Malteser

…weil Nähe zählt.

Facts, Not Feelings

Malteser Migration Report 2025

List of Abbreviations

Asylum8 countries	Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria
AsylbLG	Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act
BA	The Federal Employment Agency
BaföG	Federal Training Assistance Act
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
BKA	Federal Criminal Police Office
EU	European Union
EU eastward enlargement	Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary
EURODAC	European Dactyloscopy (European Fingerprint Identification System)
Eurostat	European Statistical Office
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
PISA	Programme of International Student Assessment
PKS	Police crime statistics
REAG/GARP	Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany / Government Assisted Repatriation Programme
ReGES	Refugees in the German Educational System
SVR Migration	Expert Council on Integration and Migration
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
Western Balkans	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia

Our cover picture: Fahim Ferdows, 31, worked as a journalist in Afghanistan. When the Taliban came to power, he had to leave his home country. He is now training in geriatric care in Germany. The cover picture shows him at work in the Malteser Marienheim in Warendorf. He says: 'I'm grateful that I can live, learn and build my future in a safe environment.'

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Preface

Facts, not feelings – this is the title of our fifth Malteser Migration Report, published this year. It's what motivates us and what we aspire to.

While the number of asylum applications in the first quarter of 2025 fell by 30 per cent compared to the previous year, public concern is still growing and the debate seems more heated than ever. However, polemics don't help generate constructive, problem-oriented debate or objective approaches to thinking and finding solutions. Clearly, society must address the challenges posed by migration. For example, when local authorities are overwhelmed, there is a shortage of childcare places, integration is not successful, or individuals with mental illness commit acts of violence. However, the aim must always be to find solutions instead of demonising people.

All the more reason for us to thank the renowned Walter Eucken Institute under the direction of Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Lars Feld for the fact-based analysis of migration in Germany. This year's report focuses on integration into the labour market. Alongside an objective explanation of developments in this area, we have invited five experts to give their personal views for the first time. With their individual expertise and drawing on their respective areas of responsibility, they focus primarily on the opportunities generated by immigration for the German labour market and identify the current obstacles to sustainable labour market integration.

Daniel Terzenbach, Member of the Executive Board of the Federal Employment Agency, emphasises that Germany has made significant progress in integrating refugees into the labour market in recent years. For him, the most important insight since 2015 is that, in addition to language and qualifications, more speed and more pragmatism are needed.

Dr Achim Dercks, Deputy Managing Director of the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, also points to the large gaps in the employment market that need to be closed. He advocates making better use of refugees' potential and ensuring easier access to the labour market and the removal of bureaucratic hurdles.

For Steffen Kampeter, Managing Director of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, lengthy administrative procedures are the main obstacle to labour market integration. In

the long term, immigration will only be able to help solve the problems of the labour market if it is accompanied by other reforms.

Eva Welskop-Deffaa, President of the German Caritas Association, emphasises the need to speed up recognition procedures for foreign qualifications. Many immigrants are employed below their skill level. This results in not just individual frustration, but also a loss of valuable skilled workers for the German labour market.

Prof. Bernd Fitzenberger, PhD and Prof. Dr Yuliya Kosyakova from the Institute for Employment Research point out the importance of good integration into the education system and explain the reasons for the gap in educational qualifications between young people with and without a migration background.

Reducing bureaucracy, granting work permits at an early stage, recognising qualifications – as individual as the perspectives may be, the experts mentioned above agree that labour market integration needs to be faster and less complicated. Keeping people out of the labour market has a detrimental effect: It is detrimental to social security funds, which are receiving less money while paying out more. It is detrimental to the labour market, which is dependent on additional workers. It is detrimental to the refugees because prolonged dependency and unwanted inactivity are mentally stressful and lead to frustration.

Unclear prospects of remaining in Germany should not be an argument against early integration. Every month of waiting means wasted time for those affected and wasted potential for society. Even if they return to their country of origin, people will take valuable professional qualifications with them, which can be a benefit for them personally and help them to make a fresh start in their home country. Early integration into the labour market is not an act of generosity, but an investment in the future.

We wish the decision-makers the strength and courage to initiate much-needed and sustainable processes to change matters.

DR ELMAR PANKAU
Chairman of the
Executive Board,
Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V. and
Malteser Deutschland GmbH

Main Prologue

The issue of migration dominated the early elections for the 21st German Bundestag on 23 February 2025. The debates in the 20th German Bundestag in January of this year, just before the end of the legislative period, were one of the main factors that led to the rise of the political fringes in the subsequent elections – to such an extent that the political centre no longer has a constitutional majority in the 21st German Bundestag. Following the election of Friedrich Merz as Federal Chancellor, the new federal government prioritised and focused on the issue of migration. Nevertheless, it is already becoming apparent that migration is likely to remain an emotionally charged and controversial topic in the coming months and years.

It is therefore time for a sober assessment in what is now the fifth Malteser Migration Report. In the first chapter of the report, as in the four previous reports, we take stock of migration. The second chapter is dedicated to integration into the labour market, with a focus on observable improvements. Given the importance of education for successful integration, both in later working life and earlier on in society, the third chapter of the report looks at the institutional framework for immigrants in the education sector and at participation in education. The fourth chapter returns to the topic of crime, once again highlighting the distortions in the available statistics.

With the fifth Malteser Migration Report, we hope to discuss the topic of migration in a sober

and objective manner. The authors are particularly committed to analysing migration issues on the basis of data and refraining from making value judgements.

I would like to thank the Maltese for their high level cooperation during this migration report. Above all, however, I am deeply indebted to the team at the Walter Eucken Institute, Daniel Bamarni and Franziska Dinter, and especially to my two co-authors Lilith Burgstaller and Amanda März. It is a great pleasure to work with them.

PROF. DR. DR. H.C. LARS P. FELD,
Director of the Walter Eucken Institute

Migration developments

– a current overview

Migration developments – a current overview

Prof. Dr Dr h. c. Lars P. Feld and Amanda März

Key facts

- **In 2024, around 1.7 million people moved to Germany, which corresponds to a decrease of around twelve per cent compared to the previous year. This includes around 213,500 people who have been registered as asylum seekers in Germany.**
- **Initial projections for 2024 showed that there would be 3.3 million asylum seekers in Germany by the end of 2024. The number of asylum seekers registered in Germany in 2023 rose by around 94,000 or three per cent, compared to the previous year, to just under 3.2 million people.**
- **Around 62,900 asylum applications were submitted between January and May 2025. In the same period, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) decided on around 135,800 applications. In 2024 as a whole, around 250,900 people applied for asylum in Germany. Compared to the previous year, this represents a decrease of around 30 per cent.**
- **In 2024, 20,100 people were deported from Germany. This corresponds to an increase of 22 per cent over the previous year.**
- **At the end of 2023, around 522,700 people were receiving standard benefits under the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act (AsylbLG); this is an increase of eight per cent compared to the previous year. At the same time, expenditure on asylum seeker benefits fell by just under three per cent.**

Migration to Germany has changed significantly in recent years. While 2022 was characterised by historically high net immigration as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the following years saw a significant decline in immigration figures. At the end of 2024, there were around 3.3 million asylum seekers in Germany, which poses particular challenges for integration policy, the public budgets of the federal government, federal states and municipalities and, last but not least, society as a whole.[1]

This chapter provides an up-to-date overview of migration in Germany in the European context for the period from 2022 to 2025. In view of the special challenges, the European Union (EU) and the Federal Government responded with legislative changes that have a significant impact on asylum seekers in Germany. The past few years have been marked by intense public debate. There has been discussion about the Repatriation Improvement Act, which provides for amendments to the Asylum Act and the Residence Act, among other things. Other issues debated include the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which has far-reaching implications for the management of asylum and migration movements within Europe; and the introduction of a payment card,

1 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Rohdatenauszählung Schutzsuchende, Wiesbaden.

which directly affects asylum seekers' access to state benefits. The aim of this chapter is to shed light on current issues in the public debate based on facts, drawing on current data from the Federal Statistical Office, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the Federal Police and relevant scientific studies.

First, the general migration trends for the years 2022 to 2025 are presented. The demographic and socio-economic developments in the subgroup of asylum seekers in Germany during this period are then analysed. Next, we take a look at migration movements in Europe. We conclude with an in-depth examination of the development of asylum policy in Germany and Europe, with a particular focus on the fiscal impact on the federal, state and local governments.

Migration from 2022 to 2024

Net immigration to Germany fell significantly between 2022 and 2024. According to preliminary results from the Federal Statistical Office, net immigration fell significantly in 2024 and amounted to just over a third of the peak in 2022 (see Figure 1).[2] Specifically, 419,000 more people moved to Germany in 2024 than moved away from Germany (2023: 663,000; 2022: 1,462,000). The main reason for this development is the drop in net immigration from Ukraine, Turkey and Syria, as well as from the EU states of Poland and Romania.

Around 2.67 million people moved to Germany in 2022. The Federal Statistical Office thus recorded the highest net immigration within a reporting year since the chronological series began in 1950. The peak figure was mainly caused by the influx of around 1.1 million asylum seekers to Germany from Ukraine as a result of the Russian war of aggression. The 55 per cent decrease in net migration in 2023 compared to 2022 was primarily due to the decline in immigration from Ukraine (2023: 276,000 people; 2022: 1.1 million

in 2024,

419,000

more people moved to Germany than moved away.

What the new federal government is planning

- The list of safe countries of origin is to be extended to include Algeria, India, Morocco and Tunisia as well as all countries with a recognition rate that has been below five per cent for at least five years.
- Family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is to be suspended for two years.
- The Western Balkans regulation is to be limited to 25,000 people per year instead of the previous upper limit of 50,000 persons. To date, around 15,000 people have travelled to Germany each year with a residence permit under the Western Balkans regulation.
- The reform of the Common European Asylum System (see box) is to be transposed into national law this year and further developed at European level.
- A binding integration agreement that defines rights and obligations is to be introduced. This will contain concrete steps towards labour market integration for unemployed persons entitled to protection and is to be based on the instruments of SGB II.

2 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Press release no. 030 of 23 January 2025, Wiesbaden; Federal Statistical Office (2024). Press release no. 247 of 27 June 2024, Wiesbaden.

people). While Ukrainian nationals still accounted for around 76 per cent of total immigration immediately after the start of the war in March 2022, their proportion had fallen to around 21 per cent by December of the same year.

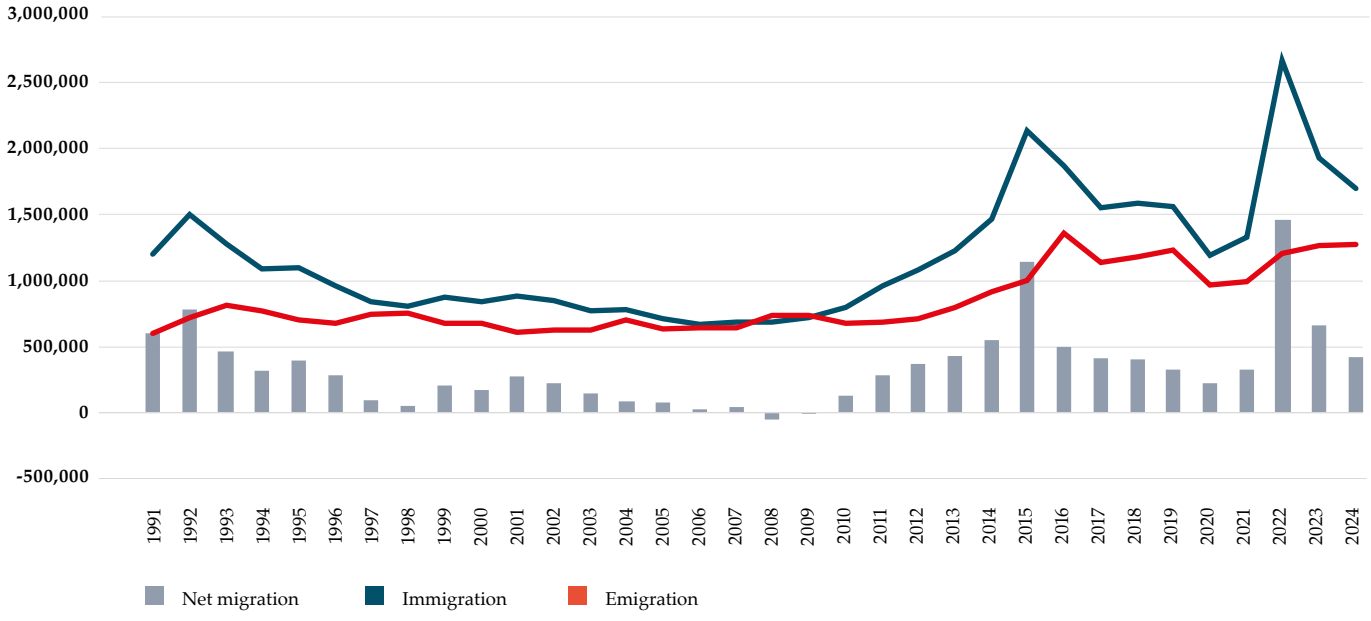
Around 1.7 million people moved to Germany in 2024. This is twelve per cent less than in 2023 (1.9 million people; 2022: 2.7 million people). These include around 213,500 asylum seekers registered in Germany.[3] While the number of immigrants fluctuated significantly, the number of emigrants from Germany remained constant in these years. In 2024, 1.3 million people left Germany. This is one per cent more than in 2023.

3 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2024, Nuremberg.

Between 2022 and 2023, the number of people leaving Germany rose by five per cent (2023: 1.3 million people; 2022: 1.2 million people). In December 2024, Ukrainian nationals accounted for around 15 percent of all new arrivals (see Figure 2). In that month, net migration was negative for the first time since December 2020.

In 2023, there was negative net migration from the EU for the first time since 2009 (see Figure 3). At 466,500 people, the number of immigrants from the EU in 2023 was lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic. The downward trend can be observed among almost all EU nationals, including countries of origin such as Poland, Croatia and Bulgaria. Demographic changes and structural adjustments to the labour markets in these countries had already become apparent

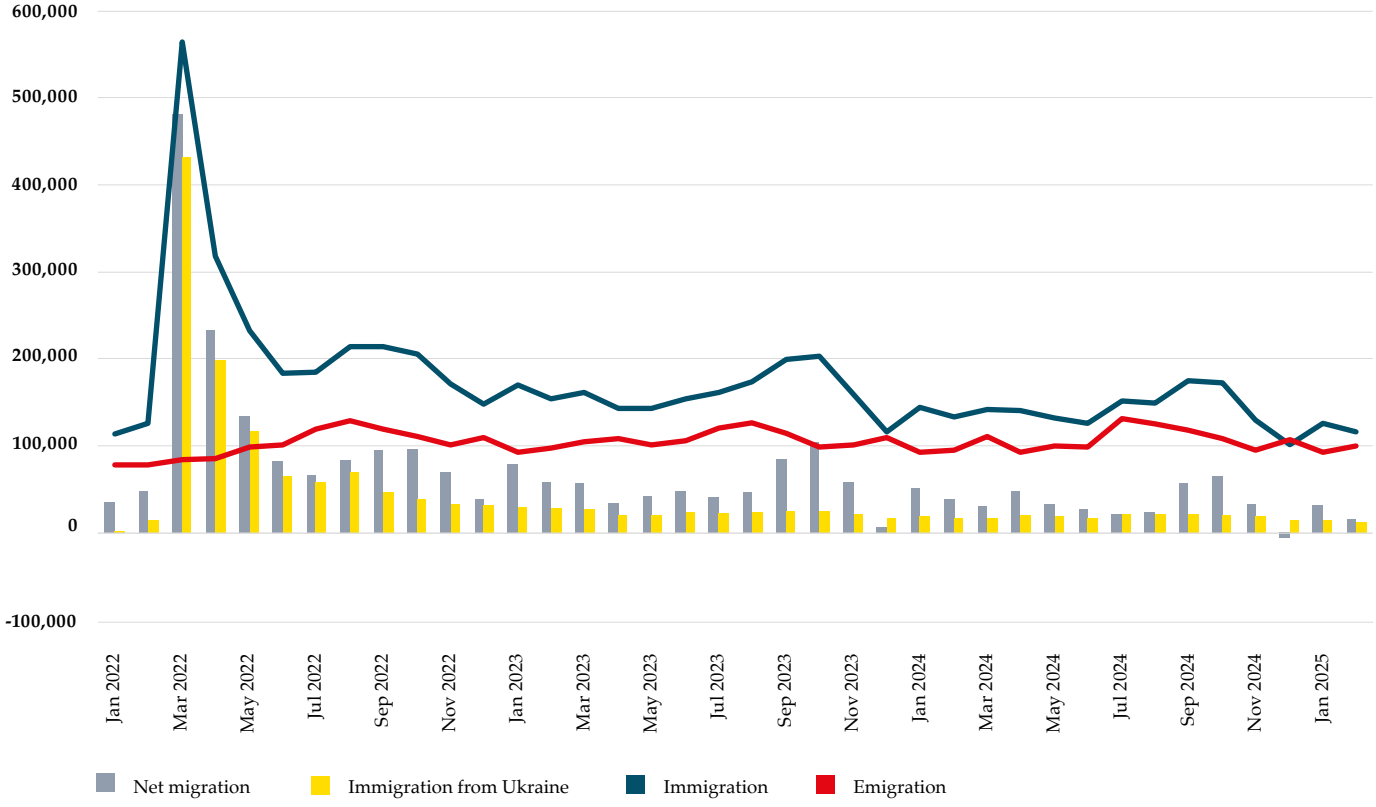
Figure 1:
Immigration and emigration across German borders



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Table 12711-0005.

Note: The results for the 2024 reporting year are provisional.

Figure 2:
Immigration and emigration across German borders in the months January 2022 to February 2025

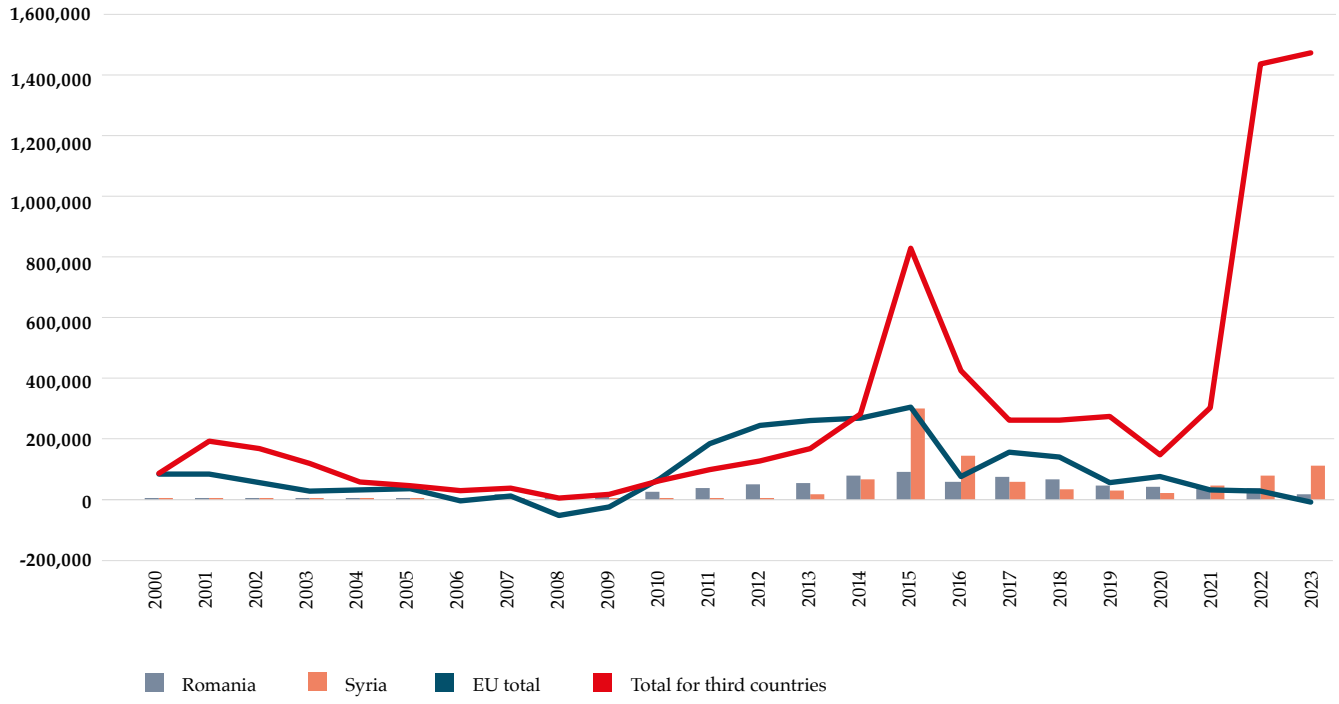


Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Table 12711-011.

before the pandemic, which led us to expect a decline in immigration.[4] At the same time, the emigration of EU nationals from Germany increased. Around 349,000 EU nationals moved away from Germany in 2023. Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian nationals were the most likely to leave the country. This means that these three groups continue to account for most of the inflows and outflows, revealing a high level of migration activity. Net immigration from Syria rose continuously between 2020 and 2023 (see Figure 3).

4 See Graf (2024). Freizügigkeitsmonitoring: Migration von EU-Staatsangehörigen nach Deutschland. Annual Report 2023, Nuremberg.

Figure 3:
Net migration by immigration group



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Table 12711-0007.

People with a history of immigration and socio-demographics of asylum seekers

Almost 83.6 million people were living in Germany at the end of 2024. This corresponds to an increase of around 100,000 people compared to the end of 2023.[5] This population growth is exclusively attributable to net immigration to Germany, as the net birth rate was negative in 2024. According to statistics on foreigners, around 14 million foreign nationals were resident in Germany at the end of 2024. Around 25.2 million people (30% of the total population) had a migration background. People with a migration background are defined as those who were not born with German citizenship or who have at least one parent who was not born with German citizenship (see box).

In 2024, the proportion of people with German citizenship and a migration background who were born in Germany fell slightly. It now stands at 23 per cent. The proportion of people with no personal experience of migration also fell slightly to 21 per cent. In addition, the proportion of foreign nationals with their own migration experience decreased. It has fallen by almost three percentage points and now stands at around 45 per cent (see Figure 4). Only around seven per cent of people with a migration background in Germany are foreign nationals and have no personal experience of migration. This proportion has fallen by around two percentage points compared to the previous year.

5 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Press release no. 030 of 23 January 2025, Wiesbaden.

In contrast, around 21.2 million people (26% of the total population) had a history of immigration. This is the case if a person or both parents have immigrated to the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany since 1950. Almost 76 per cent of this group are people who themselves immigrated to what is now Germany after 1950. The remaining 24 per cent are not immigrants themselves, but descendants of immigrants. These percentages have not changed since the previous year. In addition, around 4.2 million people (5% of the total population) had a unilateral migration background, meaning that only one parent had migrated to Germany since 1950 (see box). This percentage have remained unchanged since the previous year.

The focus below is on asylum seekers; they form a subgroup of people with a migration background. Asylum seekers are those who have immigrated to Germany for humanitarian, international or political reasons. They seek protection from persecution or existential threats, for example because of their ethnicity, religion or nationality. This group includes people with a recognised or rejected asylum application and those whose asylum procedure has not yet been completed. The number of asylum seekers registered in Germany in 2023 rose by around 94,000 or three per cent compared to the previous year to just under 3.2 million people (see Figure 5). This means that the increase in their figures in 2023 was significantly lower than in the previous year, when an increase of 59 per cent was recorded. Initial projections for 2024 showed that would be 3.3 million asylum seekers in Germany at the end of 2024.[6]

At 47 per cent, people from asylum8 countries accounted for only a slightly higher proportion of all asylum seekers in 2023 than in the previous year (2022: 46%). 22 per cent of asylum seekers in Germany had Syrian citizenship in 2023, making them the largest group of asylum seekers in Germany. This ratio remained constant compared to the previous year (2022: 22%). More than half

6 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Rohdatenauszählung Schutzsuchende, Wiesbaden.

Definition of immigration history, migration background and asylum seekers

Since 2005, people's migration background has been systematically recorded as part of the microcensus. The Federal Statistical Office recognises a person as having a migration background if they themselves or at least one of their parents were not born with German citizenship. This group includes immigrant and non-immigrant foreigners, naturalised citizens and (recent) ethnic German repatriates. This group thus also includes children who were born in Germany but have at least one parent who belongs to one of the groups mentioned. In January 2021, the Federal Government's expert commission recommended that integration issues should be based on the concept of 'immigrants and their direct descendants' in future. The Federal Statistical Office therefore introduced the term 'people with a history of immigration' in 2022. This is based on the characteristic of migration experience. It is used to describe people who have either immigrated to what is now Germany since 1950 or whose parents have done so.[7] A unilateral immigration history exists if only one parent has immigrated to Germany since 1950.

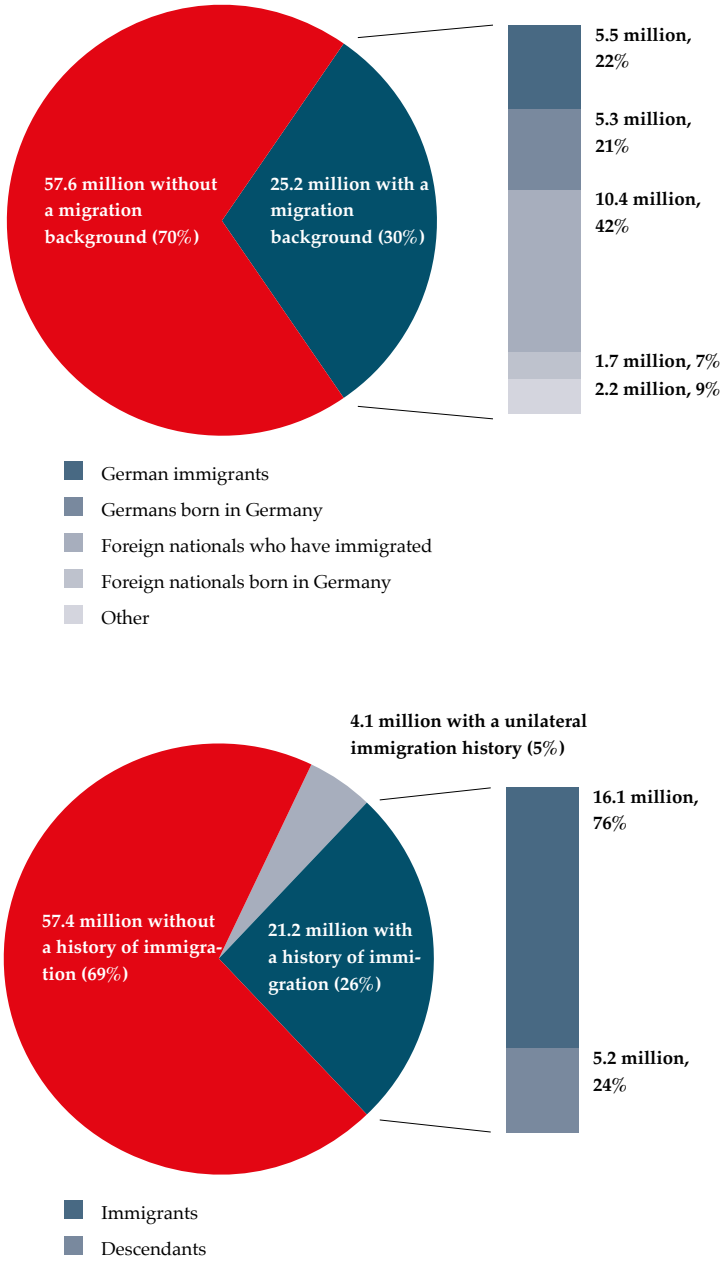
Asylum seekers are people who are in Germany on humanitarian grounds.[8] Possible reasons include protection from persecution or threat to life on the grounds of race,[9] religion or nationality. This includes people with a recognised or rejected asylum application and people in an ongoing asylum procedure. Wherever possible, we differentiate in this report between people with and without a history of immigration. Where this is not possible due to the primary data situation, we fall back on the concept of migration background. As far as the data situation allows, we also provide data for asylum seekers.

7 See Federal Statistical Office (2024). Einwanderungsgeschichte – Hintergrundpapier, Wiesbaden.

8 See Malteser Migration Report 2023, Cologne.

9 The term 'race' is used in accordance with the Geneva Refugee Convention (see Migration Report 2019).

Figure 4:
Population with and without a migration background (top) and immigration history (bottom) in 2024 (in millions) and as a proportion of the population



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Microcensus.

Note: The first figure corresponds to the number of people with the corresponding characteristic in millions, while the percentage corresponds to the proportion of the total population. The category 'Other' consists of the difference between the population with a migration background in the broader sense and the population with a migration background in the narrower sense, as defined by the Federal Statistical Office.
A migration background in the narrower sense is only determined on the basis of information about parents living in the same household. A migration background in the broader sense, on the other hand, includes all available information about the parents, regardless of whether they live in the same household or not.

of Syrian asylum seekers came to Germany for the first time between 2014 and 2016. Twelve per cent of them were born in Germany.[10] From 2021 to 2022, net immigration from Syria rose by 63 per cent and by a further 40 per cent between 2022 and 2023 (see Figure 5). In December 2024, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad was overthrown by the Islamist militia HTS.[11] As a result, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees announced on 9 December 2024 that it would temporarily postpone asylum applications from Syrian asylum seekers to take information on the situation in Syria into account.[12] The Federal Office cites the currently dynamic, confusing and difficult-to-assess situation in Syria as the reason for the postponement.

Since January 2025, Syrian nationals in Germany have been able to apply for a sponsored return to Syria as part of the REAG/GARP federal and state programme[13]. According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, 464 people had taken up this offer by mid-April 2025.[14] The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees received a total of around 1,300 such applications. The return programme covers travel costs, financial assistance for departure (€200 for adults, €100 for minors) and start-up aid of up to €1,000 per person, up to a maximum of €4,000 per family. In certain cases, medical costs are also covered.

As in the previous year, the most significant change within the asylum8 group was in the number of asylum seekers with Afghan citizenship, which rose by around 13 per cent. This can be attributed to the ongoing consequences of the

10 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Press release no. N062 dated 12 December 2024, Wiesbaden.

11 See Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (2025). Der Fall des Assad-Regimes: Regionale und internationale Machtverschiebungen, Berlin.

12 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2024). Lage in Syrien: Temporärer Verfahrensaufschub für Asylanträge, Nuremberg.

13 The abbreviation REAG / GARP stands for Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany / Government Assisted Repatriation Programme.

14 See Mediendienst Integration (2025). Abschiebungen und Rückkehr nach Syrien, Berlin.

in 2024, around

25.2 million

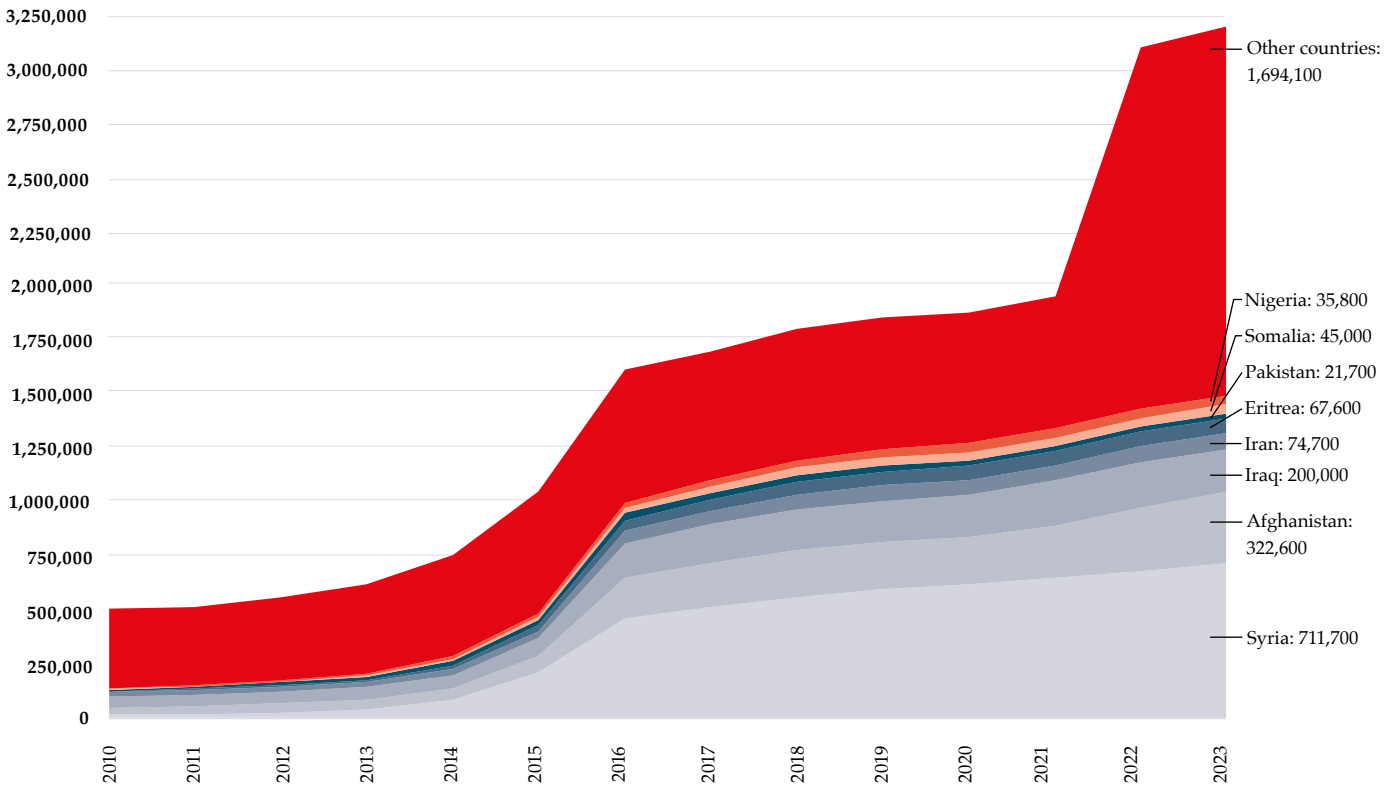
people (30% of the total population) had a migration background.

About

21.2 million

People (26% of the total population) had a history of immigration.

Figure 5:
Trends in the number of asylum seekers in Germany



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Table 12531-0002.

Taliban takeover in August 2021, which has led to an extreme humanitarian emergency.[15] With 322,600 people, Afghan asylum seekers were the second largest group of asylum seekers registered in Germany in 2024. Demographically, this group of people mostly consists of young men. The number of asylum seekers in Germany who are Iraqi (-5%), Pakistani (-6%) and Nigerian (-9%) nationals has fallen compared to the previous year.[16]

15 See Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (2023). Afghanistan, Berlin.

16 See Mediendienst Integration (2025). Wie viele Asylanträge werden in der EU gestellt?, Berlin.

Repatriation options for Syrian asylum seekers

The RPIS[17] survey conducted by the UN Refugee Agency regularly interviews Syrian asylum seekers living in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. In 2025, 3,400 people took part in the survey. 27 per cent of Syrian asylum seekers stated that they wanted to return to Syria within the next twelve months (2024: 2%). 55 per cent of asylum seekers did not have this intention.[18]The main obstacles to return cited by respondents were concerns about the availability of housing and the status of their property, followed by security concerns, economic challenges in Syria and limited access to basic services in the areas of return. It can be assumed that access to electricity and water as well as the condition of the infrastructure and the education and healthcare system play an important role in the decision to return, not just for asylum seekers in the host countries mentioned, but also for asylum seekers in Germany. Of the 61 per cent of asylum seekers who own a house or property in Syria, 81 per cent reported that it was completely destroyed or partially damaged and uninhabitable. In total, more than 16 million people in Syria are currently dependent on humanitarian aid, including over seven million children.[19] Around 43 per cent of hospitals and 63 per cent of primary health centres have limited functionality or are completely out of operation. Many areas remain inaccessible due to ongoing fighting, meaning that the population has no access to basic medical care.[20] Over 30 per cent of schools are not functional and require renovation measures, prefabricated buildings or temporary learning spaces. The basic infrastructure for drinking water supply, sanitation (e.g. toilets) and hygiene is largely out of order in the schools, which poses considerable health risks for pupils and teachers.

