



# BAMF Brief Analysis

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## Female Refugees in Germany: Language, Education and Employment

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### AT A GLANCE

- More than 500,000 girls and women have sought refuge in Germany between 2012 and 2016. They are for the most part of a young age and frequently live with their families. The most important countries of origin are Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Just like male refugees, female refugees are highly motivated to participate in German society. Yet they tend to have fewer educational qualifications and more frequently completely lack any form of schooling or vocational training. On average, they also tend to have significantly less experience regarding paid labour in their countries of origin.
- Female refugees attend the nationwide integration courses less frequently and with greater delay after their arrival in Germany. Women generally assess their German language skills as weaker than men do. This is probably because they have fewer opportunities for using the German language.
- It can be observed that specifically access to the relevant institutions, both as regards school and vocational training and the attendance of integration courses, constitutes a barrier for female refugees. Yet once they have taken the first steps, the measurable success in completing educational programmes is comparable to that of men.
- Employment participation of female refugees in Germany is significantly lower compared to that of male refugees and also to that of other population groups. At the same time, the extent of part-time and marginal employment is higher; however, this is not a specific characteristic of this group of women. Employment is clearly concentrated in certain sectors, including the cleaning business and the tourism, hotel and catering industry.
- The overall disadvantaged position of female refugees in the labour market is probably caused by a cumulation of several factors (fewer qualifications, less experience in gainful employment, less/delayed participation in language acquisition, family obligations). Yet a clear majority of women wants to be in gainful employment.

## On the significance of the subject

The number of refugee girls and women in Germany has increased over the past years. More than half a million girls and women applied for asylum in Germany between 2012 and 2016. Of course, not all of them remain in the country permanently or for a longer period, but a significant percentage of them do. Besides the asylum procedure, other entry routes for refugees, such as resettlement, the federal states' and federal government humanitarian access schemes for Syrian nationals and the access scheme for Afghan local employees, must be taken into consideration. Almost every second person coming to Germany by means of these schemes is a girl or a woman (Grote et al. 2016: 52f.), whereas 30 % of first-time asylum applicants of the past years were female.

Yet as the absolute numbers of refugees coming under humanitarian access schemes are of considerably lesser importance than numbers of people applying for asylum in Germany (the number of annually accepted persons

is in the three-to-four-digit range, whereas the number of asylum applications has been in the six-digit range since 2013), female refugees are on the whole quantitatively underrepresented. Their living conditions and their integration prospects are of little significance for the public debate. Apart from other factors, this may well have to do with the fact that security issues such as criminality, violence and Islamist radicalisation are more likely to attract media attention and are almost exclusively associated with men, whereas female refugees are often only perceived as a particularly vulnerable group (Krause 2016). De facto, however, refugees of both genders are mostly young people under 35 years who for the most part are highly motivated to take charge of their own lives. Current research findings show that men and women refugees have strong intentions to stay, to work and to gain citizenship in Germany (see Baraulina/Bitterwolf 2016: 47; Romiti et al. 2016: 46; Worbs et al. 2016: 177, 270f. and others).

### BOX 1: BAMF DATA SOURCES ON FEMALE REFUGEES

The BAMF Research Centre has data on female refugees from three in-house studies (partly in cooperation with other partners) and administrative statistics. All studies and data collections included men and women, which enables comparisons.

In the context of the **BAMF Flüchtlingsstudie 2014** (Worbs et al. 2016; BAMF Refugee Study 2014), 929 women from six countries of origin (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Sri Lanka, Syria), who live in Germany with a right to asylum or as recognised refugees and who have entered into Germany up until and including 2012, were interviewed in a written survey. This onetime survey was carried out in summer 2014.

**The IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten** (Brücker et al. 2016; IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey) is designed as a panel study over three years. In the first survey in 2016, 799 female refugees from a larger number of countries of origin (incl. Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Western Balkans, Eritrea, Somalia and Iran) were polled in computer-assisted personal interviews. They came to Germany between 2013 and early 2016. The group includes women who still are subject to an asylum procedure as well as women with a protection status and not successful asylum applicants with tolerated stay status.

The study on **Resettlement-Flüchtlinge** (Baraulina/Bitterwolf 2016; Resettlement Study) comprises data from guideline-assisted qualitative interviews with some 40

female resettlement refugees, who came to Germany in 2012 and in 2014. So far, detailed results are available only for the 2012 cohort; however, the currently conducted interviews with the 2014 cohort reveal strong parallels.

The data on the **“Social Component”** (Neske/Rich 2016; Rich 2016) relates to first-time asylum applicants and are gathered on a voluntary basis in the context of the application process. This is an administrative statistic without the standards of a scientific study, yet with the advantage of very big case numbers. The data gathered here includes details regarding school education and the last practised occupations in the country of origin. Data are currently available for 2015 and the first half of 2016.

The three first listed empirical social research studies each contain among other things data on the language acquisition of female refugees in Germany. The BAMF's **Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik** (Integration Course Statistics) provides additional information on this aspect, providing for example differentiated data on new course participants regarding gender and country of origin. Relevant data for 2015 and 2016 is included in the analysis at hand. Basic data on female asylum applicants (number, proportion of all applicants, age and religious structure) can be found in the **Asylgeschäftsstatistik** (Asylum Statistics) that is likewise kept at the BAMF.

