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"Thank God, I don't feel like a refugee anymore"

Everyday life and integration processes of refugees

Simone Christ \ BICC

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SUMMARY

This study deals with the integration processes of refugees in Germany, taking the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia in particular into consideration. It examines what arriving in Germany is like, how refugees perceive their lives here and what challenges they face in their everyday lives. The focus is on how refugees themselves experience their integration processes. The *Working Paper* compares the experiences of people who fled to Germany quite some time—about 20 to 40 years—ago with those of people who arrived after 2014. This long-term perspective makes it possible to identify consistencies and changes over time.

At the same time, it shows clearly how asylum restrictions affect people's lives. The author does not view integration as an adjustment to be solely made by refugees and other migrants but as an interactionist and open-ended process with the goal of equitable participation in society. In this qualitative study, she has methodically linked participatory observation in a refugee shelter with biographical interviews and interviews with experts.

INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

Main findings

The participation of refugees in society largely depends on the conditions of asylum legislation

Until about 2015, the integration of asylum seekers and refugees was not politically desired. Restrictive laws, such as the prohibition of employment, hindered integration into the labour market. In the past two years, many conditions have changed, especially regarding access to the labour market. However, bureaucratic categorisations into "good" and "bad" prospects of remaining create hierarchical differences between asylum seekers that significantly influence access to integration measures (such as language courses), as well as to the labour market.

Integration processes take place along diverse lines of differentiation

Integration processes are not uniform but rather depend on diverse factors. For example, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, social class and legal status make big differences, which are often coupled with structural disadvantages. The understanding of the role of women and especially of mothers—not only in the various countries of origin but also in Germany—means, for example, that given the lack of childcare places, women are discriminated against, especially when it comes to access to language acquisition and the labour market.

Refugees view learning the language as the key to participation in society

For refugees, learning German is crucial. First, refugees regard knowledge of German as a "key" that provides access to a wide range of social areas—for example, the labour market or social contacts—or creates exclusion. Second, participation in a language course helps many people find their way into a structured everyday life. However, access to official language courses for asylum seekers and refugees varies widely and depends heavily on the mechanisms of asylum legislation. For example, only asylum seekers with "good prospects of remaining" can take part in integration courses that include a language course.

Many refugees want to work, but their access to the labour market is restricted

By taking up work, refugees can regain a self-determined life, as it allows them to have their own income and to rebuild their professional identity. However, access to the labour market strongly depends on asylum regulations. Even recognised refugees whose access to the labour market is not restricted, find it difficult to get work. Frequently, they were not able to take certificates with them when leaving their country, or, if they do have them, it is difficult to get them recognised. Well-qualified refugees often experience a devaluation of their professional qualifications. Support from volunteers, therefore, plays an important role when it comes to accessing the labour market. The volunteers accompany the refugees to appointments with the authorities, for example, or help them write their job applications, mediate between employers and employees if difficulties arise, and provide emotional support. However, such support should not depend on "luck" but must become institutionalised and professionalised.

Living in your own apartment is an important step towards an independent life

While living in a shared accommodation centre is usually perceived as being burdensome, moving into a private apartment promises a return to a more independent life. But when searching for an apartment, refugees are exposed to a wide variety of discriminatory practices.

Only very few find an apartment via formal channels. Here, too, support from volunteers is of pivotal importance.

Local and transnational networks shape the everyday life of refugees

Refugees have diverse social relationships at the local as well as the transnational level. At the local level, for example, they have contacts with volunteers, neighbours or other refugees, many of whom come from the same country of origin. Often, they also cultivate friendships with refugees from other countries of origin. But at the same time, maintaining existing social relations is crucial for becoming settled in Germany. The lives of refugees are, after all, rarely rooted exclusively in their current place of residence, but also encompass a variety of transnational and translocal relationships with their relatives, acquaintances and friends in various places around the world. Integration policies must, therefore, acknowledge the transnational reality of the lives of refugees. For example, the obligation to support family members in crisis regions or refugee camps can lead to refugees taking up work in the low-paid sector to earn money as quickly as possible, rather than making use of educational and training opportunities that would be better paid in the long term. The restrictions on family reunification can hinder integration, as those affected perceive the separation from their family to be a major psychological burden.

The sense of belonging does not follow an either-or pattern

The feeling of belonging and being at home has multiple facets that depend on many factors and can change over time. Refugees feel that they belong to specific countries, but also to specific places such as a city or just a district. For some, this is the result of their social relationships. Residence status, which can be more or less secure, also influences the sense of belonging, which can change over time, especially in connection with key biographical events such as the birth of one's children. Ultimately, many refugees consider their home to be the place where they find peace and freedom.

Integration does not necessarily lead to inclusion, but can still mean exclusion

Integration seen from the perspective of the refugees themselves has different facets: First and foremost, the learning of the language, a regular everyday structure from the very beginning, and mutual engagement of both sides. Integration is not to be equated with assimilation and should be understood as participation. For many, however, the pressure of the dominant socio-political discourse gives rise to the feeling that they have to make up for deficits and adapt to the majority society. But despite being “well-integrated”, the label of “stranger” or “foreigner” often remains, which means nothing more than protracted exclusion.

On a conceptual level, integration theories must take greater account of the reality of the lives of refugees

Social science theories on integration and assimilation assume a gradual and one-sided adaptation of migrants to the host society. Although these theoretical 'phased-models' of integration have a powerful influence on political discourse, they display a large discrepancy to the everyday lives of refugees and are not conclusive enough to accurately describe the complex everyday experiences of refugees. Instead, more attention must be paid to the lines of differentiation (e.g. on the basis of legal status, age, gender, origin) in integration processes, and integration must be understood as interaction and participation.

Introduction

> *Integration was not officially intended for asylum seekers; they were not to be encouraged to move here. The highly restrictive system for asylum seekers and 'tolerated' persons (Geduldete) which was created between 1980 and 1993 had a disintegrative effect. It prevented asylum seekers from developing initiatives and leading productive lives (Thränhardt, 2015, p. 10).*[1]

This research finding, which refers to the situation before 2015, appears surprising, given the large number of initiatives, projects and programmes that have since been dedicated to the integration of refugees.[2] At the same time, it seems familiar, as integration policies and legislation clearly distinguish between people whose integration is desired and those who are excluded from it. What do refugees' integration processes look like? What are the similarities and differences between past and present integration processes?

This study[3] aims to illustrate how integration processes of refugees in Germany are taking place. In doing so, it refers in particular to the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia.[4] This study does not understand integration as a one-sided effort to adapt, but rather as an interactionist and open-ended process with the aim of equitable participation in society. The focus is on how people who have fled their homes subjectively experience their integration processes. The study examines what arriving in Germany is like, how refugees perceive their lives in Germany, and what challenges they face in their everyday lives.

To this end, the study relates the experiences of refugees from different periods of time. It compares the experiences of people who fled to North Rhine-Westphalia some time (around 20 to 40 years) ago with those of people who arrived after 2014. Through this long-term perspective, consistencies and changes over time can be identified. It also shows which restrictions under asylum law continue to affect people's lives.[5] Methodologically, this qualitative study combines participatory observation in a refugee shelter in North Rhine-Westphalia with biographical interviews in NRW and additional interviews with experts.

My hypothesis for this study is that the structural conditions of the asylum system strongly influence the everyday life of refugees. The asylum regime is determined by the respective national reactions to refugee and migration movements with regard to rules, norms, laws and decision-making processes (Betts, 2015; Pott, Rass & Wolff, 2018). In this study, therefore, "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1987) are intended to focus on the realities of refugees' lives, which have been shaped by the asylum system yet are nonetheless diverse.

It is important to me to look at everyday life and the integration processes of refugees from a holistic perspective. The focus will, therefore, not be on any one specific dimension, for example the housing market (see Table 1 on research literature, p. 10), but instead provide an insight into the entire range of everyday life. The study will illustrate the importance the refugees themselves attach to the facets of this everyday life, for instance why access to the labour market is so important for leading an autonomous life. It will become clear that everyday life does not differ much among the various groups of refugees, which were selected according to certain criteria, but that common ground dominates.

1 \ When not otherwise noted, quotes have been translated into English.

2 \ The term "refugee" is used in this *Working Paper* when it refers to people who have applied for asylum in Germany and to people who refer to themselves as refugees.

3 \ My thanks go to the participants of my study who so openly told me about their lives or shared their knowledge with me as experts. I would also like to thank my colleagues at BICC for their constructive comments while writing this study. The English version is a translation and update of the German original publication of April 2019.

4 \ The study is part of the project "Between civil war and integration—Refugees and the challenges and opportunities of societal change in NRW which is funded by the North Rhine-Westphalia State Ministry of Culture and Science.

5 \ The legal framework of the last 40 years has been in constant flux. In addition, the conditions vary greatly depending on the legal status of the individuals (sometimes also depending on key-date regulations). The text, therefore, presents general trends in the framework conditions of asylum law that are primarily intended to put the individual experiences of refugees into context.

In the following, after an overview of the state of research, I will give a historical outline of the history of the German asylum regime and show that the integration of refugees had been unwelcome for a long time. The subsequent insight into the discourses in the social sciences and in the public on integration will show that integration is understood to be an individual obligation to be met and a process of adaptation to be undertaken by migrants and refugees. This understanding of integration is based on classical theories on integration and assimilation, which are strongly criticised today. The presentation of my methodological approach is followed by the empirical part of the *Working Paper.* It describes the arrival in Germany with its different facets, both from the perspective of those who have fled since 2014 and from those who already fled a long time ago. These facets include, for example, learning a new language, looking for work, the desire to take responsibility for one's own life or building relationships at the local and transnational level. I will show that the day-to-day life of refugees stands in stark contrast to the dominant social, political and socio-scientific discourse. Therefore, I will formulate further theoretical considerations against the background of the real experiences of the everyday life of refugees.

State of research on the integration of refugees

Over the past four years, numerous studies have been published that focus on the integration of refugees. Some of the studies are based on the annual IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey, which was first conducted in 2016 as part of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). The interviewees were people who had applied for asylum in Germany between 1 January 2013 and 31 January 2016, as well as members of their households. Thus, generalised statements can be made (Brücker, Rother & Schupp, 2016a; 2016b).

These studies usually focus on a specific dimension of integration such as language, vocational and school qualifications, as well as higher education, the labour market, the housing and accommodation situation and the role of volunteers. Only few studies offer a comprehensive view of different areas of everyday life (e.g. research unit at the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration [SVR-Forschungsbereich, 2017]).

The analyses of the 2013 IAB-SOEP migration survey and the resulting studies provided information for the first time about the participation of refugees in society who came to Germany between 1990 and 2010. The refugees interviewed had been in Germany for an average of 18 years (Eisnecker et al., 2016; Eisnecker & Schacht, 2016; Giesecke, Kroh, Salikutluk, Eisnecker & Özer, 2017; Liebau & Schacht, 2016).

Before 2016, very few studies had addressed the situation of refugees; their integration was hardly ever a topic of academic discussion (Aumüller & Bretl, 2008, pp. 15-16). Many studies in social sciences focused primarily on the situation of displaced persons and refugees in the context of the end of World War II (Lüttinger, 1986). Quantitative studies were almost non-existent, as the official statistical studies did not identify or record refugees separately (Johansson, 2016, pp. 11-12). However, there are hardly any qualitative studies on the situation of refugees either, with just a few exceptions (Aycha, 1996; Täubig, 2009; Wirtgen, 1999; Johansson, 2016, p. 12).

Studies that deal with the situation of the diaspora, that is scattered national groups, some of which also include refugees, are more common. They refer to, for example, the Vietnamese (Beuchling, 2003; Ha, 2012; Schaland, 2015; Wolf, 2007), Afghan (Akkoor, 2011; Barauline, Bommes, El-Cherkeh, Daume, & Vadean, 2006; Daxner & Silvia-Lucretia, 2017), Egyptian (Barauline et al., 2006), Bosnian (Bilal, 2007; Graafland,

Table 1
Studies on the integration of refugees

Language	Educational and vocational qualification and higher education	Labour market	Housing situation and accommodation	Volunteer work
Brücker. Rother, & Schupp, 2016a; Hünlich, Wolfer, Lang, & Deppermann, 2018; Liebau & Schacht, 2016; Scheible, 2018	*Aver, 2017;Brücker, Rother, & Schupp., 2016a; Lambert, Blumenthal, & Beigang, 2018; Rich, 2016*	*Brücker, 2018; Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2018; Eisnecker & Schacht, 2016, 2016; Erler, Prytula, & Grotheer, 2018; Etzold, 2017; Kaabel, 2017; Knapp et al., 2017; Thränhardt, 2015; Wiedner, Salikutluk & Giesecke, 2018*	*Baier & Siegert, 2018; Bauer, 2017; Christ, Meininghaus, & Röing, 2017; Dilger, Dohrn, & Space, 2016; Elle & Hess, 2018; Engelmann & Raabe, 2017; Foroutan, Hamann, El-Kayed, & Jorek, 2017; Hofmann & Scherr, 2018; Schulze, 2017; Vey, 2018*	*Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2017; Karakayali, 2018; Karakayali & Kleist, 2016*

2012), Serbian (Barauline et al., 2006), Kurdish (Baser, 2013; Körsgen, 1999; Ottersbach, 1999), Tamil (Baumann, 2000), Ethiopian (Schlenzka, 2009; Warnecke & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2010), Eritrean (Conrad, 2010), or Sri Lankan (Told, 2014) diasporas. The topics examined in these studies include diaspora organisations, the integration of diasporas into development processes in the country of origin and political activism or religion.

