



BAMF Brief Analysis

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Fourth wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees

Refugees Progress in Language acquisition and Social Contacts

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AT A GLANCE

- German language skills of refugees who immigrated between 2013 and 2016 to Germany continue to improve in 2019 compared to the previous year. Almost half of all refugees report having good or very good German language skills, less than five percent no skills at all, and less than 15 percent rather poor skills.
- Further progress can also be seen in language course participation: Ninety percent of men and 79 percent of women took part in at least one language course between 2016 and 2019.
- Refugees are also increasingly establishing contact with Germans: Half of all refugees frequently spend time with Germans in 2019, yet 19 percent report no contact.
- Younger refugees, male and better-educated refugees succeed comparatively well in acquiring the German language, accessing language courses and therefore also in intensifying contact with Germans.
- Older refugees, refugees with a lower educational level and female refugees with (young) children have consistently invested time in improving their German language skills since 2016. Due to a slower progression, these groups of people were able to acquire intermediate language skills by 2019.
- Older refugees, female refugees with young children and refugees with poor German skills may find themselves in a disadvantageous position when it comes to social integration, as they are not only slow to establish contact with Germans, but the contact frequency is sometimes even declining.
- Initial findings on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic indicate that contacts with Germans have decreased and many of the refugees interviewed assume that their German language skills will stagnate or worsen.

Although there has been a significant decline in asylum applications since 2017 (BAMF 2020) the number of refugees¹ living in Germany is still increasing. At the end of 2019, 1.84 million refugees were living in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2020). Their residence is becoming more solidified due to largely completed asylum procedures and high protection quotas. Hence, the focus of research on this group is now less on the arrival process and the first integration steps but rather on long-term integration processes and social participation.

The fourth wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees (cf. Info Box) now provides data on the integration process of refugees up to 2019. The majority of the refugees considered here, who came to Germany between the beginning of 2013 and the end of 2016, have now been living in Germany for four years, and almost a fifth (19 percent) have even been living here for longer than four years². This allows more differentiated analyses of integration progresses. The focus of this Brief Analysis is, beside health issues (Entringer et al. 2021) and structural integration (Kosyakova et al. 2021), on central integrational aspects of the language acquisition and social relations with Germans.

The quick and successful acquisition of the native language of the country of residence plays a central role also in other aspects of integration. This includes, for example, education, access to the labor market as well as social relations and thus an equal participation and involvement in the social life in the country of residence (Esser 2006; Portes/Rumbaut 2006). Previous analyses have shown that both language skills and language course attendance among refugees have increased steadily since their arrival, despite relatively unfavorable conditions regarding language learning skills and the linguistic distance of the first languages from the German language (Brücker et al. 2019; de Paiva Lareiro et al. 2020). At the same time, however, problems with access to language courses and thus also with language acquisition emerged, particularly among female refugees with young children, due to structural but also individual factors (Tissot et al. 2019; Tissot 2021). Furthermore, people with a lower educational level, and even more so refugees with literacy deficiencies, were found to face obstacles in learning German (de Paiva Lareiro et al. 2020). Older refugees

also seem to face particular challenges in language acquisition due to an age-related slower learning speed (Maddox 2021).

Integration in the sense of equal participation and involvement in society does not end with the language acquisition or taking up employment, it also significantly includes the social environment and social relationships. Particularly social contacts with people who have lived in Germany for a longer time play a central role. On the one hand, social contacts help new immigrants to find their way around and settle in Germany, e.g., by providing helpful information, specific practical assistance or emotional support (Haug 1997; Kanas et al. 2011). On the other hand, social contacts can also contribute to reducing possible mutual prejudices and thus strengthen social cohesion (Allport 1954; Pettigrew/Tropp 2006). There is already evidence that refugees can benefit from social contacts when in search of housing (Baier/Siegert 2018) and employment (Stips/Kis-Katos 2020). The extent of contacts between refugees and Germans seemed to be increasing, at least from 2016 to 2017 (Siegert 2019). Nevertheless, certain subgroups, especially women and older refugees, were found to have difficulties in establishing contacts (Siegert 2019; de Paiva Lareiro 2021; Maddox 2021).

Against this background, the data from the fourth wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees from 2019 will be used in the following to analyze which further developments have occurred in the area of language acquisition, attendance of integration or other language courses and in the area of social relations. Regarding language skills, the focus is particularly on the developments of those subgroups with special challenges, i.e., women with (young) children, refugees with a lower educational level and older refugees. In addition to German language skills and acquisition in the context of language courses, the time spent on language learning and the use of the German language in everyday life are also addressed. Regarding social relations, the development of contact frequencies with Germans in general and in specific life areas are examined. Here, too, the focus is on subgroups that have shown less pronounced social participation in the past, namely female refugees, older refugees and refugees with poorer German skills.

The following analyses reflect the situation as of the survey year 2019—as the Covid-19 pandemic was not yet foreseeable. Nevertheless, it is likely that the pandemic affects the further integration process of refugees not insignificantly: Initial data from the unemployment statistics show that people from the

1 The term refugee is not used here in the legal sense, but as a collective term for persons who have applied for asylum in Germany, regardless of the state and outcome of the asylum procedure (see also Kroh et al. (2016) and the Info Box).

2 At the time of the interview in 2019, two percent of the interviewed refugees had lived in Germany for less than three years, 16 percent for three years, 64 percent for four years, 14 percent for five years and five percent for more than five years.

main origin countries of asylum seekers are more affected by the pandemic than other population groups (Brücker et al. 2020). Gaps in language acquisition and establishing contacts are also likely due to course interruptions and contact restrictions. Comprehensive findings on the effects of the pandemic on integration processes among refugees can only be obtained from the upcoming survey data from the fifth (2020) and sixth (2021) waves. However, on the basis of a Covid-19 supplementary survey conducted in the summer of 2020 (see Info Box), initial analyses suggest that the pandemic influences the linguistic and social integration of refugees. These findings will be presented in excursions.

Language development and language course participation among refugees from 2016 to 2019

While German language skills were non-existent for almost all refugees at the time of arrival (Brücker et al. 2016), refugees have used the time since their arrival in Germany to acquire German language skills and improve them: In 2019, nearly half of the respondents (47 percent) report good to very good German lan-

INFO BOX: DATA BASIS

The **IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees** is a nationwide longitudinal survey that has been running since 2016. Participants are persons who came to Germany in the period of January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2016 and who applied for asylum in Germany, regardless of the state and outcome of the asylum procedure. Thus, persons who were in the asylum procedure and those who had already been granted protection status were taken into account in the study. Furthermore, persons were interviewed whose asylum application had been rejected, but whose departure or deportation had been suspended for various reasons and had therefore mostly received a suspension of deportation (German: Duldung) (Kroh et al. 2016). In addition, the household members of these persons are also interviewed. Household members may have entered Germany before 2013 or after 2016 and/or have no migration experience of their own. The basis for the sampling was the Central Register of Foreigners (Ausländerzentralregister (AZR)). If statistical weighting procedures are used, the results obtained on the basis of the data represent the households of the population delimited above (for a detailed description of the sampling: Kroh et al. 2016; Kühne et al. 2019; Jacobsen et al. 2019).

The survey program is comparatively extensive (Kroh et al. 2016), which allows a comprehensive analysis of the living conditions of the refugees. In the analyses, it is therefore possible to take into account a variety of relevant characteristics, such as time of entry, gender, age, country of origin, level of education or residence status. All data refer to the self-assessments of the refugees.

Information is available on 4,465 adults for 2016, 5,593 adults for 2017, 4,344 adults for 2018 and 3,856 adults for 2019. The total sample currently comprises 8,153 adults who have been interviewed at least once. Of these 8,153 persons, 2,771 have been surveyed once, 2,036 have been surveyed twice, 2,105 have been surveyed three times and 1,241 have been surveyed four times by 2019. When making comparisons across the four survey years, it should be noted that the population changed slightly between 2016 and 2017 (Jacobsen et al. 2019). Thus, comparisons of the results from 2016 with the results from subsequent years are only possible to a limited extent. Furthermore, only persons who entered Germany between 2013 and 2016 were considered for this report. Finally, it must be taken into account that the analyses for 2019 are still based on provisional data. There may be slight deviations in the results if the final data is used.

From July to August 2020, a short **Covid-19 supplementary** phone survey was conducted as part of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees. One person per household was interviewed, which amounts to a total of 1,439 refugees who had also participated in the 2019 survey (Sakshaug et al. 2020).

guage skills (Figure 1)³. Compared to the previous year 2018, this is an increase of five percentage points. Also the proportion of refugees who report no or rather poor German language skills in 2019 decreases by a further five percentage points from 2018 to 2019 to 18 percent.

Previous research on language development among refugees has shown that as expected, similar mechanisms are at work in the language acquisition of refugees as with other migrants (Brenzel et al. 2019; Tissot et al. 2019). Thus, the language learning process of refugees is similarly influenced by factors relating to the motivation for language acquisition, the opportunities for using the language and the efficient outline of the learning process (Chiswick/Miller 2001; Esser 2006). Both individual (e.g., prior learning experience, contacts, employment) and structural aspects (e.g., childcare possibilities, opportunities to attend courses, course size) shape the process (Tissot et al. 2019).

Multivariate analyses are used for data from 2019 to examine which of the many individual and structural factors are correlated to German language skills and thus support the acquisition of the German language. Results confirm findings from previous years (de Paiva Lareiro et al. 2020). In particular, private accommodation, a longer residence in Germany, participation in a language course, time spent on language acquisition as

well as frequent contact with Germans are positively correlated with refugees' German skills (Appendix: Table A2). However, the results also show that particularly women who live with children under the age of four rate their German skills lower than women with older children or no children as well as men with or without children⁴. Furthermore, people with a lower educational level tend to rate their German skills poorer than those with an intermediate or higher level of education.⁵ With increasing age, refugees also assess their German language skills as poorer although this negative correlation becomes somewhat weaker at an older age.

