



SVR Annual Report Summary 2024

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# Continuity or paradigm shift? Integration and migration policy in recent years



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# 1.

## Main aspects and structure of the SVR Annual Report 2024<sup>1</sup>

Migration and integration policies are recurrent themes of political and public debates. This has also been the case in the past five years, which have seen numerous crises worldwide. For example, migration was affected by the significant impact of the coronavirus pandemic between 2020 and 2022, including on restricted mobility. Military conflicts and political unrest generated substantial refugee movements. At the same time, the shortage of labour and skilled workers in Germany has worsened. That immigration has a role to play in addressing labour shortages has been the subject of much debate and is now the consensus view.

Although politicians are sometimes accused of inaction in public debate, migration and refugee policy has in fact been very dynamic. In Germany, for example, the law on labour migration has been amended again, further opening up the labour market to labour and skilled workers from third countries. One of the main reasons why refugee policy was again on the European agenda was the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which has triggered the largest movement of refugees within Europe since the Second World War. The European Union demonstrated its ability to act and took in over 4 million refugees with a minimum of bureaucratic procedures. Over 1.2 million Ukrainian refugees were accepted in Germany. After years of divisive negotiations, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission agreed on a reform of the Common European Asylum System in December 2023. The implementation of the new management instruments introduced by the reform poses new (and old) challenges.

The fifteenth annual report presented here, “Continuity or paradigm shift? Integration and migration policy in recent years”, reviews and contextualises

developments in this field over the last five years, evaluates them and analyses possible shortcomings. This is the third time, after 2014 and 2019, that the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) has presented an annual report that takes stock of German migration and integration policy.<sup>2</sup>

Although the report focuses on refugee policy – in line with public and political debate and empirical developments – it also provides an overview of migration and integration as a whole over the last five years. For example, Part A of the report, on migration and migration policy, examines empirical and political developments in Germany and the European Union in relation to forced displacement, labour migration and extensive reforms of labour migration law. The report also analyses measures taken in the area of return policy to control migration and encourage return migration.

Part B of the report, on integration and integration policy, also focuses on refugee policy and on initial reception, accommodation, housing and measures to integrate refugees in education, training and the labour market in particular. However, this part of the report also discusses the empirical and legal developments relevant to integration policy in the areas of education and the labour market, public attitudes towards immigration and racism and the development of crime by and against migrants. Part B also focuses on significant changes in the promotion of political participation. In addition to state-level integration and participation laws and the planned Federal Participation Act, the main focus is on one of the German federal government’s core projects: the comprehensive reform of the citizenship law adopted in February 2024.

Overall, both integration and migration policy are characterized by continuity. This includes, for example, the gradual opening of the employment market to

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1 In May 2024, the Expert Council on Integration and Migration published its comprehensive Annual Report: “Kontinuität oder Paradigmenwechsel? Die Integrations- und Migrationspolitik der letzten Jahre”. This publication summarizes the German-language long text version.

2 For further explanations on the work of the SVR and its annual reports, see Section 5.

urgently needed foreign labour and skilled workers. As early as 2020, the Immigration Act for Skilled Workers significantly expanded the opportunities for skilled workers to immigrate and brought them into line with the already liberal immigration options for highly skilled workers. The 2023 amendment continued this trend and expanded the immigration options available to other groups as well. One previously indispensable requirement has been abandoned: prospective immigrants no longer have to demonstrate that qualifications acquired abroad are equivalent to German standards, and significantly more options have been created for people who cannot provide proof of (formal) qualifications to come to Germany to work. Continuity and paradigm shifts are also evident in other areas. The 2024 reform of citizenship law continues the trend towards easier naturalisation that was initiated in the early 2000s. The fundamental acceptance of multiple nationalities in all constellations, on the other hand, represents a clear departure from previous maxims. The report describes these legal changes, some of which are considerable, as well as their advantages and disadvantages. The success of these changes in terms of integration and migration policy will depend on how they are implemented. The SVR will examine this in detail in its next annual report.

This English summary of the overall German report is intended to provide interested parties with an overview of the main topics, findings and central recommendations of the SVR Annual Report 2024. To this end, Section 2 (“Summary of chapters and findings”) first provides an executive summary of the contents and findings of the individual chapters covered by Parts A and B of the report.<sup>3</sup> Section 3 provides an overview of key “Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024” regarding empirical data on important migration and integration policy issues of the last five years. Finally, Section 4 provides a complete translation of the “Ten core messages of the SVR Annual Report 2024”. The core messages also contain the SVR’s central recommendations and conclusions in condensed form.

We hope you enjoy reading this report and would like to thank all those who have supported the SVR in compiling its report over the past year.

This year, the SVR had the honour of working with the following external experts: Prof. Dr. Thomas Bliesener (Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony), Prof. Dr. Jörg Bogumil, Jonas Hafner and André

Kastilan (Ruhr University Bochum), PD Dr. Roman Lehner (University of Göttingen), Prof. Dr. Gert Pickel, Franz Beensen and Dr. Alexander Yendell (University of Leipzig), Dr. Olivier Vonk (University of Maastricht) and Dr. Luuk van der Baaren (University of Copenhagen).<sup>4</sup> We would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Jörg Bogumil (Ruhr University Bochum), David Keller (State Secretariat for Migration, Switzerland), Dr. Klaus Ritgen (Deutscher Landkreistag), Frank Schimmelpfennig (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) and Sebastian Vogel (Saxon State Ministry for Social Affairs and Social Cohesion), who kindly accepted the SVR’s invitation to participate in a dialogic expert exchange.

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3 A complete list of the literature used in the individual chapters can be found in the German version of the full report, available at <https://www.svr-migration.de/publikationen/jahresgutachten/2024/>

4 All expert reports, as well as the Annual Report itself, are available on the SVR website at: <https://www.svr-migration.de/publikationen/jahresgutachten/2024/> (in German language only).

# 2.

## Summary of chapters and findings

## Chapter A.1 – Empirical data on migration

Chapter A.1 looks at empirical developments over the last five years in the areas of labour migration, asylum and refugee migration as well as return and repatriation. Chapter A.2 goes on to examine the political developments of recent years in these specific areas.

### Chapter A.1.1 – Labour market-relevant immigration: Visible and invisible labour migration

Germany has continued to record significant migration gains in recent years. In 2022, net migration to Germany was almost 1.5 million (see Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024). However, the figures do not indicate how much of this immigration directly benefits the labour market and to what extent immigration contributes and can contribute to mitigating the labour shortages that have been worsening in many sectors and regions for some time. Over the last twenty years, Germany has undergone a transformation that seemed almost unimaginable at the beginning of the millennium: from a country characterised by worklessness to a country characterised and plagued by 'workerlessness'. This forms the structural background for a policy that is increasingly geared towards rapid labour market participation. This can be observed in numerous areas of migration law. In the area of labour migration policy, a number of measures have been taken to directly recruit people from third countries to work in Germany or to enable them to move here. However, considering only traditional labour migration from third countries in this context would fail to reflect reality in two ways. Firstly, this would ignore intra-European migration, which is extremely important for the German labour market. Secondly, it would not take into account the fact that some people who do not migrate for work purposes can also enter the labour market directly.

With regard to labour migration from third countries, a clear 'corona dip' can be seen. After this dip, the influx of migrant workers has largely stabilised again. While around 30,000 third-country nationals were granted a residence permit for the purpose of gainful employment in 2020, this figure rose to 73,065 people in 2022. However, most migrants still do not come to Germany primarily to seek work; in fact, labour migration has accounted for less than 10 per cent of immigration by third-country nationals in the last three years. Family reunification, forced displacement and asylum, for example, continue to be

of much greater importance (see Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024).

A more complete picture of labour migration can only be obtained if, in addition to the inflow of third-country nationals, other forms of migration that are extremely important for the labour market are taken into account. This applies in particular to internal EU migration. Here, it is not possible to differentiate between the motives or purposes of immigration, as is usually the case. This is because EU citizens enjoy freedom of movement, do not require a residence permit and do not have to state a motive for entering the country. However, it may be assumed that a significant proportion of EU citizens entering Germany does so for the purpose of gainful employment. In previous annual reports, the SVR put the figure at around 50%. The figures for labour migration to Germany must therefore take account of freedom of movement in the EU. Based on the figure of 50% of internal EU immigration accounted for by labour migration referred to above, a significant proportion – almost a quarter of total immigration to Germany – was labour migration from other EU countries in the years 2017 to 2021. However, immigration from the EU has declined somewhat in recent years, and even the end of the coronavirus pandemic has not led to a significant increase (see Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024).

Finally, it should be noted that statistics on the purpose of immigration can lead to the misleading conclusion that only people who apply for a residence permit for this purpose are labour migrants. However, people who do not explicitly immigrate in order to work can also be directly relevant to the labour market. This is clearly illustrated by family migration, for example. This has been an important part of overall immigration to Germany for many years. A residence permit for family reasons entitles the holder to pursue gainful employment. Gainful employment as a result of family reunification therefore grows in the shadow of labour migration statistics. Overall, it can be said that the statistical figures for third-country nationals who enter the country explicitly for work purposes are less and less able to provide information on the attractiveness of the German labour market for foreign workers. This is because it is becoming increasingly possible to change lanes from one legal migration avenue to another (see Chapter A.2.1).

### Chapter A.1.2 – Refugee migration to and in Europe

Between 2015 and 2022 – the years that have made flight a political megatopic in the recent past – an average of just over 750,000 people per year applied



for international protection in the EU. However, the number of applications has been very unevenly distributed over the years. Applications peaked in 2015 and 2016 and thereafter fell initially to a low of just over 417,000 in 2020 – partly due to the pandemic – before rising again significantly. In 2022, the number of applications reached a new high of just under 878,000 (see Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024).

Refugee migration to Europe is mainly, but not exclusively, by sea. This is due to Europe's geographical location. Of the people who have entered the EU irregularly since 2015, a total of almost 2.5 million have crossed the Mediterranean. Four routes to Europe have emerged: the eastern Mediterranean route with the countries of first entry Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece; the central Mediterranean route with the most important countries of first entry Italy and Malta; the western Mediterranean route to the Spanish mainland or the Balearic Islands and the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla; and the so-called West African Atlantic route to the Canary Islands. The extent to which the various routes are used depends primarily on the main countries of origin of those seeking protection and therefore changes over time. The eastern Mediterranean route, for example, was for many years the most popular route for refugees from Afghanistan and Syria, in particular. Since 2020, however, the majority of those seeking protection have come via the central Mediterranean route; these are mainly refugees from Bangladesh and the African continent. Since 2021, more than half of all refugees have arrived in Europe via this route.

Since the Russian army invaded in February 2022, Ukraine has been a key country of origin for refugees in Europe. However, refugee migration within and out of Ukraine already existed before February 2022, although it went largely unnoticed. After 24 February 2022, several million people fled from Ukraine to the EU within just a few weeks. Since then, over 4 million people from Ukraine have found refuge in EU member states, around a quarter of them in Germany. This was facilitated by the possibility of visa-free entry, which already existed for Ukrainian nationals. This regulation also applies to third-country nationals who were legally resident in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Most Ukrainian refugees are women, children and elderly people. Subsequently, the EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive, which provided the basis for the admission of people from Ukraine (see Chapter A.2.2).

Germany is by far the most important host country for refugees in Europe. Between 2019 and 2023, around 940,000 people applied for asylum here. Together with the admission of Ukrainians who did not have to go through an individual asylum procedure, humanitarian

admissions in the last five years were even higher than in the previous five years. The most important countries of origin of people applying for asylum in Germany for the first time have remained fairly stable over time. Around half of the 940,000 first-time asylum applications were made by people from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

After the Russian army invaded Ukraine, more than one million Ukrainian women came to Germany in 2022 alone; that was 80% of all those seeking protection who reached Germany that year. This means that two forms of refugee migration exist side by side, which are institutionally embedded in very different ways: individual asylum procedures and collective recognition following the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive at EU level. This often leads to confusion among the public and in the media debate.

### Chapter A.1.3 – Repatriation and ('voluntary') return: Sharp decline during the coronavirus pandemic

The total number of people in Germany required to leave the country rose continuously by almost 22% between 2019 and 2022 (from 249,922 to 304,308 people) but fell again somewhat to 250,749 people as of 31 October 2023. However, the figures are subject to uncertainties, including the data quality of the Central Register of Foreigners (AZR), which is why caution is required when evaluating and interpreting them. The repatriation of foreign nationals who are required to leave Germany has also been made more difficult in the last five years by the coronavirus pandemic. As a result, some areas of return policy had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 and the number of people leaving Germany who have no right to stay or no right of residence in Germany is only slowly increasing again.

Most of these people have been granted toleration status, which means that their deportation has been temporarily suspended, for example due to deportation stops, unverified identity or for humanitarian or health reasons. Of the 146,337 people required to leave the country in 2023, 127,691 had this type of toleration status, meaning that only 18,646 people could be forcibly returned from Germany. The protective measures applied during the coronavirus pandemic impacted the toleration of persons with an unverified identity, as they made the work of the foreigners' registration offices and diplomatic missions more difficult.

