



People on the Move

Advancing the Discourse on Migration & Jobs

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CHANCES FOR YOUNG REFUGEES

*On access to vocational training and the dynamics
of labor market integration in Germany*

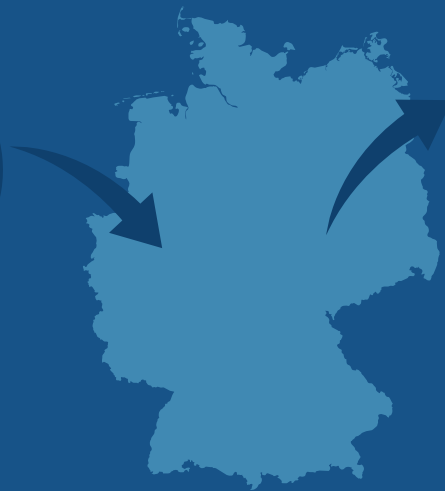
Philip Anderson, Guest Contributor

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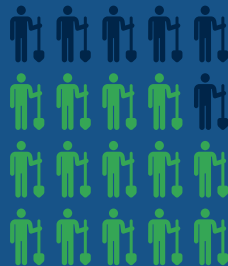
GERMANY



15.3%
In-Migration rate
(2015)



14.9%
Size of Diaspora
(% of Population)
2015



72.7%
Foreign LFPR
(2015)



79.6%
Native LFPR
(2015)



TOTAL REMITTANCES RECEIVED ANNUALLY (USD) 2016 - \$16.68 BILLION

Foreign LFPR - The foreign-born participation rate is calculated as the share of employed and unemployed foreign-born persons aged 15-64 in the total foreign-born population (active and inactive persons) of that same age.

Native LFPR - The native-born participation rate is calculated as the share of employed and unemployed native-born persons aged 15-64 in the total native-born population (active and inactive persons) of that same age.

Source: OECD (2018), UN (2017)

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Background

Over one million asylum seekers and refugees entered Germany in 2015 and 2016 combined. Integrating them into the economy through vocational training and access to the labor market – through just jobs and appropriate forms of vocational training – is imperative both to their own survival and to the economic welfare of Germany.

This chapter is based on research conducted through a three-year project (2013-2016) commissioned by the city of Munich. Its main goal was to develop strategies and recommendations on how best to enable asylum seekers – those who are awaiting a decision on their asylum application – and recognized refugees to attain a secondary school qualification. This qualification forms the basis for access to the German

vocational training system and successful integration into the German labor market. The focus was on the evaluation of classes for refugees established from 2011 to 2012 across the German Federal State of Bavaria.¹

At the beginning of the research, this project addressed the needs of a small and marginal group of a few hundred young people. With the huge rise in asylum seekers entering Germany in the period 2014-16, the importance of enabling labor-market integration of immigrants has increased enormously. It has become part of a national debate that focuses on the significance for mainstream absorption of large numbers of newly arrived asylum seekers into the vocational training system, and ultimately into the workforce.¹ Recommendations from this research

¹The evaluation, concentrating on school classes for the target group in Munich, was carried out through a monitoring program of regular exchange with teaching and social work staff (interviews, discussions, workshops), participant observation in refugee classes and wide-ranging qualitative interviews with experts and students. The students were aged 16 to 21 years in a total of ten classes (size 18 students per class).

have already contributed to ongoing discussions by decision-makers in the field of vocational training in Bavaria and as part of the broader debate on educational integration of refugees in Germany.^{ii,2}

Though the project did not examine the mass immigration of refugees into Germany in the past

three years, numbers indicate the magnitude of the challenge: Almost 200,000 of the refugees arriving in Germany in 2015 were between 16 and 29 years old³ and in Bavaria alone, 22,000 refugees were enrolled in the school system in the 2016-17 academic year.⁴

Introduction: Refugees and the “dual system” of vocational training

Germany’s traditional, large base of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a whole range of cutting-edge scientific, technical, commercial, and service-providing products and activities is the basis for what is often regarded as the German economic power house at the heart of the European Union. SMEs represent 99 percent of all companies and employ two out of three workers in Germany.⁵

