

# Refugee Women as a Target Group of Labour Market Policies

Förderprogramm „Integration durch Qualifizierung IQ“

Ildikó Pallmann  
Janine Ziegler  
Christian Pfeffer-Hoffmann

*Ildikó Pallmann, Janine Ziegler, Christian Pfeffer-Hoffmann*

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## Legal notice

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background to the case study

As yet, little is known about the lives of refugee women in Germany, their plans, and the situations in which they find themselves.<sup>1</sup> Information about their socio-economic profile, their educational experiences and their expectations is only insufficiently available.<sup>2</sup> With regard to integration into the labour market, refugee women still play a subordinate role. Compared with refugee men, they are hardly reached by the integration offers of public agencies.

Since 2015 *Fachstelle Einwanderung*, the Competence Centre for Immigration of the Network “Integration through Qualification (IQ)” has worked on the labour market integration of refugees as a part of its tasks, choosing the specific situation of refugee women as one of its key areas. Within the framework of several publications and events, the Competence Centre has dealt with this subject.<sup>3</sup> Among

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<sup>1</sup> An overview of the current state of research is provided in the article “Teilhabe geflüchteter Frauen am Arbeitsmarkt – Ausgangslage, Hürden, Handlungsstrategien” (Participation of refugee women in the labour market – initial situation, obstacles, action strategies) by Schahrzad Farrokhzad (Pfeffer-Hoffmann 2018: 85-125), updated in 2018.

<sup>2</sup> What is still decisive for Germany in this context are the results published in 2016 and 2019 about the first and second wave of the so-called IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey “Forced migration, arrival in Germany, and first steps toward integration” (Brücker et al. 2016), “Language skills and employment rate of refugees improving with time” (Brücker et al. 2019) and an accompanying publication, the women-specific evaluation “Die Arbeitsmarktintegration geflüchteter Frauen” (The integration of refugee women into the labour market) (Fendel 2019). Two more publications, which appeared in 2017, should not be overlooked, namely “Geflüchtete Frauen in Deutschland: Sprache, Bildung und Arbeitsmarkt” (Female Refugees in Germany: Language, Education and Employment) (Worbs/Baraulina 2017) and “Study on Female Refugees. Repräsentative Untersuchung von geflüchteten Frauen in unterschiedlichen Bundesländern in Deutschland” (Study on female refugees – A representative research study on refugee women in Germany) (Schouler-Ocak/Kurmeyer, 2017). For international comparison, the OECD study “Triple Disadvantage? A first overview of the integration of refugee women” (Liebig 2018) published in 2018 is of particular interest.

<sup>3</sup> Particularly noteworthy in this context are the publications “Profile der Neueinwanderung” (Profiles of new immigration) 2017 and 2018, which address the specific challenges of the integration of refugee women into the labour market, and the two events planned and organised by the Competence Centre of the Network IQ under the title “Arbeitsmarktintegration geflüchteter Frauen” (Integration of refugee women into the labour market); the expert forum took place on 26/04/2017 and the theme days on 10/10/2017 and 11/10/2017.

several other issues, the need of further investigations into the matching of labour market integration offers with the life situations of refugee women was identified.

The present case study aims at covering this need at least in parts. For this purpose, the criteria decisive for successful integration in language courses, qualification, education and training, or employment, particularly from the perspective of the refugee women themselves, were analysed. Furthermore, the function of specific measures offered to refugee women by the employment agencies and job centres (*Jobcenter*) in this context was investigated as well as the question how, from the perspective of the target group, such measures ought to be designed to improve the integration of the target group into the labour market in a sustainable manner.

Hence, the study also serves to support the German Federal Employment Agency, which has developed and tested diverse specific approaches to supporting the labour market integration of refugees during the last three years with great commitment. The development of employment promotion offers to heterogeneous groups with specific needs places high demands on the Federal Employment Agency. The findings of the study are intended to facilitate even more differentiated action for these target groups, further develop successful approaches or scale them up, and identify existing gaps.

The qualitative study was carried out during a period from September to December 2018. Throughout Germany, a survey was conducted with altogether 32 refugee women within the framework of six focus groups as well as 23 experts in individual and group interviews. Initial results from the interviews were put forward in an expert discussion with various stakeholders. In the publication at hand, the outcomes of this process are systematised and recommendations are made.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The present case study has a qualitative focus. Because of the small number of cases, it merely reflects trends to answer the research questions but cannot make a claim to representativeness.

## 1.2. Methods and key areas

The present case study intends to give a (representative) voice to refugee women by articulating their ideas, wishes and experiences concerning the individual processes of their integration into the labour market. In addition, experts will highlight the challenges of these processes and, finally, derive recommendations for action for labour market stakeholders from both these perspectives.

The data collection was made within the framework of six focus group interviews of about ninety minutes each; four to nine refugee women who, according to the German Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz – AufenthG*), are entitled to take up employment or vocational training participated in each of the interviews. The altogether 32 participants were from different countries of origin; at the time when the survey was conducted, some of them lived in urban, some in rural areas. They had diverse educational biographies and differing work experiences gained in their countries of origin and also in Germany. Of the six focus group interviews, two were exclusively conducted with women who were participating in a measure of the PerF-W<sup>5</sup> type. At the request of the interviewed women, five of these six focus group interviews were held in German; the women requested support by a translator only for one of the interviews. The focus groups were organised with the support of various network partners of the Competence Centre for Immigration (among others, project implementing agencies from Network IQ) and Minor, the implementing organisation.

Additionally, 23 experts were interviewed about their opinion on advantageous and disadvantageous factors in the context of the integration process of refugee women into the labour market. Interviews were conducted by telephone or in the field in group or individual interviews; they were held, on one hand, with project managers and personnel who work for various training institutes providing services and measures specifically designed for women and, on the other

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<sup>5</sup> PerF-W (Perspective for female refugees) is a measure conducted by the Federal Employment Agency which, in contrast to the PerF measure, particularly addresses refugee women: “The measure includes the following goals: the role and rights of women in Germany; access to the training and employment market; practical professional experience; job-related German language training; the strengthening of competences; as well as childcare provision during the course in or close to the institution offering the course.” (BA 2017: 35). An overview of the number of participants attending measures of the Federal Employment Agency, especially PerF-W, is provided in the statistical part of this case study.

hand, with employees of labour agencies and job centres. For example, at job centres, representatives for equal opportunities on the job market (*Beauftragte für Chancengleichheit am Arbeitsmarkt - BCA*), commissioners for immigration, integration specialists, leaders of specific refugee and asylum teams, and Integration Point managers<sup>6</sup> were interviewed. The locations of the employment agencies and job centres where the interviews were conducted were not identical with the locations where the six focus groups took place. The majority of the interviewed experts worked in the field of counselling in the proper sense or in projects on empowerment, coaching, or labour market integration for women (refugees), or also projects particularly for (refugee) mothers.

The interviews focused on the following thematic priorities:

- Existing work experiences and ideas about the working life in Germany;
- Factors stimulating or impeding the integration into the labour market with reference to individual and structural perspectives;
- Content design of measures of the Federal Employment Agency; and
- The question of access to offers and information to support the integration process.

The survey interview phase was completed with an expert discussion which took place on 20 November 2018 on Minor's premises; the participants were some of the experts interviewed, researchers, and representatives of the Federal Employment Agency. The initial outcomes of the study, which were presented on that occasion, were reflected upon, discussed in the group and supplemented in parts. The insights gained are processed in the final report at hand and were presented to a public of experts working in the field at an event on 21 May 2019 in Berlin.

To place the issue of labour market integration of refugee women into a framework and provide a more specific context for the present study, the following

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<sup>6</sup> In the Integration Points, which only exist in North Rhine-Westphalia, specialised experts of employment agencies, job centres, communities, Foreigners Registration Authorities, IQ recognition counselling centres, and other relevant stakeholders cooperate closely to support refugees with the integration into the training and employment market. The standardised contact points are intended to assist refugees in orienting themselves in the German social and administrative system.

chapter will deal with the current figures on this subject from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* - BAMF) and the German Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit* - BA), considering in detail the following aspects: socio-demographic characteristics, educational biographies, the situation on the training and employment market, and the participation of refugee women in measures of the Federal Employment Agency.

## 2. Statistical classification

### 2.1. Refugee women in the statistics

For the evaluation of statistical data it is important to know that statements about the group of refugee women as an entirety can be made only to a limited extent. BAMF and the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (*Statistisches Bundesamt*) evaluate the migration flows for Germany on the basis of the Central Register of Foreign Nationals (*Ausländerzentralregister* - AZR). Their publications *Migration monitoring* (BAMF) and *Foreign population* (Federal Statistical Office) also describe the proportion of women according to their resident status and, therefore, also immigrant women in the context of forced migration.<sup>7</sup> The statistics of the BA, however, cover refugee women only in extracts; data on the resident status have been collected by the BA only since 2016. For example, refugees and, accordingly, also refugee women, are recorded as ‘persons capable of work and eligible for benefits (*Erwerbsfähige Leistungsberechtigte Personen* - ELB) in the context of forced migration’<sup>8</sup>. This category, however, covers “only” those

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<sup>7</sup> On the issue of statistical coverage, see also the information overview Kompakt 11/2018, “Verschiedene Statistiken – verschiedene Probleme. Wanderungen Deutschland” (Different statistics, different problems. Migration in Germany) of the Competence Centre for Immigration of the Network IQ (Fachstelle Einwanderung 2018).

<sup>8</sup> “Following Section 7 of Book II of the German Social Code (SGB II), persons who have reached the age of 15 but have not yet reached the age limit following Section 7a, SGB II, who are capable of work, need assistance and have their habitual residence in the Federal Republic of Germany are considered as ‘persons capable of work and eligible for benefits in the context of forced migration’ (*erwerbsfähige Leistungsberechtigte* – ELB). Following Section 8, SGB II, persons who, for the foreseeable future, are not incapable of working for at least three hours a day under normal conditions of the general labour market because of illness or disability are considered as capable of work. In the statistics of basic income benefits SGB II, persons are only shown as persons capable of work and eligible for benefits if they receive unemployment benefit II” (BA 2018d: 26). The BA defines persons in the context of forced

refugee women who, as third country nationals, have a permission to reside (*Aufenthaltsgestattung*), a residence permit (*Aufenthaltserlaubnis*) under international law or on humanitarian or political grounds (Section 18a, Sections 22-26 *AufenthG*) or a temporary suspension of deportation status (*Duldung*) and are regarded as *ELB* in terms of the BA, meaning that they receive benefits under Book II of the German Social Code (*SGBII*) and are fit for work.

In the statistical sense, women who migrate to persons with a refugee status in Germany within the framework of family reunification (Sections 29 et seq., *AufenthG*) are not counted among *persons in the context of forced migration* but among *persons with other residence status* (BA 2016: 4). Similarly persons who travelled to Germany for reasons of flight but, in the meantime, have received a settlement permit count no longer among *persons in the context of forced migration* (ibid.) in the statistical sense. In all probability there are refugee women who have taken up work already without support by the employment agency or a job centre or seek employment but do not receive benefits through a job centre and, accordingly, are not included in the statistics of the BA.

Furthermore, from 2016 the category ‘asylum applicants from non-European countries of origin’ (*Personen aus nichteuropäischen Asylherkunftsstaaten*)<sup>9</sup> has been included in the BA statistics. Here, refugee women are also covered, for example, when the proportion of employment subject to social security contributions or exclusively minor employment needs to be determined. Yet, here also only a part of all employed women from the eight most common non-European countries of origin is included regardless of their actual resident status and their reasons for migration.