On the other hand, forced migration studies examine the local integration of refugees in asylum countries in a global context (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Gale, 2008; Kuch, 2016; Milner, 2014; Rudolf & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2018). Local integration is viewed as one of three solutions to the problem of protracted displacement situations, along with voluntary return to the country of origin, and resettlement to a safe third country (Hovil, 2014). Comprehensive local integration in the understanding of UNHCR is the concession of rights (e.g. work permit, access to education), of economic participation and social inclusion (for instance no discrimination [Crisp, 2004]). It is in part equated with obtaining citizenship in the country of arrival, which is a realistic option for only a fraction of refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees–UNHCR, 2019). Generally speaking, this is not the case in Germany.

It should be noted that the studies from the two research fields mentioned above—integration of refugees in Germany and forced migration studies on local integration in a global context—seldom refer to one another.

The changing German asylum system

The following historical outline shows that whether refugees are accepted into society or are socially and politically excluded depends on the current legal framework conditions and the political climate.

Article 16 paragraph (2), sentence 2 Grundgesetz (German Basic Law, the constitution-GG), which was in force from 1949 to 1993, ("Politically persecuted persons enjoy the right of asylum") is a reaction to the treatment of German refugees during the Nazi regime and constituted the most open asylum law worldwide (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, p. 86). Due to the increasing number of asylum seekers, it was first restricted in practice and later also in the GG. The "asylum compromise" must be viewed against the background of the increase in the number of asylum seekers and the Treaty of Dublin at the European Community level in 1990 (The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration – SVR, 2017, pp. 24-25); it was adopted in 1993. In the process, an amendment was made to the GG, and as a result, the number of asylum seekers fell significantly in the following years. The currently valid Article 16a GG considerably limits the fundamental right to asylum. Now, the right to asylum no longer applies to persons entering from an EU member state or via "safe third countries". As a result, legal entry for asylum seekers has become practically impossible (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, p. 113).

Until the early 1970s, most asylum seekers came from Eastern Europe, for example after the suppression of the uprisings in Hungary and Poland in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. However, the number of applications was low (see Figure 3). The reception of refugees from Eastern Europe should also be considered in the context of the East-West conflict; it was politically desired as a sign of the supposed superiority of the Western system (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, p. 86). Between 1979 and 1981, the number of applications for asylum increased due to the military coup in Turkey in 1980 and the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981 (Münz, Seifert & Ulrich, 1999, p. 54). At the same time, the fundamental right to asylum for politically persecuted persons had been further restricted since the 1970s. While previously the motives of the persecuted had justified the claim to asylum, now the reasons given by the persecuting state were decisive (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, p. 87). Integration of refugees in the sense of participation was not wanted: Asylum seekers were not allowed to work in the first twelve months of the asylum procedure, they mostly received allowances in kind, and had to live in shared accommodation facilities (SVR, 2017, p. 24).

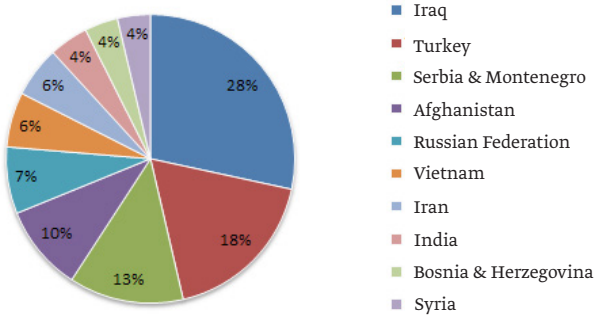
From the mid-1970s onwards, after the conquest of Saigon by communist North Vietnam, Vietnamese people fleeing in small boats across the South China Sea received a lot of media attention. Also influenced by the East-West conflict, the German federal government agreed to accept 38,000 Vietnamese refugees who were granted the legal status of refugees and a permanent residence permit (Oltmer, 2016, p. 38).

The majority of those seeking protection since the 1980s have come from Turkey following the military coup in 1980, from Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, as well as from Poland after the introduction of martial law (1981–1983) and the break-up of the Solidarnosc movement. In the mid-1980s, many Tamils from Sri Lanka—as well as Kurds from Turkey, Iran and Iraq—applied for asylum (SVR, 2017, p. 24). Due to the increase in the number of asylum seekers, various measures were introduced in the mid-1980s to limit the number of asylum applications (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, p. 88). Furthermore, potential integration was strictly prohibited by the German state (Thränhardt, 2015, p. 10). From 1987, asylum seekers had been banned from working for five years. Although this ban was lifted in 1991, the principle of "prioritising nationals", according to which jobs could only be given to asylum seekers if no "nationals" were available, made it extremely difficult for asylum seekers to take up employment (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, p. 87). As a result of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the wars in this region, around 3.7 million people were displaced. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995 in particular, many people fled to Germany; around 340,000 refugees from there were living here in 1997 (Oltmer, 2016, p. 39).

In the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999, the EU member states arranged a communitisation of migration and asylum politics, such as the binding nature of international agreements like the Geneva Convention on Refugees within the European Union. The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force ten years later, provided the basis for harmonising asylum policies within the European Union. The key legal instruments of the European Union are collected in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (SVR, 2017, p. 27). In 2015, the CEAS collapsed due to the sharp rise in the number of refugees. Temporarily, the Dublin Regulation was de facto no longer in effect (SVR, 2017, p. 30). In Germany, the large number of incoming refugees in 2015/16 met with already existing socio-political challenges. These were evident, for example, in the competition for childcare places, in schools, or in cities with a competitive housing market and little affordable housing for singles or families.

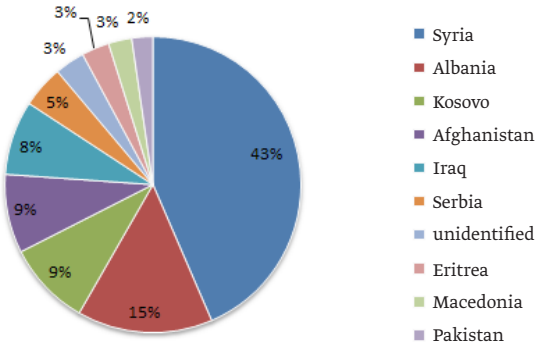
Between 2015 and 2017, in reaction to the sharp increase in asylum applications in Germany, there were changes to German asylum legislation which were generally restrictive and the most far-reaching changes to asylum laws since the amendment of the *Grundgesetz* in 1993. The maximum duration of a stay in initial reception centres, for example, was extended from three to six months; people "without a prospect of remaining" even have to live there until the end of the process and are no longer allocated to municipalities. In addition, family reunification for people entitled to subsidiary protection was suspended for two years in 2016. Since August 2018, family reunification has been possible again, but it is limited to a maximum of 1,000 people per month. Furthermore, the list of "safe countries of origin" was extended and deportations were made easier. At the same time, the

Figure 1
The ten nationalities with the most first-time asylum applications 2001



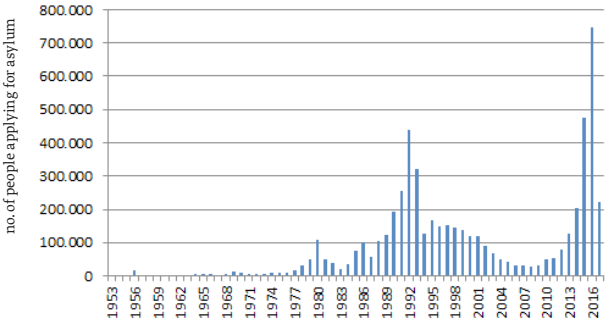
Source: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2011, p. 19

Figure 2
The ten nationalities with the most first-time asylum applications 2015



Source: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2018, p. 22

Figure 3
Development of numbers of people applying for asylum since 1953



Source: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2018, p. 13

so-called Integration Act of 2016 made it possible for those with a "tolerated" residence status to stay in Germany for the duration of their vocational training (Hanewinkel & Oltmer, 2017a). In addition, the so-called labour market test (*Vorrangprüfung*), according to which German employees are given preference over asylum seekers, was also suspended for three years in many regions.[6] After five years—in some cases even after three years—recognised refugees can obtain a permanent residence permit which is linked to certain integration measures (Hanewinkel & Oltmer, 2017b). Part of the Integration Act is the domicile requirement (*Wohnsitzauflage*). According to the Act, recognised refugees must live in their assigned place of residence for three years from the date of recognition. Throughout Germany, the domicile requirement relates to the borders of the federal states (Section 12a (1) sentence 1 Residence Act).[7] Going by its title, the Integration Act seems to suggest a change of perspective on integration. However, the Integration Act constitutes, "in contrast to the suggestion in its title, […] not a framework for a comprehensive integration policy, but rather contains detailed technical regulations devoted above all to the labour market integration of asylum seekers with good prospects of remaining[8] and recognised refugees" (Hanewinkel & Oltmer, 2017b).

The historical outline illustrates clearly how politicised refugee protection is in Germany. For example, due to the experiences of the Nazi regime, the German asylum law was designed to be very open; in the years that followed and in the context of the East-West antagonism, refugees who had fled from communist regimes were welcomed in Germany. Another trend seems to be that asylum law is being increasingly restricted as a result of the combination of rising numbers of refugees with an open swing of society to the political right. Only a very small number of people are currently granted asylum under the *Grundgesetz*. What was once the most generous asylum law guaranteed by the constitution in the world "has now become almost meaningless" (Ritgen, 2016). A look back at the history also shows that the integration of refugees—with a few exceptions such as the Vietnamese refugees—was not desired by the state. Instead, the lives of asylum seekers were marked by exclusion mechanisms, such as exclusion from the labour market. In recent years, many conditions have changed, especially regarding access to the labour market. However, bureaucratic categorisations into "good" and "bad prospects of remaining" are now creating hierarchical differences between asylum seekers that significantly affect access to integration measures. However, no consideration is taken of the fact that even people whose asylum applications have been rejected can, in many cases, not be deported and will live in Germany permanently.

6 \ The labour market test was abolished in 2019. The *Working Paper* considers legal and political developments until February 2019.

7 \ In the case of North Rhine-Westphalia, the residence requirement has been extended to include allocation to municipalities. Following the court action brought by an Iraqi whose relocation to his relatives was denied, the Higher Administrative Court of Münster overturned the municipal residence requirement in NRW in September 2018 (Hanewinkel, 2018).

8 \ In this context, a "good prospect of remaining" only indicates that asylum seekers come from countries of origin with a recognition rate of over 50 per cent (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, BAMF, 2019), and is therefore not based on an individual examination of the reasons for requesting asylum or on whether an asylum seeker's application will actually be recognised. A "good" or "bad" prospect of remaining does not, therefore, have any significance with regard to the actual recognition or rejection of an asylum application, but refers to integration measures which an individual is or is not entitled to on the basis of these prospects.

Integration in the dominant discourse

In this chapter, I will argue that the dominant discourse in the general public and integration policy is based on a theoretical perspective of integration that considers integration to be a gradual, one-sided adaptation process by migrants. This theoretical approach is still widespread in the general public and in integration policy today, although it has long been criticised by the research community.

Integration in social-science theories

Integration theories can be traced back to the classical theories of assimilation described around 100 years ago by sociologists of the so-called Chicago School (Park, 1950). Gordon (1964) and Taft (1953) developed them further. All assimilation models have in common that they assume that migrants assimilate to the majority society, and that this process is like climbing a staircase: Migrants first learn the language and essential cultural elements of the host society before finally climbing further to reach the highest level. This highest level internalises the values and norms of the host society. Until the 1970s, the classical assimilation theories were the dominant paradigm in the United States (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 101). The 1990s witnessed a return to and further development of classic assimilation theories (Alba, 2008, pp. 37-56; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Outside the United States, the dominant term is not assimilation, but integration. In German-speaking countries, integration and assimilation have been the subject of theoretical discussions since the 1980s. Here, assimilation is understood as a sub-category of integration (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p. 869; Pries, 2015, p. 25). In contrast to the term assimilation, the term integration permits the preservation of cultural identity (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 92). One representative of German-language integration research, still influential today, is Hartmut Esser. According to Hartmut Esser, assimilation—by which he means the social integration of migrants into the receiving society—offers the most promising potential for integration. Conversely, he takes a critical view of multiple integration, that is social integration into the receiving society and the society of origin at the same time (Esser, 2000, p. 287). Esser's model can be understood as a further development of classical assimilation theories. He, too, describes a gradual process which migrants go through and which is non-linear. According to Esser, (2000, pp. 306, 289) there are four dimensions of integration (cognitive-cultural, structural, social and emotional) that migrants have to climb like steps to achieve successful integration.

Criticism of Esser's model refers to the normative claim of this model. In addition, Esser describes the receiving society as static; instead, it is the migrants who have to unilaterally adapt. Moreover, structural restrictions, such as the difficult recognition of foreign educational qualifications, are not taken into account. Criticism is also directed against Esser's negative assessment of ethnicity, which—according to Esser—hampers integration (Pott, 2002, pp. 48-49, 64-65). The criticism that ethnicity is seen solely as a problem also applies to other approaches of German-language integration and migration research, such as Hoffmann-Nowotny's thesis of the underclass (1973). Representatives of transnationalism research (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, Kivisto & Faist, 2010, cf. also page 40) refute Esser's exclusively negative evaluation of multiple integration, which is also supported by the results of this study.

Criticism of this kind of integration research led to the call for a complete abolition of the term integration, see, for example Hess, Bender & Moser (2009), who argue in their edited volume that integration policies can lead to exclusion. Other researchers such as Pries (2015) or representatives of the 'postmigrant perspective' (Foroutan, Karakayali & Spielhaus, 2018b) argue that integration must be understood as participation for all people. I will discuss these more recent theoretical perspectives in more detail after presenting the empirical results against the specific backdrop of everyday experiences (see pp. 39, 41). The results of the field research show that the classical theoretical approaches to integration and assimilation, for example Gordon, Taft or Esser, do not correspond to the reality of refugees' lives.