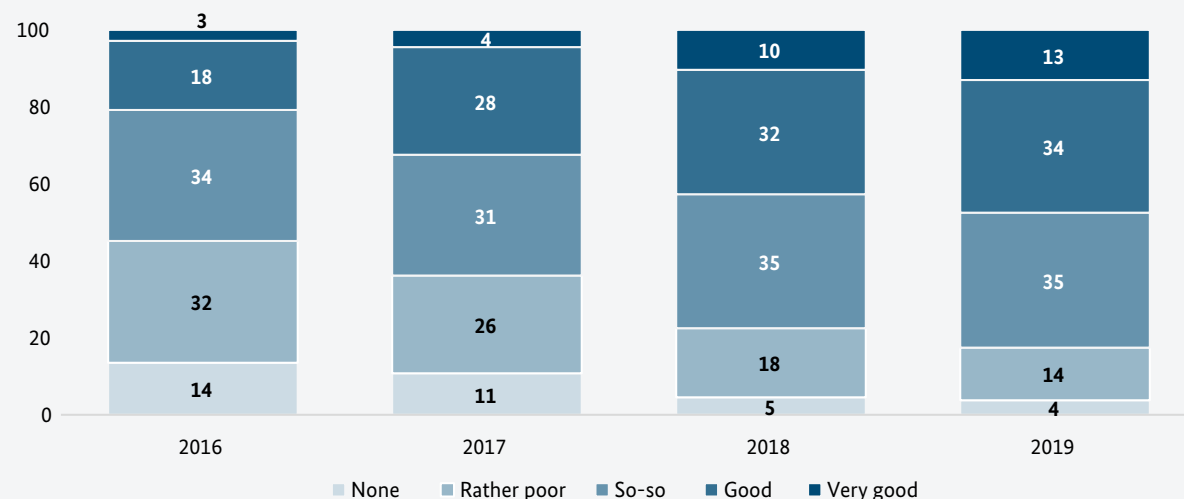
These results illustrate that the speed at which refugees (can) acquire German varies between subgroups. In particular, women with young children, lower educated refugees and older refugees still seem to face particular challenges in acquiring German. In order to better understand how language skills have developed in these groups, the following analyses will focus on

3 The data on German language skills are based on self-assessments by the respondents and allow a rough assessment of language skills in everyday life. High correlations of the self-assessment with interviewer statements in the respective survey years (Cronbach's alpha = .67) prove sufficient validity. For the analysis of German language skills, an index was formed using the three forms of language skills speaking, reading and writing.

4 In terms of family situation, four subgroups are considered in this brief analysis: a) women living in a household with at least one child under the age of four, b) women living in a household with children aged 4 to 18, c) women without children in the household, d) men. Over the years, respondents may change between the groups (e.g., when a child is born or comes of legal age). However, these changes between the groups rarely occur and are therefore not presented in this Brief Analysis. Overall, results show that differences among men depending on whether they live with younger, older or without children are only small. Thus, these differences are also not presented in this Brief Analysis.

5 Regarding educational background, three groups are distinguished on the basis of the highest educational attainment: a) low (ISCED value between 0 and 1; maximum primary education), b) medium (ISCED value between 2 and 4, maximum secondary education) and c) high (ISCED value between 5 and 8; tertiary education).

Figure 1: Development of self-assessed German language skills from 2016 to 2019 (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

these three subgroups.⁶ However, with regard to developments over time, it must be noted that no individual progresses are traced. Instead, the situation and developments within the sub-groups over the years are presented, whereby the sub-groups are not static. This means that the participants in the subgroups may change over time and there can be shifts between the groups. For example, some of the refugees change age groups due to the normal ageing process, childless women may have children and young children become older. The developments shown may therefore also be partly due to the changing composition of the sub-groups.

Particularly women with younger children continue to report weaker German language skills

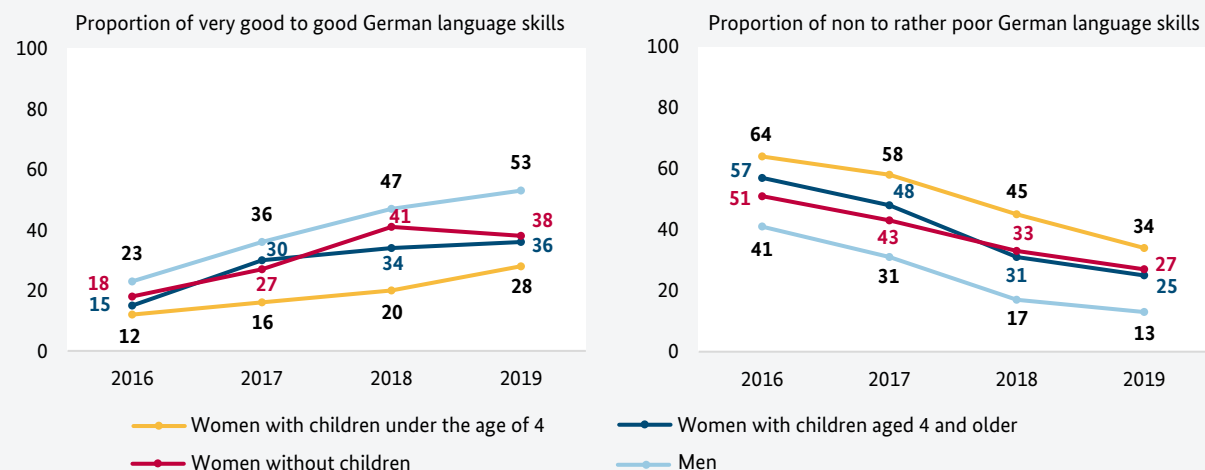
Analyses in relation to family situation show that, overall, German language skills improved steadily for women and men between 2016 and 2019. However, female refugees, especially those living with young children, still rate their German language skills lower than male refugees in 2019. In 2019, 28 percent of women with young children, 36 percent of women with older children, 38 percent of women without children and 53 percent of male refugees report good to very good German skills (Figure 2). One possible reason for weaker German skills, especially among women with young children, is that these women have less time for language acquisition due to increased family responsibilities such as childcare and household duties, and it might not be possible for them for

instance to attend language courses (Niehues 2021; Tissot 2021). Yet, similar progresses for women with older and without children, as well as greater advancements from 2018 to 2019 for women with young children (plus eight percentage points), indicate that with a longer residence in Germany the progresses of women with younger, older and without children become more similar.

However, improved German language skills are not only expressed in increasing number of people with (very) good skills, but also in decreasing number of people with no or rather poor skills. Even an average level of German can make it much easier or at least possible to get around and communicate in everyday life, for example with authorities, in the supermarket or at the playground. Therefore, it should be noted positively that from 2018 to 2019 the proportion of people with rather poor or no German skills has decreased, especially among women with young children (minus 11 percentage points). For women with older children or without children (both minus six percentage points) and for men (minus four percentage points) this decrease was somewhat smaller in the same time period. Overall, 34 percent of women with young children, 27 percent of women without children, 25 percent of women with older children and 13 percent of men rate their German language skills as rather poor or non-existent in 2019. These findings make clear that even among women with young children progress is still being made, especially with basic language skills, after an average of four years of residence in Germany and that they are acquiring German skills at a slower but constant pace. In the future, it is quite possible that persons from this group will tend to further improve their German language skills.

⁶ Table A1 in the appendix shows how the subgroups are distributed in the sample.

Figure 2: Development of German language skills by family situation (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

Less educated refugees are less likely to report (very) good German language skills

Regarding the level of education, while there were also increases in German skills from 2016 to 2019 among refugees with a lower or intermediate level of education at the time of arrival, the higher educated were nevertheless particularly quick in acquiring German (Figure 3): In 2019, 72 percent of the higher educated, followed by 54 percent of the intermediate and 32 percent of the lower educated refugees reported (very) good German language skills. This corresponds to an increase of 10 percentage points from 2018 to 2019 among the higher educated, nine percentage points among the lower educated and three percentage points among the middle educated refugees. In 2019, only four percent of the higher educated, followed by 12 percent of the intermediate educated and yet 28 percent of the lower educated refugees report non-existent or rather poor German language skills. This corresponds to a decrease of 11 percentage points for lower-educated refugees, eight percentage points for higher-educated refugees and one percentage point for intermediate-educated refugees compared to the previous year.

These statistics show that the lower educated refugees are less likely to achieve (very) good German language skills although they make more progress with intermediate German skills. This indicates that lower-educated refugees need longer or more time to achieve average German language skills. Baier et al. (2020) point to a lack of literacy and the associated lack of learning experience as possible reasons for the slower language acquisition.

Particularly high proportion of older refugees with no or rather poor German skills

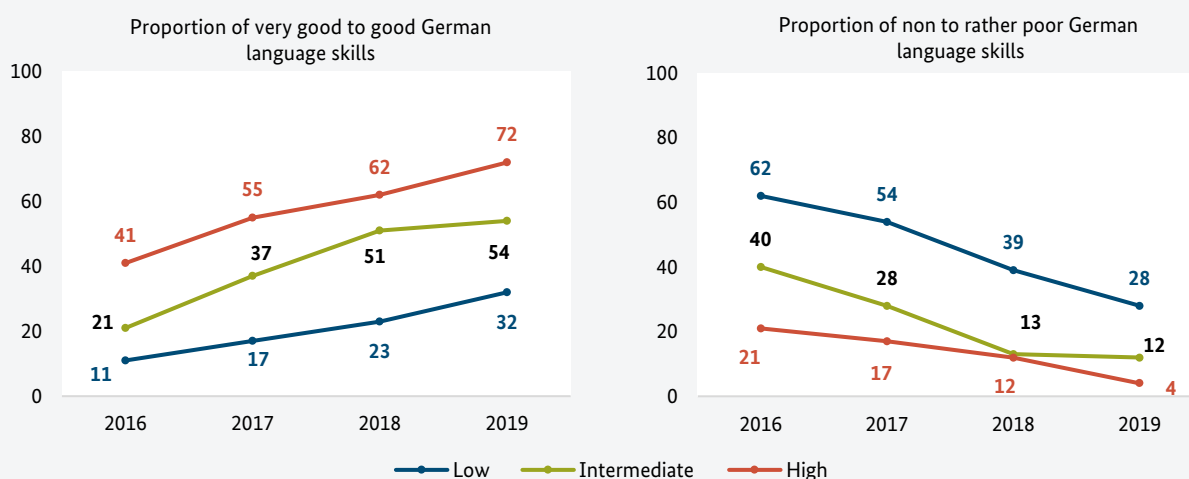
A comparison of the development of self-assessed German language skills over time between younger (18 to 30 years), middle-aged (31 to 50 years) and older (51 years and older) refugees reveals clear differences: In 2019, 59 percent of younger, 37 percent of middle-aged and 18 percent of older refugees state that they have good to very good German skills (Figure 4). This corresponds to an increase of five percentage points for younger refugees and seven percentage points for both middle-aged and older refugees compared to the previous year.