Often it cannot be easily recognised at first glance that statistical coverage is performed in different (sub-)categories so that frequently the impression is created in the analysis and evaluation of public discourse that it is always the same

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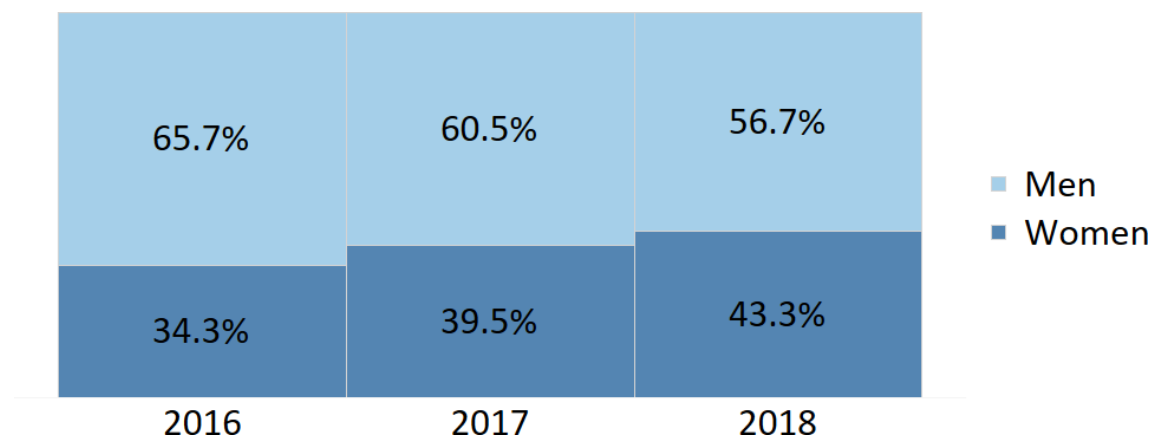
migration as follows: “The differentiation of ‘persons in the context of forced migration’ in terms of the BA statistics does not necessarily meet other definitions of ‘refugees’ (e. g. legal differentiations). For the statistical concept, reference to the labour market is decisive beyond the asylum procedure” because this group of persons has comparable “problem situations” with regard to the training and employment market (ibid.: 43).

<sup>9</sup> According to the BA, this category includes those eight non-European countries where most asylum seekers have come from in the last few years, currently: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Syria (BA 2018d: 9).

population of refugee women which is covered. Nevertheless, this is not the case as has been shown. Individual statistics can merely capture trends so that their use for establishing the needs and expectations of refugee women with regard to working life in Germany or the evaluation of their previously gained experiences and competences will be limited.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, for reasons like their countries of origin, their residence status, or the relevant benefit system covering them, also the women interviewed in the present study may only be partially identified in the following statistics.

## 2.2. Socio-demographic data

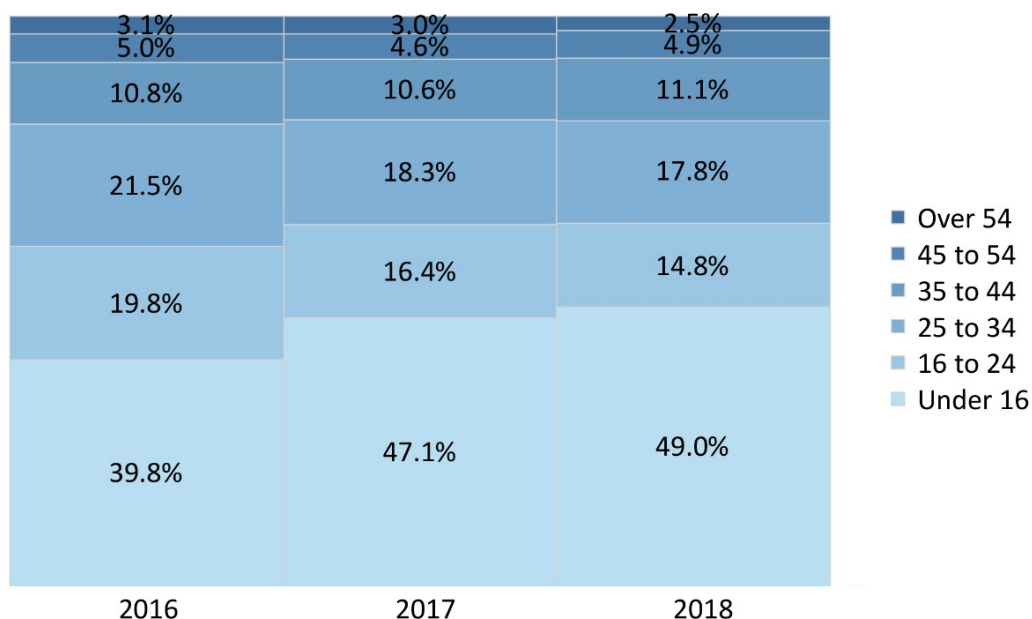
With reference to all asylum applicants, in recent years the proportion of men was considerably higher than the proportion of women (see Figure 1), even though the latter is steadily increasing: in 2016, 34.3 % of applicants were women, but in 2018 they submitted already 43.3 % of all applications. More than half of female asylum applicants is over 16 years of age and, accordingly, is potentially available to the training and employment market (see Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Gender distribution of asylum applicants**

Period: January 2016 - December 2018. n= 722.370/198.317/161.927. Own diagram based on BAMF 2016, 2017, 2018 © Minor

<sup>10</sup> In this context, the studies already quoted in footnote 2 provide most interesting insights. Yet, they cannot represent refugee women in their entirety but merely generate knowledge in extracts about the random samples they are based on and the weighting of these samples. Up to now, the largest study is the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey which was carried out in two waves and for which altogether 5,544 observations of persons, among them 2,151 data records of women, are available for 2017, the year of the survey, for analysis (Brücker et al. 2019: 2).



**Figure 2: Age distribution of female asylum applicants**

Period: January 2016 - December 2018. n= 722.370/198.317/161.927. Own diagram based on BAMF 2016, 2017, 2018 © Minor

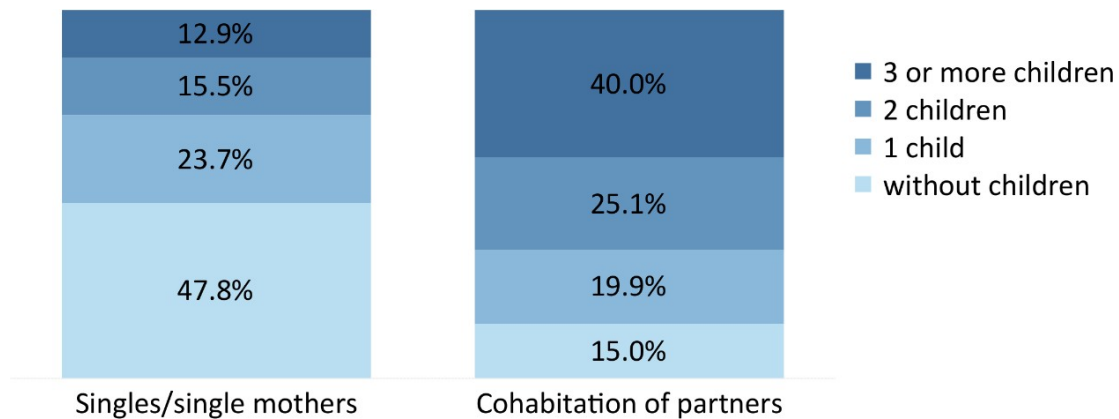
Almost 15 % are between 16 and 24 years of age and, thus, are a target group in the fields of vocational training and higher education. In the fields of professional or vocational recognition and further or partial qualification, particularly women between 25 and 44 years of age are eligible; in 2018, their proportion has increased to 28.9 %.

In the public debate of refugee women and their social participation, the individual woman's family situation, and particularly the presence of children, plays a decisive role. However, the available statistical data provide information only to a limited extent. While the current figures of BAMF do not give any information about the family situation of female asylum applicants, again the data provided by the BA may only be used for the group of women in the context of forced migration capable of work and eligible for benefits (Figure 3).

From the figures last mentioned it follows that the large majority of women in a partner relationship who, in turn, represent over two thirds of the target group have at least one child. More than half of the single women are single mothers. Even though only a portion is represented by these figures, they are important with reference to the integration of refugee women into the labour market, for example, because they demonstrate that in everyday life the majority of these



women bears responsibility for children's education and the related organisational and temporal challenges and duties, which means that they often face limitations in the process of their integration in the labour market.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 3: Number of children of women in the context of forced migration who are capable of work and eligible for benefits**

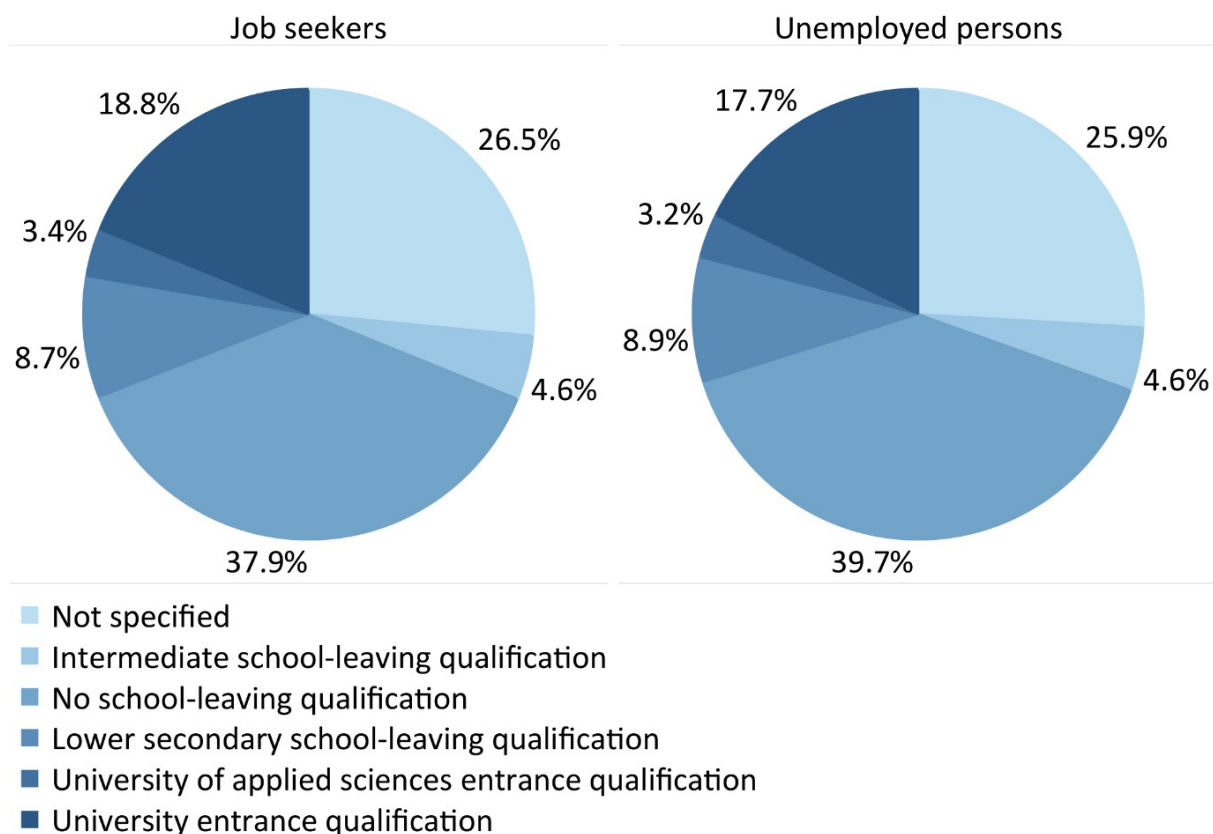
Reference month: September 2018. n= 73.211/156.869. Own diagram based on BA 2018a  
© Minor

### 2.3. Educational biographies

Looking at the educational backgrounds of the job seeking, unemployed women in the context of forced migration who are recorded in the BA statistics (see Figure 4), their diversity becomes apparent:

For slightly less than one third of the women covered here, no information is available on their school-leaving qualification (26.5 % of job seekers; 25.9 % of unemployed women); beyond that, slightly more than one third of these women (37.9 % of job seekers; 39.7 % of unemployed women) do not have any school-leaving qualification at all. The remaining 35.5 % of job seeking and 34.4 % of unemployed women in the context of forced migration declare that they graduated from school: almost one fifth of the women (22.2 % of job seekers; 20.9 % of unemployed women) have a school-leaving entrance qualification for university or university of applied sciences.