17 The abbreviation RPIS stands for Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey.

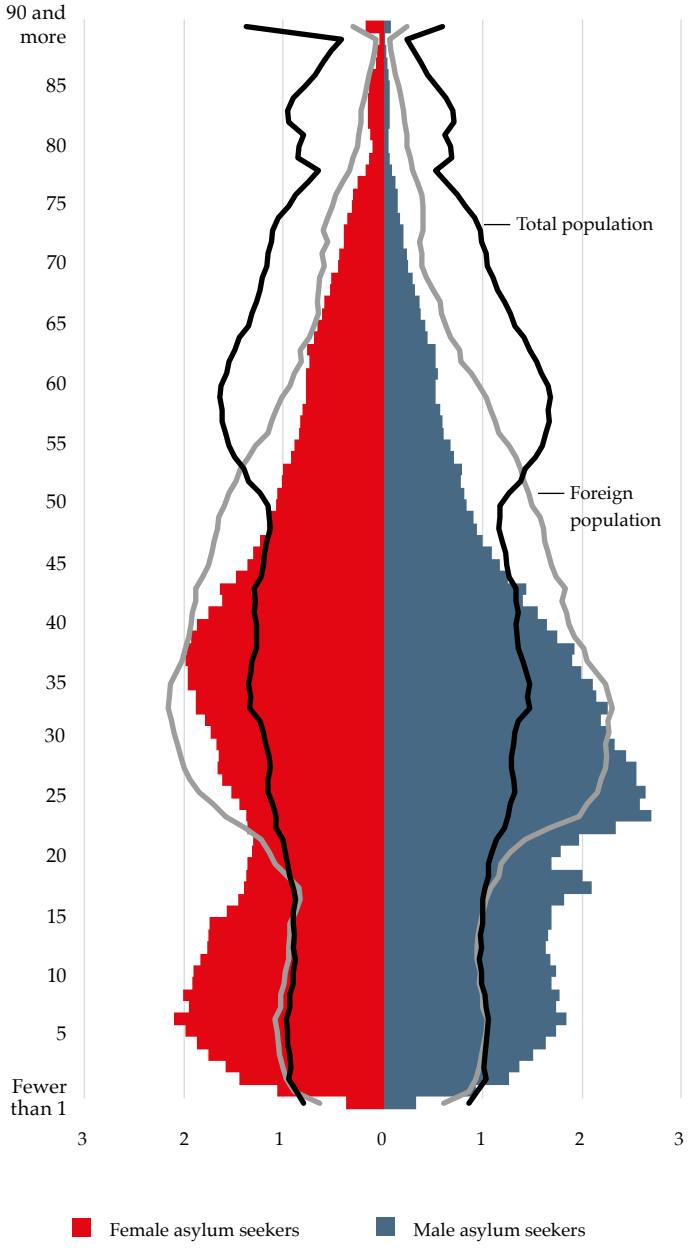
18 See UNHCR (2025). Flash Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria, Geneva.

19 See UNICEF (2025). 10 Facts About Childhood in Syria, New York.

20 See Health Sector Syria (2025). Health Sector Bulletin. January 2025. As at 31/01/2025, Geneva.

Figure 6 illustrates the demographic differences between the foreign population, the group of asylum seekers and the overall population in Germany. It can be seen that asylum seekers, in particular, are significantly younger on average than the overall population (red and blue bars respectively). While the 35 to 65-year-olds make up the largest proportion of both the overall population and foreign nationals (42% and 45% respectively), asylum seekers, as a group, tend to be younger. In terms of age and gender distribution, the population in 2023 remained largely unchanged compared to the previous year. As in the previous year, around 21 per cent of the total population was over 65 in 2023. This proportion was eight per cent among the foreign population and five per cent among asylum seekers. The proportion of men in the overall population remained constant at 49 per cent, while in the group of foreign nationals it rose by around one percentage point to 53 per cent. Among asylum seekers, the proportion of men has fallen by two percentage points to 45 per cent in 2023.

Figure 6:
Age structure of asylum seekers in Germany in December 2023



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Table 12531-0003, Table 12521-0003.

In 2023, people from the asylum8 countries made up

47%

of all asylum seekers.

3.3 million

asylum seekers in Germany.

Trends in asylum applications in Germany since 2016

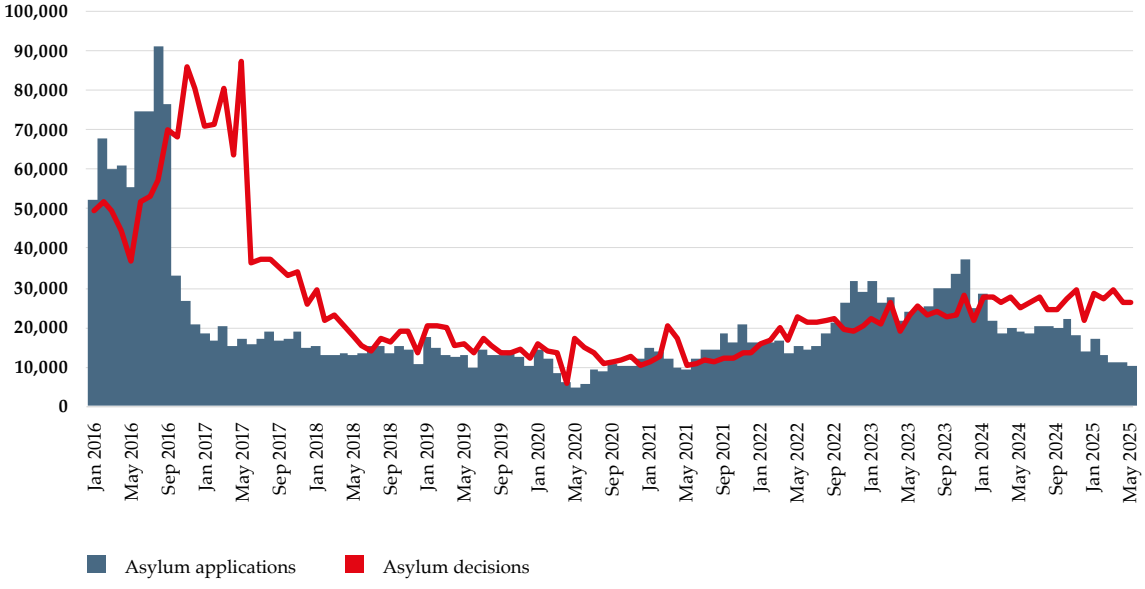
Between January and May 2025, 62,900 asylum applications were submitted. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees decided on around 135,800 asylum applications during this period. In 2024 as a whole, around 250,900 people applied for asylum in Germany, including 229,800 first-time asylum applications and 21,200 follow-up asylum applications. Compared to the previous year, this represents a decline of around 30 per cent.[21] In the same period, a total of around 301,400 asylum decisions were made (see Figure 7). The proportion of applications that are granted is shown in the overall asylum rate. Formally adopted decisions are also included here. These are asylum applications that are not processed by the BAMF, for example because an asylum application is withdrawn or it is determined that another EU member state is responsible for carrying out the asylum procedure. Between January and April 2025, the overall asylum rate was around 19 per cent. For the year 2024, it was just under 44 per cent. This means that it has fallen since 2021, when it was still 56 per cent.[22] Taking into account only the cases examined for content (adjusted asylum rate), the asylum rate in 2024 was 59 per cent, falling for the third year in a row. In 2022 and 2023, it was 72 per cent and 67 per cent respectively.[23]

21 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Asylzahlen Gesamtjahr und Dezember 2024, Nuremberg.

22 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2024, Nuremberg.

23 See German Bundestag (2025). Printed paper 20/ 14882, Berlin; Mediendienst Integration (2025). Wie viele Asylbewerber erhalten Schutz?, Berlin.

Figure 7:
Trends in asylum applications and asylum decisions (initial and subsequent applications) from January 2016 to May 2025



Source: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Asylgeschäftsstatistik.

Protection status of asylum seekers

After an asylum seeker arrives in Germany, proof of arrival is first issued. This documents a legal residence for the period between the submission of the asylum application and the formal application (see Table 1). When the application for asylum is submitted to the BAMF, the person concerned is issued with a residence permit. This authorises residence for the duration of the asylum procedure, but does not constitute a regular residence permit within the meaning of the Residence Act. Rather, it primarily fulfils the function of official identification and registration of the asylum seeker. At the end of May 2025, the asylum procedures of around 156,900 people in Germany had not yet been decided. This means that the number of pending procedures has fallen by 36 per cent since January 2024. Of all pending procedures, 33 per cent (51,700 procedures) were for asylum seekers from Syria, 20 per cent (30,500 procedures) for asylum seekers from Afghanistan and 15 per cent (23,600 procedures) for asylum seekers from Turkey.[24]

in 2024,

35,800

people received protection according to § 3 of the Asylum Act.

At the end of December 2024

220,800

people in Germany were required to leave the country.

Asylum applications can be concluded with a positive, negative or formal decision. In the event of a positive decision, the applicant is granted protection status (asylum authorisation, refugee protection, subsidiary protection or a ban on deportation). As the protection status of an asylum seeker depends to a large extent on the situation in their country of origin, the corresponding legal status granted to asylum seekers in Germany varies. In 2024, 35,800 people received refugee protection under Section 3 of the Asylum Procedure Act, around 2,000 people were granted asylum under Article 16a of the Basic Law, 75,100 people were granted subsidiary protection and 20,800 people were granted a ban on deportation.[25] In 2024, around 60 per cent of Eritrean nationals who were asylum seekers were granted refugee status under the Geneva Convention, making them the largest group within this protection status (see Figure 8 and Table 1 for an overview of the different protection statuses). Among Somali asylum seekers, 34 per cent were granted refugee status under the Geneva Refugee Convention. In contrast, only eight per cent of people with Syrian citizenship seeking protection received this status in 2024. At the same time, 77 per cent of Syrian asylum seekers were granted subsidiary protection. Subsidiary protection is granted to people who are at risk of serious individual harm in their country of origin, for example due to the imposition of the death penalty, torture, inhumane or degrading treatment or as a result of arbitrary violence in the context of an armed conflict. It is irrelevant whether the threat comes from state or non-state actors (see Table 1). The coalition agreement of the new federal government provides for the suspension of family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection for two years (see box). However, several studies point to the considerable psychological stress associated with family separation for asylum seekers. The lack of opportunities for family reunification has a demonstrably negative impact on the integration process in

24 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Current figures May 2025, Nuremberg.

25 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Current figures December 2024, Nuremberg.

the host country.[26] The number of bans on deportation granted to asylum seekers from Afghanistan is declining. While 60 per cent of Afghan applicants were still granted a ban on deportation in 2022, this proportion was only 39 per cent in 2024. Nevertheless, Afghan asylum seekers continued to be the largest group granted a ban on deportation.

If an application for asylum is rejected, the person is not granted protection status. In this case, they are deemed to be required to leave the country, either latently, enforceably or with tolerated stay.[27] In this context, the obligation to leave the country is referred to as 'latent', as the individuals concerned still have the option of appealing against the decision to leave the country. Asylum seekers who no longer have any legal remedies against the determination of their obligation to leave the country, i.e. whose obligation to leave the country has been legally established, are considered to be required to leave the country. At the end of December 2024, 220,800 people in Germany were required to leave the country.[28] However, around 81 per cent of these people had a tolerated stay permit in accordance with Section 60a of the Residence Act. This implies that although the persons concerned are required to leave the country, deportation cannot currently be carried out for factual (e.g. lack of travel documents or health reasons) or legal reasons (e.g. the right to preserve marital and family life or the assertion of illness-related risks). In 2024, asylum seekers from Turkey, Pakistan and Iraq in par-

26 See Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (2017): Wie gelingt Integration? Asylsuchende über ihre Lebenslagen und Teilhabeperspektiven in Deutschland. A study by the SVR Research Unit and the Robert Bosch Stiftung, Berlin; Swiss Red Cross (2023). Familiennachzug: ein wichtiger Faktor für Gesundheit und Integration. Fallstudie der Fachstelle Familiennachzug SRK, Bern.

27 See Federal Statistical Office (2023). Infographic: Schutzsuchende Begriffe, Wiesbaden.

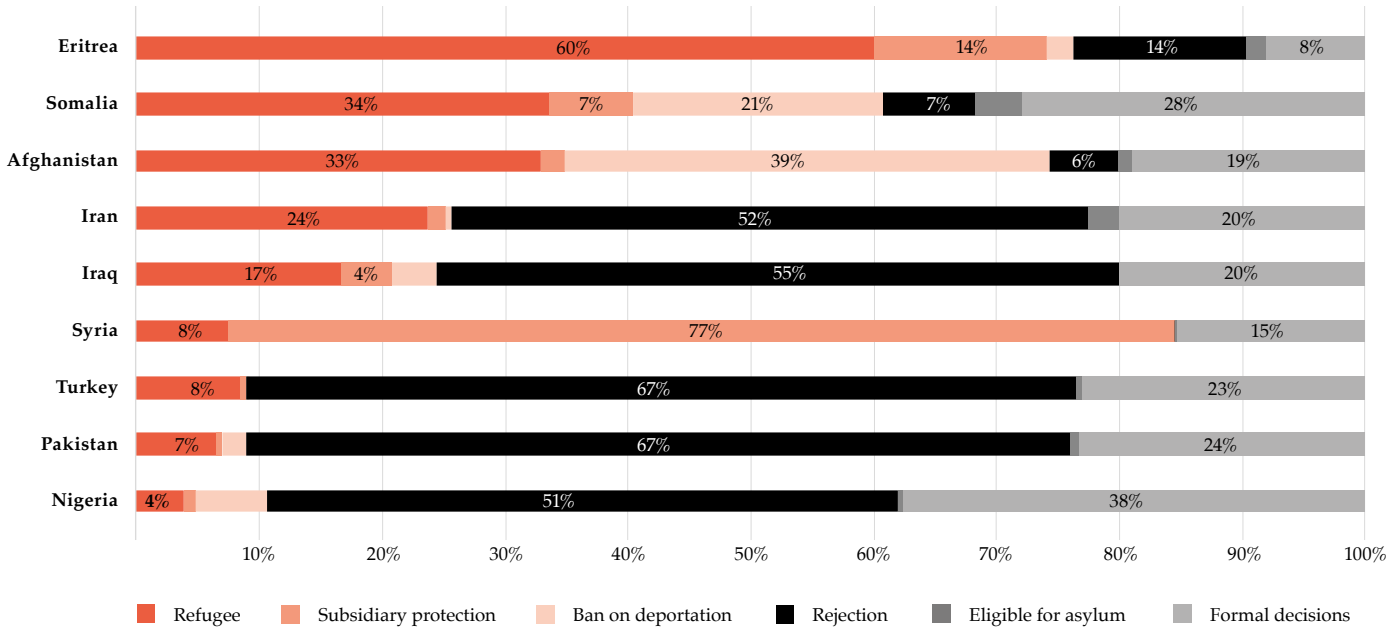
28 See Mediendienst Integration (2025). Wie viel Personen sind ausreisepflichtig, Berlin.

Table 1:
Forms of protection under German asylum law

	Prerequisites	Residence permit (in years)	Labour market access	Family reunification
Eligible for asylum § 25 (1) Residence Act in conjunction with Art. 16a Basic Law	People who are at risk of serious, state-induced human rights violations due to political persecution in their country of origin	3	Yes	Entitlement to family reunification
Refugees under the Geneva Convention § 25 (2) sentence 1 First Alternative Residence Act in conjunction with Section 3 Asylum Act	Both state and non-state persecuted people, provided that in the case of non-state persecution the country of origin does not offer effective protection and there is no reasonable domestic flight alternative	3	Yes	Entitlement to family reunification
Subsidiary protection § 25 (2) sentence 1 Second Alternative Residence Act in conjunction with Section 4 Asylum Act	People who are at risk of serious personal harm in their country of origin, regardless of whether the threat comes from state or non-state actors	1	Yes	Entitlement to family reunification, but with a limited quota of 1,000 people per month
Ban on deportation § 25 (3) in conjunction with Section 60 (5) and (7) Residence Act	Persons who, in the event of deportation, face a specific risk to life, limb or freedom in the host country, with the exception of risks associated solely with the execution of deportation	1–3	Only with the consent of the immigration authorities	No entitlement to family reunification

Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2023). Infographic: Terms relating to asylum seekers. See also Migration Report 2019.

Figure 8:
Decisions on asylum applications for asylum8 countries and Turkey up to and including December 2024



Source: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Asylgeschäftsstatistik (01-12/2024).

ticular were rejected. Among Turkish and Pakistani asylum seekers, 67 per cent respectively were rejected.

In 2024, 20,100 people were deported from Germany.[29] This corresponds to an increase of 22 per cent compared to the previous year (2023: 16,400 people).[30] Around 5,800 deportations took place in 2024 on the basis of the Dublin III Regulation. This regulates which EU member state is responsible for examining an asylum application. As a rule, the Member State through which the person concerned first entered the EU is responsible. If it transpires that the applicant has already been registered in another EU Member State, the BAMF will submit a takeover request to the competent authority of the first country of asylum concerned. If this state agrees to take charge, the asylum procedure in Germany is terminated and the person concerned is obliged to travel to the responsible state or is deported there. In 2024, around 10,200 people who were required to leave Germany voluntarily left the country as part of the REAG/GARP programme. The REAG/GARP programme supports asylum seekers with financial benefits when they return to their country of origin or continue their journey.[31] The largest proportion of people deported in 2024 were nationals from the Western Balkan countries (almost 4,300 people, see Figure 9). Around 1,800 people were deported to Georgia and almost 1,500 to Afghanistan. The sharp decline in deportations in 2020 is due to the fact that programmes such as REAG/GARP could only be implemented to a limited extent or not at all during the COVID-19 pandemic.

29 See German Bundestag (2025). Printed paper 20/14946, Berlin.

30 See German Bundestag (2025). Printed paper 20/14946, Berlin.

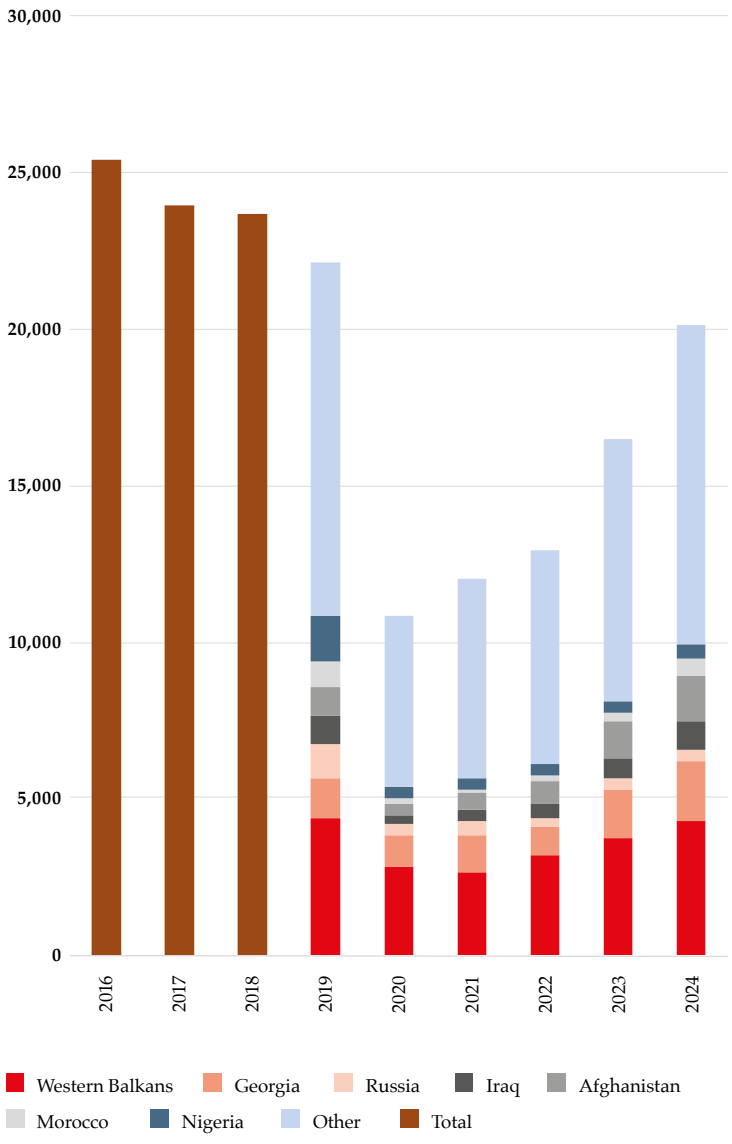
31 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2022). Freiwillige Rückkehr im Überblick, Nuremberg.

in 2024,

20,100

people were deported from Germany.

Figure 9:
Deportations by nationality in the years 2014 to 2024



Sources: Printed papers of the German Bundestag 18/4025, 18/7588, 18/11112, 19/800, 19/8021, 19/18201, 19/27007, 20/890, 20/5795, 20/14492.

In the coalition agreement of 9 April 2025, the future governing parties agreed to expand the list of safe countries of origin to include Algeria, Morocco, India and Tunisia (see box, p. 13). On 16 April 2025, the European Commission presented a proposal for an EU-wide list of safe countries of origin. This still requires the approval of the European Parliament and the Member States.[32] The future federal government also intends to limit regular migration to 25,000 people per year as part of the Western Balkans regulation.[33] This will halve the upper limit of 50,000 people that has been in place since mid-2024. The Western Balkans regulation was introduced at the end of 2015 to facilitate access to the German labour market for workers from six Western Balkan countries. At the same time, the regulation aimed to significantly reduce the number of asylum applications from these countries of origin. In the years following the pandemic-related decline, an average of around 15,000 people per year travelled to Germany with a residence permit under the Western Balkans regulation.[34]

32 See CDU, CSU, SPD (2025). Responsibility for Germany – Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU, and SPD, 21st legislative period, Berlin; European Commission (2025). Press release of the EU Commission of 16 April 2025, Brussels.

33 See CDU, CSU, SPD (2025). Verantwortung für Deutschland – Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, 21. Legislaturperiode, Berlin.

34 See Mediendienst Integration (2025). Fragen und Antworten zur Westbalkanregelung, Berlin.

Asylum seekers in Europe

In 2024, 997,000 people applied for asylum in Europe. The number of asylum applications thus fell by twelve per cent. Of these, 92 per cent were first-time applications (912,000 applications). The Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) reports that the EU member states granted protection status to a total of 437,900 asylum seekers in 2024. This corresponds to an increase of seven per cent compared to the previous year (2023: 409,500 people). Of the recognised asylum seekers in 2024, 42 percent were granted refugee status, 39 per cent subsidiary protection and 19 per cent humanitarian residence status. Most protection was granted to nationals from Syria (32%), Afghanistan (17%) and Venezuela (8%).[36]

In relation to the population, the highest number of asylum applications were registered in Cyprus in 2024 (ten applications per 1,000 inhabitants, see Figure 10). However, the country recorded a decline compared to the previous year, when 13 applications per 1,000 inhabitants were submitted. Greece was in second place with around seven asylum applications per 1,000 inhabitants (2023: six applications per 1,000 inhabitants). Iceland is in third place and also recorded a decline of more than half. Hungary again ranked at the bottom end of the scale, with only 0.00313 asylum applications per 1,000 inhabitants in 2024. This figure was at the same level as in 2023. Germany ranked ninth in Europe with just under three asylum applications per 1,000 inhabitants. Almost a quarter of all asylum applications made in Europe were made in Germany in 2024 (24%, 250,600 asylum applications). In 2023, it was still almost a third (30%, 351,500 asylum applications).

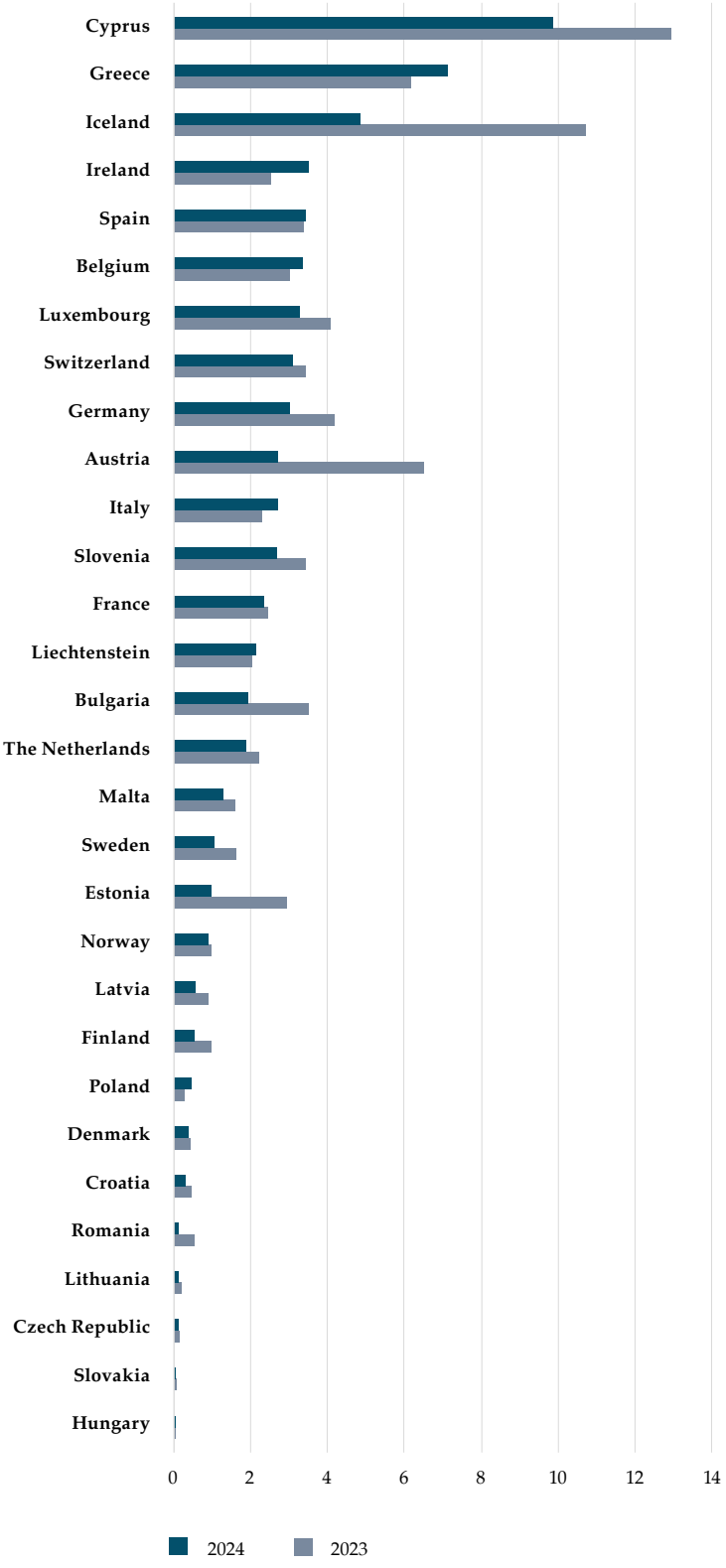
36 See Eurostat (2025). Asylum decisions-annual statistics, Luxembourg.

Repatriation Improvement Act

The Repatriation Improvement Act passed in February 2024 provides for amendments to the Residence Act, the Asylum Act, the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act, the Freedom of Movement Act and fundamental rights.[35] Among other things, the law stipulates that asylum seekers with a criminal conviction with at least one year's imprisonment can be deported. Deportation can also take place if proceedings have been initiated based on suspicion of forming or participating in a criminal organisation (Section 129 StGB). Detention to leave the country was extended from ten to 28 days (Section 62b Residence Act). In addition, authorities are authorised to enter the rooms of uninvolved third parties and all rooms in shared accommodation (Section 58 (5) sentence 2 Residence Act). It is possible to search homes for data carriers and documents, in particular to clarify identity. To ease the burden on the authorities, the period of validity of residence permits in the asylum procedure is also to be extended from the current three months to six months in future. There are also plans to extend the period of validity of residence permits for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from one to three years. In addition, the period of validity of electronic residence permits for foreign nationals with a settlement permit or EU permanent residence permit is to be extended. The legislative changes were criticised by numerous non-governmental organizations, which drew particular attention to potential conflicts with fundamental rights such as personal freedom, protection of the home and the right to privacy.

35 See Federal Law Gazette (2024). No. 54 of 26 February 2024, Berlin; Federal Government (2024). Neue Regelungen für mehr und schnellere Rückführungen, Berlin.

Figure 10:
European comparison of asylum applications per 1,000 inhabitants



Source: Eurostat (2025). Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex; own calculations; own illustration.

Regular access to Germany is generally open to third-country nationals in three ways: by entering the country with a valid visa, by visa-free entry with a corresponding passport or within the context of EU freedom of movement. Persons who do not have one of these residence permits are considered to have entered the country irregularly (see p. 100).[37] According to the European border management agency Frontex, the number of irregular border crossings into the European Union fell by 38 per cent in 2024. The number of irregular border crossings is therefore roughly at the level of 2021, a year in which migration movements were still significantly influenced by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This decline of 38 per cent is due to two developments in the flight routes (see Figure 11): The number of asylum seekers along the Western Balkan route towards Europe has fallen by 78 per cent compared to the previous year due to increased measures by the countries in the region to control the movement of people entering the country. In addition, 59 per cent fewer arrivals were recorded via the central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy. There were still around 67,000 irregular border crossings via the central Mediterranean route in 2024. This made it the second most frequently used migration route to the EU. People from Bangladesh, Syria and Tunisia, in particular, travelled to Europe on this route. This corresponded to around half of all asylum seekers who used this route.

In contrast, the use of other routes increased compared to the previous year. Following a decline due to the pandemic, the eastern Mediterranean route again had an increase in border crossings (+14%). Growth was recorded on the West African route, due in particular to an increase in departures from Mauritania (+18%). The increase in irregular border crossings via the eastern land route, which stretches for around 6,000 kilometres along the borders between Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and the EU Member States, was particularly striking. Registered

37 See Mediendienst Integration (2025). Was sind irreguläre Einreisen?, Berlin.

border crossings on this route almost tripled in 2024 compared to the previous year, from around 6,000 in 2023 to around 17,000 (+192%). Most of these border crossings were recorded at the borders with Ukraine and Belarus.

The most frequently used migration route to Europe in 2024 was the eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece, on which around 69,000 irregular border crossings were registered. The most frequently reported countries of origin for asylum seekers on this route were Syria, Afghanistan and Egypt.

In 2024, around 83,600 people entered Germany irregularly (2023: 127.500; -35%). From January to May 2025, around 25,300 arrivals were recorded, which corresponds to a year-on-year decline of 27 per cent (see Figure 12, p. 31). The political debate often calls for an end to irregular migration.[38] For migrants, however, this would mean that asylum seekers would be completely denied access to Germany. According to the current legal situation, a person's stay is considered legal from the time they receive proof of arrival (see Table 1). According to German and European law, every refugee in Germany is entitled to an individual examination of their application. Rejection without prior individual examination could violate applicable law. As part of the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) adopted in May 2024, a new screening regulation was adopted (see box, p. 30).

In 2024, in Europe

997,000

people applied for asylum.

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in 2024, around

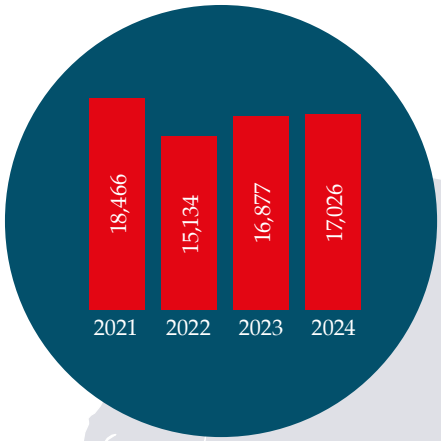
83,600

people entered Germany irregularly.

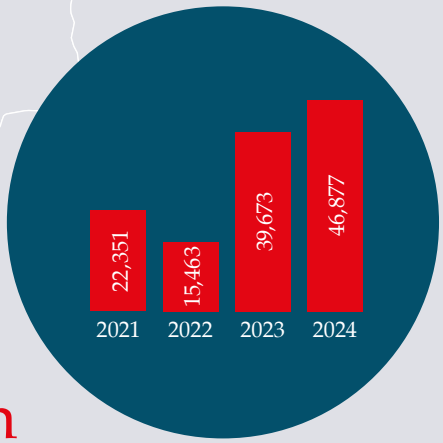
38 See German Bundestag (2024). Printed paper 20/ 14253, Berlin; Mediendienst Integration (2025). Irreguläre Migration, Berlin.

Figure 11:

Trends in refugee routes to Europe from 2021 to 2024

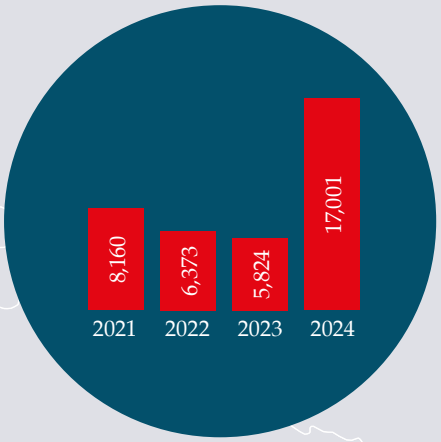


Western Mediterranean route

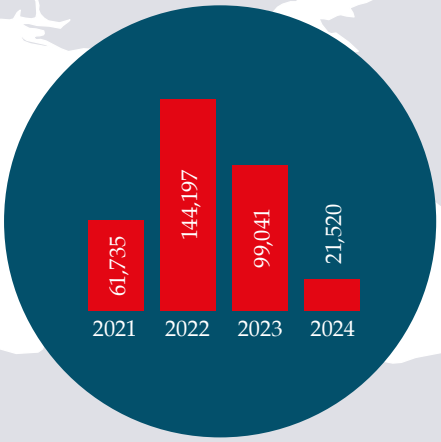


West African route

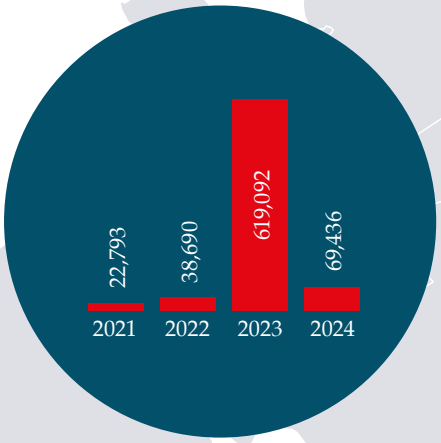
Eastern land route



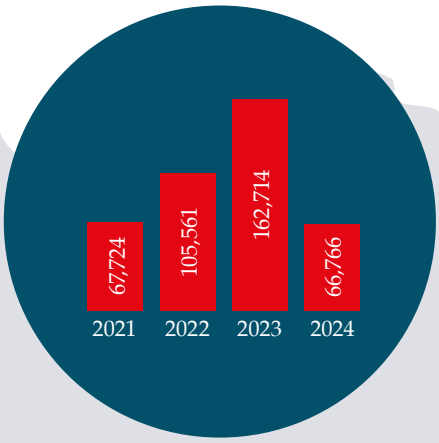
Western Balkan route



Eastern Mediterranean route



Central Mediterranean route



Source: Frontex 2025.

The reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS)

On 14 May 2024, the President of the European Parliament and the President of the European Council signed the legislative act on the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The legal acts entered into force on 11 June 2024; from this date, a two-year transposition period into national law applies. The CEAS reform aims to achieve more efficient management of asylum and migration movements and a fairer division of responsibility within the EU.[39] The reform consists of ten regulations. The next part of this report looks at the five most important building blocks.

The Asylum Procedure Ordinance introduces a border procedure for two groups of people. Firstly, for those who pose a threat to national security or public order, and secondly, for people from countries of origin for which the EU-wide average asylum rate is 20 per cent or less. The safe third country concept is also being revised. An asylum application can be rejected as inadmissible if a person could receive asylum in a safe third country. This applies if this person has a connection to a safe third country in which, for example, family members live or if the asylum seeker has already resided there. The Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management partially replaces the Dublin III Regulation, which previously regulated which member state was responsible for examining an asylum application. A European solidarity mechanism is to be introduced to reduce migration pressure on the EU's external border states.

Within the EURODAC Regulation, there are plans to expand the EURODAC database. This is currently used to compare the fingerprint data of all asylum seekers as well as stateless persons and certain third-country nationals. It is to be expanded into a migration database that can better understand migration movements within the EU and help reduce irregular secondary migration. Furthermore, the screening regulation is intended to introduce checks on irregular travellers at the EU's external borders. Irregular travellers undergo a procedure lasting a maximum of seven days, in which fingerprints are taken, an identity check and a health check are carried out and security risks are checked. As the individuals are under the control of the border authority during the check and are therefore restricted in their freedom of movement, this is a measure that restricts their freedom. After the examination, the individuals are either assigned to an asylum procedure or a return procedure. The Crisis Regulation enables the activation of an emergency asylum system in situations where a large number of people seek asylum in the EU within a short period of time or where migration is instrumentalised by third countries. It allows deviations from the regular border procedures, for example by extending registration deadlines. Activation is based on an assessment by the European Commission and a decision by the European Council.

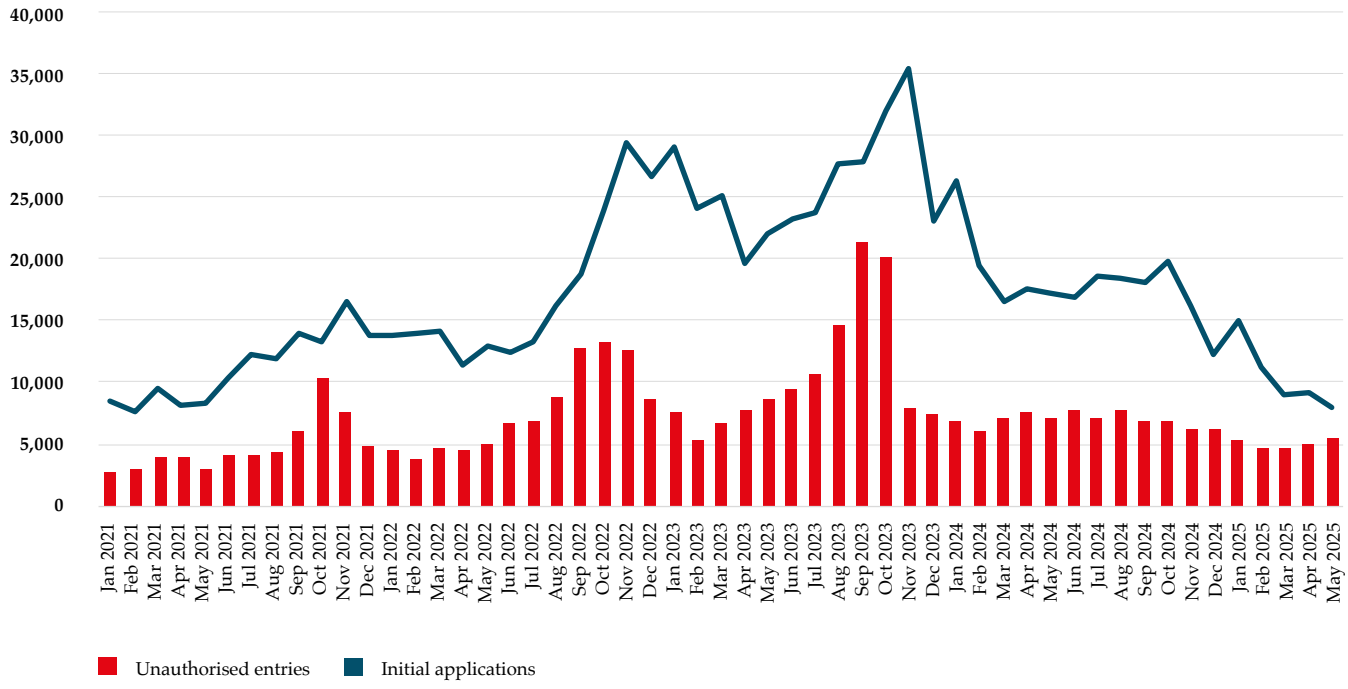
The CEAS reform is controversial.[40] NGOs criticise the fact that the reform creates new scope in which human rights and rule of law principles could be violated. These include concerns about the Crisis Ordinance, particularly with regard to the possibility of extending registration periods, as this would mean that asylum seekers would have to live under conditions that restrict their freedom for a significantly longer period of time.[41]

39 See European Parliament (2024). The reform of the Common European Asylum System, Strasbourg; Federal Ministry of the Interior (2025). FAQ zur Reform des Gemeinsamen Europäischen Asylsystems, Berlin.

40 See Federal Ministry of the Interior (2025). Fakten zur Reform des gemeinsamen Europäischen Asylsystems (GEAS), Berlin.

41 See Pro Asyl (2024). GEAS-Reform im EU-Parlament: Historischer Tiefpunkt für den Flüchtlingsschutz in Europa, Frankfurt.

Figure 12:
Monthly irregular arrivals across all land, air and sea borders and asylum applications since 2021 (as at June 2025)



Source: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Asylgeschäftsstatistik; Bundespolizei (2025). Monthly irregular entries.

Economic and fiscal aspects of asylum-related immigration since 2020

Total federal expenditure on asylum-related immigration amounted to just under €29.7 billion in 2023.[42] This corresponds to an increase of five per cent compared to the previous year (+€1.3 billion). According to the federal government's financial planning, expenditure totalling €27.6 billion was planned for 2023, resulting in a deficit of €2.1 billion compared to the original budget estimate. The largest proportion of expenditure in 2023 was on social transfer payments following the conclusion of asylum procedures (€11.8 billion, 40%). This was followed by expenditure to combat the causes of flight (€9.8 billion, 33%), payments to relieve the burden on the federal states and local authorities (€3.9 billion, 13%), integration services (€3 billion, 10%) and expenditure for the reception, registration and accommodation of people undergoing asylum procedures (€1.2 billion, 4%) (see Figure 13). This represents a change compared to previous years, in which the largest proportion of expenditure was spent on combating the causes of flight. Federal asylum-related benefits totalling €28.8 billion are planned for 2024. No information on expenditure for 2024 was available at the editorial deadline. Asylum seekers and tolerated persons receive financial benefits in accordance with the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (AsylbLG) in order to secure their livelihood (standard benefits) and, if necessary, to finance special needs (special benefits) such as illness (see table 2, p. 60). In 2023, around 535,600 people received benefits

42 See German Bundestag (2024). Printed paper 20/12401, Berlin.

under the AsylbLG. Foreign nationals who are residents in Germany and fulfil one of the requirements of the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act are entitled to benefits.[43] Compared to the previous year, the number of benefit recipients in 2023 remained relatively constant with a decrease of one per cent. 74 per cent of people who receive benefits under the AsylbLG are in the asylum process or are family members of asylum seekers. 14 per cent are tolerated persons and four per cent are persons required to leave the country (see Figure 14). The amount of the benefit rates varies depending on the living situation, marital status and age of the refugee. Since 1 January 2025, asylum seekers and tolerated persons have been receiving fewer social benefits than in 2024. According to the federal government, the current calculation of the standard rates for 2025 shows that the amounts determined are lower than the current standard rates. The significant increase in standard rates in 2023 compared to previous years was based on the expectation that the price level would rise sharply again in 2024.[44] The benefit rates applicable from January 2025 for single adults are €441 (previously: €460), for adult beneficiaries living in a partnership or a joint household €397 (previously: €413).[45]

At the end of 2023, around 522,700 people were receiving standard benefits under the AsylbLG. The number of recipients of standard benefits thus rose by eight per cent (36,600 people) compared to the previous year. Around two thirds (66%) of those receiving standard benefits were male and 28 per cent were minors. The most common countries of origin were Syria and Turkey, which each accounted for 15 per cent of all beneficiaries. Only five per cent of those entitled to benefits came from Ukraine, as they receive benefits under the German Social Code Book II (SGB II).[46]

At the same time, expenditure on asylum seeker benefits in 2023 fell by just under three per cent compared to the previous year (see Figure 15). In 2023, gross expenditure for these services totalled around €6.3 billion (2022: €6.5 billion). Around 62 per cent of expenditure was on basic benefits, 19 per cent on assistance with living expenses and 20 per cent on special benefits.

Following an amendment to the AsylbLG in May 2024, asylum seekers are to receive financial benefits via a payment card from the beginning of 2025. Similar payment card systems already exist in France, the UK and Greece. The payment card is a credit-based card without an account link with a debit function that is topped up monthly. This means that card-to-card transfers, cash withdrawals and online purchases are only possible to a limited extent and international transfers are not possible at all. The specific design of the payment card is the responsibility of the federal states. In the majority of federal states (13 out of 16), monthly cash withdrawals are limited to €50 per person. Only in Thuringia (up to €120 depending on the region), Rhineland-Palatinate (with a recommendation of €130) and Bremen (up to €200) can asylum seekers withdraw higher amounts of cash each month. In Berlin, there is a withdrawal limit for the first six months.[47]

The payment card is criticised because it can have negative consequences for the participation and integration of asylum seekers.[48]

Brücker (2023) considers it problematic that the payment card reduces the actual advantages of the subsistence benefits for those affected and, depending on the extent of the material and spatial restrictions on the use of funds, restricts their opportunities for mobility, communication and socio-cultural participation.

43 See Federal Statistical Office (2023). Infographic: Schutzsuchende Begriffe, Wiesbaden.

44 See German Federal Council (2024). Printed paper 453/24, Berlin; Malteser Migration Report 2023, Cologne.

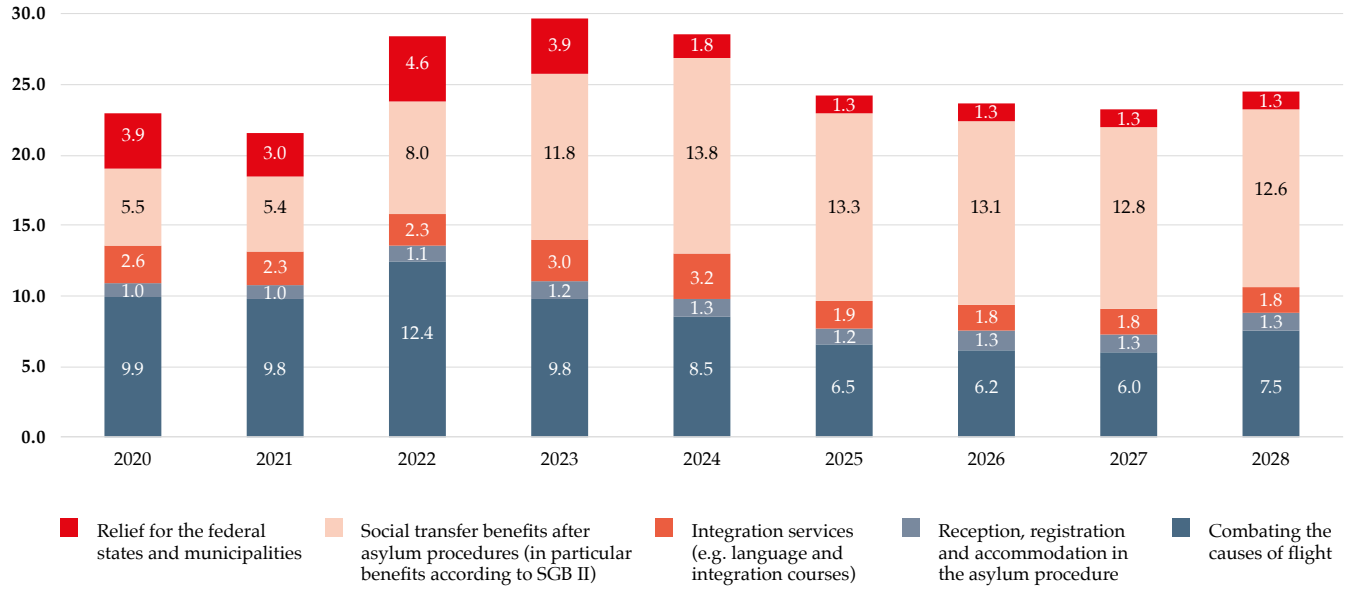
45 See Federal Law Gazette 2024 I No. 325, Berlin.

46 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Press release no. 387 of 10 October 2024, Wiesbaden.

47 See Mediendienst Integration (2025). Anfragen bei den 16 zuständigen Ministerien der Bundesländer sowie dem Betreiber „SocialCard" im Januar 2025, Berlin.

48 See Brücker (2023). Stellungnahme: Wissenschaftliche Einschätzung der Bezahlkarte für Geflüchtete, Nürnberg. Diakonie Deutschland (2024). Position der Diakonie Deutschland zur Bezahlkarte, Berlin

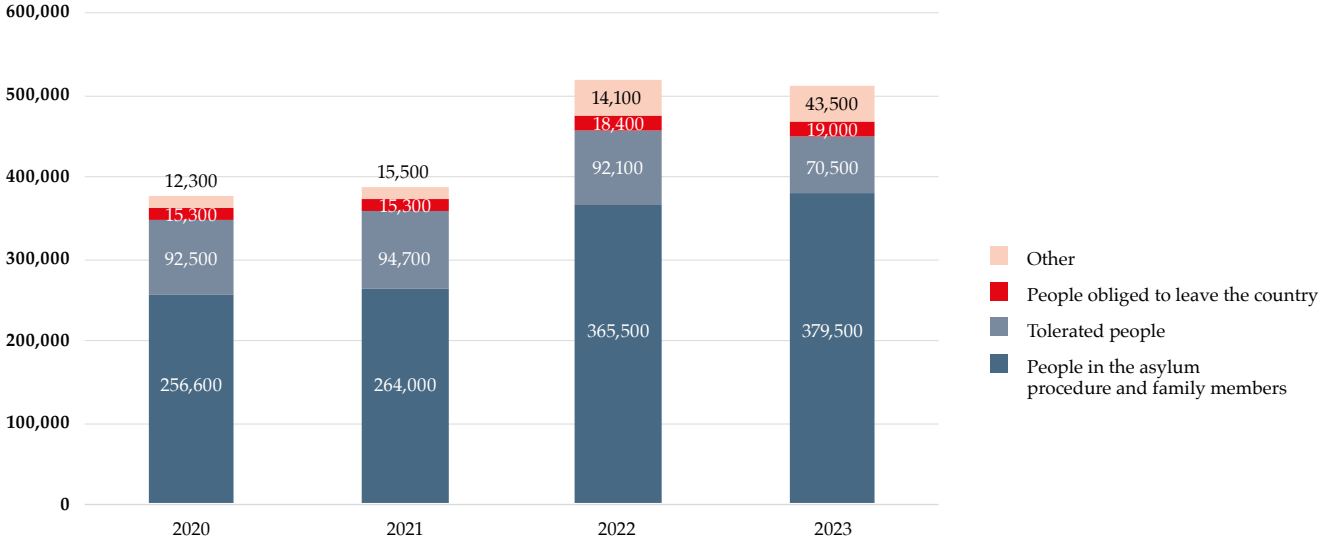
Figure 13:
Federal government asylum-related benefits in billions of euros for 2020 to 2028



Source: Printed Papers of the German Bundestag – 2020: 19/31501, 2021: 20/3101, 2022: 20/7801, 2023–2028: 20/12401.

Note: The figure for 2024 is a target value, for 2025 it is the draft and from 2026 it is the financial plan.

Figure 14:
Number of recipients of social benefits under the AsylbLG by residence status



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Recipients of benefits under the AsylbLG.

Note: The category 'Other' consists of 'Asylum application', 'Entry via airport' and 'No details'.

The argument presented by supporters of the payment card is that it limits the pull factors for migration to Germany created by the social welfare system, as it restricts the use of the financial resources provided.[49] At the same time, there is a lack of well-founded causal evidence that social benefits are pull factors. Rather, Müller (2025) shows that the pull effects of welfare state benefits largely disappear as soon as various explanatory variables such as gross domestic product, population size, geographical distance, degree of democratisation and common official language are taken into account.[50] There are similar findings from the Swiss context, for which Ferwerda et al. (2023) find limited evidence that immigrants systematically settle in regions with higher benefits. The study shows that there is no evidence of strategic behaviour when claiming social benefits in the period analysed over a decade. The fears of an influx of migrants who specifically want to receive social benefits have therefore not yet been confirmed by the data.[51]

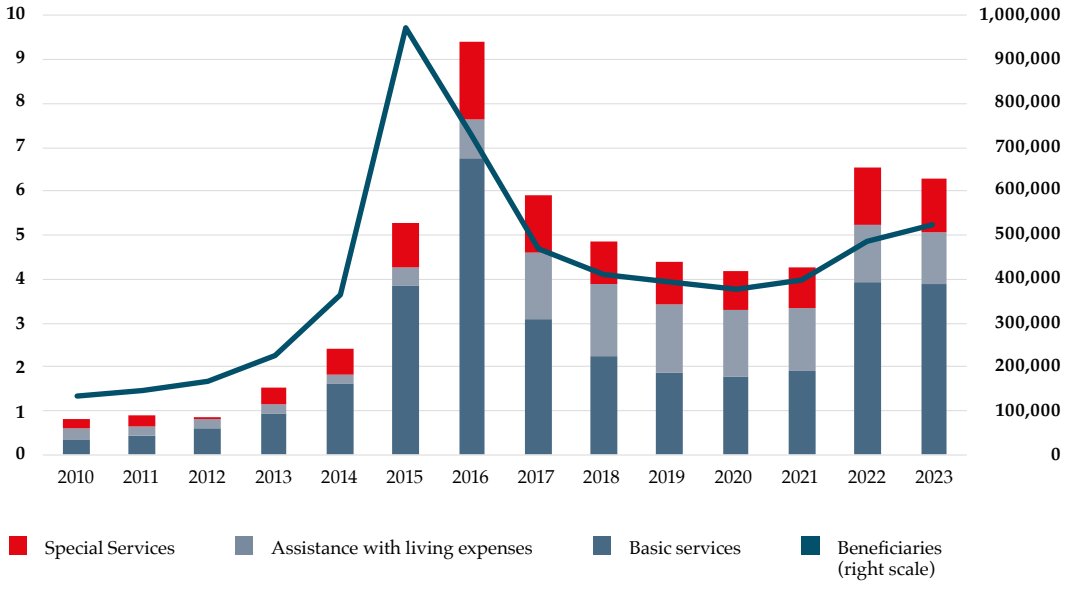
The question of who bears the costs for asylum seekers is a recurring topic in public discourse. The reception, care and support of asylum seekers are primarily the responsibility of the federal states and local authorities. Accordingly, the Basic Law stipulates that they are responsible for the associated costs. Against the backdrop of a sharp rise in the number of asylum seekers in recent years, the federal states and local authorities have stated that they are increasingly reaching the limits of their capacity. This is why the federal government has been helping to finance the costs for asylum seekers since 2015. In 2023, following another sharp rise in the number of

49 See German Bundestag (2024). Arbeit und Soziales-Anhörung-hib 211/2024: Experten kritisieren Thesen von Pull-Faktoren, Berlin.

50 See Müller (2025). Evidence for the welfare magnet hypothesis? A global examination using exponential random graph models.

51 See Ferwerda et al. (2024). Do immigrants move to welfare? Subnational evidence from Switzerland.

Figure 15:
Gross expenditure (in billions of euros, left-hand scale) and benefit recipients (in millions, right-hand scale) under the AsylbLG from 2005 to 2023



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Table 22211-0002; Federal Statistical Office (2023). Table 22221-0001.

asylum seekers in Germany as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, local authority umbrella organisations once again called for increased financial support from the federal government. The results of a survey by Kühn and Schlicht (2023) showed that 69 per cent of local authorities assessed the situation as 'barely manageable', while 17 per cent stated that they were already 'over the limit' (see Malteser Migration Report 2023).[52]

As part of the migration summit in May 2023, the federal and state governments agreed on one-off financial support from the federal government totalling €1 billion in favour of the federal states. In 2023, federal expenditure in the area of refugees and migration, which led to direct or indirect relief for the federal states and municipalities, thus totalled more than €18 billion. This included almost €3.8 billion in lump-sum relief to support the federal states.[53] €2.3 billion were allocated to the federal states as lump-sum relief for additional burdens caused by asylum seekers, and €1.5 billion as lump-sum relief specifically for asylum seekers from Ukraine. A further €129 million was attributable to the free transfer of land for the accommodation of asylum seekers and the reimbursement of set-up costs to the authorities by the Institute for Federal Real Estate.

In 2024, the previously generally applicable refugee lump sum was converted into a lump sum based on the number of asylum seekers ('per capita lump sum'). This will substantially expand the existing 'flexible' system of federal support measures. The federal government pays an annual lump sum of €7,500 for every person who submits an initial application for asylum. To this end, the federal states received an advance payment of €1.75 billion in the first half of 2024. A final settlement takes place in the following year. In the event of a significant drop in the number of new asylum applications, the federal government will ensure that the federal states and local authorities are provided with at least €1 billion annually in the form of a lump-sum reimbursement. This is intended to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is maintained in the long term.

Based on the immigration figures for 2023, these measures, in combination with the per capita lump sum, will lead to financial relief for the federal states and municipalities totalling around €3.5 billion in 2024. With around 780,000 asylum seekers, North Rhine-Westphalia is the federal state with the highest number of asylum seekers. Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg follow in second and third place with around 370,000 and 384,700 asylum seekers respectively. The city state of Bremen has the lowest amount. North Rhine-Westphalia (€806 million), Bavaria (€595 million) and Baden-Württemberg (€502 million) were thus among the federal states that received the highest lump-sum relief from the federal government in 2023.

52 See Kühn and Schlicht (2023). Kommunale Unterbringung von Geflüchteten – Probleme und Lösungsansätze, Berlin; Bundesregierung (2025). Fragen und Antworten: Migrationspolitik der Bundesregierung, Berlin.

53 See Federal Government (2025). Fragen und Antworten: Migrationspolitik der Bundesregierung, Berlin.

'Immigration for employment is important – but not as a substitute for reforms'

Position of Steffen Kampeter

There is already an acute shortage of skilled labour in one in six professions.[54] Despite economic stagnation, there are currently around 1.4 million vacancies in Germany.[55] The gap is hitting many companies hard: Half of all companies report that they can no longer find enough staff for open positions. as a result, 40 per cent even have to turn down orders.[56] The economic consequences are enormous: By 2027, the costs of the labour and skills shortage could rise to up to €74 billion.[57]

Demographic trends will exacerbate the situation even further in the coming years. By 2036, the baby boomers, approx. 16.5 million people, will reach retirement age. When this happens, the number of people in the labour force is likely to shrink by four million, as the generations entering the labour market are significantly smaller.[58] This presents employers and the entire economy with immense challenges that we must tackle head-on.

54 Federal Employment Agency (2024). Fachkräfteengpassanalyse June 2024, Nuremberg.

55 Institute for Employment Research (2024). IAB Job Vacancy Survey 2/2024, Nuremberg.

56 DIHK-Fachkräfte-Report 2023/2024

57 Burstedde & Kolev-Schaefer (2024). Die Kosten des Fachkräftemangels, Cologne.

58 Deschermaier & Schäfer (2024). Die Babyboomer gehen in Rente, Cologne.

Activating domestic potential – an essential step

Immigration into employment will not solve this challenge by itself; it must be part of an overall strategy to secure skilled labour and workers. To secure the needs of the labour market in the long term, domestic potential must be activated in a targeted manner. This requires resolute reforms to the labour market, e.g. by strengthening vocational orientation and dual training, needs-based further training and qualifications, a stronger focus on job placement and the abolition of early retirement incentives, such as the full retirement age of 63. Female participation in the labour market offers huge potential: More full-time jobs could increase the labour force potential here by up to 640,000 people by 2035.[59] However, it will be impossible to meet the needs of the labour market without immigration into employment and training. That is why we also need more immigration into employment. A clear distinction between asylum and labour migration is important – politically and legally. This distinction is necessary for acceptance in society and for the targeted management of immigration.

59 Institute for Employment Research (2021). Demographische Entwicklung lässt Arbeitskräfteangebot stark schrumpfen, Nuremberg.

Addressing new challenges

Many companies have reacted to the new labour market situation and adapted their recruitment strategies: The growth in employment in recent years has been largely driven by people with foreign nationality, particularly those from non-European third countries. Nevertheless, less than one in five companies is actively looking for qualified employees abroad. This reluctance is often due to the difficult conditions.

Skilled labour immigration laws: From theory to practice

The legal framework for skilled labour immigration has been significantly modernised in recent years. We employers' organisations have supported this process and put forward our own proposals. The main challenge remains the practical implementation of these regulations. Despite the simplifications, the procedures are often too bureaucratic and lengthy. Waiting times of up to a year are not uncommon – a clear disadvantage in the international competition for talent. A lack of digitalisation makes it difficult to process applications quickly and prevents employment from being taken up quickly. A lack of transparency regarding required documents or current processing statuses also leads to unnecessary queries and planning uncertainty for employers and foreign workers. Even now, administrative procedures are a major obstacle to more immigration.

So what needs to be done?

Labour migration to Germany must become faster and easier. The key lies in the digitalisation and bundling of processes. The large number of organisations involved has made the process inefficient to date. A feasibility study commissioned by the Federal Government[60] came to the conclusion that bundling the issuing of visas and residence permits at the Federal Office for Foreign Affairs alone could save around 40 per cent of processing times. Two other measures could be used to attract foreign labour to Germany: An abolition of the ban on temporary employment is long overdue. With their experience in placement and training, temporary employment and personnel service companies can provide valuable support, especially for small and medium-sized companies. The Western Balkans regulation is also a successful component of labour migration. Contrary to plans outlined in the coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and SPD, the regulation should not be restricted but expanded. Besides immigration into skilled jobs, there is also a need for targeted immigration into jobs below the level of skilled labour.

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Labour migration to Germany will only be successful if foreign workers can be retained and integrated in the long term.

This does not happen on its own, but must be actively organised in a welcoming culture. Many companies are already making an important contribution here, but integration beyond the workplace remains an important task for society as a whole.

60 Federal Ministry of the Interior (2025). Machbarkeitsstudie Zentralisierung der Erwerbsmigrationsverfahren, Berlin.

Labour market

– The influence of migration

Labour market – The influence of migration

Prof. Dr Dr h. c. Lars P. Feld and Lilith Burgstaller

Key facts

- **Compared to the previous year, the number of employees of German nationality shrank by an average of 130,700 people per month in 2024, while the number of foreign nationals increased by an average of 267,600 people per month.**
- **While the employment rate in March 2025 fell slightly year-on-year among German nationals, it increased in most groups of foreign nationals; by seven percentage points among Ukrainian nationals and by four percentage points among Asylum8 nationals.**
- **In the eighth year after immigration, the employment rate of male asylum seekers exceeds that of German men (81%) at 86 per cent. Among female asylum seekers, the current figure is 33 per cent (74% among German women).**
- **Active labour market policy measures for asylum seekers looking for work increased the employment rate by up to 20 percentage points in the long term.**
- **In June 2024, there were just under 566,500 third-country nationals in Germany with a residence permit for the purpose of gainful employment.**
- **The SGB II rates of asylum seekers from asylum8 countries and Ukraine are declining. In each case, 20 and 34 per cent of recipients of benefits from SGB II complete active labour market policy measures.**

Despite the recent economic stagnation and global economic uncertainties, the German labour market has so far remained largely stable, albeit with relatively poor prospects for the unemployed. As reported by the Federal Employment Agency (BA), companies are reluctant to announce new jobs in view of the current uncertainties on the global market. The number of registered jobs has been declining significantly since mid-2022. Employment and employment subject to social security contributions have recently increased only slightly, especially since November 2024. Since the beginning of 2024, the growth in employment subject to social security contributions has been primarily due to part-time employment. It is also striking that mainly the government-related services sector has seen an increase in employment. The manufacturing industry in particular and, to a lesser extent, the construction industry and trade, on the other hand, recorded a significant decline in employment subject to social insurance contributions.[61]

This chapter deals with the latest developments on the labour market. A special focus is placed on the group of persons with foreign citizenship as a whole as well as on the subgroups of nationals of

61 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Monthly report on the labour and training market - April 2025, Nuremberg.

asylum8 and Western Balkan states and those with citizenship of the countries of the EU eastward enlargement. Furthermore, where possible, asylum seekers and their situation on the labour market are examined in more detail. This is based on the latest data available at the time of going to press (mostly from April 2025).

The chapter first looks at employment trends since 2014, analysing employment figures and their changes, the relationship between employment rates and length of stay in Germany, the level of requirements and wage trends. Subsequently, the immigration of skilled labour from third countries will be discussed and the impact of the right to an opportunity residence permit and switching lanes on the employment of foreign workers will be described. The recognition of qualifications plays a decisive role in the successful integration of skilled workers into the German labour market, which is why we are looking at the processes and the number of recognition procedures. The chapter then deals with the start-up activities of people with a history of immigration. Finally, the topic of unemployment, the instruments of active labour market integration, their use and effectiveness and the dependency on basic income support are discussed.

Employment trends since 2014

Of the total of 34.8 million employees subject to social insurance contributions in Germany, 5.7 million people did not have German citizenship in March 2025. This means that 16 per cent of employees hold a foreign passport. Among the subgroups specified in Figure 16, nationals of the countries of the EU eastward enlargement account for the largest proportion. They accounted for around 1.7 million employees subject to social insurance contributions. People from the asylum8 and Western Balkan states are represented by 632,300 and 524,400 people respectively. Of the groups shown, the group of Ukrainian nationals is the smallest in absolute terms, with 245,400 employees subject to social insurance contributions.

In view of the employment trend among German nationals, it is clear that the proportion of foreign employees is likely to increase further in the coming years. Since the beginning of 2023, there has been no further increase in employment among the population with German citizenship. Instead, the slight reduction in employment in 2023 has stabilised and intensified, which is due to demographic trends. In March 2025, there were 180,000 fewer German nationals in employment subject to social security contributions than in the same month of the previous year. Employment of German nationals fell by an average of 130,700 people per month in 2024. In the same period, employment among foreign nationals

What the new federal government is planning

- The limitation of immigration via the Western Balkans regulation[62] from the current 50,000 people to 25,000 people per year.
- The introduction of a mandatory integration agreement, which is aimed at defining concrete measures for the labour market integration of unemployed asylum seekers as well as the rights and obligations of asylum seekers. The measures for labour market integration should be based on the possibilities offered by SGB II (see p. 57 and p. 59).
- The creation of a 'work-and-stay agency' that bundles the processes of labour migration and recognition of qualifications across national borders. Employers should be more involved in the recognition process.
- The expansion and consolidation of vocational language courses.
- The work ban for asylum seekers in Germany is to be reduced to a maximum of three months. The aim is for asylum seekers to gain work experience earlier and learn German at the same time.[63]

62 Since 2016, the Western Balkans regulation has made it possible for nationals of Western Balkan states to come to Germany regardless of their professional qualifications, provided they have a job offer.

63 See CDU, CSU, SPD (2025). Verantwortung für Deutschland – Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, 21. Legislaturperiode, Berlin.

The figure of

130,700

people on average was the monthly decline in employment among German nationals in 2024, while the number of people in employment rose by 267,600 among foreign nationals.

Compared to the previous year, in March 2025

80,000

Ukrainian nationals were also employed and subject to social security contributions.

increased by an average of 267,600 people per month. This resulted in an overall increase in employment, which continued at the beginning of 2025.

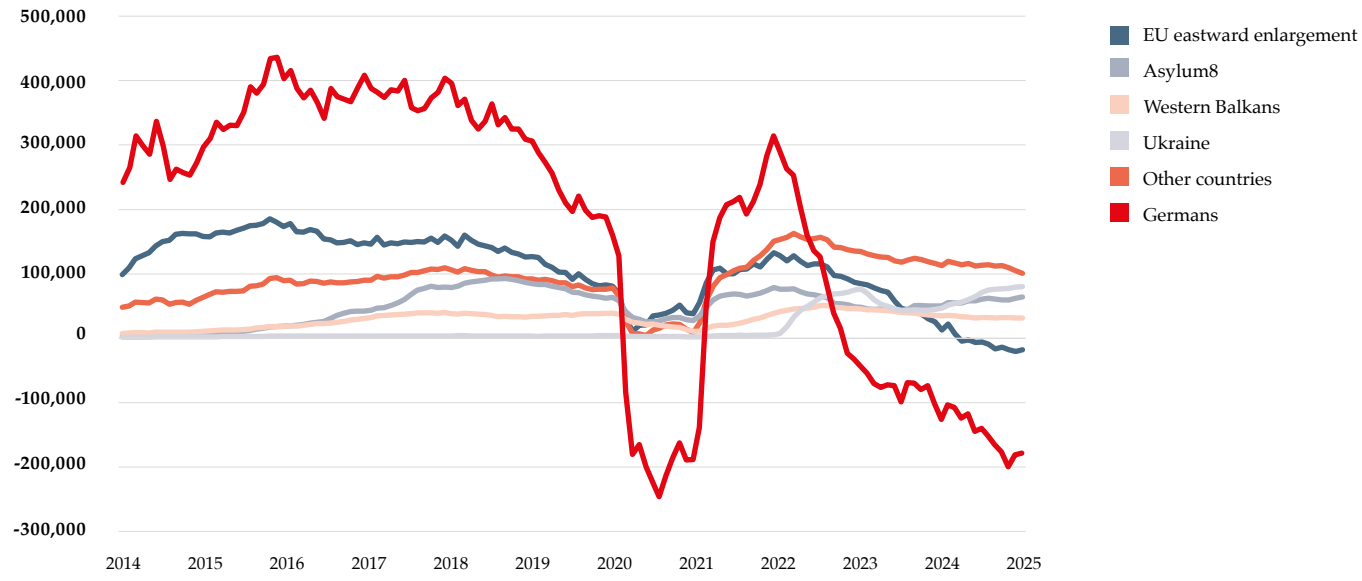
Of all groups, Ukrainian nationals contributed the most to the increase in employment. In March 2025, around 80,000 additional Ukrainian employees were subject to social security contributions compared to the previous year. This consolidates the positive trend of this group, which has only been in Germany for a short time relative to the majority of asylum seekers from asylum8 countries, taking up employment. Nationals from one of the asylum8 countries accounted for just under a quarter of the increase in employment last year. In March 2025, employment in this group grew by around 64,200 people compared to the previous year. Employment among citizens of the Western Balkan states increased by 31,200 people. There was no increase in employment among nationals from EU eastward enlargement states per se. This goes hand in hand with a decline in internal EU migration, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first half of 2024, ten per cent fewer people immigrated to Germany from EU countries compared to the same period the previous year. Hungary and the Czech Republic, for example, recorded declines of twelve and 16 per cent respectively.[64]

The employment rate provides a differentiated view of the development of employment and, in particular, of the labour market integration of the various groups. This indicates how many people are subject to social security contributions or in marginal employment relative to all people of working age (15 to 65 years). Figure 17 shows that the employment rates are continuing to converge. While the employment rate among German nationals was most recently (March 2025) at 70 per cent (-1% year-on-year), it was 66 per cent among nationals from the Western Balkans or EU eastern enlargement countries. This represents an increase of two percentage points in the first group, while it remained constant year-on-year in the second group. Higher growth can be observed among nationals of asylum8 countries and Ukraine. Among nationals of asylum8 countries, the employment rate increased by four percentage points year-on-year to 46 per cent. Among Ukrainians, it rose from 26 per cent in February 2024 to 33 per cent in March 2025. Compared to previous years, the employment rates developed very dynamically, particularly in these two groups.