This brief analysis focuses on the question of what do we know about female refugee participation in Germany in view of current statistical and scientific results.<sup>1</sup> Box 1 describes the data sources used here in greater detail. The analysis focuses on the topic of German language acquisition and on the employment situation, since both the ability to communicate in the local language and gainful employment are key prerequisites for participation in the institutions of modern Western welfare states (Lessenich 2009). In addition, the analysis takes into account the educational and vocational qualifications of female refugees as well as the extent of their gainful employment in their country of origin because they are regarded as “preceding” factors for language acquisition and labour market access in Germany.

## A quantitative overview: Refugee girls and women in Germany

Table 1 illustrates the development of female forced migration to Germany over the course of the past five years. The table entails the ten most important countries of origin of asylum applicants in Germany in 2016.

More than 500,000 girls and women who, since 2012, have for the first time applied for asylum in Germany account for a third of the entire immigration of asylum seekers based on the average of all countries of origin. The percentage of women and men is almost equal only for applicants from the Russian Federation and Serbia. Regarding the development of absolute figures, the overall increasing tendency over the course of time is noticeable,

in particular as of 2014<sup>2</sup>, as is the dominance of the three countries of origin Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. In total, more than half (264,841 persons or 52.3 %) of all female asylum applicants of the past five years came from these countries.

The total protection rate that constitutes the percentage of positive asylum procedure decisions of all decisions in a given period of time was 63.1% for female applicants in 2016 and 42.6% in 2015.<sup>3</sup> This means that more than half of all decisions in these two particularly high-entry years resulted in prospects for girls and women to get a residence permit in Germany.

The number of female refugees who entered into Germany not via the asylum procedure can only be estimated, as corresponding data are not available for all humanitarian admission programmes (Grote et al. 2016: 52f.). Yet it is definitely much lower. In the resettlement programme, a total of 635 female persons from African and Asian countries came between 2012 and 2015; the federal government’s access scheme for Syrian refugees received a total of 9,414 female persons between 2013 and 2015. Vulnerable persons coming under these programmes are likely to face similar integration challenges as do refugees in or after the asylum procedure (for resettlement refugees: Baraulina/Bitterwolf 2016).

The asylum statistics also provide data regarding the age and religious structure of asylum applicants. Both in 2015 and 2016, more than 40% of female applicants were under 18 years and 38% were aged 18 to under 35. In other words, four out of five female persons in the asylum procedure

1 The statistical data includes both under-age and adult female applicants. The research results are exclusively based on information given by adult respondents.

2 Exceptions are Albania and Serbia, where a marked decline has been observed in 2016. This is due to the classification of these countries as a “safe country of origin”.

3 Special evaluation based on the asylum statistics.

**Table 1: Female first-time asylum applicants and cumulated percentage of women by country of origin, 2012-2016**

Country of origin	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total 2012-2016	Cumulated percentage of women, 2012-2016
<b>All countries</b>	<b>24,670</b>	<b>40,109</b>	<b>57,891</b>	<b>136,315</b>	<b>247,804</b>	<b>506,789</b>	<b>33,5%</b>
<b>including: TOP 10 countries</b>							
<b>Syria</b>	2,348	4,075	11,419	41,527	96,817	156,186	32.4%
<b>Afghanistan</b>	2,447	2,282	2,740	8,459	40,379	56,307	30.8%
<b>Iraq</b>	2,502	1,859	2,261	8,675	37,051	52,348	37.2%
<b>Iran</b>	1,779	1,961	1,335	1,767	7,630	14,472	33.1%
<b>Albania</b>	107	534	3,432	21,339	6,102	31,514	40.4%
<b>Eritrea</b>	282	951	2,673	2,649	5,720	12,275	26.0%
<b>Russian Federation</b>	1,533	7,304	2,114	2,727	5,436	19,114	49.1%
<b>Nigeria</b>	418	848	1,619	1,856	4,582	9,323	37.8%
<b>Somalia</b>	404	1,015	1,486	1,476	3,282	7,663	30.0%
<b>Serbia</b>	4,212	5,661	8,342	8,188	3,113	29,516	49.0%

Source: BAMF, Asylgeschäftsstatistik (Asylum Statistics), partly own calculations. Countries in declining order based on the figures for 2016.

were girls or young women (the percentage of young persons is similarly high amongst male applicants, but with a greater percentage of 18- to under 35-year-olds). With respect to religious structure, 69.8% of female applicants in 2015 were Muslim, 17.2% Christian and 4.7% Yazidi, to name the three most important groups. The same pattern applies to 2016 with 74.8% Muslims, 12.8% Christians and 8.0% Yazidis,<sup>4</sup> although the percentage of Muslims and Yazidis has increased.

In summary, the statistical data show: the majority of refugee girls and women has been coming to Germany via the asylum procedure in the past years. Most of them originated from non-European countries and in particular from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Four fifths are (very) young people aged up to 35 years and they are mostly Muslim, however, for some countries of origin other religious groups and individuals unaffiliated with any religion may play a greater role (Worbs et al. 2016: 208). In addition, it can be assumed that a majority of these women came to or live in Germany with their families, although no comprehensive, representative data is available in this respect. For instance, only 14% of the female respondents in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 lived alone in a household, compared to more than twice as many men (36%). Other persons in the household typically include the husband and own children (Worbs et al. 2016: 66).

## German language skills and language acquisition

### Language skills

According to the results of several studies, male migrants have better second language skills than female migrants. The main explanation for this phenomenon is “different roles in professional and private life, which coincides with different motivations and opportunities for learning” (Scheible/Rother 2017: 15 [transl. from German]).

