



**REFUGEE RIGHTS**  
DATA PROJECT

In collaboration with

حلقة  
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SYRIEN

# STARTING OVER?

**FILLING INFORMATION GAPS RELATING TO  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN EMERGENCY  
SHELTERS AND COMMUNITY HOUSING IN BERLIN**

## DATES OF RESEARCH

17-21 December 2016  
4-6 January 2017

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## WITH SPECIAL THANKS ...

**Amer Katbeh and Michael Scheel from Friedenskreis Syrien** for their invaluable support throughout all stages of the project.

**Hanna Jarada and Thorsten Kreissig from Refugee Academy** for providing a meeting space at the Evangelische Schule Berlin Zentrum (ESBZ) and for hosting the report launch event in Germany.

**Heike Ernst and Zaher Al Shhab** for connecting RRD to different administrations and organisations providing emergency shelters and community housing for refugees.

**Nikola Fanus and teachers from vocational school BTB Bildungszentrum GmbH** who warmly welcomed RRD researchers on several occasions.

**EJF Wohnungen für Flüchtlinge and Caritas at LAF** for welcoming our researchers.

**All the administrators and organisations** who were welcoming and supportive of the research.

**Goethe-Institut London** for kindly hosting the report launch event in the UK.

**The RRD team**, notably deputy director Natalie Stanton, working behind the scenes throughout the year to make field research trips and report production possible.

**Me And You Create** for graphic design.

**Gordon Welters** for allowing us to use his photography.

**All those who donated via our crowdfunding page.** This study would not have been possible without your generous support: Aaron Rowlands, Alexia Smithson, Angela Stanton, Anna Orling Welander, Aoife Collins, Avikal Malik, Beata Ekert, Bjorn Welander, Bradley Edward, Chloe Turner, Christine Bennett, Claire Henderson-Howat, Diarmaid Finnerty, Eleanor Harrison, Eleanor Paton, Elizabeth Epsom, Ellen Travers, Fenella Taylor, Fredrika Johansson, Gabriele Bertolli, Graham Judge, Grzegorz Drozd, Helena Puhakka-Tarvainen, Ione Wright, Israel bennun, Jane Bennun, Janet Buchanan-Smith, Jen L, Jessica Arczynski, Joanne Harris, Johan Ekstedt, John Wilson, Kari Connolly, Linda Westberg, Luna Atkins, M Harrison, Margaret Buchanan-Smith, Marian Bennun, Mark Bennun, Matthew Crompton, Maurice Walsh, Mouska Safi, Nahzley Anvarian, Noura Ismail, Paul Bennun, Rachel Smith, Salma Kasmani, Sam Livingstone, Sara Sundholm, Sheila F Tatum, Simon Georgi, Stephanie Needleman, Susanne Jaspars, Tim Castle, Ziga Drobnic

**And above all, the courageous people in displacement who took part in this study.** You remain in our minds and hearts, with sincere hopes for a future in dignity.

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Germany's asylum policies have become a source of fierce debate across Europe, and the world. In 2015, the member states of the European Union received more than double the number of applications for asylum than in previous years.<sup>1</sup> Over a third of these refugees and displaced people - who were predominately Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan - applied for asylum in Germany.

Official records from the statistical office of the European Union, Eurostat, indicate that there were a total of 441,800 first-time asylum applicants in Germany in 2015,<sup>2</sup> signifying an increase of 155% from the previous year (2014) and amounting to a share in Germany of 35.2% of the total EU. Meanwhile, unofficial figures suggest that the number of arrivals in 2015 may have been even larger - perhaps over one million<sup>3</sup> - as not everyone had the chance of filing an application immediately. This put immense pressure on Germany's bureaucratic system, which has struggled to provide the necessary organisation, documentation and resources.

The number of refugees and displaced people applying for asylum in Germany increased in the first half of 2016 - including approximately 105,000 who arrived through an official process of family reunification.<sup>4</sup> However, in the latter half of 2016,<sup>5</sup> the number of new applicants

began to slow down - partly due to the closure of several borders along the Balkan route, deportations and voluntary returns, as well as a temporary ban on family reunification for those who received only subsidiary protection of one year (which began in March 2016 and will be in place at least until March 2018).

As the final destination of many refugees and displaced people seeking safety and protection in Europe, Germany's bureaucratic registration system has been overwhelmed by the number of asylum applications. In the autumn of 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel surprised many by introducing an 'open-door' policy, which allowed the entry of unregistered asylum-seekers - temporarily breaching the EU's Dublin protocol.

Meanwhile, the EU's ruling that Afghanistan was largely safe for return caused controversy throughout Germany, and severe anxiety among the Afghan individuals in question. The subsequent debate, driven mostly by right wing populist parties like the Alternative for Germany (AfD), raised questions about a potential U-turn on the 'open-door' policy. To address the situation and counteract this discourse, Germany has recently developed a system known as 'integrated refugee management', which caters to needs of individuals at different stages of the asylum system and aims to contribute to fairer decision-making.

As a solution to the initial distribution of refugees and asylum-seekers, Germany applies the so-called 'Königstein Key', a system which aims at equalising the redistribution of refugees across the federal states. The capital city, Berlin, which has a population of a little over 3.5 million welcomed around 80,000 refugees in 2015, and 13,300 in 2016.<sup>6</sup> Of these, 18% were from Syria, 15% from Iraq, 12% from Afghanistan, 10% from Iran, and 8% from Moldova.

The quality of accommodation for refugees in Berlin varies greatly in quality. Some shelters in the city, primarily those run by governmental or charitable organisations,

allow for relative privacy and safety. Others, such as the bulk of the emergency shelters and community housing centres, are characterised by lesser conditions. There are a total of 152 accommodation centres in Berlin, of which 99 are emergency shelters, 46 community housing, and 7 initial reception centres. In total, they have a capacity of 44,261, of which 40,759 were occupied as of September 2016.<sup>7</sup>

Accommodation is provided in vacant administration buildings, schools, hotels, container camps, sports halls, and inflatable domes - the latter of which served as a welcome shelter on a temporary basis after arrival. As a result of reports of horrendous conditions in the sports halls, new types of accommodation are currently being tested, which include so-called 'TempoHomes' and 'Modular Accommodation for Refugees' (MUF in German), which are structures with apartment-like interiors.<sup>8</sup>

In the winter of 2016, the Refugee Rights Data Project paired up with the Berlin-based Friedenskreis Syrien ('Peace Circle Syria'), in order to conduct in-depth qualitative research across refugee shelters in Berlin. Over the course of two weeks in December 2016 and January 2017, the group of researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in eight different emergency shelters and community housing centres. They further visited three information centres, which provided assistance and training to refugees and displaced people, with a focus on education, housing, and welfare.