Despite considerable criticism of Esser's model, research projects still refer to Esser in their basic theoretical assumptions, such as a current research project on the integration of refugees in different municipalities in North Rhine-Westphalia (Adam & Imani, 2017). German integration policy is also based substantially on Esser's model of social integration and adopts it uncritically, as is shown in the next chapter. In contrast, alternative sociological approaches to integration, such as those by Pries or Foroutan, are only marginally represented in public discourse.

One conclusion from the theoretical overview is the paradox associated with the term integration. Thus, theories of assimilation and integration first assume a permanent settlement of migrants and often follow their integration processes over several generations (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 87). Although there have been increasing calls for the integration of refugees since 2015, the legal situation in Germany is such that refugees are only admitted temporarily. The path to permanent residency in Germany is rocky, and it is to be expected that the refugees will be sent back to their countries of origin after the wars and conflicts have ended. Therefore, the precondition assumed by migration sociologists when examining assimilation and integration—namely a permanent stay—do not exist in the case of refugees. Second, integration and assimilation are processes in which inclusion is at the centre, but which are paradoxically also linked to mechanisms of exclusion. For example, the legal status of refugees and many migrants is often temporary, and they cannot become full members of society. They are excluded from political decision-making processes (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 88).

Integration in the social and political discourse

Refugees who have come to Germany in the last few years have encountered a social and political discourse on integration which understands integration as an obligation that must be met. This discourse also understands integration to be an adjustment process by migrants and refugees. In Germany, this discourse is rooted in the debate about migrant workers and, for a long time, did not address the situation of refugees at all. Accordingly, the discourse largely ignores the specific situation of refugees in the sense of the Geneva Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 1951), as Aumüller and Bretl already stated in 2008: "Based on a national refugee policy that assumed temporary residence, for a long time, the integration of refugees was of no importance whatsoever" (p. 7). Scherschel (2018), too, states: "The social, political, economic and cultural integration of asylum seekers has not been of political interest to date, it is all about their temporary support".

The discourse on integration did not emerge until around the 1980s in the context of migrant workers. Although 'guest workers' had already been recruited to the Federal Republic of Germany since the 1950s, integration was not an issue for around 30 years, as they were supposed to return to their countries of origin after the end of their employment contract. Instead, migrant workers experienced a variety of exclusion mechanisms both in the Federal Republic of Germany and in the German Democratic Republic (Bade & Oltmer, 2004, pp. 72, 93; El-Mafaalani, 2018, pp. 33-35). This is why migrant workers in West Germany themselves first demanded integration in the sense of social participation. In the 1970s, larger municipalities began to develop integration as an educational and urban planning programme (Hess & Moser, 2009, p. 1415). Initial integration policy measures were introduced, for example, the appointment of a Commissioner for Foreigners in 1978 (Heckmann, 2010, p. 6). It is only since the end of the 1990s that we can discern a paradigm shift in integration policy when the coalition between the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party declared in its 1998 coalition agreement that Germany is a country of immigration. Two years later, the coalition reformed nationality law, which for the first time complemented the right to citizenship based on parentage (*jus sanguinis*) by citizenship resulting from being born in Germany (*jus soli*) (Storz & Wilmes, 2007).

In the Immigration Act of 2005, for the first time, the government formulated the federal government's responsibilities for integration, such as the introduction of integration courses—consisting of a language course and regional orientation course—and the responsibility of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) for managing the support of integration. At the same time, integration was to be made statistically observable, which is why the category "with a migration background" was introduced in the 2005 micro census (Heckmann, 2010, p. 9). The category of migration background has, however, become more and more of a burden for those concerned—even descendants of immigrants of the second, third or following generations remain afflicted by this label and cannot discard it (Foroutan, Karakayali & Spielhaus, 2018a, p. 12). This Othering has become part of their lives, and their non-affiliation is statistically recorded (Mecheril, 2011, p. 51).

Ever since the term integration became a part of political and public discourses as well as integration policy measures, researchers have ascribed two different meanings to it: The first considers integration to be equality of opportunities and participation, as Pries (2015) defines it. The second refers to the supposed deficits of migrants, for example with regard to language or history, which they yet have to acquire (Hess & Moser, 2009, p. 12; Koch, 2018). The latter implicitly refers to Esser (2000), which becomes evident in the monitoring of integration. The monitoring is intended to measure the status of integration of migrants and often reflects the stages of classical assimilation theories (Pries, 2015, p. 15). In this monitoring of integration,

> *Esser himself is seldom named as a reference and the now taboo term of assimilation is simply replaced by that of integration. Against this backdrop, assimilation remains an influential concept of integration policy (Koch, 2018).*

It should be noted that the first level of meaning is only marginally represented in public discourse, while the second level of meaning dominates integration policy and the social debate (Karakayali, 2009, p. 101, Hanewinkel & Oltmer, 2017b).

Thus, it becomes clear that the term integration combines both inclusive and exclusive dynamics: On the one hand, in line with the deficit concept, migrants are supposed to integrate into the labour market, as well as socially and culturally; on the other hand, they are denied full political integration (e.g. the right to vote) (Lanz, 2009, p. 105). It also becomes evident that the dominant understanding of integration is very close to the concept of assimilation—complete adaptation to the majority society. It is also important to note that the specific situation of refugees was marginalised in the discourse on integration until around 2015.

Methodology

As the study focuses on the perspectives of the refugees themselves and describes their realities of life, it follows a qualitative research design. To highlight the emic perspective (inner perspective) of refugees, I decided on a combination of participatory observation (Bernard, 2006, p. 342) and biographical interviews. Over a period of around two years (2016 to 2018), I conducted field research in a refugee shelter opened in 2014 in a medium-sized city in North Rhine-Westphalia. Some of the residents moved out over the course of time, which is why I met with them outside the shelter or in their private homes. I 'became' a volunteer in the shelter to participate in the everyday lives of the people. For example, I helped them answer letters from the authorities, referred those who were interested to an advisory organisation for vocational integration, accompanied them to the jobcentre or spent time with them over a cup of coffee. It was important to me that this support did not create a relationship of dependency. Instead, I understood it as a possibility for reciprocity (Musante, 2015, p. 268). Over a longer period of time, I was, therefore, able to observe developments in everyday life during the first years of reception in Germany. I recorded my observations in field notes (Bernard, 2006, p. 387). In all social science research in general, but especially in qualitative studies with participatory observation, the positionality of the researcher must be scrutinised. I found access to women, especially to mothers with their children, very easy, and I spent a lot of time with them. Access to men, on the other hand, was more difficult. Therefore, I made sure to accompany them to appointments, for instance at public authorities and to additionally ask them about their perspective by means of the biographical interviews.

It was only when I knew the people well and a basis of trust had been created (Breidenstein, Hirschauer, Kalthoff & Nieswand, 2015, p. 60) that I asked them if I could conduct biographical interviews with them. In total, I interviewed ten people in this way. I also conducted biographical interviews with 14 people living in North Rhine-Westphalia, who had already come to Germany about 20 to 40 years ago and applied for asylum there. In these biographical-narrative interviews (Flick, 2002, p. 147). I asked the interviewee in an opening question to talk about a specific biographical period of their life. The biographical interview is a very open and minimally structured interview, in which the interviewer predetermines as little as possible, but rather allows room for the interviewee's stories. The interviewer's own assumptions, which could otherwise influence the wording of an interview guide, are thus avoided as far as possible. I also did a group interview with seven people and conducted seven expert interviews (Kruse, 2015, p. 166; Plummer, 2013; Riemann, 2003) with employees of advisory organisations, public authorities and volunteers.

During the two-year survey phase, I also carried out numerous informal interviews with refugees, volunteers or practitioners in North Rhine-Westphalia. I also benefited from my impressions gained from field work for a previous study on conflicts in refugee shelters in North Rhine-Westphalia (Christ, Meininghaus & Röing, 2017). I also analysed that data with regard to integration.

As a qualitative sampling strategy, I chose the principle of maximal variation (Flick, 2002, p. 101; Kruse, 2015). I, therefore, spoke with men and women of all ages and did not concentrate on any one national group, such as Syrians. Instead, I sought the perspectives of people from different countries of origin. The people I had longer conversations with came from countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey, Vietnam, and a successor state of the Soviet Union.[9]

This allowed me to understand how the everyday life of refugees depends on the structures of the asylum system. The sampling strategy also avoids methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller, 2007, pp. 17-20, Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), i.e. treating refugees in my field of research as homogeneous and distinct

9 \ The person interviewed requested that their country of origin not be mentioned

units based on nationality. The diverse composition of the data collection and the sampling strategy chosen, which reflects that diversity, allows for the empirical saturation relevant for qualitative methods. It is not the quantity of material or number of cases which determines the quality of the data but the reciprocal and iterative interpenetration of data collection and analysis (Strübing, Hirschauer, Ayaß, Krähnke & Scheffer, 2018, pp. 89-90).

The data was evaluated with the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA on the basis of the principles of 'grounded theory' (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). The core categories (language, accommodation, work, social relationships, affiliation, gender, subjective definition of integration), gained inductively through coding and categorisation, form the guiding principles for the structure of the empirical part.

The following table provides an initial insight into the lives of the people introduced below so that the reader can better understand the narratives in the empirical part. Except for Amira, Trang, Mira and Dunja, who came to Germany as children between the ages of nine and 14, all the others were between 20 and 40 years old at the time of entering Germany. Many of my interviewees had fled or applied for asylum[10] several decades ago, so that they are now looking back on their lives in Germany from the perspective of seniors.

Table 2
Overview of the research participants cited

Name*	Gender	Country of origin	Date of arrival in Germany / application for asylum
Ali	*m*	*Afghanistan*	*1970s*
Amira	*w*	*Afghanistan*	*1980s*
Dilan	*w*	*Turkey*	*1994*
Dunja	*w*	*Bosnia-Herzegowina*	*1992*
Hanh	*w*	*Vietnam*	*1980s*
Karim	*m*	*Afghanistan*	*1992*
Laith	*m*	*Iraq*	*2001*
Mira	*w*	*Bosnia-Herzegowina*	*1993*
Navid	*m*	*Iran*	*1984*
Shahram	*m*	*Iran*	*1960s*
Trang	*w*	*Vietnam*	*1982*
Vibol	*m*	*Cambodia*	*1975*
Abrihet	*w*	*Eritrea*	*2015*
Fatima	*w*	*Syria*	*2015*
Hakim	*m*	*Syria*	*2014*
Hamoudi	*m*	*Syria*	*2014*
Jalini	*w*	*Sri Lanka*	*2015*
Katharina	*w*	*Successor state of the Soviet Union*	*2015*
Khalid	*m*	*Syria*	*2015*
Nassima	*w*	*Syria*	*2016*
Piranavan	*m*	*Sri Lanka*	*2015*
Solomon	*m*	*Eritrea*	*2015*
Zara	*w*	*Pakistan*	*2015*

**All names are pseudonyms*

10 \ In a very few cases, those interviewed entered Germany for other reasons (e.g. to study), and later applied for asylum as a result of the changed political situation in the country of origin. In these cases, the year mentioned here refers to the date of the asylum application.

Everyday life and integration processes of refugees

In the following, I will present the results of field research in North Rhine-Westphalia along the categories inductively obtained by data analysis. Using thick descriptions, I want to show how significant the dimensions of integration presented here are for the refugees themselves and why they are so central to their everyday lives. In the process, the focus is less on the systematic comparison between the "refugee generations" (arrival 1970 to 1990s vs. arrival since 2014), but the striking similarities of the experiences. Since, as explained above, this is a qualitative study that focuses on the depth of phenomena, I do not infer any statistical relationships. To nonetheless contextualise the experiences of the people, I place the interview statements in relation to current studies. This shows that the individual cases described here represent typical patterns of integration processes.

Learning a new language

For almost all the people I have met in the course of my field research, learning German is of pivotal importance, as the SVR research unit also states in its study (2017, p. 35). Access to formal forms of language learning varies considerably for asylum seekers and refugees and depends heavily on the mechanisms of the asylum system (Wiedner, Salikutluk & Giesecke, 2018, pp. 17, 20). In the 1980s, language courses were mainly offered to Vietnamese refugees while other asylum seekers had no chance to attend regular language courses.

Laith, who came to Germany from Iraq in 2001, initially had refugee status, which was revoked several years later. He was not allowed to take a language course (interview with Laith, also see interview with Karim). When he received a permanent residence permit many years later, he had to earn a living and was so busy in his job that he did not have time to attend a regular language course. As much as he wanted to, "work doesn't allow [you to] sit at home and learn"[11] (interview with Laith). Karim reports that due to his uncertain residence status, he had no access to a regular language course. He thus decided that he would pay with his pocket money for the cheapest language course he could find.

Since 2015, asylum seekers with "good prospects of remaining", that is who come from countries where the recognition rate is over 50 per cent, receive access to state integration courses. The Immigration Authority may also make participation obligatory. People with "bad prospects of remaining", on the other hand, generally remain excluded from learning the language. Katharina, for example, was denied access to integration courses for a long time, as her "prospects of remaining" were deemed bad. Only after two years, was she granted a temporary residence permit. She is now allowed to attend an integration course, which means a lot to her (interview with Katharina).

People from very diverse educational backgrounds come together in the regular language courses. One language teacher reports that some participants in her classes want to study and are very ambitious. Others find it very difficult to learn the language with the help of books in courses similar to the school system. Tailoring the curriculum to different groups of participants was not possible (field notes 26 July 2017).