With regard to the number of people who actually leave the country, reliable data is mainly available on returns in which the obligation to leave the country is enforced by the state, in some cases with the help of coercive measures. In the case of voluntary departures

only the number of departures supported by the federal “Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany/Government Assisted Repatriation Programme” (REAG/GARP) can be classified as reliable.

Between 2015 and 2019, just over 20,000 people were forcibly deported from Germany each year. From 2020 to 2022, it was only around half as many each year, with the number increasing by around 27% in 2023 compared to 2022. The people who were deported despite the immense restrictions at the height of the coronavirus pandemic were mainly offenders or people that posed a potential threat to public safety.

As a result of the pandemic, the number of assisted departures has also collapsed. As an analysis by country of origin shows, the fall in numbers caused by the pandemic persisted across all countries until 2022. In 2023, however, the return figures from before the pandemic were reached again and even exceeded for some destination countries (e.g. Georgia, North Macedonia and Albania).

The pandemic-related pattern is also evident in Dublin transfers, where the person seeking protection is transferred to the EU member state they first entered. Due to restrictions on air travel, testing obligations, etc., significantly fewer people were transferred in 2020 and 2021 than in 2019. This was exacerbated by the fact that asylum applications have to be processed in Germany if a person has not been transferred to the relevant member state after a period of six months. This applied to a number of cases due to the pandemic. Although numbers rose again in 2022, they were still significantly below the pre-pandemic figures.

The effect of the coronavirus years on returns can also be seen at EU level, where the number of third-country nationals returning in 2020 fell to around half of the 2019 figure and did not return to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 either.

## Chapter A.2 – Migration policy

### Chapter A.2.1 – Labour supply policies: Dynamic developments

Demographic change is one factor that is putting increasing pressure on the German labour market. A growing number of occupations and regions are experiencing shortages not only of skilled workers, but of labour force in general. One component in dealing with this challenge is the recruitment and activation of foreign nationals for the German labour market (Figure 1). Moreover, so-called lane change rules have also become increasingly important, especially in recent years (see below).

In the area of recruitment from abroad, the Skilled Immigration Act (Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz – FKEG) that came into force in 2020 is already largely only of interest in terms of legal history. This is because many of its provisions were amended again by the Act on the Further Development of Skilled Worker Immigration, which was passed in July 2023. The FKEG largely put the legal position of professionally qualified skilled workers on an equal footing with that of academically qualified skilled workers, while also making it considerably easier to enter the country for post-qualification purposes. The rule that entry for the purpose of employment would only be granted in exceptional cases where the applicant’s qualifications were not equivalent to those required in Germany remained in force.

In addition to the FKEG, the Western Balkans Regulation, which was extended in mid-2020, was also one of the key political activities in the area of recruiting foreign workers. Citizens of the six Western Balkan states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) have privileged access to the German labour market through this regulation, for which no qualification-related conditions apply, provided they can present a job offer. This regulation was intended to divert asylum seekers whose applications were unlikely to be successful into the labour migration segment. The regulation very quickly developed into a highly sought option for immigration into the labour market.

The regulations on the further development of skilled worker immigration, which were passed by the German Bundestag and Bundesrat in summer 2023, have once again made far-reaching changes to German labour migration law. The core of the reform package and also the most drastic change can be found in the so-called experience pillar. The lack of a formal qualification that is demonstrably equivalent to German training can now be compensated for by material qualifications in the form of professional experience. This regulation represents a fundamental shift in the legal landscape, effectively abandoning a dogma that has shaped German law to date such that, in future, qualifications acquired abroad will no longer have to be recognised as equivalent to German training. The so-called potential pillar and the opportunity card anchored in it, with which a certain group of potential employees are selected using a points system, will probably be much less relevant empirically.

While the skilled labour, experience and potential pillars have been the subject of intense public and political debate, other changes have remained largely under the radar of public perception. Specifically, this concerns regulations that are intended to make it easier to recruit foreign workers who do not have any

Figure 1 Reform package for labour recruitment from abroad: Four access options



Illustration: SVR/Deniz Keskin

formal qualifications. The first of these measures is the doubling of the quota under the Western Balkans Regulation, which as such has been made permanent. The second central measure is a new standard that makes it possible to recruit workers for a limited period of time across occupational groups and countries without qualification requirements.

Overall, the Act and the Ordinance on the Further Development of Skilled Immigration continue the trend that began with the FKEG in 2020 of liberalising access to the labour market and opening it up to workers from third countries.

A high level of dynamism is evident not only in the area of traditional labour migration policy, but also in the implementation of further measures designed to improve access to the labour market for foreign

nationals who did not enter the country specifically as labour migrants. Here, the existing possibilities for lane changing have been expanded. Specifically, this concerns people who are actually required to leave the country but cannot be deported for legal or factual reasons (and therefore have toleration status), as well as those whose asylum procedure has not yet been legally concluded. The Opportunity Residence Act, which came into force on 31 December 2022, was discussed particularly intensively. This involved both a relaxation of central legalisation requirements and the introduction of a bridging standard that makes it easier to meet the requirements for the right to remain. Foreign nationals will be given the opportunity to obtain regular residence status by demonstrating integration efforts and taking up gainful employment.

## Chapter A.2.2 – Refugee, asylum and border policy

In the field of asylum and refugee policy, a political agreement was reached in December 2023 after many years of political deadlock at the European level. One of the most significant aspects of the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is the introduction of a solidarity mechanism, which represents a novel approach to apportioning the responsibility for taking in refugees more fairly. It remains to be seen how this will be implemented in practice. Overall, the new regulations comprise an array of planned new rules and directives. For example, the new Asylum Procedure Regulation provides for fundamental changes in the way the asylum system is accessed. If people seeking protection cross the EU's external borders irregularly and make a request for protection at the border or are rescued at sea, an assessment will be made in future to determine whether their application must be processed in accordance with the border procedure. According to the new Screening Regulation, asylum seekers must undergo a "preliminary check" when they submit their application at an external EU border. In conjunction with the new Asylum Procedure Regulation, this preliminary check also serves as a kind of pre-entry screening procedure. After this preliminary check, a decision is made as to whether the asylum application of the person concerned should be examined in a so-called border procedure. These accelerated asylum procedures are to be carried out at the EU's external borders for asylum seekers with low chances of being accepted (from countries with quotas below 20%) under the fiction of non-entry. In the event of a rejection, the individual's return should also be organised directly.

The new Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management will replace the so-called Dublin III Regulation. In principle, responsibility for asylum procedures will remain with the state of first entry. However, in future, states facing migratory pressure will be able to request assistance from other member states. A new solidarity mechanism will manage the distribution of asylum seekers among the member states. This mechanism is a central element of the new CEAS package and is intended to relieve the burden on the states that are currently responsible for the vast majority of asylum applications. The system enables member states to make flexible solidarity contributions. Specifically, they can avoid accepting refugees by offering financial contributions. Based on the newly created Crisis Regulation, it will also be possible to apply certain special regulations in the event of a massive influx of migrants. For example, the border procedure, which is regulated by the Asylum Procedure

Regulation together with the Screening Regulation, can be extended in such situations. The new Reception Conditions Directive, which had already been politically agreed in December 2022, aims to ensure common standards of reception conditions throughout the EU. According to this, minors should be integrated into the regular school system after two months at the latest (not after three months as previously).

Another spectacular element in terms of asylum and refugee policy at European level was the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive following the Russian attack on Ukraine. Temporary protection allows people from Ukraine to enter the EU and freely choose their country of residence. Collective recognition also gives them access to the labour market, the healthcare system and language services.

At national level, an interplay of liberal and restrictive measures can be observed. In certain areas, more rigorous measures have been implemented, particularly with regard to returns. Conversely, in other areas, such as access to the labour market, corresponding regularisation options and access to integration measures, regulations have been relaxed. Another aim of the legislative activities of the last five years has been to reduce the duration of asylum procedures.

The question of whether asylum procedures can be carried out in transit or third countries is once again being discussed more intensively – also in light of corresponding initiatives by the British and Italian governments. The proposals to date raise considerable political, legal and operational questions, the SVR points out. This applies above all to the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in the Geneva Refugee Convention. Moreover, the ban on collective expulsion and the right to access to effective legal protection are at risk. The relevant obligations under international law must be respected. It should also be borne in mind that the legal conformity of a relocation of asylum procedures depends on the political stability of the third country. The SVR also warns against excessive political dependence on third countries – the instrumentalization of asylum seekers must be avoided at all costs.

## Chapter A.2.3 – Measures to promote return and migration control

In the context of the growing influx of refugees to Germany since 2021, there has also been a growing focus on how it can be ensured that people who are required to leave the country do so again. This highlights a fundamental dilemma in return policy: a functioning asylum system is one that also ensures the return of those not entitled to protection.

This is of particular importance in order to ensure the long-term support of the general population for the acceptance of individuals who have legitimate reasons for fleeing. At the same time, many of those who are required to leave the country are already well integrated into German society. In this context of ongoing tension, the various legal changes adopted in Germany represent a dual strategy. On the one hand, legal adjustments are intended to facilitate returns in practice. In early 2024, for instance, the German Bundestag adopted a repatriation package (Act to Improve Repatriation) that tightened up the regulations on detention pending deportation and custody pending departure. On the other hand, the Opportunities Residence Act, for example, implemented more liberal measures that enable certain people who are required to leave the country to legalise their stay.

For many years, a key obstacle to the return of people who are required to leave the country has been the lack of cooperation from key destination countries. In order to facilitate returns, Germany has concluded readmission agreements with several countries. In recent years, there has been a trend in Germany and at the EU level towards the conclusion of agreements that not only address readmission but also include wider migration issues. Within the framework of such agreements, for example, readmission obligations may be combined with the facilitation of work visas. In the spirit of a migration policy based on partnership, the interests of the countries of origin are thus also taken into greater account. The SVR welcomes the fact that the first agreements of this kind have now been concluded and that further negotiations are underway. Planning should begin immediately on the evaluation and potential readjustment of these agreements.

The state's return policy portfolio also includes measures that support the assisted return of those obliged to leave the country. The assisted return of individuals who are required to leave the country not only costs less, it is also a more humane alternative to forcible deportation. In addition to measures at EU level, there are also several programmes in Germany designed to promote assisted return and reintegration in the country of origin. In the opinion of the SVR, all advisory services in the area of assisted return should be evaluated and coordinated with other services. Programmes could also be improved by drawing on the experiences of migrants, especially returnees. Overall, the SVR believes that the focus of return policy should be on assisted return. Deportations should only be carried out as a last resort – but then preferably within the legally prescribed time limits.

## Chapter B.1 – Empirical review of participation and integration

Chapter B.1 provides an empirical review of participation and integration as well as their social prerequisites in key areas of life. As refugee migration continues to account for a large proportion of immigration overall, Chapter B.2 takes an in-depth look at important areas of refugee integration policy. Finally, Chapter B.3 looks at current legal developments to promote political participation.

### Chapter B.1.1 – Trends in participation in education: Major differences by immigrant generation

Nowadays, four out of ten children and young people in Germany have a migration background.<sup>5</sup> This proportion has continued to rise in recent years. Many of these children and young people were born in Germany. In addition, many people from Ukraine and other crisis-hit countries seeking protection have arrived in the last five years. Diversity is therefore a normal aspect of educational institutions in Germany. Nevertheless, participation in education differs at all levels of education between people with and without a migration background.

With regard to early daycare, immigrant families continue to send their children to early daycare less often than parents without a migration background, even though there are now considerably more childcare places available than there were years ago. In 2022 the difference is 21 percentage points for children under the age of three and 22 percentage points for children aged three to six. In addition, there is significantly higher demand. The reasons are structural (e.g. distance, lack of knowledge of the system, insufficient awareness of diversity in early daycare centres). Discrimination is also a factor.

In terms of general school education, differences in participation continue at school. They can be determined by several indicators: the skills acquired, the decisions made at the point of transition from primary school to secondary school and finally in school-leaving qualifications. Two trends can be identified: Firstly, children born in Germany to immigrant families are increasingly catching up with their peers without an immigration background. There are only minor differences here.

Secondly, learners with personal experience of immigration, especially refugees, are at a disadvantage: they do less well in school performance

<sup>5</sup> According to the definition of the Federal Statistical Office, a person has a migration background if they themselves or at least one parent does not have German citizenship by birth.

studies and this performance gap even widened during the coronavirus pandemic. These trends are linked to less favourable learning conditions at home (e.g. inadequate digital equipment). After the transition from primary to secondary school, in 2022 only one in two (23.7%) attends a grammar school (*Gymnasium*) and more frequently lower-qualifying forms of school, compared to one in four without a migration background (41.9%). Fewer than four in ten young adults of the first-generation who are no longer of school age have an *Abitur* (university entrance certificate), compared to six in ten (61.2%) of their peers without a migration background. A disproportionately high number of refugees also leave school without any qualifications (26.2%) (see Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024).

Regarding vocational training, refugees often see the dual vocational training system as the ideal route to labour market integration and social participation. At the same time, these people in particular face numerous barriers to entry (e.g. recognition of certificates, lack of knowledge of the system, financial worries). As a result, young people with a migration background – whether refugees or not – are less likely to start vocational training than those without a migration background. In the past five years, migrants registered with the Federal Employment Agency have instead taken up employment, been unemployed or joined vocational training preparation more frequently than their non-immigrant peers.