The research presented here provides an overview of refugees' and asylum seekers' experiences in Berlin at this particular time. The study serves not only as a glimpse into displaced people's relationship to human rights, but also human rights violations, issues relating to safety and living standards, and their hopes and aspirations for the future.

1. Eurostat (2016) <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6>

2. Eurostat (2016) <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6>

3. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>

4. <http://www.migazin.de/2017/01/20/aktuelle-zahlen-familiennachzug-fluechtlingen-prozent/>

5. <http://www.rbb-online.de/politik/thema/fluechtlinge/berlin/2016/09/berlin-baut-weniger-container-fuer-fluechtlinge.html>

6. <https://www.berlin.de/fluechtlinge/infos-zu-fluechtlingen/fakten/artikel.436797.php>

7. <https://www.berlin.de/fluechtlinge/infos-zu-fluechtlingen/unterbringung/artikel.437101.php>

8. <http://www.berlin.de/sen/ias/presse/pressemitteilungen/2017/pressemitteilung.555281.php>

The purpose of RRDП’s first-hand data collection is to provide policymakers, advocacy groups and the general public with an insight into the conditions faced by refugees and displaced people within European borders.

In contrast to state and federal authorities, who mainly focus on demographic data, our data and research are independently collected with the sole aim of informing public debate and contributing to a long-term resolution to the current humanitarian crisis. In light of these objectives, our research focuses on three key areas: human rights infringements, unmet humanitarian standards, and future plans and aspirations.

During the study, undertaken in Berlin, Germany from 17-21 December 2016 and 4-6 January 2017, RRDП’s 12 academic researchers conducted 390 surveys in German, English, Arabic, Dari, Russian or Tigrinya across a total of eight emergency shelters and community housing centres. The survey format was semi-structured, and conducted predominantly on individuals over the age of 18. In total, 78.6% of respondents were men and 21.4% women.

Each member of the academic research team had field experience of working with refugees and displaced people, or similar groups. The researchers were recruited either through an online application process or via partner organisations and included native speakers in Arabic, Farsi, Dari, and Russian. The study was guided by ethical checklists that are underpinned by data protection policies, child safeguarding policies and a robust risk register to ensure the security and dignity of all participants. All researchers attended a compulsory induction evening in Germany to stress the importance of strict adherence to all RRDП policies. The research was coordinated by the RRDП Coordination Team, spearheaded by Marta Welander, Mohamad Alhussein Saoud, and Hannah-Sophie Wahle.

In most cases, RRDП’s research teams adopt a methodology of random selection – using stratification and continuously monitoring the demographics and accommodation type of the sample, to ensure that the final data is representative of a given situation. We initially planned to employ this methodology in Germany, but external conditions and barriers

made it necessary for us to be flexible in our approach. These barriers included (but were not limited to) the refusal of administrators to grant us access to some of the emergency shelters and community housing centres, as well as the prohibitively long bureaucratic process of gaining either permission or a denial to enter due to a lack of time on part of the administrators.

**THE STUDY WAS GUIDED BY ETHICAL CHECKLISTS THAT ARE UNDERPINNED BY DATA PROTECTION POLICIES, CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICIES AND A ROBUST RISK REGISTER TO ENSURE THE SECURITY AND DIGNITY OF ALL PARTICIPANTS.**

Despite extensive efforts to gain official authorisation to conduct the research, RRDП was denied access to a number of accommodation centres. However, refugees and asylum applicants themselves expressed a strong desire to take part in the survey and have their voices heard. As a result, we also conducted surveys at a language school, a centre providing a range of support services, and a Syrian cultural association, in order to diversify the sample and gain access to additional respondents. This limited our ability to follow the methodology of random

selection sampling and monitoring, leading us instead onto a path of so-called snowball sampling and a bus stop methodology.

As a result of these factors, selection bias could not always be avoided, and we were at times unable to steer the sample and stratification as much as we would ideally have liked. Nonetheless, despite these many challenges and constraints, our research team was able to obtain a large amount of data relating to the conditions in which refugees and displaced people are forced to live within European borders. The sample RRDП collected closely aligns with the breakdown of the top four nationalities in Berlin as the table below demonstrates.

IN%	SYRIA	IRAQ	AFGHANISTAN	IRAN
NATIONALITIES OF REFUGEES IN BERLIN	18	15	12	10
NATIONALITIES OF RESPONDENTS TO RRDП’S SURVEY	49	17	15	5

It is important to note that the findings relate to the urban setting of Berlin. Conditions are likely to vary between different states within Germany, urban and more rural settings, and states located in the east or west of Germany. For example, rural settings are generally known for offering good quality housing conditions, and western German states are generally said to be particularly “welcoming”. However, due to the limited scope of the study, RRDП cannot verify these claims.

This report seeks to highlight some of these issues and raise awareness of the situation for refugees and asylum seekers within emergency shelters and community housing centres in the urban setting of Berlin. We have chosen to structure the research around some of the major stages of seeking asylum: arrival, experiences of the asylum system, general daily living conditions, integration, and future aspirations. The research demonstrates how the government implements many measures which are intended to meet the needs of the large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in Berlin, while also highlighting that the lengthy process brings with it many challenges.

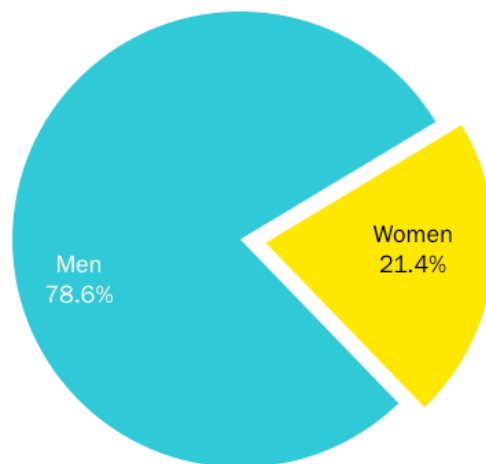
The research is based on the widely utilised social science research approach of self-reporting. Claims have not been verified by Refugee Rights Data Project.

# CHAPTER ONE

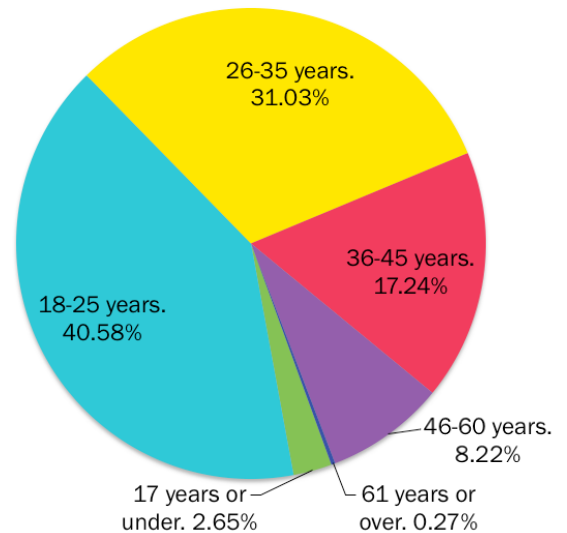
## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The following graphs provide an overview of the demographic composition of the research respondents. 78.6% of respondents were men and 21.4% were women. The largest age groups represented in the sample were 18-25 year olds and 26-35 year olds, who accounted for 40.6% and 31% respectively.

