



# **IW-Report 42/2020**

## **Making Tremendous Progress with Integration of Refugees**

A review five years after the great migration  
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Cologne, 1. September 2020

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**JEL-Classification:**

F22 – International Migration Movements

J15 – Economic Importance of Migrants

J21 – Employment Structures

## Summary

Although it has been more than five years now since the phase with the largest migration of refugees in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, more asylum seekers have still been coming to Germany over the last few years than at the beginning of the 2010s. In 2019, around 166,000 persons filed applications for asylum, as compared to only 49,000 in 2010. Many of the asylum cases in recent years have not yet been conclusively decided, which is primarily due to a large number of lawsuits filed in regard to the first-instance decisions of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees [Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF]. The number of persons with a protection status not yet definitively clarified totalled 266,000 on 31 December 2019, while only 57,000 cases had still not been decided by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Most of the refugees remaining in Germany have received a residence permit in the meantime, however. If the number of persons with temporarily granted protection status on account of an asylum case totalled 104,000 on 31 December 2014, it was almost ten times as many on 31 December 2019 at 976,000. If the regional distribution of asylum seekers on 31 December 2019 is taken into consideration, we find especially high percentages in the metropolitan areas of northwest Germany and especially low ones in the new German federal states (excluding Berlin) and Bavaria. However, the picture varies quite a bit depending on the country of origin. While many Syrians live in the Ruhr area and Saarland, Afghans are increasingly settling in the region around Hamburg and in Hesse, while Iraqis have made the region around Hanover their home.

The integration of refugees into the education system as well as the labour market has moved ahead rapidly over the last few years. Accordingly, the number of social-security-paying employed trainees from the eight countries the asylum seekers have left – Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria – climbed roughly eightfold in the period between December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2019, from 6,800 to 54,600, and the employment rate of persons from these countries has increased, after a drop due to the sharp rise in refugees between April 2016 and November 2019, from 10.6 per cent to 30.8 per cent. However, the situation in Germany has again worsened somewhat after the corona pandemic this year. Even if it is not possible to foresee how long the pandemic's negative impact on the labour market will last, it can be assumed that the (labour) market integration of refugees will return to the positive trend in recent years over the long term. In the years ahead, employment prospects should improve in and of themselves, since more persons are leaving the labour market than entering it due to demographic change. In 2017, there were roughly one quarter fewer 15- to 24-year-olds than 55- to 64-year-olds living in Germany.

## 1 Introduction

5 September will mark the fifth anniversary of the day when Chancellor Merkel announced to the refugees stranded in Hungary that they could enter Germany, which was the main trigger for the greatest immigration of refugees in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. However, this involved more a humanitarian reaction to the circumstances at that time than an intentional decision by the federal government to define a future direction. The conflict in Syria had led to a sharp rise in the number of persons seeking asylum in Europe, and Turkey had facilitated their crossing to Greek islands. At that time, the Greeks, in turn, brought these asylum seekers from the islands to poorly equipped camps on the mainland, from where many of the refugees headed toward central and northern Europe. This was possible since the borders to and between the Balkan countries not belonging to the EU on the so-called “Balkan route” were open at this time, so the refugees were not stopped until they reached Hungary. On the EU level, a major dispute broke out on the treatment of the refugees, and Hungary was heavily criticised for its very restrictive approach, especially by the German federal government. At the same time, the German public had a very positive view of admitting refugees during the summer of 2015 (Herbert / Schönhagen, 2020). The end of the great migration of refugees was marked by the closing of the borders on the Balkan route at the end of February 2016 and by the EU-Turkey Agreement, which entered into force in March and obligated Turkey to prevent refugees from crossing into Greece. However, in the years that followed, more refugees still came to Germany than before the great migration (see part 2).

Against this backdrop, it is very difficult to make precise statements about where the persons arriving in Germany during the great migration of refugees are today, since many of the relevant statistics only contain their citizenship and, if need be, their legal status, but not the date on which the asylum seekers reached Germany. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees is also of only limited use for such an analysis, since this survey has tracked persons arriving since the beginning of 2013 (Brücker et al., 2017). At the same time, the overall developments are more important than the situation with this specific group for an analysis of the current status of refugee integration and a determination of the needs for action. That is why all refugees and not only the ones arriving in Germany between the summer of 2015 and spring of 2016 are considered in the following analyses. If only these refugees were examined, the situation would probably be even better, particularly with regard to labour market integration, since this improves the longer a refugee is in the country (Brücker et al., 2020).

The study consists of four parts. It starts in part two with the changes in the refugee numbers, broken down by legal status and region of origin, followed by their regional distribution across Germany in the third part. The fourth part then addresses refugees’ qualifications and attainment of qualifications before closing with their situation on the labour market. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a brief outlook is provided on the expected impact of the corona pandemic.

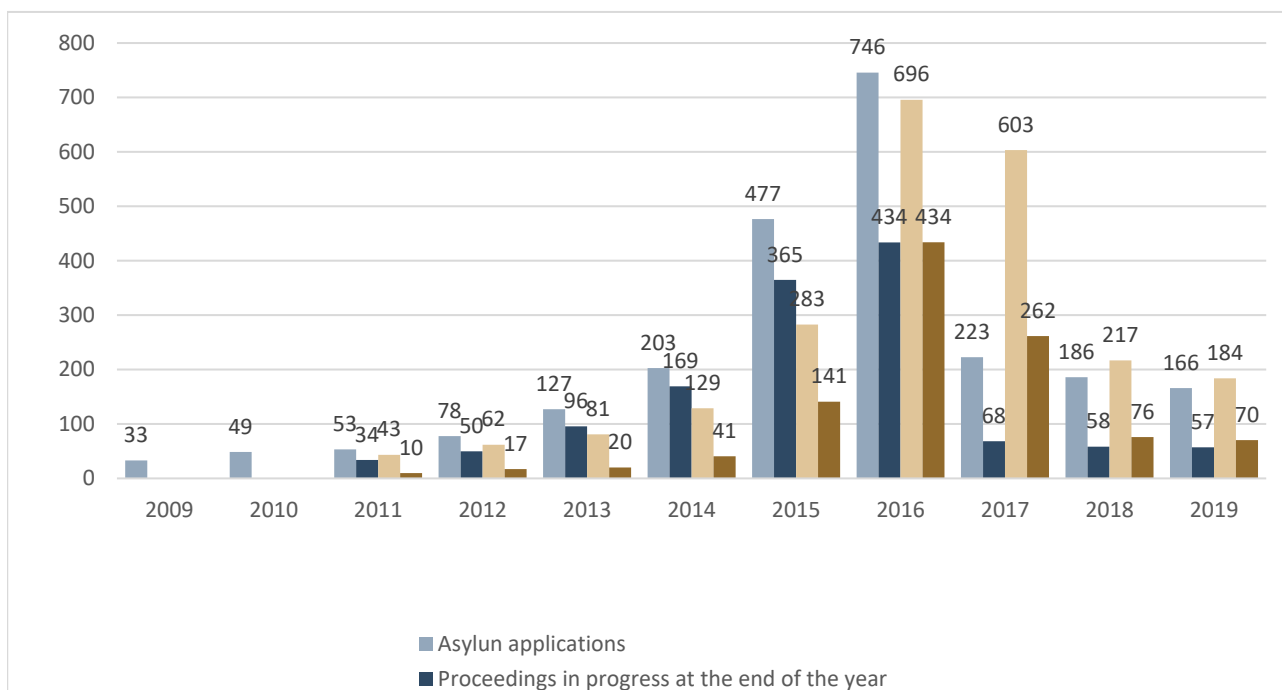
## 2 Development of refugee numbers in Germany

It is possible to gain a good understanding of the changes in the migration of refugees to Germany over the last few years by consulting the number of asylum applicants as shown in Figure

2-1. However, it is necessary to consider that family members who afterwards join persons granted refugee protection do not go through the asylum process and their residence status in Germany is also not attributed to refugee protection. For this reason, they are not included here or in any other statistics broken down by legal status. Likewise, persons who came to Germany as part of relocation or resettlement programmes and other forms of targeted admission of refugees from abroad do not have to file an asylum application. Furthermore, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees responsible for the asylum cases was overwhelmed during the great migration of refugees so that many persons arriving in 2015 could not submit their asylum application until 2016 (Geis, 2018). Apart from these two years, the date of migration and application for asylum should coincide for the most part. Although there was a sharp decline in asylum applications, from 223,000 to 166,000, between 2017 and 2019, this figure is still high in comparison to the late 2000s and early 2010s when far fewer than 100,000 applications were filed per year. To find a number higher than the level in 2014, it is necessary to go back to 1996 (BAMF, 2020a).

**Figure 2-1: Change in asylum cases**

Numbers in 1000s

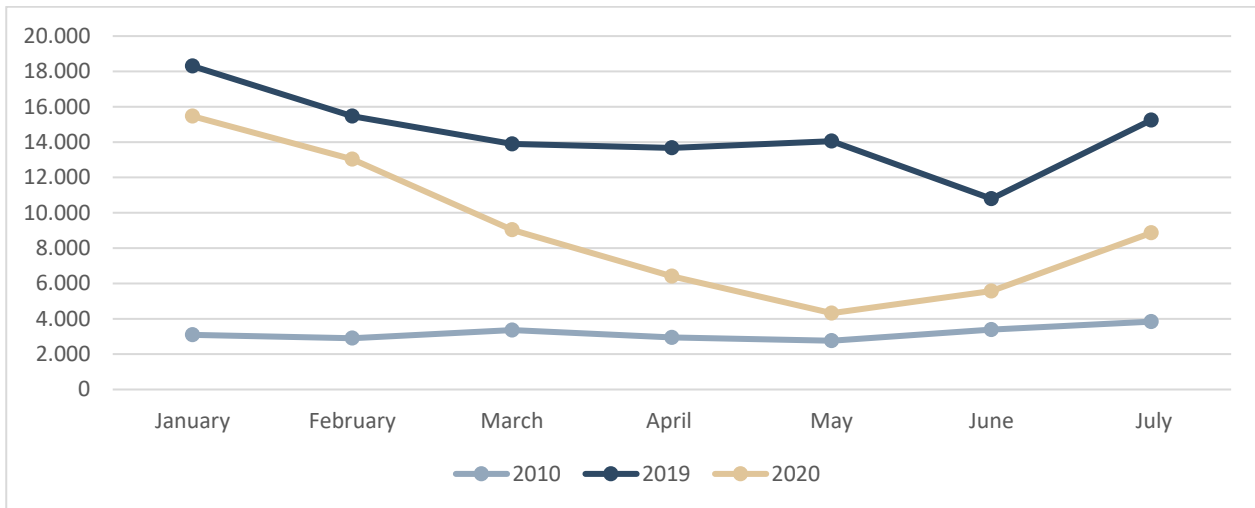


Source: BAMF, 2020a; author's own calculations

When the borders were closed to protect the further spread of the corona pandemic in the spring of this year, it was very difficult for refugees to come to Germany. Accordingly, the number of asylum applications between February and May fell sharply, as can be seen in Figure 2-2. Nonetheless, the figure in May was still higher than 10 years ago, which makes it clear how much the long-term situation has changed relative to the time before the great migration of refugees. Since May, the number of asylum applicants has been rising, but has not reached the level of the previous year by any means. Two scenarios are conceivable over the next few months. On the one hand, there could be a sharp rise in the number of asylum applicants when the Corona

protection measures are eased in Europe and in the neighbouring countries and it becomes possible for persons who were stopped on their way to Germany to continue their trip. On the other hand, the numbers could also remain at a lower level, since they were already declining beforehand.