Apart from teaching language skills, attending a language course also contributes to a regular daily routine and everyday structure in a time that is characterised by numerous uncertainties. Trang, who came to Germany as an 11-year-old in the 1980s, remembers how important they were for her to have a good start into a regular daily routine.

> *Then we were out of the house all day. I also thought it was very, very important for us to get into everyday life right away. We didn't have to wait until the end of the school year, but with everyone who lived there, we went to a German language course, which started at eight in the morning. It lasted until lunchtime. Then we had a break, and then another one or two lessons. Then there was always a lot of homework. In the evening, we always did a lot of homework. We*

11 \ The cited interviews were not corrected in terms of linguistics unless they would have been incomprehensible for the readers otherwise. Emphasis in the interview is expressed in capital letters. According to Kruse (2015), emphases are linguistic-communicative phenomena that indicate the emotionally important aspects for the interviewees.

had a regular daily routine right from the start. My father did, too. He had attended a different course. But in the morning, we all left the house together and came back (interview with Trang).

If refugees only have access to language courses organised by volunteers, it is not always guaranteed that the course offered will match the language level of those interested in taking part (interview with Jalini). Especially for mothers of young children, getting access to language courses is very difficult (see pages 36-37). They are particularly dependent on informal services from volunteers, such as low-threshold mother-and-child cafés that offer language training (interview with Jalini).

Many people also learn German independently. Others are completely dependent on doing so if they are denied access to formal forms of language learning. Vibol from Cambodia says that for him it was initially all about learning the language (interview with Vibol). Even with his brother, who had lived in Germany longer than himself, he only spoke German. Katharina, who came to Germany in 2015, learned German at home with the aid of the Internet. Later, she got to know a German woman whom she meets regularly to practice her German (interview with Katharina). Laith tried to teach himself German with the help of a dictionary. He also paid for a language course with his own money, which was extremely difficult for him financially. It was only eleven years after his arrival in Germany that he was able to attend an official German language course. Due to his previous private studies, his German was already good enough for him to take the B1 exam (interview with Laith). Many also use the diverse possibilities offered by the Internet, such as YouTube videos (interview with Jalini).

My interview partners believe that learning the language is so vital because they perceive it as a central mechanism of inclusion or exclusion. Lacking or insufficient language skills affect many areas. Good language skills are particularly relevant for being able to work in qualified professions (field notes 31 August 2017, interview with Hamoudi and Fatima, interview with Piranavan). On the one hand, Jalini is proud to have obtained a university degree abroad, but on the other, language is a major hurdle for her: "I can't do ANYTHING with that degree, because without language nothing can be possible here" (interview Jalini, in English).

But language is also a key factor in everyday life. Jalini talks about how the lack of language skills makes it difficult for her to establish social contacts: "Actually people are very nice. Most of them are smiling, but I just [feel] isolated. Maybe because of the language. But I always feel that people are looking down on me because of the language" (interview with Jalini, in English). Katharina also explains how difficult it is for her not being able to express herself the way she would like to: "I want to talk, tell stories, but I can't express myself" (interview with Katharina, translation from Russian). Khalid, on the other hand, learned German within a few months and has now passed his B2 exam. For him, the language is the "key" (interview with Khalid) to integration into German society. Although he speaks German very well and is now married to a German, he still believes that he is not competent enough to feel at home in Germany when it comes to language. He quickly feels excluded from conversations: "If two people are talking to one another, for example, two Germans, I'm somehow left out" (interview with Khalid). Even those who have been living in Germany for a long time still believe that speaking German with an accent and making mistakes is a drawback (interview with Shahram).

Some people, such as Jalini, speak good English, but for them, communication in this language is still a double-edged sword: On the one hand, they can easily converse with many people in Germany and communicate their wishes, like Jalini when visiting a doctor. On the other hand, not only do many employees at public authorities insist on communicating in the official language of German, but many others also expect migrants in Germany to communicate in German. Jalini reports how she got a phone call and asked whether she could speak English, but the caller reminded her: "This is Deutschland. It's not England", and she had to continue the telephone conversation in broken German (interview with Jalini, in English).

The use of German must also be linked to the social category of "age/generation". While learning a new language is fraught with great challenges for the first generation who migrated to another country as adults, their children are growing up with the language and can soon communicate without difficulties (Liebau & Schacht, 2016, p. 744). Trang reports:

> *Learning German wasn't easy, by the way, but I had the feeling that I didn't have any problems communicating even by the time I started school. So I'm still grateful to my German teacher, because she really gave us a great foundation.*

Often, if the parents do not understand enough German, the children have to act as interpreters, for example when visiting public authorities or doctors (El-Mafaalani, 2018, p. 119). In these cases, there may be a reversal of the parent-child hierarchy. This can be particularly problematic in cases where very personal or intimate matters are discussed, which parents would otherwise never tell their children, such as in the case of a teenage son who offered to accompany his mother to a gynaecological examination (field notes 24 August 2016, 9 December 2016).

The reports show that learning the language plays a pivotal role for refugees. Attending language courses often helps them to find their way into an everyday life with a regular daily structure. Refugees believe that the knowledge of German is a "key" that allows them to participate in or excludes them from various social areas, such as the job market or social contacts.

Moving from shared accommodation to their own apartment

For newcomers to Germany, the housing situation is a big burden. Under the German Asylum Act, they are obliged to stay in a shared accommodation centre. After the initial admission, they are assigned to the municipalities, which usually send them to shared accommodation centres as well. People can only move out of the centre and look for an apartment after their legal status has been recognised. Life in a centre is per se a source of conflict, as strangers have to share their everyday lives in a very confined space, and there are few opportunities to retreat and have privacy. A lack of everyday structure and the uncertain future also affect the situation in the centre (Christ, Meininghaus & Röing, 2017).

For most residents, moving into their own apartment is an important step into a life of autonomy and personal responsibility. However, finding accommodation is a major hurdle. Especially in large cities with an overheated housing market, competition for apartments is fierce. Lack of Internet access and language problems are just some of the practical obstacles refugees face. What is more, those seeking an apartment are also exposed to various kinds of discrimination. In one case, mentioning that a woman with a child wanted to move in, was enough not to be offered a viewing appointment (personal email 17 July 2018). In addition to discrimination based on origin, to which migrants are often exposed, refugees face further difficulties related to their legal status.

Landlords may be reluctant to rent their apartment to people who only have a temporary residence status. This mainly affects beneficiaries of subsidiary protection whose residence permit is limited to one year. Furthermore, many landlords are suspicious when the rent is paid by the jobcentre (field notes 2 March 2017). A social worker reports:

> *This is, of course, a double hurdle for the residents. I'm currently told more and more often that when the landlords hear on the phone that someone doesn't speak good German, they simply hang up. Or if the jobcentre is even mentioned to the landlords, then that's it. Typical problems (interview with social worker B).*

The desperation of those searching for apartments is exploited by brokers acting illegally, who take money for the viewing of an apartment and guarantee that they will get the apartment (field notes 6 July 2017). 'Simsar', as this illegal practice is called, puts the people who have sufficient financial capital to pay the agency fee at an advantage (Musharbash, 2015; Wein, 2017).

Some of those looking for accommodation benefit from mediation by volunteers (field notes 2 March 2017, 4 and 6 July 2017). These volunteers call the landlord on their behalf and accompany them to the viewing of the apartment. Volunteers often rely on their own local networks to find out where vacant apartments are available. Fatima, Hamoudi and their children benefited from this. They are supported by a volunteer who, before retiring, worked as a doctor in the neighbourhood where the family lived in a refugee shelter. Through his work, he is very well known in the area. When he learned of a house that was to be rented to a family, he met the landlady and was ultimately able to convince her to rent the house to a Syrian family (interview with Hamoudi and Fatima). The Vietnamese family also reported having had similar experiences in the 1980s. Their father was able to find a suitable home thanks to the support of a German family (also see interview with Navid). The importance of social contacts to help find an apartment is also highlighted in the analysis of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data: 29 per cent had support from friends, acquaintances or family members, and 57 per cent had support from government agencies or aid organisations. Only eight per cent found their apartment in the traditional manner via a classified ad (Baier & Siegert, 2018, p. 5).

The housing situation is thus particularly important in the early days in Germany. While living in shared accommodation is usually perceived as being burdensome, moving into a private apartment promises a return to a more self-determined life. However, not all refugees have the opportunity to move out of the shared accommodation after a time. Some—especially male refugees who are on their own—can not find an apartment at all. People whose residence status is uncertain for a long period of time often live in shared accommodation for years, too.

The experiences of finding accommodation demonstrate clearly which discriminatory practices refugees are exposed to. These are social disadvantages that also affect other social groups (e.g. single parents, families, migrants), as well as difficulties caused by asylum legislation, such as the subsidiary protection status. As the formal way of finding a home is extremely difficult, refugees have to choose other strategies, such as paying illegal brokers. Others benefit from the support of volunteers who draw on their personal, local network. However, once refugees are in their own homes, the situation can occur that the previous support network is no longer available, because, for example, the social workers from the shelter are no longer responsible for private accommodation or the apartment has become too far for the volunteers to travel.

Leading a self-reliant life again—In search of work

In the theoretical discussion about integration, the adoption of positions in society is of central importance. These include professional positions in particular (Esser, 2000). Integration into the labour market is also a central consideration for most of the refugees themselves. Many came to Germany with the expectation of gaining access to the labour market within a short period of time. They hoped to lead a self-reliant life as soon as possible and to earn a living independently (e.g. interview with Nassima, interview with Katharina, interview with Abrihet and Solomon, field notes 10 July 2017). Many do not like being dependent on the jobcentre. Abrihet repeatedly emphasised in our conversations that she really wanted to work again. She said she did not feel comfortable with being dependent on benefits from the jobcentre and thus other people's taxes (field notes 17 July 2017, 6 September 2017, 18 October 2017). When Dilan came to Germany in 1994, she only received vouchers to buy food, not money. She said that she felt embarrassed every time she went to the shop with the vouchers, which, due to their size, were clearly identifiable as such for the other people waiting in line. One day, Dilan was outraged when a cashier was very rude to her: "If you don't like it here,

why are you working here? I want to work, too. I don't want to buy things with vouchers, but I don't have a choice" (interview with Dilan, cf. also interview with Mira).

Many refugees suffer from the fact that in Germany they are solely perceived as refugees and that the many other aspects of their identity, in particular their professional identity, are disregarded. This is what Rosa Yassin Hassan impressively illustrates in her fictitious letter to Hannah Arendt:

> *Dear Hannah, it took me a long time to get used to my new epithet 'refugee'. To be honest, I still cannot quite comprehend how it appeared so suddenly, so quickly took possession of me and seized my entire identity until it was almost glued to my name (Hassan, 2018).*

For many refugees, taking up work is the opportunity to reconnect with their old identity and rebuild their self-perception. Hakim was a gynaecologist in Syria and is now living in Germany with his family. He says that his self-image has changed completely since he came here as a refugee, and he wants to get back to work as soon as possible. But without German, one cannot ask the patients what their problem is and therefore cannot do anything. Therefore, learning German is the top priority for him to be able to resume his profession (field notes 22 February 2017).

Often, hopes of entering the labour market at an early stage are soon quashed. Depending on the residence status, access to the labour market can be limited. Karim came to Germany in 1992 after completing his medical studies in Czechoslovakia. War was raging in Afghanistan, his country of origin, so he applied for asylum in Germany, where his family lived at the time. When his application was rejected, a difficult time lay ahead of him:

> *For me it was the worst time of my life because after twenty years of school and university, I wasn't allowed to do anything. And I didn't know what to do with my time. Yes, back then, as an asylum seeker, you couldn't even do any other kind of work. For example, I [wanted] [to work] as a medical advisor or assistant counsellor for a nursing service, because I [had] graduated in medical studies. […] I had to go to the employment agency, and this was rejected by the employment agency. And they said: No, you're not here to work. You're only [here] to wait for your asylum procedure. […] And [that] was a very bad time, really, really. Personally, too. I slipped into a depression (interview with Karim).*

To keep the option of medical work open, he wanted to attend a programme for doctors and medical students from developing countries. For this, he would have had to attend seminars that took place in another federal state, but he was denied the necessary permission from the immigration office. He suffered from the mental crisis for a long time:

> *At that time, it took YEARS. […] I was devastated. Then I slowly [started getting] better and [with] support from FRIENDS [I also worked] MYSELF out of this crisis (interview with Karim).*

Although Karim received a residence permit a few years later and German citizenship ten years after his arrival in Germany, he was never able to work in his actual profession as a doctor: "In the BEGINNING [I wasn't allowed to] work [as a doctor] for ten years. And after ten years, I hung up my white coat […], because you lose a lot, as well". An employee of an advisory organisation explained to me that some people who do not receive a work permit for many years are overcome by a lethargy due to the lack of prospects:

> [For people who don't get a work permit, it] *is of course the case that, on the one hand, there is a lack of prospects for those people, and, by the way, especially young people. And on the OTHER hand, they kind of get used to the fact that when they've been tolerated for ten years and therefore practically no longer take any initiative or withdraw, or have GENERALLY accepted that they now remain in this status (interview with an employee of an advisory organisation).*

In the interview, Karim emphasises that his story is not an isolated case:

> *The day before yesterday, I spoke to a doctor who also came in '93 and was a TAXI driver for ten years. But only now, [his] degree was only recognised two years ago, and [...] he is now training as a doctor and [will] be working as a doctor in one, two years.*

In his view, the lack of legal and professional recognition is not only a personal crisis but also something that has consequences for German society:

> *Actually it is a PITY, not only for me personally or for those affected, but also for German society [...], because you knew that they wouldn't go back, but you didn't integrate them either, you didn't want that at all. [And now there is that big] demand for doctors and engineers (interview with Karim).*

As Mira's status was that of temporary suspension of deportation (*Duldung*), her career prospects were also very limited. When she fled from Bosnia to Germany in 1993 at the age of 14, she and her family only ever received a three-month suspension of deportation. There was "no work visa, no way to try to get a work permit, even if you had found a job and someone had been willing to hire you, it was impossible" (interview with Mira). When she was looking for an apprenticeship, the status of suspended deportation was a major obstacle.