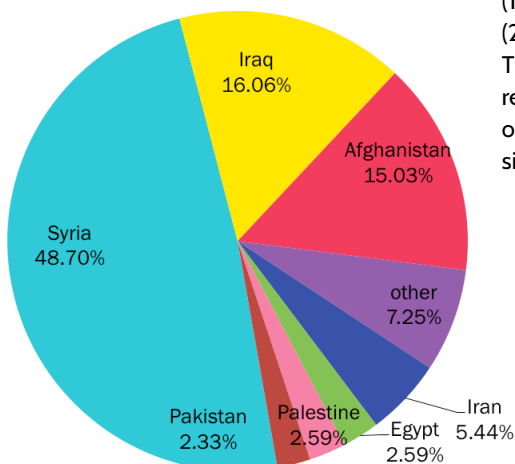
### GENDER ALL RESPONDENTS



### AGE ALL RESPONDENTS

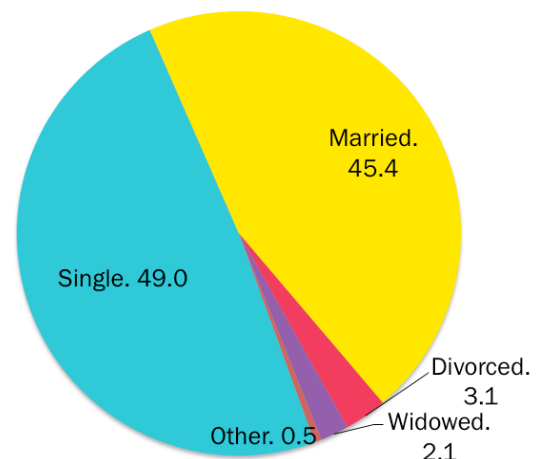


### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN ALL RESPONDENTS



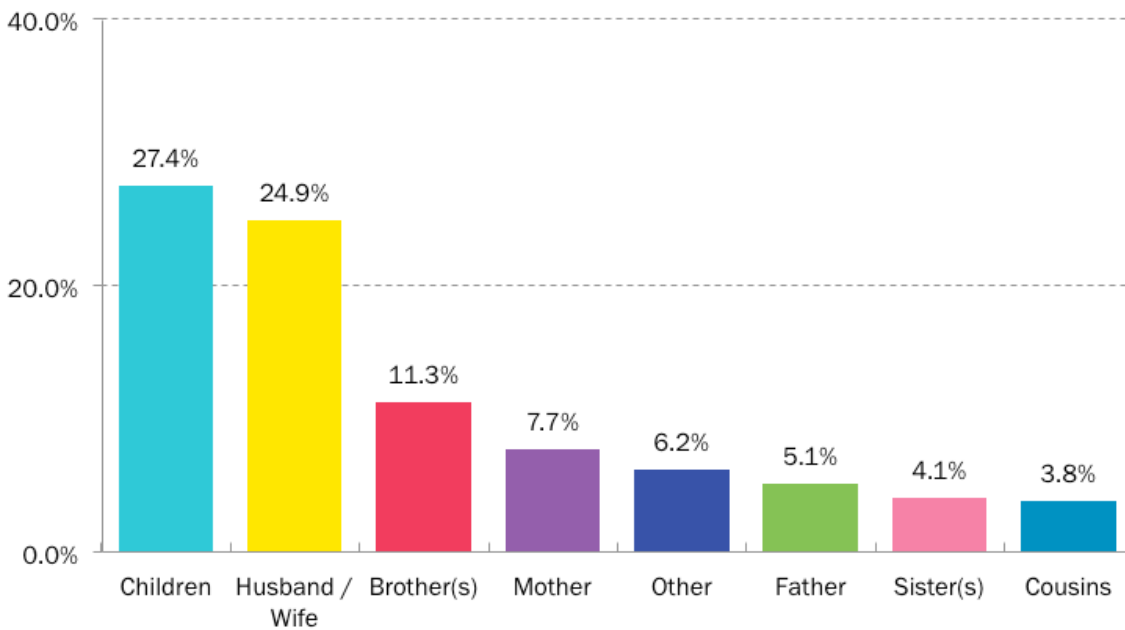
Almost half of respondents were from Syria (48.7%), followed by those from Iraq (16%), Afghanistan (15%), Iran (5.4%), Egypt (2.6%) and Palestine (2.3%). The breakdown of women respondents by country of origin also followed a very similar pattern.

### MARITAL STATUS ALL RESPONDENTS

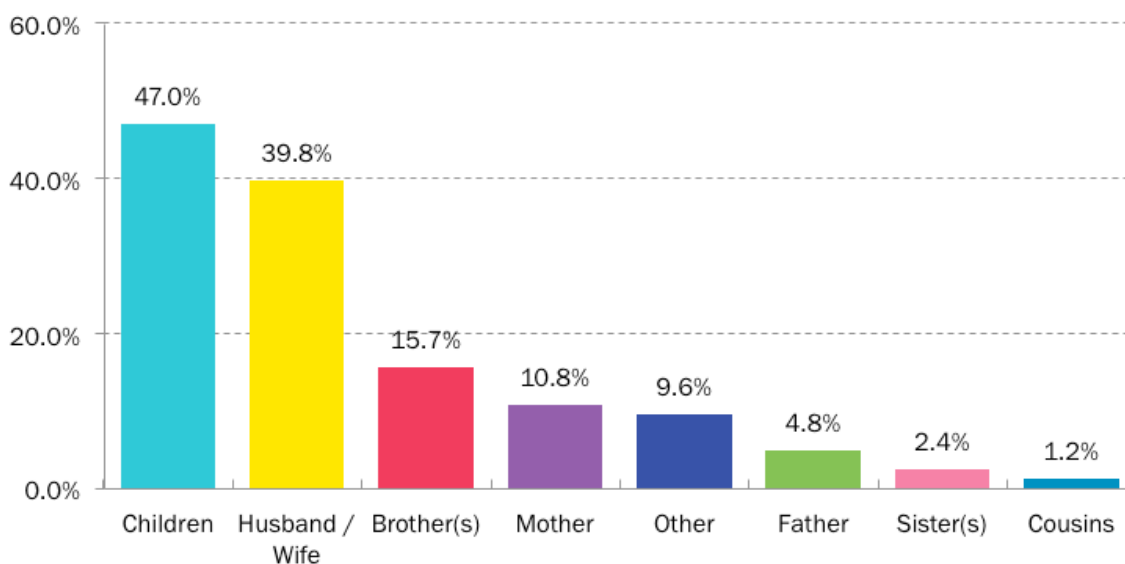


While 45.4% of respondents were married, only 24.9% were in Germany with their spouse. Among women, 56.6% were married, but only 39.8% were in Germany with their husband. This suggests that a significant proportion of respondents had been separated from their spouse at some point during displacement.