**Figure 2-2: Development of asylum applications during the corona pandemic**



Source: Eurostat, 2020; BAMF 2020a

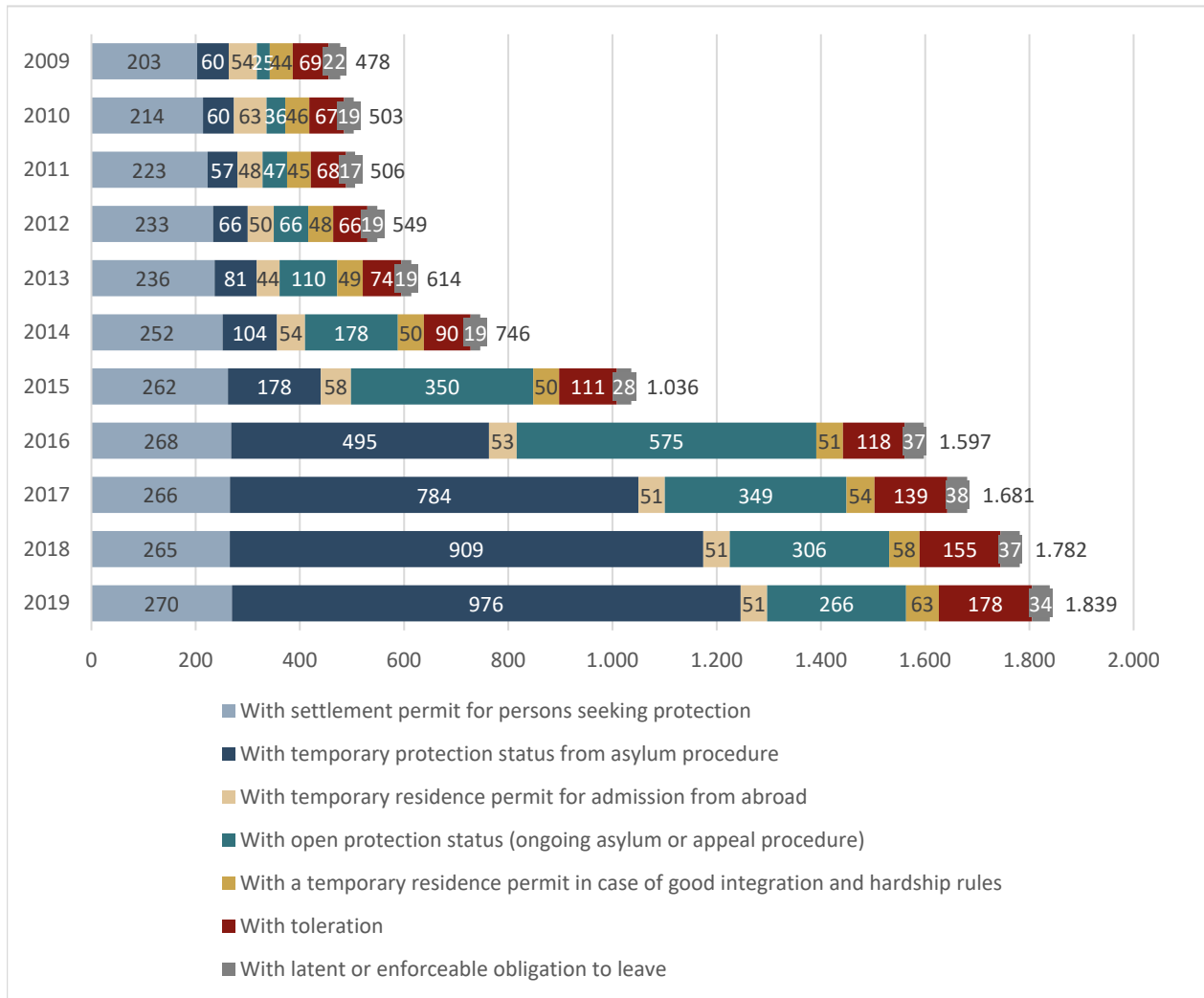
In addition to the asylum applications, the figures on the asylum cases closed and affirmed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in each given year can be seen in Figure 2-1. The figure also shows the cases still open on 31 December of a given year, which, however, do not include the pending legal proceedings at the administrative courts. Their number was 214,000 on 31 December 2018 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019), more than three times as high as the 58,000 cases that the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees had not yet decided upon. As shown in the following, Germany has a much larger number of persons living in the country with a temporary residence permit [*Aufenthaltsgestattung*], which is granted in the case of a not yet clarified protection status, than would be expected on the basis of the figures from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. The number of persons granted protection status by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees reached its peak of 434,000 right after the great migration of refugees in 2016 and has now fallen to 70,000 in 2019, which corresponds to a share of just 38.3 per cent of the closed cases. However, decisions by the administrative courts may still cause substantial changes here. The number of deportations and (recorded) voluntary departures of rejected asylum applicants totalled 22,000 and 38,000 respectively in 2019 (German Parliament, 2020), which is far below the number of rejected asylum cases, as was the case in previous years (Geis, 2018a).

Foreigners who reside in Germany for a longer period of time and are known to the authorities are entered in a central register of foreigners with their respective residence status. The German Federal Statistical Office has used these entries for some years to generate statistics on persons seeking protection, with the figures allowing for a fairly precise understanding of the changes in

the refugee numbers in Germany. The corresponding numbers broken down by legal status can be seen in Figure 2-3.

**Figure 2-3: Change in the number of persons seeking protection by legal status**

Numbers in 1000s, as of 31 December in each case



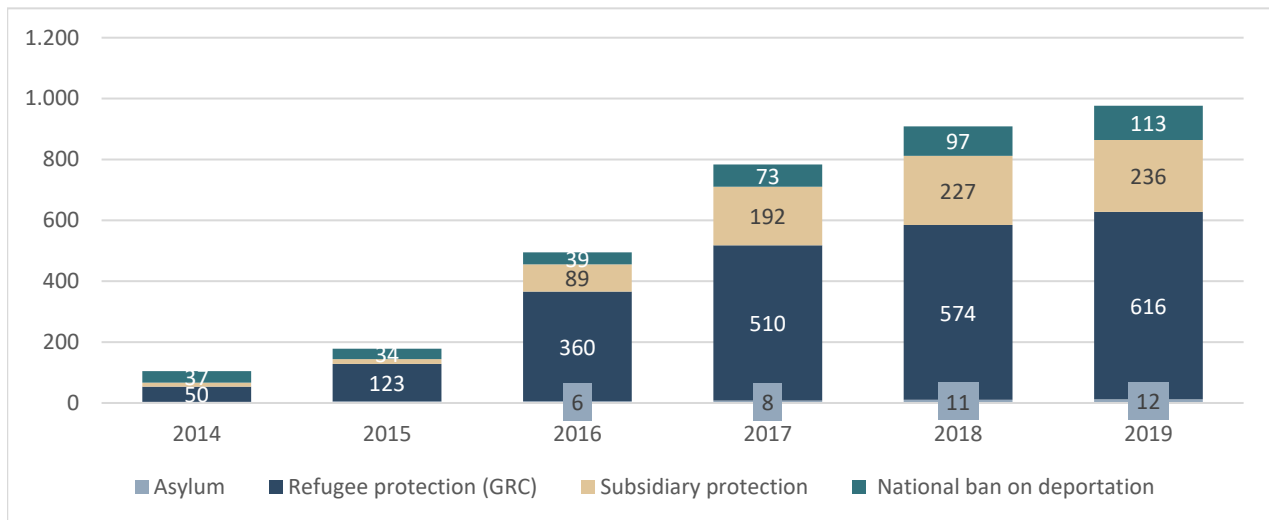
Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020a; author's own calculations

However, some remarks also need to be made on these data. It should be noted that a temporary residence permit [*Duldung*] as well as a latent or enforceable obligation to leave can result from not only a rejected asylum application, but also the loss of a previously existing residence permit outside of the humanitarian sphere (e.g. training, education), and accordingly this group does not consist of solely refugees. By contrast, refugees who have stayed in Germany for a longer period of time can, under some circumstances, also have a settlement permit [*Niederlassungserlaubnis*] that was granted without the application of the special provisions for refugees (Section 26 of the German Residence Act [*Aufenthaltsgesetz, AufenthG*] and is not included here as a result. If the refugees are naturalised, they also drop out of the statistics.

In recent years, the number of persons granted temporary protection status in an asylum case has risen in particular. If it totalled 104,000 on 31 December 2014, it was almost ten times as many on 31 December 2019 at 976,000. By contrast, the total number of persons with a temporary residence permit [*Duldung*] or latent and enforceable obligations to leave has roughly doubled from 109,000 on 31 December 2014 to 212,000 on 31 December 2019, and the number of settlement permits [*Niederlassungserlaubnis*] for persons seeking protection, fixed-term residence permits [*befristete Aufenthaltstitel*] for admission from abroad and fixed-term residence permits for good integration and in cases of hardship have only changed slightly in comparison to the overall development. The number of persons with open protection status has declined sharply since 2016, but was still at a high level of 266,000 on 31 December 2019. In addition to this, persons with temporarily granted protection status from an asylum case were differentiated according to the specific legal framework, as can be seen in Figure 2-4. Most of them continue to enjoy refugee status in accordance with the Geneva Convention on Refugees (GCR, Section 3 of the Asylum Act [*Asylgesetz, AsylG*]). In recent years, however, there has been a sharp rise in the number of persons entitled to subsidiary protection. They are in a much worse position, particularly with regard to family reunification.