A key element driving commercial success, technological innovation and high-level skills outside of the university context is the *dual system* of vocational training. Under this system, apprentices complete three- to four-year courses to attain a qualification in the fields of handicraft, commercial, technical, or services by learning on the job in an enterprise and attending vocational school for theoretical input. Schooling, which makes up on average 30 percent of the training, is

structured either in learning blocks of two to three weeks spread over the school year, or on a basis of two days out of five per week in school. Around 90 percent of students in vocational training are integrated into this dual system of learning.⁶

In Bavaria, some 240,000 apprentices were learning trades within the dual system in 2015 – though no statistics are presently available on how many of these apprentices were refugees.⁷ It should be noted that 82 percent of large companies offer training positions, as compared with 44 percent of small and 67 percent of medium-sized enterprises. Nonetheless, given the volume of SMEs, nine out of 10 apprenticeships are with SMEs.⁸

There are two interwoven factors that have led to the development of special classes for asylum seekers and refugees over the course of the last few years. After recovery from the economic crisis

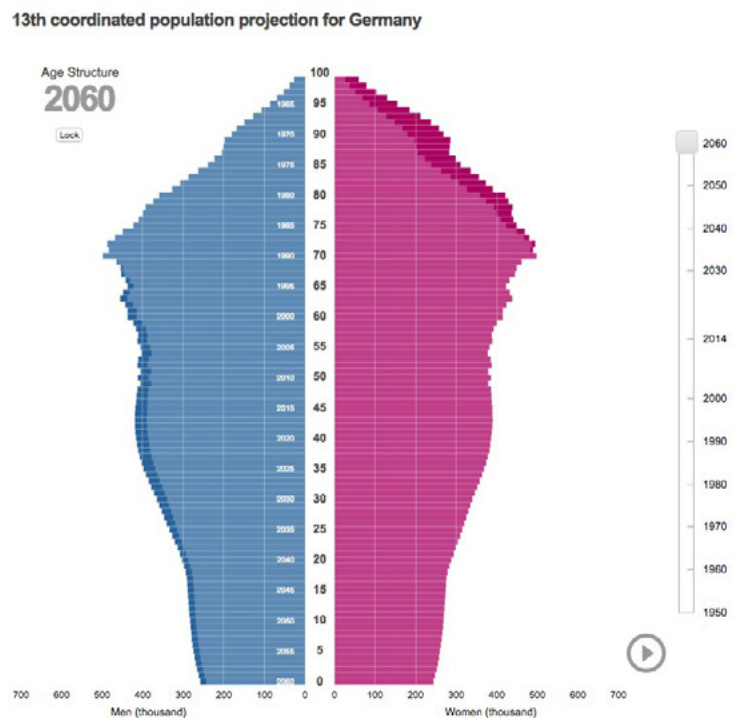
ⁱⁱ The report on which this chapter is based presented a concept with a total of 38 practice-based recommendations relating to social, pedagogical, legal, and other aspects of support for the students concerned. The project report was approved by the Munich City Council in the summer of 2016.

of 2008-2009, the southern region of Germany, in particular the state of Bavaria, has enjoyed an economic boom driven largely by a dynamic industrial sector with a large volume of exports.^{iii,9} This has fuelled continuous demand in particular for skilled and highly qualified workers. Yet there is a discernible skills gap due to a lack of appropriately qualified workers.

In addition, Germany faces a demographic challenge. Because of its aging society, there are more people already in, or entering, retirement

and not enough that are in the labor market to perform the range of jobs society requires – without regard to rationalization effects of technological transformation or “Industry 4.0” – a term used in Germany for technologically advanced forms of production.¹⁰ This dilemma is illustrated by the well-known inverted pyramid image in demographic charts: fewer and fewer people in employment supporting an increasing number of seniors through contributions to the pension system (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1
German demographic projection for 2060



Source: 13th Coordinated Population Projection for Germany, DStatis, Statistisches Bundesamt