<sup>11</sup> The figures presented here are mostly consistent with the current findings of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey (Brücker et al. 2019: 2). Also, Tanja Fendel of the IAB points to the limited employment opportunities in her women-specific evaluation of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data (Fendel 2019).



**Figure 4: School-leaving qualification of job seeking, unemployed women in the context of forced migration**

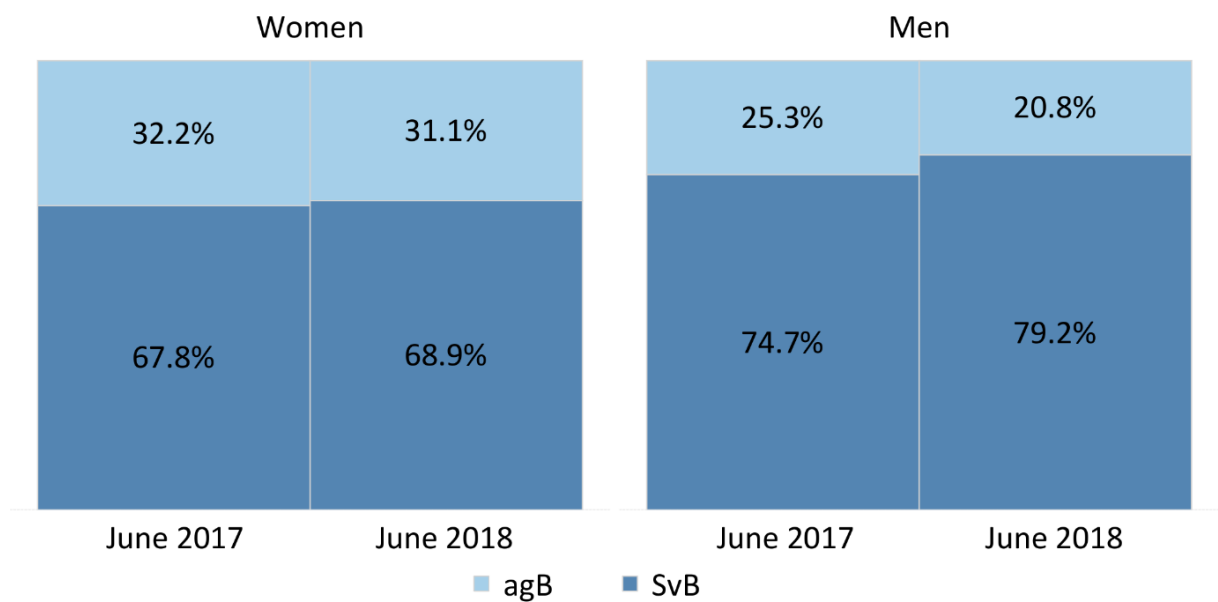
Reference month: December 2018. n= 133.812/55.390. Own diagram based on BA 2018a  
© Minor

Nevertheless, even a school-leaving qualification is not a sufficient condition for entering the German labour market. Firstly, a school-leaving qualification is only one of the preconditions for professional or vocational qualification; integration in the German labour market beyond elementary occupations depends strongly on qualifications according to the extremely differentiated educational, professional and vocational system in Germany. Secondly, such qualifications must be recognized as wholly or partially corresponding with the applicable requirements in Germany, which is usually a lengthy and time-consuming process and, in many cases, severely hampers the women in their professional development. What is more, when interpreting these figures it should be considered that many refugees do have the specified qualifications but cannot prove this through (certified) diplomas or certificates. Because ascertainment procedures for competences are not yet sufficiently available for this target group, the persons affected face particular difficulties in the recognition process of the skills and qual-

ifications already acquired and, consequently, in taking up a professional or vocational occupation in accordance with their qualifications. These circumstances are confirmed by the outcomes of the present case study (see section 3.1.).

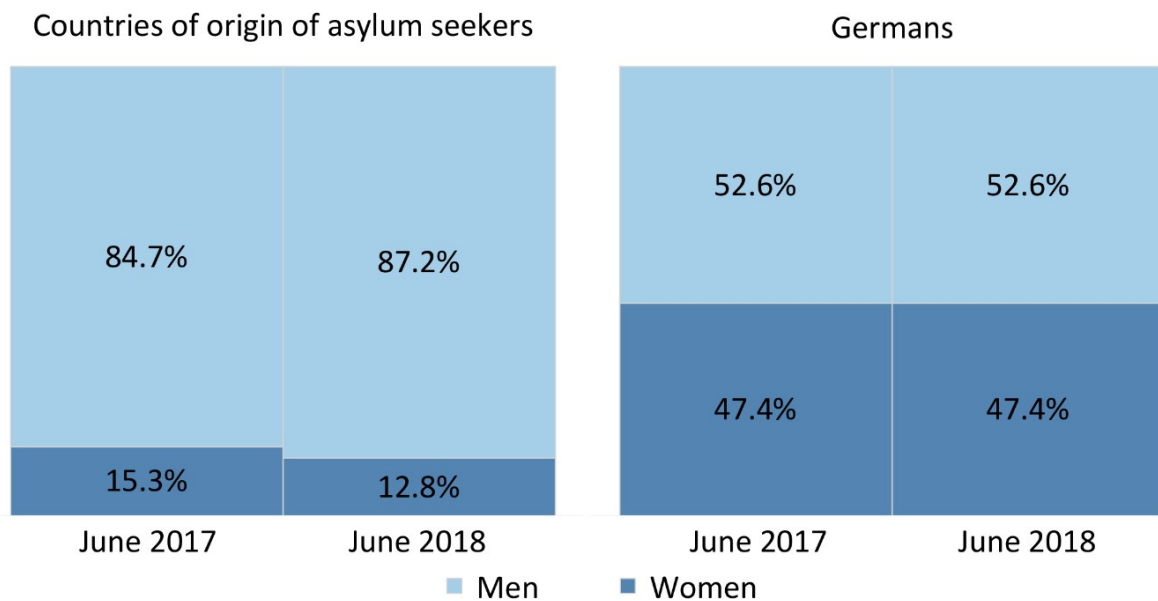
## 2.4. Situation on the labour market

When looking at the situation on the labour market, it becomes apparent that an increasing number of women from the eight most important asylum countries of origin as predefined by the BA pursues employment subject to social security contributions (*sozialversicherungspflichtige Beschäftigung - SvB*) (Figure 5).

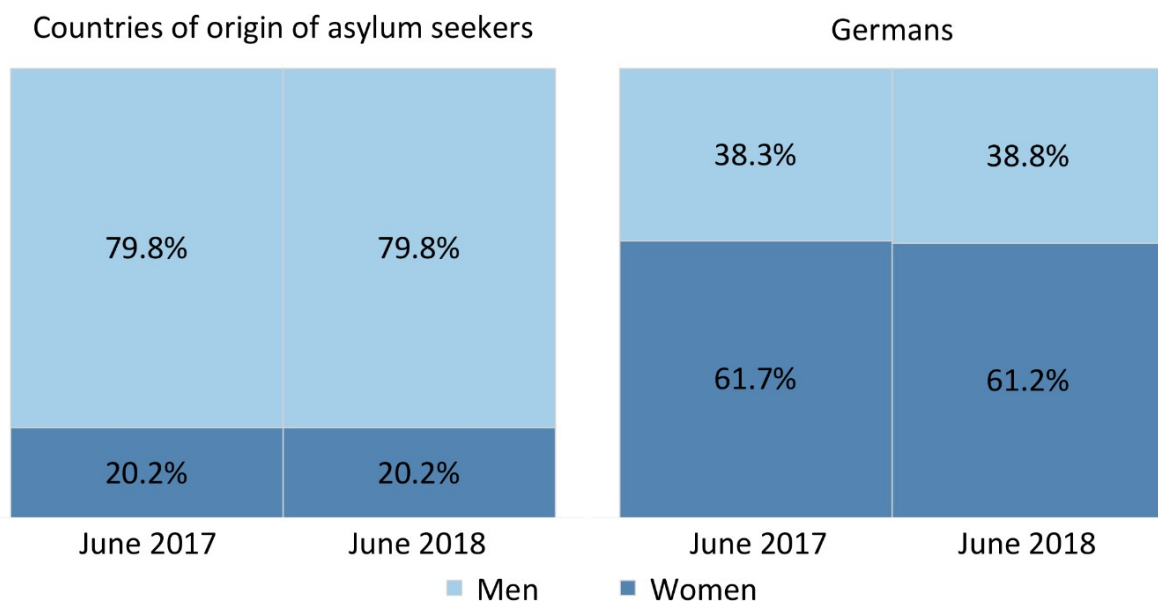


**Figure 5: Forms of employment of persons from asylum countries of origin**  
n= 35.416/45.725/177.889/270.276. Own diagram based on BA 2018b © Minor

Even so, the proportion of women in the SvB is still low at 12.8 % and, in comparison with the previous year (15.3 %), has slightly decreased (Figure 6). Regarding the exclusively marginally employed (*ausschließlich geringfügig Beschäftigte - agB*), the proportion of women from the eight asylum countries of origin is, at 20.2 %, not only slightly higher than among the SvB but has remained unchanged (Figure 7).