Unemployment exit rates provide a better illustration of employment dynamics. They indicate the proportion of unemployed people who move from unemployment to employment, training or self-employment in a given month. In the group of nationals of asylum8 countries, the monthly exit rates over the past two years have been around five per cent, with a slight increase over time. In April 2025, just under six per cent of all registered unemployed people in this group were in employment. Among Ukrainians, this rate was at a relatively low level of just under two per cent until April 2024. Since then, howev-

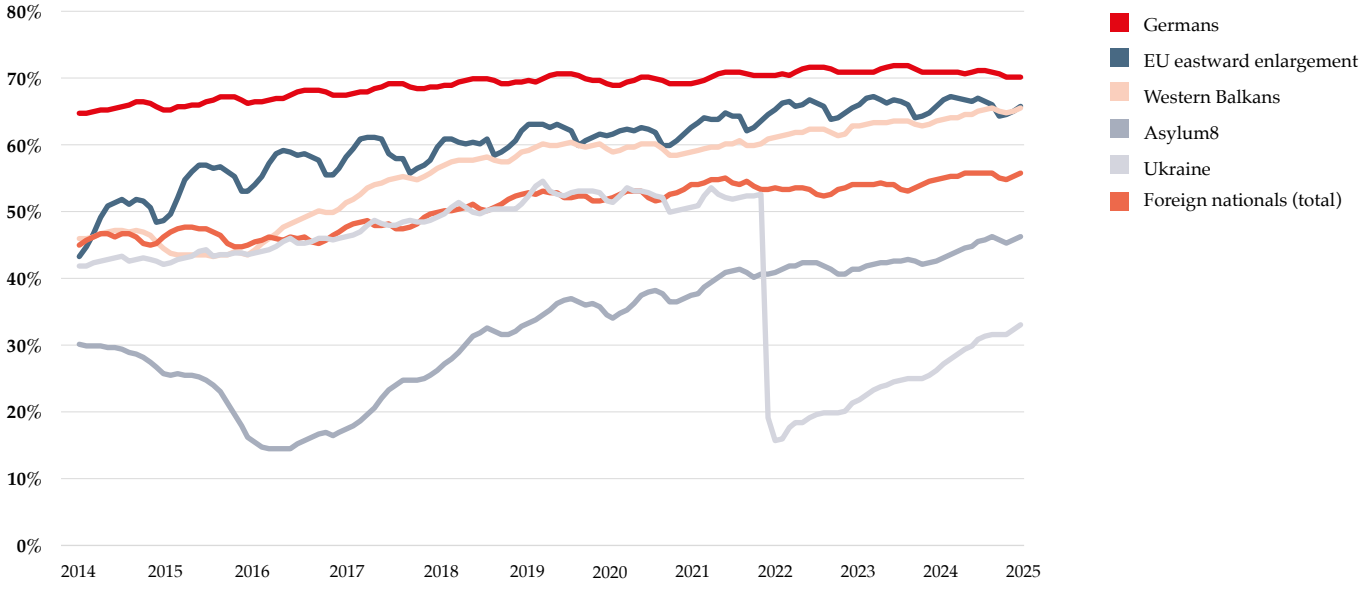
64 See Weber (2024). Freizügigkeitsmonitoring: Migration von EU-Staatsangehörigen nach Deutschland. Semi-annual Report 2024, Nuremberg.

Figure 16:
Change in employment subject to social insurance contributions compared to the same month of the previous year



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). Migration Monitor.

Figure 17:
Employment rates of the German and foreign population aged between 15 and 65 (those subject to social security contributions and in minor employment)



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). Migration Monitor.

er, it has risen sharply. In April 2025, four per cent of the currently registered unemployed people from this group found employment.[65]

The probability of being employed correlates strongly with the person's length of stay in Germany.[66] To illustrate this correlation, Brücker et al. (2024) show the development of employment rates over the duration of residence. In the first year after arrival, the employment rate among all asylum seekers is seven per cent. However, there is a difference between the sexes here. While nine per cent of male asylum seekers are in gainful employment in the first year after arrival, this figure is two per cent for women. The employment rate rises steadily with the duration of the stay: In the fifth year after immigration, the overall rate among asylum seekers is 46 per cent, 60 per cent among men and 15 per cent among women. In the eighth year after immigration, the employment rate of male asylum seekers (86 per cent) now exceeds that of German men (81%) (see dashed line in Figure 18). The differences between the sexes remain. A male asylum seeker is almost three times more likely to be in employment eight years after immigration than a female asylum seeker. The employment rate among female asylum seekers is 33 per cent eight years after immigration (for comparison: 74% among German women). Overall, the employment rate among women with their own migration history is roughly the same as among asylum seekers. The reasons for the pronounced gender differences in the employment rates of male and female asylum seekers lie, for example, in the fact that women are much more likely to take on childcare work and make less use of language and further training courses. In addition, women have often already worked in regulated professions in their country of origin, which makes rapid integration into the local labour market more difficult (see p. 49/50).

The development of employment among asylum seekers can be attributed to various factors. At the beginning of their stay in Germany, employment bans and residency requirements, a lack of language skills and the limited transferability of professional qualifications make it difficult to take up gainful employment in Germany. Most of these hurdles are reduced or completely removed with a longer stay in Germany. A ban on employment applies for at least three months after immigration and, if there is a residence requirement, for the period during which this applies. Three to four years after arrival, however, 27 per cent of asylum seekers are still subject to an employment ban. Although this can be cancelled by the immigration authorities, the bureaucratic obstacles are likely to have an impact on the search and recruitment processes for asylum seekers. As asylum seekers have to live in a reception centre until the end of the asylum procedure (but for a maximum of 18 months), their spatial flexibility is limited during this time. This makes it harder to find a job that calls for this kind of flexibility. Three to four years after arrival, 27 per cent of all asylum seekers are still subject to a regulation that is determined by the federal state in which they live. 35 per cent are legally bound to one location.[67]

Besides the need for a formal work permit and flexibility regarding the place of work, language skills are often essential for taking up employment. The longer people stay, the more likely they are to participate in language courses. After a three to four-year stay, 52 per cent of asylum seekers had completed an integration course, which includes a language course. Ten per cent had completed an explicitly job-related language course and 34 per cent of asylum seekers had completed a general language course. At that time, 53 percent had taken advantage of job centre offers or other labour market-related support measures. In addition to formal employment bans, mobility restrictions and a lack of language skills, unresolved asylum procedures create fundamental uncertainties. If it is unclear

65 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Arbeitsmarktsituation von Staatsangehörigen der Asylherkunftsländer (TOP 8) und Ukraine, Nuremberg.

66 See Brücker et al. (2024). Verbesserte institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen fördern die Erwerbstätigkeit, Nuremberg.

67 See Brücker et al. (2024). Verbesserte institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen fördern die Erwerbstätigkeit, Nuremberg.

whether someone will be able to stay in Germany, they are less invested in language and vocational training.[68]

Employment rates show quantitative integration, i.e. how many people are in work. To assess the quality of their integration, it helps to take a look at the requirements level of their jobs. A distinction is made between unskilled worker, skilled worker, specialist and expert activities. Unskilled worker jobs are jobs that require a maximum of one year of vocational training and in some cases no formal qualification. Examples include assistants for electrical work or geriatric care assistants. Skilled workers are people, such

68 See Brenzel and Kosyakova (2019). Längere Asylverfahren verzögern Integration und Spracherwerb, Nuremberg; Brücker et al. (2024). Verbesserte institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen fördern die Erwerbstätigkeit, Nuremberg.

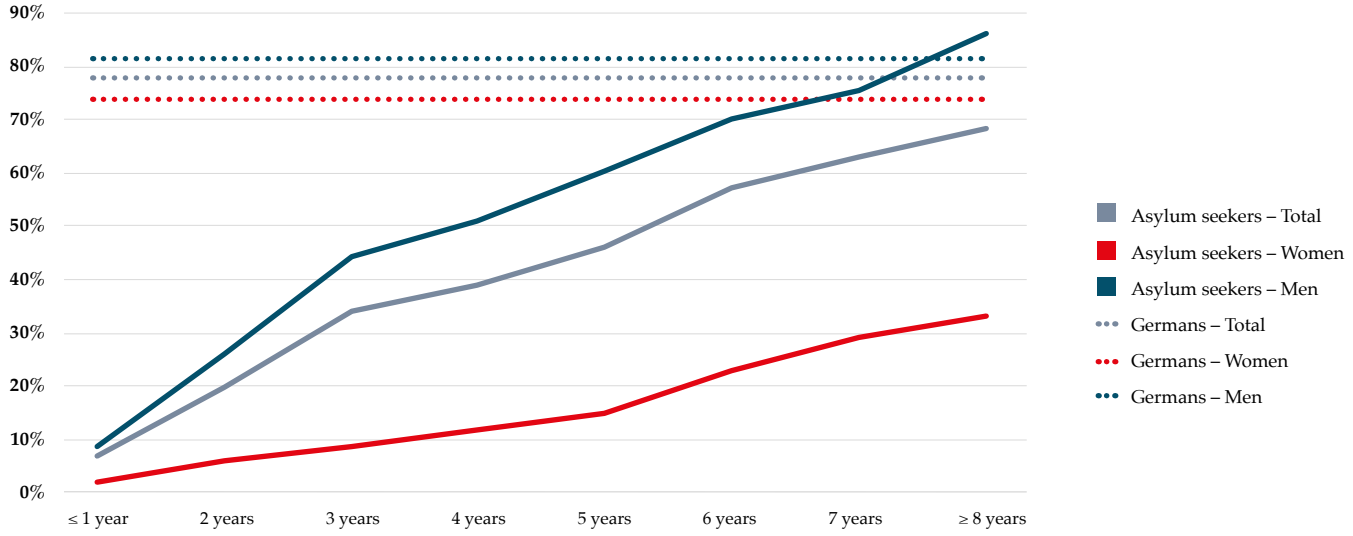
The employment rate among male asylum seekers 8 years after entry is

86%

27%

of asylum seekers are still subject to an employment ban after three to four years of residence in Germany.

Figure 18:
Employment rates (employed and self-employed) of asylum seekers by length of stay



Source: Brücker et al. (2024). Verbesserte institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen fördern die Erwerbstätigkeit; Statistisches Bundesamt (2025). Erwerbstätigenquoten 1991 bis 2024. Figure based on Brücker et al. (2024).

Note: The dotted lines show the labour force participation rates among Germans. The data is taken from the microcensus and is stated for 2023.

as bakers or civil servants in the intermediate civil service, who carry out a specialised activity for which vocational training is required. Specialist activities include complex tasks for which a master craftsman title, a technician qualification or a bachelor's degree is required. This applies, for example, to wastewater foremen and IT organisers with a corresponding degree. Expert occupations, for instance a surveying engineer, require at least four years of study.[69]

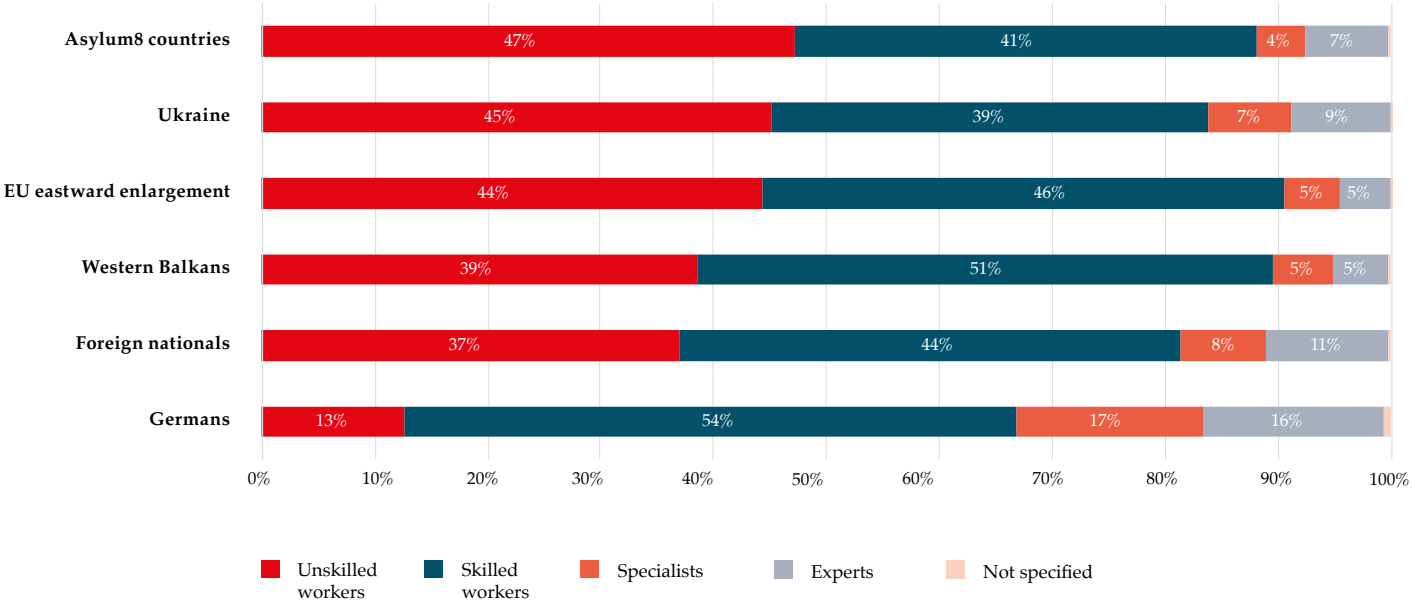
Analyses show that the average requirement level of the work performed among immigrants as a whole and among asylum seekers in the host country is significantly lower than in the country of origin. Around 14 per cent of all immigrants worked as unskilled workers before moving to Germany. This proportion doubles to just under 27 per cent after the influx. At the same time, the proportion of experts among immigrants falls from 28 to 19 per cent after arriving in Germany.

Among asylum seekers, the proportion of unskilled workers among all employees in this group is around three times higher than before they fled. The proportion of skilled workers fell again by 19 percentage points to 48 per cent and the proportion of people employed in specialist and expert roles also fell by four and ten percentage points to two and four per cent respectively.[70] Asylum seekers switch more frequently between

69 See Federal Employment Agency (n.d.). Methodische Hinweise zu gemeldeten Arbeitsstellen. Anforderungsniveau eines Berufs, Nuremberg.

70 See Schuß (2022). Integration in Beruf und Arbeitsmarkt: Die Verwertung von vor Zuzug erworbenen Qualifikationen von Zugezogenen mit und ohne Fluchthintergrund. In: Ertl et al. (2022). Integration Geflüchteter in Ausbildung und Beruf, Bonn.

Figure 19:
Employment rates by skill level and nationality in November 2024



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). Migration Monitor.

Note: These are employees subject to social security contributions, excluding trainees (six-month figures). Values below four per cent are not shown for better readability.

jobs with different levels of requirements than locals or people with their own immigration history. For example, 23 per cent of asylum seekers who work as unskilled workers switch to a skilled job within four years. Two per cent move directly into a job as a specialist or expert. Three per cent of skilled workers switch to expert or specialist positions. However, mobility works in both directions: Those who start as skilled workers are 15 per cent likely to switch to an unskilled worker job within four years. From specialist and expert jobs, 20 per cent switch to a skilled worker's job and seven per cent directly to an unskilled worker's job. This is likely to be related to misplacements on the labour market and high educational participation, among other things.[71]

In November 2024, people with foreign citizenship worked as unskilled workers at an above-average rate compared to German citizens (37% of all foreign nationals compared to 13% of German citizens) (see Figure 19). Among all employees, the largest proportion of unskilled workers is found in the group of nationals of asylum8 countries (47%). A similar proportion of unskilled workers can be found among all employees with Ukrainian citizenship or citizenship of one of the countries that joined the EU in its eastern enlargement, at 45 and 44 percent respectively. This proportion is significantly lower among citizens of the Western Balkan states at 39 per cent.

The proportion of skilled labour in all employees is similarly distributed. The proportion of skilled workers among all foreigners is 44 per cent, and 54 per cent among Germans. At 39 per cent, this proportion is lowest among Ukrainian nationals and is only slightly higher among asylum8 nationals (41%). At 51 per cent, the proportion of nationals from the Western Balkans is, however, closest to that of German nationals.

Among German nationals, 17 per cent of all employees work as specialists. Among all foreign nationals, the proportion of specialists is only just under half as high (8%). It is particularly low among nationals of asylum8, Eastern European or Western Balkan states (4% and 5% respectively). Among Ukrainians, it is seven per cent.

More variation between the groups can be observed in the proportion of experts. Experts make up 16 per cent of all employees among German nationals. They make up 11 per cent of all foreign nationals. Looking at the subgroups, the proportion of Ukrainians working as experts is the highest at nine per cent. It is seven per cent among nationals of asylum8 countries and five per cent among people with citizenship from one of the EU eastward enlargement countries and the Western Balkans.

71 See Liebau (2023). Geflüchtete in Deutschland arbeiten zunehmend – auch als Fachkräfte, Berlin.

Labour migration to Germany

An additional 400,000 people are expected to be needed on the labour market each year to secure Germany's long-term employment potential.[72] Germany thus faces the major challenge of recruiting suitable labour from abroad. This can be done within the EU and from third countries. EU citizens enjoy freedom of movement and can thus stay in Germany without a visa, look for work and pursue it. The Federal Government has recently adopted a number of amendments to the Residence Act for skilled workers from third countries. In 2020, non-academic skilled workers from third countries were able to work in Germany and obtain a residence permit to look for a job for the first time.[73] Adunts et al. (2024) show that this amendment has already increased the number of people coming to Germany to work by 31 per cent. At the same time, interest in migrating to Germany to work increased by 25 per cent. The authors were unable to identify any side effects on other forms of migration, such as the number of illegal border crossings.[74] However, labour migration to Germany is associated with substantial hurdles for immigrants. For example, bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining visas and information barriers, physical separation from family and friends and discrimination play a major role for interested immigrants.[75]

In 2023, the regulations on skilled labour immigration for third-country nationals were made more flexible; the changes came into force gradually between the end of 2023 and mid-2024. As part of this, the Chancen-Karte (opportunity card) was introduced. It is based on points systems such as those used in Canada. Since June 2024, it has not been necessary for various criteria to be fulfilled simultaneously without exception. Instead, the right to a residence permit can be based on various combinations of requirements (such as language skills, the existence of a job confirmation or professional experience). As the law has only recently come into force, no results are yet available as to whether the law contributes to the recruitment of skilled labour.

The BAMF's monitoring of educational and labour migration reports on the number of residence permits issued for employment purposes in the first half of 2024. During this period, almost 63,500 third-country nationals received a residence permit for labour migration. This corresponds to eight per cent fewer visas issued compared to the previous year.[76] However, the downward trend in residence permits is likely due to the fact that embassies have been issuing visas for a period of up to one year since mid-2023. Accordingly, people who are in Germany to look for work do not have to apply directly for a residence permit, but can stay in Germany for up to one year for gainful employment with the visa issued by the embassy. Hence, they are not included in the statistics. The age structure of those arriving in the first half of 2024 shows that this group is predominantly young. Just under 70 per cent of all those entering the country to work are under 35 years old, and only seven per cent are over 45.

As at 30 June 2024, there were just under 566,500 third-country nationals in Germany with a residence permit for employment purposes. This corresponds to a year-on-year increase of 13 per cent. Of all residence permits, 23 per cent were permanent (settlement permit). Of the temporary residence permits, the largest proportion (28% or 123,800 persons) was the 'EU Blue Card'. This is awarded to academically trained employees whose profession is closely related to their studies. It is usually issued for four years.[77] In second

72 See Fuchs et al. (2021). Demografische Entwicklung lässt das Arbeitskräfteangebot stark schrumpfen, Nuremberg.

73 See Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2020). Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz in Kraft, Berlin.

74 See Adunts et al. (2024). Migrationswirkungen des 2020 in Kraft getretenen Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetzes, Nürnberg.

75 See Fendel & Ivanov (2024). Gute Arbeitsmarktintegration trotz bürokratischer Hürden und Diskriminierung, Nürnberg.

76 See Heß (2025). Monitoring zur Bildungs- und Erwerbsmigration: Erteilung von Aufenthaltstiteln an Drittstaatsangehörige, Nürnberg.

77 See Paritätische Gesamtverband (2024). Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz 2.0: Die neuen Regelungen für die Aufenthalte zum Zwecke der Arbeit, des Studiums oder der Ausbildung, Berlin.

place are residence permits for other employment, which include the Western Balkans regulation in particular. At the end of June 2024, a total of 77,700 people held a residence permit issued under the Western Balkans rule. 56,400 skilled workers with vocational training and 48,100 skilled workers with an academic qualification were living in Germany with a residence permit for skilled workers. India accounted for the largest proportion of labour migrants in mid-2024 (around 14%); nationals from the Western Balkans made up 25% of all labour migrants. This exceeds the number of people who enter Germany under the Western Balkans Regulation, as a large proportion receive a residence permit on the basis of their recognised vocational training and not under the Western Balkans Regulation.

Although the procedures for working in Germany were made easier, only six per cent of all companies actively recruited workers abroad. The proportion is more than twice as high among companies with more than 50 employees. 36 per cent of the companies surveyed do not recruit abroad despite the need for skilled workers, while a further 59 per cent stated that they had no need for skilled workers. 54 per cent of companies cited difficulties in assessing the qualifications of people from abroad as a reason for this reluctance, while 52 per cent cited bureaucratic and legal hurdles. This could be due to a lack of awareness of the new legislation: On average, 17 per cent of all companies (31% for small enterprises) stated that they were not aware of the accelerated procedure for the immigration of skilled workers.[78]

Recognition of qualifications

Recognising a qualification makes it easier for companies to assess whether a foreign applicant is qualified. Since 2012, it has been possible for immigrants to have foreign professional qualifications recognised in Germany. Everyone with a professional qualification or a university degree who is looking for work in Germany is entitled to recognition. This applies to regulated and non-regulated professions regardless of the country of training, nationality, place of residence or residence status. Recognition of the qualification of a regulated profession is required to practise the profession in Germany. This does not apply to non-regulated professions. Nevertheless, recognition signals the equivalence of the profession, which helps employers to correctly assess the qualifications of a foreign applicant.

While the majority of professional recognition procedures are regulated by federal law (e.g. healthcare professions and training professions in the dual system), the federal states are responsible for recognising the training of educators and teachers. The recognition of qualifications is intended to make it easier for people who have a qualification from abroad to work in accordance with their qualifications. This will make Germany attractive to skilled workers from abroad and make it better able to meet the increasing demand for skilled labour. According to legal regu-

63,500

third-country nationals received a residence permit for the purpose of gainful employment in the first half of 2024.

13%

increase in the number of third-country nationals residing in Germany in the first half of 2024 year-on-year.

78 See Zimmermann (2024). Derzeit werben etwa 6 Prozent der Betriebe Fachkräfte im Ausland an, Nuremberg.

lations, recognition procedures should be completed within two to four months. The result of a recognition procedure is either full equivalence, partial equivalence or no equivalence. In the second case, the applicant may be obliged to take compensatory measures that ultimately lead to full equivalence.[79]

Empirical studies show that the recognition of qualifications significantly increases the labour market potential of foreign workers, as can be seen from the employment rate and daily earnings. Three years after recognition, the employment rate among people with a recognised vocational qualification is 25 percentage points higher than among people whose qualification has not been recognised. People with a recognised professional qualification also earn 20 percent more three years after recognition than comparable people whose qualification has not been recognised. These effects are much more pronounced among people with a degree that is regulated.[80] Employers are more likely to consider applications from a person with foreign qualifications if their professional qualification is recognised. At the same time, people with a foreign qualification are less likely to be invited for an interview than German applicants. Recognition cannot close this gap, but it can reduce it. At the same time, the more professional experience applicants have, the less important recognition becomes.[81]

In light of these positive effects of recognition of the qualification on labour market potential, it is not surprising that the number of applications submitted has been steadily increasing since 2012. In 2023, around 62,100 applications were submitted (federal and state law). The majority of applications for recognition in 2023 were submitted for regulated professions (79% of all applications). Overall, 33 per cent of applications were made by healthcare professionals and nurses and 15 per cent of all procedures were made by doctors. Among the non-regulated professions, people working as electrical system fitters and cooks, in particular, underwent a recognition procedure.

Whereas applicants from third countries were represented in roughly equal proportions as applicants from EU member states in 2014, this ratio has shifted significantly in favour of third-country nationals in 2023. 84 per cent of applications were submitted by people who completed their vocational training in a third country. Applicants with training in Turkey (12% of all applications), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ukraine and Tunisia (6% each) were most strongly represented.[82]

Just like the number of applications, the number of approved applications is steadily increasing over time. While 26,200 applications were approved in 2016, this figure was just under 65,300 in 2023. This corresponds to a year-on-year increase of almost 25% (see grey line in Figure 20). Around 58 per cent of all applications that were approved were submitted by women.

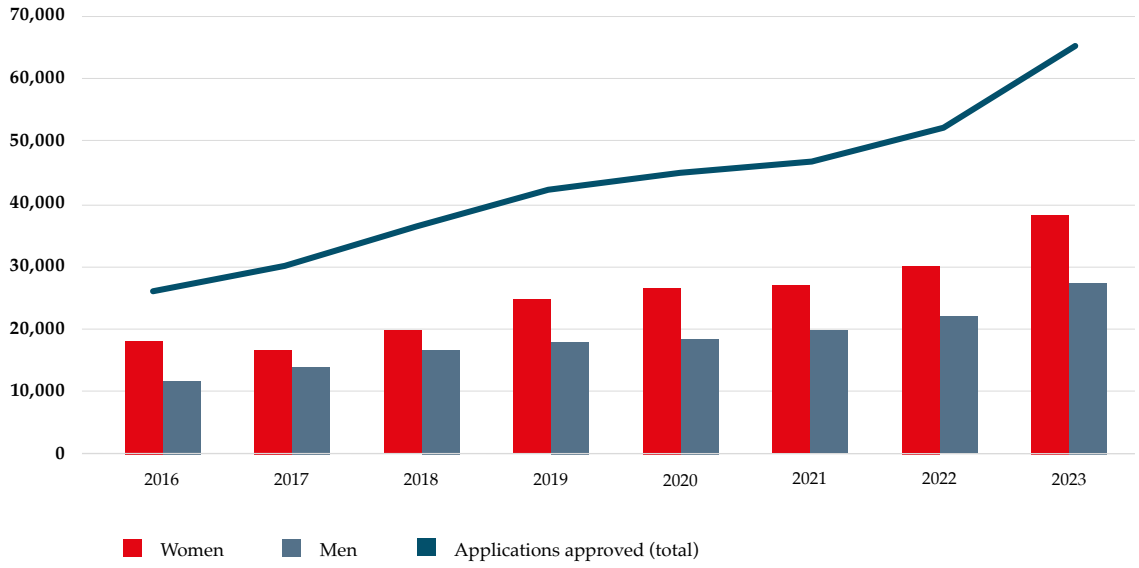
79 See Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2023). Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2023, Berlin.

80 See Brücker et al. (2021). Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsabschlüsse hat positive Arbeitsmarkteffekte, Nuremberg.

81 See Damelang et al. (2020). Foreign Credential Recognition and Immigrants' Chances of Being Hired for Skilled Jobs-Evidence from a Survey Experiment Among Employers.

82 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2024). Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen. Ergebnisse des BIBB-Anrechnungsmonitorings, Berlin.

Figure 20:
Positive decisions on applications for recognition of qualifications by gender of the applicant (left axis)



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2025). Verfahren und Neuanträge zur Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen.

Note: Positive recognition procedures include those in which full equivalence of the professional qualification is certified directly and those in which full equivalence is only granted after completion of a compensation measure. In addition, some of these include equivalent recognition and the granting of positive partial access to the profession. The figures include applications that have been approved under state and federal law as well as regulated and non-regulated professions.

Use of the opportunity residence permit and switching lanes

What was referred to as the 'traffic light' government introduced the opportunity residence permit and the lane switching procedure to boost skilled labour immigration. These regulations enable people who originally came to Germany for humanitarian reasons to switch to a residence permit for the purpose of gainful employment. Both of them work with cut-off date provisions to prevent the possibility of obtaining a permanent residence permit in Germany from becoming a pull factor, i.e. a decisive reason why asylum seekers flee to Germany to escape war or political persecution.

People who have been in Germany for five years with a tolerated stay permit as of 31 October 2022 have the opportunity to apply for an 'opportunity residence permit'. This residence permit gives tolerated persons the opportunity to obtain a permanent residence permit if they fulfil the requirements for this within 18 months. Tolerated individuals can take advantage of the opportunity residence permit if they have been living in Germany with a tolerated status for at least five years and recognise the free democratic basic order. At the same time, they must not have been convicted of a criminal offence or have given false information about their identity.

Once the opportunity residence permit has been granted, the individuals receive a work permit and, from this point onwards, benefits under SGB II and XII (the latter in the case of reduced earning capacity and old age) and not, like other tolerated persons, the significantly lower benefits

137,100

people were able to take advantage of the opportunity residence permit at the end of 2022.

under the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (AsylbLG). At the end of the 18 months, tolerated persons must finally prove that they have at least sufficient language skills, can largely earn their own living through gainful employment and that questions about their identity have been clarified. The nuclear family of a person who is granted an opportunity residence permit is also granted an opportunity residence permit. With the exception of five years' residence in Germany, they must also fulfil the above requirements.[83]

At the end of 2022, 137,100 people were able to take advantage of the opportunity residence permit. 70 per cent of those entitled were male and the average age of those entitled was 28. The largest group of beneficiaries had Iraqi citizenship (14%), with just under eleven per cent having Afghan citizenship. By September 2024, about 76,100 applications had been made for the opportunity residence permit. Accordingly, 55 per cent of tolerated persons in Germany have received this residence permit. 74 per cent of residence permits were granted to the applicants themselves, and just under 23 per cent of residence permits were granted to minor children. The remainder was accounted for by spouses or adult children.

A comparison of the group of tolerated individuals who had been in Germany for just under five years on the reference date with the group that had been in Germany for just over five years can be used to measure the effects of the opportunity residence permit on the granting of long-term residence permits. The probability of obtaining a long-term residence permit is 30 percentage points higher in the second group than in the first group. This indicates that the opportunity residence permit enables long-term tolerated persons to stay in Germany. Nevertheless, a final assessment of the opportunity residence permit will not be possible until the end of 2025, when the 18-month probationary period has expired for all eligible persons.[84]

The so-called lane switching procedure has also been in force since 1 January 2024. It is based on the idea of allowing people who originally entered the country via the asylum system to stay for the purpose of gainful employment. People who are still in the asylum procedure can withdraw from it and apply for a residence permit for the purpose of gainful employment instead. People whose asylum applications have not yet been decided and who came to Germany before 29 March 2023 are entitled to switch lanes. From this subgroup, only those who are already working as a skilled worker, have a corresponding offer or a recognised vocational qualification are eligible to switch lanes. The fact that the law only came into force on 23 December 2023 further restricted the group of beneficiaries. The majority of asylum procedures for those who entered the country before 29 March 2023 had already been completed by this date.[85] There are currently no well-founded analyses of the use of lane switching. Media reports based on enquiries to immigration authorities in larger German cities indicate that the use of lane switching has so far been very limited. Some cities stated that they had not received any applications for a lane change. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees stated that it did not have any nationwide data available.[86]

83 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2023). Informationen zum Chancenaufenthaltsrecht, Nürnberg.

84 See Peitz & Carwehl (2025). Zwischen Duldung und Bleiberecht: Wie und für wen wirkt das Chancen-Aufenthaltsrecht?, Nürnberg.

85 See Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration (2024). Überblick zu den Möglichkeiten des „Spurwechsels“ für Fachkräfte, Berlin.

86 See Welt am Sonntag (2024). Asylbewerber wechseln selten in Fachkräfte-Verfahren, Berlin.

Developments in the training market

The training market is assessed on the basis of the applicants and vacancies registered with the Federal Employment Agency. As not all applicants and employers register with the this agency, the statements can only be interpreted to a limited extent for the training market as a whole. Furthermore, the Federal Employment Agency's figures only refer to dual training occupations. Purely academic-based training occupations, such as many occupations in the health and social services sector, are not taken into account.[87]

Movements on both sides of the training market have recently led to a narrowing of the gap between registered vacancies and applicants. On the one hand, the number of registered positions decreased in the 2023/24 training year compared to the previous year. However, the number of applicants also rose for the first time since 2012/13. While the number of registered training places in 2022/23 exceeded the number of applicants by more than 100,000, this difference only amounted to 71,000 in the past training year. At the end of the training year, 198,000 people registered with the Federal Employment Agency had started vocational training. This corresponds to around 46 per cent of the registered applicants. At the same time, 69,000 training places remained unfilled.[88]

Of all applicants in the last training year, 22 per cent were foreign nationals. Their number has risen by 15 per cent, while the number of German applicants has fallen slightly. Compared to German nationals, foreign nationals have less success on the training market. The placement rate, i.e. the proportion of applicants at the beginning of the training year who are offered a training place, is 49 per cent among German nationals. Among foreign applicants, it is 35 per cent. This is accompanied by a lower level of formal qualification among applicants with foreign citizenship. They are significantly more likely than German citizens to have a lower secondary school leaving certificate (26% of all applicants with German citizenship, 35% of foreign applicants). 38 per cent of foreign applicants for training places were asylum seekers. In the 2023/24 training year, the placement rate among asylum seekers was around 32 per cent. At the end of the training year, asylum seekers who did not receive support were more likely than German applicants to be registered as employed, in school, receiving support or unemployed. A total of 8,000 Ukrainian asylum seekers were looking for a training place in the 2023/24 training year. Their number has thus quadrupled compared to the previous year.[89]

A look at the current year shows that the number of registered applicants in April 2025 has risen sharply compared to the previous year. At this time, 35,100 people were registered with the Federal Employment Agency as applicants (+ 36% compared to the previous year). Two thirds (32,200 people) of the registered applicants had not yet found a training place in April 2025, which represents a year-on-year increase of two per cent (see Figure 21). 11,900 applicants had already found a training place in April 2025. In the overall population, 57 per cent of applicants had not yet found a training place . This proportion is higher than in the previous year.[90]

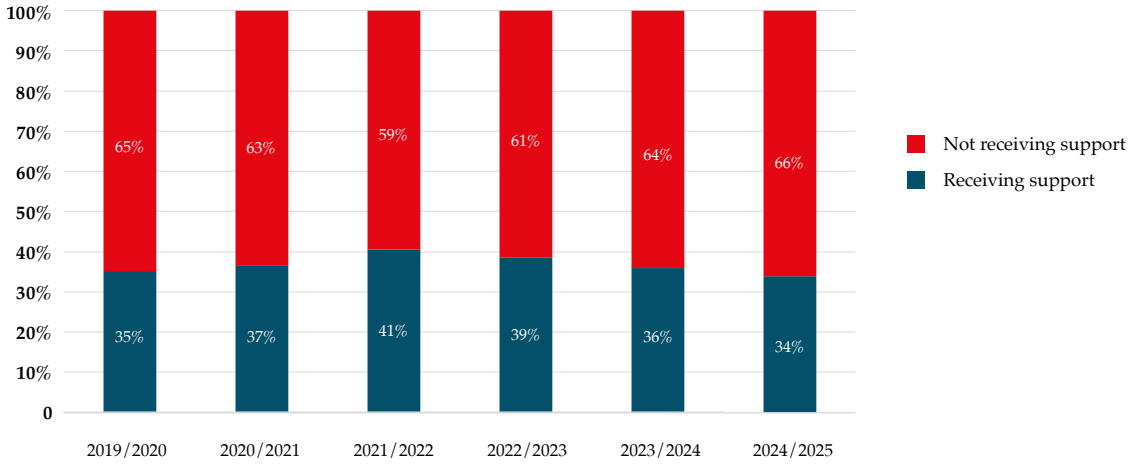
87 See Federal Employment Agency (2024). Situation on the training market 2023/24, Nuremberg; Federal Employment Agency (2024). Beruf Aktuell. Lexikon der Ausbildungsberufe, Nuremberg.