**Figure 2-4: Persons with temporary protection status due to asylum case by type**

Numbers in 1000s, as of 31 December in each case



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020a; author's own calculations

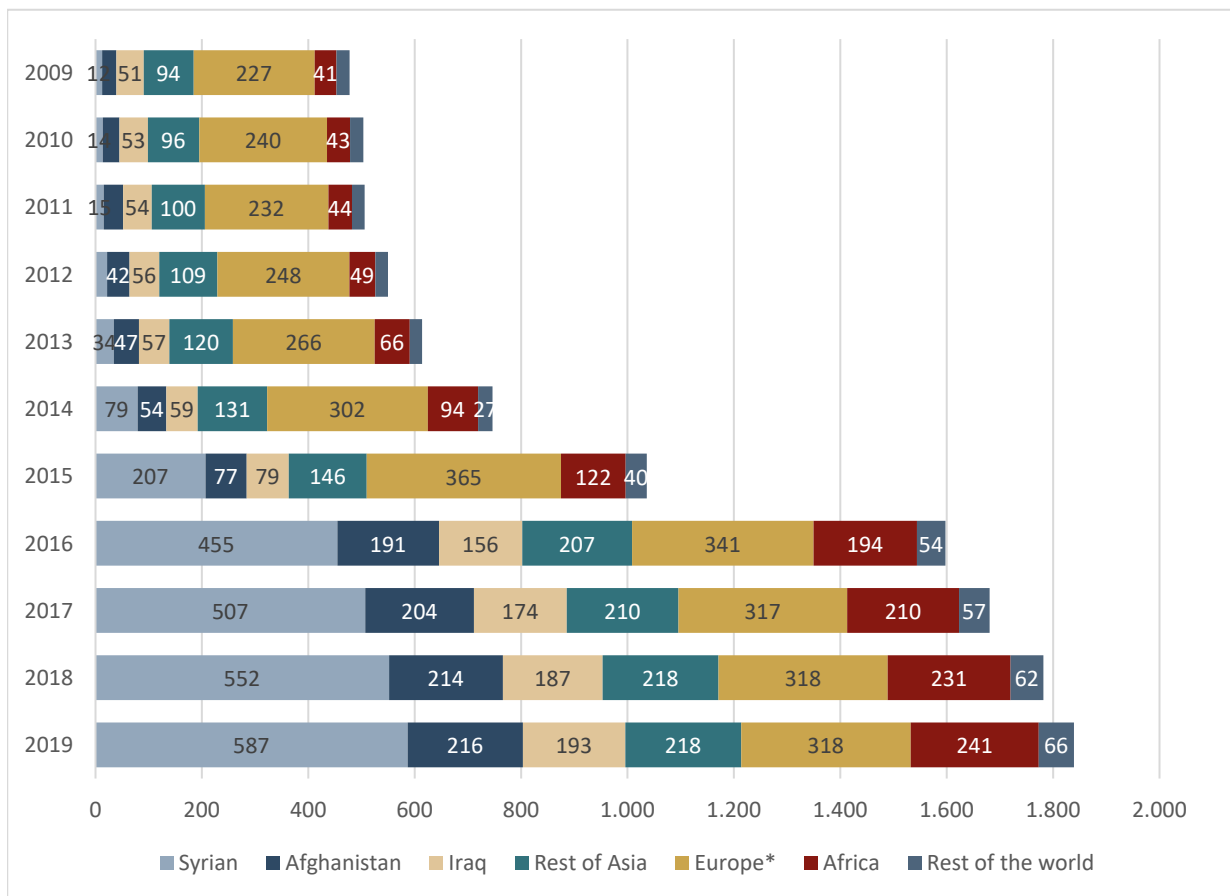
Broken down by countries of origin, Syrians accounted for 587,000 or 31.9 per cent on 31 December 2019, by far the largest group of persons seeking protection. They are followed by Afghans who totalled 216,000 or 11.8 per cent, and in third place were Iraqis with 193,000 or 10.5 per cent. Far behind these groups were Iranians with 73,000 or 3.9 per cent, Turks with 67,000 or 3.7 per cent, Russians with 65,000 or 3.5 per cent and Eritreans with 62,000 or 3.4 per cent. If the countries with shares below 10 per cent are combined into continents, the numbers by continent can be seen in Figure 2-5. In Europe, which also includes Turkey and Russia, 140,000 or 7.6 per cent of the total amount are attributable to the Western Balkan countries and 111,000 or 6.0 per cent to the non-EU members in Eastern Europe. In the case of Africans, the largest amount comes from northern Africa south of the Sahara. With 138,000, more than half of them



come from three countries: Eritrea, Nigeria and Somalia. In the rest of Asia, roughly half or 101,000 are accounted for by Iran and Pakistan (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020b, author's own calculations). These five countries together with Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan make up the group of (non-European) refugee countries of origin that is often used for analyses on the situation of refugees if there is no information on the legal status of foreigners in the statistics, as is also the case in parts 4 and 5 here.

### Figure 2-5: Change in persons seeking protection by regions of origin

Numbers in 1000s, as of 31 December in each case



\*Including Russia and Turkey

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020a; author's own calculations

A look at the changes in the numbers of persons seeking protection from various regions of origin over the last few years shows that by far the greatest increase is among Syrians. Accordingly, their number has risen more than sevenfold from 79,000 on 31 December 2014 to 587,000 on 31 December 2019. Afghans and Iraqis roughly quadrupled and the number of Africans climbed around two and half times, which is also a very dynamic development for the short span of only five years. By contrast, persons from Europe seeking protection have become a special case, as their number has declined since 31 December 2015, which should be viewed in the context of the change in the migration policy of the German federal government with respect to the Western Balkan countries (Geis, 2018b).

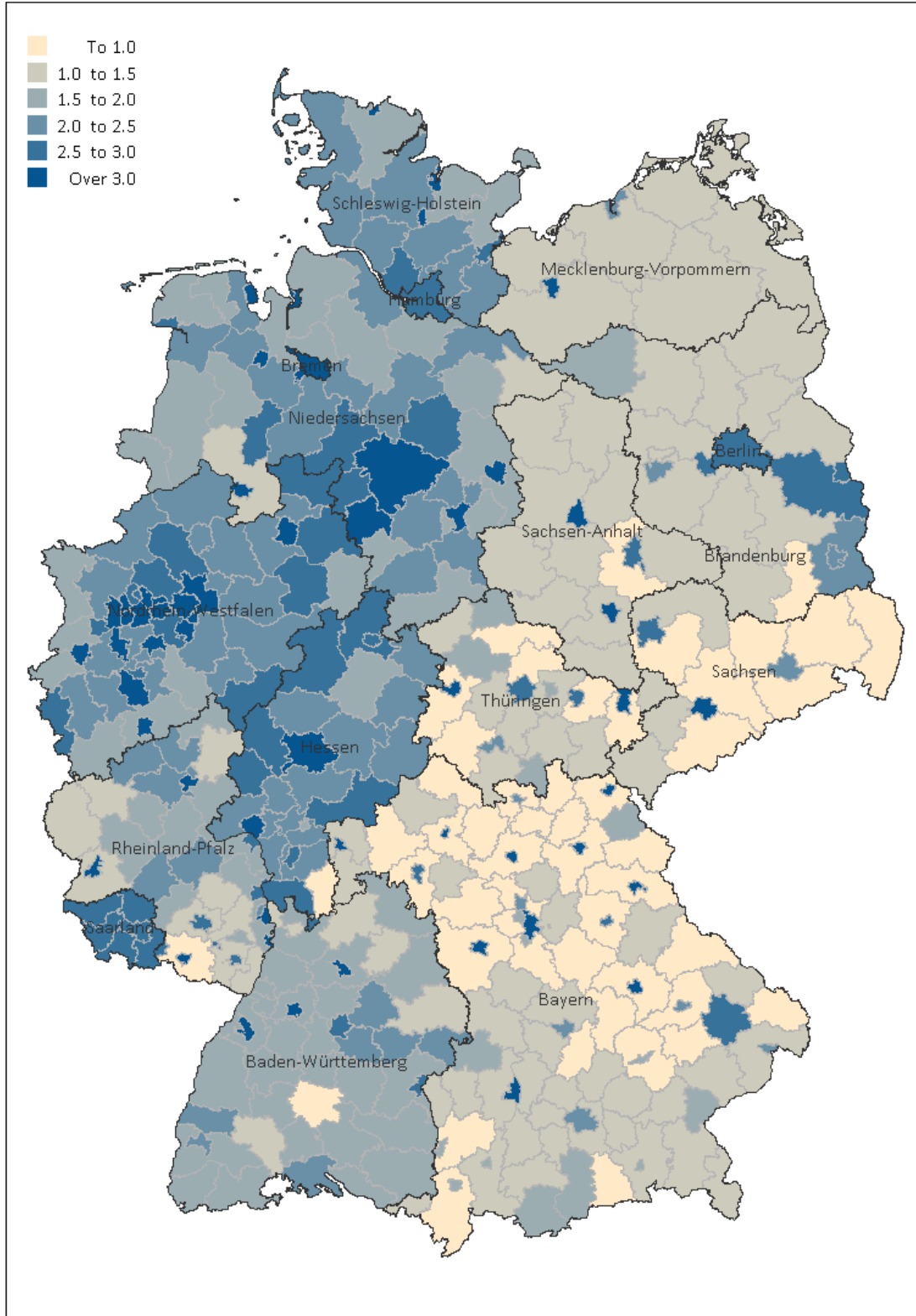
### 3 Regional distribution of refugees

The Federal Statistical Office's statistics on persons seeking protection show not only the developments of the figures overall, but also the distribution of refugees across the individual municipalities in Germany. However, a comparison of the absolute figures in this case is less meaningful, since the sizes of the municipalities in the individual states differ widely, even with a similar settlement structure. That is why each share of persons seeking protection as a percentage of the total population on 31 December 2019 is shown in the following figures. The city of Kassel, which does not have municipalities, and the district of Kassel, as well as the city of Cottbus, which also does not have municipalities, and the district of Spree-Neiße and Saarland assume a special place here. They each have only one shared immigration authority and no statistics on foreigners broken down by municipalities, so average values had to be reported in these cases.

If the shares of all persons seeking protection as a percentage of the population, as shown in Figure 3-1, are considered, especially high figures are found in the metropolitan centres of northwest Germany and low ones in the rural areas of Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony. The percentages for the states and urban regions as a whole, which can be seen in Table 3-1, also confirm that substantially fewer persons seeking protection live in the new federal states (not including Berlin) and Bavaria. Accordingly, the figures in these areas are less than 1.8 per cent as compared to a national average of 2.2 per cent. If a differentiation is made by the legal status of the persons seeking protection, there is a sharp urban-rural and northwest-southeast divide in regard both to persons with a temporary protection status due to an asylum case and persons seeking protection with a permanent protection status (Figure 3-2). By contrast, shares of persons seeking protection with an open protection status are also relatively high in large parts of Baden-Württemberg and Brandenburg, while there are fewer clear regional differences in the case of persons with a temporary residence permit [*Duldung*] as well as latent and enforceable obligations to leave, except for low percentages in Saarland and North Bavaria. If persons seeking protection are broken down by the three most important countries of origin, big differences are seen. While many Syrians live in the Ruhr area and Saarland, Afghans are increasingly settling in the region around Hamburg and in Hesse, while Iraqis have made the region around Hanover their home. Persons seeking protection from Africa, whose regional distribution was also illustrated in Figure 3-3 in the context of the relatively sharp rise in their total number, are primarily located in Hesse and southern Bavaria. These regional structures should become even more pronounced over the next few years, since ethnic communities develop in the places where many refugees from a given country of origin have settled, encouraging the immigration and integration of other persons from the given country of origin (Massey et al. 1998).