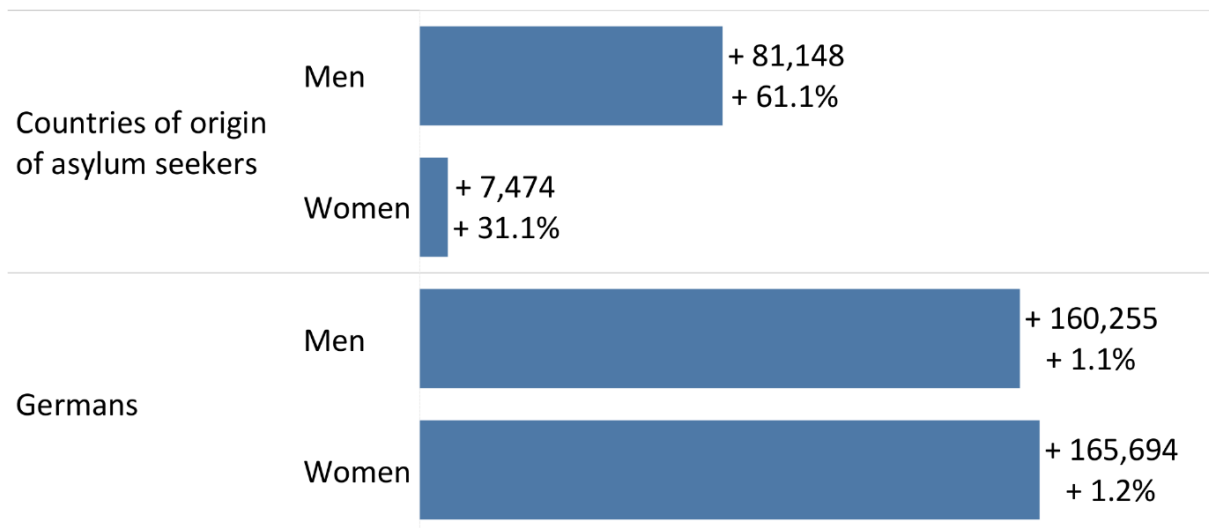


**Figure 6: Gender distribution of employees subject to social security contributions**  
 n= 156.850/245.472/28.677.921/29.003.870. Own diagram based on BA 2018b © Minor



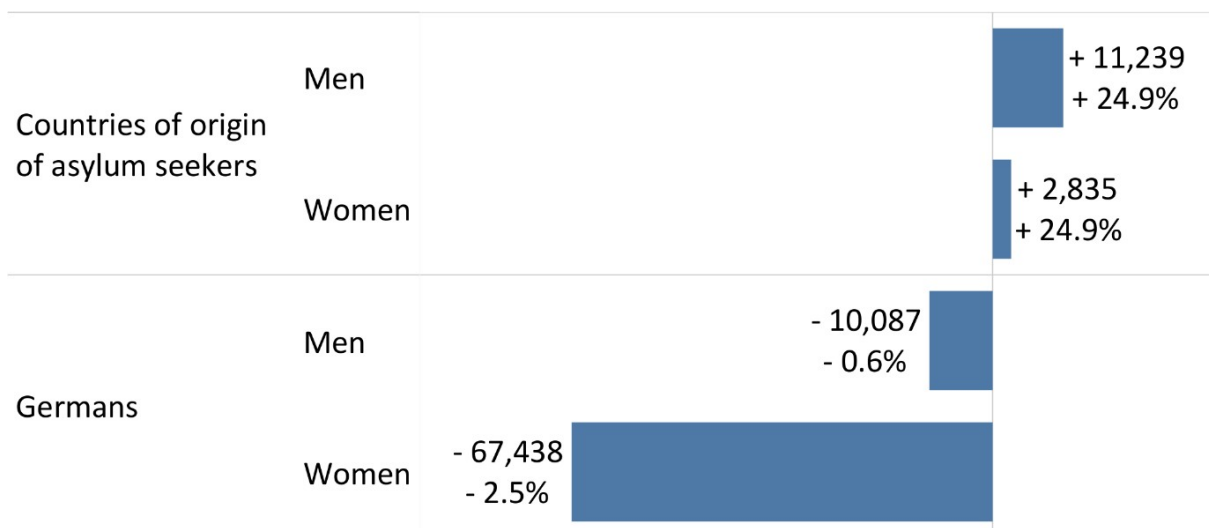
**Figure 7: Gender distribution of persons in exclusively marginal employment**  
 n= 56.455/70.529/4.384.610/4.307.085. Own diagram based on BA 2018b © Minor

Generally, in comparison with the previous year the proportion of employees subject to social security contributions (see Figure 8) and of the exclusively marginally employed (see Figure 9) from the so-called asylum countries of origin has significantly increased, which is primarily attributable to the number of male employees.



**Figure 8: Number of employees subject to social security contributions**

Reference month: June 2018; cf. June 2017. Own diagram based on BA 2018b © Minor



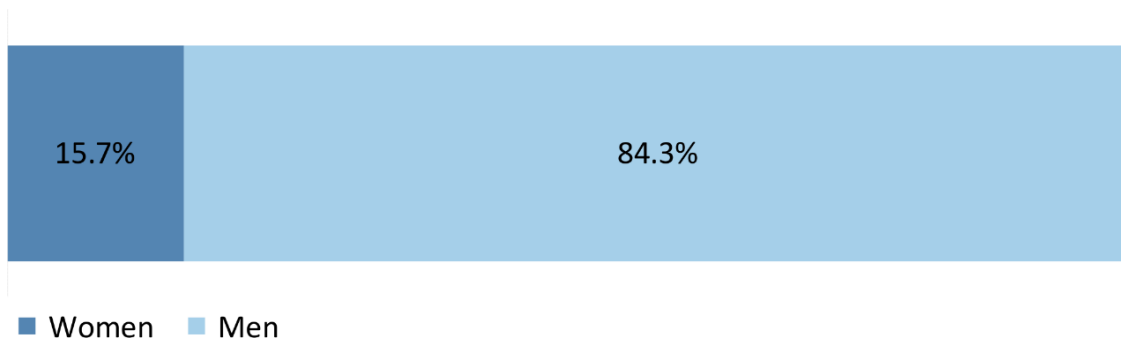
**Figure 9: Number of persons in exclusively marginal employment**

Reference month: June 2018; cf. June 2017. Own diagram based on BA 2018b © Minor

When considering the number of employees it is important to keep in mind that these numbers are only significant to show how many people, in the present case with a refugee background, were able to find work, but they do not show whether the work they found is adequate in any way to their qualifications already gained or to the level of their education or training.

## 2.5. Situation on the training market

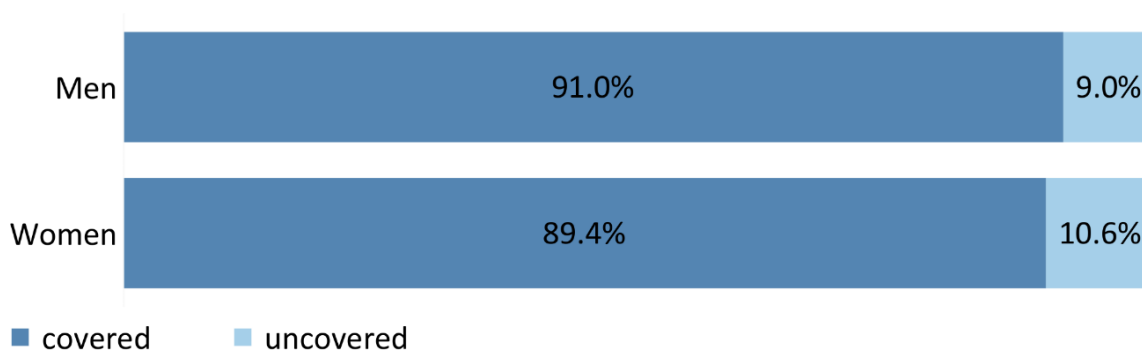
Refugee women are underrepresented not only on the labour market but also on the training market (see Figure 10). With a proportion of 15.7 %, they represent less than one sixth of all applicants for places of professional or vocational education and training in the context of forced migration.



**Figure 10: Applicants for places of professional or vocational education and training in the context of forced migration**

Representative month: September 2018. n= 38.299. Own diagram based on BA 2018c © Minor

Nevertheless, at 89.4% (women) and 91.0% (men) the coverage rate is about the same for both sexes (see Figure 11). Yet, many questions which are also interesting cannot be answered on the basis of statistical data. For example, the data do not indicate the type of training places to which the relevant persons applied, how old they are, which previous experiences or qualifications they may have, or the sector they applied in.

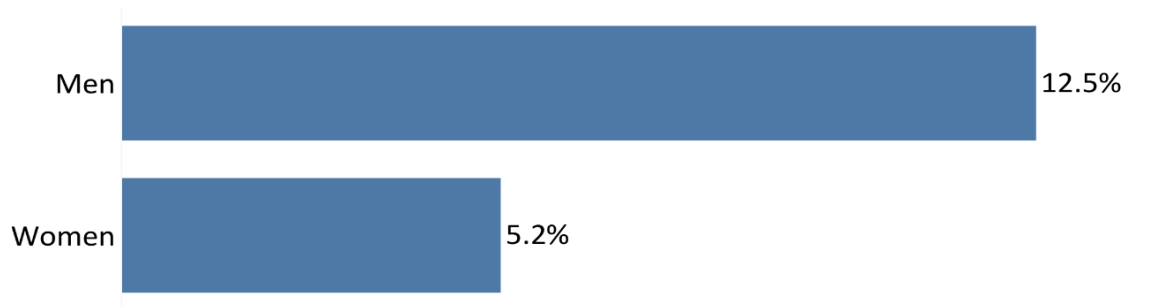


**Figure 11: Coverage rate of applicants for professional or vocational training places in the context of forced migration**

Representative month: September 2018. n= 6.003/32.296. Own diagram based on BA 2018c © Minor

## 2.6. Participation in measures of the Federal Employment Agency

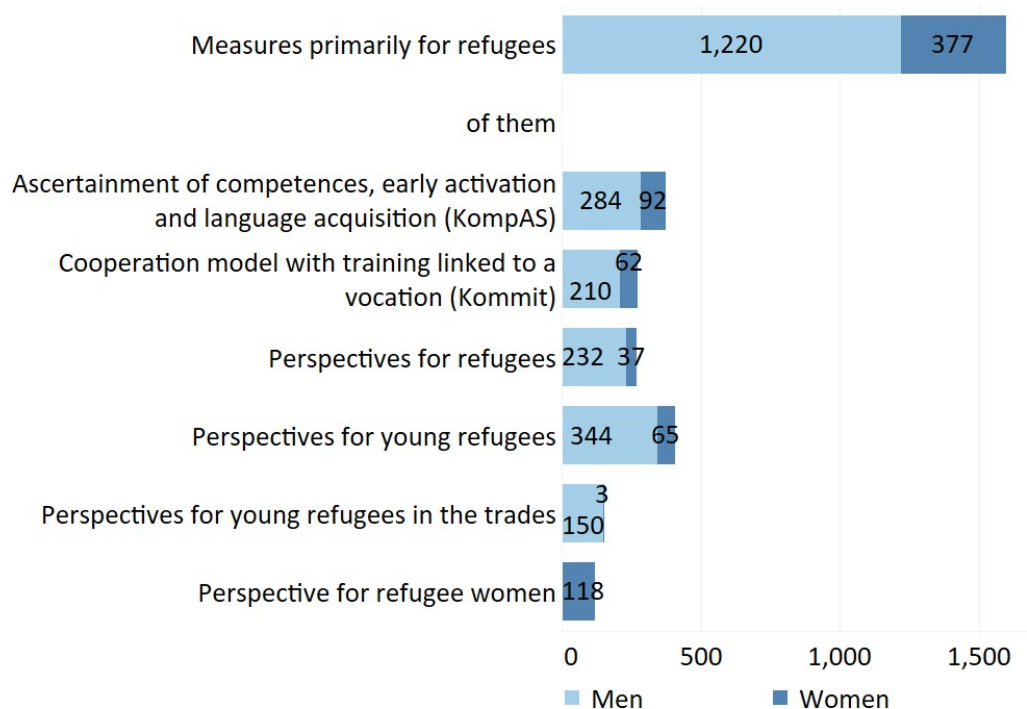
The number of refugee women reached by measures of the BA is significantly lower than of refugee men (see Figure 12).



**Figure 12: Participation rate of persons capable of work and eligible for benefits in the context of forced migration in BA measures**

Proportion of all persons capable of work and eligible for benefits in the context of forced migration. Representative month: March 2018. n= 236.105/367.120. Own diagram based on BA 2018a © Minor

Even the evaluation of BA measures offered primarily to refugees shows a significant underrepresentation of refugee women (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13: Persons capable of work and eligible for benefits in the context of forced migration in BA measures**

Representative month: September 2018. Own diagram based on BA 2018a © Minor

It is interesting that even “Perspective for female refugees” (PerF-W), a type of measures particularly designed for refugee women, has very few participants: in September 2018 there were 118 women throughout Germany (see Figure 13). One of the reasons for the low number of participants is that this type of measures is only offered at very few locations in Bremen, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Wuerttemberg, and Berlin. For the present study, two focus groups were conducted with participants of this type of measure.