88 See Federal Employment Agency (2024). Situation am Ausbildungsmarkt 2023/24, Nuremberg.

89 See Federal Employment Agency (2024). Situation am Ausbildungsmarkt 2023/24, Nuremberg.

90 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Monatsbericht zum Arbeits- und Ausbildungsmarkt – April 2025, Nürnberg.

Figure 21:
Applicants for vocational training positions in the context of refugee migration



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). People in the context of refugee migration.

Note: All figures are for April of the respective year. Ukrainian asylum seekers are excluded from the presentation due to the underreporting of protection status.

Start-up activities of people with a history of immigration

While the previous explanations largely focused on labour market integration into dependent employment, the following section examines the founding of innovative companies by immigrants. The Migrant Founder Monitor, which analyses the results of the German Startup Monitor, provides an overview of the start-up activities of people with a history of immigration. This in turn is based on survey data from German start-ups. It thus highlights particularly innovative founders whose companies are less than ten years old and are growth-orientated in terms of employees or turnover. Around 1,800 founders were surveyed, including 255 with a history of immigration. Due to the design of the study, it cannot be assumed that the sample is highly representative either for the German start-up ecosystem as a whole or for the subgroup of immigrant founders. Nevertheless, the survey provides insights into start-up activity in Germany.[91]

A total of 18 per cent of founders in Germany have a history of immigration. This proportion is lower than for employed and self-employed people (25% and 22% respectively). Around 14 per cent of founders were born abroad themselves, and this proportion is 23 per cent among particularly successful start-ups. 91 per cent of founders with a history of immigration have a university or college degree. The results of the survey show that start-ups offer immigrants a more straightforward entry into the labour market, as language barriers play a smaller role than in German companies. In 50 per cent of these start-ups, the working language is English. The results also show that there is a need to catch up in terms of Germany's attractiveness as a business location.

91 See Startup Verband (2024). Deutscher Startup Monitor 2025, Berlin.

Two thirds of those surveyed stated that they perceive Germany as an unattractive location for start-ups compared to the USA, while a quarter said that they would set up their next start-up abroad. The level of taxes and duties and the conditions for skilled labour immigration in Germany are viewed particularly negatively.[92]

Unemployment

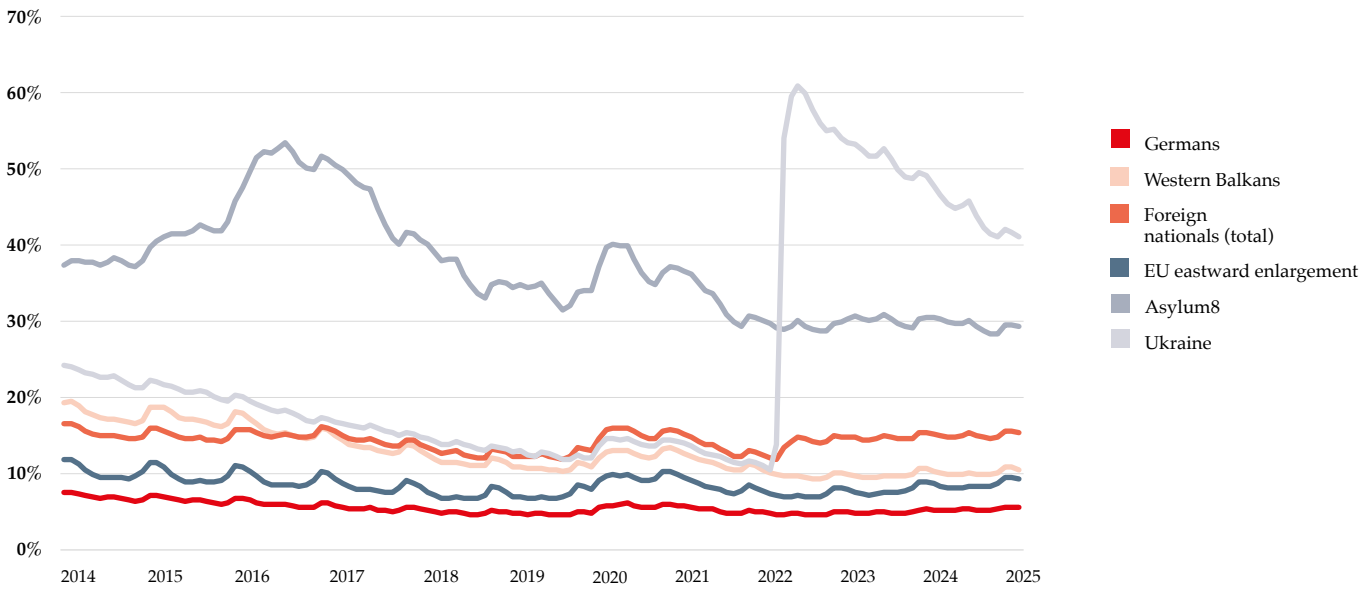
While the various forms of employment have been the focus of the analysis so far, the following section examines the topic of unemployment. Firstly, we examine the unemployment rates. These describe the ratio of unemployed people to the total labour force, i.e. to all employed and unemployed people. People in labour market policy measures do not count as unemployed.[93]

92 See Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (2025). Migrant Founders Monitor 2025, Berlin.

93 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Arbeitslosigkeit, Nürnberg.

The economic imbalance that has persisted since 2023 is slowly making itself felt in the unemployment indicators. The unemployment rate among German nationals rose by 0.4 percentage points year-on-year and stood at 5.7 per cent in March 2025. With the exception of Ukrainian nationals, the unemployment rate among all foreign nationals remained almost unchanged compared to the previous year. Among all foreign nationals, it was just under 16 per cent in March 2025. At nine per cent, the unemployment rate was lowest among citizens from the EU's eastward enlargement, followed by citizens of the Western Balkan states, among whom the unemployment rate was just under eleven per cent. Correlated with employment rates, unemployment rates were highest among asylum seekers. Among nationals of asylum8 countries, the average rate was 29 per cent, among Ukrainian nationals 41 per cent. The latter group showed strong momentum (see Figure 22). Unemployment among Ukrainian nationals fell by seven percentage points year-on-year, continuing a trend: After peaking at just

Figure 22:
Unemployment rates for German and foreign workers



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). Migration Monitor.

under 61% in August 2022 as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, it fell by 20 percentage points over the course of just over two years.

The following section examines the development of unemployment rates and unemployment figures within the asylum8 countries. Only the asylum-seeking population from the respective countries is considered. The unemployment rate among Syrian asylum seekers was around 35 per cent in March 2025. Among Afghan and Somali asylum seekers, it was 31 and 30 per cent respectively. Among Iraqi asylum seekers it was 27 per cent. The unemployment rate for Eritrean, Iranian, Nigerian and Pakistani nationals is significantly lower at 19, 17, 17 and 15 per cent respectively. Over time, it can be seen that all subgroups follow a similar trend. After unemployment rates rose sharply to up to 49 per cent in the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), they fell continuously across all groups until the start of the second winter of the COVID-19 pandemic (December 2021). Since then, the rates have been trending sideways; there have been slight increases in the unemployment rate among Afghan and Somali nationals in particular. The rising rates go hand in hand with an increase in refugees coming out of Afghanistan following the Taliban's seizure of power in August 2021. In 2022 to 2024, the annual average number of asylum applications from Afghanistan was around two and a half times higher than in 2019 to 2021. At the same time, the number of unemployed Afghans has increased by a factor of 1.6 since December 2021 to 105,200 people in December 2024. The number of asylum applications from Somali asylum seekers has also increased again since 2021. It increased by a factor of 1.5. Since December 2021, the number of Somalis who are unemployed has increased by a factor of 1.3. This means that in both cases, unemployment rose less sharply than the number of asylum applications, which suggests that the positive integration dynamics on the labour market are continuing.

The most recent absolute unemployment figures from March 2025 show an increase compared to April 2023 across all nationalities with the exception of Iraqi nationals. This is likely due to the temporary increase in asylum numbers in 2022 and 2023. As asylum seekers can only register as unemployed after the asylum procedure has been completed, the effects on unemployment figures are delayed. Most recently, 118,900 Syrian and 47,400 Afghan asylum seekers were registered as unemployed. They thus made up the largest groups among the asylum8 countries. The other main countries of asylum origin accounted for only a small proportion of unemployed asylum seekers in Germany, as can be seen in Figure 23.

Drawing on statistics from the Federal Employment Agency, it is possible to make statements about the level of requirements and the sectors in which asylum seekers are looking for work. In April 2025, the majority of nationals from asylum8 countries were looking for a job as an unskilled worker (71%), 16 per cent were seeking employment as a specialist, and five per cent as a specialist or expert. Among Ukrainian nationals, 57 per cent sought employment as unskilled workers and 22 per cent as skilled workers. A total of 14 per cent were interested in specialist or expert positions.[94] In April 2025, the most popular target occupations among male asylum seekers with citizenship of asylum8 countries and Ukraine were jobs in warehousing, postal services, delivery and goods handling. In each case, 22 and 16 per cent of jobseekers stated this type of profession as their target occupation. At eight and nine per cent respectively, employment in the field of vehicle driving was in second place in both groups. Female asylum seekers with citizenship from asylum8 countries and Ukraine were seeking employment in the cleaning sector at rates of 28 and 14 per cent respectively. 16 per cent of asylum8 nationals intended to work in food preparation. Among female Ukrainian asylum seekers, sales was the second most popular occupation, accounting for 13 per cent of asylum seekers.[95]

94 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Arbeitsmarktsituation von Staatsangehörige der Asylherkunftsländer (Top 8) und Ukraine, Nuremberg.

95 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Arbeitsmarktsituation von Staatsangehörige der Asylherkunftsländer (Top 8) und Ukraine, Nuremberg.

Active labour market integration

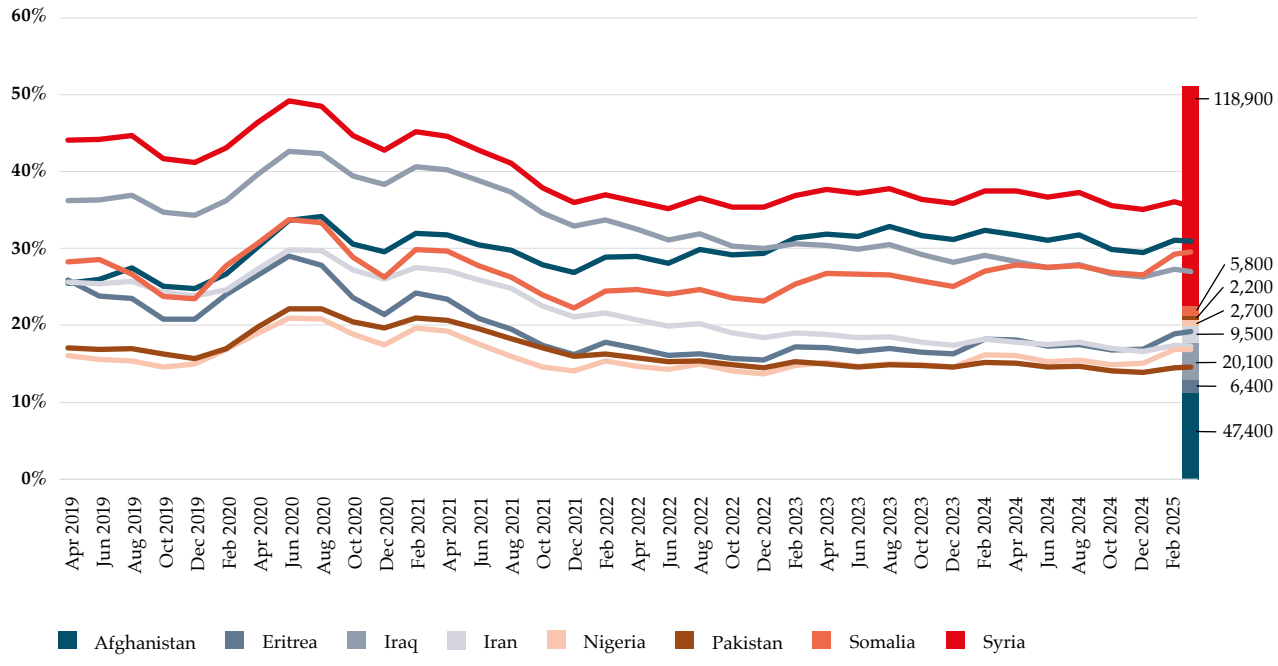
There are various instruments for integrating asylum seekers into the labour market. Some European countries, including Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, have long emphasised language acquisition and defined it as the first step towards integration. Germany also focuses on continuing vocational training or the recognition of qualifications within the German education and vocational system.[96] Recently, various countries have introduced measures that emphasise a 'work first' approach, such as Denmark.[97] Arendt (2022) examines a Danish measure from 2016 that aims to simultaneously offer a language course to asylum seekers and integrate them into the labour market. To this end, language requirements and other formal prerequisites for taking up employment have been abolished. This enables asylum seekers to take up gainful employment immediately after their arrival. One year after their arrival, the employment rate of male asylum seekers after the introduction of the measure was ten percentage points higher than in the comparison cohort before the introduction of the measure. However, the dependency of asylum seekers on social benefits remains equally high in both cohorts. In this respect, although the measure appears to lead to a faster take-up of employment, the extent of employment and the pay are not sufficient to reduce dependency on the social security system in the long term.[98]

96 See Honorati et al. (2024). Labor market integration of refugees in Germany: new lessons after the Ukrainian crisis.

97 See Arendt (2022). Labour market effects of a work-first policy for refugees.

98 See Arendt (2022). Labour market effects of a work-first policy for refugees.

Figure 23:
Unemployed people in March 2025 (bars) and unemployment rates (lines, left axis) in the context of refugee migration from asylum8 countries



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). People in the context of refugee migration.

Note: The bar represents the number of unemployed people who were citizens of the respective countries in March 2025.

Furthermore, Arendt and Bolvig (2023) show that, in terms of integration policy, a balance must be struck between language acquisition and rapid labour market entry. They show that the positive effects on employment are temporary; three to four years after arriving in Denmark, there is no recognisable difference between the group that took up work early and those that did not. At the same time, the language skills of the asylum seekers who took part in a 'work first' measure are significantly worse than those of the asylum seekers in the comparison group.[99]

To successfully integrate asylum seekers into the labour market, the Federal Employment Agency works with active labour market policy instruments. In total, there are currently around 62,000 people from one of the asylum8 countries and 41,600 people from Ukraine in a labour market policy measure. These measures include activation and integration measures, vocational training or further training and employment-creating measures.[100] Female asylum seekers are strongly underrepresented among participants in labour market policy measures. For this reason, reliable data for unemployed women is only available for the 'Maßnahmen bei Trägern' (MAT). MAT is aimed at people who have relatively limited access to the labour market. As part of these measures, asylum seekers are introduced to the labour market, barriers to placement are reduced and they are actively placed in employment. The employment rate of female participants in such a programme is, on average, around one percentage point higher twelve months after participation than among comparable women who have not taken part in such a programme. The employment rate for men is one and a half times higher twelve months after the start of the programme. These positive effects on labour market integration continue to increase over time for both genders. 'KompAS' measures, which include language support in addition to MAT, have a similarly positive effect. As these measures are primarily used by men, there is no reliable data available for women. The positive effects of a KompAS measure start later than those of a MAT. The employment rate among participants 19 months after the start of the programme is around three percentage points higher than among comparable non-participants. Positive effects can be observed for both measures with regard to earned income. For example, the monthly earned income of participants 21 months after starting the programme is, on average, €41 (MAT) or €54 (KompAS) higher than that of comparable non-participants. For both measures, the effects within the observation period do not lead to a decrease in the rate of unemployment benefit II recipients. As a result, these measures do not, on average, lead to asylum seekers becoming independent of state benefits. Measures aimed at asylum seekers who have good labour market access show significantly greater effects, although here again only data on male asylum seekers is available. One of the measures is the 'Maßnahme bei Arbeitgebern' (MAG), in which the participants are in direct contact with an employer and test their professional aptitude in practice. The employment rate of participants in the programme increases by around 20 percentage points compared to the comparison group. The monthly gross income, in turn, increases by an average of €494 (depending on the time of observation). Asylum seekers benefit similarly from vocational training programmes (FbW). These are aimed at people who want to acquire a professional qualification or have existing foreign qualifications recognised. The employment rate among participants in an FbW programme is 15 percentage points higher 20 months after the start of the programme than among comparable people who have not taken part in a programme. Their income is, on average, €586 higher. As a result, the rate of SGB II benefits received by participants in such measures is significantly lower than among comparable non-participants (-15% for MAG and -11% for FbW).[101]

99 See Arendt & Bolvig (2023). Trade-offs between work-first and language-first strategies for refugees.

100 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Arbeitsmarktsituation von Staatsangehörigen der Asylherkunftsländer (TOP 8) und Ukraine, Nuremberg.

101 See Kasrin et al. (2021). Der Großteil der Maßnahmen erhöht den Arbeitsmarkterfolg, Nuremberg.

Dependence on basic social security

The benefits that asylum seekers receive depend primarily on their residence status and the duration of their stay in Germany. An overview of the benefit features and requirements of the various groups can be found in Table 2.

Citizen's benefit is regulated in the Second Social Code (SGB II). In principle, every person with a valid residence permit is entitled to a citizen's benefit as long as certain conditions are met. People are entitled to citizen's benefit if they have reached the age of 15 but have not yet reached the standard retirement age, are resident in Germany, are able to work at least three hours per day, and are in need of assistance themselves or members of their household are in need of assistance. A person or a household is deemed to be in need of assistance if their income or that of the household falls below the minimum subsistence level. Persons who are not capable of work but live in a household with a person capable of work who is entitled to benefits also receive benefits from SGB II.[102]

In January 2025, a total of 5.4 million people received standard benefits from SGB II. This included 3.9 million people capable of working and 1.5 million people not capable of working who were entitled to standard benefits, most of them children under the age of 15. Those eligible for standard benefits include the unemployed (44% of the total population), people in labour market policy measures (13%) and people in unsubsidised employment who are in need of assistance despite their employment (10%), as well as people in school or training (11%), people in education and care (6%) and people who are unable to work (6%).[103]

A new strategy for the rapid labour market integration of asylum seekers: The Job Turbo

In response to the perceived inadequate labour market integration of asylum seekers in general and Ukrainian asylum seekers in particular, the German government decided on the Job Turbo in autumn 2023. It thus gave higher priority to the labour market integration of asylum seekers. The model is based on three phases of integrating asylum seekers into the labour market and pursues the idea of implementing integration measures simultaneously rather than one after the other.[104]

In the first phase, asylum seekers are given the opportunity to find their feet in Germany and receive support in learning the language, for example through integration courses. People who are particularly qualified and can work without German language skills (e.g. IT specialists) are sometimes placed directly. In the second phase (from language level A2 onwards), participants are expected to take up employment or training. This is done in coordination with the job centres, which arrange additional funding opportunities. In the third phase, employees are to be developed into skilled workers, partly through employer-provided tools and partly through public funding.[105] The Job Turbo provides support for employers from the Federal Employment Agency, for example through placement and advice on qualification and funding opportunities.[106]

102 See Federal Employment Agency (n.d.). Bürgergeld: Voraussetzungen, Einkommen und Vermögen, Nuremberg.

103 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Monatsbericht zum Arbeits- und Ausbildungsmarkt – April 2025, Nürnberg.

104 See Bertelsmann Stiftung (2024). Der Job-Turbo – Konzept und Praxis, Gütersloh.

105 See Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (n.d.). Job-Turbo zur Arbeitsmarktintegration von Geflüchteten, Berlin.

106 See Federal Employment Agency (2024). Arbeitsmarktintegration von geflüchteten Menschen. Informationen zum Job-Turbo, Nuremberg.

In January 2025, a total of 1.88 million foreign nationals were receiving benefits under SGB II and 54 per cent of them were women. Of these, 198,300 were nationals of countries of the EU eastward enlargement, 631,000 were nationals of asylum8 states, 504,200 were Ukrainian nationals and 88,400 were nationals of the Western Balkan states. Of all foreign nationals, 41 per cent of those entitled to standard benefits were unemployed, which is a lower proportion than in the population as a whole. This proportion is lowest among Ukrainian and asylum8 nationals, at 37 and 38 per cent respectively. In both groups, a high proportion of SGB II recipients are also enrolled in labour market policy measures, such as an integration course. Among Ukrainian nationals, this figure is just under 34 per cent, and 20 per cent among nationals of asylum8 countries. People from the countries of the EU's eastward enlargement or the Western Balkan states are not legally entitled to participate in an integration course. They made up eight and six percent respectively of those entitled to standard benefits in a labour market policy measure. The proportion of unemployed people entitled to standard benefits who are nationals of EU eastern enlargement countries or Western Balkan states is 44 and 47 per cent respectively.

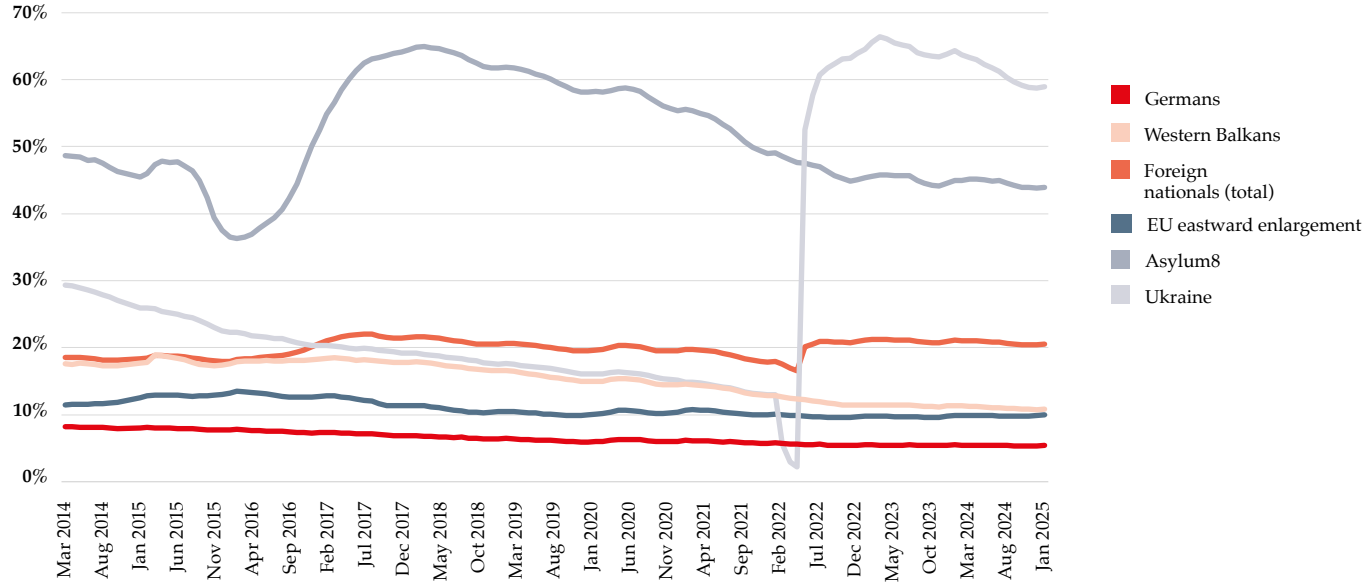
The SGB II rate can be used to compare the dependency of the respective groups on the welfare system. It describes the proportion of people entitled to standard benefits in the total population between the ages of zero and 65 or up to the standard retirement age. Across all nationalities, the SGB II rate in February 2025 was around eight per cent. In January 2025, it was five per cent among German nationals and just under 21 per cent among all foreign nationals. As can be seen in Figure 24, there are major differences between the SGB II rates of the individual groups, which are analogous to their reason for residence in Germany. While people from the countries of the EU's eastward enlargement and the Western

Table 2:
Features and scope of benefits from the AsylbLG and SGB II or XII

	Asylum seekers and tolerated persons	Authorised asylum seekers
Benefits system	• AsylbLG	• SGB II with ability to work • SGB XII with inability to work
Scope of benefits	• Basic benefits for essential needs • Benefits for essential personal needs	• Standard need to cover living expenses • Assumption of costs for accommodation and heating • Additional requirements for single parents or pregnant women
Benefit amount (since 01/2025)	• €441 for single persons • €397 for couples	• €563 for single persons • €506 for couples
Healthcare	• Limited, only treatment of acute illnesses	• Statutory health insurance
Family benefits	• No entitlement	• Entitlement to child and parental allowance
Integration benefits	• No entitlement to an integration course	• Entitlement to an integration course
Other	• Analogous benefits: after a 36-month stay, entitlement to benefits under SGB II or XII	

Source: §1 AsylbLG; Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2024). Neue Leistungssätze nach dem Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz; Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2025). Leistungen und Bedarfe bei Bürgergeld; Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration (2024). Leistungseinschränkungen im AsylbLG; Mediendienst Integration (n.d.). Unterbringung und Versorgung.

Figure 24:
SGB II rates among Germans and foreign nationals



Source: The Federal Employment Agency (2025). Migration and the labour market.

Balkans come to Germany primarily for gainful employment and in many cases with a promise of employment, people from the main countries of origin of asylum and Ukraine are fleeing war and persecution. As a result, they are less well prepared for the German labour market when they arrive.

The SGB II rate among people who are nationals of the EU's eastern enlargement or Western Balkan states is ten and eleven per cent respectively. While the trend in the first group is largely constant, the rate of SGB II recipients among people from the Western Balkans has been falling continuously since 2014 from 18 per cent at the time. Among Ukrainian nationals up to the age of 65, 59 per cent are dependent on benefits from SGB II; among nationals of asylum8 countries, this proportion is 44 per cent. Over time, it can be seen that the SGB II rate for Ukrainian nationals rose sharply in July 2022. This is the consequence of the decision to grant Ukrainian nationals who came to Germany as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine benefits under SGB II instead of under the AsylbLG. The SGB II rate for asylum8 nationals has been falling continuously since its high of 65 per cent in March 2018, with the curve flattening out since the beginning of 2023.

'Labour market integration of refugees: Utilising opportunities, breaking down barriers'

Position of Dr Achim Dercks

The German economy is in a serious crisis. The current situation is dominated by rising unemployment figures, falling investment, high energy costs, economic uncertainty, considerable bureaucratic burdens, and an economic downturn that is now in its third year. Industry in particular – a sector in which almost one in five employed refugees work[107] – recorded a significant decline in employment of almost 70,000 jobs. Against this backdrop, their integration into the labour market is becoming increasingly challenging. It also remains crucial, especially in light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, to tap into the potential of refugees more quickly. Qualification, language acquisition, clear incentives and communication of expectations are central to this. To provide pragmatic support here, the IHK organisation has been bundling its comprehensive services in the 'Ankommen in Deutschland – Gemeinsam unterstützen wir Integration' (Arriving in Germany - Together we support integration) programme since 2016. Thousands of counselling sessions, job fairs and workshops have brought companies and refugees together. The 'NETZWERK Unternehmen integrieren Flüchtlinge', a cooperation project with the former Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection (now Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy), has advised more than 4,000 members and almost 30,000 companies on hiring refugees. However, in practice: Despite great efforts, companies and refugees face major challenges. Targeted improvements are needed:

107 See Federal Ministry of the Interior and for Home Affairs & Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2025). Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung 2023, Berlin, Nuremberg.

1. Facilitating access to the labour market
Complex regulations often prevent authorised refugees from taking up employment. One example is the residence requirement, which often leads to the immigration authorities rejecting an application to relocate for a job, thereby preventing people from finding employment. This hurdle should be removed if the prospects of finding employment are good.

2. Reducing bureaucracy
Employees from third countries – not just refugees – must regularly extend their residence permit. This often generates uncertainty for companies and employees, as there is no guarantee of receiving an appointment at the immigration office in good time. Residence permits for authorised refugees should therefore be issued with the shortest possible processing time and a reasonable period of validity. This would free up capacity at the immigration authorities for other important decisions.

3. Targeted expansion of language support
Without sufficient language skills, access to the labour market is difficult in most cases. Providing funds for language and integration courses here, even in difficult economic times, is an important investment. Language acquisition should be much more closely linked to professional practice, for example through the concept of 'learning in the workplace', in which job-specific language skills are taught directly at vocational schools or in companies and the courses should be available as widely and easily as possible. The potential of digital offerings is also not yet being utilised; private providers, for example, offer modular distance learning courses in

small groups that are available at short notice and after work.

4. Optimising the provision of training and qualifications

Refugees have extremely heterogeneous education levels: 35 per cent of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2016 had a (technical) university degree or a secondary school leaving certificate at their time of entry. Meanwhile, 15 per cent were illiterate when they entered the country.[108] Many have only informal professional qualifications. Companies thus need unbureaucratic support for the often necessary post-qualification programmes. Procedures like partial qualifications or skills assessments at the Chambers of Industry and Commerce (IHK) can do this effectively. Dual vocational training offers many refugees the chance to utilise their talents and gives them a promising start to their working life. It facilitates further integration through many interpersonal contacts and allows companies to train their own young skilled workers. The IHK organisation offers numerous bridging programmes that provide targeted preparation for technical language and training content. The instruments of entry-level qualification and assisted training (AsA), which offer support for school and social problems, have also proven their worth.

5. Creating affordable housing for all employees

At present, affordable housing is a growing problem for many people in Germany and hence also an obstacle to securing skilled labour. This necessitates targeted measures to cut red tape in housing construction, create incentives for company housing and speed up approval procedures in the construction sector. This improves the housing situation overall and thus also offers refugees in training and work more opportunities to move out of collective accommodation. This has a demonstrably positive effect on their integration.[109]

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Conclusion: Much remains to be done

In addition to the agreed special funds, far-reaching structural reforms are essential for the hoped-for rapid and sustainable recovery of the German economy. To prevent the new economic momentum that will hopefully develop from this from being slowed down, companies need skilled workers and a skilled workforce. This also includes the potential of refugees: Over one million refugees are currently in employment. In addition, there are over 200,000 naturalised Syrians. Around 900,000 refugees are registered as jobseekers, meaning that they can take up employment in the medium term or are underemployed.[110] Their successful integration into the labour market also relieves the burden on social systems and promotes social cohesion. Politics, administration and business must act decisively to remove existing obstacles and utilise opportunities in a targeted manner. The IHK organisation itself will keep playing an active role in shaping this process.

108 See Scheible (2018). Alphabetisierung und Deutscherwerb von Geflüchteten: Deutschkenntnisse und Förder- bedarfe von Erst- und Zweitschriftlernenden in Integrationskursen. Issue 01 | 2018 of the Brief Analyses of the Research Centre for Migration, Integration and Asylum of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Nuremberg.

109 See Brücker et al. (2024). Arbeitsmarktintegration von Geflüchteten: Verbesserte institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen fördern die Erwerbstätigkeit, Nuremberg.

110 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Faktenblatt Arbeits- marktsituation von Staatsangehörigen der Asylherkunftslän- der (TOP 8) und Ukraine Stand März 2025, Nuremberg.

'From entry to advancement – strengthening the labour market integration of refugees in a targeted manner'

Daniel Terzenbach's position

Germany has achieved a great deal in recent years when it comes to integrating refugees into the labour market. This article takes a look back at what has been achieved so far and looks ahead to how we can use the experiences gained from Job Turbo for the labour market in the future.

The labour market integration of refugees is an opportunity, a challenge and – if we look to the future – also a prerequisite for a stable labour market. Immigration in particular is already preventing a decline in the kinds of employment that are subject to social insurance contributions. The growth in employment in Germany is currently being driven exclusively by foreign nationals.

If we look further into the future, it's clear that that demographic developments in Germany alone will result in a shortage of around seven million people in the labour market by 2035 if we don't take decisive action.

We need to pull out all the stops to make sure these developments don't catch us off guard. Successful labour market integration of refugees can contribute to this, provided we set the course in the right direction at an early stage. This is because many refugees bring skills and qualifications that are needed on the German labour market, particularly in areas where there's a shortage of skilled workers such as care, IT or skilled trades. A key realisation from the first refugee movement in 2015/16 is that, in addition to language and qualifications, speed and pragmatism are also needed to offer refugees and companies prospects.

This is where Job Turbo, which was launched at the end of 2023 to integrate refugees into the labour market, comes in. Germany has thus expanded its previous focus on a strategy primarily geared towards qualifications to include the aspect of speed. The core idea is to integrate refugees who have an initial basic knowledge of German into work at an early stage and then foster their further development in parallel with their career. Instead of waiting for perfect German language skills, comprehensive further training and the recognition of existing qualifications, this enables 'entry to advancement'. For this to succeed, we also need to invest in sustainability after taking up employment by offering language courses and suitable further training programmes. The combination of sustainability and speed represents a paradigm shift in the integration process.

Many steps have been taken in the right direction with Job Turbo: Employment agencies and job centres have significantly expanded their advice for refugees and employers. In 2024, around 600,000 additional counselling sessions and over 3,000 events and trade fairs were held with employers and refugees. Cooperation and framework agreements have been concluded between migrant self-organisations, advisory services, welfare associations and the The Federal Employment Agency (BA).

More than one million people from asylum seeker' countries of origin and Ukraine are now employed. By February 2025, the number of employed Ukrainians had risen to 306,600. Similarly, employment among refugees from the eight most prominent countries of origin for asylum seekers rose to 731,400. This is despite the fact that there are still significant differences in the integration rates of men and women.

These developments show that the efforts are worthwhile and must be continued. At the same time, despite the successes, it'is clear that labour market integration still faces considerable challenges.

Refugees have professional qualifications they acquired abroad that we have so far failed to utilise, value and recognise enough. The recognition process is often lengthy and complicated. It can take years from application to notification. That's why it's essential to speed up recognition procedures for foreign qualifications and simplify administrative processes to get refugees into employment more quickly. Digital solutions and scalable procedures for skills assessment – especially for non-regulated professions – offer great potential for facilitating access to the labour market.

An equally important factor is linguistic integration. Many refugees don't fail due to a lack of qualifications, but due to a lack of language skills. What's needed here is flexible, practical language support that goes beyond traditional integration courses, for example through job-related programmes directly in companies. Dovetailing language acquisition and practical work experience, for example through internships during waiting periods, can make it much easier and faster to get started.