> *Especially since for starters it was very difficult to get an apprenticeship. Nobody was willing to hire someone who would, in the worst case, be gone after three months. And there was no political intention at the time to give people vocational training to then retain them here. Rather [the policy] was simply to accommodate people for some time and then send them back home (interview with Mira).*

Her friend adds: "They told us directly at the immigration office: You are guests here and when the war is over, you will go back to our country" (interview with Dunja). When Mira was 18 years old and in her second year of her apprenticeship, the peace agreement was signed, and only two weeks later she was to be deported. It was only thanks to the commitment of her boss, who even acted as a guarantor, that deportation was suspended for the next two years.

Refugees and many migrants in general—not just in Germany—(Gupta, Man, Mirchandani & Ng, 2014; Kofman, 2012; Nieswand, 2011; Nohl, Schittenhelm, Schmidtke & Weiß, 2014; Shan, Pullman & Zhao, 2016; Shinozaki, 2015), are severely affected by the vocational devaluation. For asylum seekers, the uncertain legal situation can be one of the reasons for this, as Karim's example above shows. Laith, who had studied mathematics in Iraq and fled to Germany in 2001, was never able to make his great dream of teaching mathematics in a school come true, either. Due to his legal status, which was uncertain for a long time, he was always forced to earn money in the low-wage sector and could not work towards getting his professional qualification. He finds the discrepancy between his dream and the physical activities necessary to make a living to be enormous:

> *If I had not [come to Germany], 100 per cent I would now have PhD in mathematics or Master's degree or at least I am a successful maths teacher in a school in my home country. But 17 years I have worked PHYSICALLY. I worked in different jobs. And I, I NEVER forget, first job in Germany, that was in Saarbrücken in a foundry. I worked very hard, that was very hard (interview with Laith).*

He now works as a taxi driver.

Since the 1990s and early 2000s, many of the legal conditions that restricted the employment of asylum seekers (Täubig, 2010) have changed. Asylum-seekers and those with a temporary suspension of deportation are now allowed to take up work after three months, if the competent employment agency agrees. Asylum seekers from safe countries of origin (Section 61 German Asylum Act) are excluded from this. Recognised refugees are not restricted when it comes to gainful employment. In addition, with the Integration Act of 2016 the labour market test—which favours nationals when taking up jobs—was suspended for three years in most districts of the employment agency; it was abolished in 2019. Although the legal conditions for access to the labour market have been facilitated greatly, the path to employment for refugees remains rocky. The recognition of educational and vocational qualifications remains a big hurdle

(Brücker, Rother & Schupp, 2016a, pp. 48-50; Kaabel, 2017, pp. 55-56; Lambert, Blumenthal, von & Beigang, 2018, p. 10). Although the Recognition Act, which came into force in 2012, has simplified the procedure for evaluating foreign professional qualifications at the federal level, the procedure is still time-consuming and the qualifications are not always recognised. In addition, not all refugees with corresponding educational qualifications had the opportunity to bring their certificates with them when fleeing to Germany (field notes 4 September 2017).

Khalid came to Germany in 2015. Within a short time, his German was good enough for him to start an apprenticeship. However, his original dream of studying pharmacy had already come to an end because, being in his mid-20s, he would have had to go back to school for a few years despite his Egyptian general university entrance qualification. He, therefore, decided to train as a pharmaceutical assistant. Khalid passed the entrance examination for college-based vocational training and was offered a place. Meanwhile, his school certificate was still in the recognition process:

> *And then we were just waiting for the certificate. The certificate came and they needed at least a secondary school leaving certificate. But my certificate was deemed lower secondary school leaving certificate. And they said: Well, unfortunately we can't accept you here. And then, well, yes, I signed out (interview with Khalid).*

Because his Egyptian school certificate was only recognised as a lower secondary school leaving certificate, Khalid now attends an evening secondary school to get his secondary school leaving certificate.

Hamoudi also had to overcome some hurdles before he could start his apprenticeship. In 2014, he came to Germany from Syria, where he had worked as a physics teacher. About six months after his arrival, he was able to bring his family to join him. He started a German language course, which he completed after a few months with the B1 examination. After that, he wanted to get a job. The fact that Hamoudi had been unable to bring his certificates to Germany when he fled was a major obstacle in the application process. A volunteer who has known the family for a long time offers her help in the application process and is very motivated herself: "Then I said, I WANT him to succeed. So I fought for it" (interview with Katrin). Together, they prepared the application documents and made an appointment at the employment agency for career guidance. For about eight months, she has been writing applications with him (Erler, Prytula. & Grotheer, 2018, p. 36). She and another volunteer drove Hamoudi to his job interviews in the wider area. Hamoudi first applied to a large company that has an internship programme for refugees but did not receive an answer. Hamoudi was invited to several job interviews for an apprenticeship in medium-sized industrial companies but was not accepted. He is considered to be overqualified (cf. also interview with Piranavan), as the volunteer helper reports:

> *So this medium-sized industrial company basically said that he is overqualified. He is too old, he does not fit into the scheme. They said, [...] we are a small company here. The other apprentices are 18. You are 37. The other workers are 37, as well. They can send the trainee to do the sweeping, but not him. Because he just has a different personality. And therefore they have difficulties placing him (interview with Katrin).*

After a job interview, he finally got the chance to do an internship in the technical department of a large clinic. But before he could sign his internship contract, his mother in Syria fell ill, and Hamoudi was forced to make quick money to send to her. Since the financial conditions in the intended internship were not favourable for his plan, he decided not to sign the contract. When the two volunteers heard about it, they immediately met with Hamoudi and tried to convince him to start the internship anyway, especially as the future boss was also convinced of Hamoudi's qualifications. Finally, Hamoudi agreed and completed it successfully. After a six-month bridging period as a volunteer sponsored by the federal government (*Bundesfreiwilliger*), which was initially difficult for him to accept due to the poor contractual conditions, he finally began his training.

At the time of our interview, Hamoudi is proud of his first year of training: "I'm satisfied now, the first year is already over". In the vocational college, he is the best in his class. The other apprentices are significantly younger than him and benefit from his experience.

Hamoudi's example provides an impressive illustration of the bumpy road to the labour market (SVR Research Area, 2017, p. 61). On the one hand, there are missing certificates, an unfamiliar application process and the problem of "overqualification". On the other hand, volunteer support proved to be helpful and both practically and emotionally motivating (Wiedner, Salikutluk & Giesecke, 2018, p. 24). Statistical data from 2013 shows that about half of the refugees found their first job through social contacts and thus gained faster access to the labour market and more often had full-time jobs than refugees who used formal ways of finding a job (Eisnecker & Schacht, 2016, pp. 759,762). At the same time, his example also shows the other considerations that play a role in taking up a job—in Hamoudi's case, it was the need to fulfil his transnational family obligations and to support his sick mother.

Now, there are many quantitative studies on refugees' access to the labour market. The examples of Khalid and Hamoudi show how difficult vocational integration is even for well-qualified refugees. However, not all refugees have such a high level of education (Brücker, Rother & Schupp, 2016b, pp. 37-47). According to the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey, 35 per cent of the refugees have a secondary school leaving certificate, and 11 per cent have a university degree or doctorate. At the same time, 12 per cent have only attended primary school, and 13 per cent have not attended school at all (Brücker, Rother & Schupp, 2016a, pp. 25-31; German Federal Employment Agency, 2018, p. 6). The majority of refugees only find work in the low-wage sector; even highly qualified refugees tend to work in jobs with a lower status (Wiedner, Salikutluk & Giesecke, 2018, p. 28). The strong polarisation in the qualification structure indicates origin-specific differences (Lambert, Blumenthal, von & Beigang, 2018, p. 6).

At the end of 2015, only about eight per cent of refugees were in employment. According to an IAB study, this figure had risen to 28 per cent by June 2018. Even though it also includes people who work in paid internships or minor employment, almost 78 per cent of them are in employment subject to social security contributions (Brücker, 2018). Despite this encouraging development, the Federal Employment Agency emphasises "that integration into the labour market is a lengthy process" (2018, p. 12).

Social relationships at the local level

Often, the first contact between refugees and the German majority society—apart from the staff in the shelters for refugees—is with volunteers. While some shelters offer a very wide range of volunteer services, others lack these. As already explained by the example of housing and job search (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016, p. 24), volunteers offer a wide range of support. They also provide language courses, visits to the authorities, advice on specific issues, including correspondence with authorities or explaining letters (IfD Allensbach, 2017, p. 17), meeting cafés, clothing banks or the search for childcare places. However, it appears that volunteers, most of whom have a higher educational background, are more likely to support refugees who also have a better educational and social status. Refugees with a more difficult starting position (e.g. who have very poor language skills) are less likely to benefit from volunteer work. This finding points to the fact that volunteering is socially selective (Erler, Prytula & Grotheer, 2018, p. 25).

Katrin explained to me how she gradually built up volunteer services. A few years ago, she noticed that no activities were offered to refugee children in the shelter in her neighbourhood during the summer holidays. Together with others, she organised a voluntary holiday programme with reading children's books, visits to the botanical garden and other excursions. At the same time, she supported a refugee family extensively, helped with learning German and filling out application forms, or explained medical issues. In

the winter, it turned out that many residents in the shelter had no warm jackets and shoes. This prompted her and others to set up a clothing bank in the shelter. The presence of the volunteers in the shelter was perceived as very positive because apart from the caretaker and the security staff, there were no other people on-site to contact—not even social workers. At the same time, she also reports conflicts among volunteers. She said that although there had been enough volunteers who had wanted to commit themselves since mid-2015, differing expectations often clashed. For example, a senior citizen who was teaching German to two Albanian girls accused a long-time volunteer of not supporting her enough. Also, some areas were more attractive to volunteers than others: Katrin reports that all potential volunteers wanted to be involved exclusively in childcare. Katrin took over the coordination of the ever-increasing number of volunteers. After many of them were disappointed by the work at some point, about half of the potential helpers left (interview with Katrin).

Abrihet is happy about the support she receives from volunteers, which makes her everyday life in Germany a lot easier:

> *Yes, of course, if I have a problem, I ASK the Germans. And where I can I, for example, [...] ask the immigration office, the registrar's office. [...] And the other people also helped me. So, I'm so happy. Yes, [...] before was a bit DIFFICULT. I didn't have much contact. [...] I also have many German contacts.*

When her daughter was christened and a big party was celebrated in her honour, the family also invited their German friends and acquaintances. For her partner, their attendance means a lot: "[To] baptism of my CHILD, also many Germans CAME. My HEART is HAPPY" (interview with Solomon).

The contact with volunteers contains a hierarchical level that automatically assigns to the refugees the role of the seeker of help and the volunteers that of the helpers. Not everyone reflects this hierarchy in the same way as Katrin, who attaches importance to explaining various options to the families she looks after, but leaves the decision, such as about their children's secondary school, to them. In some cases, volunteer relationships develop into friendships where people meet as equals (interview with Navid).

Trang, who fled from Vietnam to Germany in the early 1980s, also welcomed the contact with the volunteers:

> *There was also a German family that supported us. The Schmidt family. They always came over and they got us things—from pillows to towels—from somewhere or bought them for us. The Schmidt family had a connection with Vietnam because they had three adopted Vietnamese children. And they are really the first and only [Vietnamese children] in this city. And when they heard that there was a refugee shelter with Vietnamese refugees, they came to visit and since then have supported us with everything. Including when we were looking for an apartment with my dad.*

Social relations at a local level are by no means limited to volunteers. Even though living together in confined spaces in a refugee shelter often presents a problem, there are also friendships that continue even after moving out. Although Fatima is very happy that she no longer lives in a shared accommodation facility, she misses her social contacts: "We drink coffee together, talk to each other, what's happening to me, what's happening with other things [...] Not like here [in the house]" (interview with Fatima). Her husband even says that they lived "like one big family" in the shelter (interview with Hamoudi). The image of the family is also used by Abrihet when she thinks back on almost two years during which she shared a room with a woman from Iran (interview with Abrihet). Although they did not have a common language and had to make do with their little knowledge of German and their hands and feet, the two became friends. They are still in close contact today. In the shelter, Katharina became friends with Nassima from Syria, whom she met at a language course for mothers (interview with Katharina). Both are alone with their children and therefore share a similar life situation.

They, too, communicate in German. Now that Nassima can at last move into the long-awaited apartment, Katharina often stays at her place overnight.

For many people, contact with other people from the same country of origin or the same language area is an important support that helps shape their everyday lives. Although Khalid is married to a German and therefore also has many contacts with the German majority society, it is hard for him to build up close friendships with Germans because of difficulties with the language:

> *Well, somehow, I don't have German FRIENDS. I know a few, but not as real friends. We don't go out together or anything like that. Yes, most [friends] are from Syria. […] Especially with the language, it is actually much more difficult (interview with Khalid).*

These experiences are also shared by the people whose experience of displacement is long in the past. For example, Hanh, an elderly woman, regularly meets up with other people from Vietnam in different cities. There, among other things, they attend events with Vietnamese music, eat together and chat (interview with Hanh). Likewise, senior women from Afghanistan find their monthly meeting invaluable. Many of them are now alone; their partners have died and the children moved out. Thanks to their regular meet-ups, they feel less alone; everyone brings something to eat, they talk and laugh together. They say that this keeps them healthy and prevents depression. The women tell me that these group meetings are like therapy for the soul (group interview with women from Afghanistan).