As mentioned initially, it was one of the motivations for the present case study to shed light on the question why, so far, the BA has hardly reached refugee women with its offers of employment promotion. For this purpose, discussions with the target group about the visions of their future with regard to their (work-) life in Germany and related needs were held. In the following chapter, key findings from the conducted interviews are presented in detail and analysed.

### 3. Findings of the focus groups and expert interviews

#### 3.1. Socio-demographic data of the interviewed women

The refugee women interviewed within the scope of the focus groups were a most heterogeneous group with regard to their age, their countries of origin, their educational biographies, work experiences and language skills, and their current life situations.

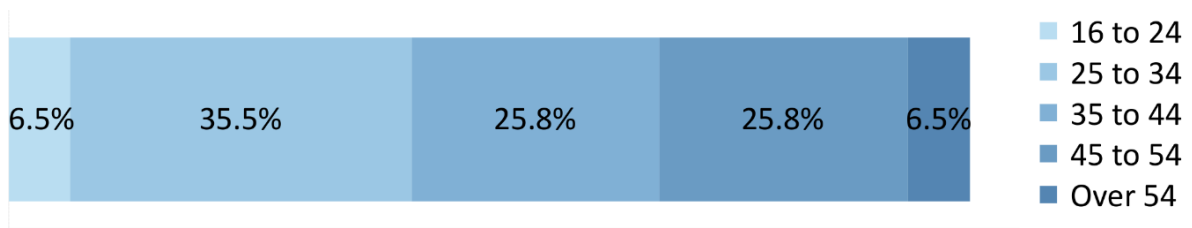
The women were from several countries of origin including Syria, Afghanistan, Guinea, Iran, Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> Most of them had lived in Germany since 2015, others less than a year or still others already for five years. Deliberately, the study did not enquire about the women’s exact residence status.

Concerning the age structure, all age groups between 20 and 65 were represented; the highest percentage at 35.5% were women between 25 and 34 years of age.

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<sup>12</sup> Accordingly the women were from more countries than those covered by the BA statistics under the so-called (eight) countries of origin of asylum seekers.

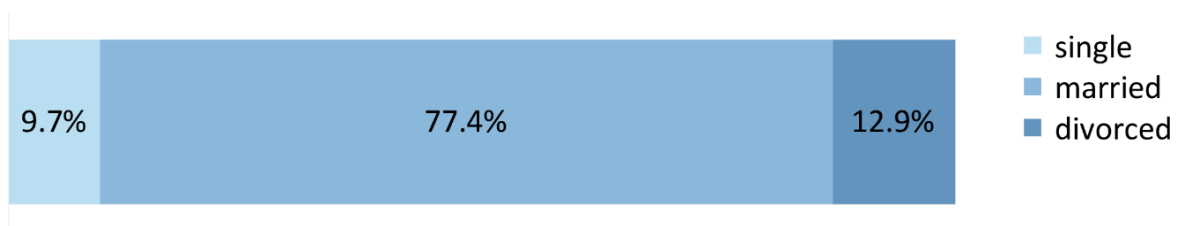




**Figure 14: Age distribution of the participants**

n= 32 © Minor

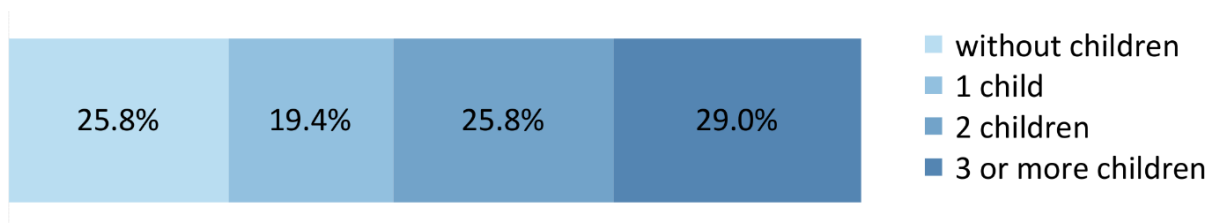
More than three quarters of the interviewed women were married. Almost 13% were divorced; all of them were women with children, and most of them described themselves as single mothers.



**Figure 15: Family status of the participants**

n= 32 © Minor

A large majority of the interviewed women (74.2 %) had children, almost one third of them had three or more children.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 16: Number of children of the participants**

n= 32 © Minor

Yet, the percentage of women without any children was, at 25.8 percent, still significant; they were also women of all age groups.

<sup>13</sup> The high proportion of married women with children among the interviewees confirms the relevant data of the BA statistics (see 2.2.).

The educational biographies and work experiences of the interviewed women showed a picture just as diverse.<sup>14</sup> Most of the women stated that they had attended school, learned a profession or vocation and obtained relevant qualifications. A striking number of the interviewed women, about 42%, attended university in their countries of origin.

Completed training	Completed studies	Work experience in semi-skilled occupations
Pharmacist	Teacher (several, e.g. sports, biology, chemistry, arts)	Fitness trainer
Florist	Social work	Cook
Dressmaker	Informatics	Sales assistant (several)
Paediatric nurse	Political science	Educator
Language mediator (completed in Germany)	Arts (several)	Travel agent
Job coach (completed in Germany)	Graphic design	Language teacher for Arabic
Technician in the rubber industry	Engineering	Interpreter (several)
	Anglistics	Nursing
	Law	
	Dentistry	

**Figure 17: Overview of the participants' professional or vocational training and higher education**

© Minor

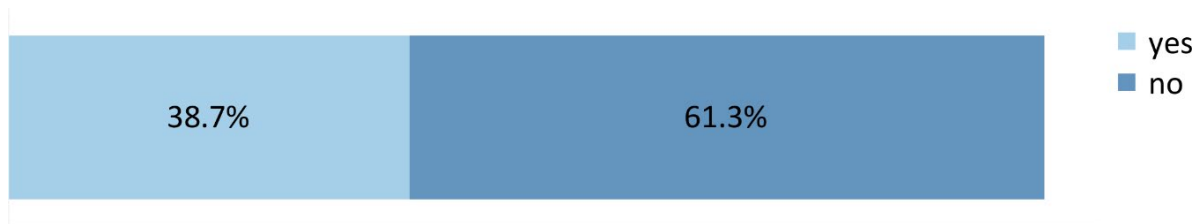
It should be taken into consideration that the educational systems of the countries of origin can be compared with the German system only to a limited extent which, among other factors, plays an important role for the duration and complexity of a possible recognition procedure and, if necessary, the required adjustment qualifications.

Among the interviewed women, two had attended school only for a few years in their home countries, and one of them had never attended school. Altogether six persons did not have any work experience at all, among them women who had been housewives in their countries of origin and very young women who had just acquired university entrance qualification in their home countries but,

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<sup>14</sup> The high diversity of the interviewed women with reference to their educational biographies is consistent with the relevant statistical data of the BA (see 2.3.).

partly due to the birth of a child, had not been able to immediately learn a profession or attend university.



**Figure 18: Participants' work experience in Germany**

n= 32 © Minor

Circa 39% of the women had gained initial work experiences in Germany, for the most part in voluntary activities, internships or traineeships, or mini-jobs. Here, the large majority of the interviewed women worked below their actual level of qualification. At the time of the survey interview, the majority of the women was registered as unemployed or seeking employment. Twelve of the women were participating in a measure by the Federal Employment Agency; ten of them were attending a type of measures particularly designed for refugee women, "Perspective for female refugees" (PerF-W)<sup>15</sup>; two women were attending vocational training.

At the time of the survey interview, one half of the women lived in collective accommodation facilities, the other half lived already in homes of their own. For several women, the situation was such that some of their family members still lived in their countries of origin.

The interviewed persons had German language skills ranging from level A2 to level C1. At the time of the survey interview, some of the women were waiting for a possibility to repeat a failed language test and then attend a follow-up course, others were waiting for the next course to begin.

### 3.2. Own ideas and wishes expressed by the interviewed women relating to their working life in Germany

In the first part of the interviews the women were asked, among other things, how relevant a professional or vocational activity in Germany was for them and

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<sup>15</sup> Deliberately, more women attending qualification measures of the BA were selected for the groups of interviewees than were considered for the statistical population.

how important it was for them to work. Regardless of their age, their educational backgrounds, their previous work experiences or their present situations in life, all of the interviewed women displayed great interest and a high motivation to participate in the German labour market. For them, the chance to work was particularly associated with increased participation in society because many of them still felt socially excluded and contacts to the local population hardly existed at that time. Frequently women who had not yet participated in working life recognized an opportunity to learn something new and to realise their potentials; they were open for different occupational fields and showed great interest for education and training measures. Here, the situation of the women who had already worked in their countries of origin gave a differentiated picture: for some of them it was of great importance to work in their learned professions again, to contribute with their obtained qualifications and skills, and to develop them further. They refused to participate in new vocational training courses, especially over several years.

“In my home country, I worked as a telecommunication engineer for 15 years. I wish to work in this field again also in Germany.” (Woman from Syria, married, no children)

Others, in turn, were generally open for working in new spheres:

“You can discover new abilities and work in other fields. Women should have a chance to discover their abilities and skills. For this, they need more information about the possibilities they have here in Germany.” (Woman from Syria, dentist, divorced, three children)

“I studied in Iran and worked for three years for an NGO in the medical field. I do not have any documents about my medical qualification, but I am quite flexible. I’d just like to have a good job, and I’d also like to do an apprenticeship. Studying at university is too difficult because of the language.” (Woman from Afghanistan/Iran, political scientist, divorced, one child)

On the whole, it became clear that it is of central importance for these women to work and, not least through their work, to participate in society. It is especially significant for them to find work which matches their own interests and ideas, but which need not necessarily match the fields where they had previously worked. However, most of the women did not know anything about the options

open to them and the paths they might take to find work which met their expectations.

### 3.3. Previous experiences of the interviewed women in the process of integration into the labour market

#### 3.3.1. *Multiple burdens*

Despite their high motivation to take up work in Germany, from the perspective of the interviewed women and the experts there are numerous factors which impede rapid integration into the labour market equivalent to qualification levels. For example, many of the refugee women reported about multiple burdens like insecurity regarding residence status, worries about family members who were still in countries of origin or transit, cramped and noisy living conditions in collective accommodation facilities, or lacking childcare places. Such conditions made it very difficult for many of the women to concentrate on learning German and meeting possible new challenges in working life. A particularly serious barrier to successful integration in the labour market was represented by insecurity regarding residence status, even though many women and their families had lived, and still live, with this situation over a longer period of time. The interviewed experts reported that women whose asylum procedure was still being processed or who had only a short-term residence permit or a temporary suspension of deportation status frequently experienced a permanent state of anxiety and, as a result, were often not able to develop any long-term perspectives.

“What is also difficult is the problem of the perspective. People do not really know how long they will stay. [...] So there is always the question whether it makes sense to do anything.” (Staff member at a training provider)

Especially for the interviewed members of staff at training providers, working with traumatised women poses another challenge. Usually it does not yet make sense to even think of integrating them into the labour market at their current state; instead, above all they need professional support by therapists; however, it is not always ensured that such support is sufficiently available when needed.