Targeted placement in employment in the same sector enables previous work experience to be utilised, existing skills and qualifications to be strengthened and opportunities for promotion to be increased. Companies can significantly increase their chances by taking informal skills into account, for example through trial work instead of formal certificates. Trade unions, works councils and HR managers play a central role in onboarding, support and counselling.

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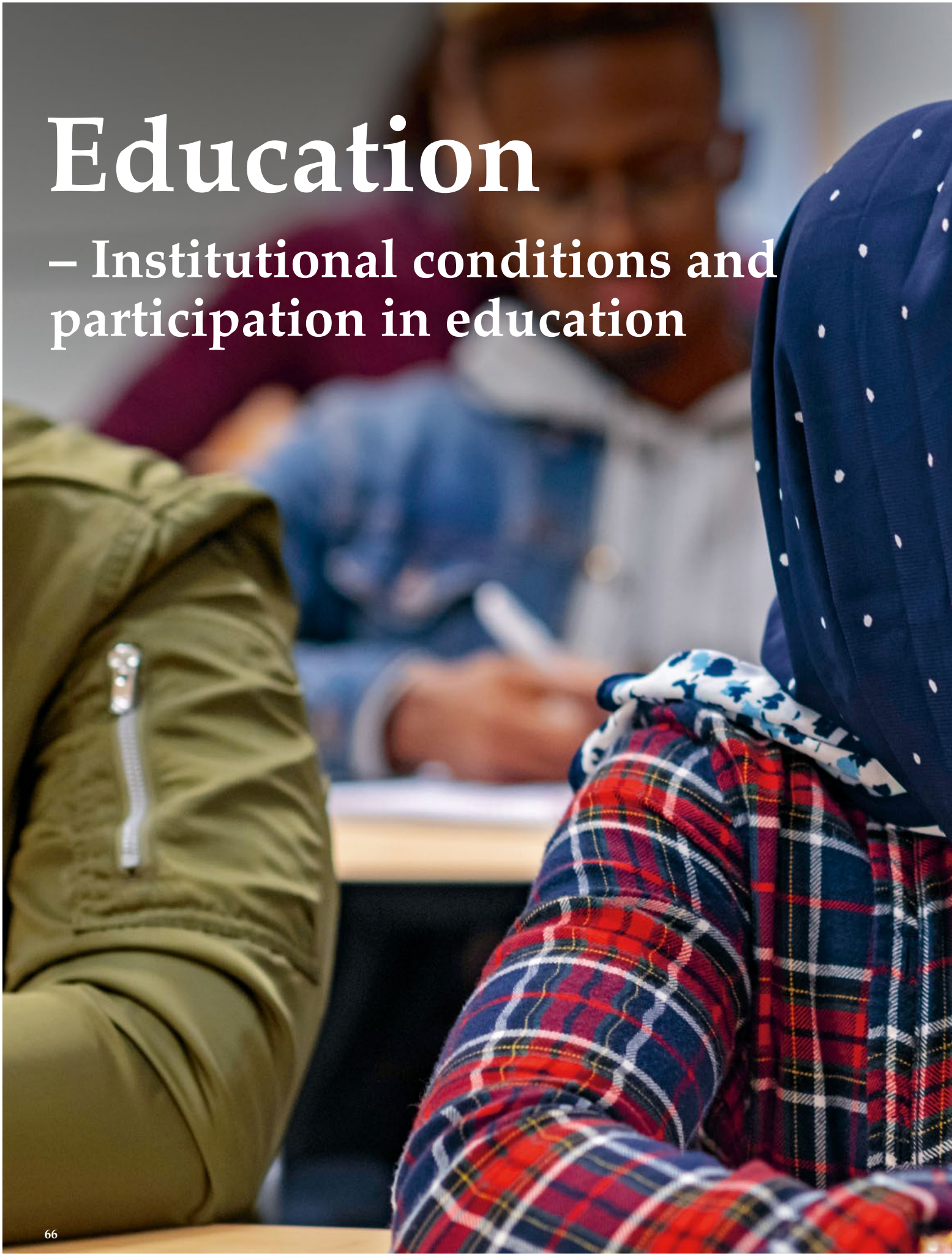
The experience of recent years shows: Labour market integration of refugees is feasible – and it works.

Job Turbo has provided important impetus that combines speed, sustainability and practical relevance. The task now is to permanently anchor and further develop the changes that have been initiated. It helps to deal pragmatically and constructively with the existing system and current structures. Close co-operation, a pragmatic approach and a transparent and binding procedure make major changes possible. Experience with Job Turbo shows that the triad between companies, public administration and refugees and their communities plays a key role here.

Education

– Institutional conditions and participation in education



Education – institutional conditions and participation in education

Prof. Dr Dr h. c. Lars P. Feld and Amanda März

Key facts

- **More than a third of the pupils in Germany have a history of immigration.**
- **74 per cent of the population aged 15 and over without a school-leaving qualification had a history of immigration in 2023.**
- **There are major differences between the childcare rates of children with and without a migration background. Among three- to six-year-old children with a migration background, the nationwide childcare rate in 2023 was 77 per cent. Among children of the same age without a migration background, the rate was 99 per cent.**
- **German language skills are a decisive factor in children's educational pathways. In 2024, 14 per cent of children in publicly funded child day care did not speak German at home.**
- **There are differences in competence between pupils with and without a migration background: Children with a migration background perform worse in standardised performance tests than children without a migration background. These differences in skills are linked to poorer living conditions, such as the risk of poverty.**
- **Almost half of the population without a vocational qualification had a migration background in 2023**

Education plays a central role in social participation and the individual development of children, young people and adults. For people with a migration background or a history of immigration, as well as for asylum seekers, access to educational institutions is an essential prerequisite for integration and equal opportunities. Early childhood, school and vocational education are crucial stages that play a decisive role in determining social and economic participation in the host society.

Despite legally enshrined educational rights, there are still structural inequalities that make it difficult for people with a migration background to access educational programmes. Differences in the childcare rate between children with and without a migration background can already be seen in the pre-school sector. These differences are reflected not least in school education, where there are clear differences in performance between young people with and without a migration background in key areas such as reading, maths and science. People with a migration background also face specific challenges in vocational and academic education. Applicants with a migration background, for example, are significantly less likely to be offered a company-based training place than applicants without a migration background.

This chapter examines the educational stages in Germany and analyses the participation of people with a migration background, a history of immigration and asylum seekers.[111] It covers the institutional and legal framework, the current state of participation in education and the practical challenges that influence educational success. It draws on current study results and data on the utilisation of educational institutions and educational outcomes.

There are various definitions in the literature for people with a migration background, immigration history and asylum seekers (see box on p. 15). In each section of this chapter, the discussion will first refer to migration background, then to the more recent definition of immigration history and, finally, specifically to asylum seekers.

Early childhood education: Institutional conditions

There is a scientific consensus that the foundation for a successful educational biography is laid in early childhood education. Together with the parents, daycare centres support the holistic development of the child and play a decisive role in promoting social, cognitive and language skills.[112]

The statutory mandate of child daycare centres encompasses both the range and quality of care provided by child daycare centres. In addition, daycare centres have a legal mandate to support and supplement upbringing and education in the family and to help parents reconcile work, child rearing and family care (§22 Para. 2 SGB VIII). With the Good Daycare Centre Act (2019 to 2022) and the subsequent Daycare Centre Quality Act, the federal government is supporting the federal states in measures to further develop quality and improve participation in childcare. From 2019 to 2022, the federal government provided the federal states with around €5.5 billion for this purpose. In 2023 to 2026, the federal government will support the federal states with a total of around €8 billion. Among other things, the Daycare Centre Quality Act identifies needs-based provision, further training for managers, language education and health education as fields of action. The federal states decide which fields of action they invest in and which specific measures they

More than

1/3

of pupils in Germany have a history of immigration.

What the new federal government is planning

- The Startchancen Programme: Around €20 billion for schools in challenging locations. Funding is provided for construction, lesson development (especially German and maths) and multi-professional teams.
- The introduction of a legal entitlement to all-day childcare for primary school children from the 2026/27 school year.
- Compulsory language and development diagnostics for all four-year-old children.

111 The structure of the following chapter is based on the German Council for Integration and Migration. (2025).

112 See Lokhande (2023). Integrationsmotor Kita. Wie gut ist die frühkindliche Betreuung auf den Normalfall Vielfalt eingestellt?, Berlin.

take.[113] Every child has a legal entitlement to childcare from the age of one (§24 SGB VIII). Many federal states make an exception for children living in initial reception centres. Some federal states only allow access to early education programmes after moving from the initial reception centre to private accommodation, after an asylum application has been approved or after a tolerated stay has been granted.[114]

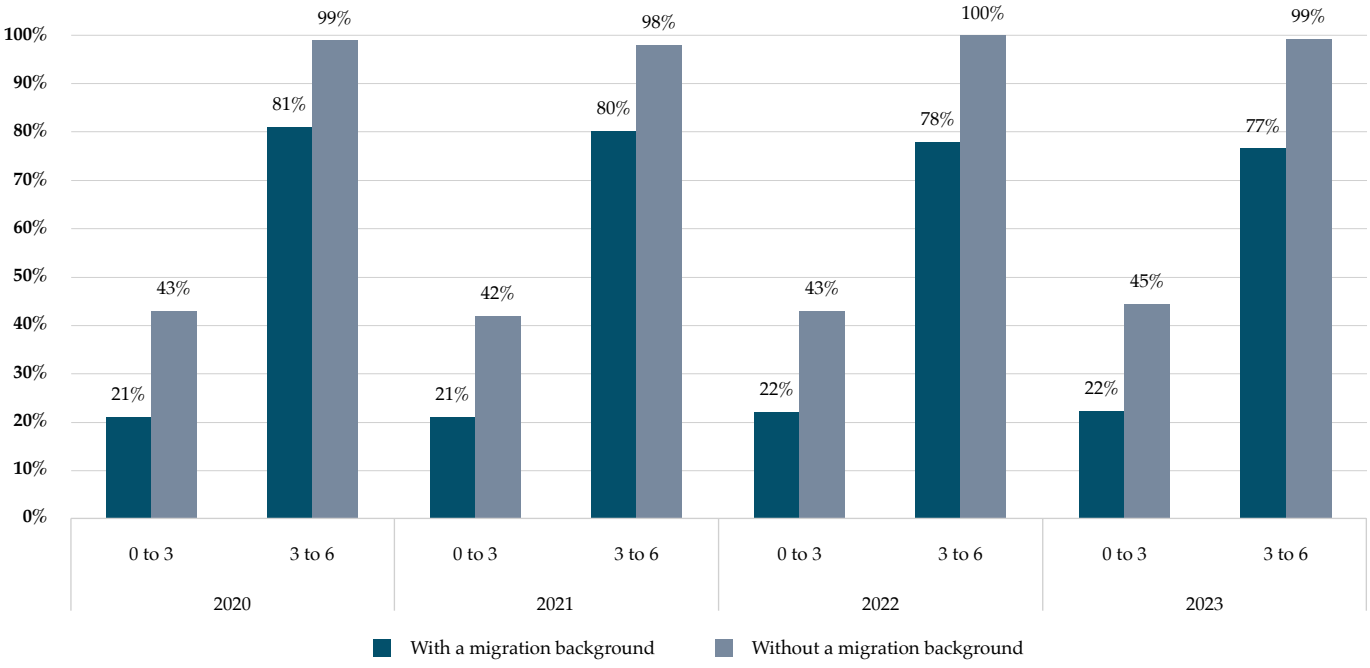
113 See Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2024). Für gute Kinderbetreuung bundesweit: das KiTa- Qualitätsgesetz, Berlin.

114 See Wenzel et al. (2022). Vertrauensaufbau zwischen geflüchteten Eltern und frühpädagogischen Angeboten, Lüneburg.

Early childhood education: Significance and advantages

There is a big difference between childcare rates for children with a migration background and those without (see Figure 25). For three to six-year-old children without a migration background, the nationwide childcare rate has been between 98 and 100 per cent since 2020. The childcare rate for children of the same age with a migration background fell continuously. In 2020, it was 81 per cent, while in 2023 it was 77 per cent. For children under three, the childcare rate for children with and without a migration background has risen by a few percentage points: In 2020, the childcare rate for children without a migration background was 43 per cent, while in 2023 it was 45 per cent. The childcare rate for children with a migration background has risen from 21 to 22 per cent in the same period.

Figure 25:
Childcare rates for children under six by migration background



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2024). Microcensus.

Parents with a migration background are generally just as interested in a childcare place as parents without a migration background, but are more often faced with obstacles that make it difficult for them to access a daycare centre.[115] Jessen et al. (2020) show that families with a lower level of education or with a migration background are less likely to have the opportunity to access the childcare they want.[116] Their results also show that higher daycare centre quality and simplified enrolment procedures would make access easier for people with a migration background. Although it is forbidden by law in Germany to deny children access to childcare on the basis of their migration background (General Equal Treatment Act), discrimination could play a role in the allocation of places. In a Germany-wide field study, Hermes et al. (2023) found the first causal evidence of discrimination against parents with a migration background who were looking for a childcare place for their child.[117] The researchers sent emails to over 18,000 early childhood care centres, in which they posed as parents with or without a migration background and asked about available places and the application process. The names of the email senders varied in order to investigate the influence of a migration background on the chances of finding a place at a daycare centre. Names were specifically chosen that either signalled no migration background (e.g. Andreas, Stefanie) or a Turkish migration background (e.g. Ömer, Fatma). The study found that parents with a migration background were around four percentage points less likely to receive a response than parents without a migration background. Parents with a migration background were also offered a place much less frequently and the answers were shorter and less encouraging.

The current data situation enables us to take a closer look at the importance of early childhood education for children seeking asylum. Early childhood education is particularly important for them. Through early language support, for example, it reduces educational inequalities based on origin and promotes the social participation of parents seeking asylum and their children.[118] In 2024, 14 per cent of children in publicly funded child day care did not speak German at home. This represents an increase of two percentage points compared to 2020 (see Figure 26). For children seeking asylum in Germany, attending a day care centre often means coming into contact with the German language and the cultural norms and values of the host society for the first time.[119] Seuring and Will (2022) show that children seeking asylum who attend a daycare centre have better German language skills than those who do not.[120] Attending a day care centre is therefore important for acquiring German language skills.

The ReGES study provides insights into the reasons why children seeking asylum attend a daycare centre.[121] This longitudinal study has been following children and young people seeking asylum and their parents since they fled crisis regions in spring 2018. Data is collected through surveys and performance tests.[122] The majority of parents surveyed whose children attend a daycare centre hope that their children have contact with the German language (98%), with other children (98%) and with German culture (96%). Almost two thirds of the parents surveyed whose children do not attend a daycare centre state that the reason is that there are no childcare places available.

115 See Lokhande (2023). Integrationsmotor Kita. Wie gut ist die frühkindliche Betreuung auf den Normalfall Vielfalt eingestellt?

116 See Jessen et al. (2020). Gründe für unterschiedliche Kita-Nutzung von Kindern unter drei Jahren sind vielfältig, Berlin.

117 See Hermes et al. (2023). Discrimination on the childcare market: A nationwide field experiment.

118 See Gambaro et al. (2019). Kita-Besuch von Kindern aus nach Deutschland geflüchteten Familien verbessert Integration ihrer Mütter, Berlin.

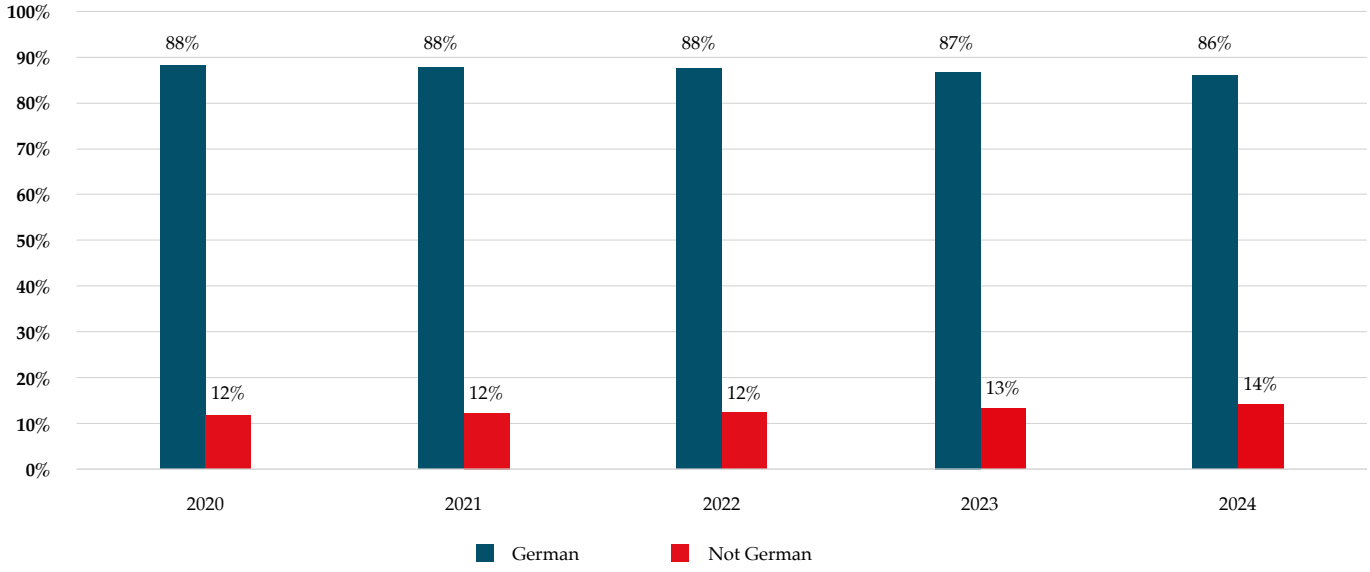
119 See Gambaro et al. (2019). Kita-Besuch von Kindern aus nach Deutschland geflüchteten Familien verbessert Integration ihrer Mütter, Berlin.

120 See Seuring & Will (2022). German language acquisition of refugee children—the role of preschools and language instruction, Bamberg.

121 The abbreviation ReGES study stands for Refugees in the German Educational System.

122 See Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (2021). LIfBi Research compact, Report No. 2, Bamberg.

Figure 26:
Children in publicly funded daycare according to the language spoken in the family



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2024). Table 22543-0004.

The reasons for the difference in the uptake of childcare places are manifold and include socio-economic, cultural and structural factors.[123] Particularly due to a more traditional gender-specific division of labour in families seeking protection, women are less likely to be employed and dependent on childcare. In addition, daycare centres are less common in some countries of origin, which is why childcare outside the family may be less accepted there.

For the age group of zero to three-year-olds, the lower participation rates of children seeking asylum can mainly be explained by living conditions and financial status. In particular, the employment of mothers often goes hand in hand with children seeking asylum attending a day care centre. For the age group of three to six-year-olds, the employment of mothers also shows a strong correlation with the childcare rate. In contrast to the younger age group, structural and migration-specific factors, such as the parents' German language skills and the number of years since arriving in Germany, are also decisive for attending a daycare centre. These correlations underscore at the political level that the provision of childcare is important for successful labour market integration.

123 See Homuth et al. (2021). The role of socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors in daycare attendance among refugee children. p. 30.

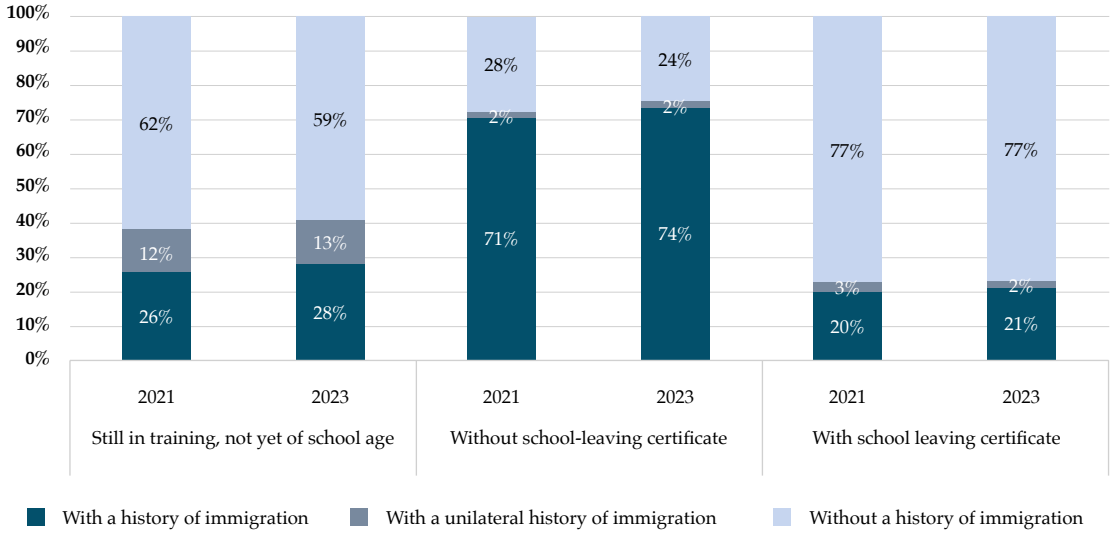
School education

In Germany, school attendance is compulsory for all children between the ages of six and 18. As a result, the education system has an obligation to ensure that all children of this age have access to high-quality educational programmes in order to promote their individual educational opportunities and reduce existing inequalities.[124] More than a third of pupils in Germany have a history of immigration. There are clear differences in school qualifications between people with and without a history of immigration (see Figure 27). According to the microcensus (see box on p. 74), 28 per cent of people in education or not yet of school age had a history of immigration in 2023. 13 per cent of those in education or not yet of school age had a unilateral immigration history. People with a history of immigration are significantly overrepresented among people without a school-leaving qualification: 74 per cent of people without a school-leaving qualification had a history of immigration in 2023. This rate has risen by three percentage points since 2021. In contrast, only two per cent of people without a school-leaving qualification had a unilateral immigration history in 2023.[125] Among people with a school-leaving certificate, 21 per cent had a history of immigration. This figure has risen by one percentage point since 2021.

124 See author: internal education reporting group (2024). Bildung in Deutschland 2024. p. 129, Bielefeld.

125 This figure should be viewed in the context of the general development of the population with a history of immigration in Germany over time.

Figure 27:
School education of the population by immigration history



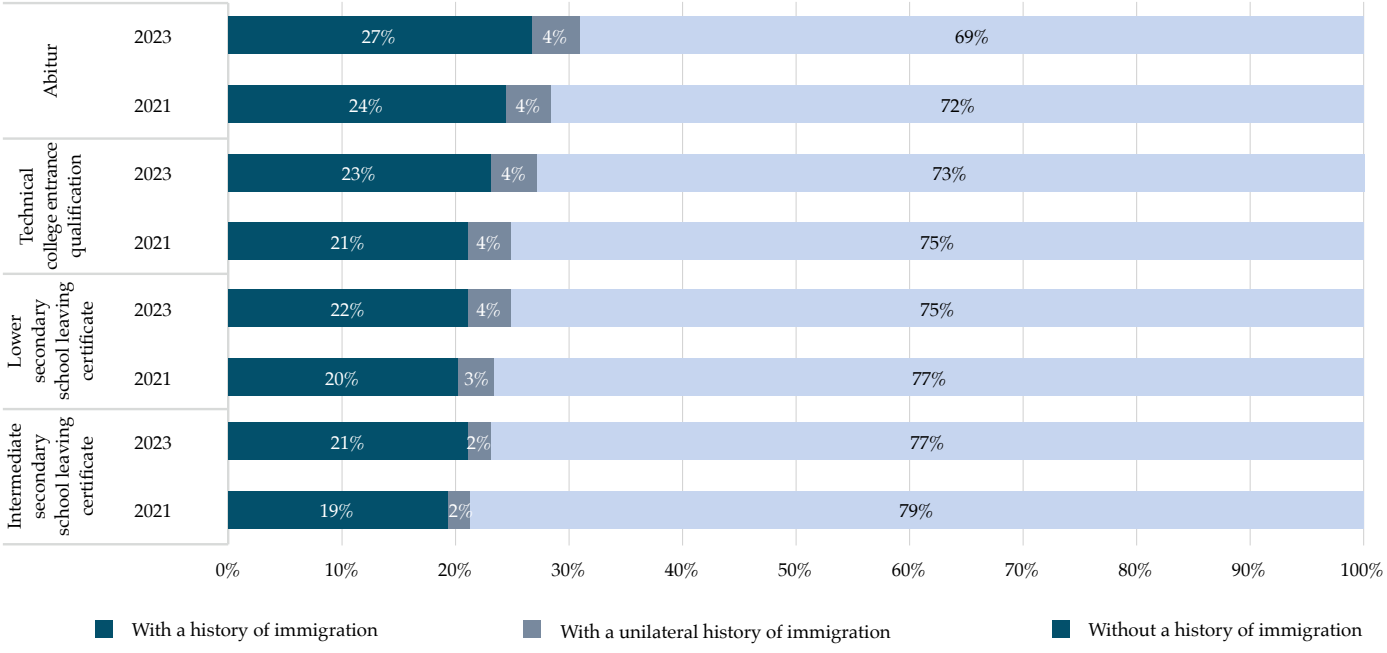
Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2024). Microcensus population aged 15 and over in main residence households.

Microcensus

The microcensus is a representative survey of households in Germany in which surveys one per cent of the population each year. Participation is mandatory by law. It is the largest regular official household statistic in Germany and provides data on the structure as well as the economic and social situation of the population. It also provides information on family and civil partnership, household, labour market and employment, education and migration. The results of the microcensus are published at the end of March of the following year. The microcensus has been conducted since 1957. The microcensus was redesigned in 2020.

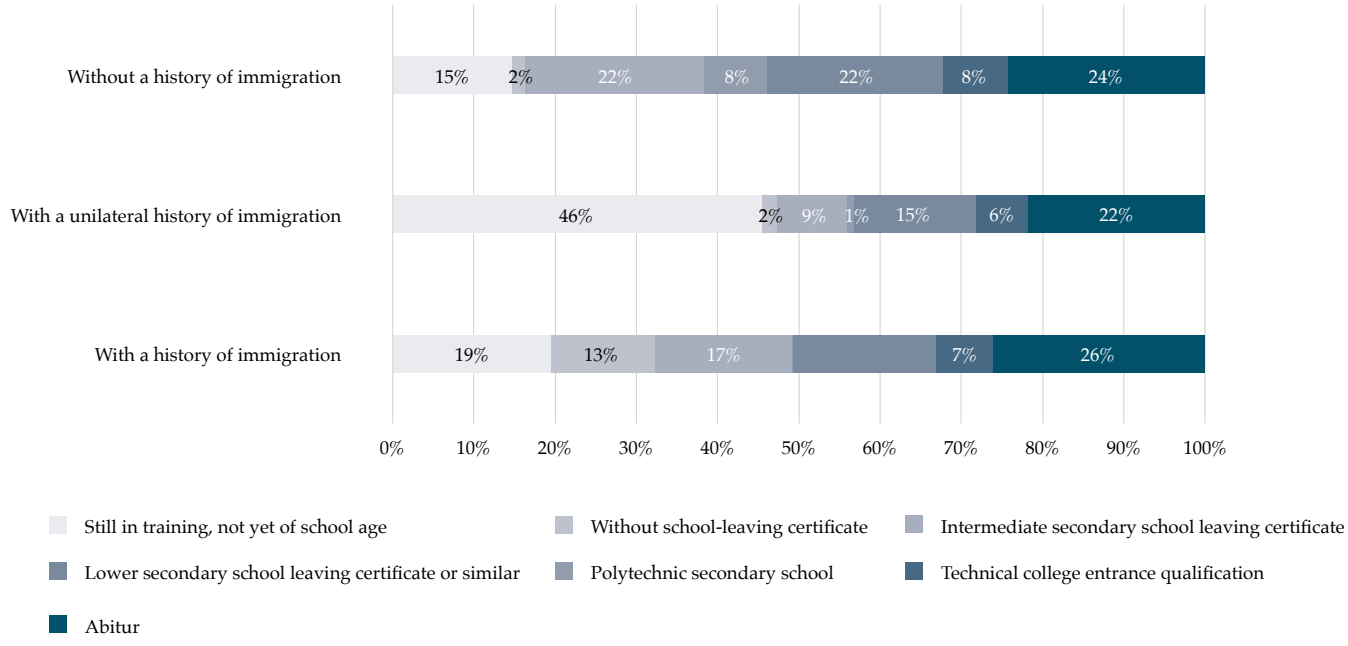
The differences between the population with and without a history of immigration can also be seen in the type of school-leaving qualification obtained (see Figure 28 and Figure 29). The proportion of people with a history of immigration is highest among people with a high school diploma (27% in 2023) and lowest among people with a lower secondary school leaving certificate (21% in 2023). There has been a slight increase in the proportion of people with a migration background since 2021, which is attributable to the population growth in this group. Looking only at the population with a history of immigration, 26 per cent have an Abitur, seven per cent a Fachhochschulreife, 18 per cent a Realschulabschluss and 17 per cent a Hauptschulabschluss. For comparison: in the population without a history of immigration, 24 per cent have an Abitur, eight per cent a Fachhochschulreife, 22 per cent a Realschulabschluss and 22 per cent a Hauptschulabschluss (see Figure 29).

Figure 28:
Distribution of the population with a history of immigration, with a unilateral history of immigration and without a history of immigration via school-leaving qualifications



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2024). Microcensus.

Figure 29:
School-leaving qualifications of the population by immigration history



Source: The Federal Statistical Office (2024). Microcensus.

Children who are asylum seekers face their own challenges when it comes to accessing school. Despite compulsory education, it can take several months before these children or young asylum seekers have access to schooling. The results of the ReGES study show that young people only received schooling in exceptional cases during their flight.[126] Even among those whose flight lasted longer than six months, the school attendance rate during this time was only just under 16 per cent. After their arrival in Germany, it took around seven months on average before they were able to attend school.[127]

Access to school education for asylum seekers is regulated differently in the federal states (see Figure 30).[128] In Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein, there is immediate access to school education, as both compulsory schooling and the right of access apply immediately after entry. In Bavaria, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia, on the other hand, there is a waiting period of three to six months, as access to the school is only possible after allocation to a local authority. In six other federal states, combined regulations apply in which the right of access to school exists immediately, but compulsory schooling only applies after an allocation or a waiting period.

The German Institute for Human Rights justifies the delays in access to schools resulting from the regulations in some countries with reference to the best interests of the child, the avoidance of frequent school changes and easing the burden

126 See Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (2021). LIfBi Research compact, Report No. 2, Bamberg.

127 See Von Maurice & Will (2021). Geflüchtete Kinder und Jugendliche im deutschen Bildungssystem: Zentrale Befunde der Studie ReGes, Bamberg.

128 See author: internal education reporting group (2024). Bildung in Deutschland 2024, Bielefeld.

Figure 30:
Compulsory schooling and right of access for asylum seekers in 2019

- Right of access to school from entry, compulsory schooling after a waiting period or allocation to a municipality
- Right of access to school after the start of compulsory schooling, compulsory schooling after a waiting period or allocation to a municipality
- Right and obligation to attend school from entry

Source: Author: Internal group on education reporting (2024). Bildung in Deutschland 2024, p.133.

74%

of people without a school-leaving qualification had a history of immigration.

on local authorities. However, such delays can have an impact on the children concerned, as they may not have access to education for several weeks or months. As a result, they have fewer opportunities to socialise with their peers, which can affect their social integration and educational opportunities.

In addition to the time it takes for these children and young asylum seekers to gain access to schooling, the type of school and school class to which they are assigned plays a role in their educational progress. The allocation of newly arrived pupils to a type of school is not standardised in Germany. In Rhineland-Palatinate, for example, parents and pupils can choose freely between all school types, and immigrant pupils are integrated directly into mainstream classes. In Hamburg and North Rhine-Westphalia there are preparatory classes in all types of schools. In Bavaria and Saxony, preparatory classes for newly arrived pupils are mainly offered at schools with lower performance levels, which has an impact on the children's educational opportunities. Will et al. (2022) show that pupils who are asylum seekers and live in Bavaria and Saxony are around 16 percentage points less likely to attend a Gymnasium than pupils in states that are more flexible in their allocation to different types of school.[129]

In an empirical study, Höckel and Schilling (2022) examine the effect of separate preparatory classes, in which language support is prioritised, on the academic success of primary school children who are asylum seekers.[130] To do this, they compare children from these preparatory classes with those who have been directly integrated into mainstream classes. The results of the study indicate that the direct integration of children who are asylum seekers into regular classes promotes their academic success more than preparatory classes. Primary school children who are

129 See Will et al. (2022). Educational policies matter: How schooling strategies influence refugee adolescents; school participation in lower secondary education in Germany. p. 17.

130 See Höckel & Schilling (2022). Starting off on the right foot: Language learning classes and the educational success of immigrant children.

asylum seekers and who attend a preparatory class in the course of their school career perform significantly worse in the standardised tests of the fifth grade. The negative effect is particularly pronounced in maths and German. They are also slightly less likely to attend an upper secondary school than children who have not attended a preparatory class.

Other studies show that factors such as class size and educational support contribute to the integration of asylum seekers in mainstream classes. Kölling et al. (2017) show that class size is an important factor for learning success in heterogeneous learning groups. Children who are asylum seekers have very different educational biographies and language skills, which poses additional challenges for large classes.[131] Closely linked to class size is the question of educational support and whether there is enough staff to provide individualised support for children who are asylum seekers. Teachers report that an individual teacher quickly reaches their limits in classes with additional requirements such as language support, previous traumatic experiences and highly heterogeneous performance levels.[132]

131 See Kölling et al. (2017). Integration durch Bildung: Die Berufsorientierung jugendlicher Flüchtlinge als Querschnittaufgabe, Duisburg.

132 See Standing Scientific Commission of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (SWK) (2022). Stellungnahme zur Unterstützung geflüchteter ukrainischer Kinder und Jugendlicher – Integration in das Bildungssystem, Bonn.

Data basis – Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international comparative study that analyses the mathematical and scientific skills of fourth-graders. The study is organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and has been conducted every four years since 1995. Almost 360,000 fourth-graders from around 58 countries worldwide took part in the 2023 TIMSS study. Of these countries, 22 are members of the EU and 29 are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OSCE). In Germany, 4,442 fourth-graders, around 2,660 parents / guardians, 244 maths teachers, 243 science teachers and around 200 school administrators took part in TIMSS 2023.

The migration background is recorded by querying the country of birth – at the national level since 2007 and at international level since 2015. A distinction is made between the following groups: (1) Children whose parents were both born in Germany, (2) children with one parent born abroad and (3) children with both parents born abroad. In this way, the definitions of migration background and immigration history are taken into account in the TIMSS data. The group of children whose parents were both born abroad is based on the Federal Statistical Office's definition of 'immigration history'. The group of children where only one parent was born abroad is closely related to the definition of 'migration background' used by the Federal Statistical Office.

42%

of children with a history of immigration are at risk of poverty.

School education: Differences in expertise

In addition to school-leaving qualifications and attendance at different types of school, educational success can be measured on the basis of differences in skills. International studies such as PISA and TIMSS[133] (see box) map the characteristic of migration background or immigration history in addition to competences. For over 20 years, they have been systematically documenting lower competences of children with a migration background and immigration history compared to their peers in key school areas such as reading, maths and science. These differences are closely linked to socio-economic conditions and the use of language at home.