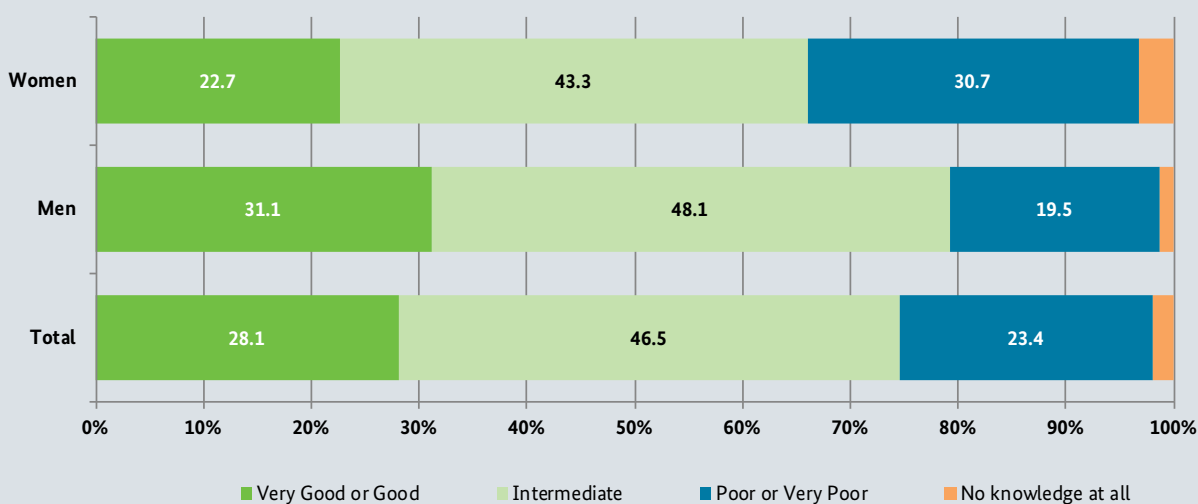
This general finding can also be applied to refugees. For instance, the data of the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 reveals that two thirds of polled women classify their German language skills as “Very Good”, “Good” or “Intermediate” in an index comprising all four language skills (understanding, speaking, reading and writing), compared to almost 80% of men. At the time of the interviews, these people had been in Germany for more than five years on average, meaning that they have already had opportunities for acquiring the language. Consequently, a third of female respondents, yet only about a fifth of men thought they had bad to non-existent skills (Figure 1).

However, linear regression models<sup>5</sup> reveal that the influence of gender on language skills disappears when taking other factors into account (Table 2). People with longer periods of residence thus estimate their skills to be significantly better, just as those with longer school attendance,

4 Special evaluation based on the asylum statistics.

5 First corresponding results were published by Worbs et al. (2016: 228); the above-noted results derive from an extended model. See Box 2 for an explanation of the basic concept behind regression models and their interpretation.

Figure 1: Index of self-assessed German language skills by gender



Source: BAMF Flüchtlingsstudie 2014 (BAMF Refugee Study 2014), n=2,790, weighted. Percentages under 5% are not accounted for. The index is based on details given regarding languages skills in understanding, speaking, reading and writing. The basis is respondents who provided valid information on all four language skills.

compared to those who have not attended school at all or at most for four years. Structural opportunities, for example, the inclusion in vocational training, employment and social contacts, seem to have a particularly strong effect. The nominally strongest effect arises from the status “In vocational training”, compared to the reference category “Non-working” which applies particularly to many women. Gainful employment, the search for a job or vocational training position as well as German friends and contact to German people in the neighbourhood at least once a week likewise positively influence the self-assessment of German language skills. Separate models for men and women that are not included in Table 2 arrive at identical results regarding the significant influencing factors. Merely the origin effects are observed only for the total number of respondents and for men (see Worbs et al. 2016: 225 for more detail).

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey provides insights into the language skills of people who have only recently

come to Germany. More than 90% of respondents stated that they had no speaking or writing German language skills prior to their entry into Germany (Romiti et al. 2016: 37). The language skills then improved relatively quickly: 32% of the refugees living in Germany for more than two years assess their German language skills as “Very Good” or “Good” and 37% as “Intermediate”. Yet this study, too, reveals that in the time between entry into the country and the survey the German language skills have improved slower amongst female than amongst male respondents (Romiti et al. 2016: 38).

### Language acquisition in integration courses

In the years 2015 and 2016 in particular, refugees were provided with a wide range of opportunities for language acquisition. In addition to the integration courses that are designed, coordinated and funded by the BAMF and now are accessible also for asylum applicants with good

**Table 2: Results of a linear regression model with the dependent variable “Self-assessed German language skills“**

Independent variables	Coefficients	Standard error
<b>Country of origin (RC: Afghanistan)</b>		
Eritrea	0.05	0.08
Iraq	-0.05	0.08
Iran	-0.15 *	0.08
Sri Lanka	-0.37 ***	0.08
Syria	0.08	0.07
<b>Age in years</b>	-0.01	0.01
<b>Age in years, squared</b>	-0.00	0.00
<b>Duration of stay in years</b>	0.10 ***	0.02
<b>Duration of stay in years, squared</b>	-0.00 **	0.00
<b>Gender: Male (RC: Female)</b>	-0.03	0.05
<b>Duration of school attendance (RC: 0-4 years)</b>		
5-9 years	0.22 ***	0.07
10 or more years	0.67 ***	0.06
<b>Employment status (RC: Non-working)</b>		
Working	0.41 ***	0.07
In school or vocational training	0.78 ***	0.09
Searching for work or vocational training	0.41 ***	0.07
Other	0.30 **	0.09
<b>Contact to Germans in the neighbourhood at least once a week (RC: Infrequent or never)</b>	0.24 ***	0.05
<b>Contact to German friends at least once a week (RC: Infrequent or never)</b>	0.28 ***	0.05
Constant	3.12	0.25
Number of cases	1,470	
Adjusted R square	0.33	