Maintaining local social contacts was crucial to the people I met in my research, with the exception of people like Piranavan, who calls himself as a loner (interview with Piranavan). According to the analysis of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey, 60 per cent of the refugees had contact with Germans at least once a week, and 67 per cent had contact with people from the same countries of origin (Giesecke, Kroh, Salikutluk, Eisnecker & Özer, 2017, p. 93). Those who could not establish local social contacts suffered as a result. It was noticeable that these negative experiences were mainly reported by women who had moved out of the shelter. Since Fatima has moved out of the shelter, she only rarely has contact with the volunteers or with other women from the shelter. She also finds it difficult to establish additional contacts with other people, such as other parents in her children's school. She feels lonely, and it is not easy for her to fully commit to the new life in Germany (interview with Fatima).

Jalini's situation is similar; but while it is difficult for Fatima to approach new people, Jalini sought contacts after she left the shelter. She hoped to get to know other parents in her daughters' kindergarten or at the playground, but language barriers seem to be an obstacle: "I didn't' really get a very good contact yet. […] I feel isolated" (interview with Jalini).

These experiences resemble those of the women who came to Germany a long time ago. While Ali quickly got to know people through his work, this was much more difficult for his wife, who stayed at home because of their child. She found it difficult to communicate with Germans due to a lack of language skills; at the same time, however, she could not get to know other people from her country of origin, Afghanistan, as at that time only a few Afghans lived in the town (interview with Ali).

The empirical examples show the diversity of local social relationships. This was exemplified by the baptism of Abrihet's and Solomon's daughter. Many people who live in the same city as Abrihet and Solomon were invited. These included Eritreans—be it those who had fled recently or people who have already been in Germany for a long time—and refugees from other countries, as well as Germans, including many volunteers. Apart from that, many Eritrean friends came from all over Germany (field notes 23 July 2017). This can be taken as an example of the fact that social relationships are not only confined to the local area but also extend beyond national borders, as in Abrihet's case.

Social relationships at the transnational level

How does family life work under the conditions of displacement and settlement in Germany? Many families send a family member ahead so as not to expose everyone, especially the children, to the dangers of fleeing. They hope to then bring the family to Germany to join them. For people from Eritrea, to flee is particularly difficult. Abrihet's escape route went from Eritrea, across Sudan, through the Sahara to Libya, and across the Mediterranean. The route is very dangerous, and she could not justify taking her children with her (field notes 7 July 2017). Her partner, for example, had watched children die in a car accident. when they fled. Nor should the children have to experience the hazardous journey across the Mediterranean (interview with Solomon).

More than 30 years before that, Trang's parents were facing the same decision. They wanted to leave Vietnam by sea. Several times, the family tried to flee together, but they were repeatedly intercepted and sent to prison. Eventually, the family decided to try it separately. They only succeeded after the family members had split up. And still, family members died. Thirty years later, the family still mourns their loss.

> *Many Vietnamese families were torn apart at that time and some even died. I also had two cousins who died while fleeing. [Now I] have met my cousin [...] back in Vietnam. [...] Her father lives in America, she and her mother in Vietnam. They never got over the loss of their brother and son. And the parents are still blaming each other over who was responsible (interview with Trang).*

The small boat on which Trang, her father, her three siblings and three cousins fled was eventually rescued by the Cap Anamur, one day before a big storm hit the South China Sea. As the Cap Anamur was operated by a German aid organisation, all refugees were able to travel to Germany after a fairly long stay in a Philippine refugee camp. Trang's mother, her youngest sister, her sister-in-law and her children, were only later able to flee from Vietnam. Their boat stranded in Malaysia. As one part of the family was already in Germany, Trang's mother and the rest of the family could also leave for Germany due to the family reunification programme.

Today, people with refugee protection status or entitlement to asylum, still qualify for family reunification, although it is limited to members of the nuclear family. By contrast, family reunification for people entitled to subsidiary protection is restricted. According to the Asylum Package II of 2016, the family reunification of family members of people entitled to subsidiary protection was suspended for two years.

Since 1 August 2018, persons eligible for subsidiary protection are again able to apply for family reunification, however, there is a limited quota of 1,000 people per month.

Many beneficiaries of subsidiary protection consider it arbitrary to have only been granted this protection status while other family members have been granted full refugee protection status (interview with Nassima, field notes 18 July 2017, 11 October 2017). The long, uncertainty as to whether and when they will be able to bring their families to join them is very stressful.

But even families with full refugee protection can have difficulties getting their family members to Germany. Abrihet applied for family reunification for her two under-age children in 2016. The children live with their grandmother in a neighbouring country of Eritrea. Abrihet's mother is Eritrean national but is now too old to take care of the children. The children's father passed away. For a long time, Abrihet wondered why the proceedings were taking so long in contrast to the proceedings of many of her friends from Eritrea, whose family members had long since travelled to Germany. In the end, it turned out that the state refugee authority, which cooperates with UNHCR, is refusing to register the children. However, this is the prerequisite for recognition as a refugee and thus for family reunification. With the financial support of volunteers, Abrihet was finally able to travel to see her children again in the spring of 2018 after five years of separation and to finally start the procedure locally.

Although she has an appointment with her children at the German embassy, she is not admitted. The situation is very difficult for Abrihet. She feels helpless because she cannot make a difference either in Germany or there. The procedure continues to be held up despite the fact that she has engaged a lawyer and is getting extensive support from an advisory organisation and a volunteer. She constantly worries about her children and is always thinking about them. Her partner is worried about her: "My wife[12] always sad, too. No sleep at night. Always crying, always DREAMING. [She dreams of her children] My child, my child, my child. Always" (interview with Solomon). For an indefinite period of time, Abrihet can only keep in touch with her children via smartphone, which is made more difficult by the fact that Internet access there is very limited outside the larger cities. She suffers greatly from this forced transnational relationship. How family life will settle after so many years of separation remains uncertain. Solomon's parents and most of his siblings are also in Eritrea, while an uncle now lives in Denmark and one sister in England (interview with Solomon). He has no relatives in Germany. The couple is in regular contact with all the relatives mentioned above via smartphone while it is difficult to keep in touch with the family in Eritrea (field notes 01 August 2017).

Trang describes the relationship with her mother, whom she did not see for more than four years because they fled separately:

> *I mean, from when I was 11 to when I was 15, I didn't have my mother with me. So, actually in the most important time of my development. I am emotionally very, very close to my father, and with my mother, I sometimes have trouble building up certain emotions. It was just this break, which no one is to blame for. It does have a big impact on life (interview with Trang).*

Experiences from international labour migration, in which people often involuntarily lead a transnational family life over years or even decades, also show that family reunification is a long-awaited moment, but that relationships do not simply pick up again from when the family members separated geographically. Feelings of alienation and lack of familiarity, therefore, often determine everyday family life (Christ, 2017).

For many refugees, a transnationally organised family life is part of everyday life. Some members of the family live in a refugee camp, some are still in their country of origin, while others are in a different receiving country. Mira talks about her concern for her family members during the war in Bosnia, when the possibilities of communication technology were significantly limited compared to today:

> *The most important thing was: Is there any news from Bosnia? Who is dead? Who is alive? Months passed, years passed. You just didn't know, my father was down there the whole time. Is he alive, is he not alive? Send money down. All you really dealt with was how can I get something down there and how can I get information? That totally affected our life (interview with Mira).*

Dunja talks about her mother, who took up cleaning jobs—illegal due to the ban on working—so she could send money to her relatives in Bosnia:

> *But we weren't able to get by any other way. She had to do it. [...] Then my mother quite soon took me along to do cleaning, and then I was trapped in it. You can't go to school today, because I have so many cleaning jobs that we have to do. And most of it went to Bosnia, to the relatives. She always said: We are safe here. She also felt guilty in a way. I was nine (interview with Dunja).*

Hamoudi and Fatima are also in regular contact with their relatives in Syria: "[We use] WhatsApp. I talk to my family every day [...] In the past, it was very difficult because many bombs came, but now is better" (interview with Fatima). Her children even receive transnational religious lessons from their aunt in Syria, in which their aunt's children also take part: "Now they're also reading the Quran with their aunt in Syria. In WhatsApp" (interview with Hamoudi and Fatima).

Transnational relationships, however, are not a new phenomenon, as the interviews with people who fled to Germany a long time ago show. Navid's mother and sister live in Iran, two brothers live in Denmark,

12 \ Even though they are not married, he refers to his partner as his "wife".

and one sister lives in the United States (interview with Navid, cf. also interview with Hanh, interview with Ali). Amira reports how contact with relatives has intensified in recent years as a result of better communication channels:

> *THERE IS contact, nowadays much more intensive [...] than in the past. Because nowadays, social media simply offers more opportunities. Even WORLDWIDE. Because this Afghan community is spread very widely in the whole world. Many who came to Europe stayed, and many who went to America. But I also have relatives in Japan and Australia. So that really means that my family is scattered all over the WHOLE world (interview Amira).*

Even though social relationships at the local level play an important role for refugees in their everyday lives and when it comes to settling, their world is shaped by transnational relationships with relatives, acquaintances and friends in different places all over the world. In some cases—especially the geographical separation of the nuclear family—the transnational realities are not chosen voluntarily but are the result of restrictive provisions of the asylum system or bureaucratic regulations of international refugee protection.

Of multiple belongings and the meaning of places and people

As already set out above (see in particular the chapters on social relationships at the local and transnational level), having the status of refugee or asylum seeker poses great challenges to people's own identity. Belonging needs to be renegotiated (Krist & Wolfsberger, 2009, pp. 173-176): Where do refugees feel they belong? What do they consider to be their home? According to a social-anthropological understanding, home is "a dynamic process that encompasses imagination, creation, destruction, change, loss and movement of the places where you feel at home" (Krist & Wolfsberger, 2009, p. 172).

For some people, the country of origin is the place they consider their home. Jalini says: "Truly speaking Sri Lanka. I have everything there, house and mother and relatives, friends and everyone" (interview with Jalini, in English). For Fatima, too—in contrast to her husband—her home is her country of origin, Syria: "My LIFE in Syria. Here [it is] different". Nonetheless, she knows rationally that her place is no longer in Syria: "My heart [says] I would go to Syria. But my head, no". Her husband adds with a laugh: "She wants to go [to Syria] tomorrow". Both Jalini and Fatima are women who feel very alone in Germany. The fact that it is difficult for them to build up local relationships certainly also has the effect that their respective home country is their only emotional point of reference. The difference between Fatima and her husband, who was able to establish many contacts through his professional activities and feels very comfortable where he is now, is striking. The family is also an example of the fact that the feeling of settling in can also differ between the generations. Fatima's and Hamoudi's children feel comfortable in Germany. They cannot imagine returning to Syria someday: "[Our children] like living here in Germany. They want to stay here. Not back to Syria. Always say that. They have a lot to do here" (interview with Fatima and Hamoudi). The intergenerational aspect is also reflected in what parents want for their children. Even if they do not yet feel at home in Germany, it is still clear to them that they see Germany as a future for their children. Hamoudi explains:

> *Because I have come here to Germany because of my future, also my children's future. Now, for example, if my children stay in Syria, no more school, they learn nothing. Here in Germany, it is different now. They go to school, have already learned a new language. They have already had good grades in school, too (interview with Hamoudi).*

Piranavan, too, explains that they want to stay in Germany because of the children: "When children are well-integrated, because of the children must stay here" (interview with Piranavan).

For Fatima's husband, Hamoudi, home does not refer to a country, but to a very specific place, namely the city he has been living in for four years.

> *When I go to BERLIN, Frankfurt, I do not like. I love A. (Laughter.) People say to me, for example, 'Are you coming here to live or to the other city?' I don't want. I'm staying here. Is my best city" (interview with Hamoudi).*

Some people have such a strong attachment to a district of a city that they cannot imagine living in another quarter. A woman from Iran definitely wants to remain in this district after moving out of the shelter. She tells me that even if she is only on her way to the bank, she always meets many people she knows and greets. Although she has friends in a neighbouring town and they are encouraging her to move there, she refuses. She enjoys being in her city and especially in this quarter (field notes, 9 August 2017).

The feeling of belonging can also depend quite specifically on the residence status, as Katharina's example demonstrates. She was already forced to flee as a child and lived in a refugee camp for some time. As an adult, she has been fleeing from her violent partner for six years in various countries in Europe. Her prospects of staying in Germany are uncertain. She does not feel as if she belongs anywhere: "Now I think [I'm] a stranger everywhere." Dilan only felt at home in Germany after she received permanent residency 13 years after her arrival here. The years before were marked by great uncertainty. She and her family were ordered to leave the country and had to fear deportation every day. The suspensions of deportation they received were only limited to three months. Every morning, she would first of all check the post. Dilan's children knew nothing about the potential deportation because she did not want them to feel like strangers. Dilan and her husband did not get a work permit and the impending deportation stood in the way of even small everyday decisions such as buying furniture, as they never knew how long they would be staying. Dilan spent many sleepless nights with her worries. It was only after she received a residence permit, following a change in the law in 2007, that she felt at home in the village where she lives: "Now is our home. I live here. Here is my village" (interview with Dilan).

Based on the experiences that Abrihet and Solomon gained in the authoritarian regime of Eritrea, home for them is the place where they find peace and freedom, as Abrihet explains: "If you have freedom, HOME". Her partner adds: "Yes. With peace, with peace. Always free" (interview with Abrihet and Solomon). Hanh, who escaped Vietnam by boat as an adult in the 1980s, shares this attitude. For her, home is the place where she does not have to be afraid (interview with Hanh).