In the wake of the 'PISA shock', the PISA study in 2001 revealed that there are significant differences in performance between young people with and without a migration background. The term 'PISA shock' refers to the public surprise at Germany's unexpectedly poor performance in international comparisons, particularly among children with a migration background.[134]

These differences remained significant in the 2022 PISA study. Pupils with a migration background performed significantly worse than their peers without a migration background. However, as will be discussed later, the characteristic of a migrant background cannot be viewed in isolation as the cause of differences in skills, since a history of migration entails other circumstances that play an important role in educational attainment.[135]

The TIMMS Study 2023, which records the characteristic 'immigration history', paints a similar picture. Compared to pupils of the same age without a history of immigration, children with a history of immigration perform significantly lower in maths and science. In the TIMSS study, four points along the performance scales were identified as international performance averages: the Peak Average (625), the High Average (550), the Mean Average (475) and the Low Average (400).[136] On average, children with a history of immigration score 38 points lower in maths and 70 points lower in science than children without a history of immigration (see Figure 31). These differences in learning progress have existed since the TIMSS study in 2007. A positive exception to this is children from certain groups of origin, such as Spanish or Vietnamese, who achieve above-average results despite their parents' comparable educational backgrounds and similar socio-economic situation. The study also shows that children with a history of immigration feel less socially integrated and have less self-confidence in maths and science lessons.

Using the PISA 2022 results, Mang et al. (2023) show that young people with a history of immigration in particular are at a socio-economic disadvantage.[137] The TIMSS study also makes it clear that there are considerable differences between children with and without a history of immigration in terms of socio-economic living conditions and language use at home (see Figure 32). 42 per cent of children with a dual immigration history are at risk of poverty. In families where both parents were born in Germany, however, this proportion is only 13 per cent. A similar trend can be seen in the employment of parents. Among the families surveyed in which both parents were born abroad, the em-

133 The abbreviations PISA and TIMMS stand for Programme of International Student Assessment and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study respectively.

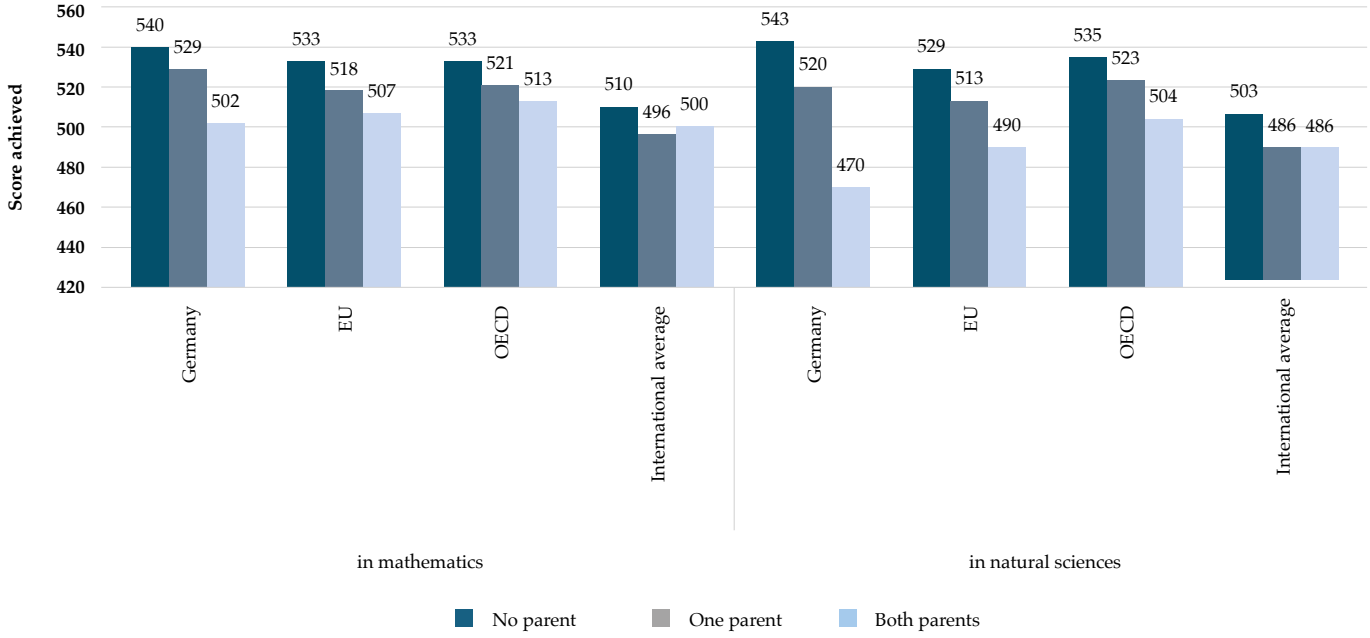
134 The PISA study is an international school performance test in which the skills of 15-year-olds are tested in the areas of maths, science and reading.

135 See Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2025). Ungleiche Bildungschancen: Fakten zur Benachteiligung von jungen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund im deutschen Bildungssystem, Berlin.

136 See Mullis & Fishbein (2020). Using Scale and Anchoring to Interpret the TIMSS 2019 Achievement Scales.

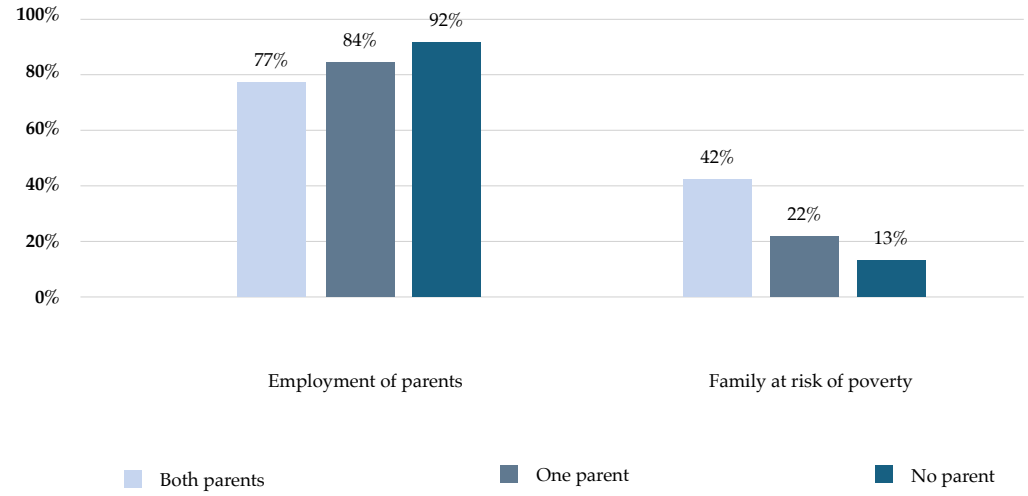
137 See Mang et al. (2023). Herkunftsbezogene Ungleichheiten im Kompetenzerwerb. In PISA 2022: Analyse der Bildungsergebnisse in Deutschland.

Figure 31:
Differences in the skills of fourth-graders according to immigration history



Note: Mullis et al (2020) identified four points along the performance scales in the TIMSS 2019 as international performance averages: the Peak Average (625), the High Average (550), the Mean Average (475) and the Low Average (400).
Source: Schwippert et al. (2024). TIMSS 2023.

Figure 32:
Employment and risk of poverty among fourth-graders according to parents' immigration experience



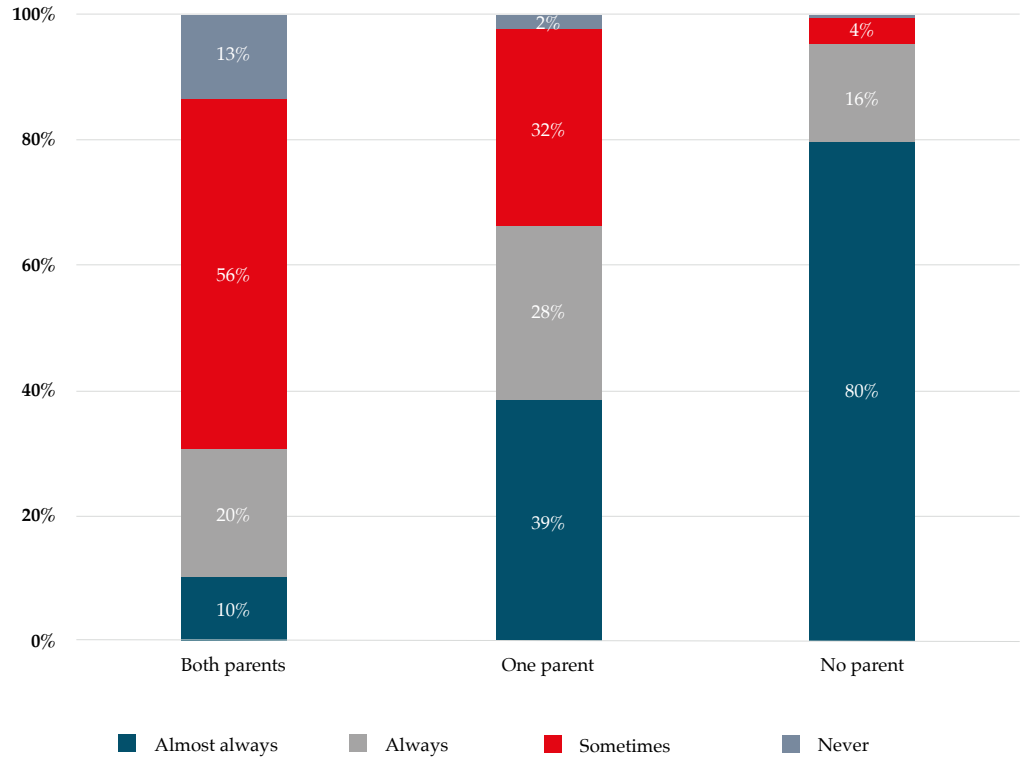
Source: Schwippert et al. (2024). TIMSS 2023.

ployment rate of the parents is the lowest (77%). In contrast, the employment rate in families in which both parents were born in Germany is 92 per cent. There are also clear differences between the family groups with regard to language use at home: Among parents who were both born abroad, 57 per cent stated that they 'sometimes' spoke German at home (see Figure 33). Only ten per cent of these parents stated that they 'always' spoke German at home. Unsurprisingly, however, 80 per cent of parents without a history of immigration stated that they 'always' speak German at home. Among families with a unilateral immigration history, 39 per cent of parents stated that they 'always' spoke German at home.

For the subgroup of children seeking protection, Stanat et al. (2020) show that the skills disadvantages of children who are asylum seekers are strongly related to challenging socio-economic characteristics of the family.[138] Lower financial resources and more difficult access to knowledge, education and culture are just as important as the fact that German is often not spoken in the families.

138 See Stanat et al. (2022). IQB-Bildungstrend 2021: Kompetenzen in den Fächern Deutsch und Mathematik am Ende der 4. Jahrgangsstufe im dritten Ländervergleich.

Figure 33:
Use of German at home in families according to parents' immigration experience



Source: Schwippert et al. (2024). TIMSS 2023.

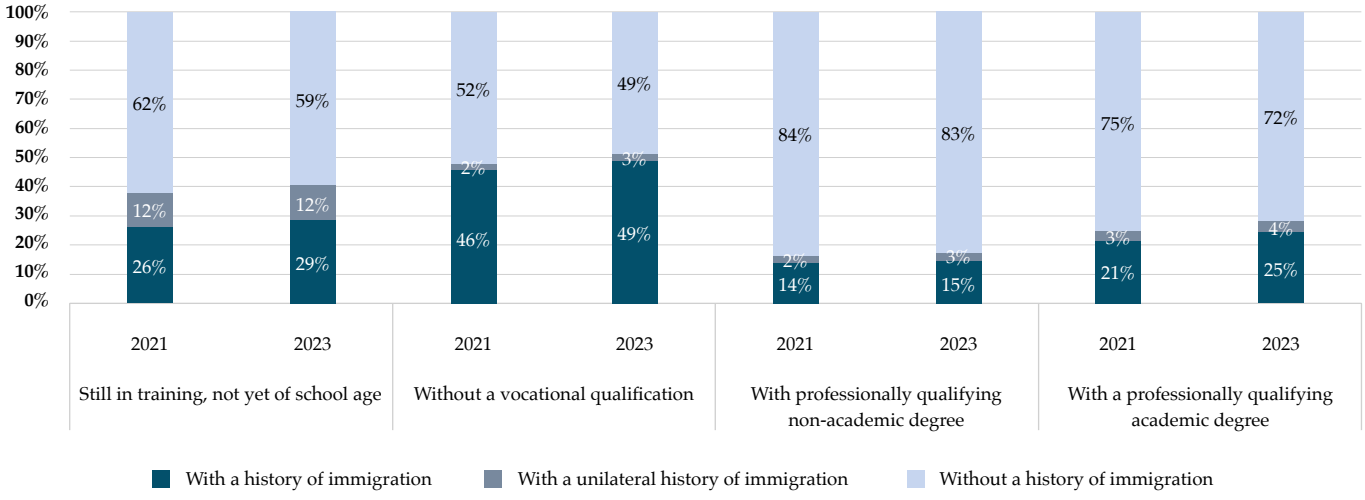
Vocational education

Vocational education is an important step towards integration into society and the labour market.[139] People who want to pursue vocational training can choose between three main educational pathways: an apprenticeship, university studies or participation in a transition system, which is intended to make it easier for people without an apprenticeship to find an apprenticeship in the medium term. The following sections deal with training and studying, in each case with reference to people with a migration background and asylum seekers.

In Germany, a distinction is made between academic and non-academic professional qualifications. A professionally qualifying academic degree includes the Bachelor and Master's degree, Diploma and Magister qualifications or the state examination. In the population group with a professional academic qualification, a quarter had an immigration history in 2023 (see Figure 34), while 72 per cent had none. The group with a history of immigration has increased its proportion by four percentage points since 2021 (21%). A non-academic vocational qualification includes an apprenticeship and a vocational college qualification. Among people with non-academic professional qualifications, the proportion of those with a history of immigration was 15 per cent. This proportion has risen by one percentage point since 2021. Of the people without a vocational qualification, 49 per cent had a history of immigration. Within the group that is in education or not yet of school age, 29 per cent had a history of immigration in 2023.

139 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2024b). Issue 2: Migration und Integration, Bonn.

Figure 34:
Vocational training according to immigration history



Source: Federal Statistical Office (2024).Table 12211-05; Table 12211-20.

Vocational education: Training

Our initial focus is on people with a migration background. Applicants with a migration background are significantly less likely to be offered a company-based training place than applicants without a migration background.[140] This is the case even if school leavers with a migration background have the same qualifications and grades and live in similar socio-economic conditions to their peers without a migration background.[141] At the end of the 2021 training year, around 29 per cent of applicants with a migration background registered with the Federal Employment Agency were in in-company vocational training, compared to 43 per cent of those without a migration background.[142] Between 2018 and 2021, this placement rate for applicants with a migration background fell more sharply than that of applicants without a migration background. This represents a decrease in their proportion of training contracts concluded. This indicates that the hurdles for applicants with a migration background are not only higher, but are actually increasing (at least during this period).

People with a migration background include asylum seekers for whom integration into the training and labour market is an essential prerequisite for long-term residence in Germany. In recent years, several legislative changes have been made to facilitate access to the training market, particularly for asylum seekers. Asylum seekers can usually start vocational training no later than six months after their arrival in Germany. Tolerated persons are entitled to do so from the first day of their tolerated stay, provided the training leads to a recognised vocational qualification and they are no longer obliged to live in an initial reception centre. In addition, approval from the Federal Employment Agency is no longer required for the immigration authorities to authorise the training.[143]

Limited language skills and knowledge of the education system, residence restrictions and discrimination are challenges that asylum seekers have to overcome.[144] Asylum seekers who are no longer subject to compulsory schooling, for example, have limited access to the programmes offered by the transition system. Of asylum seekers who are interested in training and enter the transition system, 18 per cent make use of offers that do not lead to a fully qualifying training programme.[145] At the same time, they often leave the transition system early: At the end of 2021, at 13 per cent, they were significantly more likely to be employed without a training qualification and subject to social security contributions or in marginal employment than applicants of German origin, among whom this proportion was eight per cent.

140 Vocational training statistics and training reporting do not record migration background, but nationality. This section therefore draws on sample surveys from the BA/BIBB applicant survey 2021, which asked about the characteristic of 'migration background'.

141 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2024a). Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2024. Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung, Bonn; Granato & Christ (2022). Integration junger Geflüchteter in berufliche Ausbildung: Zugang zu und Gestaltung von beruflicher Ausbildung, Bonn.

142 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2024a). Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2024. Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung, p. 283, Bonn.

143 See Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2024). Geflüchtete: Arbeitsmarktzugang und -förderung. Ein Leitfaden für Mitarbeitende von Arbeitsagentur und Jobcenter p.16, Bonn.

144 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2024a). Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2024. Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung, Bonn; Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2025). Ungleiche Bildungschancen: Fakten zur Benachteiligung von jungen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund im deutschen Bildungssystem, Berlin.

145 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2024a). Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2024. Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung p. 283, Bonn.

Vocational education: Studies

Young people with a migration background are significantly more likely to choose to study after leaving school than their peers without a migration background who have a similar socio-economic status. This could be because vocational training models only exist in a few countries and are not widespread or known in the major countries of origin.[146] Students with a migration background are more likely than average to enrol on a degree programme, even if their average marks are lower. However, they are less likely to study their chosen subject and drop out more often than students without a migration background. In the graduating class of 2020, 42 per cent of students with a migration background who successfully completed the German school system did not complete their Bachelor's degree. Among students without a migration background, the drop-out rate was 28 per cent.[147] Overall, the educational disadvantage of students with a migration background is largely due to their social background and living conditions.[148] More than half of students with a migration background are the first in their family to study.

Asylum seekers can study regardless of the status of their asylum procedure or their residence status, provided they fulfil the legal requirements for higher education.[149] Under higher education law, asylum seekers who take up studies are categorised as foreign students. In principle, the same regulations apply to them as to other foreign applicants and students. The general admission requirements include a higher education entrance qualification, adequate knowledge of German and the ability to earn a living.[150] However, there are special regulations based on residence status that do not apply to foreign students. These differences relate in particular to social, support and residence rights. For example, asylum seekers cannot change their residence status from an asylum-related residence permit to a residence permit for study purposes by becoming a student. On the other hand, foreign nationals with a valid residence permit for study purposes are generally able to apply for asylum.

However, students who are asylum seekers face a number of practical challenges due to legal requirements, for example with regard to their mobility, learning conditions, and financial support for their studies. As a rule, asylum seekers are subject to spatial restrictions during their stay in the initial reception centre and for the first three months after their arrival in Germany. Staying in shared accommodation and limited internet access also create precarious learning conditions. Although students who are asylum seekers generally have access to BAföG benefits, this grant is dependent on their residence status, previous length of stay and previous employment.

146 See author: internal education reporting group (2024). Bildung in Deutschland 2024. Ein Indikator gestützter Bericht mit einer Analyse zu beruflicher Bildung, Bielefeld; Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (2024b). Issue 2: Migration und Integration p. 10, Bonn.

147 See Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2025). Ungleiche Bildungschancen: Fakten zur Benachteiligung von jungen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund im deutschen Bildungssystem, Berlin.

148 See Expert Council on Integration and Migration. (2025). Ungleiche Bildungschancen: Fakten zur Benachteiligung von jungen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund im deutschen Bildungssystem, Berlin; Schamman & Younso (2016). Studium nach der Flucht? Angebote deutscher Hochschulen für Studieninteressierte mit Fluchterfahrung, Hildesheim.

149 See Schamman & Younso (2016). Studium nach der Flucht? Angebote deutscher Hochschulen für Studieninteressierte mit Fluchterfahrung. p. 7, Hildesheim.

150 Depending on the degree programme, a different language level is required.

'Speed of light'

Viewpoint of Eva M. Welskop-Deffaa

'Memory is a room with wandering doors' – poetic sentences by Iris Wolff stuck in my mind while I was writing my 'position' for the Malteser Migration Report. 'Sometimes the shadow of a mountain hits you, sometimes a word.'

When it comes to the pressing issues of migration and labour market integration, the shadows against which new beginnings and hopeful initiatives must prevail are very long; we all carry many memories with us that stand for wonderfully successful, but unfortunately also repeatedly for failed integration efforts. There are also shadows of racism and xenophobia that reach people who've been working in Germany for years, who aren't 'living off the social welfare system', and who roll up their sleeves and take on difficult, innovative tasks. Many of them were 'guest workers' who made our prosperity possible in the 1960s by working in the mines and in the steel and automotive industries. They are my first memory of labour market integration..

Because these workers from Italy and Greece and Turkey stayed, we decided at some point that the name 'guest worker' didn't fit them. It seemed to actively prevent successful integration, and the conceptually emphasised guest status underscored the temporary and unfamiliar nature of the situation for both sides – the guests and the 'hosts' alike. The term was fitting for the originally intense longing to return to their old homeland and, consequently, it seemed to us that it hindered integration. We looked for new words and found new challenges because the new names for the people who came to Germany to work and live obviously didn't solve the problems. Dark skin colour and foreign-sounding names persisted as markers of discrimination even after prominent journalists, politicians and professors had made it clear that you don't have to be called Müller and have blonde hair to make valuable contributions to prosperity and cohesion in Germany. Almost five years ago, Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier awarded Özlem Türeci and Ugur Sahin the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany after their research into messenger RNA technology laid the foundations for producing an effective COVID-19 vaccine quickly and comparatively cheaply. 'Speed of light' is the name the two gave to the project they launched to develop the vaccine that would contain the virus and save lives.

If only there were a similar magic word to make integration happen so quickly!
Because, as was the case 60 years ago, we're still urgently dependent on the immigration of labour from abroad today. This time, it's not just social work professions that are stepping up their efforts to attract qualified professionals from abroad. The care sector in particular is facing considerable challenges in Germany: More and more people are in need of care, while, thanks to the retirement of baby boomers, more and more carers are leaving the workforce. Migrants already play a central role in tackling this task, and it will become even more significant in the coming years and decades. This means that helping migrants get into the German job market in a way that fits their skills and is sustainable isn't just crucial for them, but also essential for ensuring we have enough people to work in care and to keep our country economically and socially stable.

The proportion of nursing staff with non-German nationality is currently 18 per cent (as of: June 2024) and is still growing steadily. This is the only explanation for the general growth in employment in the care sector since 2022.[151] Migrant professionals are indispensable for maintaining the healthcare system and make a significant contribution to the care and support of the population. Their integration and the recognition of their professional qualifications must thus be accelerated and simplified. Their cultural and linguistic skills can and must be utilised as a valuable resource in the care of migrant elders.

151 See Federal Employment Agency (2025). Arbeitsmarktsituation im Pflegebereich, Nürnberg.

Recognising foreign qualifications currently takes an inexplicably long time; it's a complex process that's often associated with bureaucratic hurdles. Many migrants are consequently employed below their skill level despite having high qualifications. This leads not just to individual frustration, but also to a loss of valuable skilled workers for the German labour market. So, there's an urgent need for a reform of the recognition procedures that enables foreign qualifications to be assessed more quickly and efficiently.

Not just the first, but also the second and third generation of migrants struggle with obstacles to integrating into the labour market. Important decisions are made in childhood. Children and young people with a history of migration are less likely to get early childhood education in daycare centres and are disproportionately present in lower secondary schools and underrepresented in upper secondary schools.[152]

Children from families with a history of migration often find out that they don't have the same educational opportunities as their German friends of the same age.

The services offered by welfare organisations, in particular daycare centres, language daycare centres, school social work, youth migration services and much more, are crucial building blocks for the integration of children and young people with a migration background. Language daycare centres, in particular, have proven to be very beneficial, as they promote language development and also boost respect and intercultural understanding for all children. The coalition agreement's promise to strengthen the language daycare centres and the expansion of the Startchancen programme to include daycare centres are thus important steps towards an open integration society.[153]

Eva M. Welskop-Deffaa (* 1959) has been President of the Deutscher Caritasverband since November 2021. Prior to this, she had been a member of the Executive Board since 2017, responsible for specialist and social policy.

On average, 41 per cent of school-age children and young people have a history of migration, and in some federal states (Hesse, Hamburg, Bremen), even more than half of all children do.[154] Language support and tutoring, mentoring programmes and extracurricular activities can significantly boost the self-confidence and social skills of these children. Even in a society that's open and respectful, where diversity is seen as a positive thing from a young age, it doesn't automatically mean that people will find it easy to get a job at light speed. But it keeps doors open. Integration happens when we don't close the doors to our memories, but instead learn from the last 60 years – building a connection that goes beyond the workplace.

152 See Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2024). Ungleiche Bildungschancen Fakten zur Benachteiligung von jungen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund im deutschen Bildungssystem, Berlin.

153 See CDU, CSU, SPD (2025). Verantwortung für Deutschland – Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, 21. Legislaturperiode, Berlin.

154 See Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2024). Ungleiche Bildungschancen Fakten zur Benachteiligung von jungen Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund im deutschen Bildungssystem, Berlin.

'Untapped potential: Migration and training'

Viewpoint of Prof Bernd Fitzenberger, PhD and Prof Dr Yuliya Kosyakova

Young people with a migration background are less likely to achieve higher educational qualifications in Germany compared to those without a migration background. In addition, the proportion of those without completed vocational training is significantly higher in the group with a migration background, even though many people who have immigrated with the intention of gainful employment have a university degree. Vocational training in particular is pursued comparatively rarely by many people with a migration background. In a situation where numerous training places remain unfilled and many skilled workers are set to retire in the coming years, valuable potential remains untapped.

Educational inequality between people with and without a migration background is on the rise in Germany. Children with a migration background are less likely to attend a daycare centre, are overrepresented at lower secondary schools and are underrepresented at upper secondary schools. In 2023, 61.5 per cent of 20-29 year-olds without a migration background had a general higher education entrance qualification or entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences. Among people born in Germany with a migration background, this proportion was 57 per cent, compared with only 36.8 per cent among those born abroad. In the latter group, 12.3 per cent had not completed their school education. The educational gap is also reflected in the results of school performance tests such as the PISA study, in which young people with a migration background perform significantly worse on average. This is all the more striking given that 42.3 per cent of all children of school age in 2023 have a migration background.

Educational inequalities continue in vocational training and are even more pronounced there than in higher education. The number of non-formally qualified people (people who have not completed vocational training) aged between 20 and 34 grew from 1.9 million (2015) to over 2.86 million (2022), with migration – particularly from refugees – contributing significantly to this increase. in 2022, the rate was 19.1 per cent and the differences by migration background are clear: The rate is 11.6 per cent for people without a migration background, 20.4 per cent for people with a migration background who grew up in Germany and 39.1 per cent for people who immigrated themselves. This disparity is of great significance, as those without formal qualifications have significantly higher labour market risks: In 2022, their unemployment rate was 19.8 per cent and they account for more than 60 per cent of the long-term unemployed. In addition, their earnings are significantly lower than those of people who have completed vocational or academic training.

Due to the lower proportion of people with vocational qualifications, the qualification structure of people with a migration background in Germany is comparatively polarised. In 2022, 28 per cent of 25 to 35-year-olds without a migration background will have a university degree, 64 per cent a non-academic vocational qualification and 8 per cent no vocational qualification. For people born in Germany with a migration background, these proportions were 24, 57 and 19 per cent respectively, and 31, 33 and 34 per cent respectively for those born abroad. The comparatively low proportion of vocational qualifications among people with a migration background is striking, while the proportion with a university degree is relatively high.

Six key reasons for the comparatively low proportion of vocationally trained people with a migration

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background are listed below. Firstly, these people face higher barriers to accessing the vocational education and training system, which offers a wide range of opportunities but is complex and difficult to understand. Early, informed decisions require comprehensive knowledge of how vocational education and training works at the local level. Parents with a migration background are often at a disadvantage when it comes to advising their children about careers, partly because social networks play an important role in accessing attractive training places. Secondly, children with a migration background and the same socio-economic status as their parents have on average higher, but sometimes less realistic, educational aspirations than children without a migration background. This correlates with a comparatively lower estimation of vocational training, as this is less well-known in their country of origin or is seen as less useful for an career, both in Germany or abroad. Thirdly, people with a migrant background often have a lower socioeconomic status, which goes hand in hand with fewer educational opportunities – partly because their parents are less able to support their children as they progress through the education and vocational training system. Fourthly, vocational training is a long-term investment in labour market opportunities in Germany. Whether this investment is worthwhile depends crucially on whether the migrant plans to stay in Germany permanently. In addition, the period of vocational training is associated with a low income, while at the same time the labour market for unskilled workers often offers better short-term earning opportunities. Fifthly, despite professional competence, language barriers and difficulties with training content can make it difficult to successfully complete training, especially for new immigrants. Vocational schools are not always in a position to offer all students sufficient support in view of the increasing diversity of the student body in part-time lessons. Sixthly, as the vocational training system in Germany is very specific, the recognition of vocational skills acquired abroad is often a challenge, as these are often not certified in a form comparable to German qualifications.

The key to better utilising the previously untapped potential of people with a migration background to become skilled workers is to attract more of these people to vocational training.

To this end, the advantages of vocational training should be communicated in a more targeted manner, barriers to access should be removed and individual support needs should be given greater consideration. At the same time, awareness should be raised that the long-term prospects in the labour market for unskilled workers are significantly worse.

Crime

– Current developments and their connection with refugee migration

Crime – current developments and their connection with refugee migration

Prof. Dr Dr h. c. Lars P. Feld and Lilith Burgstaller

Key facts

- **After the pandemic-related decline in 2020 and 2021, the level of observed crime increased again until 2023.**
- **The year-on-year decline in crime in 2024 is primarily due to the decrease in drug-related offences as a result of cannabis legalisation. Overall, the number of recorded offences is seven per cent higher than in 2019, but six per cent lower than in 2010.**
- **For most types of offences, the number of offences remained largely constant compared to the previous year. While the number of theft offences committed by Germans and non-Germans, including asylum seekers, fell, the number of property theft and forgery offences committed increased in all groups.**
- **The number of victims who were asylum seekers rose by 19 per cent in 2023 compared to the previous year.**
- **The number of recorded xenophobic offences increased by 38% in 2023 compared to the previous year.**
- **39,700 cases of human trafficking were recorded in 2023. This corresponds to an increase of 119 per cent compared to the previous year.**

The connection between crime and migration is increasingly being discussed in public again. Since there is often a lack of existing data, the debate frequently remains detached from the facts. This chapter aims to contribute to a more objective debate on the role of migration in the development of crime.

Based on data from the police crime statistics, the chapter provides an overview of the development of crime in 2023 and 2024, focussing in particular on asylum seekers. Alongside the trends in the number of crimes and suspects, it also looks at the nationalities and sociodemographics of suspects. This is followed by a report on scientific studies that have examined the causal relationship between migration and crime in Germany. For the first time in this report, the following chapter provides an overview of the extent of human trafficking offences. This is followed by an overview of the role of the media in the discussion on the connection between crime and migration.

Crime trends since 2022

Basically, the following can be said: Despite population growth of four per cent since 2010, the number of suspects in 2024 was around six per cent below the 2010 level.[155] According to current population estimates, around two per cent of the population in Germany had committed criminal offences in 2024.[156] After falling continuously from 2016 to 2021, crime in Germany rose again in 2022 and 2023. Following the sharp rise in the number of offences in 2021 compared to 2022 (+12%), the number increased by a further six percent in 2023. In 2024, there was a nominal decline in recorded offences. This was primarily due to the legalisation of cannabis, which reduced the number of drug-related offences. Without taking this effect into account, the number of offences in 2024 was roughly on a par with the previous year. In the medium term, an increase in crime can still be observed: A comparison of the number of offences in 2024 with 2019, the last year before the pandemic-related restrictions and the associated decrease in crime, shows an increase of seven percent. Most recently, this increase was due in part to the rise in violent crime, particularly among children and young people. [157]

In 2024, there were a total of 5.8 million recorded crimes. The sharpest year-on-year increase was in cases of white-collar crime (+58%) and offences against the New Psychoactive Substances Act. The latter is primarily related to a significant increase in investigative activities in juvenile detention centres.

155 See Federal Statistical Office (2024). Bevölkerung nach Nationalität und Geschlecht, Wiesbaden; Bundeskriminalamt (2025). Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2024: Polizei registriert über 5,83 Millionen Straftaten im Jahr 2024, Wiesbaden.

156 See Federal Statistical Office (2025). Bevölkerung im Jahr 2024 um 100 000 Menschen gewachsen, Wiesbaden; Bundeskriminalamt (2025). Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2024: Polizei registriert über 5,83 Millionen Straftaten im Jahr 2024, Wiesbaden.

157 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2025). Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2024: Polizei registriert über 5,83 Millionen Straftaten im Jahr 2024, Wiesbaden.

What the new federal government is planning

- The revocation of the right of residence in the event of a prison sentence for serious criminal offences (e.g. offences against life and limb or incitement to hatred).
- Examination of the need for changes to residence regulations in the event of public calls for the abolition of the free democratic basic order.

Crime data situation

The main source of this chapter is the Police Crime Statistics (PKS) of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA). They provide information on crime and the extent of individual types of offences and the number and characteristics of suspects. The data collected can be used to calculate crime rates and compare them over time. For example, frequency figures (number of known cases relative to the population) or growth rates can be calculated.

All criminal offences known to the police and forwarded to the public prosecutor's office are statistically recorded in the PKS. Criminal offences are recorded and classified in the PKS after police investigations have been completed. However, the classification of the offence may still change during the proceedings due to the final assessment by the public prosecutor's office. Only those offences that are reported are included in the PKS (recorded statistics). The recorded crime rates are thus dependent on the reporting behaviour of citizens, which can vary over time or in relation to different groups of suspects. The recorded number and classification of offences also depend on how intensively the police carry out checks and how the offences are classified legally and statistically.

Since 2020, the Federal Criminal Police Office has been conducting victimisation surveys in a representative sample of the German population to determine whether people have been victims of crime. In

this way, the authorities want to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the actual crime situation. The second survey began in February 2024 and the results will be made available at the end of 2025. This is the only way to assess trends in unreported crime. Individual key figures from the 2020 survey are included in the report below.

While multiple suspects are only counted once as suspects in the total number of suspects in the PKS, anyone who becomes a victim is counted separately in the victim figures. So if people are victims of several offences, they are included in the statistics more than once.

In the following, we rely on the PKS classification of 'non-German suspects' and 'immigrants'. The first group includes all suspects with foreign citizenship, including tourists, which limits comparability with the number of foreign nationals living in Germany. The second group is defined by the Federal Criminal Police Office as people with the residence status 'asylum seeker', 'person entitled to protection and asylum, quota refugee', 'tolerated stay' and 'unauthorised stay'. As in the rest of the report, we summarise this group as 'asylum seekers'.