ⁱⁱⁱ The export share of Bavarian industry is 48.8 percent

Innovative approaches

Politicians in Bavaria's ruling Christian Social Union (CSU) party – sister party and coalition partner to Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union in Berlin – have been made aware of the manpower shortage problems faced by many businesses, especially in rural regions of Bavaria. Whether butchers, bakers, or electronic valve makers, many small and medium-sized enterprises are experiencing the demographic shift as a loss of retirement-age personnel without adequate youthful replacements. For example, in 2017 there was a shortage of around 36,000 qualified engineers in the German labor market,¹¹ and Bavarian businesses expect a shortage of 230,000 skilled workers by the year 2020.¹² This effect is enhanced in rural regions by a discernible flight from the countryside. Parts of northern Bavaria have faced radical depopulation with the decline of traditional industries, such as porcelain manufacture, and socio-economic changes caused by German reunification. While Bavaria has benefited from internal migration from Eastern Federal States (*Länder*), this movement has mainly been to cities and not to rural areas.

It is against this background that the program of qualification for young asylum-seekers is to be viewed. It was originally conceived in the Bavarian

context not only as an answer to the skills gap but as a resources-oriented approach to integrating young refugees as skilled workers into the labor market, driven to a large extent by demands from employers' associations and SMEs in Bavaria.

Independent of their residential status, all asylum seekers and recognized refugees in Bavaria – i.e. both those awaiting a decision on their application and those with temporary permission to remain – are allowed to attend the two-year school certificate classes. After completing these classes successfully, refugees can begin vocational training, assuming they find an appropriate employer certified to train and offering a training position.

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This is a much more innovative approach as compared to most states in Germany, where formal recognition as a refugee is a prerequisite for this kind of course. The second important feature is that Bavaria has raised the age for optional vocational training to 21 years (in exceptional cases 25 years). Before, young people were only allowed into the vocational training system until the age of 18. This has given young refugees – and potential employers – the requisite time frame for apprenticeships. Previously, potential trainers were deterred from giving asylum seekers a chance by the lack of a statutory right to attend vocational school beyond the age of 18.

Classes: Concepts and challenges

With the development of the new program in Bavaria, asylum seekers and refugees attend classes in which the first year is mainly focused on learning the language, acclimatizing socially and culturally, and getting an idea of the more than 320 potential trades/apprenticeships young people can undertake in the German system.¹³

The second-year concentrates on familiarizing them with the specialist subjects they will be taught at vocational schools. They also receive support by doing internships to get to know potential trades and establish contacts with possible trainers while preparing for their school certificate exams. The aim is for students to complete a school certificate at the end of the two-year course, which under the German system enables them to begin a course of vocational training (apprenticeship), made up of learning on the job in a company combined with theoretical background provided at a vocational school.

The ethnic background of students broadly reflects the countries from which most refugees have entered Europe in the last few years: Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, followed by Somalia and Eritrea.¹⁴ The young students are provided a broader range of support services, given their difficult circumstances and migration journeys. Learning outcomes depend on addressing more than just the training itself. This means that teachers work closely with school social workers and psychologists to help cope with the trauma that they may have experienced before or during the migration process, as well as the ongoing challenges of displacement and integration.¹⁵

Local networking is an essential element in the pedagogical concept. There has to be regular liaison with lawyers guiding students through the asylum procedure, with youth office and Foreigners' Residence Office employees, with social workers in projects for unaccompanied minors, and with therapists and activists in NGOs campaigning for the social, educational, and human rights of asylum seekers at the local level. Regular workshops enable professionals to network with the many volunteers who have become involved in supporting refugees since the huge increase in levels of forced migration.¹⁶

Despite these support mechanisms, the challenges are considerable. Young refugees are often frustrated that the German system requires them to complete an apprenticeship before taking up a job as a skilled worker. For example, having already worked as a sales person in a family shop in their country of origin, a young person may not see the need to do three years of training as a retail sales assistant before being able to work in this capacity in Germany.

This frustration at not being able to work straight away in jobs that refugees or asylum seekers sometimes think do not require training – jobs for which they feel qualified through their previous work experience – is all the greater if their relatives (with whom they may well be in regular touch via social media) reinforce this feeling: Why should our nephew train for years as a car mechanic when he was helping with repairs in the family business from early childhood?