**Figure 3-1: Regional distribution of persons seeking protection**

In percent, as of 31 December 2019



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020b; author's own calculations

**Table 3-1: Percentages of persons seeking protection in the states**

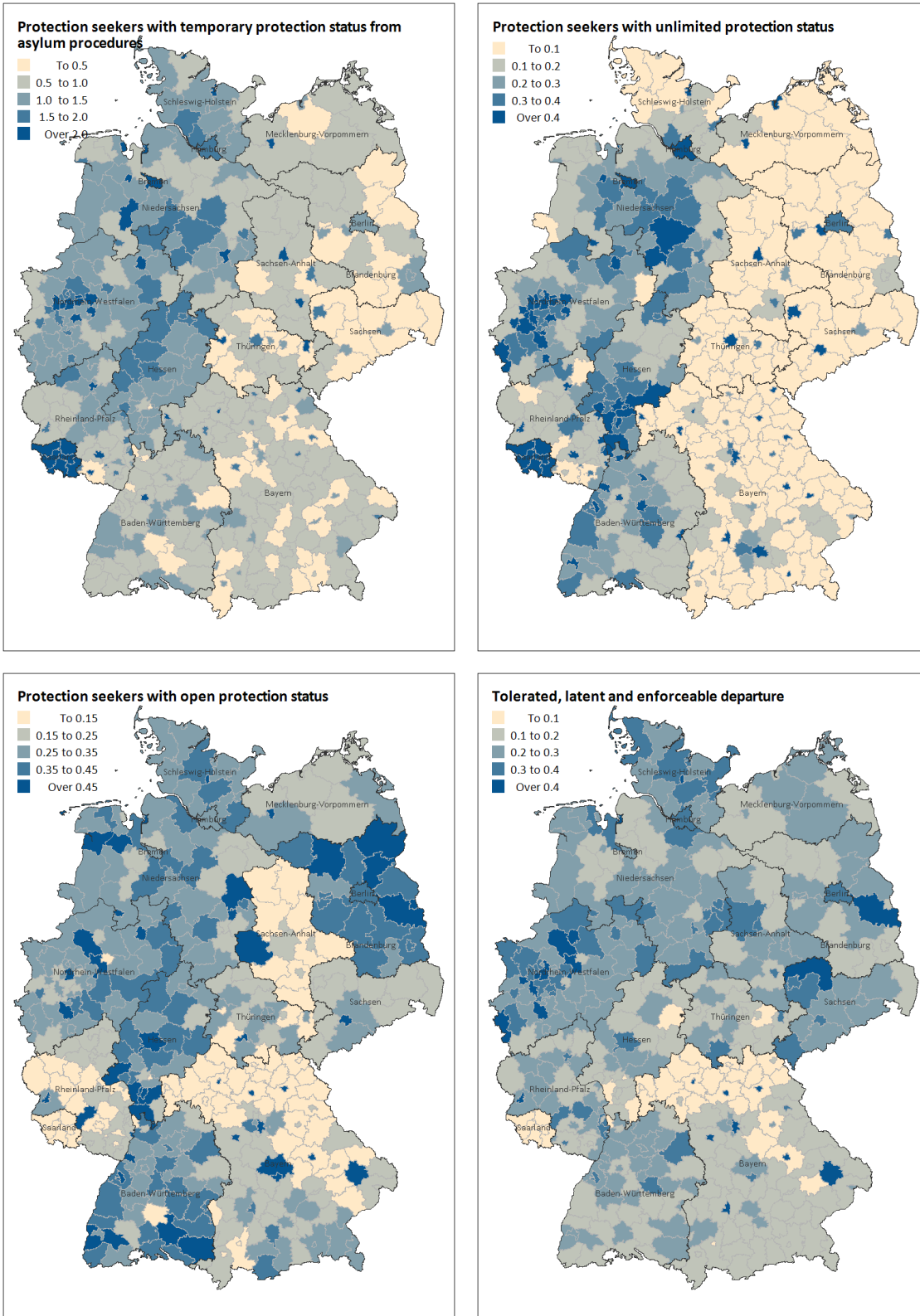
In percent, as of 31 December 2019

State / Region	Per-centage	State / Region	Percent-age
<b>Germany</b>	<b>2.21</b>	<b>Lower Saxony</b>	<b>2.48</b>
<b>Baden-Württemberg</b>	<b>1.89</b>	Statistical region – Braunschweig	2.34
Administrative district – Stuttgart	1.97	Statistical region – Hanover	3.12
Administrative district – Karlsruhe	1.80	Statistical region – Lüneburg	2.05
Administrative district – Freiburg	1.93	Statistical region – Weser-Ems	2.32
Administrative district – Tübingen	1.81	<b>North Rhine-Westphalia</b>	<b>2.76</b>
<b>Bavaria</b>	<b>1.62</b>	Administrative district – Dusseldorf	3.00
Administrative district – Upper Ba- varia	1.63	Administrative district – Cologne	2.52
Administrative district – Lower Ba- varia	1.35	Administrative district – Münster	2.59
Administrative district – Oberpfalz	1.45	Administrative district – Detmold	2.72
Administrative district – Upper Fran- conia	1.63	Administrative district – Arnsberg	2.85
Administrative district – Central Franconia	1.94	<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	<b>2.02</b>
Administrative district – Lower Fran- conia	1.70	Former administrative district – Ko- blenz	2.07
Administrative district – Schwaben	1.55	Former administrative district – Trier	1.87
<b>Berlin</b>	<b>2.78</b>	Former adm. dist. – Rheinhessen-Pfalz	2.02
<b>Brandenburg</b>	<b>1.61</b>	<b>Saarland</b>	<b>2.95</b>
<b>Bremen</b>	<b>4.24</b>	<b>Saxony</b>	<b>1.49</b>
<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>2.99</b>	Former administrative district – Chem- nitz	1.40
<b>Hesse</b>	<b>2.50</b>	Former administrative district – Dres- den	1.27
Administrative district – Darmstadt	2.42	Former administrative district – Leipzig	1.95
Administrative district – Gießen	2.81	<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	<b>1.75</b>
Administrative district – Kassel	2.49	<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	<b>2.44</b>
<b>Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>Thuringia</b>	<b>1.54</b>

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020b; author's own calculations

**Figure 3-2: Regional distribution by status of persons seeking protection**

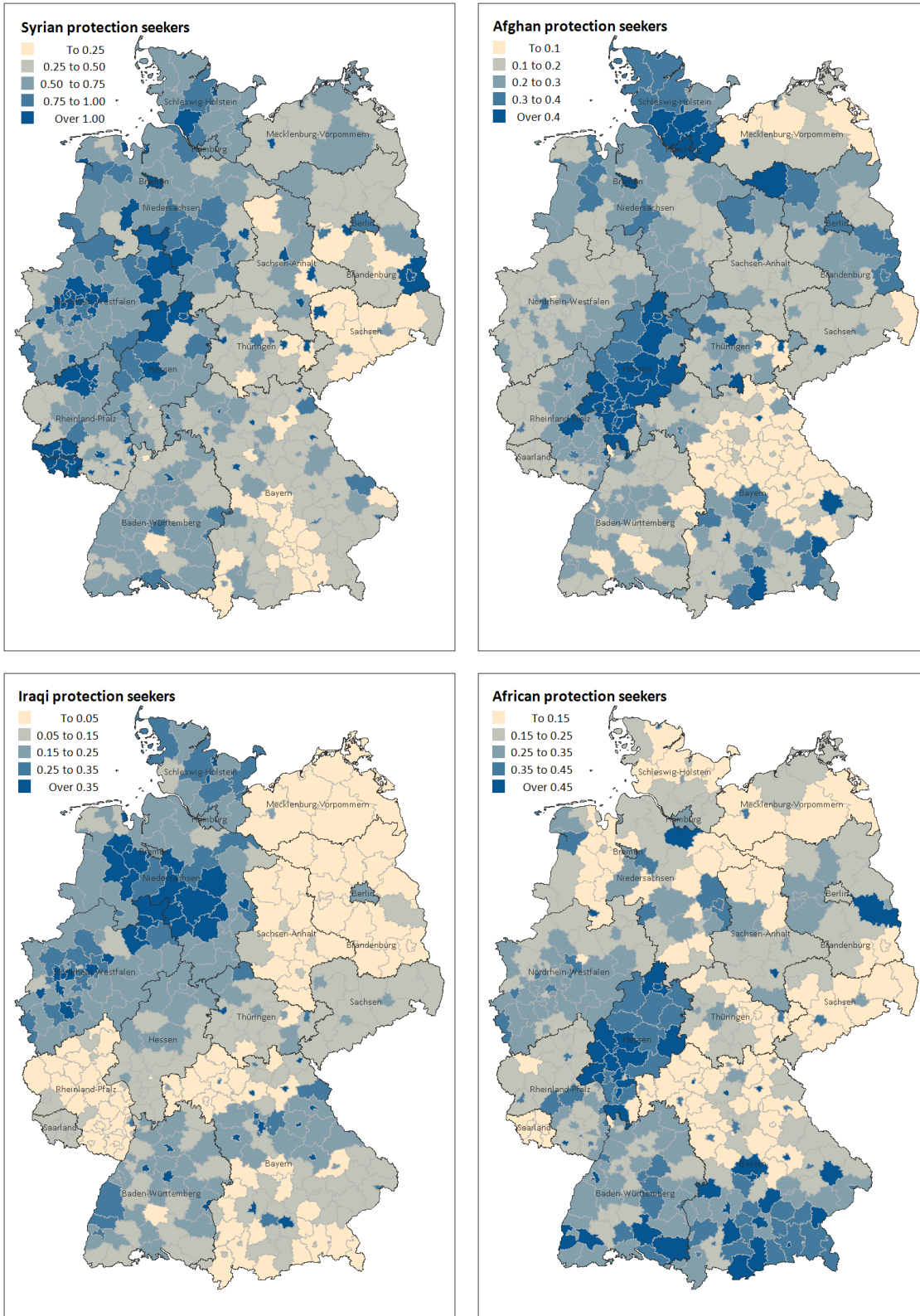
In percent, as of 31 December 2019



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020b; author's own calculations

### Figure 3-3: Regional distribution by region of origin of persons seeking protection

In percent, as of 31 December 2019



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020a, b; author's own calculations