When it comes to higher education, young people with a migration background often have a worse starting point for higher education than their peers without a migration background. Many of them are the first members of their family to go on to higher education and therefore have no support from parents with their own university experience. They often also lack financial resources. Student numbers reflect these differences: the first-generation of immigrants, who were still minors when they immigrated and therefore required to attend school, and refugees in particular, are significantly underrepresented at universities and universities of applied sciences (in 2022: 6.1% vs. 25.1% of young adults without a migration background). In contrast, those born in Germany with a migration background have long been almost on a par with young adults without a migration background in terms of participation in higher education. Many students with foreign citizenship do not manage to successfully complete their studies despite having completed their school education in Germany – the drop-out rates for Bachelor's degrees in 2020 were 42% and 32% for Master's degrees, around 10 percentage points higher than for German students.

Unequal participation in education therefore begins in early childhood and continues throughout the entire

educational career. It is also clear that educational inequality is closely linked to social background. Children born in Germany to immigrant families are catching up, while the situation remains challenging for children who have experienced immigration themselves. Refugee pupils in particular need attention so that they do not fall behind.

### Chapter B.1.2 – Labour market integration

Despite multiple crises, the employment situation of people with and without a migration background has remained largely stable over the past five years. However, first-generation immigrants were more affected by the crisis-related fluctuations than people without a migration background and members of the second-generation of immigrants. This is mainly because they are generally more likely to have insecure employment and to be employed in sectors that have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic. As people with a migration background are also less likely to have completed vocational training, they are more likely to work in jobs that do not require special qualifications where they are easily replaceable. The employment rate for people coming to Germany seeking protection rose by 3 percentage points between 2018 and 2022, from 52% to 55%. There have also been some encouraging developments among refugees from Ukraine. However, there is still room for improvement in their labour market integration in Germany compared to other European countries. This is also due to the fact that women are heavily overrepresented in this group. In general, the labour market participation rate of women with a migration background continues to be lower. This is partly due to their low qualifications and partly due to structural obstacles such as a lack of childcare.

Educational qualifications increase participation in the labour market regardless of migration background. The employment rates of people without educational qualifications are in 2022 generally more than 20, and in some cases even more than 30, percentage points below those of people with a qualification. However, first-generation immigrants with higher educational qualifications are less likely to work in corresponding occupational fields (73%) than second-generation immigrants (85%) or people without a migration background (87%).

Income differences between the sexes have decreased somewhat in the last five years. However, women continue to earn significantly less and have a lower pension than first-generation male immigrants and women without a migration background, particularly in the group of first-generation immigrants. At 28%, the population with a migration background is around twice as likely to be at risk of poverty as those

without a migration background (12%) and almost three times as likely to be dependent on transfer payments (14% vs. 5%) in 2022. Here too, education is a decisive factor in reducing the risk of poverty.

The less favourable labour market situation of first-generation immigrants is due to a combination of individual factors related to their immigration biography and structural factors. These factors may be interrelated. At the individual level, German language skills are decisive in addition to educational qualifications; this is particularly true for highly qualified jobs. However, personal motivation and social capital in the form of social networks are also important. At the structural level, the extent to which immigrants can utilise their professional qualifications and experience is decisive. The training systems in most countries can hardly be compared with the dual system in Germany. Work experience from the country of origin is not always easily transferable to Germany either. It is therefore encouraging to note that there has been a growing recognition of foreign qualifications in recent years. This also highlights the need for federal and state governments to provide an adequate infrastructure for effectively organized procedures. Regulations are also needed for professions that require a university education in the country of origin, but 'only' an apprenticeship in Germany. This applies to educators from Ukraine, for example, whose high formal qualification may prove an obstacle under the applicable collective agreements to recruitment.

### Chapter B.1.3 – Attitudes towards immigration in Germany

Attitudes towards immigration are relatively stable, with a slight upward trend. While around a quarter of the population has consistently held the view over the last twenty years that immigration is making Germany a worse place, the proportion of those who see a positive effect of immigration has risen slightly over this period. However, most people position themselves in the middle on this question (see Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024). Longitudinal studies also show that attitudes towards migration are not becoming increasingly polarised. Rather, the degree of polarisation remains stable over time or tends to decrease. Even if it is not possible to speak of (increasing) polarisation in society as a whole, conflicts about migration are sometimes very emotional because they affect fundamental convictions about social consensus. This may also explain why groups that hold highly opposing views on important social issues sometimes distance themselves from each other or reject each other, which is referred to as affective polarisation. This affective polarisation is

indeed often evident in the issue of migration. In this respect, there are indeed affectively polarised groups in society. However, this is not true for the majority of the population, but only subgroups that receive comparatively high (media) attention.

In addition, survey results show an increasing awareness that immigration can have positive effects on the economy, on which Germany is dependent. Accordingly, a clear majority of the population would like people to immigrate to Germany if they have a job or a corresponding offer. Whether or not people are in favour of labour migration depends heavily on the expected impact on society as a whole. At the same time, views on labour migration differ according to region of origin; EU citizens are preferred here.

Solidarity with refugees from Ukraine is strong and only decreased slightly in the first two years of the war. The willingness to accept refugees from 2015 onwards was also quite high. Aside from taking in refugees as such, there is also a relatively high willingness to support refugees themselves; this decreased only slightly over the course of 2022. The high willingness to help may also be attributed to the fact that the German population's perception of the challenges posed by the influx of refugees is less pronounced than its concerns about the spread of war, rising energy prices or poor economic development.

In addition, solidarity with Ukrainian refugees appears to be somewhat higher than with those from Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries. Research suggests that this phenomenon can be explained by a perceived religious and cultural proximity to Ukrainian people, geographical proximity and the associated feeling of being threatened by the war. Additionally, the demographic composition of the Ukrainian refugees, particularly women, children and older people, may also contribute to this perception. The striking acceptance of this refugee group therefore also seems to be linked to their characteristics – or the characteristics attributed to them – such as the high proportion of women and children and the ideas and images associated with them.

### Chapter B.1.4 – Crime against and by migrants

The chapter examines both crimes committed by immigrants and crimes directed against them. The latter, like anti-immigrant attitudes, tarnish the climate of integration and jeopardise social cohesion. The same applies to crime committed by immigrants. This can be a sign of a lack of integration, but can also point to a dysfunctional integration policy.

The vast majority of xenophobically motivated hate crime offenses can still be attributed to individuals and groups on the political right-wing spectrum. In the last

five years, the number of xenophobically motivated right-wing crimes has been significantly higher than in the period before 2015, with over 7,000 cases (over 8,000 cases since 2020). Antisemitic hate crime offences also increased from 2018 to 2021 in particular, reaching a (temporary) peak of over 3,000 in 2021. Even though fewer antisemitic offenses were recorded again in 2022, their number is expected to have risen again in 2023 following the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel and the resulting war in the Gaza Strip.

The increase in hate crime against people perceived as 'foreign' could also be linked to the fact that the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party has established itself at federal and state level and is aggressively advocating right-wing populist to extreme right-wing positions. The extent to which this assumption is correct is difficult to assess on the basis of the available data. However, it can certainly be assumed that the party has made racist, anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic positions more acceptable. It is thus creating a climate in which, at least in certain population groups, the acceptance of hate crimes is increasing.

Due to methodological problems and incomplete data, there is no clear and reliable picture of crime committed by foreigners or immigrants. If different data sources and methodological approaches are carefully and thoughtfully combined in the analysis, a reasonably reliable overall picture can be obtained. Accordingly, there is no clear answer to the question of whether foreigners living in Germany have a greater tendency to commit crime than Germans. It is true that European crime statistics point almost consistently in this direction. However, it is unclear to what extent the reporting behaviour of the population or the actions of the security authorities are guided by prejudices; this could distort the figures on crime rates.

One thing is certain: with the increasing number of immigrants since 2015, not only has the absolute number of crimes committed by foreign suspects increased, but also the proportion of such crimes. This is hardly surprising given the socio-demographic characteristics, as the refugee and immigrant population is not only much more male-dominated, but also significantly younger than the overall population. However, even when these factors are taken into account, the crime rate is noticeably higher among certain groups of immigrants. It is politically sensitive that those accused of sexual offenses often come from Muslim countries in Africa and the Middle East. This underlines the need for prevention work and intercultural education on the norms and values of equality and individual self-determination among some immigrant groups.

The relevant figures and the conclusions drawn from them are partially confirmed by analyses of

estimated unreported cases, which in some cases also point to a higher tendency towards violence among respondents with a migration background. However, foreign or migrant population groups generally have a significantly higher risk exposure. This is due, for example, to a lack of language skills and qualifications, which in turn reduce opportunities for training, employment and participation and often result in a precarious socio-economic situation. Managing and reducing these risk conditions is a central task for future crime policy and an important prerequisite for the social integration of immigrants.

## Chapter B.2 – Refugee integration policy

The equal participation of all in all areas of social life can be seen as a central challenge for immigration societies. In recent years, various measures and projects have been initiated and implemented in Germany to promote the integration of immigrants. The focus has been on the group of refugees, including those who have arrived from Ukraine since 2022 seeking protection.

### Chapter B.2.1 – Accommodation and housing: Sustainable solutions instead of crisis measures

One of the most pressing political tasks in recent years has been the provision of adequate housing. This also applies to the accommodation of refugees. As the majority of Ukrainian refugees were (temporarily) housed privately, the need for state accommodation was lower in 2022/23 than in 2015/16. Nevertheless, the influx of refugees from Ukraine also placed an additional burden on municipal systems in particular. Those municipalities that were able to build on the structures they had established in 2015/16 were comparatively well equipped. Overall, it is clear that one cause of the reception bottlenecks is a fundamental infrastructure problem.

As the number of refugees arriving rose again, there was renewed discussion between the federal levels as to how the reception and accommodation of refugees could be financed in the long term. At the end of 2023, the federal and state governments agreed on a dynamic financing system that takes into account fluctuations in the development of refugee numbers. However, the mechanisms by which costs are reimbursed to municipalities by the federal states is also important. The SVR calls for more transparency between all levels in this respect.

In addition to funding issues, the federal government has adjusted the framework conditions



for refugee accommodation in various areas over the last five years. For example, exemptions were extended to facilitate the construction of refugee accommodation under planning law. The time limit on residence restrictions for recognised refugees, which initially applied for three years, has been abolished; at the same time, the list of exceptions has been extended. The SVR has assessed the removal of the time limit as problematic – also because no evaluation was carried out beforehand. The evaluation carried out retrospectively shows that the residence requirement tends to hinder integration in many cases, particularly on the labour market. Instead of primarily restricting the freedom of settlement, recognised refugees should rather be distributed to the municipalities in such a way that their needs and skills match local living conditions and work opportunities. The SVR agrees with the evaluation’s recommendation that, at most, negative residence restrictions should still be possible. The purpose of these is to prevent large concentrations of refugees arising in municipalities that are already struggling to cope with numbers. The initial distribution of refugees should take into account as many aspects as possible that increase the likelihood that those affected will voluntarily remain in their assigned location. The social participation of refugees is also hindered in the long term by longer stays in collective accommodation centres. The SVR therefore believes that residence in collective accommodation should be avoided. Where such collective accommodation is used, however, it must meet binding minimum standards.

Beyond the short-term accommodation of refugees, measures must also be taken to meet the need for permanent and affordable housing. This is because refugees are supposed to move into their own home once they have been granted protection status. However, as this is often difficult on the private housing market, some of them continue to live in refugee accommodation. The issue of permanent solutions for the accommodation and housing of refugees must be placed more strongly in the wider context of housing supply. Housing in Germany is in overall short supply and measures need to be taken to promote affordable housing in general. In addition, measures must be taken to provide housing for refugees and new immigrants in particular. This also entails taking stronger action against discrimination on the housing market.

### **Chapter B.2.2 – Education, vocational training and entrance to the labour market: Many challenges remain**

The increased influx of refugees in the period around 2015 prompted the federal and state governments to

take action. Measures were introduced at all stages of education to facilitate access to education for refugee children, adolescents and young adults.

The commitment to support refugees was enormous in many places, as demonstrated by the university initiatives “Integra” and “Welcome”, which received over 100 million euros in funding from the federal government. Between 2016 and 2021, refugees were supported at over 170 universities, from applying for a place at university through their studies to the transition to the labour market.

In addition, measures for integration into vocational training were strengthened as a key building block for participation in the labour market. After 2015, this included, for example, preparatory vocational training measures that were specifically geared towards the needs of refugees. This phase was a kind of ‘test laboratory’: various instruments were (further) developed, tested, adapted and finally established in the regular system. Many of these measures have proven to have a positive effect. After 2018, refugees then increasingly took part in the vocational preparation programmes offered by the regular system.

In the first few years after 2015, schools primarily created offers and structures that were specifically aimed at refugees. In the past five years, there has been a stronger trend towards integrating refugee learners into measures within the regular system (e.g. partially integrated language learning classes). However, the extent to which the various measures can actually promote participation cannot yet be assessed in every case; there is still a lack of empirical research in many areas. The first study on the effectiveness of preparatory classes, for example, was published in 2022 and calls segregated schooling into question.