Source: BAMF Flüchtlingsstudie 2014 (BAMF Refugee Study 2014), unweighted.  
 \*significance level 5% \*\*significance level 1% \*\*\*significance level 0.1%.  
 RC=Reference Category.

## BOX 2: BASIC CONCEPT AND INTERPRETATION OF REGRESSION MODELS

Figure 1 illustrates a bivariate correlation between the characteristics “Gender” and “German language skills”. Yet this says nothing about whether the language skills are influenced by other factors, for example, the educational level of the respondents, and whether gender even is relevant for language skills when controlling such other factors. This is where multivariate models come in, such as the regression analyses represented in Tables 2 and 6. They have the advantage of simultaneously testing the impact of a range of assumed influencing factors, the so-called “independent variables”, on a given circumstance. The regression type (in this brief analysis: linear or multinomial logistic) is dependent on the type of the “dependent variable”, that is, the circumstance that one wishes to explain.

The second column of Table 2 provides the regression coefficients; Table 6 provides the so-called average marginal effects (AME). The correlation between the respective independent and the dependent variables is all the stronger the greater the absolute value of the coefficient. The algebraic sign indicates the direction of the correlation. This means that Table 2 indicates a negative correlation between the affiliation to the country of origin group “Sri Lanka” and the German language skills compared to the reference category (country of origin group “Afghanistan”). So respondents from Sri Lanka tend to have lesser German

language skills than those from Afghanistan, also when controlling the other factors given in the table.

The respective significance levels that must be taken into consideration in the interpretation in addition to size and algebraic sign of the calculated coefficients are given at the bottom of Tables 2 and 6. The reason behind the concept of “significance” is the fact that the regression models are based on a sample that represents a larger population group. So if such a model identifies a correlation between or “influence” of an independent variable on the dependent variable, there is a calculable risk that such a correlation exists only in the sample, but not in the larger population group of actual interest. One would erroneously assume a correlation. In coefficients without an asterisk the probability of this error is larger than 5%, which is why established convention regards this correlation as not verified. It is therefore also not interpreted. The more asterisks, the more probable is an actual correlation. For example, based on the regression model represented in Table 2, one can assume with a very low degree of uncertainty of less than 0.1% that longer school attendance has a positive impact on the German language skills.

prospects to stay in Germany<sup>6</sup>, the entry-level language courses were offered by the Federal Employment Agency as well as other different language learning formats were developed by the federal states, municipal authorities, welfare associations and volunteers. This is augmented by diverse digital learning tools, such as the use of apps and German-language media. Yet with the exception of

the integration courses there is no reliable representative gender-specific data available regarding the utilisation of the various offers.

Access to the nationwide integration courses is open to all persons with a right to attendance disregarding gender. According to data from the BAMF’s Integration Course Statistics, women were slightly overrepresented amongst the new integration course attendants in 2015. Their percentage was over 50% across all course types (Table 3). Migrants from other EU Member States constituted the most important group of new course attendants (Table 4). The

<sup>6</sup> “Good prospects to stay” means that the total protection rate for the respective country of origin is more than 50%. In 2016, this applied to the refugees from Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Somalia and Syria.

**Table 3: Development of the proportion of women amongst new integration course attendants per quarter, 2015 to third quarter 2016**

	2015				2016		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
<b>New course attendants*</b>	47,155	42,689	40,141	49,413	61,556	93,033	91,536
<b>Percentage of women</b>	53.8%	49.6%	49.7%	49.8%	42.6%	31.4%	30.7%

Source: BAMF, Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik (Integration Course Statistics), special evaluation.

\*Without repeat attendants.

Note: Special courses for parents, women and others are offered in addition to the general integration courses. The percentage of women in these courses is significantly higher (BAMF 2017: 5).



Table 4: New course attendants in integration courses in 2015

Country of origin	Total number (absolute)	Percentage male	Percentage female
All countries	179,398	49.3%	50.7%
including: TOP 10 countries			
Syria	34,514	74.5%	25.5%
Poland	15,744	35.5%	64.5%
Romania	15,389	39.6%	60.4%
Bulgaria	11,829	44.7%	55.3%
Italy	7,965	53.2%	46.8%
Turkey	7,254	48.6%	51.4%
Greece	5,152	48.6%	51.4%
Iraq	4,307	58.9%	41.1%
Spain	4,273	50.1%	49.9%
Hungary	3,904	36.5%	63.5%

Source: BAMF, Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik (Integration Course Statistics), special evaluation.

ten most important countries of origin in 2015 included seven EU Member States, whereas typical countries of origin of refugees were represented only by two countries, Syria and Iraq.