## WITH WHOM ARE YOU HERE? ALL RESPONDENTS



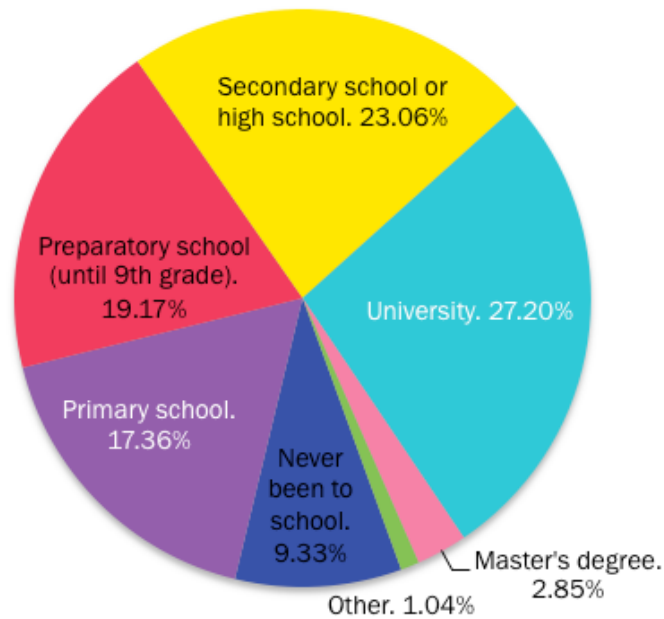
## WITH WHOM ARE YOU HERE? WOMEN ONLY



EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Overall, the respondents demonstrated advanced levels of education. 53% had been to secondary school or university, and 3.8% had a Master's degree or higher. Only 9.3% had never been to school.

WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF EDUCATION?  
ALL RESPONDENTS



PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

We identified a variety of professional backgrounds among respondents. 30.3% were skilled workers or business owners, and 5.5% were specialised professionals such as doctors or lawyers. Only 2.1% were unemployed, and 26.4% were students.

WHAT WAS YOUR PROFESSION IN YOUR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN?  
ALL RESPONDENTS

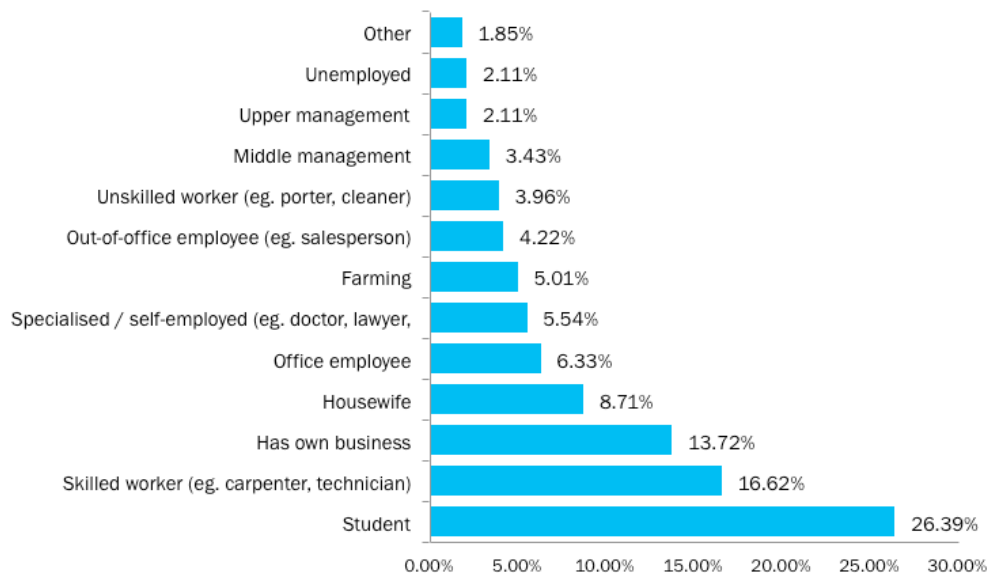




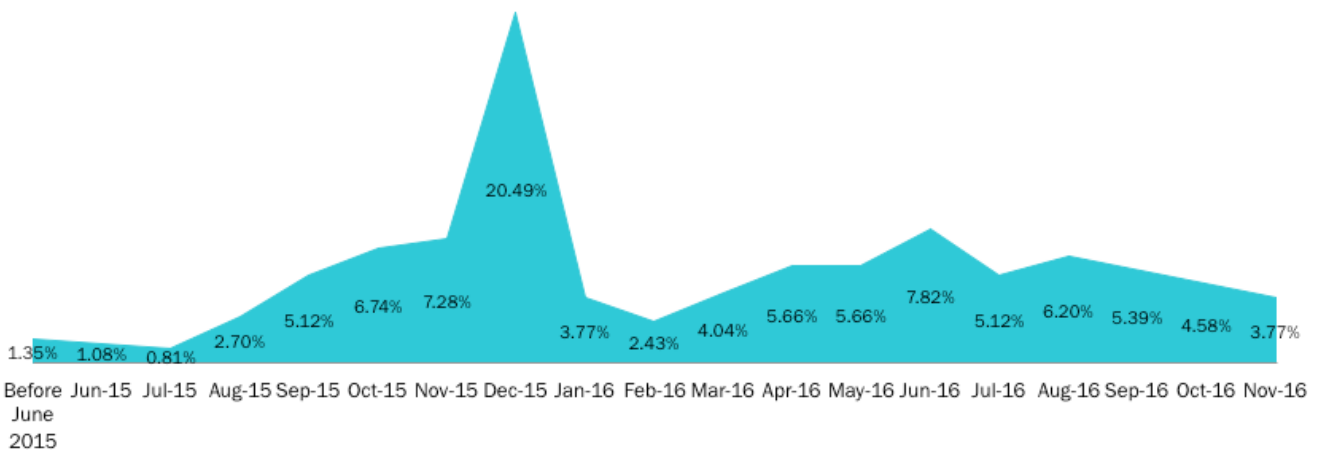


Photo: Gordon Welters

## LENGTH OF TIME SPENT IN CAMP

Some 20% of respondents had been living in their current camp for one year, while 46% had spent one year or more in the camp.