"When I am here for long, then I miss Afghanistan, these friendships, these acquaintances, these friends" (interview with Ali). His example shows that home and belonging are not necessarily linked to specific places, but often to specific people (see, for example, interview with Vibol, interview with Vu, interview with Trang). Khalid sees Syria as his home—but for him, Syria without his family is not a real home, either: "My home is SYRIA, that's for sure. And my family. [But] if I imagine now I'm in Syria WITHOUT my family, it's no use either. [...] These two [must] be there—family AND Syria" (interview with Khalid).

Still, in this context, there are big differences between the people who fled to Germany a long time ago and those who fled recently. While the latter are unable to return to their country of origin due to war and political persecution, the former meanwhile have a permanent residence permit, and often German citizenship at the time of the interview. In some countries, the political situation has even changed so that visits to the country of origin are now possible. In Vietnam, for example, the Communist government—because of which the "boat people" left the country in the 1970s and 1980s—is still in power, but one can visit Vietnam today without having to fear persecution. Others come from countries like Afghanistan where there are ongoing conflicts; they can only visit their country of origin if the security

situation allows it. Due to her uncertain residence status, Dilan was only able to travel to Turkey again 18 years after her arrival in Germany. Because of the long separation, she did not recognise her own sister at first when she stood in front of her (interview with Dilan).

Many refugees regularly take an active interest in the political and social situation in their country of origin from afar; they read books and attend educational events (interview with Karim, interview with Shahram). Due to their privileged position compared to their country of origin, some people feel morally obliged to engage in political or charitable activities in their country of origin. Karim explains:

> *For me, Afghanistan still remains my first home, where I also have a kind of emotional connection. To the COUNTRY and also to the people, where I also really know the problems of the country and the people, the POVERTY in Afghanistan. Well, it's one of the poorest countries in the WORLD. And people are SUFFERING very badly, not only because they are very poor, but also because there has been a war raging there for forty years. The bond with Afghanistan is strong. And that's why I also DO SOMETHING for the people, from HERE. I don't have to do it. I don't earn any money [with it] either" (interview with Karim, also see interview with Shahram, interview with Ali).*

Many interview partners, especially those who have been in the country for a long time, consider Germany their second home (e.g. interview with Laith, interview with Hanh, group interview with women from Afghanistan). Navid talks about how he feels in his country of origin, Iran: "When I go to Iran, I [get] homesick for here" (interview with Navid). Hanh confirms this, too: "We are happy in Germany. Like second home" (interview with Hanh).

The birth of their children is not only a major biographical event for many refugees but also affects their sense of belonging. Trang, who came to Germany in the 1980s, says:

> *Yes, and actually I feel comfortable in Germany. It has become my home country of choice or my home. Especially since the children were born. [...] Germany has definitely been my home since the children arrived. [...] It's just a feeling because it simply reinforces being here even more (interview with Trang).*

The interviews show that the either-or categorisation of home—so often described in the research literature, particularly in Esser's work—falls too short. Trang describes how she feels when asked whether she is Vietnamese or German:

> *Sure, it has often happened to me that people have asked me, how do you feel: more Vietnamese or more German? I find the question very difficult to answer. I don't know what it feels like to be German or Vietnamese. I'm somewhere in-between. [...] I feel the way I feel (interview with Trang).*

Laith combines his identity to "Kurdish-German" (interview with Laith). Ali, too, explains that he unites two national identities that are not mutually exclusive: "50 per cent home Afghanistan and 50 per cent Germany. If I'm in Afghanistan for a LONG time, I miss Germany. Because I've been LIVING here for so long" (interview with Ali).

A feeling of belonging and having a home can, therefore not be described using either-or categories, but has multi-faceted aspects that depend on many factors and can change over time. People feel they belong to certain countries—whether it is their country of origin, Germany, or even a completely different country in some cases. Often it is about one or even several very specific places, for example, the city or even the neighbourhood. For some people, belonging is the result of social relationships in a specific place, while a lack of these often leads to homesickness for the country of origin. The, more or less secure, residence status influences the sense of belonging, which can also change over time, especially in connection with key biographical events such as the birth of one's children. Ultimately, many refugees consider their home country to be the place where they find peace and freedom.

Integration as a gendered process

Learning the language, which is crucial for many newly arrived people during their initial time in Germany, already illustrates how much integration is a gendered process. During my field research, I observed that access to language acquisition depends heavily on gender. An understanding of roles—widespread both in the countries of origin and in Germany—that makes women in particular responsible for childcare proved to be problematic. Many of the women I met during field research were pregnant or had small children. The strategy of the families was therefore mostly to send the male partner into the public sphere, while the women stayed with the children in the private sphere in the shelter. Men should first learn the language and then try to find a job in the labour market as "family breadwinners". The woman's educational background played hardly any role in this decision; even well-educated women remained at home with the children for an indefinite period (interview with Jalini, Zara, Fatima, field notes, 4 July 2017).

One important reason why women do not gain access to education and work over a long period of time is the lack of childcare (interview with a representative of a migrant women's self-organisation, interview with a social worker). Language courses with childcare are rare (field notes 20 June 2017, 26 July 2017, 17 October 2017) and even if they do exist, some children are still too small to be given to unfamiliar people for a few hours (field notes 17 October 2017). A group discussion with social workers in autumn 2018 showed that the lack of childcare for language courses is still an issue (field notes 23 November 2018). At the statistical level, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP study also shows a much higher proportion of men in language courses than women if there are children under 18 in the household and there is no external childcare (Brücker, Rother & Schupp, 2016a, pp. 40-42).

Moreover, the few courses with childcare do not always correspond to the language level of the women who are interested (field notes 12 June 2017). Jalini spent a long time looking for a course with childcare but did not find one (field notes 15 December 2016). While her husband was attending further education courses at university level, she had to wait until she had finally found a place at a kindergarten for her youngest daughter (field notes 6 July 2017, interview with Jalini). Zara, on the other hand, benefited from her husband finding a part-time job in which he worked in the evenings. In the mornings, he was able to look after his children, and she could then attend a German language course (field notes 24 May 2017).

Another problem is finding a place in a kindergarten (interview with Katharina). One single mother has been looking for a kindergarten place for her son since he turned one. He is now three and a half years old, and despite numerous attempts by a volunteer to place him in various kindergartens and the family office of the municipality, he has still not been able to get a place (field notes 25 August 2016). A member of a migrant self-organisation reports of a young Syrian mother who, despite difficult circumstances—she has separated from her husband and lives alone with her two small children—is making a tremendous effort to learn German:

> *She then took along all her DOCUMENTS from the German language course. And she said, yes, she's trying to learn GERMAN and her grades are all really good and so on. So that's how she showed: I'm doing everything I can so that I can integrate here and I'm making an effort. Please support me (interview with a member of a migrant self-organisation).*

The experiences of the women who have come to Germany since 2014 are very similar in this aspect to the experiences of those who fled to Germany some time ago (interview with Hanh, interview with Ali). At a group meeting of senior women from Afghanistan, I am told that the topic of understanding the language is still relevant to them today. The majority of the

women in this group have difficulty communicating in German, even after more than 20 years in Germany; this still causes difficulties for them in their everyday lives. The majority of these women had never attended a German language course, as they were looking after their children (field notes 26 September 2018).

The lack of required language skills also prevents women from gaining a foothold in the labour market, although many wish to do so (interviews with Katharina, Jalini, Nassima, Fatima). Women often struggle with their situation, which is marked by uncertainty, waiting and boredom (field notes 11 August 2017). Fatima, who worked as a maths teacher in Syria, talks about her husband, who has finally found an apprenticeship: "This is good for my husband and my children. But I, yes, I'm at home now. I've lost three years. I've done nothing" (interview with Fatima). When she is only at home, her thoughts go round in circles: "Always thinking, always thinking. [...]. No work, no anything, always thinking" (interview with Fatima).

As a part of family reunification, Fatima and the three children were able to follow her husband after a few months. In the first few years, she was at home taking care of the children. At the same time, she was attending a language course and passed her B1 exam a year ago. Unlike her husband, she was able to prepare for the departure and take her certificates to Germany. At the time of the interview, the documents were still waiting to be recognised. Her biggest wish is to work in Germany in her profession as a school headmistress again. However, she says: "We have lost many things. [...] Here we start new life with my children. I have lost my job. Lost my future" (interview with Fatima). To resume her old job, she will need a lot of time: "I start [from] zero. That is hard and [...] takes a lot of time." Her language skills are not yet sufficient to be able to do an internship at a school. Even at a later date, she was not able to accept an offer from the headmaster because of moving and the need for her to look after her children in the afternoon. An advisor at the jobcentre now recommends that she apply for a job as a kindergarten teacher or a job providing assistance or afternoon care at schools. She should also take the B2 language test so that she can get a more highly-qualified job.

A social worker reports that in the shelter she supervises, more and more people have taken up work, but that most of them are men. Only one woman has found a job so far (interview with social worker A). Studies also indicate that female refugees have a lower labour market participation rate than men (Wiedner Salikutluk & Giesecke, 2018, p. 22). The analysis of the 2013 IAB-SOEP migration survey of refugees who fled to Germany in the period from 1990 to 2010 shows a significantly lower proportion of female refugees who are gainfully employed (17 per cent) compared to male refugees (36 per cent) (Giesecke Giesecke, Kroh, Salikutluk, Eisnecker & Özer, 2017, p. 79). In comparison to other migrants, female refugees are also less likely to be in gainful employment (Giesecke, Kroh, Salikutluk, Eisnecker & Özer, 2017, p. 83).

An employee of an organisation offering counselling drew attention to an important point: Refugees can receive a settlement permit if they fulfil the corresponding integration obligations, such as mastering the German language or making an independent living. This can lead to different opportunities for getting a settlement permit due to gender:

> *BECAUSE they [women, especially mothers] DON'T speak German that well, because they don't attend German language courses. [...] then it is the women who make sure that the children go to school, as a contribution to integration. It is generally not the men who do that. This service towards integration does not play any role with regard to immigration law. Instead, it's always about making a living (interview with an employee of an advisory organisation).*

The examples show that everyday practices and gender norms lead to the situation in which men are faster than women, especially mothers, to start moving in the public sphere and gain access to important areas such as language learning and the labour market. This does not always correspond to the wishes of women. While it is more difficult for them to gain access to language courses and the labour market, the important role they play in creating the conditions for the integration of their children is seldom recognised. In particular, this can have a negative impact for them if legal regulations depend on it, for example with regard to the chances of obtaining a settlement permit.

What do refugees mean by integration?

As described in the introductory chapters on integration in the political, social and academic discourse, integration is often defined as a gradual adaptation of migrants. Here, I want to explain how refugees themselves understand integration.[13]

For Khalid, integration is first and foremost about language. Language is an essential key that makes the process of settling down easier (Kaabel, 2017, p. 52): "The language is really what comes first. It is the key […]. If you can't speak it well, then he won't have any luck. Language and SETTLING DOWN. I still don't have that. But I'm getting there" (interview with Khalid). Although Khalid has now attained a higher level of German language skills than many other people who arrived around the same time as him, he still does not feel that his language skills are good enough for him to feel as if he has settled. Trang also agrees that language is of pivotal importance. She is proud of her parents' efforts to learn the language directly and not be dependent on the translation services of their children: "My parents had the attitude that integration works best when you're integrated into everyday life. And they also made sure for themselves that they were not dependent on us. That also included the
language" (interview with Trang.). Furthermore, she considers it to be important that they had a fixed daily structure right from the beginning.

> *The basic prerequisite for it is to first master the language and to have a daily structure. […] Integration and settling down in Germany started with the structure of the day. We had the structure right from the beginning. We came to the shelter and in the first week, we were already told that lessons would start the next day, and then you have to go there and back again (interview with Trang).*

Laith feels very deeply that he must overcome certain "deficits" to be considered integrated and to receive access to certain rights.

> *I understand that [one] must make good contacts with Germans, must [know] German culture, must accept working conditions, must love Germans, or else must leave Germany. I understood it like that, integrating (interview with Laith).*

In his case, this feeling of having to compensate for certain deficits and to have to make adjustments has a biographical background. After he had been recognised as a refugee for five years after entering Germany from Iraq in 2001, his residence permit status was converted to "temporary suspension of deportation" in 2006. In various German cities, he took on jobs that entailed hard physical work and accepted difficult working conditions. He hoped that this would enable him to obtain a residence permit. However, his hopes were dashed. To prove his efforts to integrate, he even took the naturalisation test and passed it without a single mistake—but again, his efforts did not prove successful. He only received a permanent residence permit in 2012.

Although Trang and her family, as Vietnamese "boat people" received an unlimited residence permit in Germany directly, they also felt the pressure of adapting and convincing the German majority society of their abilities:

> *There was always this wish to be good at everything. That's what my father taught us too. Be good at everything you do, because you are the strangers here and you must first prove to yourself that you understand it all and that you can do it all (interview with Trang).*

Dilan also shares the view that refugees have to adapt as newcomers: "You can't change anything here, you have to change [yourself]. That's the way it is" (interview with Dilan).

13 \ Towards the end of the interviews with people who came to Germany a long time ago, I asked them about their understanding of integration. For language-related reasons, this was usually not possible with those who only recently come to Germany. Even a paraphrase of the term, such as "having settled down" usually did not help.

Dunja tells us about her mother, who always admonished her to show restraint: "My mother always behaved like a guest, as inconspicuous as possible" (interview with Dunja).