While the proportion of persons with rather poor or no German language skills fell to 10 percent among the younger and 22 percent among the middle-aged by 2019, it still applies to half (50 percent) of the older refugees. Whereby a decline of seven percentage points among older, eight percentage points among middle-aged and four percentage points among younger refugees between 2018 and 2019 can also be observed here.

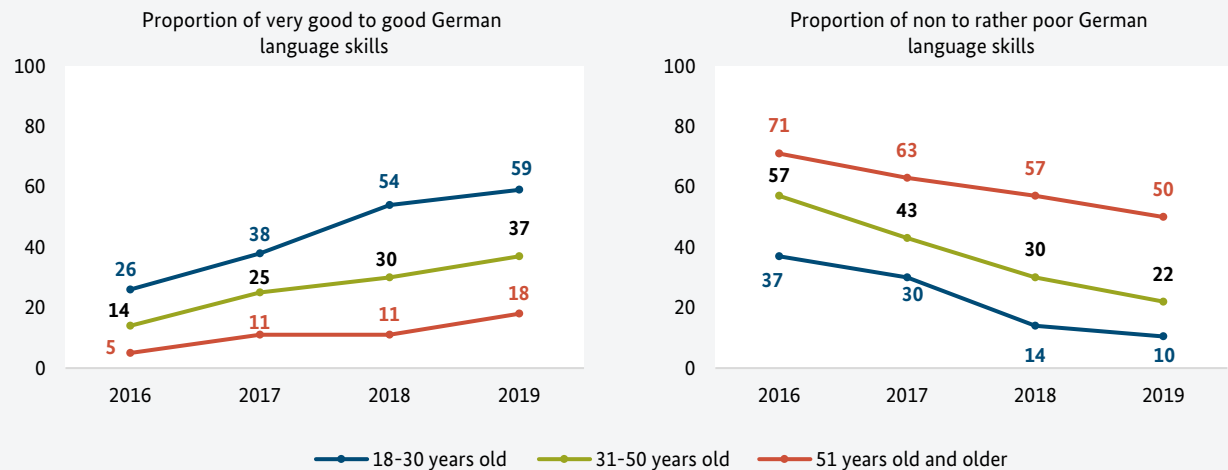
Despite steady progress in all age groups, German skills among older refugees are the slowest to improve, so that even after an average of four years since arriving, one out of two older refugees reports poor to no German language skills.

Overall, the detailed observations of self-assessed German language skills from 2016 to 2019 confirm that some subgroups learn German more quickly and at a higher level than other groups. This applies particularly to male refugees and women without children, higher educated and younger refugees. Yet, women with

Figure 3: Development of German language skills by educational background in Germany (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

Figure 4: Development of German language skills by age (in percent)

(young) children, lower educated and older refugees seem to need more time and maybe specific support to learn German. However, despite challenging circumstances, many of these persons have also been able to especially reach an intermediate level of German and have steadily improved their language skills. The restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020 may, however, slow down or reduce these positive developments. This is indicated in the results from the Covid-19 supplementary survey (see Excursus 1).

Participation in language courses

Participation in language-promoting measures, e.g., in the form of language courses, as guided systematic teaching of the German language, promotes the acquisition of German. This positive correlation also exists after an average of four years of residence in Germany, regardless of when the language-promoting measures were attended. This is confirmed by the multivariate results described in the beginning of this Brief Analysis. For this reason, participation in language courses in general and specifically in the integration course in the years 2016 to 2019 are examined below. Since participation in language-promoting measures can also vary among groups, this section also looks at the differences between the subgroups already analyzed.

Saturation effects in language course participation

Looking at refugees' attendance in language-promoting measures⁷ over the years 2016 to 2019, it is noticeable that only slight increases in language course visits were recorded from 2018 to 2019 (Table 1): By 2019, 87 percent of refugees had attended a language course, which is three percentage points more than in the previous year. At 90 percent, participation in language courses by 2019 is once again higher among men than among women (79 percent). The expected "saturation effect" that almost all persons who were allowed, required and/or wanted to participate in a course have done so seems to be increasingly occurring.

However, it should be noted that with this saturation there are still further increases in the completion of language courses from 2018 to 2019. By 2019, 71 percent of refugees, and thus six percentage points more than in the previous year, state that they have completed a language course. For men, this rate is 78 percent in 2019 and for women 57 percent, so that here there is an increase of seven percentage points for men and an increase of five percentage points for women compared to the previous year. Thus, courses that were already

⁷ The language-promoting measures captured in detail include integration courses, ESF-BAMF courses/vocational language courses, measures of the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit; BA) with language promotion components and other language courses (for more information: de Paiva de Lareiro et al. 2020). From 2018 to 2019, collecting data on participation in language-promoting measures was rearranged. Since survey inaccuracies cannot be ruled out with regard to participation in the ESF-BAMF/vocational language courses, the BA measures and the other language courses, these are not presented in further detail. Yet, due to the cumulative calculation, the total participation figures should only be slightly affected by this.

EXCURSUS 1: LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE COURSE PARTICIPATION AMONG REFUGEES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic dominated the year 2020. The data and findings presented in this report so far are collected before the time of the pandemic. However, it is to be expected that the restrictions and regulations during the pandemic have, or already had, an impact on the further acquisition of German and participation in language courses, as language courses often could not be held or could no longer be held as face-to-face courses. For example, in the field of integration courses, courses were discontinued or interrupted in March 2020 and online tutorials were initially promoted to bridge the gap. From July 2020, the courses could be resumed or restarted in various pandemic-compatible models funded by the BAMF (e.g., hybrid or virtual classrooms).⁸

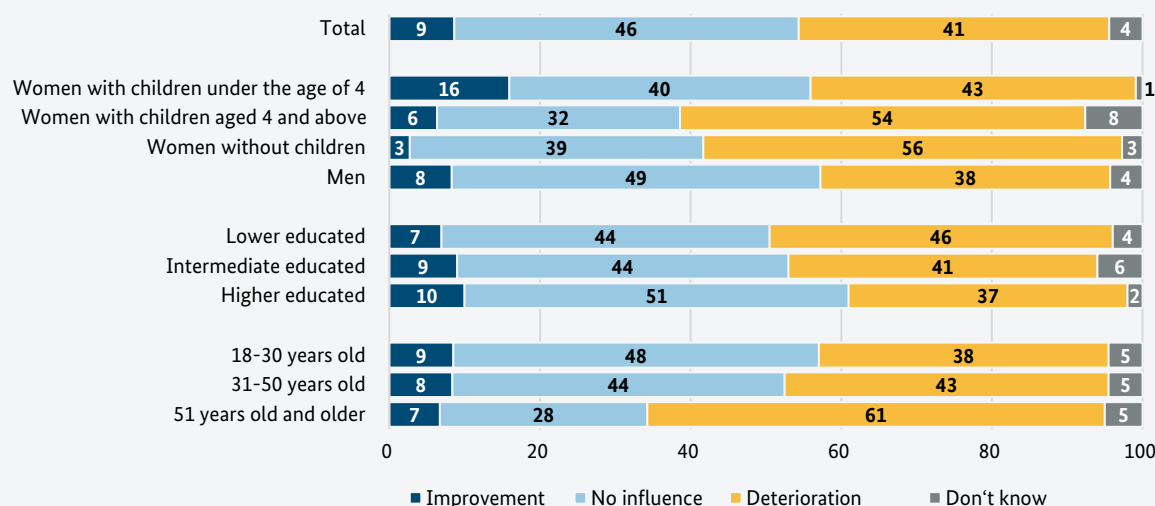
At the time of the additional survey in July/August 2020, 269 of the 1,169 refugees surveyed (16 percent) were attending an integration course or another language course. However, due to the pandemic, 73 percent of the course participants surveyed (equivalent to 192 people) had suspended their course, a further 11 percent (equivalent to 35 people) had cancelled their course and 16 percent (equivalent to 33 people) attended either partially or fully online courses. Due to the small number of participants in online courses, no further analyses of these course forms can be presented here.

When asking to assess the impact of the pandemic situation on their German language skills, the results of the supplementary survey reveal a divided picture among the surveyed refugees: Forty-six percent of the respondents assume that the pandemic has no influence on their German skills and a further 41 percent of the respondents assume that it will lead to a worsening of their language skills (Figure 5). Only a small proportion of respondents (nine percent) expect an improvement and four percent of respondents could not/would not give an assessment. In the different sub-groups sorted by family situation, educational background and age, there are no statistically significant differences (probably also due to lower and different case numbers in sub-groups), so that systematic deviations cannot be assumed here, even if the previous patterns emerge. Overall, the findings support the assumption that the Covid-19 pandemic will reduce progress already made in learning German or at least stall further improvements.

When interpreting the findings from the Covid-19 supplementary survey, it should be noted that these results can only depict trends, due to smaller case numbers than in the main survey. Reliable statements about the impact of the pandemic on refugees will only be possible using the data from the upcoming, regular surveys from 2020 and 2021.

⁸ For pandemic related changes in the framework of integration courses, including the various promoted course models, see Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

Figure 5: Refugees' assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their German language skills in 2020 (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Covid-19 Supplementary Survey 2020, data weighted.

started could also be completed more frequently in 2019.