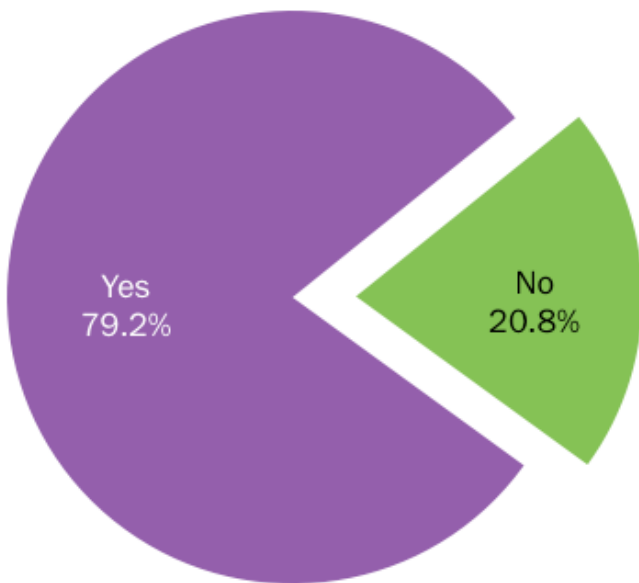
### WHEN DID YOU ARRIVE IN THIS CAMP? ALL RESPONDENTS



# CHAPTER TWO

## SEEKING PROTECTION

**WAS GERMANY THE COUNTRY YOU WANTED TO GO TO WHEN YOU LEFT YOUR HOME?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS



As discussed earlier in the report, Germany has become a major destination for refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe. Our findings demonstrate that more than three quarters, 79.2%, of all respondents said that Germany was the place they planned to reach when leaving their home country. This figure is even higher among women respondents, with 87.8% having planned to go to Germany.

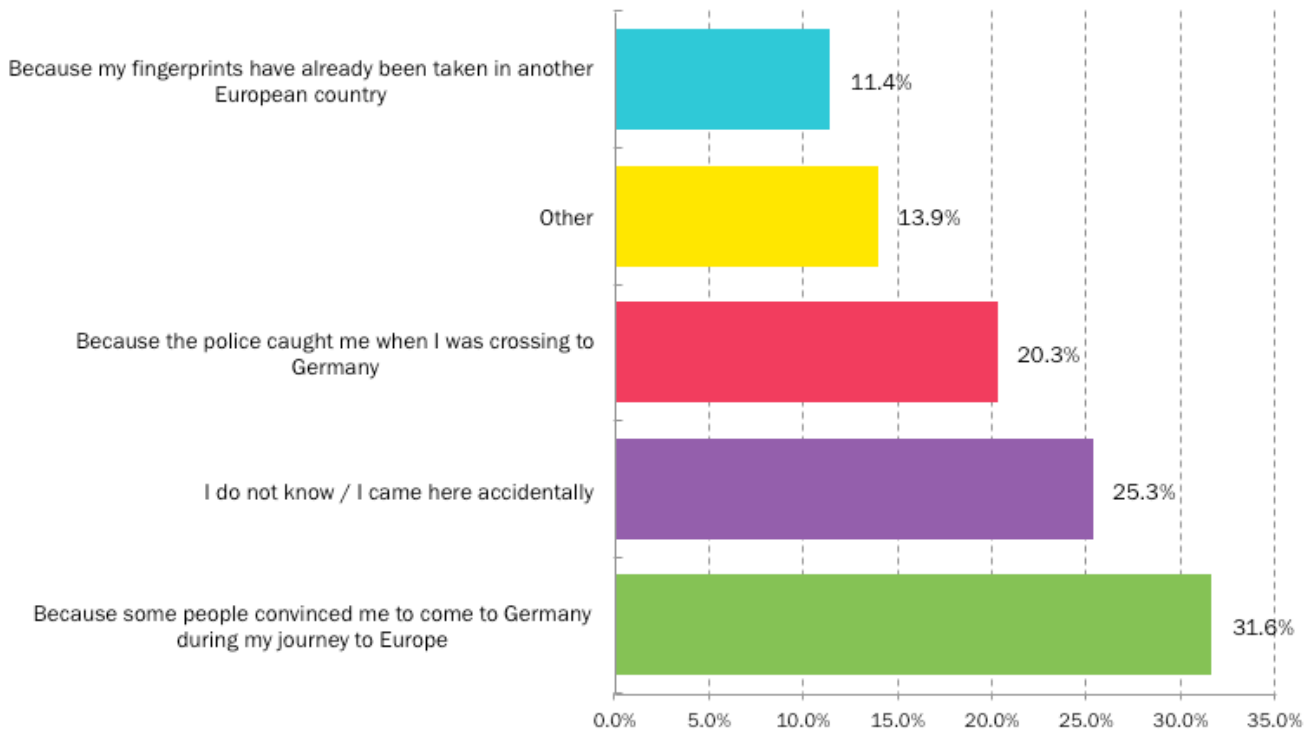
The proportion of respondents who aimed to reach Germany varies significantly by country group. The majority of Afghans (80%), Egyptians (100%), Iraqis (88.7%), and Syrians (82.4%) wanted to reach the country, while fewer Iranians (47.1%), Pakistanis (33.3%) and Palestinians (40%) hoped to do so.

Some 31.6% of those who said they had not initially intended to reach the country explained that people convinced them to go to Germany during their journey to Europe. Meanwhile, 25.3% said they went there by accident, and 20.3% intended to travel across Germany but were caught by the police. Before Merkel launched the open-door policy in autumn 2015, German border controls were relatively strict and registered many individuals who wanted to travel onwards to Sweden or elsewhere to be reunited with family members.<sup>9</sup>

**"MORE THAN THREE QUARTERS OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT GERMANY WAS THE PLACE THEY PLANNED TO REACH WHEN LEAVING THEIR HOME COUNTRY."**

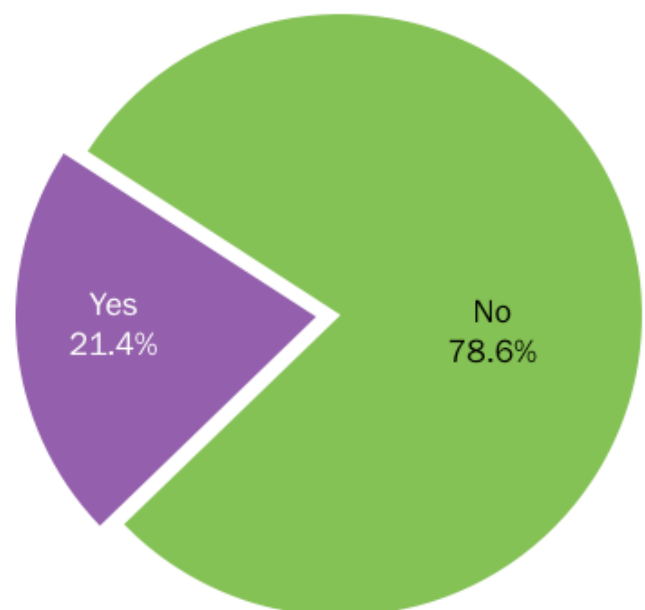
<sup>9</sup> <http://www.taz.de/!5226634/>

**WHY DID YOU COME TO GERMANY?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS



Despite the long process of seeking protection and for obtaining a residence permit, 78.6% of all respondents (79.5% of women) said that they did not regret going to Germany. Interestingly, while Iranians which were among the nationalities of which the fewest respondents initially planned to travel to Germany, they are also the group who least regret having gone there - 90.5% said that they do not regret now being in Germany. The lowest figure is among respondents from Pakistan, of whom about half (55.6%) said they regret having gone to Germany. The number of women who regret the move is broadly in line with the proportion of men.