Nevertheless, there are still key hurdles at all stages of education that have not yet been sufficiently addressed and continue to make access to education more difficult for refugee children. These include, for example, legal barriers to school access. According to EU Directive 2013/33/EU (Reception Directive), minors who have fled must be allowed to attend school no later than three months after arrival; in future this will be after two months (Art. 16 para. 2 Reception Directive EU 2024, Art. 14 para. 2). In most federal states, however, refugees still only have access to a regular school once they are living in a municipality and in some states compulsory schooling begins only six months after arrival. This has particular consequences for those children and young people who are housed in collective accommodation centres. They are then not given access to a mainstream school at all or only at a late stage. The schooling options for minors in these collective accommodation centres are still often unregulated and generally do not correspond to

the curricula at mainstream schools. In addition, there is not only a lack of daycare places, but also school places. In 2023, around 4,000 refugee children and young people were still waiting for a school place.

This shows that structural problems in the education system need to be addressed, in particular the high demand for qualified personnel. To this end, greater use should also be made of the corresponding potential of new immigrants and the recognition of existing qualifications should be simplified nationwide and (ideally part-time) further qualifications should be promoted.

### Chapter B.3 – Political participation promotion and designation policy

In addition to the group of refugees, in recent years politicians have also focused on the participation of people with a history of immigration who have been living in Germany for some time or were born here. The focus here has been on political participation, among other things. The federal and state governments have taken legislative action in this area in recent years. In addition, the concept and designation “migration background” were widely discussed.

#### Chapter B.3.1 – Towards a modern citizenship law: Focus on naturalisation

A key step taken by the current federal government in migration and integration policy was the reform of the Citizenship Act adopted at the beginning of 2024. In its entirety, the reform has the potential to sustainably increase the number of naturalisations in Germany. In certain groups of origin, naturalisation figures have already risen recently – albeit from a low starting level.

In addition to the shortening of prior residence periods, the general acceptance of multiple citizenship is an important innovation. This addresses the situation described as under-inclusion, which arises when a significant proportion of the population does not have German citizenship and is therefore excluded from elections as a central form of political decision-making. However, the SVR believes that one consequence of the regulation should not be ignored: the foreign citizenship of a person naturalised in Germany can in future be passed on to their descendants indefinitely in accordance with the principle of descent. This will increase the group of people who can vote not only in Germany, but also in the country of origin of the person originally naturalised in Germany. The dual passport with generational cut-off and the model of dormant citizenship offer approaches that enable multiple citizenship in order to avoid under-inclusion,

while at the same time limiting the problems caused by over-inclusion. The SVR is also critical of the decision to tighten the naturalisation criterion of securing one’s own livelihood.

Beyond the legal form of the Citizenship Act, the SVR advocates that more thought should also be given to its practical implementation. It is to be expected that the number of naturalisation applications will continue to rise as a result of the reform. However, many naturalisation authorities are already heavily overloaded. As a result there is a risk that – while on paper the period of prior residence was reduced from eight to five years – due to the backlog of applications at the authorities, those entitled to naturalisation will still not obtain a German passport more quickly. To enable the authorities to cope with the application process, the SVR believes that greater centralisation should be considered and the work of the authorities should be more digitalised.

#### Chapter B.3.2 – Integration laws in the federal states and a possible federal participation law: A dynamically evolving field

In addition to the reform of the Citizenship Act, a federal law on integration and participation is also planned according to the coalition agreement, which is intended to promote the participation of people with a history of immigration. This area has also developed dynamically at federal level in recent years: integration and participation laws have been enacted or amended in several federal states; others are in the making. It is clear that such laws can help to better manage integration policy by enshrining certain principles and goals in legislation and institutionalising structures for consultation and participation. The aim of enshrining the promotion of political participation in law is to be welcomed. This underlines the fact that politicians generally attach great importance to integration and participation. Placing advisory and participation bodies on a legal footing and entrusting them with specific tasks can fundamentally strengthen their position.

The practical impact of the laws as a whole depends on how they are legally structured. Targets must be underpinned by concrete and sustainably financed instruments. The Integration and Participation Act in North Rhine-Westphalia should be emphasised here, which provides reliable minimum annual funding for the relevant municipal integration measures. Changes can also be made in other areas of law relevant to integration via an article law within the framework of an integration and participation law.

Purely symbolic integration and participation laws may not be effective in practice. An integration and participation law at federal level must therefore also be

general and specific at the same time. Only then will the strong signal effect of such a law have a tangible impact. The draft presented by the Federal Conference of Migrant Organizations has enriched the discussion on the legal measures required to promote integration and participation at national level. However, some of the proposals raise considerable questions regarding their legitimacy and practicability. These include the unclear structure and design of the proposed Participation Council.

Overall, the steering power of integration laws should not be overestimated; they cannot bring about integration on their own. Their success depends on whether and how the goals and principles laid down in them are implemented in practical policy. The legal framework is just the starting point. The degree of seriousness with which politicians implement the principles and structures set out in law is of crucial importance. It is essential that all those involved in day-to-day practice consider the operational aspects of integration and participation. The process of drafting such laws plays an important role in this; if there are sufficiently broad opportunities for participation, this can significantly increase acceptance.

### Chapter B.3.3 – Statistics and designation policy: Evaluating terms and concepts

In countries of immigration, there is intense debate about what terms should be used to describe first-generation immigrants or those who have a family history of immigration. These terms are closely linked to the politics of belonging. The terms and categories that (should) indicate belonging change over time and are not without controversy. An analysis of corresponding developments therefore provides insight into how a society currently sees itself. The issue is also the subject of controversial debate in Germany. Based on the presentation of different approaches in other countries, this chapter outlines the developments of recent years and evaluates the arguments for and against the concept of “migration background”.

The countries presented as examples in the chapter – the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom and the USA – have each chosen different ways of recording people with a family history of immigration. The Netherlands and France are examples of how similar concepts can develop from different traditions – multiculturalism in the Netherlands and republicanism in France: in both countries, people now talk about immigrants and their descendants. In the Netherlands, only the place of birth of a person or their parents plays a role, while in France citizenship is also taken into account. In the United Kingdom and the USA, immigrants who were born in another

country are recorded separately as part of the foreign-born population. The four countries therefore record at least the first-generation of immigrants, while the Netherlands and France also record the second-generation. In contrast, people with a history of immigration who were born in the country (second and later generations) are recorded in the United Kingdom and the USA exclusively via self-identification. This differs significantly from the official statistics surveys in Germany.

In Germany, data from the Federal Statistical Office differentiated according to citizenship (German/foreign) until the early 2000s. With the Microcensus Act of 2005, the term “migration background” was introduced to describe people who “are not themselves a German citizen by birth or who have at least one parent who is not a German citizen by birth”. The new characteristic was intended to make it possible to describe the participation situation and integration progress of naturalised immigrants or people born as German citizens in a more differentiated way than before.

The debates of recent years illustrate the dilemma of this statistical category of migration background: On the one hand, it is important to differentiate between people with and without a history of immigration in order to uncover inequality and to document integration successes. On the other hand, such a concept must not lead to exclusion. Implementation has also been discussed critically, in particular the complexity of the construct, which makes interpretation difficult.

Various alternative terms have therefore been proposed, most recently by the Expert Commission on Integration Capability (*Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit*). According to them, the population statistics on “immigrants and their (direct) descendants” should only take into account the country of birth and no longer nationality. This concept is more precise and easier to interpret than the previous definition of migration background and is more internationally compatible. However, a new concept only partially solves the problem of potential stigmatisation. The SVR also believes that a uniform approach is crucial. Corresponding adjustments must therefore be carefully considered and implemented as consensually as possible.

# 3.

## Facts and figures from the SVR Annual Report 2024

## Empirical migration relations

Germany is a country of immigration. Over the last five years, net migration has been positive. Since the 1960s, the country has almost consistently recorded a positive migration balance (Figure 2). This was highest in 2022, with up to 1.5 million people entering the country. In 1975, in contrast, emigration clearly outweighed immigration, with a balance of almost 224,000 people leaving the country.

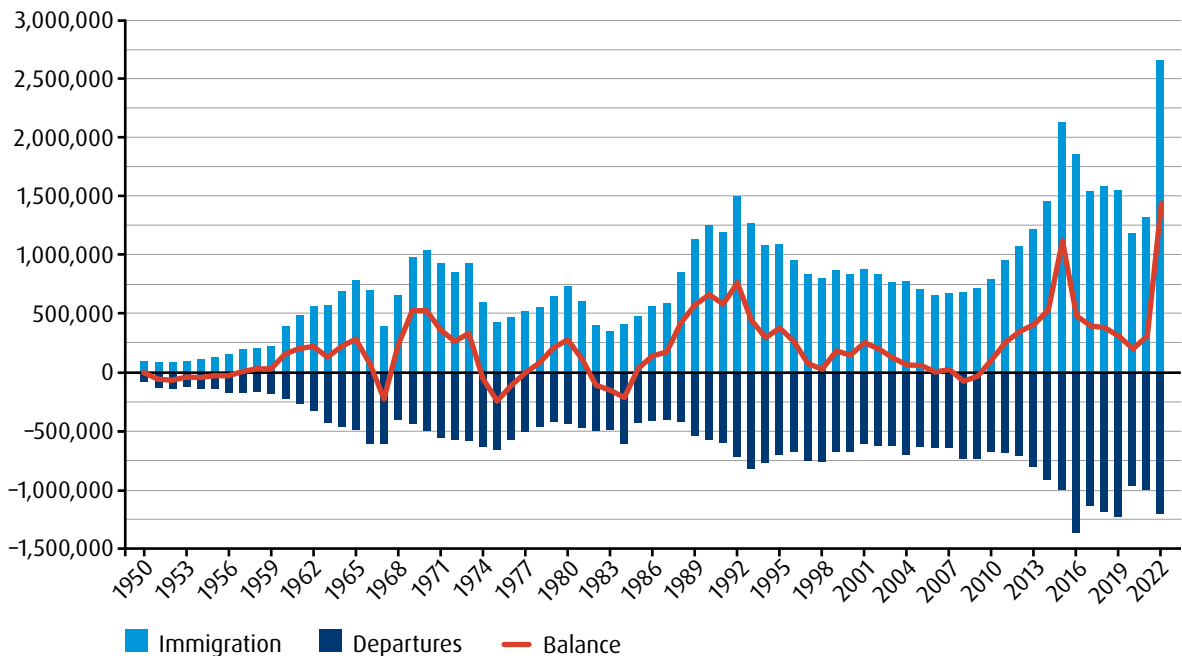
### Refugee immigration

Refugee immigration has been particularly dynamic in the last five years. Although the number of applications for individual asylum in the EU and Germany is well below the highs of 2015 and 2016, it has risen again in recent years (Figure 3). In 2022, around 218,000 asylum applications were submitted in Germany, which is more than twice as many as in 2020. There was a further increase to almost 330,000 applications in 2023. The majority of applicants were granted protection status (Figure 4): in 2022, the recognition rate rose to well over 50%, before falling slightly again in 2023. The adjusted overall protection rate was just under 60% in 2019 and has been around 70% since 2022. On the one hand, the main countries of origin of asylum

seekers show a certain stabilisation: over the entire period from 2015 to 2022, applications were primarily submitted by people from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Recently, however, the focus has shifted to countries that were previously of little or no importance as countries of origin of asylum seekers. Venezuela, for example, was one of the most important countries of origin in the period from 2018 to 2022. Since the attack on Ukraine, intra-European refugee migration has also become a reality on an unprecedented scale.

Over 4 million Ukrainian refugees have found protection in the EU since February 2022, and more than a quarter of them were taken in by Germany. They did not have to go through an individual asylum procedure, but were granted collective protection status. In relation to the number of inhabitants, the Czech Republic has taken in the most people, followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland (Germany: 10th place). In Germany, therefore, two forms of refugee immigration currently coexist and are institutionally embedded in different ways. On the one hand, refugee migration includes individual asylum, which was the focus in 2015 and 2016 and has increased sharply again since 2022, and on the other hand, refugee migration from Ukraine, which has been institutionally managed through collective recognition.

