' integration more difficult

Refugees in Germany perceived more discrimination in 2020 in all areas compared to 2019, especially those who were attending an educational institution or looking for employment or a training program. The economic and social upheavals in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic were probably largely responsible for this increase. In addition to declining economic output, planning uncertainty in many sectors led to a hiring freeze and pandemic-related layoffs of refugees, which very likely massively increased their perception of discrimination compared to 2019. In addition, many integration measures, vocational training, and language courses for refugees were canceled during the pandemic. All of these factors can have contributed to the increase in perceived discrimination. Thus, the coronavirus pandemic has been a massive setback to refugees on their path to equal participation, while simultaneously increasing perceived discrimination. In future crises, be they economic, military, or health-related, it will be important to take measures to protect refugees from unemployment and exclusion, lest their integration be further hindered.

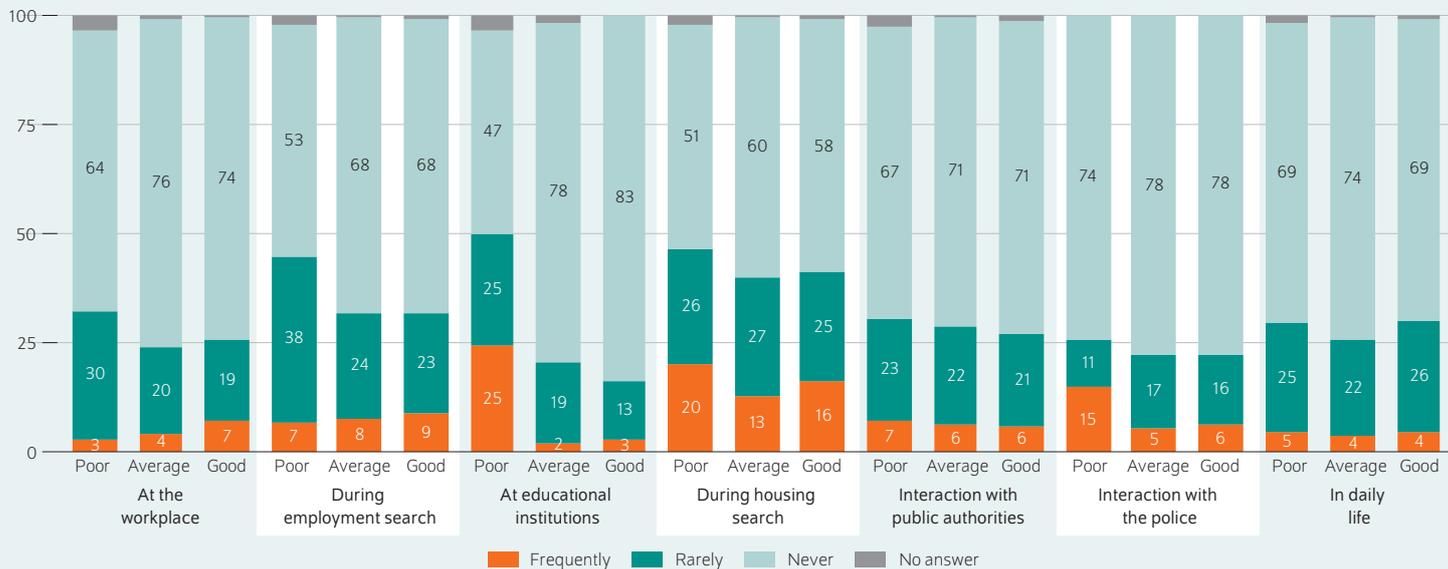
Refugee women's experience with discrimination stands out in particular. Women who are employed or looking for employment report more experiences of discrimination than refugee men working or looking for employment. So far, the reasons for this remain unclear. Multiple discrimination by

## PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION

Figure 6

### Refugees' perceived discrimination due to their country of origin by German skills, 2019

Shares in percent



Source: Authors' own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, weighted (longitudinal data, 2019).

© DIW Berlin 2022

Refugees with poor German skills perceived more discrimination in many dimensions.

the (potential) employer is possible, which women—especially mothers—often experience on the labor market or during the employment search, whether they are refugees or not. Particularly worrying is the lower level of labor market participation of refugees in eastern Germany. Moreover, refugees there perceive discrimination in all dimensions analyzed much more frequently than refugees in western Germany. Although the analyses cannot provide direct information on why this is so, various reasons are plausible: Refugees may perceive discrimination more often due to the tighter labor market in eastern Germany, where it is more difficult for refugees to find gainful employment. It could also be that actual discrimination against refugees is simply higher in eastern Germany.

Furthermore, younger refugees generally feel more affected by discrimination than older refugees. This is likely explained by the fact that younger refugees react more sensitively to perceived discrimination because they may expect to be treated equally. Last, refugees with poorer language skills reported more discrimination, which is unsurprising when

considering that being able to communicate successfully is essential for all dimensions observed. This finding supports the need to continue to invest in measures for refugees' language development.

In the long term, perceived discrimination makes integration more difficult for refugees, as people who experience discrimination tend to withdraw from the areas in which they experience said discrimination, such as the labor market or public life. Thus, it is important to invest in public measures for improving refugees' integration. With the current influx of Ukrainian refugees, this issue is all the more important. If Ukrainian refugees remain in Germany permanently, German society will be faced with another integration task. However, supporting Ukrainian refugees should not be at the expense of other refugees already in Germany, for example by putting them at a disadvantage compared to Ukrainians when participating in language and integration courses. Rather, efforts should be concentrated on supporting the integration of all refugees to ensure their social and economic participation.

**Adriana R. Cardozo Silva** is a research associate in the Socio-Economic Panel Research Infrastructure at DIW Berlin | [acardozosilva@diw.de](mailto:acardozosilva@diw.de)

**Christopher Prömel** is a research associate at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin | [christopher.proemel@fu-berlin.de](mailto:christopher.proemel@fu-berlin.de)

**Sabine Zinn** is Division Head of Survey Methodology and Management in the Socio-Economic Panel Research Infrastructure at DIW Berlin | [szinn@diw.de](mailto:szinn@diw.de)

JEL: A14, J15, J71, Z13

Keywords: Perceived Discrimination, Refugees, Integration