When considering participation in language-promoting measures, it should also be noted that they can vary a lot in terms of their scope, demands and professionalism. A prominent measure for promoting basic and advanced German language skills after arrival in Germany is the Integration Course.⁹ The Integration Course consists of a language and an orientation course component and participation can either be obligated or volunteered, depending on the eligibility for participation. If the residence in Germany is not going to be permanent, e.g., in the case of an obligation to leave the country due to a rejected asylum, there is no entitlement to participate in an integration course.¹⁰ By 2019, 70 percent of the refugees surveyed had attended an integration course. This is another five percentage points more than in the previous year. At 72 percent, participation among men by 2019 remains higher than among women (65 percent), with stronger increases compared to the previous year among women (10 percentage points) than among men (three percentage points). Thus, also in the case of integration course attendance a certain saturation can now be assumed after an average of four years of stay in Germany.

Similar to language course attendance in general, the increases in the completion of an integration course from 2018 to 2019 are greater than in its participation. By 2019, 54 percent (and thus six percentage points more than in the previous year) were able to complete an integration course. The increase among women (eight percentage points) is greater than among men (three percentage points), therefore also more women have completed courses.

Strongest increases in integration course attendance from 2018 to 2019 among women with young children

If we now concentrate on the subgroups singled out at the beginning and first take a look at their family situation, it is striking that women with young children in particular participated or were able to participate less frequently in an integration course up to 2019 (52 percent; Figure 6). Meanwhile, the participation rates of women with older children, women without children and men have converged by 2019 (between 72 and 74 percent). According to analyses by Tissot (2021), delayed or difficult access to courses can be related not only to individual but also to structural reasons such as the frequent lack of regulated childcare places offered and also the obligation practices of Jobcentres and employment agencies. Based on qualitative interviews, Tissot found that when children under four years of age live in a household and an obligation to participate in an integration course is to be made for the household, this obligation has (so far) tended to be made in favor of the man instead of the woman. This may at least partly explain lower participation rates of women with young children. However, the high increase of 13 percentage points in participation among this group in particular from 2018 to 2019 suggest that catch-up processes can be expected in the future, i.e., when

9 For more information on the Integration Course, see <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/Integration/Zugewanderte/Teilnehmende/Integrationskurse/integrationskurse-node.html> (24.02.2021).

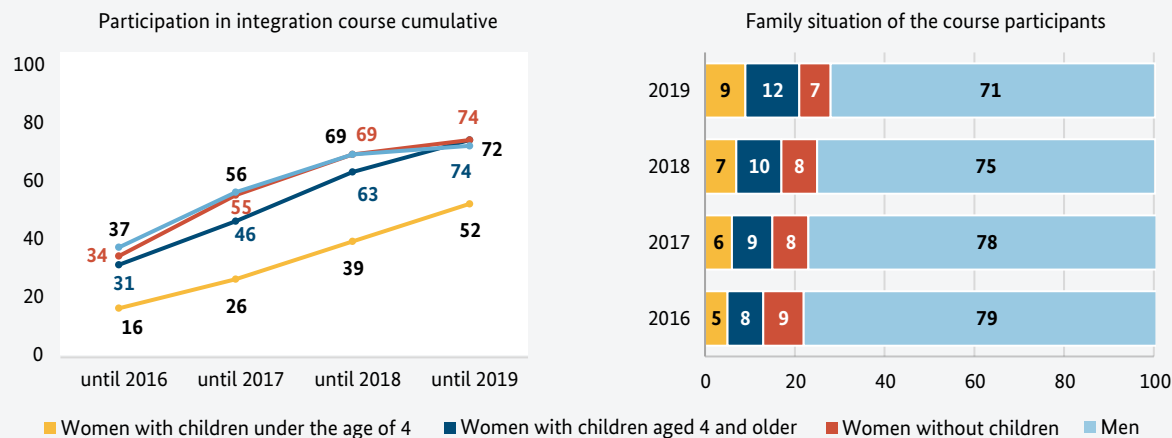
10 The extent to which the respective legal requirements for participation in an integration course are fulfilled cannot be determined in individual cases on the basis of the available data. The following analyses are therefore not to be understood as a participation rate in the sense of an exhaustion of all those entitled or obliged to participate, but the participation rate refers only to the surveyed population. There are differences according to residence status, which are to be expected due to different attendance rights.

Table 1: Participation and completion of language courses by year of survey (in per cent)

		Course Participation and Course Completion					
		Total		Men		Women	
		Participation	Completion	Participation	Completion	Participation	Completion
Total	2019	87	71	90	78	79	57
	2018	84	65	88	71	76	52
	2017	79	49	85	54	66	37
	2016	70	37	74	40	58	28
Integration Course of the BAMF	2019	70	54	72	59	65	45
	2018	65	48	69	52	55	37
	2017	52	32	56	35	40	22
	2016	34	18	37	19	27	13

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

Figure 6: Participation frequency in the integration course and composition of course starters by family situation of the refugees (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016–2019, v36, data weighted.

Example: 72 percent of the male refugees surveyed in 2019 stated that they had attended or were attending an integration course by the time of the survey (left figure). Of all surveyed refugee course starters in 2019, 71 percent were male (right figure)..

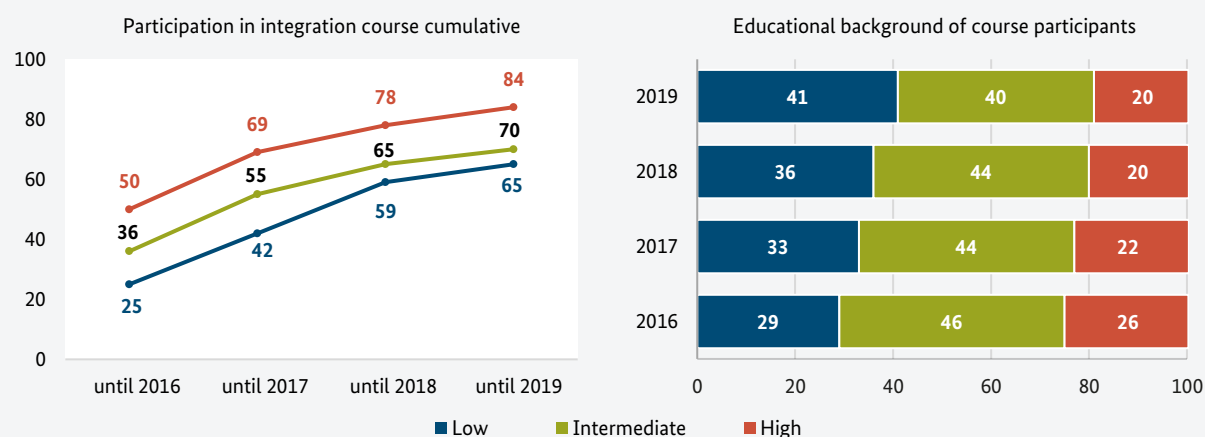
their children get older and as a result women are able or are obliged to participate.

If we look at the composition of the refugees who started an integration course in the respective year with regard to their family situation, the vast majority of course starters among the respondents in 2019—in line with the gender structure of the refugees in the basic population (see Appendix: Table A1)—are still male (71 percent), followed by 12 percent women with older children and seven percent women without children. At the same time, however, the proportion of women with young children has increased by two percentage points from 2018 to 2019 to nine percent.

Participation in integration courses increased among refugees with a lower educational background

The participation rate in the integration course increased from 2018 to 2019 for higher-educated (six percentage points), intermediate-educated (five percentage points) and lower-educated (six percentage points) refugees (Figure 7). By 2019, with a participation rate of 65 percent, lower-educated refugees were still unable to catch up with higher-educated refugees (84 percent), but are increasingly closing the gap with the participation rate of intermediate-educated refugees (70 percent). The increase in course participants with a lower educational background is also reflected

Figure 7: Participation frequency in the integration course and composition of course starters in terms of the educational background of the refugees (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016–2019, v36, data weighted.

in the composition of course participants: From 2016 to 2019, the proportion of lower-educated refugees—in relation to all refugee course participants—increased once again, so that in 2019 it was 41 percent and similar to the proportion of higher-educated refugee course participants (40 percent). Due to the comparatively lower participation rate they previously had, it is possible that also in the future lower-educated refugees increasingly strive to participate in integration courses.

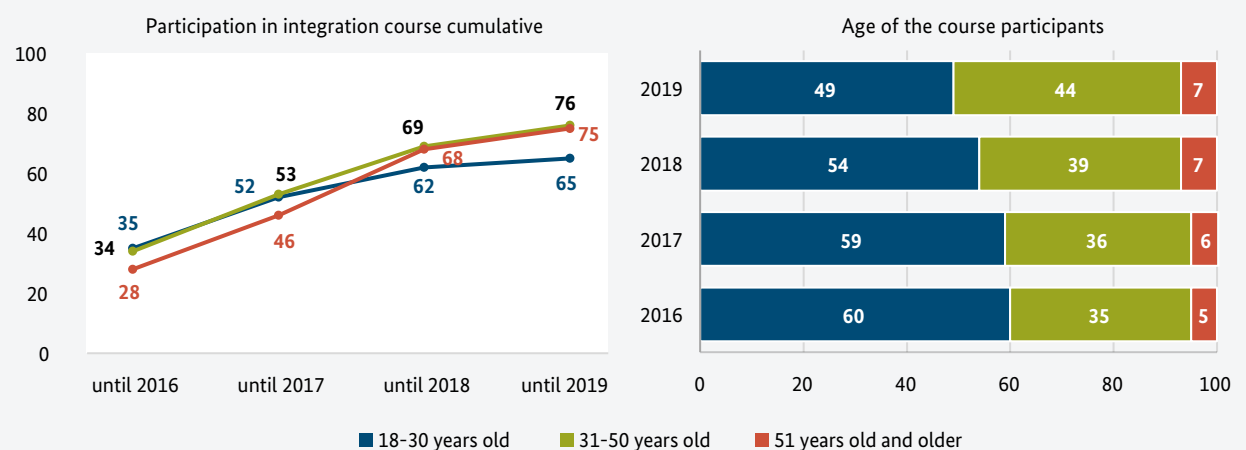
Participation in integration courses increases among over 30-year-olds and stagnates among under 30-year-olds

Comparing age groups, only few differences in participation in the integration course can be found. One exception is the participation rate of younger refugees: While the participation rate for younger refugees in 2016 and 2017 was still the same or slightly higher than that of middle-aged and older refugees, it developed more slowly than that of middle-aged or older refugees from 2017 onwards (Figure 8). The participation rate in 2019 is accordingly 65 percent for younger, 76 percent for middle-aged and 75 percent for older refugees. These findings may come as a surprise in regard to the better self-assessed German skills among younger refugees compared to middle-aged and older refugees. A possible explanation is that younger refugees more often had the opportunity to further develop their German language skills in the context of other educational opportunities, such as schools, vocational training or qualification measures and therefore attending an integration course became obsolete for them.