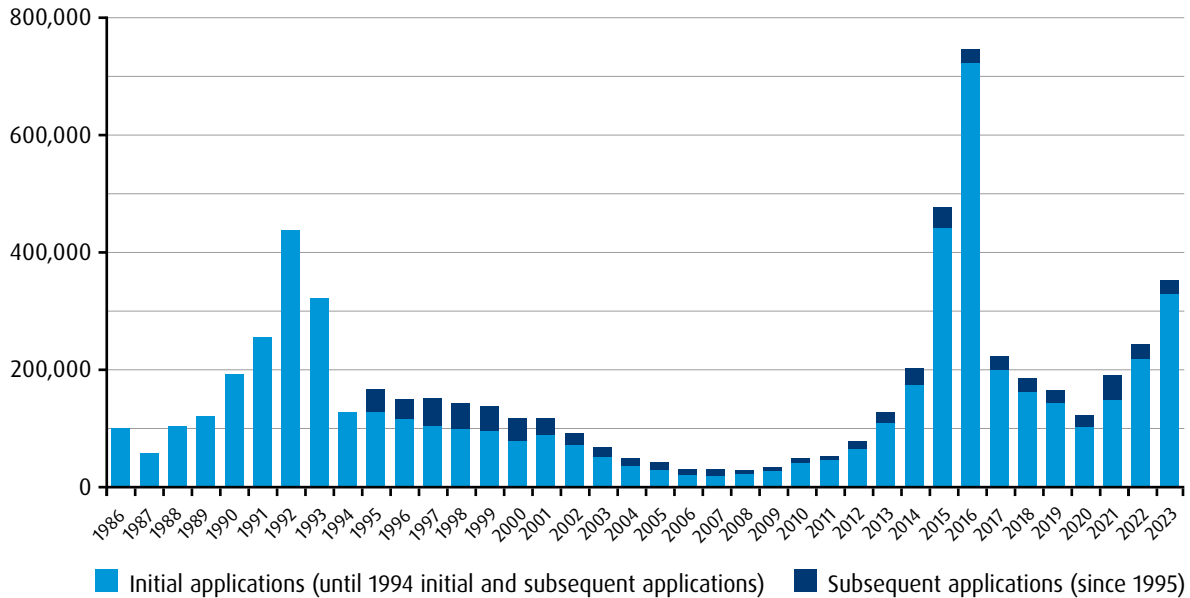
Figure 2 Immigration to and emigration from Germany since 1950



Note: Due to a change in data collection in 2016, figures from 2016 onwards are not fully comparable with previous years.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2018; 2023h; Illustration: SVR

Figure 3 Initial asylum applications and subsequent applications since 1986



Source: BAMF 2023a: 6; 2024: 6; Illustration: SVR

Figure 4 Immigration of third-country nationals according to selected residence titles, residence permit and tolerated stay 2017–2022

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Family reasons	114,861	97,129	96,633	58,022	84,095	93,960
Study	44,567	48,317	46,762	17,083	34,484	60,395
Language course, school attendance, other education	8,768	10,110	10,478	8,173	13,252	n. a.
Gainful employment	60,849	60,838	64,190	29,725	41,100	73,065
Humanitarian reasons	35,750	25,568	21,014	11,785	25,290	877,425
EU right of residence	13,266	14,815	15,688	10,909	12,765	15,570
Temporary suspension of deportation	20,442	20,574	20,336	19,572	22,860	31,880

Note: For 2021, the previously separately recorded values for “Study” and “Language course/school attendance/other training” have been combined into “Education”. Due to a re-categorisation of the data from 2021 onwards, the figures for before 2021 are not fully comparable with those for after 2021.

Source: AZR, BAMF 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023b; BMI/BAMF 2024; Illustration: SVR

The sum of these two forms now significantly exceeds the influx of refugees from 2015/16; this poses considerable challenges for local authorities in particular.

**Labour migration**

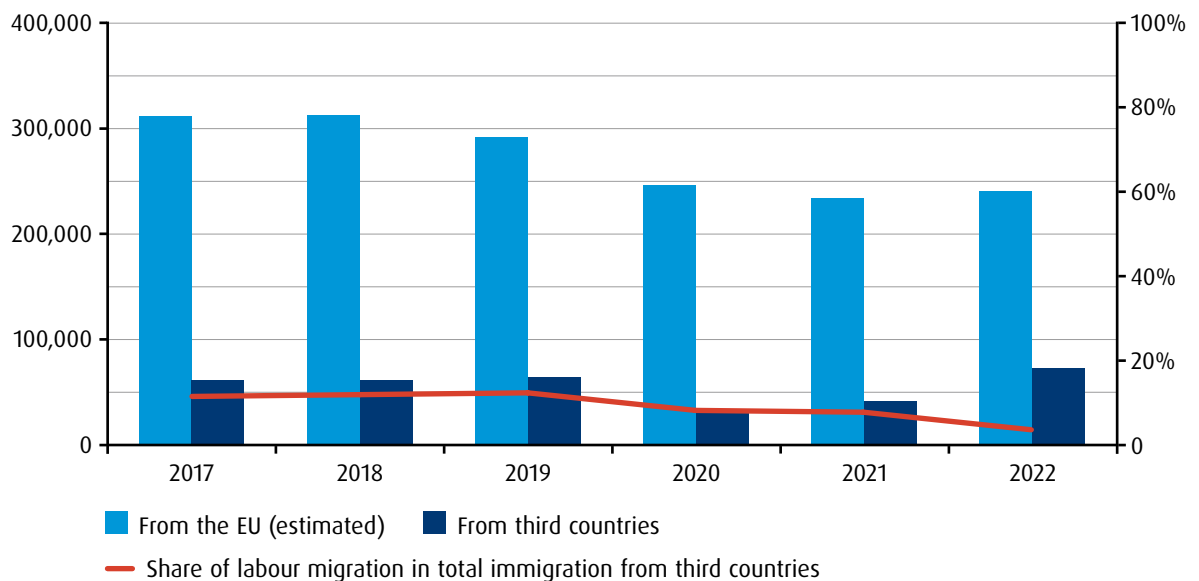
Statistically, most migration has not been into the labour market, despite significant gains in migration and a clear political will. At least in the case of immigration of third-country nationals, most residence permits are issued in the categories of family reunification and asylum immigration. However, the picture of labour migration remains incomplete if other forms of immigration are not included. For example,

internal EU migration plays a very important role in the area of employment. As EU citizens enjoy freedom of movement, they do not have to give a reason for their stay and are therefore not fully recorded statistically.

However, based on the microcensus, it can be estimated that around half of immigrants from the EU come to Germany to work (Figure 5). Against this backdrop, a quarter of EU citizens who moved to Germany between 2017 and 2021 did so for employment reasons.

EU citizens therefore continue to make up the largest share of labour migration – even if immigration from the EU has fallen slightly in recent years and has hardly increased again even after the pandemic.

**Figure 5 Labour migration of third-country nationals and EU citizens 2017–2022**



Source: AZR, BAMF 2018–2022; BMI/BAMF 2024; calculation and illustration: SVR

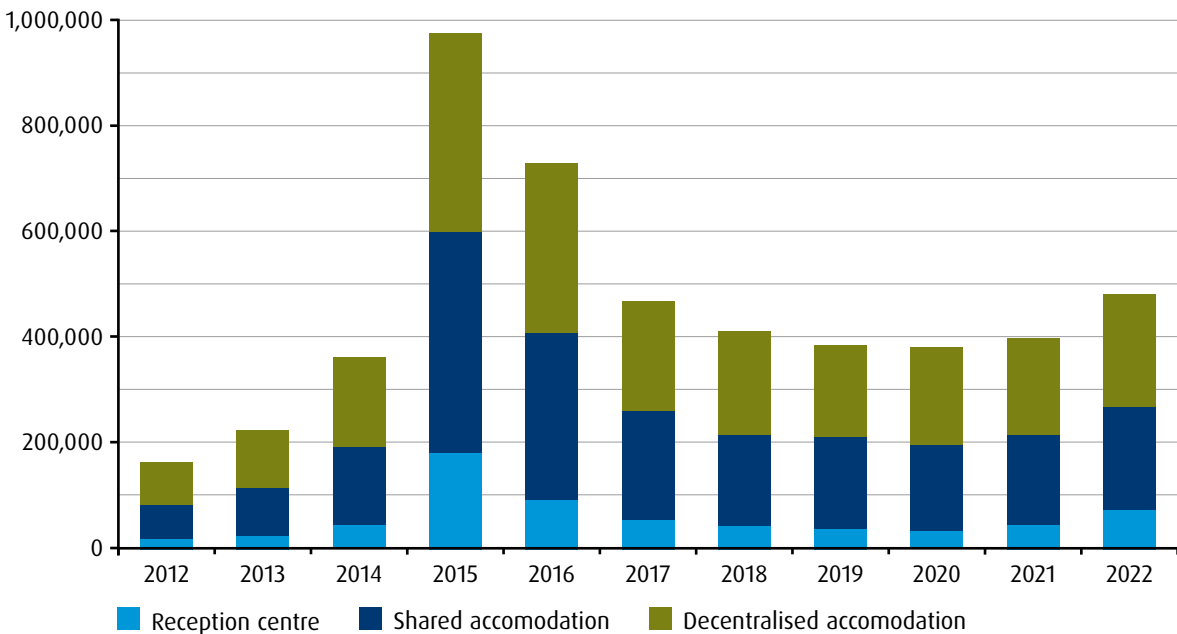
## Accommodation for people seeking protection

The proportion of people seeking protection who were accommodated in decentralised housing units had fallen to a nationwide low of 39% by 2015 (Figure 6). Since then, it has been between 44 and 49%. However, accommodation is organised differently from region to region: At the end of 2022, people seeking protection were predominantly housed in decentralised accommodation in Berlin (82.4%), Saarland (69.2%), Schleswig-Holstein (65.3%), Lower Saxony (63.7%), Rhineland-Palatinate (53.8%) and Thuringia (51.2%). In contrast, other federal states increasingly used collective accommodation centres, including Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (62.6%), Hamburg (58.4%), Hesse (57.8%), Bremen (49.4%) and Bavaria (47.9%). Refugees who are granted protection status are no longer obliged to live in a municipal institution. Nevertheless, many recognised refugees remain in collective accommodation. This is particularly

true in regions with a tight housing market, where it is correspondingly difficult to find accommodation on the private market.

The legal basis for Ukrainian refugees granted collective protection status is different from that for asylum seekers. Ukrainian refugees are therefore not subject to residence requirements and had the option of private accommodation from the outset. As a result, the majority have not utilised the capacities of the municipal accommodation system. According to a representative survey, three quarters of Ukrainian refugees were living in private accommodation in late summer 2022. Only 9% of them were accommodated in collective accommodation, a proportion that fell to 8% at the beginning of 2023. The proportion of people in other accommodation, such as hotels and guesthouses, fell from 17 % (2022) to 13% (2023). With around 250,000 people living in municipal facilities, the influx of refugees from Ukraine nevertheless places an additional burden on the municipal accommodation system.

Figure 6 Accommodation for recipients of asylum seeker benefits 2012–2022



Note: Data as at 31 December. Bremen is underreported in the figures for 2015, Thuringia for 2016, Brandenburg for 2021 and Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate for 2022.

Source: Statistik der Empfänger von Asylbewerberleistungen, Statistisches Bundesamt 2022; 2023c; 2023d; Illustration: SVR

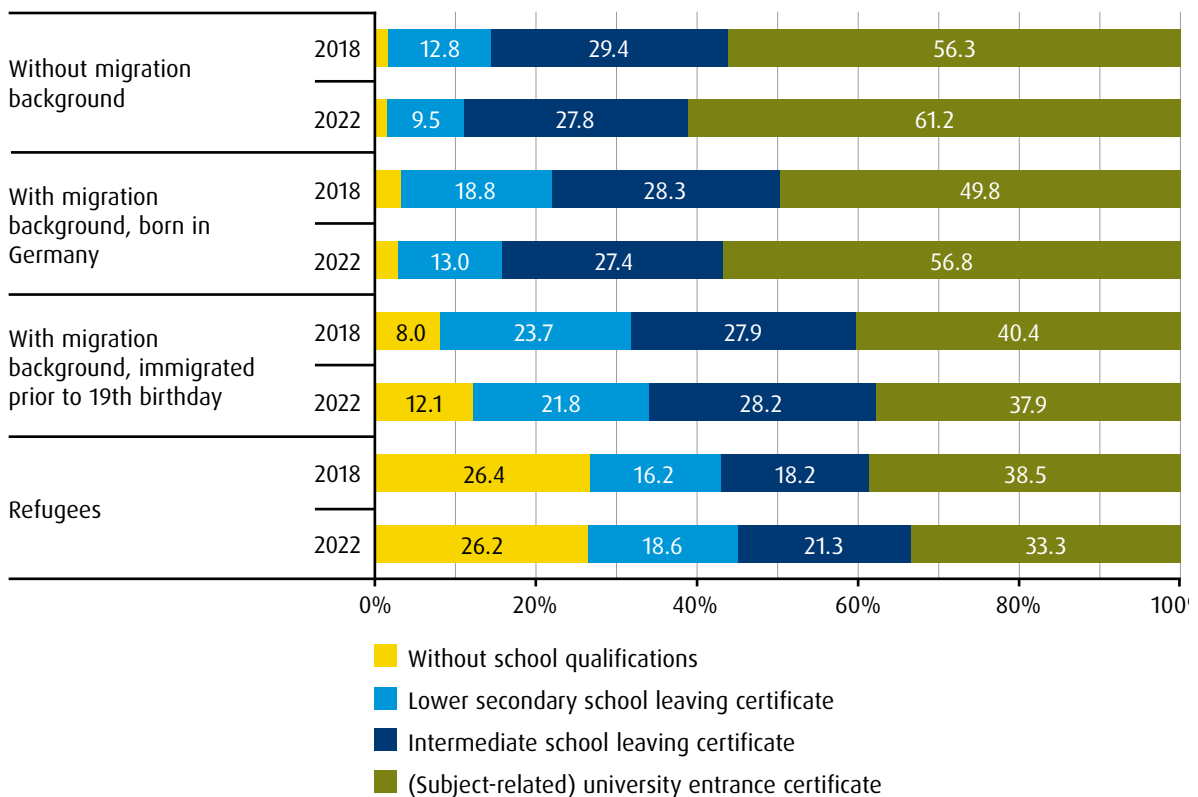


## Participation in education, training and the labour market

Differences in participation in educational programmes between children with and without a migrant background begin in early childhood and continue throughout their educational careers. This is reflected not least in the general education qualifications of young adults. Over the past five years, the rates of (subject-related) university entrance qualifications among young adults born in Germany with and without a migrant background have continued to rise: in 2022, 61.2% of young adults without a migrant background and 56.8% of those born in Germany with a migrant background had a *Fachabitur* (subject-related university entrance certificate) or *Abitur* (university entrance certificate) (Figure 7).