In order to make offences and the associated suspects as comparable as possible, offences under immigration law are not taken into account below. As these can only be committed by foreign nationals, taking them into account would limit the comparability of German and non-German suspect figures. Comparability is limited for two further reasons. All foreign persons who are suspected of an offence in Germany and have foreign citizenship are counted as foreign suspects. This also includes, for example, tourists who are not resident in Germany. Dreißigacker et al. (2023) also show that perpetrators are more likely to be reported if they have a migration background. The number of recorded offenders is thus greater in this group of suspects than in the group of German suspects. [158]

Nationwide, 5.55 million cases and 1.97 million suspects were recorded in 2024. Multiple suspects are only counted once. Overall, around three per cent fewer suspects were recorded in 2024 than in 2023. Of all suspects in 2024, just under 1.3 million were German citizens (-4% compared to the previous year). The number of suspects without German citizenship remained largely constant (+0.3%). A total of 696,900 foreign suspects were counted. These included around 172,200 asylum seekers who were criminal suspects. This corresponds to a year-on-year decline of just under four per cent (see Figure 35, left-hand scale in each case). This decrease comes after an increase in the number of suspects who were asylum seekers in 2022 compared to 2023. In the same period, the number of asylum seekers in Germany rose sharply and by leaps and bounds (+60% year-on-year from 2023 to 2022), which is due in particular to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.[159] The number of people with non-German citizenship in Germany had increased by 13 per cent in 2023 compared to the previous year.[160]

158 See Dreißigacker et al. (2023). Jugendliche in Niedersachsen. Ergebnisse des Niedersachsensurveys 2022, Hannover.

159 See Federal Statistical Office (2024). Zahl der Schutzsuchenden im Jahr 2023 leicht gestiegen, Wiesbaden.

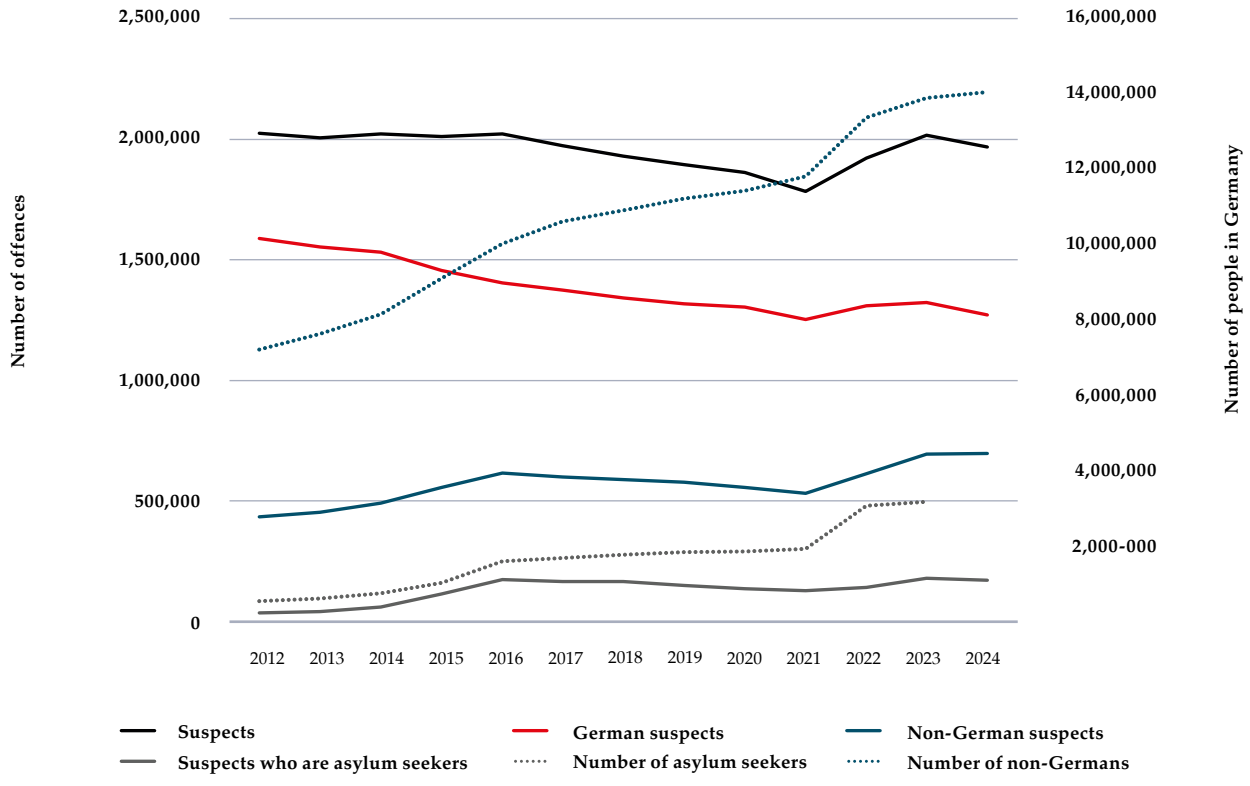
160 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2023, Wiesbaden.

Figure 35 shows that the increases in the foreign population and the population of asylum seekers were both steeper (dashed lines, values shown on the right axis) than the increases in suspects in these groups (left axis). Thus, despite a nominal increase, the number of suspects is developing at a lower rate than the number of people residing in Germany.

Multiple offenders play a significant role in criminal activity among asylum seekers. In 2023, multiple offenders were involved in 77 per cent of offences committed by asylum seekers. Just under 32 per cent of all suspects who were asylum seekers were suspected of multiple offences. This means that their proportion is higher than the proportion of multiple offenders in the population as a whole. There was a particularly sharp rise in the proportion of suspects who were asylum seekers and who were charged with 21 or more offences. In 2023, it rose by 49 per cent year-on-year to just under 1,300 people. Multiple offenders play a particularly significant role in theft offences.[161]

161 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Bundeslagebild Kriminalität im Kontext von Zuwanderung. Bundeslagebild 2023, Wiesbaden.

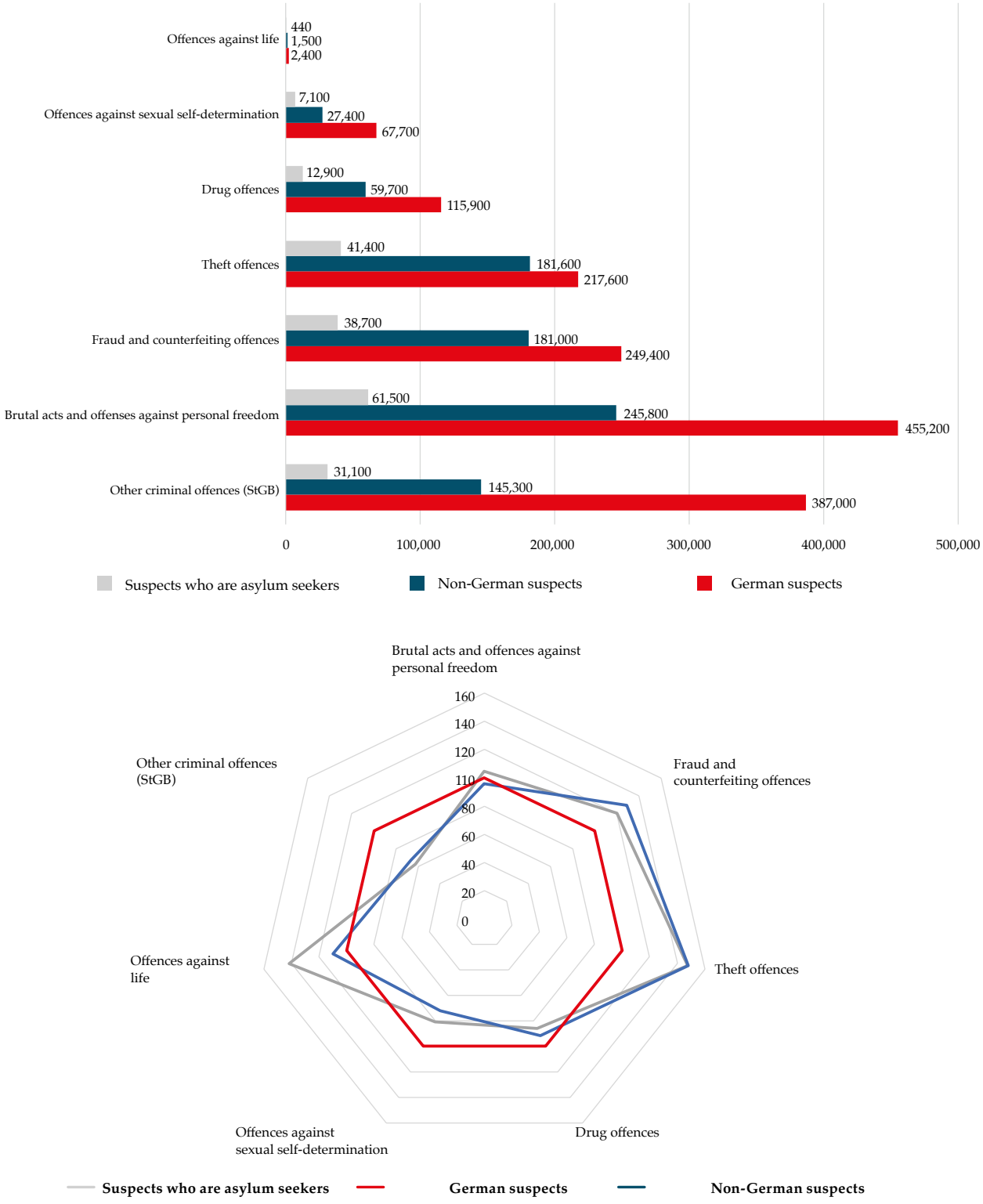
Figure 35:
Trends in the number of all reported offences (left axis) and the number of people in Germany (right axis) within one year



Source: Federal Criminal Agency (2025). Police crime statistics 2024; Federal Statistical Office (2025). Population; Germany, reference date, nationality; Federal Statistical Office (2024). Zahl der Schutzsuchenden im Jahr 2023 leicht gestiegen.

Note: Violations of residence or asylum procedure laws are not taken into account. Suspects who are asylum seekers are shown in the PKS as a sub-category of non-German suspects. The total number of suspects is therefore the sum of German and non-German suspects. The number of people with German citizenship was omitted for reasons of clarity.

Figure 36:
Comparison between German, non-German and asylum-seeking suspects by offence in 2024



Source: Federal Criminal Agency (2025). Police crime statistics 2024. Own calculations; own presentation.

Note: The grey and blue lines in the graph below indicate whether suspects of an offence are over- or under-represented compared to German suspects. Calculation as in the SVR Migration Annual Report 2019.

Compared to previous years, the number of offences committed has remained largely stable across all types of offences. The Federal Criminal Police Office recorded the highest rates of change in the number of offences against life (+4%) and in offences involving bodily harm and offences against personal freedom (+3%). The latter include robbery, bodily harm and threats. At the same time, the BKA recorded a decrease in the number of theft offences (-6%). Drug-related offences fell by 34 per cent as a result of the legal changes. As this effect is not due to the actual development of crime, the report does not discuss the trends in drug-related offences.

The rates of change in the individual types of offences were moderate overall in 2024, which is why only rates of change above five percent are described below. The number of theft offences decreased across all groups compared to the previous year. Eight per cent fewer theft offences were recorded among German nationals and seven per cent fewer among asylum seekers than in the previous year. The number of offences against sexual self-determination committed by asylum seekers fell by five per cent. At the same time, the number of recorded property and counterfeiting offences among asylum seekers increased by five per cent. A six per cent increase was recorded in the number of offences of violence and offences against personal liberty committed by non-German suspects. The number of offences against life increased slightly in all groups; among non-German nationals and specifically among asylum seekers, the increase was around five per cent. The number of other criminal offences committed by non-Germans increased by seven per cent and by six per cent among asylum seekers in particular.

Across the three groups of suspects, the majority of offences committed are offences involving bodily harm and offences against personal liberty. Around 30 per cent of all offences fell into this category. In 2024, 455,200 of these kinds of offences were committed by German nationals and around 245,800 offences by non-German nationals, of which 61,500 offences were committed by asylum seekers (see Figure 36 above). The second most common offences committed by Germans were property and counterfeiting offences with 249,400 cases. Among all non-Germans and especially among asylum seekers, theft offences were the second most common, with 181,600 and 41,400 offences recorded respectively. At around 0.2 per cent of all recorded offences, offences against life played by far the smallest role in all groups. Around 2,400 offences against life were committed by German nationals and 1,500 by non-German nationals. Of these, 440 offences were committed by asylum seekers.

Relative to German suspects, non-German suspects were overrepresented in 2024 in the areas of property and counterfeiting offences, offences against life and theft offences. Asylum seekers were also slightly overrepresented in the area of violent offences and offences against personal freedom (see Figure 36 below). Non-German suspects and suspects who were asylum seekers were significantly underrepresented in the area of offences against sexual self-determination, drug-related offences and other criminal offences.

Nationalities and socio-demographics of asylum seekers who are criminal suspects

The proportion of suspected offenders of individual nationalities among asylum seekers has shifted significantly in relation to their proportion of the total population of asylum seekers compared to the 2021 reporting year. One reason for this is that the Federal Criminal Police Office has changed the reporting format: Until 2021, it calculated the proportion of asylum seekers from certain countries staying in Germany as an average of the years 2015 to the respective reporting year. Since 2023, however, the percentage relates to the number of asylum seekers of the respective nationality in the respective reporting year. In addition to this purely statistical effect, there is a clear shift due to the sharp increase in the number of Ukrainians among all asylum seekers. In 2023, 33 per cent of all asylum seekers in Germany had Ukrainian citizenship. 29 per cent of all asylum seekers had Eritrean, Iraqi or Syrian citi-

zenship. In 2021, they still accounted for 54 per cent of all asylum seekers. The number of Afghan asylum seekers also rose sharply in 2022 and 2023 (+56% and +41% respectively year-on-year), meaning that the proportion of people from Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan fell by just two percentage points to15 per cent.

If we compare the proportion of suspected offenders of individual nationalities with their proportion of all asylum seekers, two trends can be identified based on the nationalities summarised above within the group of main countries of asylum origin. In relative terms, Eritrean, Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers were less frequently suspected of offences in 2023 than their proportion of the total asylum-seeking population (29%). Their proportion of all suspected asylum seekers was 26 per cent. In contrast, asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria and Somalia were suspected of offences slightly more frequently than their proportion of the total population seeking protection. In 2023, they accounted for 16 per cent of all suspected asylum seekers, with their proportion of the asylum-seeking population corresponding to 15 per cent. As in previous reports, the group of asylum seekers from North African countries stands out: While they only consist of one per cent of the total asylum seeker population, they make up nine per cent of all crime suspects who are asylum seekers. The group of people from the Western Balkans is less numerous, but still overrepresented among all asylum seekers. While they account for three per cent of all asylum seekers, they make up five per cent of crime suspects who are asylum seekers. Ukrainian asylum seekers, on the other hand, are strongly underrepresented. While they make up 33 per cent of all asylum seekers, they account for only 12 per cent of all suspects. This is probably due, among other things, to the demographic composition of this group of asylum seekers, with women, children and older people disproportionately represented.[162]

The group of crime suspects who are asylum seekers is disproportionately male (83% of suspects). However, only 55 per cent of all asylum seekers in Germany are male.[163] In addition, the group of suspects is significantly younger than the average asylum seeker population. Around 57 per cent of crime suspects who are asylum seekers were under 30 years old. Compared to the previous year, there was an increase in the number of suspects who were asylum seekers in some age groups: The number of suspects among 14 to under 18-year-olds increased by 42 per cent compared to the previous year. At 41 per cent, the number of suspects over 60 rose at a similar rate.

Christ et al. (2018) show that asylum seekers with poor prospects of staying are more likely to commit criminal offences. One reason for this could be that they have no access to language and integration courses.[164] This type of trend is recognisable for 2023: The crime rate is higher than average among people from North African countries, while it is lower than average among people from Ukraine (see Figure 37).

Nationalities and socio-demographics of victims of criminal offences

The Federal Criminal Police Office recorded a total of 1.2 million victims of criminal offences in 2023 (+9% year-on-year). Victims are counted based on the fact that they have been victimised, i.e. if someone is the victim of multiple crimes, they are counted separately for each crime in the statistics. However, the Federal Criminal Police Office does not record the socio-demographic characteristics of victims for all criminal offences, but only for those that are directed against highly personal legal interests. One of the reasons for this is that some offences cannot be associated with one or more victims at the same time, such as in the case of property offences. Victims are recorded in the case of offences against life or

162 See Federal Statistical Office (2024). Gesellschaft – Ukraine, Wiesbaden.

163 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Bundeslagebild Kriminalität im Kontext von Zuwanderung. Bundeslagebild 2023, Wiesbaden.

164 See Christ et al. (2017). „All day waiting“: Konflikte in Unterkünften für Geflüchtete in NRW.

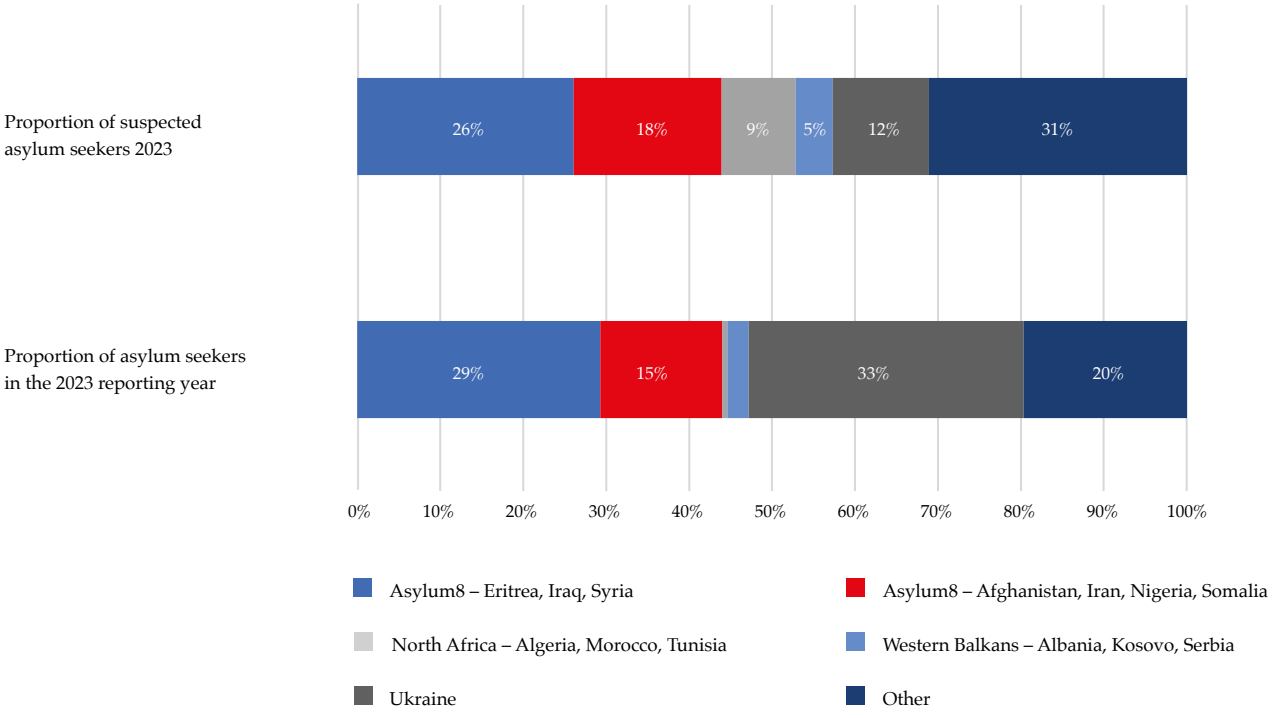
against sexual self-determination as well as in the case of crimes of violence and offences against personal freedom. Around 75 per cent of people who were victims of criminal offences in 2023 had German citizenship, while just under 25 per cent had foreign citizenship. Almost 22 per cent of the non-German victims were asylum seekers. There were 66,600 victims who were asylum seekers, an increase of 19 per cent compared to the previous year. In 75 per cent of cases in which asylum seekers were victims of a criminal offence, it was a case of bodily harm. This corresponds to 49,700 victims and a year-on-year increase of 19 per cent. Around 1,100 asylum seekers were victims of offences against sexual self-determination in 2023 (+20% compared to the previous year).

While the proportion of Ukrainians among all asylum seekers is

33%

they only make up 12% of asylum seekers suspected of crimes.

Figure 37:
Comparison of proportion of suspects with proportion of asylum seekers by nationality in 2023



Source: Federal Criminal Agency (2024). Bundeslagebild Kriminalität im Kontext von Zuwanderung.

Note: As the proportion of suspects of Pakistani nationality has no longer been shown separately in the federal crime statistics since the 2023 reporting year, they cannot be shown as part of the asylum8 countries in this chart.

The vast majority of victims were adults (75%). Almost 70 per cent of recorded asylum seekers who were victims of criminal offences were male. This proportion remained constant compared to the previous year. Only in the area of offences against sexual self-determination was the proportion of female victims significantly higher than the proportion of male victims at 88 per cent. In line with the main countries of origin of asylum seekers, around half of the victims had Syrian, Ukrainian or Afghan citizenship.[165]

The causal link between refugee migration and crime

In recent years, a number of scientific studies have investigated the causal relationship between migration and crime. For example, a recent study by the ifo Institute shows that although immigrants are overrepresented in the crime statistics for the years 2018 to 2023, it cannot be concluded from this that migration has a causal relationship with higher crime rates. Instead, the overrepresentation of immigrants can be explained by their choice of place of residence. Immigrants often move to places where crime rates are high, not least due to crime among Germans. This in turn increases the probability of them committing offences. The higher crime rates cannot then be attributed to a generally higher tendency to commit crime among immigrants. The same applies to the subgroup of asylum seekers.[166]

A number of other studies look specifically at the effect of migration of asylum seekers and crime. These studies mostly differentiate crime rates according to residence status (in the asylum procedure or recognised asylum seekers) and according to the short or long period after the arrival of the asylum seekers. There is no significant increase in crime rates among asylum seekers who are still in the asylum process. This applies to all offences with the exception of offences under immigration law that may arise solely as a result of the asylum seeker's stay in Germany.

If we focus on recognised asylum seekers, it becomes clear that asylum seekers often move to districts in which an above-average number of people from the same country of origin already live. For this subgroup, a causal relationship between migration and crime rates for property offences and fraud can be established. All other offence groups (such as sexual offences or robbery) remain unaffected by the number of recognised asylum seekers in a district. This suggests that it is primarily monetary reasons, combined with the often precarious living situation of asylum seekers, that lead to increased crime rates.[167] Lange and Sommerfeld (2024) focus on the years 2015 and 2016 and the effect of the high influx of asylum seekers in these years. In the year of the strong influx, no increase in the crime rate is recorded, but in the following year they observe a statistically significant effect of the influx of asylum seekers on the crime rate. At the same time, the authors find indications that this increase could be driven at least in part by a greater willingness to report offences.[168]

Huang and Kvasnicka (2019) address the question of who the victims of these increased crime rates are. Their analysis shows that even with a slight increase in overall crime, the number of German victims does not increase significantly. The increase in crime is thus mainly directed against other asylum seekers. This is also shown by the fact that crime rates do not rise when asylum seekers are housed in decentralised locations. [169] The fact that asylum seekers are disproportionately victimised by other asylum seekers is underlined by a study from Switzerland. It calculates that the probability of becoming a vic-

165 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Kriminalität im Kontext von Zuwanderung 2023, Wiesbaden.

166 See Alipour & Adema (2025). Steigert Migration die Kriminalität? Ein datenbasierter Blick, Munich.

167 See Dehos (2021). The refugee wave to Germany and its impact on crime.

168 See Lange & Sommerfeld (2024). Do refugees impact crime? Causal evidence from large-scale refugee immigration to Germany.

169 See Huang & Kvasnicka (2019). Immigration and Crimes against Natives: The 2015 Refugee Crisis in Germany.

4,400

people were suspected of trafficking foreign nationals in 2023.

17,500

people were victims of container trafficking.

tim of violence by asylum seekers is three times higher for asylum seekers than for Swiss nationals. Using detailed data on victims and perpetrators, this study also sheds light on one of the reasons for crime among asylum seekers: If asylum seekers were exposed to violence in their childhood (for example in the form of a civil war), they are significantly more likely to become criminal suspects than if they did not have to go through this experience. The team of authors attributes this observation to the psychological trauma caused by victimisation, the effects of economic hardship and social changes due to conflicts.[170]

Trends in human trafficking

In 2023, there were 380,200 cases of unauthorised border crossings (+17% compared to the previous year). In a total of 39,700 cases, there was suspicion of human trafficking, which represents an increase of 119 percent compared to the previous year. According to the Federal Criminal Police Office, human trafficking is defined as 'bringing about the unauthorised entry of a person into a country in which they have no residence status' (see box for a definition of the terms 'unauthorised entry' and 'unauthorised stay'). Assistance with entry can be provided in different ways. Human trafficking includes organising or providing transport for crossing the border, obtaining false travel documents or organising accommodation.[171] In 2023, 4,400 people were suspected of trafficking in foreign nationals (+27% compared to the previous year). The suspects included 750 Syrian citizens and 405 German citizens.

One type of human trafficking that has attracted particular attention due to media reports is container trafficking. This involves locking people in a closed-off space (e.g. a refrigerated lorry) to get past stages where there is a high probability of checks being carried out (e.g. in regions close to the border). In 2023, the authorities became aware of around 1,200 such cases. 17,500 people were trafficked through container trafficking.[172]

170 See Couttenier et al. (2019). The Violent Legacy of Conflict: Evidence on Asylum Seekers, Crime, and Public Policy in Switzerland.

171 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Bundeslagebild Schleusungskriminalität, Wiesbaden.

172 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Bundeslagebild Schleusungskriminalität, Wiesbaden.

87%

increase in the number of attacks against asylum centres in 2023 compared to the previous year.

Irregular migration

The term 'irregular migration' is being used more and more frequently in debates on migration. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees combines the offences of 'unauthorised entry' and 'unauthorised stay'.[173] The Federal Ministry of the Interior defines unauthorised entry as the entry of a foreigner who does not have the required residence permit and valid identity documents. If asylum seekers enter Germany via an external EU border without prior registration, they enter the country without authorisation if they do not have a visa. 'Irregular' or unlawful residents are people who are in Germany without a right of residence or toleration and without the knowledge of the authorities. Unlawful residence is a criminal offence in Germany and can be punished with a fine or imprisonment. If asylum seekers apply for asylum immediately after arriving in Germany, the criminal proceedings for unauthorised entry or residence are suspended and dropped if the application is successful.[174]

According to the Federal Criminal Police Office, there were almost 93,200 cases of unauthorised entry and 187,100 cases of unauthorised residence in 2023. Overall, the number of offences under immigration law rose by 32 per cent year-on-year to 298,900. [175]

173 See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2018). Irreguläre Migration, Nuremberg.

174 See Federal Ministry of the Interior and for Home Affairs (n.d.). Irreguläre Migration, Berlin.

175 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2023, Wiesbaden.

Trends in xenophobic hate crimes

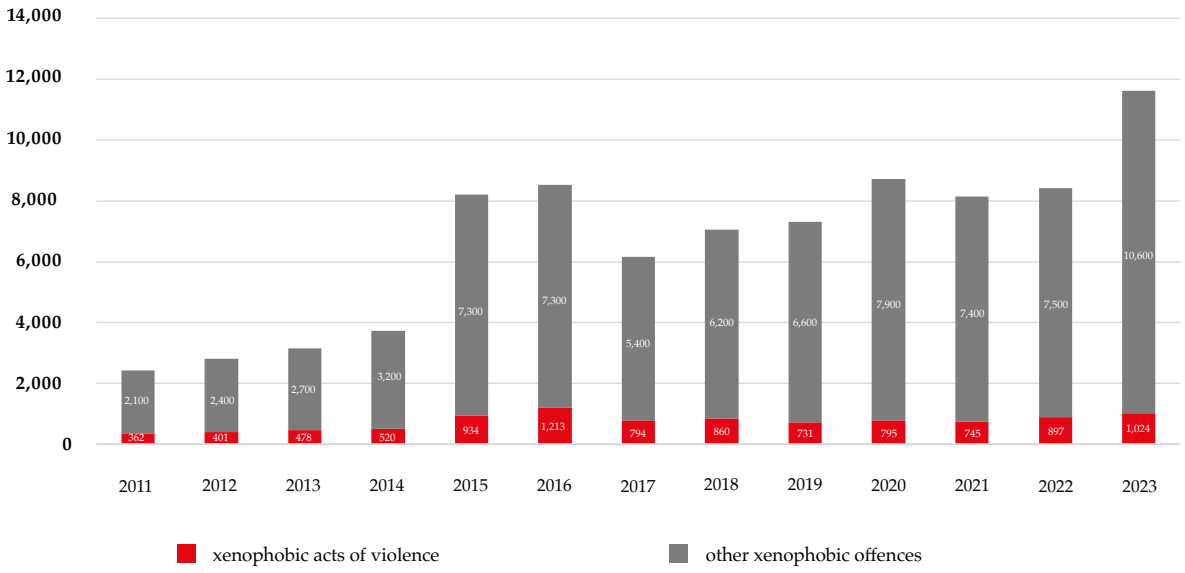
A comparison with the previous year shows a considerable increase in politically motivated xenophobic hate crime in 2023. This confirms the trend of recent years. The total number of xenophobic offences (violent offences and other offences) rose by 38 percent year-on-year to around 11,600 offences; 1,000 of these were xenophobically motivated acts of violence. In 2011, the number of cases of politically motivated xenophobic hate crime was still at 2,400. In 2023, a total of around 1,000 xenophobic acts of violence were committed (+14% compared to the previous year). The number of cases of other offences amounted to just under 10,600, which corresponds to an increase of 41 per cent compared to the previous year (see Figure 38). There has been an even greater increase in attacks on asylum centres: While 83 offences were recorded in 2022, this figure rose to 153 in 2023 (+87%). Fifteen of these offences were violent crimes, while the others involved damage to property, propaganda offences and incitement to hatred.[176]

The victimisation study conducted by the Federal Criminal Police Office in 2020 shows that people with a migration background feel significantly less safe on average than people without a migration background. Across all offence groups and nationalities, people with a migration background are more afraid of becoming victims of theft, assault or sexual harassment than people without a migration background. At the same time, people with a migration background consistently rate the police much more negatively than people without a migration background. This applies across all categories surveyed by the Federal Criminal Police Office ('friendliness', 'inconsiderateness', 'professionalism' and 'compassion'). [177]

176 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2024). Bundeslagebild Kriminalität im Kontext von Zuwanderung. Bundeslagebild 2023, Wiesbaden.

177 See Federal Criminal Police Office (2020). Sicherheit und Kriminalität in Deutschland 2020, Wiesbaden.

Figure 38:
Trends in xenophobic hate crimes in the area of politically motivated right-wing hate crime



Source: Federal Ministry of the Interior and for Home Affairs (2024). Übersicht „Hasskriminalität“: Entwicklung der Fallzahlen 2011-2023, eigene Darstellung.

A recent study by Riaz et al. (2024) looks at the causal relationship between crime committed by immigrants and the incidence of xenophobic hate crime. For the years 2015 to 2019, they investigate the extent to which the existence and reporting of a criminal offence committed by an immigrant has causally led to hate crime against asylum seekers in Germany. Their results show that the probability of hate crime in a district increases sharply if a criminal offence was recorded by an immigrant up to two weeks beforehand.[178]

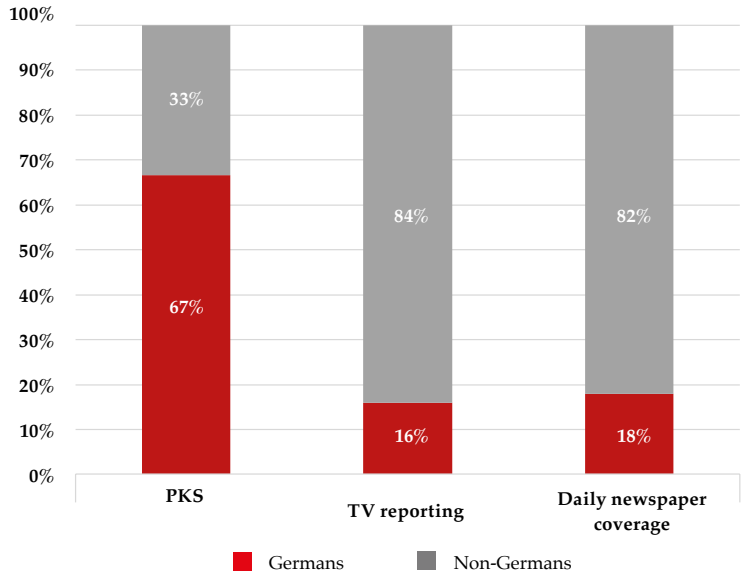
The role of the media

The role that crime plays in a society is influenced not just by its actual occurrence, but also by how it is reported. Reporting influences how society perceives crime, what social significance is attributed to it and what measures appear suitable for combating it. Hestermann (2023) regularly analyses reporting on crime in television and daily newspapers to illustrate how the media report on crime and, in particular, the origin of the perpetrators. As part of the study, all articles on violent crime published in the first quarter of a year in the main news, in tabloid television programmes and in national newspapers are collected. His main focus is on whether the media report on the origin of a perpetrator of a violent offence.

The role of media coverage can be analysed initially by examining how often the perpetrator's origin is mentioned in the respective reports. Compared to 2020, the perpetrator was men-

178 See Riaz, et al. Out-group Threat and Xenophobic Hate Crimes: Evidence of Local Intergroup Conflict between Immigrants and Natives.

Figure 39:
Comparison of the origin mentioned in the reporting of violence with the proportion of suspects in the PKS in 2023



Source: Federal Criminal Agency (2024). Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik; Hestermann (2023). Die Fieberkurve steigt. Description based on Ehlers (2025). So berichten Medien über Gewalttaten.

Note: In newspaper and TV reports, the origin of the perpetrator is not named in 63% and 71% of cases respectively. The basis for reporting in TV and daily newspapers is the reports in which the origin of the perpetrator was explicitly mentioned. In 2023, there were 269 of these kinds of TV reports and 376 newspaper articles.

tioned significantly less frequently in 2021. The origin of the perpetrator was mentioned in 14 per cent (television) and 30 per cent (daily newspapers) of the reports. This corresponds to a year-on-year decline of 17 per cent in TV news and 14 per cent in daily newspapers. In 2023, the origin of the perpetrators was again mentioned more frequently, namely in 30 per cent of television news items and 37 per cent of news items in daily newspapers.

In the second step, following Hestermann (2023), the report focusses only on those cases in which the origin was explicitly mentioned. Among these, the proportion of media reports in which German or non-German suspects were explicitly named can be compared with the respective proportions of suspects in the PKS. In the reporting in 2023 in which the suspect's origin was named, 84 per cent of the TV news and 82 per cent of the daily newspapers reported on non-German suspects. If one compares the reporting with the proportions of suspects in the PKS, it becomes clear that the reporting in no way corresponds to the distribution of citizenships. In fact, 67 per cent of all suspects have German citizenship (see Figure 39).

In other words: While according to the PKS there are 0.5 suspects of non-German nationality for every suspect of German nationality, TV reports on suspects of foreign nationality are five times more frequent and daily newspapers report on suspects of German nationality more than four times as often.[179] Due to the disproportionate mention of nationality for offenders that do not have German citizenship, it appears as if a disproportionate number of offences are committed by non-German persons, although this does not correspond to reality.

179 See Hestermann (2023). Die Fieberkurve steigt.

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WHO WE ARE: Malteser in Germany is a Catholic aid organisation and provider of inpatient health and social care facilities under the umbrella of the German Association of the Sovereign Malteser. In Germany, about 58,700 Maltese volunteers are involved in helping people in need – regardless of their religion, origin or political conviction. With over 40,000 full-time employees, Malteser are also one of the largest employers in health and social care. Founded in the 11th century, the Order of Malta is responsible for projects and activities in over 120 countries worldwide to support the needy and those in need of help.

What we do: Volunteers mostly work in civil defence and disaster protection, first-aid training, assisting the elderly, sick or disadvantaged people as well as youth support and international cooperation. There are also social enterprise services, including rescue services and patient transport, home emergency calls and meal services. Malteser operates hospitals, care facilities, schools and social institutions for young people, the sick and asylum seekers.

How we work: Today, Malteser fulfils its 950-year-old mission in a contemporary form that best meets the needs of people and the social conditions. Malteser provides all its services and facilities on a non-profit basis. All revenue generated flows back into maintaining and expanding the range of services.

'Nurturing, witnessing, and protecting the faith, and serving the poor and the sick'

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