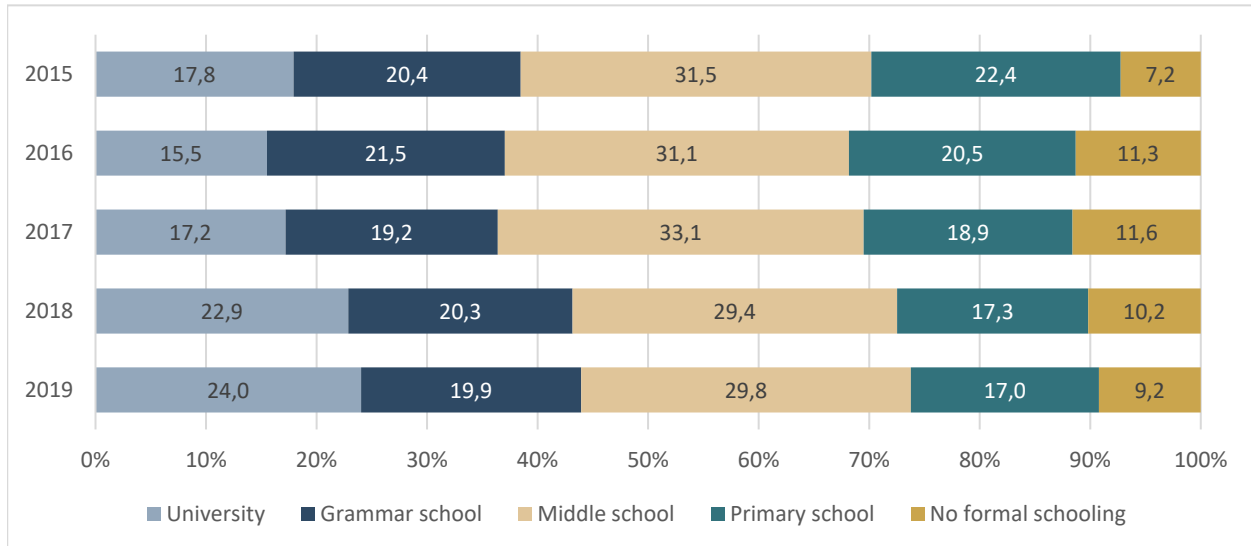


## 4 Refugees' qualifications and attainment of qualifications

The acquisition of the qualifications required for successful participation in the labour market and in society is a central precondition for the successful integration of refugees. The required form of qualification depends greatly on the knowledge and skills brought from the homelands, however. In this regard, a relatively precise picture is provided by the data on so-called "Social Components" ("Sozialen Komponenten", SoKo), which are collected on a voluntary basis by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees when the asylum application is submitted. However, only the educational institutions attended and not the degrees obtained are recorded here. This makes a big difference, as is seen in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees, which annually tracks the integration process of refugees and their families arriving between 2013 and 2016 and accordingly does not include the persons arriving in recent years on a representative basis. According to the survey, 17 per cent had attended a university in their homeland and 10 per cent had an academic degree. 40 per cent went to a secondary school that extends beyond the lower level (roughly 10-13 year-old pupils) and 35 per cent had also completed such an upper level secondary school. 25 per cent had attended no more than a primary school and 39 per cent had not graduated from any school (Brücker et al. 2017). In recent years, the educational background of the refugees coming to Germany, as Figure 4-1 shows, has improved substantially. Accordingly, the percentage of asylum applicants who had already attended a secondary school or university – even if they do not have a degree, at least they have familiarity with the fundamentals for an academic or more complex professional education or training – rose from 37.0 per cent in 2016 to 43.9 per cent in 2019. At the same time, the percentage of those who had attended no more than a primary school and who can be expected to have major gaps in their basic education, if not a lack of reading, writing and mathematical skills, totalled 26.2 per cent in 2019 and were still above one-quarter.

**Figure 4-1: Highest educational institution attended by asylum applicants**

Adults, in percent



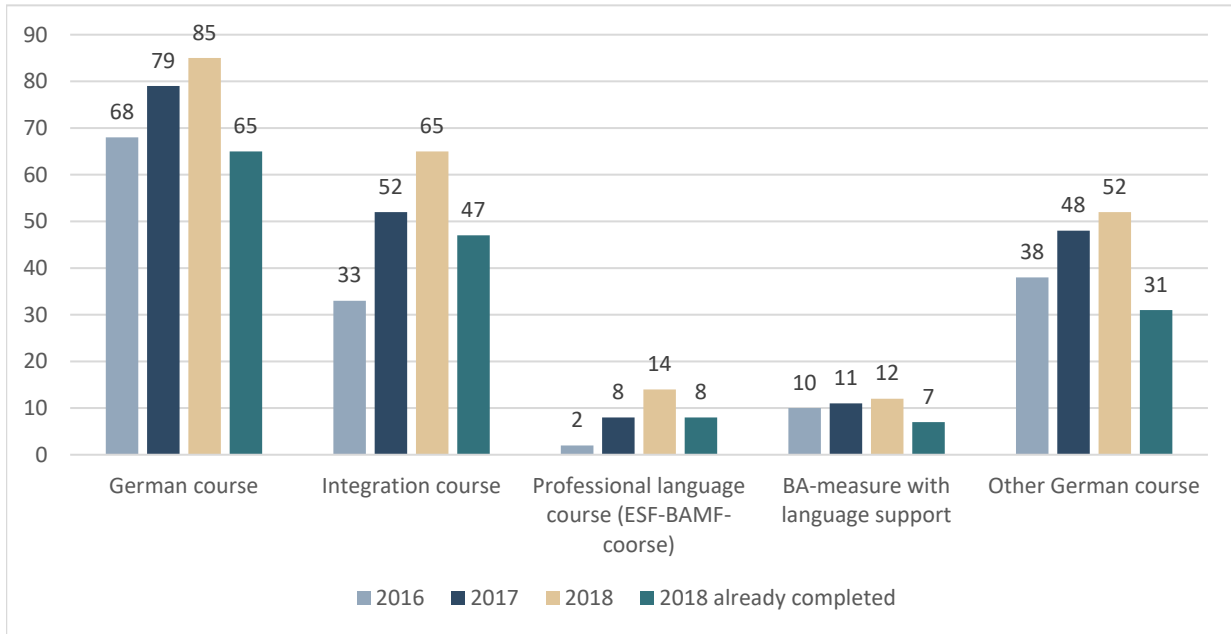
Sources: Heß, 2019, 2020; Neske, 2017; Rich, 2016; Schmidt, 2018;

The first step toward qualification, which almost all refugees have to go through, is learning German. In 2015 only 1.8 per cent of asylum applicants had knowledge of German and 28.1 per cent of English (Rich, 2016), which can be used as a communication language in Germany, if need be. The findings in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey show that most of the persons arriving between 2013 and 2016 had completed a German course by 2018. However, a total of 15 per cent, a relatively large number, had not begun any language course yet and thus failed to take this first step toward integration. Furthermore, the findings suggest that language training received usually involves only a course in the fundamentals, as the integration course in particular should have dealt with, and further support in the area of vocational language training rarely took place through 2018. However, the development of the numbers on participants in integration courses and vocation-related language courses supported by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, as seen in Figure 4-3, shows that more and more immigrants, who are not necessarily refugees, increasingly began to use this form of language support over the last two years, while the integration courses reached their peak in 2016. In this context, it should be assumed that many of the refugees arriving in recent years are still in the phase of learning the language and have not yet reached the point where they can commence with vocational training or professional activity.



### Figure 4-2: Refugee participation in language courses

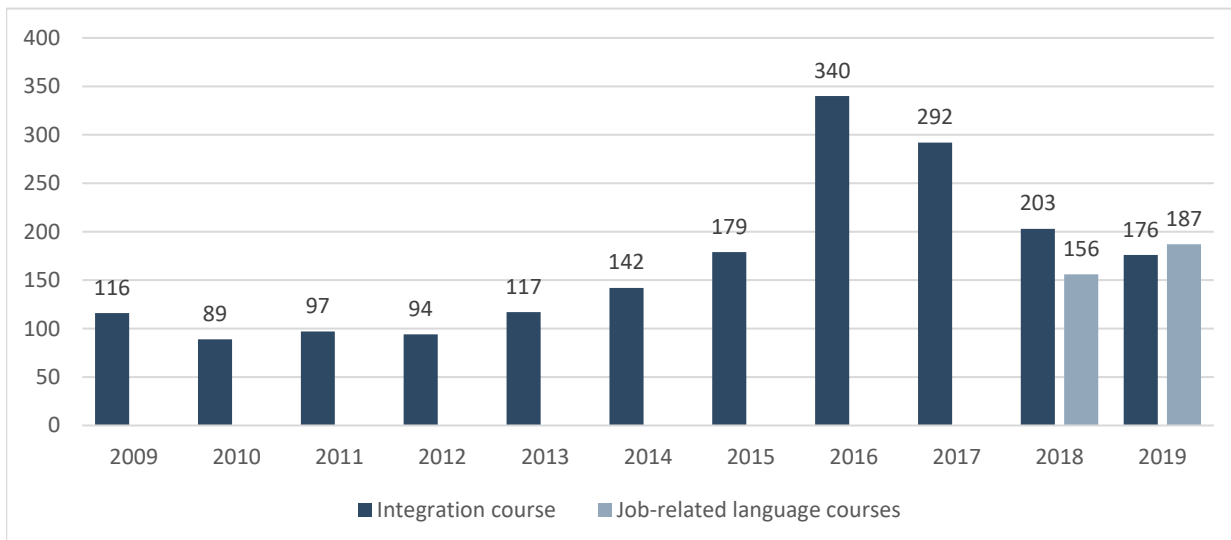
Findings from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees, current or past participation, in percent