In line with these findings, the proportion of younger refugees in relation to all refugee course starters is steadily decreasing over time, it stays nevertheless high in regard to the age distribution of all refugees. That is, in 2019, nearly half (49 percent) of all refugee course starters are young, 44 percent are middle-aged and seven percent are older than 50.

In summary, participation in language courses in general, but also in the integration course in particular, has reached a certain saturation after an average of four years of residence in Germany. Nevertheless, by 2019 already started courses could be completed increasingly and this development is likely to continue. The reasons why language courses could not yet be completed before 2019 may vary and differ depending on the individual situation, e.g., due to taking up a job or relocation, child birth, course content being too demanding or too easy, or the language support measure still ongoing at the time of the survey (e.g., a part-time course). In addition, the in-depth analyses show that women with young children in particular still have some catching up to do when it comes to attending integration courses. However, the observed increase of 13 percentage points from 2018 to 2019 suggests that further catching-up processes can be expected in the coming years within this group. These catch-up processes may be affected in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, since courses had to be suspended or were (partially) changed to virtual formats (cf. Excursus 1).

Figure 8: Frequency of participation in the integration course and composition of course starters by age of refugees (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

Other forms of language acquisition

German language skills can not only be acquired and consolidated within formalized courses, but can also be (further) developed through goal-oriented and self-directed learning or with everyday language use (Klein/Dimroth 2003). Especially with longer residence, such forms of learning may gain importance. Due to initial learning success, the time consciously spent on learning German may decrease with a longer residence in Germany. For these reasons, the following section looks at how much time refugees spent learning German on weekdays between 2016 and 2019 and which language they predominantly used in their everyday lives.

Over an hour is invested in acquiring German on weekdays

Refugees are asked every year about the number of hours they spend learning German on an average working day.¹¹ This can be learning time in the context of language courses, i.e., formalized forms of learning, or informal forms of learning, such as exchanges with friends. Since participation in language courses declines over the years of residence, it is to be expected that the hours spent learning German will also decline. It should also be noted that the time spent on language acquisition is not an indicator for the efficiency of the learning process.

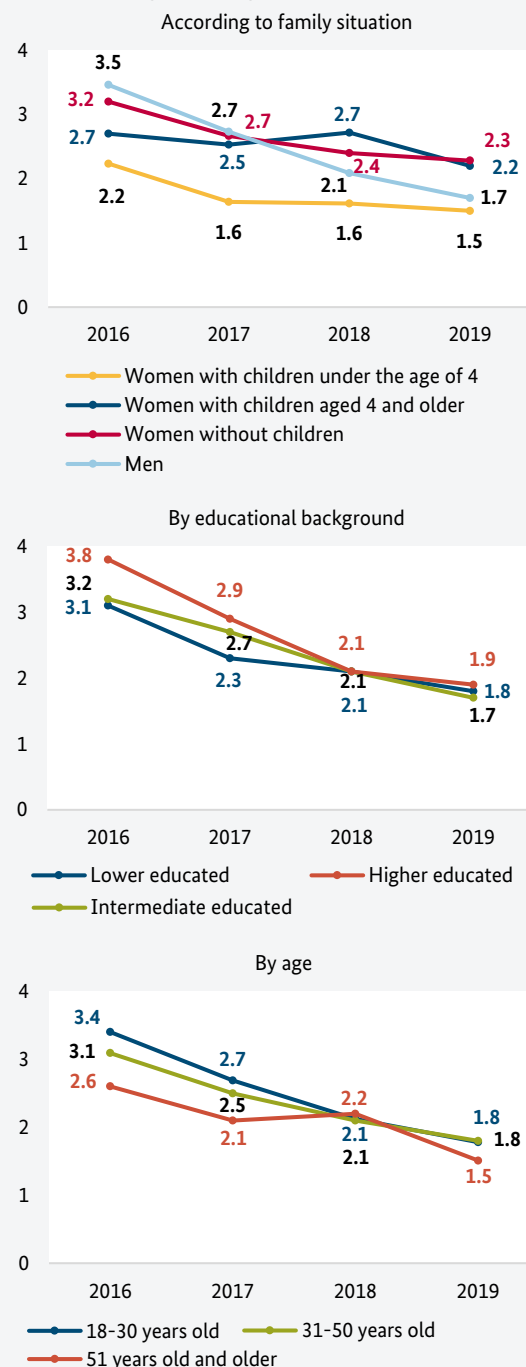
The observation over time confirms the expectation that the longer a person stays in Germany, the less time they spend on learning German. Whereas in 2016 refugees spent an average of 3.3 hours on weekdays learning German, this time fell to 2.6 hours in 2017, 2.1 hours in 2018 and 1.8 hours in 2019. As in the previous analyses, differences between subgroups are found. For example, women with young children spend less time on learning German in 2019 (1.5 hours) than women with older children (2.2 hours), no children at all (2.3 hours) or men (1.7 hours). For men, the time spent learning German decreased the most from 2016 to 2019.

Differentiating by educational background, less pronounced differences between the subgroups are observed. The time spent on acquiring German decreased over the years among lower, intermediate and higher-educated refugees. Since the decrease was somewhat smaller among lower-educated refugees, the time spent

learning by lower and higher-educated refugees was equalized by 2018.

Differentiating by age, the time spent learning German also decreased in all subgroups (i.e., younger, middle-aged and older refugees) between 2016 and 2019. The decrease was slower for younger and intermediate-aged refugees, thus the time spent was similar between the groups in 2018 (2.1 to 2.2 hours; Figure 9). In 2019, the numbers were again somewhat different

Figure 9: Average time spent learning German on an average working day (in hours)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

¹¹ The multivariate results in the form of a regression cited at the beginning show that in 2019, time spent learning German is positively related to German language skills, even when other important factors such as participation in courses, family situation, age, etc. are taken into account (see Appendix: Table A2).

among the groups, so that in 2019 younger and middle-aged refugees (1.8 hours each) spent slightly more time on learning German than older refugees (1.5 hours). Overall, refugees continue to invest time in improving their German language skills even after an average of four years in Germany. Whether the Covid-19 pandemic contributes to either more or less time (e.g., due to increased childcare obligations) being spent on learning German is yet to be concluded.

German is increasingly spoken with friends

Improved German language skills can also open up the possibility for refugees to more frequently use German in their everyday life, e.g., when conversing with friends or consuming news. Reciprocal relations can be assumed here, as it can for instance be possible that both better German language skills make it easier to establish contact with Germans (see the next section) and that German language skills improve as a result of increased contact with Germans (Martinovic et al. 2009). Therefore, since 2017 we have been capturing which language refugees use when they inform themselves about world events in the media or talk to their friends.¹²

In 2019, the native language of the respondents still dominates with 67 percent when it comes to obtaining news via the media (Figure 10); German plays only a subordinate role with five percent in exclusive use and 11 percent in combined use.¹³ There might be diverse

possible reasons for this, such as insufficient knowledge about the German-language news landscape, increased linguistic demands in the reception of news or even limited coverage of certain world regions in the German media (Ranger 2019). As local news became more important during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example in relation to regulations and restrictions, changes in favor of German news could be possible. Future data from 2020 and 2021 may provide more information on this.

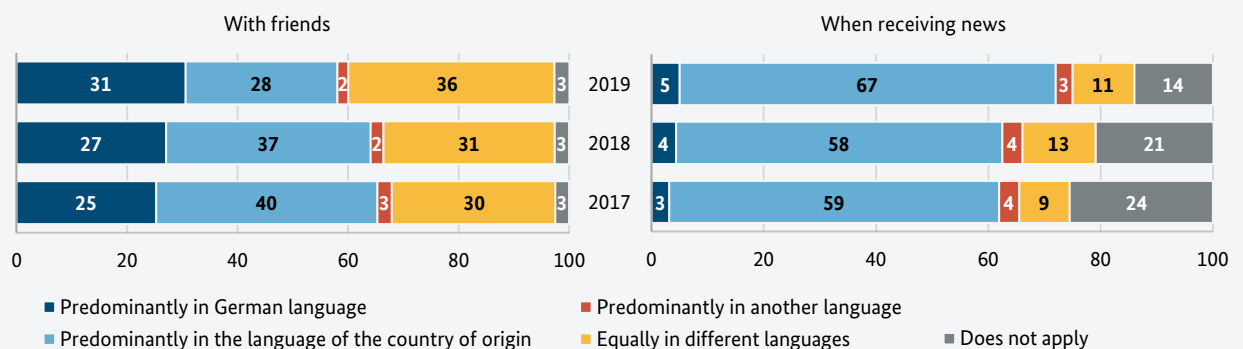
Using German in conversations with friends might be clearly less demanding. Thus, over the period of 2017 to 2019 the share of persons who predominantly communicate with friends in German or equally in different languages is increasing. In 2019, nearly a third (31 percent) of the refugees surveyed communicated with friends predominantly in German and more than a third (36 percent) communicate with friends in different languages. Twenty-eight percent mainly used their native language. Thus, in 2019, a large proportion of refugees are already making use of the opportunity to use, expand or consolidate their acquired German skills through exchanges with friends. However, far-reaching contact restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic may impair these developments. Analyses of the different subgroups also reveal a similar pattern to that of German language acquisition: For example, women, lower-educated and older refugees are less likely than men, higher-educated and younger refugees to report using German predominantly or equally in exchange with their friends in 2019 (not shown¹⁴).

12 Refugees could indicate here whether they communicate mainly in German, their native language, another language or equally in different languages. In addition, the respondents had the option of stating "does not apply" if they could not assign themselves to any of the possible answers.