This picture changed over the course of 2016. The percentage of women amongst new course attendants steadily decreased in the first three quarters and was only at about 31% in the third quarter. This can be partly explained by the changed structure regarding the countries of origin (Table 5). The first three ranks of countries with the highest number of new course attendants now are occupied by three typical countries of origin of refugees: Syria, Iraq and Eritrea. In addition, the quantitative weight of Syria has significantly increased compared to 2015. Iran has moved up to be included in the Top 10. The percentage of women

amongst new course attendants from these countries is consistently below 30% and therefore also below the cumulated percentage of women amongst asylum applicants in the 2012-2016 period (Table 1). By contrast, women accounted for significantly more than 50% of new course attendants when looking at the five EU Member States (with the exception of Italy).

So all in all, the results of the Integration Course Statistics indicate that the group of female refugees do not (yet) access the integration courses to the same degree as male refugees do. This applies also when taking into consideration the fact that men are generally overrepresented amongst refugees. The survey data at hand supports this finding. In spite of the fact that the respondents in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 on average already having been

Table 5: New course attendants in integration courses in the first three quarters 2016

Country of origin	Total number (absolute)	Percentage male	Percentage female
All countries	246,125	66.1%	33.9%
including: TOP 10 countries			
Syria	114,253	80.7%	19.3%
Iraq	17,991	76.8%	23.2%
Eritrea	13,825	83.0%	17.0%
Romania	10,142	40.5%	59.5%
Poland	8,962	34.0%	66.0%
Iran	8,443	70.9%	29.1%
Bulgaria	8,353	44.0%	56.0%
Turkey	4,831	50.6%	49.4%
Italy	4,508	53.1%	46.9%
Croatia	3,256	41.9%	58.1%

Source: BAMF, Integrationskursgeschäftsstatistik (Integration Course Statistics), special evaluation.

in Germany for more than five years many women were still represented in ongoing integration courses and on the whole attended these somewhat less frequently than men (Worbs et al. 2016: 256). This lower presence of women in integration courses is evident also in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, especially when female respondents live with children in the household (Romiti et al. 2016: 40).

The qualitative study on resettlement refugees provides insights into the potential causes behind the apparent rarer and later attendance. Women who came to Germany with families tend to predominantly focus on issues such as the housing provision and the welfare of their children. Their own wishes to learn the German language or take up a job are initially regarded as secondary (Baraulina/Bitterwolf 2016: 39). Especially the task of childcare, which is in the most cases carried out by women, plays a role in this context, as is illustrated by the following transcript of an interview with a married couple:

*“The respondent attends the integration course and take an unpaid internship in the metalworking industry; he works from 9 am to 3 pm. The wife, who also takes part in the interview, has as yet been unable to attend an integration course because of looking after the children. In the long term, the spouses want to try to split childcare between them so that both can attend the integration course and learn the language. The respondent is very worried about his wife, who spends the majority of her time alone with the children in their apartment. She cannot move freely around town as she can neither read nor write and therefore cannot cope with public transport. She feels very lonely, cries almost every day, suffers from headache and wants to move where other people who speak her language live.”*

However, the lower or “later” presence of female refugees in the integration courses must be seen as separate from the question regarding the success in the course. The data of the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 reveals that “gender differences regarding certificate attainment [...] [are] not very pronounced” amongst integration course attendants (Worbs et al. 2016: 259). They are particularly negligible when taking into account only those study respondents, who have actually completed the course and sat the test. In general, women attained the B1 certificate in the German language test even more frequently than men in 2015 and in the first three quarters of 2016 (BAMF 2016: 14; 2017: 14). This is an indication of the fact that entry into

these courses constitutes the main problem for female refugees.

## Integration into the labour market

Analyses by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) of earlier cohorts of female refugees in Germany show that they had significantly less work experience than men (Liebau/Salikutluk 2016: 735) and that their entry into the labour market in Germany was slower and as a result progressed on a significantly lower overall level, both compared to male refugees and to other female migrant groups (Salikutluk et al. 2016: 751f.). These results refer to women who for the most part came to Germany between 1990 and 1999; the most important regions of origin were South Eastern Europe and Turkey (Eisnecker et al. 2016: 729). The question arises whether these phenomena occur also in the current refugee migration, although analyses of labour market participation over a longer period of time is not yet possible.

### Start conditions I: Educational and professional qualifications

When looking at educational and professional qualifications, one must consider that many refugees, both female and male, come from countries of origin where the structure of the educational and vocational training system is different to Germany. Formal training courses with certificates are frequently not the norm, especially in the field of vocational training outside of colleges and universities. The attended schools of general education are difficult to compare to German standards regarding the attained level of competence, which is why the following paragraphs focus on the length of school attendance and the attainment of educational degrees (with disregard to their concrete contents).

Evaluation of the data regarding the “social component” of first-time asylum applicants in 2015 and the first quarter of 2016 reveals that the percentage of female refugees who have no formal school education or only primary school education is higher than that of males (Neske/Rich 2016: 7; Rich 2016: 6). This finding is repeated in the empirical studies: more than every fifth of the women polled in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 (21%) were not able to attend school in her country of origin. For example, even more than every third (35%) woman from Iraq didn’t attend school, whereas the percentage amongst males was “only” at 14%. More than over 40% of the Iraqi women in this study belong to the religious minority of the Yazidi, who presumably faced particularly great obstacles in attending school (see also Romiti et al. 2016: 42). Also, female refugees on the whole remain behind male refugees regarding longer periods of school attendance of ten years or more. Yet where school was attended, the women attained a

7 Unpublished protocol (Summer 2014) of an interview with refugees with Ethiopian citizenship in the context of the BAMF research project “Flüchtlingsaufnahme (Resettlement): Integrationsverläufe von besonders Schutzbedürftigen” (Resettlement: Integration progress of particularly vulnerable persons).



corresponding qualification certificate even somewhat more frequently than men (Worbs et al. 2016: 111, 116).