Source: de Pavia-Leiro et al., 2020

### Figure 4-3: Integration courses and vocation-related language courses

New participants, numbers in 1000s



Source: BAMF, 2019, 2020a, b; author's own calculations

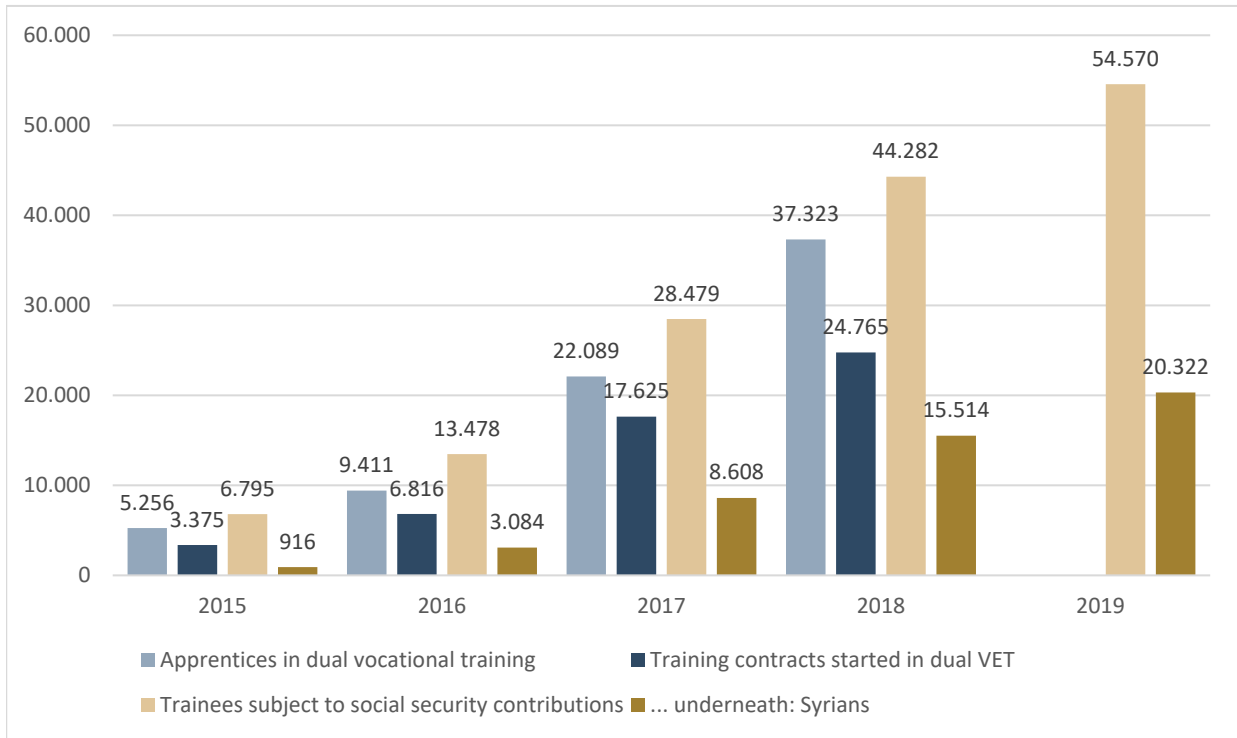
Nonetheless, as Figures 4-4 and 4-5 show, the number of trainees and students<sup>1</sup> who are citizens of the eight countries of origin from which asylum seekers originate – Afghanistan, Eritrea, Irak, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria (see part 2) – has risen sharply in recent years. Differences based on residence status are not found in the underlying statistics here. To reflect the change in company training over the last few years as well, Figure 4-4 contains both the data from the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training [Bundesinstitut für Berufliche Bildung, BiBB], which is the standard source for dual vocational training, and the figures from the German Federal Employment Agency [Bundesagentur für Arbeit] on social-security-paying employees in vocational training. The latter figures are somewhat higher because they also include persons in the practical phases of school vocational training. Between 2015 and 2019 there was roughly an eightfold increase here, and for Syrians it rose by more than a factor of 20, which shows that refugees are increasingly entering vocational training. Somewhat less dynamic is the development with regard to students, although the numbers here, as Figure 4-5 shows, have also doubled for all eight countries between the winter semesters 2014/2015 and 2018/2019, and more than quadrupled for Syrians. This makes it possible to draw the conclusion that refugees in recent years have been increasingly entering the German educational system and also more frequently going through vocational training programmes that they usually are not familiar with in this form in their homelands. It will not be clear for a few years how many of them will actually acquire a vocational or university degree and how many will remain less qualified.

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<sup>1</sup> Many studies of foreign students only consider foreigners who have obtained their university degree abroad. However, a differentiation by nationality alone makes more sense here, since the location of the admission entitlement to enrol in a university is of secondary importance for the integration of refugees.

**Figure 4-4: Persons in vocational training from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate**

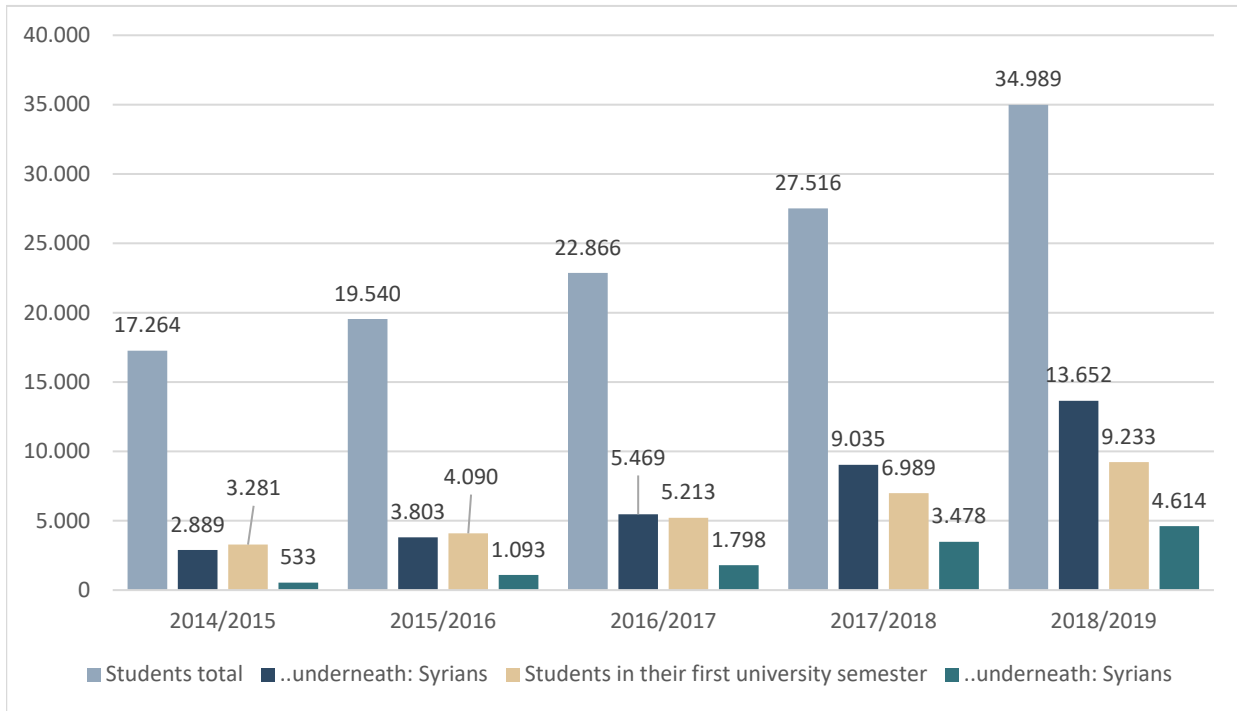
As of 31 December in each case



Source: BIBB, 2020; Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020a

**Figure 4-5: Persons at universities from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate**

Winter semester in each case



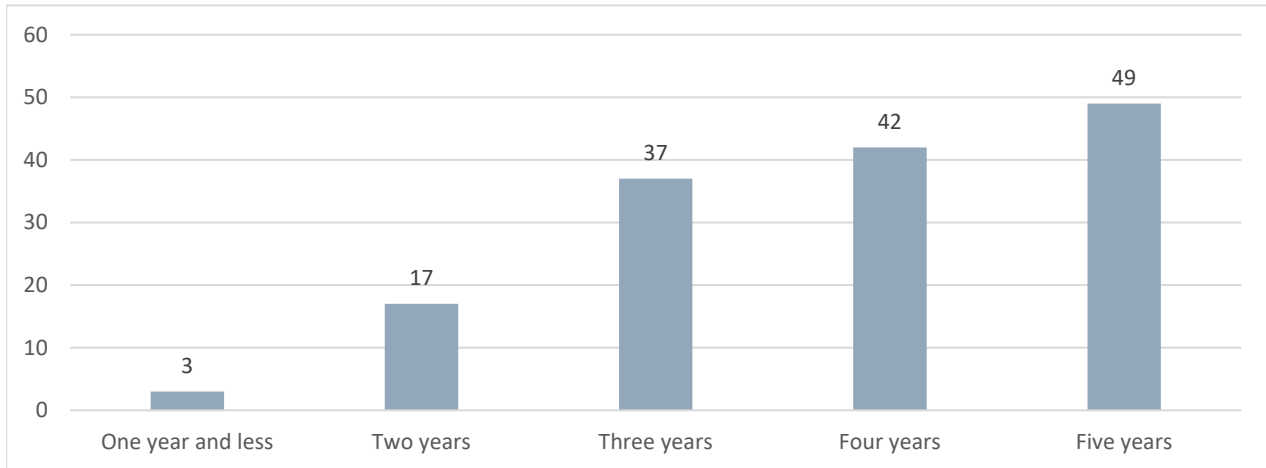
Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, various years; author's own calculations

## 5 Refugee situation in the labour market

Different from job-related immigrants, the integration of refugees into the labour market usually does not take place right after their arrival, but only after a somewhat longer period of time. The reasons for this are not only a lack of German language skills, but also their sheltering in communal housing and uncertainty regarding their ability to stay while their case is pending. Brücker et al. (2020) used the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees as of 2018 to draw the conclusion that 67 per cent of the refugees arriving in the country after 2013 and between the ages of 18 and 64 had begun employment activity within five years after their arrival, while it was only 58 per cent in the case of refugees arriving between 1990 and 2012. However, a portion of this group has lost their initial employment. The employment rate of 18- to 64-year-olds, as can be seen in Figure 5-1, was at 49 per cent five years after their arrival, according to the calculations. Yet it should be noted that the large number of refugees migrating in 2015 and 2016 had not been in Germany very long at the time of the survey, and the figures may also reflect only the situation of refugees who had already entered the country prior to the great migration. Their admission initially took place under slightly different circumstances. For example, the integration courses were not opened for asylum applicants with a good chance of remaining until 2016.

### Figure 5-1: Employment rates for refugees by length of residence

Findings from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees, as of 2018, persons between the ages of 18 and 64, in percent

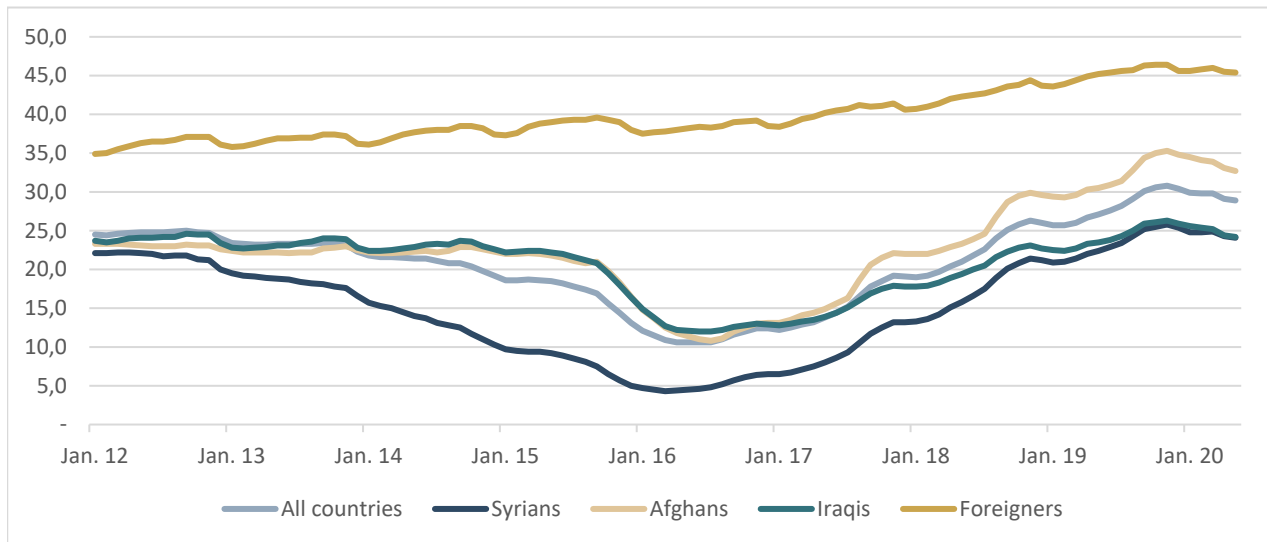


Source: Brücker et al., 2020

If one considers the shares of social-security-paying employees as a percentage of persons of working age who are citizens of the eight countries of origin from which asylum seekers originate – Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria –, as in Figure 5-2, a sharp drop to only 10.6 per cent in April 2016 was seen as a result of the great migration in the years 2015 and 2016. In the years thereafter, the percentages rose very rapidly again and reached a high of 30.8 per cent in November 2019. Since then, they have declined again, in the context of the corona pandemic, to 28.9 per cent in May 2020. However, they were still much higher than before the great migration of refugees, as the figure in May 2012, for example, was only 24.8 per cent. If Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis are viewed separately, there are even clearer differences. The employment rate among Afghans in May 2020 was significantly higher at 32.7 per cent than among Syrians and Iraqis at 24.1 per cent and 24.2 per cent, respectively. The reasons for this are primarily the different times of the migrations and the degrees of integration connected with this, since many Syrians have only been in Germany for a relatively short time (see part 2).