“When we sit round the table here, we face several different forms of trauma. We try to deal with all these problems here somehow. In some

cases I must say: presently it is not possible at all to make them fit for matters of labour market policy. Before that, we need to clarify some things first.” (Staff member at a training provider)

### *3.3.2. How do you find a childcare place?*

Furthermore, many of the interviewed mothers reported about serious problems to find childcare places for their small children. If, in general, the search for such a place is difficult in many towns and communities because places are insufficiently available, this is even much more difficult for refugees. This is partly because the interviewed women did not have any knowledge how exactly the search for a childcare place works and which steps they needed to take accordingly to find a care place for their child, or children. In addition, the entitlement to a care place is dependent on the scope of the parents’ occupational activities. According to their own statements, the support they received for this by public authorities was not at all sufficient. For some of the interviewed women this resulted in the fact that they had to wait for a longer period until they were able to participate in a language course or any other measure. Some of them reported that, when they turned to the job centre seeking help, they could not get any help there because the respective providers rarely offered any courses with childcare. In the opinion of the interviewed representative for equal opportunities on the job market, the problem of insufficiently available daycare places is compounded by the insufficient provision of all-day offerings, particularly at primary schools. As a result, the women concerned face organisational challenges which, in many cases, can hardly be solved. If primary school ends already at 11:30am it is hardly possible, even if only part-time, to attend measures or language classes.

For the interviewed women, this situation was very unsatisfactory because they did not want to wait for such a long time to start activities, in particular language acquisition. In so far as the interviewed women were married and lived together with their husbands, the latter seemed to play a relatively minor role in the field of childcare. Admittedly, the women stated to receive support from their husbands to pursue their work and career plans, but still they felt mainly responsible for the care of their children, especially when the children were still very young.

“For many women it is difficult to balance family and classes. Especially the issue of childcare rests with the women. When occupational activities are

concerned, they always come second place. Even if the men support the women's plans, they do not necessarily take care of the children." (Staff member at a training provider)

### *3.3.3. No information, no perspectives!*

All of the interviewed women, without exception, stated that they felt hardly appreciated or taken seriously with regard to the competences and qualification they already possessed and their own ideas about their working life in Germany. Many of them said that, since their arrival in Germany, the focus group was their first occasion to talk about this in such detail. Furthermore, it was remarkable that the majority of the women did not have any definite ideas about what their career prospects in Germany should look like, which is partly attributable to the fact that the existing, relevant options were hardly known to them, if at all. Also the staff members at the interviewed training providers had made this experience with regard to the women who participated in their offers: they had not been informed about the offers by employment agencies or job centres or about other available offers. The reasons the women gave for this were that, from their point of view, the information provided was insufficient, confusing and often incomprehensible on one hand and, on the other hand, the advice given by employment agencies or job centres was inadequate with regard to vocational prospects.

"Today I am talking about my wishes for the first time. During counselling at the job centre I was never asked. The only thing the job centre asked for were my documents. The appointment at the job centre was only short. They advised me to work in elderly care, but I would like to do something else, for example, work as a shop assistant at the baker's or in a supermarket. At the moment I don't see any future for myself." (Woman from Syria, secretary, divorced, two children)

The main reason why the interviewed women were so dissatisfied with the advisory service they received in the process of their integration into the labour market in Germany was, from their point of view, primarily the lack of individual approaches in the employment agencies and job centres. When asked about their experiences with employment agencies and job centres, most of them described appointments which were hardly helpful regarding their professional or vocational perspectives in Germany. From their perspective, advice where their

qualifications, competences, ideas and interests in their search for career prospects in Germany were taken into account was given only to a limited extent. Instead, many of the interviewed women felt that they were put under pressure by the job centre employees to take up some sort of job as quickly as possible, mostly elementary occupations (predominantly as geriatric care helpers or cleaners).

“The job centre only wants us to find a job, no matter what. But I don’t want to work as a cleaner or a baker. The job centre keeps urging me to do some job. I’d like to work but not just anything.” (Woman from Afghanistan/Iran, no qualification, married, two children)

“The major problem with the job centre isn’t the language. We need advice and have no idea where to get it. The job centre wants us to become geriatric nurses or work for a cleaning company.” (Woman from Syria, secretary, divorced, two children)

#### 3.3.4. *“This will not be recognized in Germany anyway.”*

From the women’s point of view, previously acquired qualifications and work experiences barely played a role in consultation appointments; and if they did, advisors tended to dismiss them as of no value in Germany. According to the interviewed persons, they were advised and referred (*Verweisberatung*) to the recognition counselling centres only in individual cases. In several cases, however, job centre employees gave an outlook of their own whether the attempt to have the vocational or academic qualification recognised in Germany might have, or have not, a chance of success, or whether the attempt made sense at all.

“I asked someone especially to accompany me to the appointment. I was told that law was too difficult, probably this wouldn’t make sense. Unfortunately, I was not advised what else I could do. I was very insecure after the job centre appointment as I did not receive any information. I have no idea how to go on from here.” (Lawyer from Afghanistan, single, no children)

“Up to now, my qualification hasn’t been recognised yet. The advisor at the job centre kept dissuading me from working as an engineer again. It wouldn’t be recognised in Germany anyway. She offered me a job as a ‘wrapper’ in a chocolate factory, I shouldn’t be so choosy.” (Woman from Syria, engineer, married, no children)



Also the interviewed providers said they had the impression that, first and foremost, the job centre intended to place the women in jobs, no matter in which field – the interests and desires the women had often seemed to be of secondary importance.

“Probably the workload experienced in the job centres is immense (...). So, firstly the people there need to be equipped with additional time resources. But the institution also needs an ethical orientation so that it is really a matter close to our hearts to help shape a person’s career path. Often the women feel that the attitude of the job centres towards them is not sympathetic. They seem not to be really interested that the path a person takes is a good one.” (Staff member at a training provider)

On several occasions, the staff members at the implementing organisations reported about examples where women who participated in their projects brought information from the job centre along to the project or measure that the recognition of their professional or vocational qualification would not make sense but working as a geriatric care helper was their only chance even though, at that time, the women had not yet visited any recognition counselling centre.

“Again and again I am surprised why the job centre does not concern itself with the recognition of documents. Sometimes the recognition procedures are started only here [in the measure].” (Staff member at a training provider)

In this context, many of the women also complained about the procedures and processes which, for them, were not transparent. For most of the women it was not apparent why the recognition of their qualification was not possible or, respectively, why this process took so much time.

“We need better recognition of our diplomas. Why are they not recognised? Why are we urged into unskilled jobs? This system is not transparent.” (Woman from Kosovo, paediatric nurse, worked as an educator for several years, married, three children)

An example for smooth cooperation among job centres, employment agencies and IQ recognition counselling centres are the Integration Points in North Rhine-Westphalia. According to the interviewed employees of these job centres and employment agencies, it is part of their standard programme for refugee women

(and also refugee men) who have formal, or non-formal, professional or vocational qualifications to send them directly to recognition counselling centres and, if the recognition of their qualification is an option, to accompany and support them in the entire recognition procedure. To prevent the women from losing their motivation during the often lengthy process, the interviewed experts ensure the greatest possible transparency.

### 3.3.5. *“Mostly I don’t understand them.”*

Language barriers, which may increase the feeling of not receiving adequate, individual advice, aggravate the situation. In the focus groups, the women mentioned again and again how difficult it was for them to understand what was going on at the appointments at the job centre or at the employment agency because of their still insufficient knowledge of German. Not always was it possible for the women to find suitable persons to accompany them to the appointments as translators. According to their own statements, they received hardly any support from the job centres and agencies in this matter. The interpreter hotline provided by the Federal Employment Agency was not known to any of the interviewed women and, as the women stated, was not used during any of their appointments

“Generally at the job centre it’s all about filling in papers. Mostly I don’t understand them. Explanations are not given. No one helps with filling in the forms, and the job centre doesn’t help us anyway.” (Woman from Afghanistan/Iran, teacher, married, two children)

“I was sent away and I was told to bring an interpreter next time.” (Woman from Afghanistan/Iran, teacher, married, two children)

“There are no interpreters at the job centre. Especially for Persian there are none at all. The letters always say that I must bring an interpreter myself.” (Woman from Afghanistan/Iran, no vocational qualification, married, two children)

“I don’t have any problems with interpreters at the job centre. The security people are often Arabic. They help with translating.” (Woman from Syria, social worker, single, no children)

As becomes apparent from the interviewed women’s quotes, there are not only the communication problems during the appointments but also the difficulties

in understanding the letters, applications, and other documents they receive from employment agencies and job centres. Here also, the women receive hardly any support; multilingual materials barely exist.

“It would be useful to provide information in several languages, otherwise no one will understand what all this is about. It must be clearly stated what I need to bring, otherwise too much time is lost as it is not clear which documents are required. Especially when you are new in Germany this is difficult. If information is lacking, much time is lost.” (Woman from Afghanistan, lawyer, single, no children)

Sometimes the women are helped by social workers if they still live in collective accommodation facilities or, if they are attending courses or measures, by staff members at the providers. Here, the latter’s activities are often close to voluntary work because the personnel structures and financial resources of the projects are not suited to providing this kind of support. However, especially for more time-consuming documents this is not always possible so that, in such cases, the women are often left to their own devices. Also, the employees at job centres and employment agencies who were interviewed within the framework of the case study confirmed that this problem exists. Admittedly, according to their own statements these employees used the interpreter hotline or called in multilingual colleagues for support if necessary. In information events where the target group was addressed they also cooperated with interpreters if required. However, from the interviewed persons’ point of view, problems arose in connection with the numerous forms which were only available in German but hardly ever understood by the target group. To date, suitable support is not yet provided here.

### 3.3.6. *“It’s always only about measures!”*

In the discussions with all the women it became particularly apparent that, even after many appointments with employment agencies and job centres, most of them did not know at all which career prospects they might have in Germany. Many of them felt that they were running out of time and wasted precious years of their lives.

“The job centre says always no. It’s always only about measures; there is no proper advice.” (Woman from Syria, university entrance qualification, married, three children)

Some of the interviewed women had gained experiences with employment promotion measures. In particular, these were job application trainings, computer courses and the type of measures particularly designed for refugee women, “Perspective for female refugees – identify potentials, facilitate integration” (PerF-W). When asked how useful they found the attended measures for their career prospects, the feedback ranged from “very useful” to “not at all useful”. To provide a detailed picture of such measures, the following paragraphs will discuss PerF-W and the experiences made by participants and course instructors more explicitly. As already mentioned in 1.2., two of the focus groups were conducted with women who, at the time of the survey interview, were attending a PerF-W type measure. Within the framework of these two focus groups, the participants were asked, among other things, how useful they estimated this measure to be for their career prospects in Germany, which relevant improvements they might suggest, and what exactly a measure should, in their opinion, include so that it would be seen as supportive with regard to integration into the labour market.

On the matter whether it is generally useful to offer a specific measure for women with a refugee background, the instructors and the women themselves had different opinions. The interviewed experts were supportive of this type of offer on the grounds that the target group could be offered a protected space there, particularly for the initial time after their arrival in Germany. All the interviewees were in favour of an offer specifically for women, but most of them expressed their wish not to select the participants on the sole criterion of their refugee background. In this context, the interviewed women and also the staff members at the providers pointed to the high level of heterogeneity of the target group, which means that the needs and interests of the individual women differ strongly. In addition, some of the women found it a disadvantage that, because of this limitation, they would only get in contact with other refugees. If, then, the majority of participants came from Arabic-speaking countries, they communicated hardly ever in German but very much in Arabic.