Another major issue in the classes is their heterogeneous composition, on account of the

enormous variety of refugees' ethnic, cultural, religious, and social/educational backgrounds, all of which can be sources of conflict in their own right. They also come to the classes with different levels of prior experience in educational and professional settings, and this is in pedagogic terms the most significant challenge because experience is the most potent factor in setting the agenda for academic attainment of the students in school certificate classes and thereafter. In other words, it is the students' diverse biographical backgrounds and experiences which determine how well they can adjust to the demands of the school and training system in Germany.

To give an example: A youth from a middle-class family from Homs in Syria with nine years of schooling, his school certificates saved on his *iPhone*, and good knowledge of English – quite apart from the soft skills accruing from awareness of the latest Hollywood films and an opinion on Jay-Z – will be in a very different position from the young Afghani who is illiterate, has no experience of modern educational systems, sees himself confronted with totally different gender roles, and is profoundly influenced by a forced migration process which may have taken years.

Paradoxes of immigration policy and collaboration at the local level

The two-year school certificate program has developed over the last few years by taking account of these and other specific challenges. It is essential that the students do short-term internships in small and medium-sized enterprises, so that they become acquainted with areas of vocational qualification that might suit them. The potential trainers at workplaces also benefit from these internships, as they get to know the target group – in many cases a first-time intercultural encounter for the craftsmen concerned. Potential apprentice supervisors in these businesses often come to realize that while young refugees have substantial language issues – especially as regards technical terminology – they can compensate for this with a high level of

engagement and willingness to learn. This can tip the scales in deciding to offer a young applicant an apprenticeship.¹⁷

There are other issues. Particularly in Bavaria – a traditionally agrarian state – many smaller towns, villages, and rural communities have over the last couple of years for the first time come to terms with substantial groups of asylum seekers in their midst. While this has meant that SMEs have – against the background of the skills shortage – shown interest in training young asylum seekers, there are significant differences in attitude. Some businesses are prepared to adapt to the specific needs of this target group regarding language issues, intercultural factors (differing notions

of punctuality, religious distinctions, gender aspects), the insecurities of asylum procedures (recognition as a refugee, including uncertainty over long-term residence and the right to work), and all the attendant paperwork. Others may be inclined to treat this group as a “flexible reserve”: cheap, willing, and exploitable labor which can be used on a casual basis – and then laid off.^{iv}

An important aspect of local networking has been the preparedness of local chambers of commerce, trade organizations of various branches of handicraft and commerce, and the labor agencies to cooperate to: a) increase awareness of resources and needs of young refugees in SMEs; b) provide advice and training support to enable a good transition from school classes to apprenticeships; c) enable good transitions into further training courses (on asylum law, refugee traumatization and related issues); and d) social work support for both trainers at the workplace and teaching staff in vocational training schools. These institutions are in turn engaged in regular exchange with other administrative, social, therapeutic and educational professionals working closely with young asylum seekers.

This said, there is a clear paradox evident in federal government, and especially Bavarian

State, policies regarding asylum seekers. On the one hand, we see the mobilization of resources as described above – a “joined-up thinking” or resources-orientated approach that has been the main characteristic of policy over the last five years. On the other hand, however, the political line taken by policymakers has become increasingly restrictive. At the national level, the declaration of more nations as “countries of safe origin,” increasing levels of deportation, more restrictive family reunion policies for recognized refugees, and an increasingly aggressive anti-refugee governmental rhetoric are all indicators of this.^v

This restrictive policy has become more pronounced in 2017 with deportations of rejected asylum seekers from Afghanistan on the premise that – in the view of the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior – parts of Afghanistan may be designated “safe” to return to. This policy has been met with vigorous civil society protest, not least from many of the professional groups working with asylum seekers mentioned above as well as substantial sections of the business community who have invested time and money to incorporate asylum seekers into vocational training and the workforce.^{vi}

^{iv} There is no reliable data on how many businesses exploit refugee labor. German labor law does not provide specific safeguards against this either.

^v The denigrating term “economic refugees” has been a particular favorite on the part of the Bavarian state CSU government.