13 However, the high proportion of respondents who said "does not apply" to this question in 2017 to especially 2018 and also 2019 could be an indication that this question was difficult for respondents to understand. An alternative explanation would be that these respondents do not consume news via media.

14 The illustrations not shown in this Brief Analysis can be obtained from the authors.

Figure 10: Language(s) used to communicate with friends and consume news (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2017-2019, v36, data weighted.

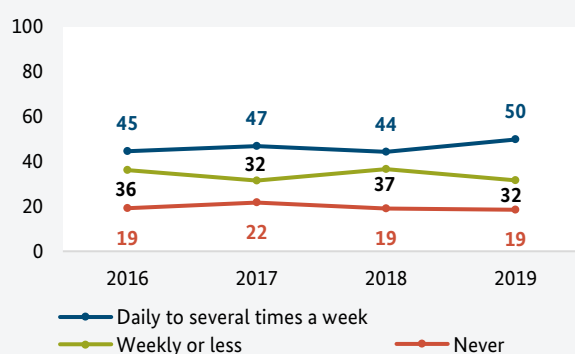
Refugees' social contacts

With the increase in refugees' German skills shown in the previous section, an important premise for communication with the receiving society has improved (Martinovic et al. 2009), especially since German is also increasingly spoken among friends (Figure 10). Therefore, the extent of contact between refugees and Germans is examined below by looking at how often refugees spend time with Germans and how the frequency of contact has developed over the years—and also in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the extent of Germans being part of refugees' close social networks is examined. The frequency with which time is spent with Germans is used as an indicator of the extent of refugees' contacts with people who have lived in Germany for a longer period of time. It should be noted that no statements can be made about whom the refugees identify as "Germans".

Refugees increasingly spend time with Germans

From 2016 to 2019, the proportion of refugees who frequently spend time with Germans, i.e., several times a week to daily, increased from 45 to 50 percent (Figure 11). The proportion of those who occasionally spend time with Germans decreased by a similar amount over the same period, from 36 to 32 percent, while the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans remained stable at 19 percent.

Figure 11: Frequency of time spent with Germans (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016–2019, v36, data weighted.

German skills and employment are closely related to the frequency of contact with Germans

In line with previous research, the last section has shown that the level and development of German language skills can vary depending on education, age, gender and the age of children living in the household. Since these characteristics have also proved to be significant in other contexts, the question arises to what extent they are also related to the frequency with which time is spent with Germans, independent of German language skills and other aspects such as employment or residency length. Therefore, a multivariate analysis is employed to examine which correlations exist between the frequency of contact with Germans and these characteristics as well as other factors in the survey year of 2019.

As expected, the frequency with which time is spent with Germans increases with increasing German language skills (see Appendix: Table A3). Employment continues to play a central role. Non-employed refugees spend significantly less time with Germans than refugees who are employed (including apprenticeships and internships). Furthermore, it is evident that refugees living in shared accommodations spend less time with Germans than refugees living in private accommodations.

With regard to further social contacts, it becomes clear that spending time with people from one's own country of origin or with people from other countries excludes spending time with Germans at the same time. The number of close persons with whom personal matters can be discussed is also positively related to the frequency of time is spent with Germans. One possible reason for these correlations could be that the more contacts there are, the more opportunities there are to meet more people.

With regard to age and marital status, results show that male refugees spend more time with Germans than female refugees with children, but not more than female refugee without children. There are also differences between age groups, yet only the difference between younger and older refugees is statistically significant. Thus, it seems reasonable to differentiate in relation to levels of German language skills as well as the family situation in the following analyses.

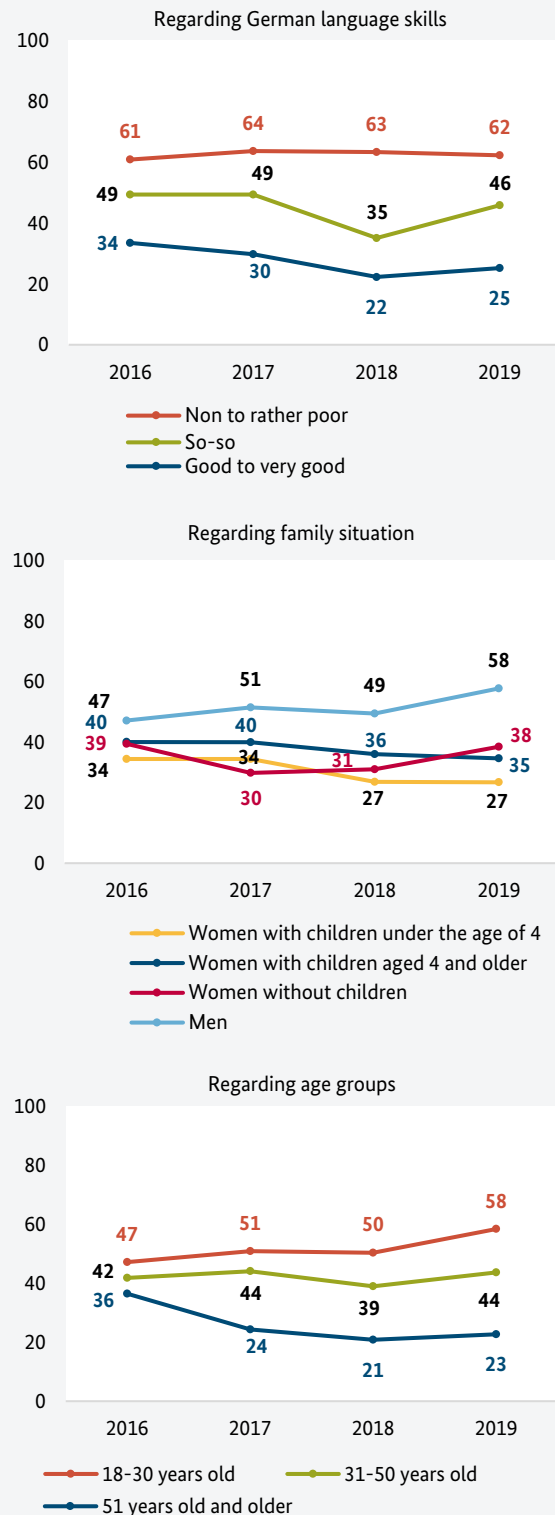
Especially male and younger refugees spend more time with Germans

As expected, the proportion of those who frequently spend time with Germans is higher, the better the refugees assess their German language skills in the respective survey year (Figure 12): Between 2016 and 2019, these proportions remain largely stable among those with at least good German language skills. For those with intermediate German skills, the proportion decreases slightly from 49 to 46 percent. Among those with poor German skills, the proportion also decreases over time by around nine percentage points from 34 percent in 2016 to 25 percent in 2019. As a result, the gap with those with good German skills also slightly increases. In addition, among those with average or poor German skills, the share of those who never spend time with Germans increases over time (not shown). Among those with poor German skills, the proportion increases by about 11 percentage points to 40 percent, and among those with intermediate skills it increases by nine percentage points to 21 percent. Yet, for those with good to very good skills, the share remains largely stable at around eight percent (2016) and nine percent (2019).

As already noted above (p. 5), it must be taken into account that no individual courses are traced, and rather how the situation presents itself for the individual subgroups per year is illustrated here. However, the different subgroups can change over time. In particular, the group of those with poor German language skills becomes smaller and smaller, since German skills in this group also improve over time and the persons concerned change to the group of those with intermediate or even good German language skills. The trends shown can thus also be partly attributed to the changed composition of the subgroups.

Among male refugees, the proportion of those who frequently spend time with Germans is consistently higher than among females and has increased by around 11 percentage points between 2016 and 2019. Among female refugees without children, the proportion remains largely stable but it decreases among female refugees with children. At just under seven percentage points, the decline is most pronounced among women with at least one child under the age of four. Overall, this leads to an increase in the gap between male and female refugees. Here, too, the trend is reinforced by the development in the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans. While the share among men decreases by around three percentage points from 2016 to 2019 to 14 percent and remains largely stable among women without children at 24 percent (2016) and 23

Figure 12: Proportion of refugees with frequent contact with Germans, by survey year and various characteristics (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2016-2019, v36, data weighted.

percent (2019), it increases by seven percentage points to 30 percent among women with young children and by around six percentage points to 28 percent among women with older children.

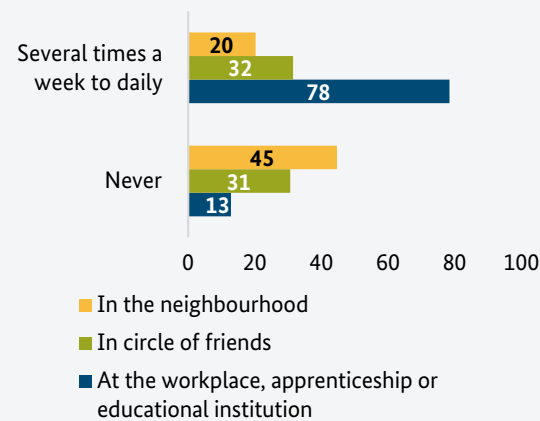
The proportion of refugees who frequently spend time with Germans is highest in the youngest age group and lowest in the oldest age group at all times of the survey. The difference between the oldest subgroup and the middle-aged subgroup is greater than between the middle-aged and the youngest. Over time, the proportion of those who frequently spend time with Germans increases slightly in the middle-aged group and most strongly in the youngest subgroup. Yet, in the oldest subgroup there is a proportion decrease of 13 percentage points. This leads to an increase in the difference between older and younger refugees. This is also reinforced by the fact that among the older refugees, the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans has increased by around eight percentage points since 2016 to 37 percent, while among the younger refugees it has remained stable at 17 percent (2016) and 16 percent (2019) (not shown).

Frequent contacts with Germans are most likely to happen at the workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution, least likely in the neighborhood

In the survey year 2019, 78 percent of employed refugees or refugees undergoing job training have frequent contact with Germans at their workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution, nearly a third (32 percent) of all refugees have frequent contact with Germans in their circle of friends, and a fifth (20 percent) of all refugees have frequent contact with German neighbors (Figure 13). The workplace, apprenticeship and the educational institution thus play a central role in the development and consolidation of contacts between refugees and Germans. This is also reflected in the fact that only 13 percent of refugees who are employed or in job training state that they never spend time with Germans at work, apprenticeship or educational institution in 2019. The importance of the workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution is probably due to the fact that there are sufficient contact opportunities between Germans and refugees there and that these contacts are unavoidable—at least to a certain extent.