Asked about their reasons or their motivations to participate in the measure, most of the women stated that they took part because the job centre had told them that they had to do this. Moreover, some of them reported that they were threatened with benefit reduction in case they refused to participate in the measure. Why they should participate, or how exactly they would profit from

this – these were questions which, according to the women’s own statements, were not sufficiently answered. In this context they complained that they did not feel taken seriously and that they were not asked what they themselves would like to do or which needs they identified themselves. The training providers confirmed what the women described: many of them were very sceptical when coming to the measure and they did not know why they should attend. When they had already participated in a number of measures which, however, did not yield any concrete results for a career, their motivation decreased strongly, as the instructors reported:

“The more experienced ones come with quite a bad feeling: ‘Oh, another measure, again!’. Of the other ones, one half is indecisive because they have no idea what to expect. The other half comes joyful and full of expectations. In general, however, previous experiences are rather negative.” (Staff member at a training provider)

### *3.3.7. “There is a total lack of practical relevance!”*

Particularly those of the women who already had a conception of the work they would like to do or the studies they would like to pursue in Germany found the contents of the measures as communicated at that time too general. They made similar comments about the communication of occupation-based German language skills as these were also perceived to be too unspecific: individual professions or vocations and the relevant terminologies were only briefly outlined but could not be explored.

To an extent, the interviewed women had very definite ideas about what ought to be included in a measure to support them with their first steps on the labour market. For example, they wished for a stronger differentiation and a clear reference to professional or vocational practice in Germany in line with their interests and, partially, already acquired competences and qualifications. From their perspective, a more homogeneous group of participants would be supportive. In addition, there were repeated complaints that the measures lacked direct practical relevance to working life. What is more, the separation of language learning and vocational orientation or qualification, respectively, was criticised.

“We need direct measures in connection with individual professions. Learning the language and working at the same time would be very good.”  
(Woman from Syria, housewife, married, three children)

“There is a total lack of practical relevance of the measures.” (Woman from Syria, sports teacher, married, four children)

From the interviewed women’s point of view, it would also be useful for a reasonable design of a measure if the participants were more homogeneous concerning their educational backgrounds and German language skills. This would make it easier for instructors to make a measure more interesting for everyone present.

“It would be much better if participants had a similar level. Here, it is a mixture of everything, there are even illiterate women in the class. Many of us are very bored.” (Women from Syria, university entrance qualification, married, three children)

“The job centre does not take the women’s interests or other criteria into account for the composition of the courses. 26-year old women are sitting next to women who are 50 years old. This is often difficult. If there are still more differences like, are they literate? Have they studied? Did they gain work experiences? [...] This makes our work very difficult. Motivations are different, learning processes differ strongly. [...] This means that we can often work only with a portion of the course participants.” (Staff member at a training provider)

Again and again, the lack of flexibility relating to contents and structure of courses and measures was pointed out by the interviewed providers. As a result, frequently the individual needs and interests of participants can only be considered insufficiently or not at all because some of the project targets relating to course contents are very narrow and schedules are tight (course duration). In addition, there are the women’s very different language levels. For the participants, this leads to the situation that some of them are bored in the respective measure because they are underchallenged or the measure bypasses their interests. Others are not at all able to cope; they withdraw from the class and also leave the measure with the feeling that it has done nothing for them.

“A modular design of measures would be useful, like knowledge about several industries, language modules, or extra modules like job application trainings. Generally, people should be able to participate in the measures they like. But then in turn, providers should be able to offer a wide range of measures. Which of them can actually do this? Perhaps rather a training

centre where people can learn several things in one building.” (Employee of an employment agency)

Moreover, providers reported that they faced great difficulties and that much time and many resources were required when they searched for companies and enterprises willing to provide internships or traineeships for refugee women. The search was even more difficult if the women were not yet confident enough in speaking German – a task which could hardly be achieved by providers under the prevailing conditions.

“We are largely on our own and must look for cooperation partners ourselves. Putting this into practice is a very labour-intensive task for which resources are not always available. [...] We must constantly be in search for opportunities. It is not that we get support from anywhere. So, eventually it depends on the personnel and on the backgrounds and contacts they have.” (Staff member at a training provider)

“The average entrepreneur wants people who are ready to work. In fields with a great labour shortage, for example, elementary occupations like letter sorter at DHL, they are always on the lookout. But – what is the problem? There are no internships. You can only start working immediately and it’s small-scale.” (Staff member at a training provider)

Only in individual cases did the interviewed providers succeed with arranging internships or traineeships for participants. For the large majority of the participating women, there was no internship or traineeship after they had finished the measure, not to mention employment. This means that, from their point of view, their participation in a measure did not improve their current life situation. With many of the interviewed women, the feeling prevailed that the PerF-W type of measure did not really help them in respect of their career prospects in Germany.

“Actually I have no idea why I am here! I don’t want to waste still more time. For me, my time is precious; I only want to work. Chances are low to find a job through a measure.” (Woman from Syria, secretary, divorced, two children)

“If at the end of the measure you ask the women, ‘What will you do next?’, they often reply, ‘I must wait what the job centre will tell me.’ Many are not

aware that they can decide themselves what they want to do.” (Staff member at a training provider)

Some of the providers interviewed within the framework of the case study, who offer vocational orientation projects for, among others, refugee women, succeeded in entering in cooperation with interested enterprises through which they were able to arrange internships or traineeships, entrance qualifications, or apprenticeships. In addition, some of the enterprises offered job-specific language courses, an offer which was very gladly accepted by the interviewed women. In this context, the providers had a long-term function as contacts for the enterprises on one side and the women on the other side. From the interviewed providers’ point of view, this model is particularly suitable for supporting refugee women with their integration into the labour market, even though it is very time- and resource-consuming.

### *3.3.8. Integration into the labour market as cooperative process*

The aspect that the lack of perspective is disillusioning and ultimately frustrating has been repeatedly pointed out by the interviewed experts. In their opinion, the intended goal of a sustainable and long-term integration of refugee women into the labour market is often merely considered to be of secondary importance. In addition, as the experts stated, matters were strongly dependent on individual contact persons encountered at authorities or companies and their commitment. For example, the cooperation existing with representatives for equal opportunities on the job market, who work in job centres and employment agencies, were mentioned very positively several times. On many occasions, an intensive exchange among the various stakeholders takes place here. Also the refugee and asylum teams which cooperate specifically with many job centres and employment agencies are regarded as committed and well-connected partners.

“Besides time, some flexibility and open-mindedness of job centres and other actors is needed. We cooperate beneficially with representatives for equal opportunities on the job market at the agency and the job centre; yet, again and again we face major obstacles when dealing with the case managers. When we have accompanied the women in this time-consuming process, when they have found the profession of their dreams and are prepared to walk this path, and then are told by the job centre, ‘We don’t see any



need for this, you can just as well work as a cleaner', then this is very frustrating." (Staff member at a training provider)

In this context, the interviewed experts criticised that, from their point of view, the integration of refugee women (and of refugees in general) into the labour market was not at all perceived as a process to be performed jointly and holistically by the various stakeholders.

In many cases, the impression prevailed among the interviewed experts that relevant information, for example about the progress made by some of the women, was indeed recorded but no systematical, further use was made. This means that the relevant stakeholders in the individual stages of the process of labour market integration consult each other only sporadically. What is more, many experts reported that cooperation between employment agencies or job centres and individual providers strongly depended on the commitment of individual employees, for example, when considering whether, and if so which, information about course participants should be transferred to providers, whether queries from providers should be dealt with, etc. Partly, the various stakeholders cooperate profitably and closely, partly stakeholders hardly perceive cooperation as existing at all. This, in turn, has the effect that the support needed by the concerned women to build up their career prospects in Germany is not always available in the form which, in the eyes of the interviewed women and experts, is actually required.

To improve this situation and, thus, open up vocational prospects for refugee women in Germany, all stakeholders involved in the process of labour market integration are called upon. For this purpose, and on the basis of the outcomes of the conducted interviews, concrete recommendations for action will be developed in the following chapter.

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendations for action

Within the framework of the present case study, it was investigated why, until now, refugee women have not been sufficiently reached by the employment promotion measures of the Federal Employment Agency and to what extent the women who were reached by measures benefited from them. The focus was on the question which factors are decisive for a successful process of integration

into the labour market by means of language acquisition, qualification, training, or employment. Besides various experts, above all the refugee women themselves got a chance to voice their opinions. In doing so, they talked about their ideas and desires regarding their career prospects in Germany, and they stated clearly which kind of support they needed to put these ideas and desires into practice. They reported about their previous experiences in their attempts to work here and related positive and negative events. A decisive role in this context was played by employment agencies and job centres; all the interviewed women had been in contact with them, and employment agencies and job centres were important partners for them in matters relating to working in Germany.

The large majority of the women interviewed within the framework of the case study had work experience, some of them for many years. These women had worked and/or studied in their countries of origin or, partially, also in the countries where they had lived during their flight. They were certain that they wanted to work in the professions or vocations they had learned or also in new ones. All the greater was their disappointment and, for some, frustration that up to then it had hardly been possible for them to do so because of the many existing obstacles. Often, they felt that they were not perceived, appreciated, or supported as persons with their individual abilities and interests at the competent offices or authorities but rather impeded and degraded. The only prospect they could see for themselves, or which had been offered to them, were elementary occupations, primarily in elderly care or the cleaning business. However, particularly those among the interviewed women who had already acquired a vocational or academic qualification and relevant work experience of several years found this hard to accept.

The perception of the women was largely confirmed by the interviewed experts. Every day, they face new challenges in their task of supporting refugee women in developing career prospects for themselves and taking their first steps on the German labour market. Under prevailing conditions, these challenges are often hard to cope with. This is true for the interviewed staff members of the various providers and also for the employees of job centres and employment agencies. Frequently they feel left to their own devices because cooperation with other relevant stakeholders is still in its early stages.

In particular, the results of the present case study clearly show that the integration of refugee women into the labour market is a long-term, individual and often also very time-consuming process which should not be regarded as completed with the completion of a measure or a course. From the point of view of the interviewed women and the experts, some factors are especially important for a successful, long-term integration of refugee women into the German labour market under fair conditions. These factors are as follows:

#### 4.1. Advice and support

##### ***Comprehensive, individual advice and support under consideration of work experience, professional or vocational qualifications, and educational qualifications***

Concerning subjects, contents and duration, advice and support provided by the job centres, employment agencies and educational providers should be oriented towards the particular woman's individual needs and interests and, at the same time, take her entire life situation into account. The persons involved should focus on working together to develop long-term vocational prospects under special consideration and appreciation of individual competences and existing qualifications of each individual woman.

"I think that generally the most important thing is that we really always focus on the individual cases, that we look closely at what the individual women bring along, which resources they have, and then start developing prospects together with them." (Staff member at a training provider)

"We urgently need more possibilities for vocational orientation, in particular for low-skilled women! What are the options at all if someone has attended school only for a few years? Working in the care sector or permanent employment in elementary occupations may be a component, but it can't be the only answer." (Job centre employee)

Language communication has an important function here so that, regardless of the individual person's knowledge of German, it should be generally guaranteed during appointments. For this, the systematic involvement of suitable interpreters in the appointments is required. For employees of job centres and employment agencies, the interpreter hotline of the Federal Employment Agency is available and it should be used to a greater extent.

If required (in case of trauma, family problems, etc.), socio-pedagogically and/or psychologically trained personnel needs to be involved to accompany the advisory process.

In general, the authorities involved in the process of the integration of refugee women into the labour market need a higher sensitivity for the life situation and the resulting needs of the target group. In this context, the specific refugee and asylum teams existing in some job centres and employment agencies can be mentioned as positive examples. They should cooperate in making their expertise increasingly available to integration specialists and case managers to raise their awareness for the specific needs of refugee women.