^{vi} One particularly controversial instance of heavy-handed police intervention in June 2017 made waves across the Federal Republic. The attempt by officers in Nuremberg to remove a vocational school student from his class during school time for direct deportation led to mass protests and skirmishes forcing the police to abandon the action – and highly evocative images for prime-time TV. The Federal government subsequently cancelled deportations to Afghanistan pending a review of the security situation in Afghanistan as a purported “country of safe origin” by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

Future perspectives and policy recommendations

One of the longer-term effects of the increased flows of refugee migration to Europe – and increased absorption and integration into educational and vocational training structures – has been a perceptible shift in perspectives in the debate over asylum seekers. Up until a few

years ago this group was structurally marginalized and economically excluded. Yet now, more resources are being made available by the (local) government and businesses, enabling asylum seekers and refugees to access

education, training, and the labor market. A survey of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) from April 2017 shows that 11 percent of businesses employ refugees and 10 percent plan to hire refugees in the next two years. In four out of 10 of these businesses, refugees are or will be in dual vocational training positions.¹⁸

The “numbers game” has also shifted. Even advocates of a more restrictive policy acknowledge that higher numbers of asylum seekers must be admitted and – an essential change – given language, educational, and vocational training support to enable qualified access to the labor market as soon as possible, provided there is a likelihood of their being

allowed to stay in Germany. Policymakers thus see a clearly defined distinction between the “good” migrant (welcome, “genuinely” persecuted, highly or potentially skilled) and the “bad” migrant (“economic migrant”, from a supposedly “safe” country of origin, unskilled) as the basis

for integration policy. Civil society grassroots groups and many professionals rigorously oppose this division.

To enhance the social and educational integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the vocational training

system, decision-makers must (in addition to other steps which have already been touched upon) take the following steps.¹⁹

First and foremost, asylum seekers require secure stay and the prospect of being able to remain in Germany to complete their training and start a new life. There has been much controversial debate on the mixed signals being sent by the Bavarian State, leading to great uncertainty. Many businesses and employers’ associations have demanded clarity, and the German federal government adopted a new Integration Law in 2016. One of its main reforms is the so-called “3+2” rule: refugees and their employers have the guarantee that apprentices can stay at least for the duration of three years of training plus

at least two subsequent years on the job.²⁰ The Bavarian government has committed to this, and even added a provision that gives refugees an employment permit up to six months prior to a confirmed apprenticeship.²¹

Then there is the issue of psychotherapy for the traumatized. Much has been achieved over the last couple of years as child and adolescent psychiatrists and psychiatric hospitals have addressed the issues around flight-induced trauma – often a specialty of which therapists have learned little or nothing during their training. Existing institutions, such as the pioneer organization *Refugio* in Munich, are overstretched, meaning that demand for treatment far exceeds supply. This field, as well as the challenge of working with interpreters in the therapeutic setting, are areas of innovation requiring more resources.

In the school context, it is important that culturally sensitive teaching skills become a core competence in teacher training and that holistic support of students in and out of school – and the interdisciplinary role of school social workers in ensuring this – are part of the strategy.

Mentoring, coordinated with the active involvement of volunteers, is a key element in keeping students motivated when the

linguistic, social, and emotional challenges of an apprenticeship may seem too much and they are in danger of giving up.

Continual support in learning the language is an essential ingredient as well as extra courses to help many students “learn how to learn” (scanning specialist texts, summaries, writing skills). Finally, liaison with and further training for SMEs is essential so that supervisors feel capable of dealing with the challenges that may arise – residential law, asylum procedure, effects of trauma being just a few of the relevant issues.

Ultimately, the litmus test will not be short-term success but longer-term social and labor market integration. This is also an important avenue for further research as we know little about outcomes – for example, how many students from the classes received an apprenticeship position and went on to complete dual vocational training successfully. These young people are candidates for the long haul – if they are given the chance, the appropriate motto being “*If at first you don’t succeed, then try, try again!*” Support systems of the type described in this article are a good starting point: not only for the individuals but also for the broader benefits to Germany’s economy and society.

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Endnotes

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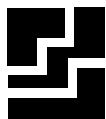
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