According to the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 data, female refugees hold professional qualifications less frequently than men. At the time of the survey, 69% had neither started nor completed a vocational training or degree course, compared to 58% of men. In the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, too, female respondents stated more frequently than males that they did not have an educational or professional qualification. This applies in particular to women with children (Romiti et al. 2016: 43).

Yet like regarding the educational qualification and the attendance of integration courses, it appears that women who do manage to enter into a professional training course are as similarly successful as men in attaining a qualification. According to the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 data, the difference here is only minimal (21% female vs 25% male; Worbs et al. 2016: 129). In addition, female refugees, like males, are also affected by interrupted educational biographies because of the forced migration itself, as the following account by a female interviewee in the resettlement project reveals. In spite of adverse circumstances, the respondent managed to acquire competences that allowed her to earn her own income:

*“I attended school to fifth grade and then we went to Iran, but since the Iranians are very rigorous with Afghans, I did not have the chance to develop there or go to school. Yet I received lessons in Arabic at a Shiite religious school, especially grammar and literature as well as Quran lessons ... Later, I privately tutored girls of Afghan origin in Arabic ... Because they did not have enough time to learn the language at school, they came to me and I gave them private lessons. And I lived on that income ...”<sup>8</sup>*

### Start conditions II: Labour market experience in the country of origin

Both the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey consistently show that female refugees have significantly less experience with gainful employment in the countries of origin than men. In the former study, the percentage amongst women is 40%, amongst men 75% (Worbs et al. 2016: 173); in the latter, the ratio is 50% vs. 81% (Vallizadeh et al. 2016: 48). Also amongst first-time asylum applicants in 2015, only about a third of all women, but three quarters of men stated

that they had last worked in their country of origin (Rich 2016: 7).

The qualitative data of the resettlement study indicates that women without educational qualifications had gained experience in formal labour markets in unskilled jobs (e.g. as factory workers) as well as in informal labour markets (in household-related services, temporary jobs and in the context of domestic work). Trade occupations such as hairdresser or seamstress were learned directly on the job. Some of the women polled in the study had in their countries of origin combined their household work and childcare with informal working from home, for example, as a seamstress. Yet the interviewed women did not regard this experience in remunerated occupations as relevant and for the most part described themselves as housewives:

*“I attended four years of primary school ... After the marriage I looked after my four children. Yes, I had to provide for children during difficult times in Iraq. I also worked as a seamstress so we could live better, a little extra in addition to the man’s income. I did this from home ...”<sup>9</sup>*

This shows that, compared to female refugees, male refugees not only bring with them better educational qualifications, but also work experience that can facilitate their integration into the labour market in Germany. The occupational skills of women, unless these are academic qualifications, are often not verified by certificates. Given this, they find it difficult to assess the applicability of their previous experiences in the German labour market.

### Involvement in the German labour market

When investigating the labour participation of female refugees in Germany, one must consider that gender differences in this regard are characteristic also for the non-immigrant population and other groups of migrant women. Women are generally less likely to be working and at the same time more frequently employed in part-time or marginal jobs than men (replicable on the basis of the 2015 micro census, Statistisches Bundesamt/German Federal Statistical Office 2016, and other sources). It would therefore be surprising if these patterns were to be completely different with respect to female refugees.

What also must be taken into consideration is the fact that in most cases forced migration is not primarily driven by the intention to participate in the labour market in the country of destination, unlike in the cases of, for

8 Interview with a female refugee with Afghan citizenship (Winter 2014) in the context of the BAMF research project “Flüchtlingsaufnahme (Resettlement): Integrationsverläufe von besonders Schutzbedürftigen” (Resettlement: Integration progress of particularly vulnerable persons).

9 Interview with a female refugee with Iraqi citizenship (Winter 2014) in the context of the BAMF research project “Flüchtlingsaufnahme (Resettlement): Integrationsverläufe von besonders Schutzbedürftigen” (Resettlement: Integration progress of particularly vulnerable persons).

example, many migrants from other EU Member States or third-party countries, who come to Germany with the explicit intention to seek gainful employment.

The German Federal Employment Agency has nationwide data available regarding the issue of labour market participation in addition to the aforementioned studies. In July 2016,<sup>10</sup> a total of 105,285 people who are citizens of “non-European countries of origin of refugees” (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria) were employed subject to social insurance contributions in Germany, of which 19,505 were women, corresponding to a percentage of 19%. The proportion of women was significantly higher for all people in employment subject to social insurance contributions (46%) and for German citizens (47%).

In the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 (12% vs. 50%) and in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey (7% vs. 16%), too, significantly fewer of the polled women are working compared to the men.<sup>11</sup> Figure 2 illustrates on the basis of the former study, in which living circumstances do the female respondents find themselves more often than in employment. This is in particular the status “Non-working”, which comprises persons who are neither active in the labour market nor engaged in vocational training and who at the time of the survey were not looking for any

occupation either, that is, in particular housewives (Worbs et al. 2016: 149).

Multinomial logistic regression models<sup>12</sup> for explaining gainful employment reveal that gender significantly influences gainful employment also after control of other variables (Table 6, column “AME Total”). Male refugees are more likely to participate in the labour market.