***Multi-language information materials on the subjects of work, training and study in Germany, and the systematic use of simple language***

If the access of these women to relevant information with reference to the subjects of training and employment in Germany as well as various other subjects concerning everyday life in Germany is to be improved and facilitated, information material should be increasingly made available in several languages and in simple language<sup>16</sup>. For documents where this is not possible because legal issues need to be presented correctly, it must be ensured that women seeking advice can understand the content. For this purpose, interpreters should be called in if required.

In addition, information offers on the Internet should be expanded and structured more clearly. As only few refugee women have a computer of their own but most of them own a smartphone, digital information should be prepared in such a way that it can be easily retrieved with a mobile phone.

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<sup>16</sup> Competence Centre for Vocational German Language (*Fachstelle Berufsbezogenes Deutsch*) (2019a).

## 4.2. Recognition of professional or vocational qualifications and competences

### ***Transparent, long-term support with the recognition of professional or vocational qualifications and competences***

Women who have formal or non-formal professional or vocational qualifications should be informed about the options of recognition of their qualifications and referred to a competent counselling centre. Assessments by employees of job centres and employment agencies with reference to the chances of success should be dispensed with because such chances must be assessed by the relevant IQ recognition counselling centres. For this purpose, close cooperation among job centres, employment agencies and IQ recognition counselling centres as takes place already in the Integration Points in North Rhine-Westphalia, for example (see 3.3.4.), is recommended.

The extremely complex and, in most cases, very prolonged procedure of recognition of a professional or vocational qualification and, if appropriate, adjustment qualification should be kept as transparent as ever possible. During this process, the women concerned should receive intensive support by the stakeholders involved and be informed in regular intervals about the current state of affairs, the further procedure and the next necessary steps.

## 4.3. Language development

### ***(Job-specific) language development according to individual needs combined with a high percentage of practical content***

Confident use of the German language is required to pursue qualified employment in Germany. Existing language course offers should be significantly improved and expanded so that refugee women have a chance to acquire the necessary language skills as fast as possible. For this, it is recommended to organise courses in smaller groups which are more homogeneous with regard to the learning level to ensure that, if possible, course contents are orientated towards participants' individual needs which should be taken into consideration more effectively. As regards content, subjects should be increasingly orientated towards these women's realities of life and, thus, enable them to cope with everyday and working life by using their linguistic skills.

Concerning integration into the labour market, the acquisition of job-specific language skills is of particular importance. According to their individual needs, interests and previously acquired work experience, as the case may be, the women should be supported through specific offers with a high percentage of practical content. This corresponds to the project “Integrated Content and Language Learning” (*Integriertes Fach- und Sprachlernen - IFSL*)<sup>17</sup>, which has been driven forward in the network IQ in many areas but is hardly anywhere reflected in measures attended by the women or their practical experiences.

Already acquired language competences should not be lost. To prevent this, waiting times between different courses or until an examination may be repeated if necessary should be significantly reduced.

Furthermore, also mothers of small children should be enabled to participate in language courses. For this purpose, courses with childcare should be offered increasingly, or the women should be supported in their search for such offers or a regular childcare place. However, courses with childcare should be regarded as temporary, short-term solutions. If equal participation of women (not only refugee women) in the labour market is to be facilitated, it must be ensured that high-quality offers of care for children in day care centres or primary schools are made available area-wide by towns and municipalities.

#### 4.4. Measures of employment promotion

***Specific measures oriented towards the needs and professional or vocational interests of refugee women with a high percentage of practical content which aim at establishing career prospects***

Measures of employment promotion are a possibility to support refugee women in entering the German labour market. However, for the design of such measures it is essential to consider the heterogeneous nature of the target group, particularly regarding age, educational background, and previous work experience, if this goal is to be achieved. This heterogeneity results in different interests and needs of the target group, which call for a high degree of flexibility in terms of

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<sup>17</sup> Competence Centre for Vocational German Language (*Fachstelle Berufsbezogenes Deutsch*) (2019b).

organisation, contents and approaches in the measures (for example, modular course design) so that participants will benefit from these measures.

For this purpose, vocationally specific measures which combine vocational practice with the acquisition of relevant terminology should be increasingly offered. At the same time, the options for internships or traineeships in professional or vocational fields the women are experienced or interested in should be widened and improved during or after measures. However, internships or traineeships should be provided also for women who do not yet feel confident enough to use German to the required extent.

Furthermore, offers for elderly women are urgently needed, which includes a group of women who already have many years of work experience and would like to work again in this field, and also women who are looking for new perspectives.

If refugee women are to be given the chance to benefit from their participation in employment promotion measures to a larger extent, the selection of such measures or, respectively, the decision in favour or against participation should always be made together with the women. To facilitate this process, it should be discussed in advance with women seeking advice what they would like to do themselves and which type of offer they might need for this. This requires, however, that the competent job centres or employment agencies inform the women which type of offers is available for their individual needs, what they should expect in the individual measures, and how these measures will benefit them practically.

“The information why a measure is useful should be better communicated. The women should not feel forced to take part in a measure. This doesn’t work!” (Job centre employee)

When selecting a suitable measure, the current life situation of the advice seekers should always be taken into consideration by job centres or employment agencies. At the same time, the option of attending measures part-time (also concerning internships or traineeships, trainings and apprenticeships, qualification measures, etc.) should be considered because, otherwise, many offers cannot be accepted by the women or are not compatible with the realities of their lives.

“Let’s not talk about people but with them. [...] Get everyone involved round a table and ask them, ‘What do you wish for your lives? What are your hopes, expectations, desires?’, instead of making decisions from above or design offers or measures at the drawing board. I think this is a rethinking process where each institution must take a good look at itself.” (Job centre employee)

#### 4.5. Financing of offers and measures

##### ***Structurally sustainable financing of projects instead of short-term offers and measures***

For the successful long-term support of the process of integrating refugee women (and other target groups) into the labour market, sustainable financing is required which goes significantly beyond individual measures and short-term projects. This means also that approaches which have proven to be successful should be transferred into mainstream funding.

“We need so much openness and flexibility. We must be very well networked and cooperate with many actors to build bridges for the women. And we need time. It is simply not enough to send someone into a measure like, for example, application training. It is a very long process. We have accompanied many women for more than three years, and now we are beginning to see how they are growing and developing.” (Staff member at a training provider)

##### ***Sufficiently available human resources of implementing organisations and authorities***

Within the scope of individual vocational guidance, support and assistance of refugee women as well as refugees in general which, partially, takes place as outreach work for better access to the target group, questions are repeatedly brought forward which are not directly related to the labour market but whose solution plays an important role for the successful integration of the women into the labour market (for example, children’s education, health problems, housing conditions, or questions regarding residence status). For providing holistic guidance and support to advice-seeking women, personnel resources must be sufficiently available at implementing organisations and in the official structures.



## 4.6. Networking and cooperation

### ***Understanding of labour market integration as a cooperative process***

On the part of the relevant stakeholders, like job centres, employment agencies, training providers, chambers, companies, towns and municipalities, the process of the integration of refugee women into the labour market should be understood as a common process and the cooperation in this respect should be significantly strengthened. For this, regular networking and exchange formats where all involved stakeholders meet, exchange their experiences about recent developments and current needs and, if required, discuss individual case constellations are of particular importance. Locally there are already some examples of successful networking in the form of round tables or work groups, but in many places considerable gaps still exist, particularly with regard to refugee women.

## 4.7. Companies and businesses

### ***More openness and commitment of companies and businesses***

The extent to which refugee women are given a fair chance on the German labour market depends largely on the openness and commitment of individual companies and businesses. Since 2015, many companies and businesses have been strongly committed to supporting refugees with their integration into the labour market. Women, however, have not yet been at the focus here; this ought to change. In this context, the cooperation among companies and businesses, job centres, employment agencies, and the various educational providers has an important function. Presently, there is still urgent need of improvement here; in the process of developing possible cooperations, training providers would benefit from the support by job centres and employment agencies because they often lack extensive contacts, for example to different industries or networks, and also the time resources to establish and coordinate such contacts to the necessary degree. In general, companies and businesses should be made more strongly aware of their responsibilities to engage themselves in the process of the integration of refugee women into the labour market by providing a much larger number of internships or traineeships, increasingly facilitating part-time models, and establishing language supporting measures along with entrance qualifications and apprenticeships. In turn, they should receive more support if

they commit themselves in this field, for example, in the form of permanent contacts at providers and, as the case may be, also job centres or employment agencies who are responsible for individual women.

#### 4.8. Conclusion

“There remains much to be done; even though we don’t see the refugees so much or, now, won’t see them any longer because of the ‘Anchor Centres’ – the problems still exist; and they are problems of our society. I feel, if someone said at some time, ‘You are welcome’, this means for the next few years. And there are tasks to perform until the people are integrated. And I think, if integration offers are made – the earlier, the better, because if you keep saying no, and with temporary suspension of deportation and preventing people from doing something, you create discontent, frustrated people, they will become ill, aggressive, angry ... Instead we could take a positive approach ... I mean, taking it all together, blocking everything will cost more than supporting people intensively for one or two years and then let them do everything themselves. Quite apart from the fact that people know very well what the right way is and that they wish to get involved in this society.” (Employee of an employment agency)

Women who had to flee from their home countries need improved conditions to arrive in Germany and, whether on their own or with their families, to participate in social life. Participation in the labour market has an important function here. As clearly shown by the results of the present study, despite their largely strong motivation there are only few possibilities for refugee women to put their ideas of career prospects in Germany into practice and to contribute to society with their multifaceted professional or vocational qualifications. To the contrary, there is a danger that they will permanently stay in low-skilled elementary occupations. There is an urgent need for action here! The situation of refugee women on the labour market can only be improved through interaction of all involved stakeholders from politics, economy, administration, and civil society, with focus always to be placed on integration on fair conditions.

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## Authors

### **Ildikó Pallmann**

Ildikó Pallmann completed her studies with the Master's programme in Social Sciences at Humboldt University (Berlin). She worked with the German Trade Union Confederation in a number of projects with a focus on combating human trafficking for labour exploitation. Since 2016, she has worked for Minor in the IQ Competence Centre for Immigration where she focuses particularly on the issue of labour market integration of refugees.

### **Janine Ziegler**

Janine Ziegler studied in Munich and Paris and received a doctorate in political sciences. With Minor, she works as a research associate in the IQ Competence Centre for Immigration and in the research projects "Women's Science – Situationen, Visionen und Bedarfe geflüchteter Frauen" (Women's science – situations, visions and demands of refugee women) and "WIR HIER! Kein Platz für Muslimfeindlichkeit in Europa – Migrantenorganisationen im Dialog" (WE ARE HERE! No room for islamophobia in Europe – migrant organisations engaged in dialogue). Her work priorities are migration and integration (into the labour market), freedom of religion, and Islam in Germany and France.

### **Christian Pfeffer-Hoffmann**

Christian Pfeffer-Hoffmann is Minor's chairman and head of the IQ Competence Centre for Immigration. As a graduate media educator, he has published numerous studies and articles in the contexts of migration; vocational, professional and political education; media education, and securing of skilled labour; and conducted a wide range of model and research projects.



## Förderprogramm „Integration durch Qualifizierung IQ“



9 783967 290097



minor - projektkontor für bildung und forschung  
alt-moabit 73 • 10555 berlin • t: +49 - (0)30 - 39 74 42 27  
minor@minor-kontor.de • www.minor-kontor.de

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