For Amira, it is important to ensure that integration is not confused with assimilation and calls for participation:

> *Integration for me means being curious, becoming involved. […] So, for me, what sometimes gets mixed up is integration and assimilation. And I clearly differentiate. And it's also important to me to always use the right wording. […] I have my background, my appearance, and [stick to] the rules, I help shape the rules over time, speak the language to communicate with others. But also to be able to get involved. This definitely ALSO INCLUDES the fact that in this ring, in this chain, in which I'm now a NEWCOMER, in quotation marks […], SPACE is made, too. That's important for it, too. That I'm also given time and space to integrate (interview with Amira).*

When Amira's family is visited by her relatives who live in Australia, she realises for the first time that she is still considered a "foreigner" even though she has been in Germany for a long time:

> *And THIS is an experience that I had because of my relatives, who, for example, came from Australia to visit us in Germany. […] At the time, we had been here only, only in quotation marks, for twenty years. And they said, 'Your neighbours are talking about you, saying you are FOREIGNERS, you are FOREIGNERS here'. And that was TOTALLY surprising for them, MORE than that. Actually, they were APPALLED about it. Because they had been living just as long as we had, but in Australia. And they had already been Australians for a LONG time. And at the time, I was surprised. Naturally, I wasn't aware of that, because I didn't KNOW any different. And I thought: Oh, really? It can actually be very different. And it's [the same], STILL TODAY. And that's STRANGE (interview with Amira).*

As a result of this experience, she concludes that integration should be a two-way process:

> *And somehow I think that integration involves BOTH. Both sides. On the one hand, a group that is open to it. But at the same time also a group that is ready to LET others in (interview with Amira).*

The empirical examples show that integration seen from the perspective of the refugees themselves has different facets. They consider the learning of the language, a regular everyday structure from the very beginning, and mutual engagement of both sides to be very important. This also means that integration must not be equated with assimilation and that participation must be called for. For many, however, the pressure of the dominant socio-political discourse gives rise to the feeling that they have to compensate for deficits and adapt to the majority society. At the same time, refugees reported the following paradox: Even people who are considered to be "well-integrated" persistently remain "Others" who are labelled "strangers" or "foreigners". In this sense, integration does not necessarily lead to inclusion, but rather can still involve exclusion.

Theoretical considerations against the background of life experiences

Social science theories and the dominant social and political discourse on integration presented in the first part of the *Working Paper* show a large discrepancy compared to the actual lives of refugees. The theoretical stage-models of integration, which have very effectively inscribed themselves in the political discourse, are not compelling enough to describe the complex everyday experiences of refugees theoretically. In the following, therefore, I propose taking various more recent concepts into account for the interpretation of living environments that better reflect the complexity of experiences, particularly with regard to the specific conditions of the asylum system.

Civic stratification—Inequitable access to civic rights

The examples presented show that the integration of refugees into the labour market is important. German legislation took this on board. The Integration Act of 2016, for example, opened up the labour market by making it possible to obtain a permanent settlement permit after three or five years, if one could largely earn their own living. Thus, refugees who come to Germany with certain resources, such as a high level of education, are better off than others, which actually amounts to an extension of their citizenship rights (Scherschel, 2018). Since November 2015, asylum seekers and people with a temporary suspension of deportation who—with "good prospects of remaining"—have also been granted more civil rights, and now have access to integration courses for the first time. At the same time, people with "bad prospects of remaining" are excluded from integration courses as well as from the housing and labour market.

Although efforts to integrate refugees are to be welcomed, in this regard German policy reflects the concept of civic stratification: Individuals experience inequitable access to civic rights depending on different resources. However, this also means that it is accepted that some migrants and refugees are denied participation in civic rights (civic exclusion).

> *Rights can be either restricted (civic contraction) or extended (civic expansion). The model of civic stratification describes a dynamic process in which civic ascents and descents are plausible. In the case of civic gain and civic deficit, having access to or possessing the most varied capitals plays a decisive role (Scherschel, 2015, p. 128).*

As the "potential" ascribed to refugees and migrants depends not only on their own initiative and background but also on their country of origin and their prospects of remaining, a principle of arbitrariness is created.

Integration as interaction and participation

The practice described above conflicts with the demand for migrants to integrate. In light of this legal situation, integration proves to be undesired by the state for certain population groups, such as people with "bad prospects of remaining" or people who have been living in the country with a temporary suspension of deportation or other temporary residence permits for a long time. These exclusion mechanisms stand in stark contrast to the demands of the political and social discourse that migrants have to integrate themselves. Conversely, the experiences of refugees from Vietnam indicate how participation promotes the inclusion of refugees right from the start. Thus, one can only speak of integration when opportunities for participation[14] apply equally to all people. Pries argues in favour of extending the integration concept to an interactionist and participation-oriented idea of integration, according to which integration follows "the idea of the participation of all people and social groups in a society or in a complex interrelationship of people that is as equitable as possible" (2015, p. 24). In this case, participation refers to social activities

14 \ According to El-Mafaalani (2018), improved participation and a greater sense of belonging, which for him constitutes successful integration, also lead to more conflicts. For this, he uses a positive concept of conflict, according to which conflicts are a normal part of social change. According to him, the aim is not to combat these conflicts, but to find forms of constructive conflict resolution in open societies.

and areas that are regarded as important and are relevant as an "enabling strategy" (Pries, 2015, p. 28) for all people in a society—not just for migrants.[15] This does not contradict the fact that refugees, for example through contact with family members, continue to maintain a close bond with their home country, as findings from transnationalism research show.

Integration and transnationalism

Assimilation theories and integration theories describe exclusively the incorporation of migrants into a host society, without taking into account their various simultaneous affiliations, for example in the host society and the society of origin. Since the 1990s, however, the concept of transnationalism has gained in importance, triggered by an essay in which the authors Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1995) presented this concept as a new analytical approach to understanding migration processes. The lives of migrants today are shaped by networks, activities and everyday actions that extend beyond national borders and include the society of origin and the host society.

Refugees' realities are very rarely anchored solely in the specific place they are currently located, but rather are set in various transnational and translocal connections to their relatives, acquaintances and friends in different places throughout the world.

The demand for assimilation into the host society contradicts the realities of refugees who are often concerned about their relatives in areas of conflict or who are in regular contact with relatives in other countries. Transnational involvement does not have to be in contradiction to integration, but rather research shows that these processes are closely interwoven. However, unlike integration, transnationalism is not a mode of incorporation, but can rather influence the process of integration into the host society in many ways (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, pp. 148-150). It should be noted, however, that there is still no consensus in the research on how exactly integration and transnationalism influence one another (Waldinger, 2017).

In an overview, the authors Erdal and Oeppen, therefore, name four positions which describe the relationship between integration and transnationalism in the research literature. First, they identify the alarmist view, according to which the existence of transnational ties could hinder integration. A second position is that in the case of a difficult structural integration, migrants must adopt transnational strategies of making a living. A third view assumes that processes of integration and transnationalism can support each other. The fourth position, dominant in the research literature, is the pragmatic view, which assumes that the reality for the majority of migrants is far more differentiated than a simple decision between transnationalism and integration (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, pp. 872-873).

Intersectionality

The experiences of the refugees presented here also challenge the implicit basic assumptions of existing theories on integration and of political and social discourse that the gradual process of integration is the same for all people. On the contrary, one can observe a variety of differentiations that can shape integration processes. They differ, for example, depending on gender, age/generation, ethnicity/nationality, or social class and, crucially, also according to the structural legal requirements. Thus, integration processes vary, depending on whether the person in question is a woman, a man, an adult, a child, a youth or an elderly person, or a person with a good or barely formalised education. Especially the legal category of

15 \ Pries (2015, pp. 25-26) refers to Berry, who, as a comparative culture psychologist, examines the relationship between immigration, acculturation and adaptation. According to Berry (1997), the four strategies of acculturation are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. At first glance, the four acculturation strategies correspond to Esser's model. A key difference, however, is that according to Berry's model, participation in the society of origin and in the host society is not mutually exclusive. While for Esser assimilation is the most promising strategy for social integration, for Berry it is multiple integration. According to Berry, migrants can retain their own identity and also participate in societal activities of the majority society. Berry's thoughts are thus closely related to findings from transnationalism research and contradict Esser's model of assimilation, the model which prevails in politics and public discourse.

"refugee" can be perceived as exclusionary. For Laith, it was a relief, after all those years of uncertain residence status, to not only finally obtain a permanent residence permit, but also to put aside his status as a refugee: "Thank God, I no longer feel like a refugee" (interview with Laith).

These social categories are interconnected and linked to ongoing experiences of discrimination, as research on intersectionality demonstrates (Degele & Winker, 2007; Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017; Lutz, Vivar & Supik, 2010). Similar to a road junction, where traffic flows from multiple directions, discrimination comes from different directions, too. For example, experiences of discrimination based on gender (e.g. woman), legal status (e.g. subsidiary protection) and nationality (e.g. Syrian) intersect.

Post-migrant perspectives

The politicised discussion regarding the admission of refugees in 2015/16 shows that migration is by no means seen as a normal reality in Germany. The experiences of those who fled to Germany around 20 to 40 years ago are also proof of this. As long as migration is not recognised as normality, it can be assumed that refugees—even people who are regarded as "well-integrated" according to current perceptions—will in future still be viewed as "Others" and "strangers". Thus, they share the experiences of other migrants and their children and grandchildren.

Recent research in German-speaking countries addresses this problem and characterises societies, such as the German society, as "post-migrant societies". A post-migrant society is a society shaped by the experience of migration; as a result of it, pluralisation and heterogenisation processes take place in society.

The concept of post-migration must be understood as an explicitly normative concept—not as a description of the current reality, but as an aspiration. It attempts to formulate expectations, to create an ideal, and to provide fresh momentum in social discourse. Foroutan explains:

> *The 'migrant' part in the term 'post-migrant' stands here as a cipher for real and constructed, social and symbolic inequalities, the overcoming of which is the goal of the plural and democratic immigration society (2018, p. 15).*

Just as colonial history should be narrated from the perspective of the colonised in the post-colonial discourse, a post-migrant perspective should serve to represent the voices of migrants and to normalise migration experiences (Yildiz, 2018, pp. 20-22). The social reality of the complexity of multiple identities should be acknowledged at a socio-political level (Schmitz, Witte & Schneikert, 2018, p. 148).

For the concept of integration, a post-migrant perspective means that social integration is not unilaterally limited to migrants, but instead refers to all members of a society (Schmitz, Witte & Schneikert, 2018, p. 146). The origin of a person should no longer be the dominating aspect of the integration discourse (Foroutan, 2013, p. 89). Foroutan demands that German society should negotiate what and not who will be integrated. This is the only way to overcome the thinking that people with a migration background display certain deficits and therefore have to integrate unilaterally (Foroutan, 2013, p. 99).

Conclusion

When comparing the experiences of people who fled to Germany around 20 to 40 years ago with those who have fled since 2014, it is the continuities that are most striking. These experiences are closely related to the individual legal position in the asylum system. Access to language courses depended and depends directly on the respective residence status. In the past, refugees only had access to language courses after a positive decision.[16] Today, asylum seekers can already attend integration courses, however, are classified based on criteria relating to their national affiliation: Only asylum seekers with "good prospects of remaining" have the opportunity to attend language courses. At the same time, as the empirical part has shown, access to or exclusion from language courses is not insignificant, as it influences the social inclusion or exclusion of refugees to a great extent. The refugees view language as a key that opens the door to participation in society, for example as a prerequisite to entering the labour market or for making social contacts in Germany.

In addition, access to the labour market is of the utmost importance to my interviewees, to lead a self-reliant life without being dependent on state benefits (Thränhardt, 2015, pp. 4-5). Moreover, work is an activity that creates identity, especially for people to whom only the identity "refugee" is ascribed from the outside. There are differences in access to the labour market between the past and the present that are a result of the development of the asylum system, but there are also continuities. The interviews with people who have been in Germany for a long time but were excluded from the labour market illustrate, for example, the great psychological strain experienced during the long years of legal uncertainty and lack of prospects. However, the hurdles which recognised refugees have to overcome today are similarly burdensome. Great commitment is required from the job seeker and the employer, as well as on the part of third parties such as volunteers—not only to find a job but also to do justice to the demands of everyday working life.

From a gender perspective, in particular, the continuities between the experiences from a long time ago and those from only a few years ago are striking. In the past, as now, women are more likely to be active in the private sphere, while families rely on the strategy of sending men into the public sphere first. This makes it more difficult for women to gain access to key areas of society, such as language learning or the labour market.

Many of the day-to-day challenges faced by refugees are similar to those faced by migrants without a refugee background, e.g. the lack of recognition of educational and vocational qualifications, the devaluation of their previous professional biographies or the learning of a new language. Nevertheless, my empirical findings illustrate how greatly the real lives of refugees are shaped and structured by the asylum system. Their access to language courses, the labour market or other services depends on their respective legal status—the particular current legal situation, the status of the asylum procedure, and the type of residence status. While participation is made possible for some people (e.g. Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s and 1980s, or currently people with "good prospects of remaining"), others experience multiple exclusion mechanisms. People whose residence status is uncertain over a long period of time in particular live in a state of waiting, uncertainty, and lack of prospects. While many of them receive permanent residence status much later, they are unable to make up for the time in their lives they feel they have lost. The legal preconditions thus prove to be a key factor in the course of integration processes.

16 \ In isolated cases, municipalities funded language courses for asylum applicants, for example in Cologne in the late 1980s. Language courses were also offered to some extent by welfare organisations (interview with an employee of a counselling organisation).

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bicc \
Internationales Konversionszentrum Bonn
Bonn International Center for Conversion GmbH

Pfarrer-Byns-Straße 1, 53121 Bonn, Germany
+49 (0)228 911 96-0, Fax -22, bicc@bicc.de

www.bicc.de
www.facebook.com/bicc.de

bicc Bonn International Center for Conversion \

AUTHOR
Dr Simone Christ, Senior Researcher, BICC

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Jean Maples

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