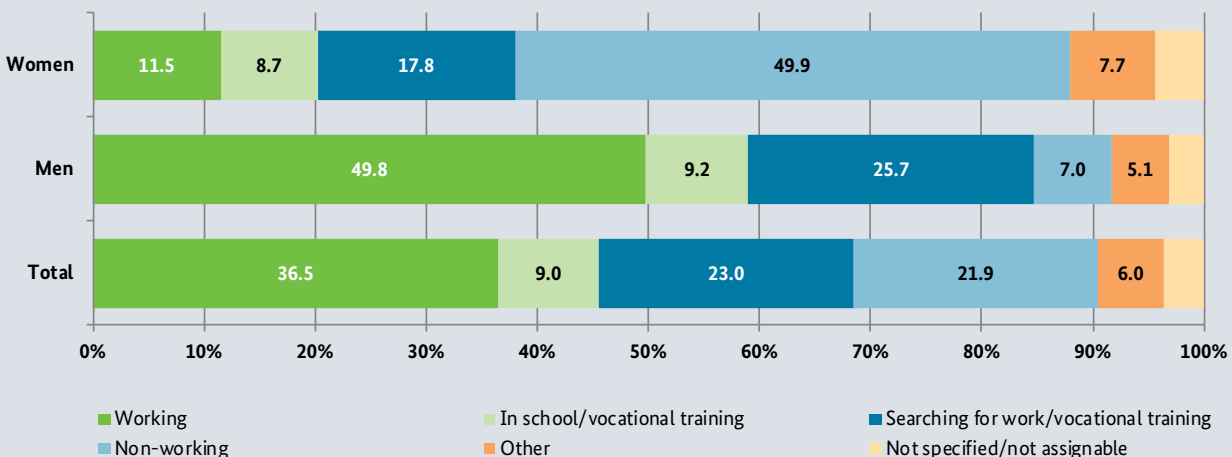
The gender-segregated models in the third and fourth column of Table 6 reveal that two factors play a significant role both with regard to men and women: a completed professional qualification or university degree increase the probability of gainful employment in Germany; the presence in the household of at least one child of preschool or primary school age lowers it. With respect to women, only the factor of contacting German friends at least once a week has a further positive influence. Regarding the men, those from the country of origin Sri Lanka (see Worbs et al. 2016: 150 for more detail) are more likely to be working than the respondents from other countries of origin. Positive factors are also longer residence in Germany and a younger age; however, the effect sizes of these two variables are very small. The fact that German language skills have no significant effect in any of the three models is at first surprising, for such effects have frequently been proven. A possible explanation is that most

10 Source of these figures is a special evaluation of labour market statistics that was provided by the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit).

11 In contrast to the aforementioned FEA data, both studies enquired after any kind of gainful employment, not only after employment subject to social insurance contributions. The lower overall level in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey compared to the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 can be ascribed to the fact that these are persons who came to Germany later and who in part still are subject to the asylum procedure. Some of them may even not yet have obtained a work permit.

12 For basic information about regression models see Box 2. Worbs et al. (2016: 155) provide results of binary logistic regression models for gainful employment regarding the totality of respondents and men. As these models could not be calculated regarding women for methodological reasons, the multinomial approach was chosen in a second step, where the (categorical) dependent variable can have more than two categories. The independent variables were moreover expanded compared to the original binary models and in part differently encoded. Yet the key results prove to be robust and occur both in binary and multinomial models.

Figure 2: Activity status by gender



Source: BAMF Flüchtlingsstudie 2014 (BAMF Refugee Study 2014), n=2,805, weighted. Percentages under 5% are not accounted for.

**Table 6: Results of multinomial logistic regression models with the dependent variable “Employment status”**  
(Respondents aged 25 to and including 65)

Independent variables	AME Total	AME Men	AME Women
<b>Country of origin (RC: Afghanistan)</b>			
Eritrea	0.09	0.07	0.08
Iraq	0.04	0.11	-0.12
Iran	-0.11	-0.12	-0.04
Sri Lanka	0.30 **	0.35 **	0.16
Syria	-0.11	-0.15	-0.02
<b>Age in years</b>	0.03	0.05 *	-0.00
<b>Age in years, squared</b>	-0.00 *	-0.00 **	0.00
<b>Duration of stay in years</b>	0.06 **	0.09 ***	-0.01
<b>Duration of stay in years, squared</b>	-0.00	-0.00 **	0.00
<b>Unlimited residence permit (RC: Limited residence permit)</b>	0.02	-0.01	0.05
<b>Gender: Male (RC: Female)</b>	0.23 ***		
<b>Duration of school attendance (RC: 0-4 years)</b>			
5-9 years	0.06	0.11	0.02
10 or more years	0.03	0.09	0.03
<b>Completed vocational training (RC: No or not completed vocational training)</b>	0.14 ***	0.13 **	0.16 *
<b>Labour market experience in country of origin (RC: No experience)</b>	0.05	0.09	-0.08
<b>Index German language skills (RC: Bad to no knowledge at all)</b>			
Intermediary knowledge	0.04	0.04	0.03
Good to very good knowledge	-0.03	-0.04	0.04
<b>At least one child of preschool or primary school age in the household (RC: No such child in the household)</b>	-0.11 **	-0.10 *	-0.14 *
<b>Contact to German friends at least once a week (RC: Infrequent or never)</b>	0.07 *	0.06	0.12 *
<b>Perceived discrimination in search for a job or vocational training position (RC: No discrimination perceived)</b>	-0.04	-0.07	0.00
<b>Religious affiliation (RC: Unaffiliated with any religion)</b>			
Christians	0.01	0.00	0.04
Muslims	0.00	0.03	-0.07
Hindus	0.01	-0.09	-0.06
Yazidis	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01
Number of cases	743	527	216
Pseudo squared R	0.25	0.23	0.31

Source: BAMF Flüchtlingsstudie 2014 (BAMF Refugee Study 2014), unweighted.