In contrast, neighborhoods seem to play a rather subordinate role in contacts between refugees and Germans. This is reflected not only in the comparatively small proportion of refugees who frequently spend time with

Figure 13: Frequency of contact with Germans in different areas in 2019 (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2019, v36, data weighted.

Germans in this context (20 percent), but also in the high proportion of those who never do so (45 percent).

A comparison between 2017 and 2019 shows that in 2019, the proportion of those who spend time with Germans has increased in the circle of friends and, to a lesser extent, in the neighborhood (2017: 21 percent frequently and 50 percent never; circle of friends 2017: 29 percent frequently and 38 percent never). In contrast, the proportion has slightly decreased at work, apprenticeship or educational institution (2017: 85 percent frequently and 11 percent never). Nevertheless, the pattern, that frequent contacts are most likely to take place at work, apprenticeship or educational institution and least likely in the neighborhood, has not changed.

In all areas surveyed—workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution, circle of friends, neighborhood—the proportion of those who frequently spend time with Germans in 2019 is higher, the better the self-assessed German skills are (Figure 14). The highest proportions in all three sub-groups are found at workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution and the lowest in neighborhoods. It is worth noting that those with poor German skills have mainly contact with Germans at the workplace apprenticeship or educational institution, while the other two areas hardly play any role. Thus, of those with poor German skills, only 12 percent frequently spend time with German in circle of friends, while 53 percent never do so. Yet, among those with good German skills the proportions are 43 percent (frequently) and 19 percent (never). However, it must also be taken into account that only 15 percent of those with poor German skills, and thus comparatively few, are employed or in training (good to very good German

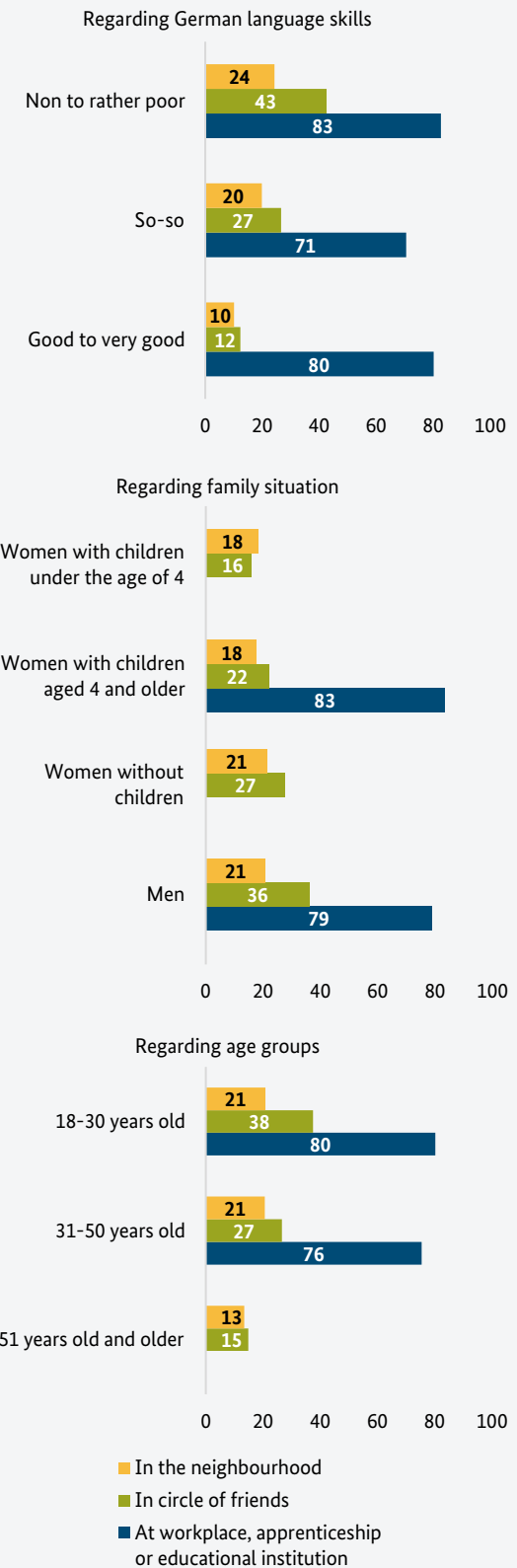
skills: 51 percent, average German skills: 41 percent). This means that for the vast majority of refugees with poor German skills contact opportunities with Germans seem to be rare.

With regard to the family situation, female refugees have similarly frequent contact with Germans in the neighborhood as male refugees, but much less in their circle of friends. Female refugees with older children, who are employed or in job training even have slightly more contact with Germans at workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution than male refugees. However, the proportion of female refugees with older children, who are employed or in education is significantly smaller than that of male refugees (17 to 52 percent). No reliable statements can be made about the frequency of contact with Germans at the workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution among female refugee with young children or no children due to the small number of cases. In particular, female refugees with young children are hardly ever employed or in job training (five percent). However, while for all other subgroups the neighborhood plays a subordinate role for contacts with Germans compared to the other areas, female refugees with young children have contacts with Germans mainly in their neighborhood (18 percent). Yet, the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans in the neighborhood hardly differs from the ones among the other subgroups (women with young children: 45 percent; women with older children: 44 percent; women without children: 48 percent; men: 45 percent).

The findings for age groups show a similar picture as the findings for the subgroups sorted by the level of German language skills. Similarly, contacts take place most frequently at workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution and least frequently in the neighborhoods. However, regarding age groups, it is the young refugees who have the most contacts in all areas and the older refugees who have the fewest. Yet, it should be noted that an evaluation of the frequency of contact with Germans at the workplace is not possible for the older refugees due to the small number of cases.

Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the data reflects the situation in 2019. In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, which reached Germany at the beginning of 2020, extensive contact restrictions came into force, which are likely to have influenced contacts between refugees and Germans. Since the frequency of contact with Germans was also surveyed as part of the Covid-19 supplementary survey, it is possible to

Figure 14: Proportion of refugees with frequent contact with Germans in different areas in 2019 regarding different characteristics (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees 2019, v36, data weighted.

EXCURSUS 2: SOCIAL CONTACTS DURING THE COVID-19-PANDEMIC

A comparison of the information provided by those who took part in both the main survey of 2019 and the Covid-19 supplementary survey shows that the proportion of those who frequently spend time with Germans in 2020 has decreased significantly (Figure 15). At the same time, the share of those who occasionally or never spend time with Germans has increased.

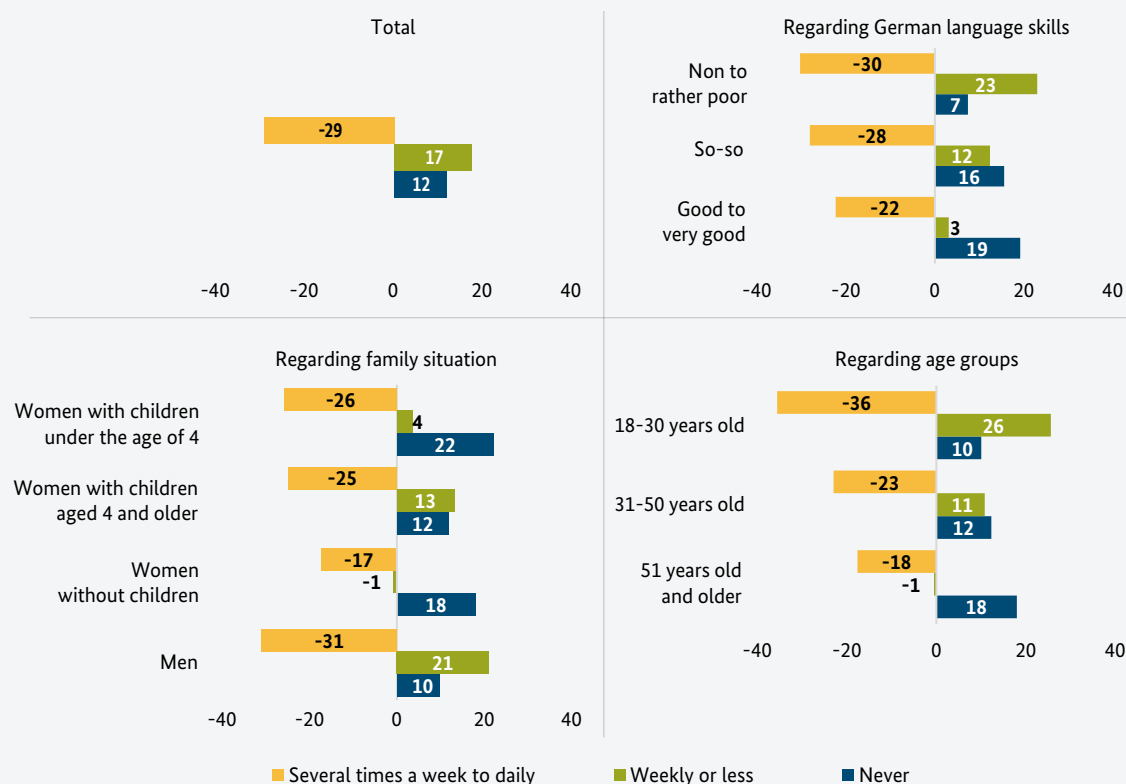
Among younger refugees and refugees with at least a good command of German, the proportion of those who frequently spend time with Germans shifts mainly towards those who have weekly contacts at most. However, the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans increases relatively slightly. The situation is different for those with poor German language skills and older refugees, who rarely spend time with Germans generally. Here, the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans is increasing.

Among male refugees and female refugees with older children, there is also a shift from frequent to occasional contact. The situation is different for female refugees

without children or with young children, where the proportion of those who spend time with Germans frequently decreases and in return the proportion of those who never spend time with Germans increases almost exclusively.