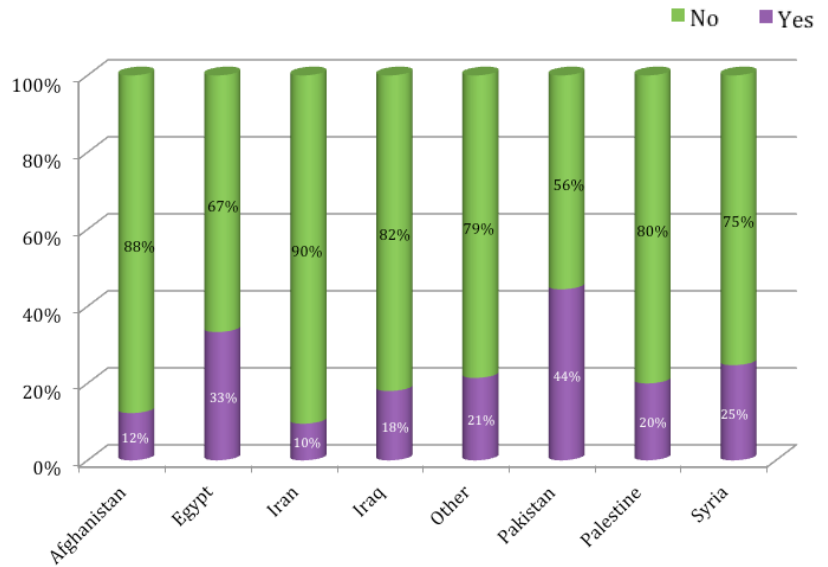
**DO YOU REGRET COMING TO GERMANY?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS



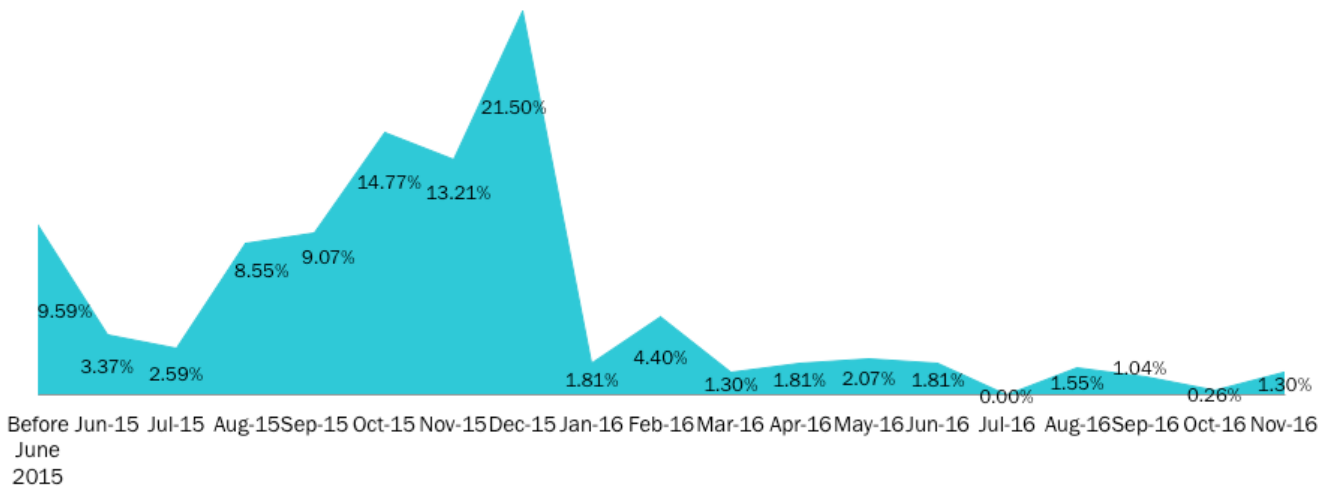
Respondents had been in Germany for an average of 13.7 months. The majority (67.1%) arrived in the country between 12 and 16 months prior to our research, suggesting that most arrived close to September 2016. This also shows that many people who arrived during this large influx are still living in emergency shelters and community housing centres, demonstrating how long it takes to create a sufficient number of accommodation possibilities. More on the topic of the housing situation follows in Chapter 2.

**"THE MAJORITY HAD ARRIVED BETWEEN 12 AND 16 MONTHS PRIOR TO THE RESEARCH"**

**DO YOU REGRET COMING TO GERMANY?  
BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**



**WHEN DID YOU ARRIVE IN GERMANY?  
ALL RESPONDENTS**

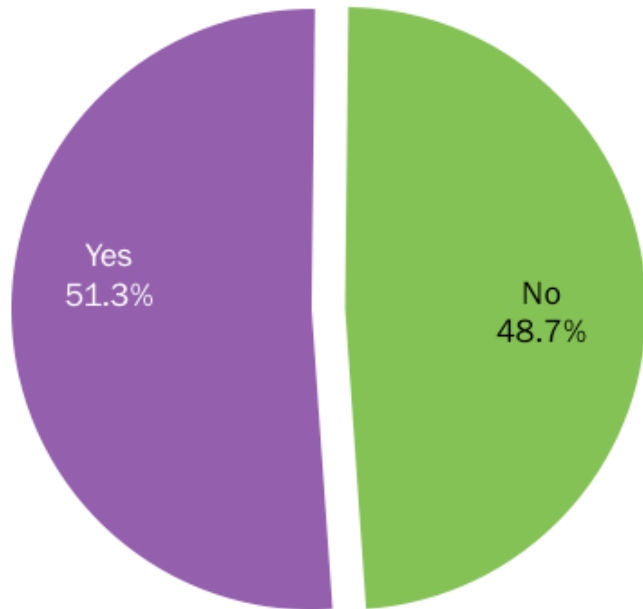




**"RESPONDENTS HAD BEEN IN GERMANY FOR AN AVERAGE OF 13.7 MONTHS."**

Having finally claimed asylum in Germany and brought their long journeys to an end, most refugees found themselves navigating lengthy bureaucratic processes. About half of those surveyed had already received one of the four varieties of residence permit available under German law: refugee protection, entitlement to asylum, subsidiary protection, or a national ban on deportation.