The rates are significantly lower for young adults who immigrated themselves and were of school age in Germany (37.9%) and those with a refugee background (33.3%). It is also worrying that a comparatively high number of young adults who immigrated themselves continue to leave school without any qualifications: 12.1% in the first generation of immigrants and as many as 26.2% of refugees. These rates are presumably due to the fact that many of the refugees arrived as teenagers or young adults and were therefore no longer required to attend school or only attended school in Germany for a few years. This makes it considerably more difficult for them to obtain or catch up on a general school-leaving qualifications.

Figure 7 General school-leaving qualifications of young adults (18-29 years) by migration background 2018 and 2022



Note: People who are still attending school are not included in the analyses. The concept of migration background corresponds to the definition of the Federal Statistical Office. Young people are categorised as “refugees” if both parents have stated flight/asylum as a reason for immigration. Refugees thus form a subset of the population group with a migration background (with and without their own migration experience). Totals may deviate from 100% due to rounding. Values below 5% are not shown.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2023f; calculation and illustration: SVR

### Labour market integration

Despite numerous crises, labour force participation has remained relatively stable. In 2022, 72.9% of people aged 25 to 64 who migrated themselves and 81.4% of people born in Germany with a migration background were in employment (population without a migration background: 84.9%). In 2018, the employment rate was 72.6 and 84.8% respectively (without a migration background: 83.8%). However, the crisis-related decline in employment in 2020 hit the population with a migrant background harder (2.1%) than the population without a migrant background, which only fell by 0.9%. Moreover, the latter had already recovered in 2021. In contrast, the population with a migrant background as a whole was still declining slightly in 2021.

Analyses also show that in 2022, people with a migrant background were underrepresented in occupations with high entry requirements at 37% (compared to 51% without a migrant background). On the other hand, at 15%, they were three times more likely to be employed in unskilled jobs than people without a migration background (5%). This applies primarily to people who have immigrated themselves; members of the second generation of immigrants hardly differ from the population without a migration background in terms of the distribution of qualified and lower-skilled jobs. However, the proportion of employees in qualified jobs has risen slightly

compared to 2018, both among those who immigrated themselves and among the second generation of immigrants. The slightly less favourable overall labour market situation of the population with a migrant background is also reflected in their economic situation. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for the population without a migration background was 12% in 2022; for the population with a migration background, it was more than twice as high at 28%.

### Naturalisation process

After remaining relatively constant between 2011 and 2018 (around 110,000 per year), the number of naturalisations has increased again in the last five years (Figure 9). In 2021, over 131,000 foreigners were naturalised, an increase of almost 20% compared to the previous year. In 2022, the number of naturalisations rose by 28% compared to 2021 to just under 169,000; this is the highest level since 2001.

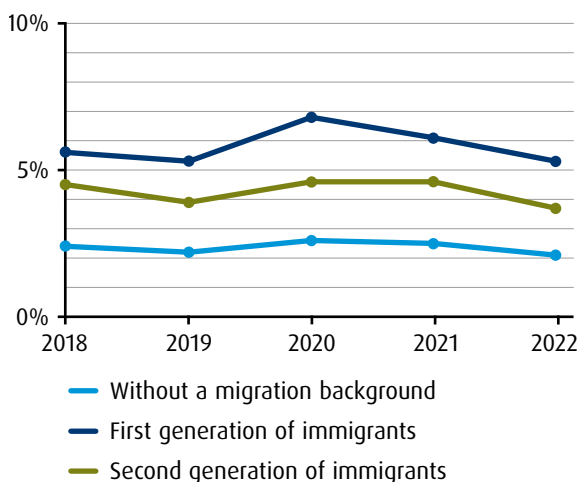
More than three quarters of the increase is attributable to Syrians, whose number of naturalisations has increased sevenfold within two years (2020: 6,700; 2022: 48,385). The number of naturalisations is also comparatively high for other important countries of origin of refugees such as Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. For Ukrainian nationals, it has almost tripled compared to the previous year (2021: 1,915; 2022: 5,565).

Less than a fifth of naturalised persons had the citizenship of an EU member state in 2022; in the previous year, it was a quarter. Turks, Germany's largest immigrant group, have so far naturalised comparatively rarely; their naturalisation potential is 1.1% and has been stagnating at a low level for years. One reason for this is that they have so far had to give up their Turkish citizenship when naturalising. This was changed in 2024 as part of the reform of citizenship law. Multiple nationality is now generally accepted. In a European comparison, Germany's naturalisation rate of 1.2% (2021) is far below the average of all EU member states (2.2%). The reduction of the residence period required for naturalisation to five years as part of the reform of the citizenship law adopted at the beginning of 2024 will significantly increase the number of people eligible for naturalisation; the groups of origin will shift. At the end of 2022, around 6.3 million foreign nationals fulfilled the previously required residence period of eight years; with a minimum residence period of five years, this applies to 8.9 million people (Figure 10).

### Attitudes towards immigration

Attitudes towards migration among the German population have remained relatively stable over time or

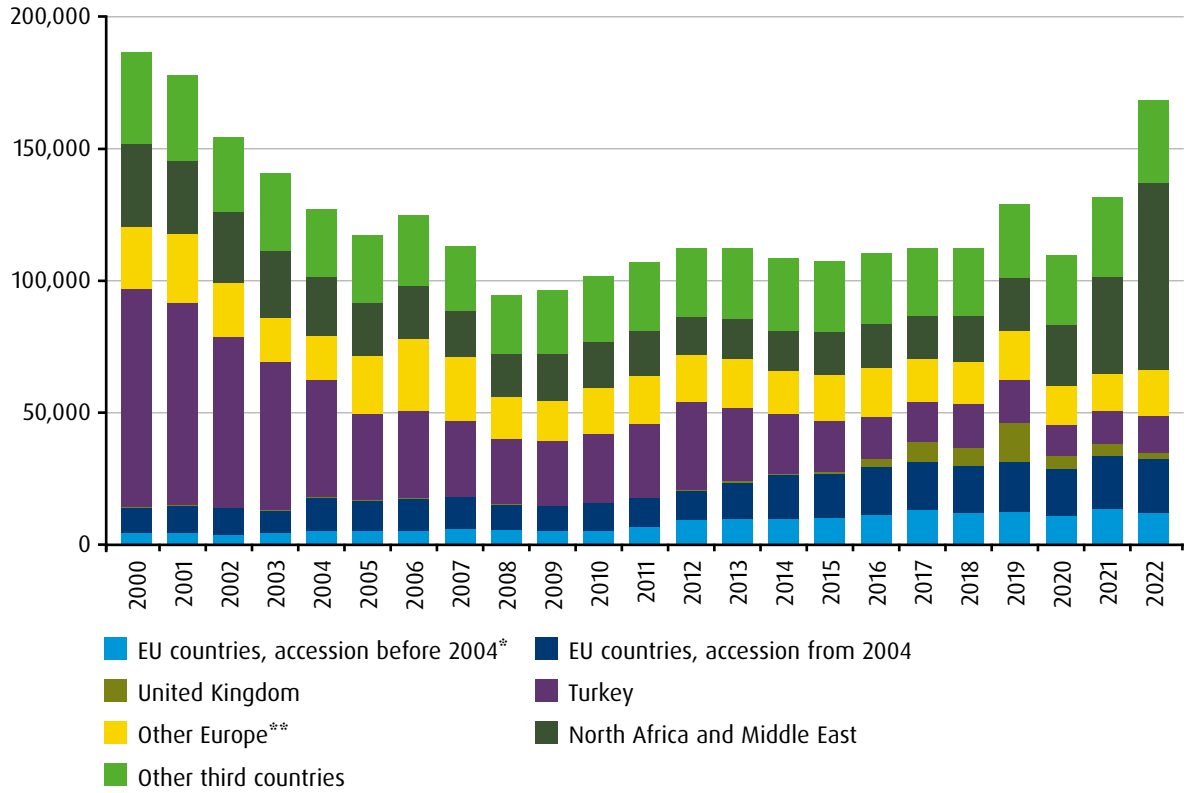
**Figure 8 Unemployment rate by migration background 2018–2022**



Note: Persons aged 25 to 64 were taken into account. The unemployment rate refers to the proportion of unemployed people in the labour force. Both figures are based on the ILO labour force status concept.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2019–2023; 2023e; calculation and illustration: SVR

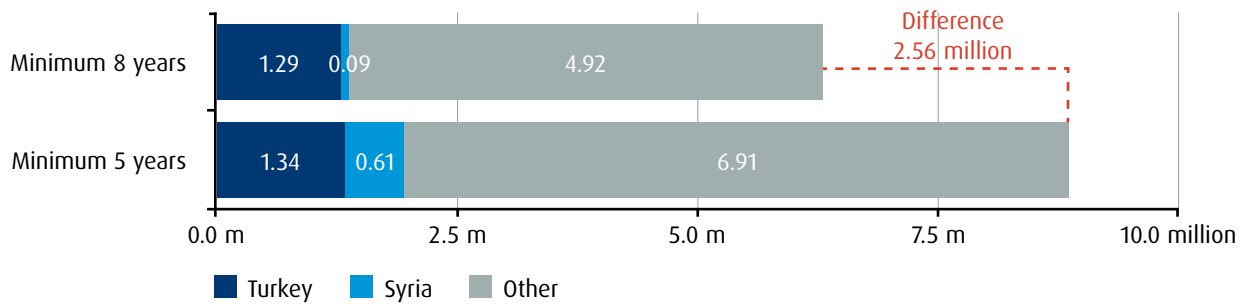
Figure 9 Naturalisations by previous citizenship 2000–2022



Note: \*excluding the United Kingdom. \*\*Including Yugoslavia (until 2003).

Source: Einbürgerungsstatistik, Statistisches Bundesamt 2023b; calculation and illustration: SVR

Figure 10 Naturalisation potential after previous residence (5 and 8 years) 2022



Note: Data as at 31 December.

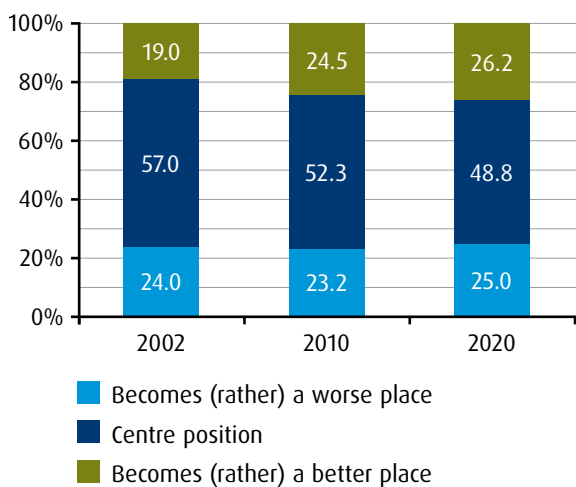
Source: AZR, Statistisches Bundesamt 2023a; 2023g; calculation and illustration: SVR

have become slightly more positive: The group of those who are more in favour of immigration has grown from just under a fifth to a good quarter between 2002 and 2020 (Figure 11). The proportion of those with a sceptical attitude towards migration has remained the same at around a quarter.

The data indicates that, contrary to popular opinion, there is no evidence of an increasing social divide within Germany in relation to migration. Although there are emotionally polarised groups, these only form a minority of the population. Emotionally charged conflicts about migration in society primarily arise in relation to the management of migration. For example, regarding the selection criteria for immigration – i.e. the question of who is allowed to stay – and the rights of migrants.

Despite this, the willingness of the German population to accept and support Ukrainian war refugees remains high. Solidarity with them has only decreased slightly over the past year despite the many challenges.

**Figure 11 Estimated impact of immigration on Germany as a place to live in 2002, 2010 and 2020**



Note: The question was: “Is Germany made a worse or better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?” An eleven-point scale was used with the marginal values 0 = “worse place to live” to 10 = “better place to live”. For the presentation, the categories 0–3 were summarised as “will (rather) become a worse place to live”, 4–6 as “average position” and 7–10 as “will (rather) become a better place to live”. Totals may deviate from 100 % due to rounding.