Thus, the results suggest that refugees are spending less time with Germans in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic—a result that is plausible and expected against the background of the recommended and prescribed contact restrictions to contain the spread of the infection. However, there are also indications that contacts have decreased particularly among groups that already had little contact with Germans. Since only part of the original sample took part in the Covid-19 supplementary survey and the number of cases is comparatively small, especially among female refugees, the results must be interpreted with caution. They can also be applied to only a limited extent to the basic population of refugees in Germany.

Figure 15: Changes in the frequency of contact with Germans in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic regarding different characteristics (in percentage points)



Source: IAB-BAMF SOEP Survey of Refugees v36, 2019, and Covid-19 supplementary survey 2020, data weighted.

estimate what consequences the pandemic had on the contacts of refugees (see Excursus 2). However, it should be noted that there were comparatively few contact restrictions in the period of the supplementary survey (beginning of July to end of August 2020).

Number of close acquaintances has increased since 2017, number of German close acquaintances remains largely stable

The results so far only give a limited insight on the quality and intensity of the contacts. Even if time is frequently spent with Germans, these contacts can be rather superficial and non-committal. Only the time spent with Germans in the circle of friends may indicate that these contacts go beyond simple, casual encounters.

An indicator, which allows drawing conclusions about the quality of contacts and has been surveyed since 2017, is the proportion of Germans to the persons with whom the refugees share personal matters. In the survey year 2019, refugees name on average 2.4 people with whom they share personal thoughts and feelings (not shown). This compares to around 1.9 people in 2017 and 2018 (not shown). In all years, women tend to name more persons than men, although the gender differences are not statistically significant.

The persons with whom personal matters are discussed are mainly family members, especially among female refugees, for whom almost all close acquaintances are family members (not shown—see also BiB/BAMF 2021). This applied indicator for social contacts (i.e., question about persons with whom personal matters are shared) generally generates a relatively high share of family members named (Wolf 2006). However, at around 83 percent, it is particularly high among refugees. Yet, it must be taken into account that refugees have not been living in Germany for very long and many have therefore had little time to build up a close social network that extends beyond family members. Moreover, the proportion of Germans among close acquaintances in the survey year 2019 is around six percent and has hardly changed since 2017.

Refugees with good to very good German skills and younger refugees know more Germans with whom they can discuss personal matters than older refugees or refugees with poor German skills. Male refugees and female refugees with older children have a similar number of Germans with whom they can share personal matters. Female refugees without children and female refugees with children under four years of age also have a similar number of close German acquaintances, but both slightly fewer than the previous two groups. Overall, however,

the differences between the subgroups are small and mostly not statistically significant.

Thus, there are hardly any differences between the subgroups in terms of close acquaintances overall, which is to be expected since the development of close friendships takes time. Nevertheless, similar patterns to the other indicators can already be observed, which may also point to similar developments over time. This suggests that also here, older refugees, female refugees with (young) children and refugees with (still) poor German skills are at risk to further fall behind.

Summary and conclusion

Refugees report significant increases in their German language skills in the average time period of four years between their arrival in Germany and the survey year 2019. Almost half of all refugees report good or very good German skills in 2019, less than five percent report no skills and less than 15 percent report rather poor skills. This positive development is also due to rather frequent language course participation—by 2019 nine out of ten men and eight out of ten women have taken part in at least one language course. Seventy percent of the refugees have taken part in an integration course by 2019.

However, in-depth analyses show that these processes are not equally rapid and equally successful among all subgroups. The development from 2018 to 2019 shows further increases for refugees who more easily learn a language and access a language course, for those who already had a high command of German in 2018 and also for those who use the German language more frequently in everyday life. Such are the younger, better-educated and male refugees, but there are also certain saturation effects. The latter applies both to the level of German language skills and to the participation in integration courses. For these subgroups, the focus should be on further language learning support after the integration course and also accompanying work, e.g., in the context of vocational language courses, but also on further consolidation of existing language skills, e.g., in form of informal learning or by means of more flexible forms of learning such as online or less time-intensive course formats.

However, there are also subgroups of refugees who show a delayed start in language acquisition. This applies particularly to women with (young) children, who later or less frequently find access to an integration course, probably due to child care, and a limited amount of time to learn German. A slower progression—in some cases even despite course participation—is also found among

lower-educated and older refugees. Here, low-threshold opportunities to use the acquired language skills in everyday life still seem to be lacking. Nevertheless, progress can also be seen in these groups: Many have succeeded in building up an intermediate command of German and attending courses. Therefore, despite more challenging individual and structural conditions, the continuous, albeit slower successes within these groups appears remarkable. These progresses are likely to continue in the coming years, if the circumstances allow it and if tailor-made support services such as more flexible and low-threshold learning formats can be provided and used.

Compared to the development of German language skills, refugees' contacts with Germans have increased less strongly between 2016 and 2019. This slower progress is not surprising, as establishing contacts, especially close contacts, is linked to certain opportunities and sufficient German language skills. A positive development can generally be noticed by 2019. Similar to the area of language acquisition, an increase is observed, yet not in all subgroups. For older refugees, refugees with poorer German language skills and female refugees with young children, the proportions are stagnating or even declining. These groups are thus at risk of falling behind in social integration.

One possible reason for these developments could be that these subgroups take part in areas where they can interact with Germans less frequently. Frequent contacts with Germans are most likely to take place at the workplace, apprenticeship or educational institution, but least often in neighborhoods. Older refugees, refugees with poorer German language skills and female refugees with young children, however, are rarely employed, in education or job training. Thus, low-threshold courses or activities could offer a framework here in which contacts can be made. However, it would be important for language mediators to be present to facilitate the exchange. Overall, results highlight the importance of refugees learning German soon after arriving for the establishment of contacts between them and Germans.

With regard to the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on refugees' integration process, the results indicate that refugees spend less time with Germans in the wake of the pandemic and many fear that their German language skills would not improve further or would even worsen. This result is plausible and expected against the background of the recommended and prescribed contact restrictions to contain the spread of Covid-19, which initially also led to course interruptions, despite the fact that in the meantime in many cases, such as the integration course, language courses take place in various digital formats. However, there are also indications that

subgroups who already had poor German language skills or little contact with Germans would be particularly affected by the consequences of the pandemic, i.e., older refugees and female refugee with young children. Since only part of the original sample participated in the Covid-19 supplementary survey, the results shown must be interpreted with caution. They can only be applied to the population of refugees in Germany to a limited extent.

Hopefully, these changes will only be temporary and there will be more contacts and exchanges after the pandemic. Particularly older refugees, refugees with poorer German language skills and female refugees especially with young children were already facing greater challenges in language acquisition, course participation and social integration before the pandemic. Since German language skills and social contacts are central to the social participation of refugees in Germany, these results once again point to the importance of language support and the promotion of contact opportunities and eliminating the obstacles blocking the way in these matters.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Distributions in the population regarding central characteristics (in percent)

		2016	2017	2018	2019
Familiensituation	Women with children under the age of 4	9	11	12	12
	Women with children aged 4 and older	9	10	10	12
	Women without children	9	8	8	7
	Men	73	71	70	69
Educational background^a	Low	39	41	40	44
	Intermediate	42	42	43	40
	High	17	17	17	16
Age	18-30 years old	59	59	57	53
	31-50 years old	35	35	37	41
	51 years old and older	6	6	7	7
Employment related to gender	Men employed	16	27	44	52
	Men unemployed	84	73	56	48
	Women employed	5	6	11	13
	Women unemployed	95	94	89	87

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees 2019, v36, data weighted.

Notes: ^a Educational background classified according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 (see footnote 5 in report).

Table A2: Influences on German language skills - OLS regression

Factors	Coefficient	Sig.
Motivation		
Employment	0.048	
Time spent on German acquisition in hours	0.119	***
Occasion		
Participation in a language course	0.980	***
Length of residence in Germany in years	0.235	*
Contact with Germans ^a	0.427	***
Living in shared accommodation	-0.552	**
Family situation (Ref.: women with children under the age of 4)		
Women with children aged 4 and older	0.867	***
Women without children	0.923	**
Men	1.049	***
Efficiency		
Age	-0.167	***
Age squared	0.001	**
Educational background ^b (Ref.: low)		
intermediate	0.882	***
high	1.902	***
Primary and functional illiteracy at arrival	-1.716	***
Satisfaction with health ^c	0.071	
Further control variables ^d	✓	
Constants	5.876	***
R ²	0.45	
Total	3,663	

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2019, v36, data weighted.

Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable: Aggregate index of German language skills in reading, speaking, writing from 0 to 12; ^a Contact measured on a 6-point scale (1 “never” to 6 “daily”); ^b Educational background classified according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 (see footnote 5 in report); ^c Satisfaction with health measured on an 11-point scale (0 “very bad” to 10 “very good”); ^d Other control variables are: Residence status, Country of origin. Significance levels: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. The full results can be obtained from the authors.

Table A3: Influences on the frequency of spending time with Germans - OLS regression

Influencing factors	Coefficient	Sig.
German language skills (Ref. : good to very good)		
Intermediate German skills	-0.498	***
Poor to no German skills	-0.971	***
Age (Ref. : 18-30 years old)		
31-50 years old	-0.170	
51 years old and older	-0.433	*
Family situation (Ref.: Men)		
Women without children	-0.191	
Women with children under the age of 4	-0.452	**
Women with children aged 4 and older	-0.495	**
Partner living in household	-0.006	
(Ref.: no partner in the household)		
Employment (Ref.: fully employed)	0.023	
Limited employment/apprenticeship/internship	-0.870	***
Economically inactive	-0.316	*
Living in shared accommodation		
(Ref.: living in private accommodation)		
Number of close acquaintances	0.116	**
Contacts with people from the country of origin	-0.037	
Contacts with people from other countries	0.238	***
Other control variables ^a	✓	
Constants	4.310	***
R2	0.26	
Total	3,445	

Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2019, v36, data weighted.

Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable: Contacts with Germans measured on a 6-point scale (1 “never” to 6 “daily”). Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. ^a Further control variables are: Country of origin, residence status, length of residence in Germany in years, level of education. The complete results can be obtained from the authors.

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