Categories of the dependent variable: 0=non-working (basic category), 1=registered as unemployed and seeking employment, 2=working.

The table illustrates the average marginal effects (AME) for the category “working” compared to the basic category.

\*significance level 5% \*\*significance level 1% \*\*\*significance level 0.1%. RC=Reference Category.

of the gainfully employed respondents in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 work in low- and medium-skilled jobs, possibly also in “ethnic niches” such as catering, which at least initially require little German language skills.

Furthermore, working women in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 are far more frequently only employed in part-time or marginal jobs than male refugees (67% vs. 43%). Yet it has been pointed out already in the introduction that this specific gender difference can be observed also in other population groups. Gainfully employed female refugees are represented in particular in the cleaning business,

in sales, the tourism, hotel and catering industry and in non-medical health professions (beauticians and others) (Worbs et al. 2016: 163).

The desire for gainful employment is slightly less pronounced in female refugees than in males, but present in a clear majority of them. 79% of female respondents in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 want to work in Germany (men: 92%; Worbs et al. 2016: 176); in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, the corresponding ratio is 85% to 97% (Vallizadeh et al. 2016: 51).

The resettlement study data provides a possible explanation for the discrepancy between the high degree of motivation and the de facto low degree of labour participation of female refugees, at least in the first few years after their arrival in Germany. Similar to language acquisition, it can be observed that women put their wishes on hold as long as the family's daily problems remain unsolved:

*Interviewer: "Do you intend to work or is that not important for you?"*

*Respondent: "Yes, I want to work, too."*

*Interviewer: "And do you already have ideas, in what field?"*

*Respondent: "I have completed a vocational training as a commercial clerk, but I have no work experience. I would like to work in my profession. But the situation at home is currently bad because of the housing conditions, you know, the children and all, that's all still very chaotic ..."<sup>13</sup>*

In addition, other, partly previously mentioned barriers for entering the labour market that to some extent apply also to men might affect female refugees. These include, for example, missing (formally verified) professional qualifications as well as a lack of social networks, in particular, German friends who could support access to the labour market.

## Conclusion and outlook

Of course, in reality there is no such person who would fully represent the typical female refugee (just as there is no model male refugee). The refugee women come from very different countries and have different migration experiences; they come from different social backgrounds and have different levels of education and therefore different expectations regarding life in Germany. An older, single physician without children has other needs than a young mother who never had the chance to attend school and has come to Germany with her husband and three children. However, as has been described in this brief analysis, some common "trend findings" do exist despite these differences.

The motivation of female refugees for participation in Germany is only a little below or on par with that of male refugees. Yet on average they display qualification disadvantages regarding school and professional education. These disadvantages are likely to derive from difficulties in accessing educational institutions in their countries of

origin, but are not owing to less success in the educational systems. A similar phenomenon can be observed regarding the attendance of integration courses in Germany: female refugees seem to attend these less frequently or later, yet with similar success (attainment of certificate) as male refugees.

The importance of the BAMF's low-threshold women's courses that were positively evaluated in 2016 and now are open also to asylum applicants with good prospects to stay must be acknowledged given this background. As an introductory offering they are particularly useful for younger women who (as yet) cannot or do not want to attend integration courses because of family obligations (Syspons GmbH 2016: 7). In addition, specifically with regards to female refugees, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry for Families will in 2017 again increase their funding for childcare complementary to the integration courses (BMI 2017).

Female refugees have less labour market experience in their country of origin than men and are significantly less often gainfully employed in Germany. These findings correspond to the results regarding earlier cohorts of female refugees (Liebau/Salikutluk 2016; Salikutluk 2016) in spite of the now different composition of countries of origin. The current labour participation of female refugees is characterised by a high degree of part-time and marginal employment and a concentration in certain sectors (cleaning, catering among others).

It therefore seems important to contact female refugees at an early stage of the integration process, to assess their potential and to provide them with comprehensive information enabling women to develop realistic educational and employment strategies. At the same time one must take into consideration that not all female refugees aim to participate in the educational system or in the labour market, be it for reasons of age, illness or other personal incapacity, or because of childcare obligations. This is why opportunities for social participation beyond the education and employment systems are of equal importance.

From a scientific point of view, two types of analysis seem to make sense in the coming years regarding female refugees in Germany. On the one hand, this is the long-term observation of certain participation indicators such as those presented in this brief analysis. A combination of survey and official data or administrative statistics, such as already are available regarding gainful employment and integration courses, would be preferable. On the other hand, comparisons should be drawn with other groups of female migrants to work out in how far the social position of female refugees is in fact a specific one.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with a female refugee with Iraqi citizenship (summer 2014) in the context of the BAMF research project "Flüchtlingaufnahme (Resettlement): Integrationsverläufe von besonders Schutzbedürftigen" (Resettlement: Integration progress of particularly vulnerable persons).

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