**DO YOU HAVE A RESIDENCE PERMIT IN GERMANY?  
ALL RESPONDENTS**



However, RRDП found stark differences between different nationalities. For example, 77.7% of Syrians had been granted a permit, in contrast to only 37.9% of Afghans, 14.5% of Iraqis and none of the Egyptians surveyed.

**DO YOU HAVE A RESIDENCE PERMIT IN GERMANY?  
BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

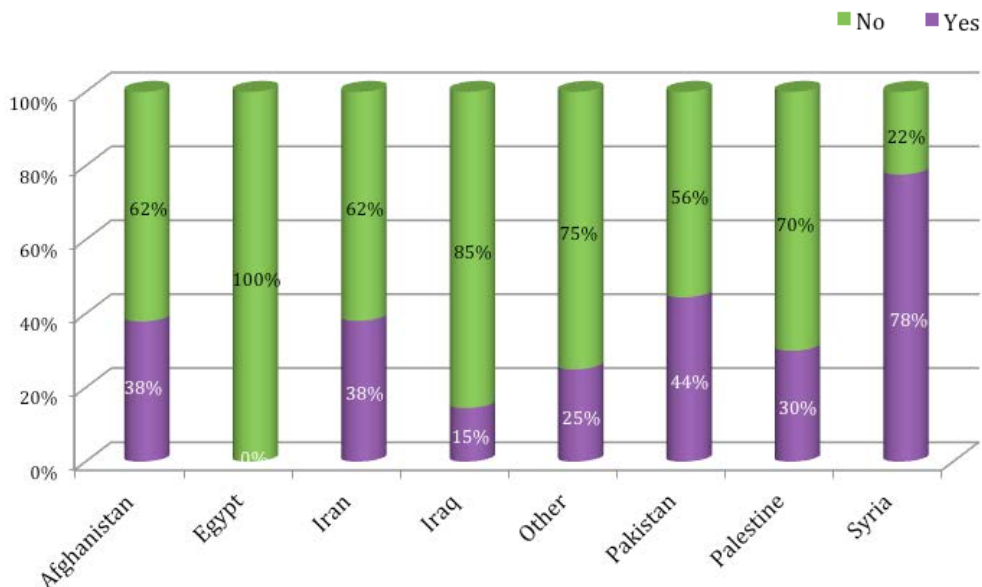


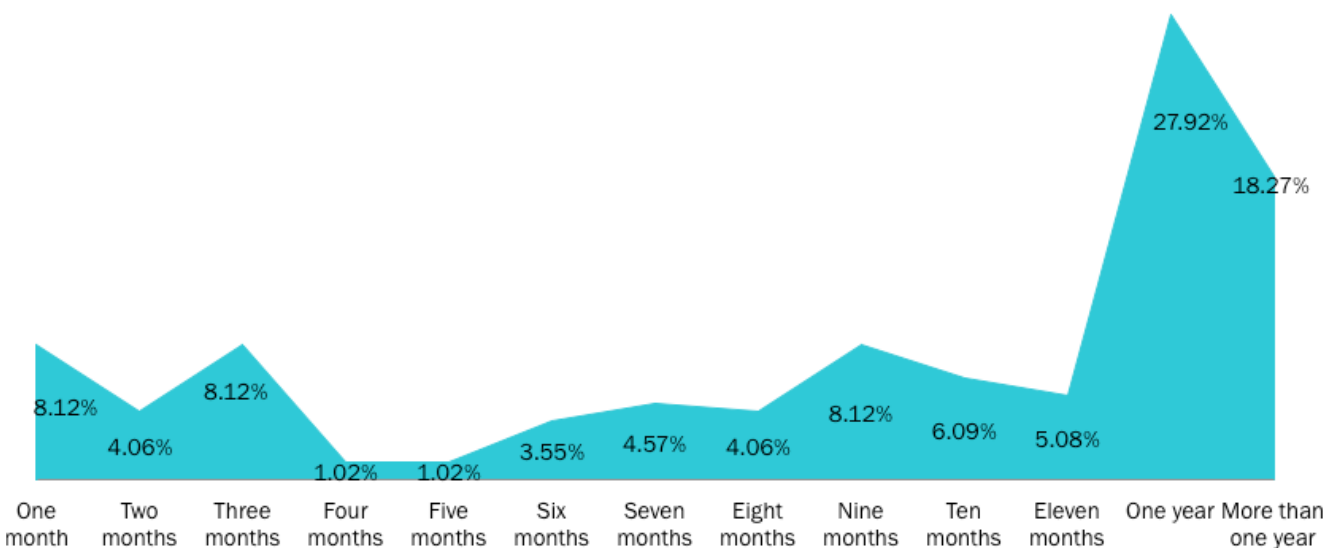


Photo: Gordon Welters

On average, those who had been granted a residence permit had waited for 9.4 months. 27.9% of respondents waited for one year, and 18.3% waited for more than a year. Pakistanis experienced the longest average wait time, at 12.5 months. However, in general, it is difficult to discern any patterns relating to waiting

times between different country groups. It is difficult to assess whether an applicant's nationality impacts the waiting time, or if it is just linked to the individual's history and circumstances, the date of filing an application, and the internal administrative caseload.

**HOW LONG DID YOU WAIT FOR YOUR RESIDENCE PERMIT?  
ALL RESPONDENTS**



# CHAPTER THREE

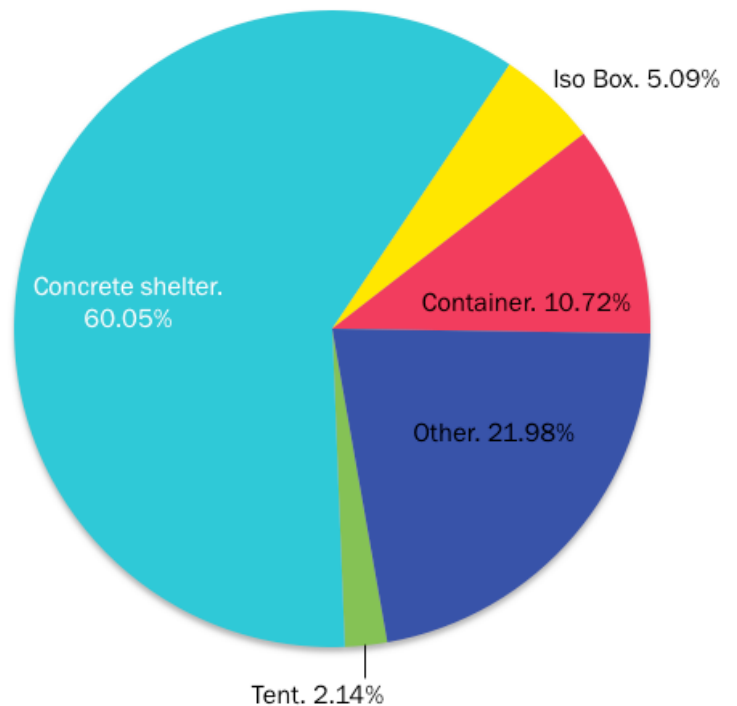
## EVERYDAY LIFE

### ACCOMODATION

More than 60% of respondents lived in a concrete shelter or building at the time of the study. These types of accommodation included an abandoned local authority building, a sports hall, a former apartment hotel, and reception centres known as 'heims' or 'homes'. Only 15.8% lived in a so-called 'IsoBox' or 'container', and 2.1% lived in a tent. One 23 year old Iraqi man explained, "I have been living in the sports hall for more than one year, because there is a war in my country."