Source: ESS ERIC 2018a; 2018b; 2023; weighted data; calculation and illustration: SVR

In recent years, awareness has grown that Germany is dependent on immigration due to demographic trends and the resulting shortage of labour and skilled workers, among other things. The proportion of those who expect immigration to have a (rather) positive effect on the economy has risen considerably in recent years. At the same time, in 2020 only around 16% believed that immigration would have a (somewhat) negative effect on the economy in Germany (compared to around 23% and 24% in 2002 and 2010 respectively). In addition, a clear majority of the population would like people to immigrate to Germany if they have a job or a suitable job offer.

#### Attitudes towards labour migration from different regions 2021

Nevertheless, there is a considerable proportion of the population who would like to restrict labour migration and thus exert greater control over it. The majority of people are in favour of unrestricted labour migration, as permitted by EU freedom of movement, although subject to conditions. Around a third of people in Germany are in favour of this for Eastern European member states; the figure for other EU countries is significantly higher at 44%. Overall, immigration of labour from the EU is clearly preferred to immigration from third countries: for the latter, only 17% are in favour of unrestricted immigration.

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The facts and figures presented in Chapter 3 are based on the sources listed below:

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# 4.

## Ten core messages of the SVR Annual Report 2024

Developments in migration and integration policies over the last five years have been characterised by very high numbers of people seeking protection and the pressures this entails, a growing need for labour from third countries and an intensification of policy debates and proliferation of proposed solutions. German legislators and the responsible public authorities have responded with numerous measures. Efforts to reform the Common European Asylum System, which had been stuck for years, finally resulted in agreement at European Union level.

The SVR's analysis shows that although public debate was at times very heated and created political pressure for action, the direction of travel of policy and legislation remained largely unchanged. However, there was also a shift in emphasis in certain areas and greater use was made of existing leeway. In this annual report, the SVR explains the measures that have been taken and how they work in practice.

## 1 Germany as a country of immigration: Between openness and restriction

An analysis of developments in integration and migration policy reveals the struggle for a balance between openness and restriction, between promoting integration and controlling immigration, which was already familiar from earlier periods. This demonstrates that migration has been the norm in Germany for a long time and must be organised. In their 2021 coalition agreement, the current governing parties recognised that Germany is a country of immigration. They also drew up political plans for the further development of integration and migration policy. Many of these have already been implemented.

Migration and integration policies are currently shaped by the need for labour immigration on the one hand and the strains of admitting people in need of protection on the other. Labour migration has been relatively liberalised in response to the labour shortages caused and exacerbated by demographic factors. In contrast, more restrictive asylum policies have been adopted as the number of asylum seekers began to rise again from 2022. At the same time, the labour market has also been opened up for those whose asylum application has not or not yet been approved.

All of this was accompanied by a number of new developments. The reform of citizenship law has removed key obstacles to naturalisation. The fundamental acceptance of multiple citizenship in particular represents a paradigm shift in this respect. New ground has also been broken in labour migration

policy. In non-regulated professions, for example, it is no longer necessary to demonstrate that qualifications acquired abroad are equivalent to German standards; in future, qualifications recognised abroad will also suffice as proof (see core message 3).

## 2 EU refugee and asylum policy is capable of responding in times of crisis; human rights must continue to be respected

The management of refugee migration is just as controversial in other EU countries as it is in Germany. However, discussion at the European level, especially in the Council, often revolves around disagreements concerning responsibilities, admission procedures and the allocation of asylum seekers across the EU. However, following Russia's attack on Ukraine, the international community reacted quickly and prudently, demonstrating its ability to respond by activating the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time. Over 4 million Ukrainian refugees have been accepted in the EU, more than a quarter of them in Germany.

In addition, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission announced the agreement on a reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in December 2023 after many years of negotiations. The urgent need for reform is not only demonstrated by the renewed increase in the number of people seeking protection in Europe. Some member states are also increasingly undermining applicable law, as evidenced by human rights violations such as pushbacks at the EU's external border. The divergent interests and positions of individual EU member states regarding the burden-sharing of refugee admissions and the increasingly frequent closure of internal borders also pose a threat to fundamental achievements of the EU, such as the free movement of persons. The SVR therefore welcomes the agreement reached at EU level. The reliable control of asylum immigration cannot be achieved through national measures alone, but only in a coordinated manner at European level. However, human rights and refugee rights standards must be upheld at all costs – they are the key benchmark for the success of the reform.

The centrepieces of the reform are a new Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management, which introduces a new solidarity mechanism, a new Asylum Procedure Regulation and a new Screening Regulation. Accelerated asylum procedures are to be carried out at the EU's external borders for asylum seekers with low chances of being accepted (from countries with quotas below 20%) under the fiction of non-entry. In the event of massive refugee

movements, these border procedures can be extended to other groups under the new so-called Crisis Regulation. The SVR emphasises that people involved in such procedures must have access to independent legal advice at all times. Accommodation must also be organised in a humane manner. People with special protection needs in particular – e.g. minors or the elderly – require extended protection. Experience from Greek reception centres shows how difficult it is to provide adequate accommodation for people seeking protection under such circumstances. Overcrowding and excessive length of stay should be avoided. The EU member states bear joint responsibility for this (cf. core message 4).

The SVR welcomes the introduction of a binding solidarity mechanism between the EU member states in principle. The fact that the previous system did not provide for burden- and responsibility-sharing was one of the key design flaws of the CEAS. The tasks and responsibilities associated with taking in refugees should be distributed more evenly across the EU. This would not only benefit countries of arrival such as Italy and Greece, but also countries of destination such as Germany. However, the solidarity mechanism depends on all member states participating. It remains to be seen whether this can be guaranteed and whether the mechanism will live up to expectations.

### **3 Labour market has been opened to further immigration; gainful employment can lead to continuation of residence**

There have been a variety of legislative measures and reforms in the area of labour migration over the last five years. Some of these continued previous developments. Others, however, have introduced significant changes to German labour migration law. This is due not least to demographic change, which is putting increasing pressure on the German labour market. Not only highly skilled workers, but labour in general is becoming scarce in an increasing number of occupations and regions.

To remedy this situation, the Bundestag (German parliament) passed the Law and Ordinance on the Further Development of Skilled Labour Immigration in 2023. The reform builds on the Skilled Immigration Act, which came into force in 2020 and opened up the labour market to the immigration of skilled workers from third countries. It also creates new and more far-reaching opportunities for other groups. In non-regulated professions, for example, it will no longer be mandatory to prove the equivalence of a qualification acquired abroad. The opportunities for

labour immigration will also be significantly expanded for people without formal qualifications.

The SVR welcomes the fact that the labour market will also be opened up to people who do not have recognised qualifications that comply with German standards. However, it also urges caution. The expansion of immigration opportunities for foreign labour must not be at the expense of worker protection. This applies in particular to the low-wage sector. Here, close scientific monitoring is required to examine the impact of the changes and the extent to which opportunities for further qualification exist and are utilised. Challenges are also to be expected in terms of communication and administrative implementation, as the new legal provisions are very complex in some cases. As the authorities are chronically overburdened, this could make it more difficult, rather than easier, to recruit skilled workers from abroad.

However, the current federal government has not only made it easier for labour and skilled workers from abroad to move to Germany. It also wants to make better use of the potential offered by migrants who are already living in Germany. One such measure is the Opportunity Residence Act. This is aimed at foreign nationals who are in fact required to leave the country but who have tolerated stay status. In future, they will be given the opportunity to obtain regular residence status by demonstrating integration efforts and taking up gainful employment. The SVR supports this development not only in view of the increasing labour shortage, but also from an integration policy perspective. However, it points out that measures that facilitate such a change of track relativise regulatory considerations. These measures therefore also harbour considerable risks: the options available for the regularisation of residence status blur the distinction between the two different migration routes of asylum and labour migration. If there is too much permeability, at some point it will no longer matter whether a person enters the country regularly, for example with a pre-issued visa, or irregularly, i.e. without a pre-issued residence permit. This could increase the motivation for irregular entry. It is therefore important to conduct accompanying research into such effects.

### **4 Strengthening assisted return, negotiating effective migration agreements**

Germany has performed a balancing act in its asylum policy in recent years. Repatriation measures have been combined with integration support programmes: opening elements are designed to enable refugees



to take up work quickly; restrictive measures are designed to prevent reception capacities from being overstretched. The SVR welcomes this approach. It makes it possible to maintain a balance between integration policy and control policy elements.

The fact that many more refugees are once again arriving in Germany as a result of violent developments worldwide – above all the war in Ukraine – presents political decision-makers and the responsible authorities with major challenges. In this context, the debate on stronger migration management is not new; politicians have been trying to implement a more effective return policy for a number of years. This concerns first and foremost people whose asylum procedure has been concluded without their claim being recognised. Assisted return and reintegration programmes have been implemented and developed, and migration agreements have been concluded with various countries of origin.

One of the main obstacles to return is the lack of cooperation with important countries of origin. If negotiations on readmission and migration agreements are to have a lasting effect, the SVR therefore believes that they must be conducted on an equal footing: the interests of the countries of origin must also be taken into account. In addition, a joint approach needs to be taken to a range of migration matters. A readmission obligation could, for example, be accompanied by an easing of the work visa regime. The fact that the first agreements of this kind have now been concluded is to be welcomed. Planning now needs to begin on the evaluation and possible follow-up of these agreements.

In parallel to migration agreements, the German government has also tried to make it easier to enforce the legal obligation to leave the country in recent years. Regulations on detention pending deportation and custody to secure departure, among other things, will be tightened in 2024. Return policies cannot be abandoned if the distinction between refugee and labour migration is not to be blurred. However, financed voluntary departure is preferable in these instances and should be further expanded. Deportations should only be carried out as a last resort – but then preferably within the legally prescribed time limits.

## 5 Designing sustainable reception and integration structures, distributing refugees intelligently

The reception of asylum seekers from Ukraine and other third countries has pushed many municipalities to their limits. In retrospect, the municipalities that were best prepared were those that already had established structures and resources for reception and

accommodation to fall back on. They reacted more quickly and pragmatically than local authorities that did not have the necessary capacities.

In view of the increasing number of people seeking protection, the federal government has adapted the legal framework for refugee accommodation over the last five years. Special building regulations have been extended and the minimum periods for residence restrictions have been lifted. In addition, following lengthy negotiations in autumn 2023, the federal and state governments agreed on a dynamic system for financing the admission and integration of refugees that takes into account fluctuating trends in refugee numbers. This is a step forward that will secure long-term funding between the federal and state governments. However, the mechanisms by which costs are reimbursed to municipalities by the federal states is also important. The SVR calls for more transparency between all levels in this respect.

However, a comprehensive evaluation of the residence restrictions (that stipulate where people must reside) shows that they do not have the intended effect, but rather hinder integration. Instead of primarily restricting the freedom of settlement, recognised refugees should rather be distributed to the municipalities in such a way that their needs and skills match local living conditions and work opportunities (see also core message 6). For this reason, factors that increase the likelihood that refugees will subsequently voluntarily remain where they are first sent after leaving collective accommodation centres for those seeking protection should be taken into account from the outset. Furthermore, the SVR is in favour of binding minimum standards in refugee accommodation.

One cause of admission bottlenecks is fundamental infrastructure problems. Above all, sustainable solutions depend on policymakers creating framework conditions that enable existing general needs to be met. This applies to the housing market as well as other areas such as education and administration. Immigration sometimes makes structural problems more visible; in most cases, it has not caused them.

## 6 Further facilitate access to education and gainful employment for refugees, speed up recognition procedures

The current German government is not the first to pursue the political objective of promoting the integration of refugees. In addition to housing, access to education and training as well as subsequent entry into the labour market is also a challenge.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, various integration policy initiatives have already led to some

successes. For example, preparatory training measures specifically for refugees have been strengthened and a legal loophole in the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act has been closed in order to create legal certainty for asylum seekers' access to preparatory training measures. After 2015, instruments that specifically support refugees were trialled. In the following years, programmes for learners with a refugee background were then embedded into the regular system. The SVR strongly supports this development. Positive effects are already recognisable: compared to previous decades, for example, more people with a refugee background have entered employment or education and training.

Nevertheless, decisive hurdles remain. For example, the SVR takes a critical view of prolonged accommodation in collective centres and residence restrictions (see also core message 5). These measures make it more difficult for new immigrants with a refugee background to access the labour market and educational opportunities. In addition, the recognition of existing qualifications, for example, should be simplified and further training promoted throughout the country. Only a coherent approach can create the conditions for people with refugee backgrounds to be able to work as skilled workers in the future, rather than in precarious employment.

To achieve this, structural problems need to be addressed: if children cannot be cared for due to a lack of childcare places, if the journey to work is too long, and if job offers cannot be taken up because evidence of qualifications cannot yet be presented, refugees of working age (especially young women) have little chance of working or gaining further qualifications. There are a number of changes that policymakers need to make here. They also need to be clearer about what Germany's priorities are when it comes to labour market integration. Rapid labour market integration can be in the interests of both those seeking protection and the host municipalities. However, there is also the risk that too little investment is being made in the acquisition of vocational qualifications or language skills, which are important for better social participation in the long term. Flexible programmes should therefore be developed. The aim should be to enable early entry into the labour market and to provide opportunities for further training to improve career prospects and avoid precarious employment.