### Figure 5-2: Employment rates of persons from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate

The share of employees **subject to social security payments** as a percentage of the population between the ages of 15 and 64 in percent

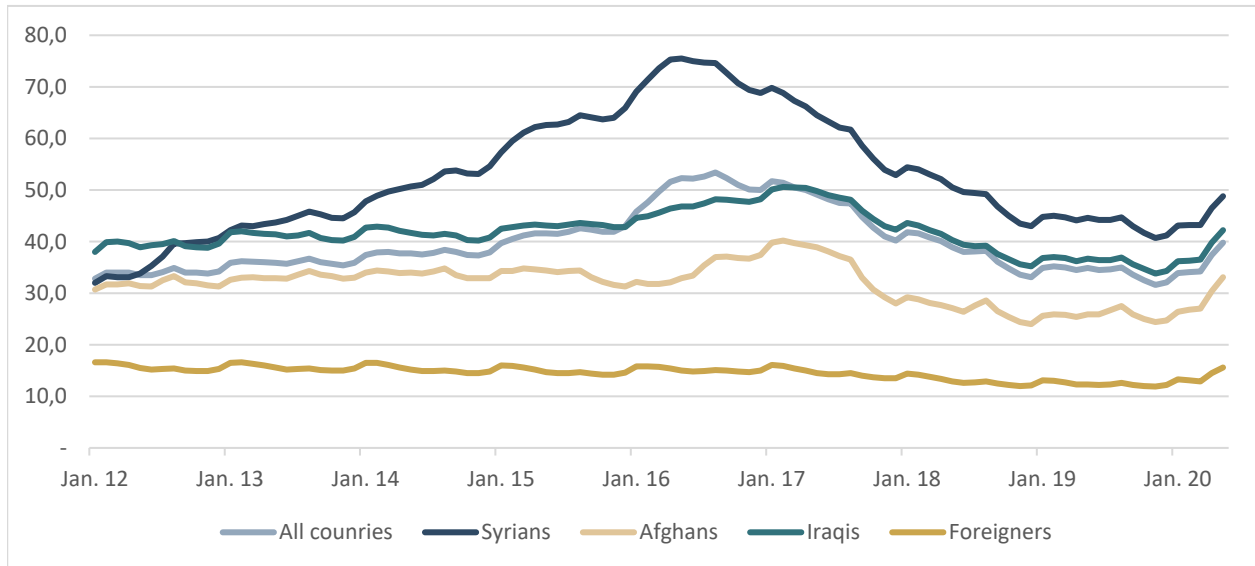


Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020a

The tremendous progress made over the last few years with the integration of refugees into the German labour market can also be seen in the unemployment rates shown in Figure 5-3. In this regard, it should be noted that only refugees with a secured residence status must file for unemployment benefits to receive government transfer payments in accordance with Social Code Book II (SGB II), while asylum applicants and persons with a temporary residence permit (*Duldung*) can obtain asylum applicant benefits without filing for unemployment benefits. This means that many refugees do not become formally unemployed until a protection status is granted. Against this backdrop, the actual percentage of persons without work from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate was probably substantially higher in the first few months after the great migration of refugees, and the drop afterwards was even more pronounced. The impact of the corona pandemic can be seen more clearly in the unemployment rates than in the statistics on employees subject to social security payments. Accordingly, the unemployment rate for the eight countries of origin from which asylum seekers originate rose between November 2019 and May 2020, from 31.6 per cent to 39.8 per cent. At the same time, the share of employable recipients of benefits in accordance with Social Code Book II as a percentage of persons between the age of 15 and the regular age of retirement for pension insurance from the eight asylum countries of origin increased only slightly between November 2019 and April 2020, from 52.5 per cent to 52.9 per cent (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020a). A significant portion of the refugees who were unemployed over the last few months was also probably dependent on government transfer payments during their former activity.

**Figure 5-3: Unemployment rates of persons from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate**

With limited reference value, not including freelancers and civil servants, in percent

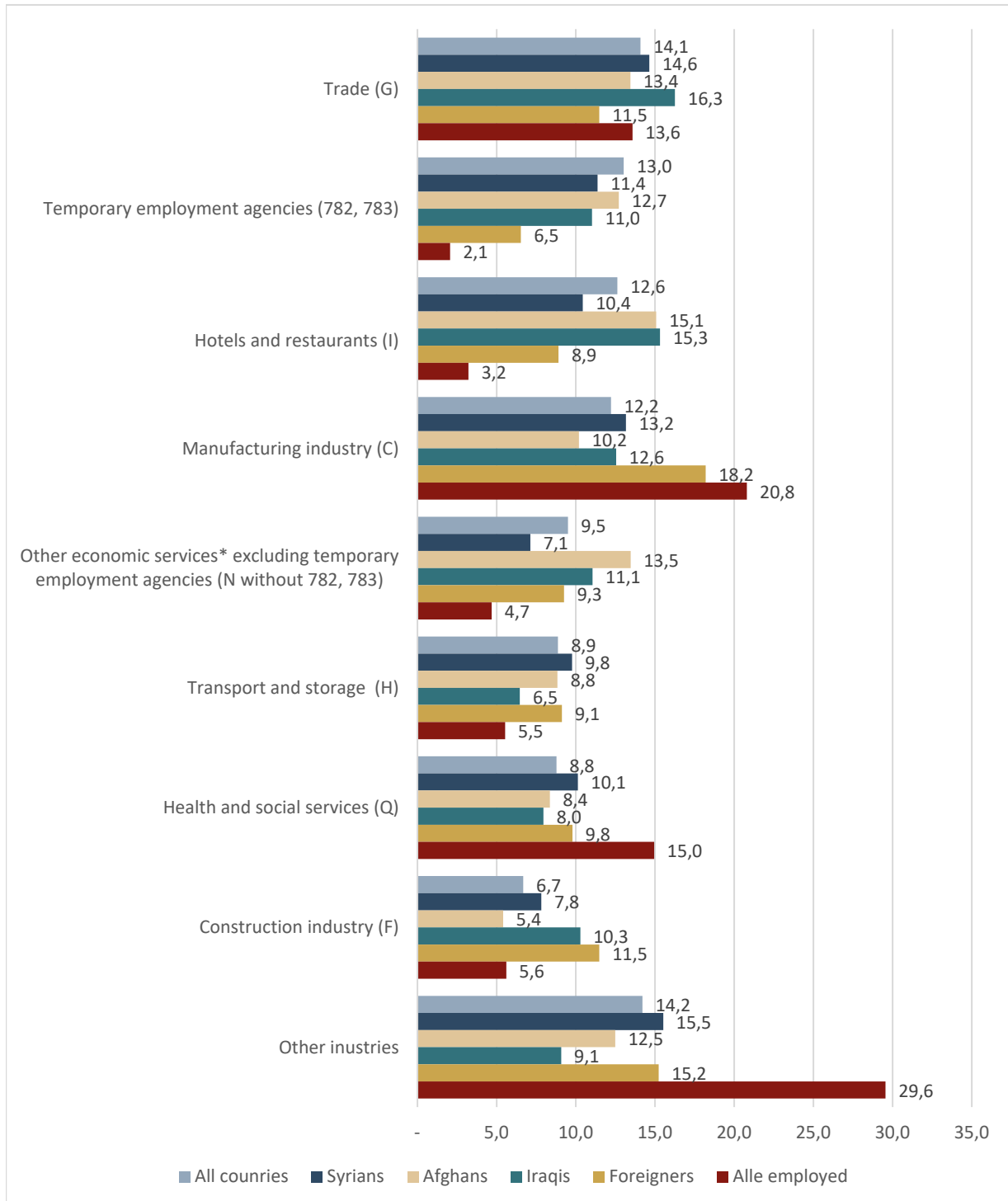


Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020a

Furthermore, as Figure 5-4 shows, a relatively large amount of social-security-paying employees from the eight countries of origin where asylum seekers originate, 13 per cent, worked at temporary staffing agencies. Foreigners whose qualifications do not meet the German standards often use these agencies as a stepping-stone for other employment (Jahn, 2016), since these companies give them the opportunity to gain work experience in other industries and build up their competence profile. However, temporary staffing agencies could hardly still perform this bridging function during the corona pandemic, since the economic collapse caused by the pandemic hit them especially hard. Another leading area of occupation for employed asylum seekers is the restaurant industry, which was also heavily affected by the corona pandemic. The employed asylum seekers, as Figure 5-5 shows, also tend to work substantially more frequently in small and medium-sized companies and less in large corporations as compared to other employees. If consideration is given to the level of requirements for the activity, the percentage of employees from refugee countries of origin with skilled labour positions continually declined through the middle of 2018, but has risen again to 48.5 per cent since then. Compared to the percentage for all employees, 83.6 per cent, this continues to be low, however. Since a large percentage of the employees from the countries of origin has jobs that do not require qualifications, this probably also caused and will continue to cause them to be affected substantially more by the impact of the corona pandemic on the labour market. During times of crisis, like this, staff policy decisions usually focus primarily on retaining the know-how of skilled labour for the company, and, in addition to this, refugees usually have the disadvantage of a shorter period of employment, making them more likely to be the first made redundant in lay-offs. To improve the position of refugees on the labour market over the long term, it is necessary to increase their qualifications, especially due to the frequently low level of education that they have upon arrival (see part 3).