## **7** Investing in the future, strengthening standardised education systems

Four out of ten children and young people in Germany now have a personal or family history of immigration.

Most of them were born here. However, many have also come to Germany in the last five years as refugees, especially from Ukraine. Linguistic and cultural diversity is therefore the norm in German educational institutions. However, this diversity poses major challenges for the educational system. The coronavirus pandemic and increased refugee migration have both cast a hard light on and exposed structural deficits that have existed in the German education system for some time: the system does a poor job of compensating for the disadvantages caused by a person's background.

However, it turns out that the second generation, i.e. those born in Germany, are increasingly catching up with children without a migrant background. Children and young people who have experienced immigration themselves, and especially those with a refugee background, are particularly disadvantaged: they are less likely to make it to a grammar school and are more likely to have no school-leaving qualifications at all later on. The challenges begin right at the start of their educational career in Germany: due to a shortage of admission capacity, many new immigrants sometimes wait months for a place in a daycare centre or school. Increasing diversity in daycare centres and schools also poses a major challenge for many teachers. A diverse student body is not a new phenomenon in itself, and extensive materials and training courses on diversity-sensitive support are now available, for example in the area of language education. However, due to the acute shortage of specialised staff, many educational institutions are finding it difficult to adapt to the needs of specific target groups and to deploy multi-professional teams, even though many employees are personally very committed.

The SVR urges political decision-makers at both state and federal level to act quickly. It would be disastrous if recently immigrated children and young people became a 'lost generation'. Educating the younger generation – and this also applies to new immigrants – is one of the most sustainable investments that can be made in the future. In order to promote the educational integration of immigrants, all aspects of the education system should be designed to be accessible to all, regardless of their background. This requires sufficient qualified staff and appropriate training programmes. Skilled workers from abroad can make an important contribution in this context. The potential of new immigrants should be utilised at an earlier stage, the recognition of professional qualifications of foreign educational specialists and teachers should be simplified and ideally efforts should be made to provide further on-the-job training.

## 8 Facilitate naturalisation, promote political participation of people with a migration background

The equal participation of all citizens in political decision-making processes is a cornerstone of democracies; it increases the sense of belonging and the acceptance and legitimacy of political decisions. The most important form of political participation is the right to take part in elections. This is generally reserved for people with German citizenship (and EU citizens at municipal level). At the same time, a relatively small number of people from other countries who are eligible to apply for German citizenship are currently opting for naturalisation. As a result of these two factors, the gap between the resident and voting population in Germany has widened in recent years – and with it the problem of under-inclusion.

The reform of citizenship law adopted at the beginning of 2024 has introduced various changes that will facilitate naturalisation. For example, the period of required residence will be shortened. However, a key adjustment is the general acceptance of multiple nationalities, which removes a major hurdle to naturalisation. The SVR welcomes this, but also believes that passing on dual citizenship indefinitely across generations on the basis of place of birth raises fundamental political questions about the nature of democracy. As the reform takes effect, more and more people will be eligible to vote not only in Germany, but also in the country of origin of the person who originally immigrated to Germany. This will allow them to have a say in political decisions that do not affect them at all. The SVR therefore proposes examining approaches that allow multiple nationality in principle, but at the same time limit the problems associated with over-inclusion. These include the model of a dual passport with generational cut-off, which has been further developed by the SVR, as well as the idea of dormant citizenship presented in this annual report. The SVR is also critical of the decision to link naturalisation even more closely to the ability of potential new citizens to support themselves financially. Furthermore, the lack of provisions in the reform to reduce statelessness is seen as a missed opportunity. Overall, the reform of the citizenship law is a big step in the right direction and could sustainably increase the number of naturalisations. However, this presupposes that the authorities can keep pace with the reform's implementation; only then will the facilitated naturalisation intended by the reform be a success. Many of the authorities responsible are already heavily overburdened. The SVR recommends that the naturalisation authorities should be adequately staffed,

that greater centralisation should be considered, that administrative practices should be standardised and that administrative processes should be digitised to a greater extent.

Political participation is not limited to participation in elections. There are various other forms that do not depend on nationality. The political participation of migrants can also be promoted through integration and participation laws. Over the past five years, this area has developed dynamically at the level of the federal states: existing laws have been amended and new laws are currently being drafted or have been passed. At federal level, the coalition agreement of the current governing parties also includes plans for a participation law.

The drafting and amendment of laws on integration and participation can provide the occasion and the framework for wider public debate, from which a common understanding of integration and participation can emerge. To this end, opportunities for the involvement in debate of organised civil society, academia, associations and public administration should be used and expanded at various levels. In the SVR's view, consultative and participatory bodies should be enshrined in the law itself, with tasks and powers as clearly defined as possible, in order to strengthen their position.

## 9 Practical implementation: Reduce bureaucracy, formulate law more comprehensibly

Over the past five years, the SVR has observed rapid and sometimes challenging developments on which it has provided advice as part of its scientific analyses. Old and new violent conflicts, the intensification of man-made climate change, a global increase in refugee migration, the effects and after-effects of the coronavirus pandemic: the world is in a permanent state of upheaval. Political decision-makers need to adapt to this – and do so better than before.

On balance it is true to say that politicians have initiated an extraordinary number of changes in the area of migration and integration. This is one of the most dynamic policy areas. At the same time, federal and state administrations often implement laws too slowly and bureaucratically. The regulations adopted often prove to be far too complicated.

Furthermore, the current challenges – in administrative practice, but also in the housing market or in education, for example – are not only the result of increased immigration (see core messages 5 and 7). Rather, these challenges are due to underinvestment over the years and delays in implementation as a

result of overregulation. The lack of digitalisation of the authorities and their lack of cooperation is an overarching problem that also has a negative impact on the reception and integration management of new immigrants (with or without a refugee background) (see core message 6).

Implementation is made even more difficult by the many changes made in an increasingly complex legal landscape. Every change in the law means additional work for public authorities: new rules have to be implemented in corresponding procedures, staff have to be given further training, new software may be needed. Legislative bodies should give much greater consideration to implementation when developing new regulations. Otherwise, important and correct political initiatives, such as the reform of citizenship law, will come to nothing, causing disappointment among those affected and exhaustion and frustration among already overburdened public authority staff. Many naturalisation authorities already have a dramatic backlog of applications. The SVR therefore urgently recommends that the relevant offices be better equipped and prepared to achieve the reform's intended effects (see core message 8). The SVR points out that strengthening comprehensive systems has priority over special programmes for specific segments of the population. This also simplifies implementation by the authorities.

Finally, the law must become more transparent and easier to understand. This is a challenge for politicians and, in particular, the legislative bodies. German labour migration law, for example, is now so complex that hardly anyone understands it (see core message 3). If Germany wants to recruit foreign labour effectively – and competition is fierce, which is why more effort is needed – then it must also address this issue. More courage to simplify is needed to ensure that existing law can be communicated in an understandable way, both internally and externally.

## 10 **Despite situational scepticism: Population remains fundamentally open to immigration**

Politicians must always demonstrate their ability to act and shape developments – in both calm and turbulent times. This also applies to issues that affect the cohesion of a diverse society. Migration – generally speaking, without differentiating between labour migration and refugee migration – is currently once again cited in surveys as one of the most pressing problems and is also perceived as polarising. At the same time, however, the majority still agree that Germany is a country of immigration. The German

population is not fundamentally sceptical about immigration. A long-term analysis also shows that the population's attitudes towards this issue have become more positive over the last twenty years. However, the majority expect politicians to take control, particularly in the area of refugee migration, for example with regard to the extent of immigration, admission criteria and the expectations to be placed on new arrivals. This would also help to avoid polarisation in public discourse. There is an urgent need to address the topic of migration in an objective, knowledge-based and solution-orientated manner.

There is a growing awareness among the population that Germany is dependent on immigration. The majority of respondents would like people with a job offer to be able to immigrate to the country. Freedom of movement within the EU is also supported by the majority, albeit with certain reservations. Solidarity with refugees from Ukraine is somewhat lower than at the beginning of the war but remains high despite major housing and integration challenges. Nevertheless, many people are worried. In view of infrastructural deficits such as the lack of housing, they wonder whether the country can adequately accommodate new immigrants without increasing competition. These concerns must be taken seriously.

Being a country of immigration does not mean permitting indiscriminate immigration. Instead, clearly defined rules must be applied to determine who is allowed to enter and stay and who has to leave. Refugee movements will foreseeably continue to be part of everyday life. The effects will not only be felt in Germany and Europe, but also in many other countries where most people around the world seek protection. The reception and sustainable integration of people in need of protection is therefore not only dependent on a policy based on solidarity and in compliance with international law, but also very much on the support of society at large – from local businesses and associations, organisations and volunteers. Appropriate structures, especially at local level, are therefore of immeasurable value.

# 5.

About the SVR and its annual reports

## Mission: Independent Policy Advice

The Expert Council on Integration and Migration is an independent body providing research-based policy advice. Its reports aim to assist those bodies responsible for integration and migration policy, as well as the general public, in their opinion-forming processes. Germany is a country of immigration. Integration and migration are thus key issues of the future which will continue to pose significant challenges to politics and society in the coming years. This is why the Federal Government took the decision on 2 December 2020 to establish the Expert Council on Integration and Migration. It will continue the work of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, founded in 2008 as a consortium of private foundations.

Under the charter establishing the Expert Council on Integration and Migration, it is tasked with

- providing research-based information about trends, issues and evidence-based solutions in the fields of integration and migration, monitoring these trends and providing a neutral and methodologically sound assessment of them,
- providing actionable policy advice and taking a clear stance on current issues so as to be able to supply factual arguments for the public and political debate, objectivising information provided to the public and giving new impetus to the relevant debates

for the benefit of politics at federal, federal state and local authority level, as well as civil society.

The Expert Council on Integration and Migration is mandated with providing independent advice. Its assessments and evaluations are bound only by scientific criteria. It publishes all its statements, recommendations and reports.

Under the charter establishing the Expert Council, it has a threefold mission:

- The Expert Council draws up an **Annual Report**, which is forwarded to the Federal Government in the second quarter of each year and then published. The Annual Report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of integration and migration policy.
- Every two years the Expert Council publishes an empirically-based analysis of the integration climate in Germany, which may cover the country as a whole, the individual federal states and municipalities (**Integration Barometer**). Both people with and without a migration background are included in this analysis, which looks at a variety of groups so that account can be taken of the opinions and personal assessments of various population groups.
- The Expert Council also prepares, on its own initiative, **position papers** on individual issues or gives its **opinion** when requested to do so.

## Council Members

The interdisciplinary Expert Council comprises a total of nine Researchers, who are each required to have specialist knowledge of and experience in their own disciplines within the fields of integration and migration as well as international research standing. The Council Members are appointed for a three-year term by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community with the agreement of the involved federal ministries and the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration following consultations with the Chair of the Expert Council. Reappointment (generally only once) is possible. Appointments are based on a vote by an independent selection committee. The Expert Council on Integration and Migration elects a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson from among its Members for three years. The members of the Expert Council are:

### **Prof. Dr Hans Vorländer**

#### **Chairperson of the Expert Council**

Director of the Mercator Forum on Migration and Democracy (MIDEM) and of the Centre for the Study of Constitutionalism and Democracy at the Dresden University of Technology (TUD)

### **Prof. Dr Birgit Leyendecker**

#### **Deputy Chairperson of The Expert Council**

Senior Professor at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Family Research (ICFR), part of the Faculty of Psychology at Ruhr University Bochum

### **Prof. Dr Havva Engin**

Professor of General Pedagogy with a focus on Intercultural Pedagogy at Heidelberg University of Education and Head of the Heidelberg Centre for Migration Research and Transcultural Pedagogy (Hei-MaT)

### **Prof. Dr Birgit Glorius**

Professor of Human Geography with a focus on European Migration Research at Chemnitz University of Technology

### **Prof. Dr Marc Helbling**

Professor of Sociology with a focus on Migration and Integration and Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) of the University of Mannheim

### **Prof. Dr Winfried Kluth**

Professor of Public Law at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU)

### **Prof. Dr Matthias Koenig (since 1 January 2024)**

Professor of Empirical Macrosociology at the Max-Weber-Institute of Sociology at the University of Heidelberg

### **Prof. Sandra Lavenex, Ph.D. (since 1 January 2024)**

Professor of European and International Politics at the University of Geneva

### **Prof. Dr Steffen Mau (to 31 December 2023)**

Professor of Macrosociology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

### **Prof. Panu Poutvaara, Ph.D.**

Professor of Economics at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU Munich) and Director of the ifo Center for International Institutional Comparisons and Migration Research, ifo Institute

### **Prof. Dr Sieglinde Rosenberger (to 31 December 2023)**

Professor of Political Science at the University of Vienna, Austria

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The Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) gGmbH

Neue Promenade 6

10178 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0)30 288 86 59-0

Fax: +49 (0)30 288 86 59-11

[info@svr-migration.de](mailto:info@svr-migration.de)

[www.svr-migration.de/en/](http://www.svr-migration.de/en/)

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For more information, go to: [www.svr-migration.de/en/](http://www.svr-migration.de/en/)