**Figure 5-4: Employees from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate by sector**

Employees subject to social security payments, sectors according to WZ 2008, as of: December 2019, in percent



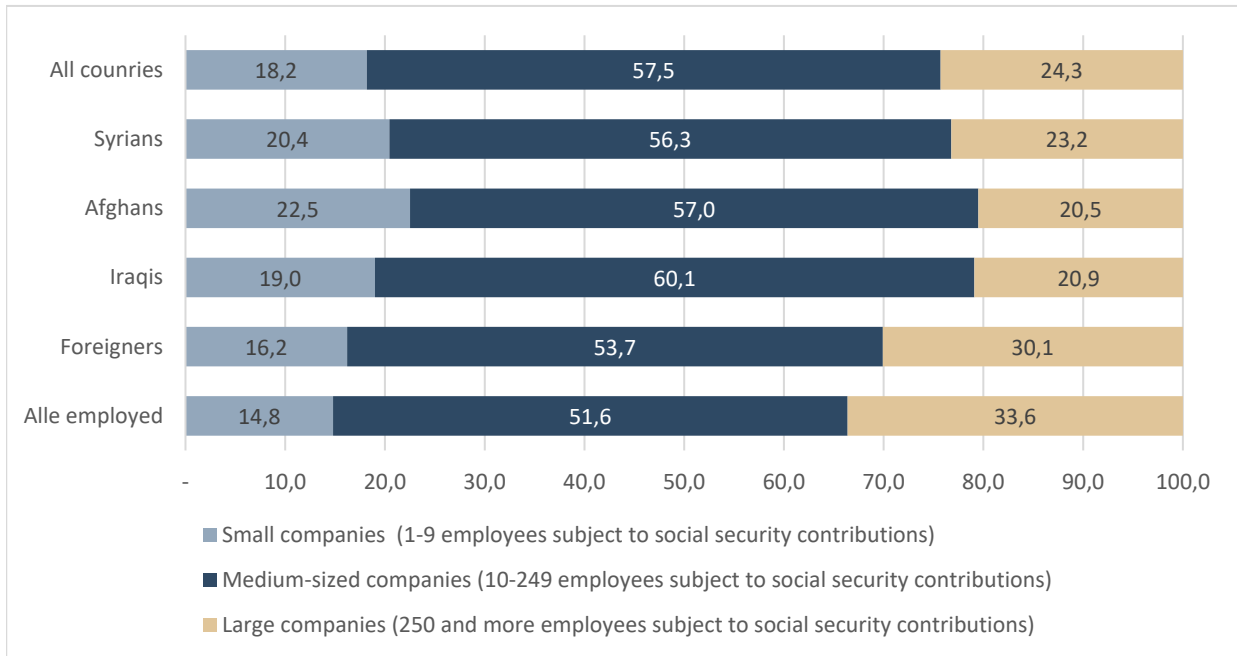
\*This includes in particular security guard, caretaking and cleaning services as well as gardening and landscaping

Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020b; author's own calculations



**Figure 5-5: Employees from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate by size of company**

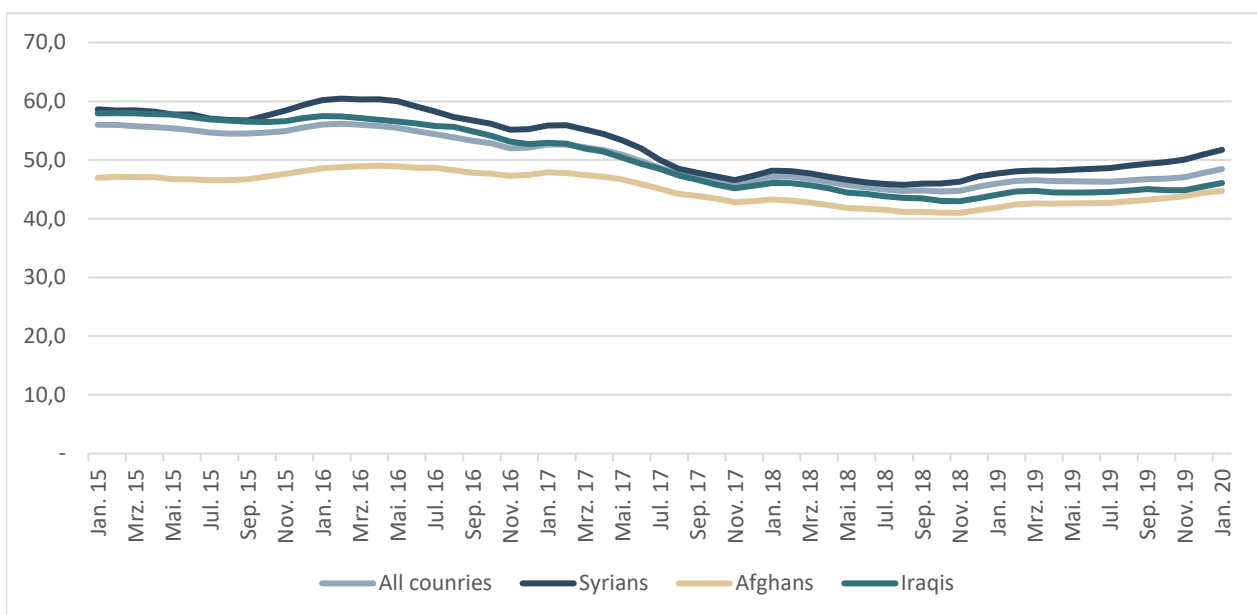
Employees subject to social security payments, as of: December 2019, in percent



Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2020b

**Figure 5-6: Share of skilled labour as a percentage of employees from countries of origin where asylum seekers originate**

Employees subject to social security payments, shares of persons with activities falling under the requirement categories of “professional”, “specialist” and “expert” according to KldB 2010 as a percentage of all employees, in percent



Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2020a, author’s own calculations

## 6 Conclusion and outlook

Although the migration of refugees has abated with the closure of the borders on the Balkan route and the enforcement of the EU-Turkey agreement at the beginning of 2016, the number of asylum applicants has remained at a higher level over the last few years than at the beginning of the 2010s. A substantial portion of these persons is currently receiving a rejection in the asylum decision and opting to file a lawsuit, so the protection status of around 266,000 persons was still open at the end of 2019. The number of persons with a temporary residence permit [*Duldung*] and a latent and enforceable obligation to leave was a manageable amount of 212,000 at this time, and the persons seeking protection with a residence permit or a settlement permit [*Niederlassungserlaubnis*] totalled 1.36 million, by far the largest group. Consequently, longer-term residence has been secured for most refugees in the country in the meantime. Tremendous progress has been made over the last few years with the integration of refugees into the labour market. Accordingly, the employment rate of persons from the eight most important countries of origin from which asylum seekers originate rose between April 2016 and November 2019, from 10.6 per cent to 30.8 per cent. However, at the end of 2019, the employment rate had not yet reached a level that could allow one to speak of a successful conclusion of the integration process, and the situation deteriorated again somewhat in recent months due to the corona pandemic.

The ongoing course of the pandemic and protection measures will determine how quickly it is possible to return to the long-term positive trend, which can hardly be predicted at the present time. Nonetheless, it is almost certain that this will be the case after the end of the pandemic. Over the next few years, the integration of refugees will benefit from demographic change. That this demographic change will lead to major gaps on the German labour market, even in the case of a slight recession, can be seen from the fact that the ratio of 15- to 24-year-olds to 55- to 64-year-olds in 2017 was only 0.75 to 1 and the ratio of 10- to 19-year-olds to 50- to 59-year-olds was 0.59 to 1 (Geis-Thöne, 2020). To close the demographic gap, it is necessary to support the integration of refugees even more, and other entry paths in the area of education and employment migration should be opened so that a systematic controlling of migration is possible. The asylum system should also continue to have a primarily humanitarian function and grant protection to persons who have suffered from war and persecution.

Besides the prospects on the labour market, the corona pandemic can also have a negative impact on another area related to the integration of refugees. The prohibition and limitation of contact to slow the spread of the virus has greatly curtailed exchange with persons outside of one's closest social circle and thus the contact between refugees and Germans. Together with the discontinuation of language courses and other qualification programmes during the lockdown, this caused many refugees not to speak almost any German for a period of time, which can have a negative impact on their learning of the language. Nonetheless, most of the language courses were restarted as the virus measures were eased, so that the gaps should not be too great. The qualification programmes for refugees will continue to be expanded over the next few months. If the refugees do not succeed in finding a (new) job due to the currently difficult situation on the labour market, they should use this time to close the gaps in their qualifications and improve their employment prospects over the long term.

It is not possible to foresee whether the corona pandemic will lead to a long-term change in asylum seekers' migration to Germany or the slightly negative trend in previous years will continue, since this depends on very many factors in the countries of origin and transit countries. However, it should be anticipated that the number of asylum seekers in Germany will remain high over the next few years and many asylum applications will also continue to be rejected by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in the first instance. Therefore, it is necessary to work urgently on making the legal proceedings less frequent and resolving them more quickly in the future to avoid long phases with an open protection status and the associated uncertainty to the greatest extent possible. Furthermore, the instruments for attaining qualifications and supporting employment, as developed in recent years, must definitely be continued and intensified wherever successful to date, even if the admission and integration of refugees is no longer at the centre of public attention. If newly arriving asylum seekers quickly gain a foothold on the German labour market and generate an income that secures their livelihood, they can also contribute to the stabilisation of public budgets after a certain period.

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## Abstract

Although the period of the largest migration of refugees in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany lies five years in the past, more asylum seekers have come to Germany in recent years than at the beginning of the 2010s. In 2019, about 166,000 persons filed asylum applications, compared to only 49,000 in 2010. Many of the asylum cases in recent years have not yet been finally decided, mainly due to a large number of complaints against first-instance decisions made by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). On 31 December 2019, the number of persons whose protection status had not yet been definitively decided was 266,000, while only 57,000 cases had not yet been decided by the BAMF. However, most of the refugees who have remained in Germany have by now been granted a residence permit. While the number of persons with a temporary protection status that had been granted in an asylum process amounted to 104,000 on 31 December 2014, it was 976,000 on 31 December 2019, which is nearly ten times higher. Looking at the regional distribution of refugees on 31 December 2019, the numbers are particularly high in the metropolitan areas of north-western Germany and particularly low in the eastern states, excluding Berlin, and Bavaria. However, the picture differs considerably depending on the country of origin. While many Syrians live in the Ruhr area and in Saarland, Afghans are often found in the region around Hamburg and in Hesse, and Iraqis live in the region around Hanover.

The integration of refugees into the educational system and the labour market has progressed rapidly in recent years. For example, the number of social-security-contributing trainees from the eight countries of origin – Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria – increased approximately eightfold from 6,800 to 54,600 between 31 December 2015 and 31 December 2019, and the employment rate of persons from these countries rose from 10.6 per cent to 30.8 per cent between April 2016 and November 2019, following a sharp drop due to the great migration of refugees. However, the situation here has worsened somewhat again this year with the corona pandemic. Even though it is not yet clear how long its negative effects on the labour market will continue, it can be assumed that the (labour market) integration of the refugees will return to the positive development in recent years over the longer term. In the years ahead, employment prospects should improve considerably, since against the background of demographic change many more people will be leaving the labour market than will be entering it. In 2017, there were around a quarter fewer 15 to 24-year-olds than 55 to 64-year-olds in Germany.

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