**"I HAVE BEEN LIVING IN THE SPORTS HALL FOR MORE THAN ONE YEAR, BECAUSE THERE IS A WAR IN MY COUNTRY."**

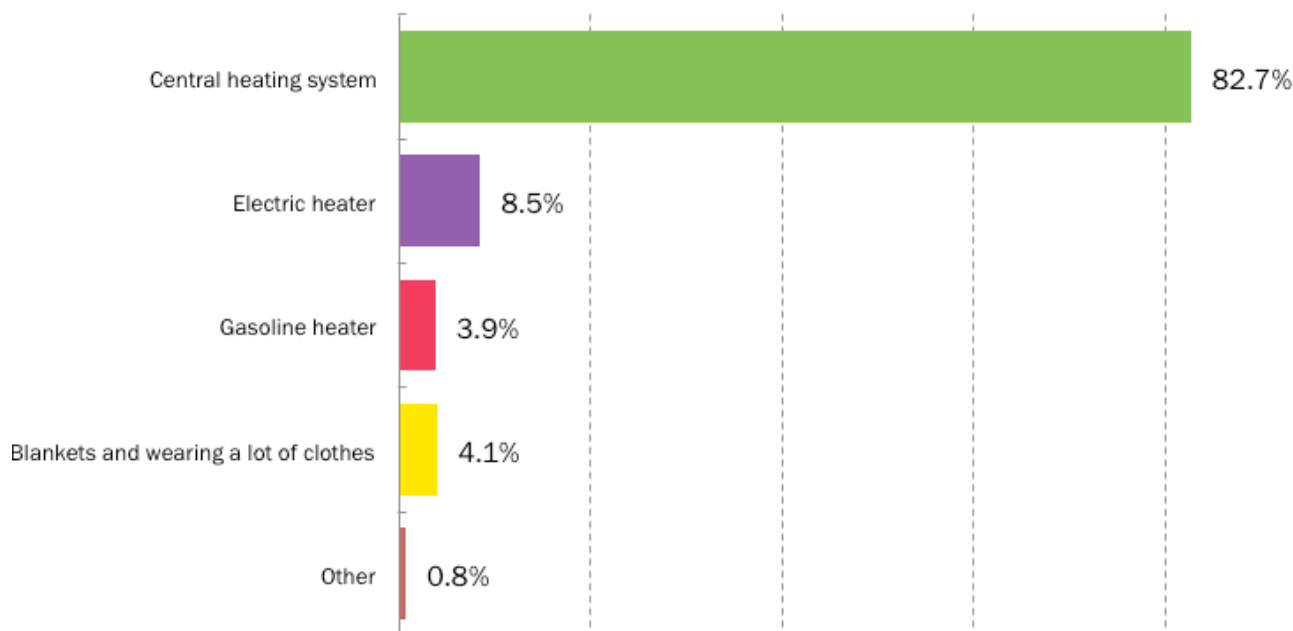
#### WHAT TYPE OF SHELTER DO YOU LIVE IN? ALL RESPONDENTS



<sup>9</sup>. <http://www.taz.de/!5226634/>



## HOW DO YOU KEEP WARM? ALL RESPONDENTS

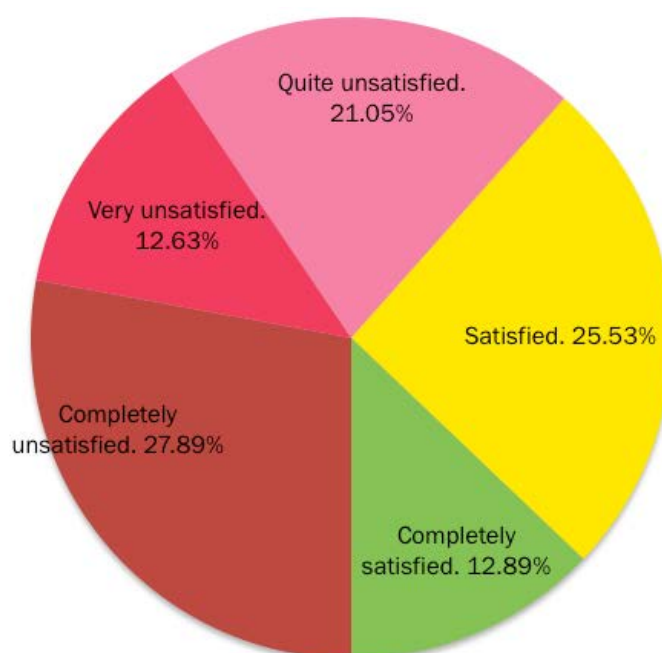


The majority of respondents live in relatively warm and secure housing. In total, 95.3% of respondents (94.8% of women) said they have their own bed to sleep in. Only 5.8% (9.8% of women) said their shelter lets water in when it rains. The vast majority, 82.7%, lived in shelters with functioning central heating. Meanwhile, only 4.1% said they had to use extra clothing or blankets to keep warm, which is a common phenomenon across camps in Europe.

Despite many accommodation centres appearing to provide acceptable to very good living conditions, others featured a number of problems similar to those recorded by RRD in other European countries including France and Greece. For example, 13.6% of respondents said there are many pests and insects in their camps - predominately those who resided in tents, 'IsoBoxes' or 'containers'.

Hence, the research findings suggest varying living standards between different camps, as can be seen in the following graph.

## HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE CAMP? ALL RESPONDENTS



## ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

78.7% of respondents said they had enough water to shower and wash themselves. A similar percentage, 75.3%, were able to wash and shower with hot water. However, only 40% said they were unable to shower anytime they wanted - largely due to camp rules (46.7%), a lack of hot water at particular times (44.7%), and overcrowding (42.1%). Only 3.9% cited security concerns. Meanwhile, one respondent explained: "After 10 pm there are

*no lights anymore, so we can't shower then."*

The cleanliness of toilet facilities varied between sites, which is reflected in the research findings. Just over 30% reported that the toilets were 'very dirty' or 'quite dirty', while 35.9% said they were 'clean' or 'very clean'.

**"AFTER 10PM THERE ARE NO LIGHTS ANYMORE, SO WE CAN'T SHOWER THEN."**

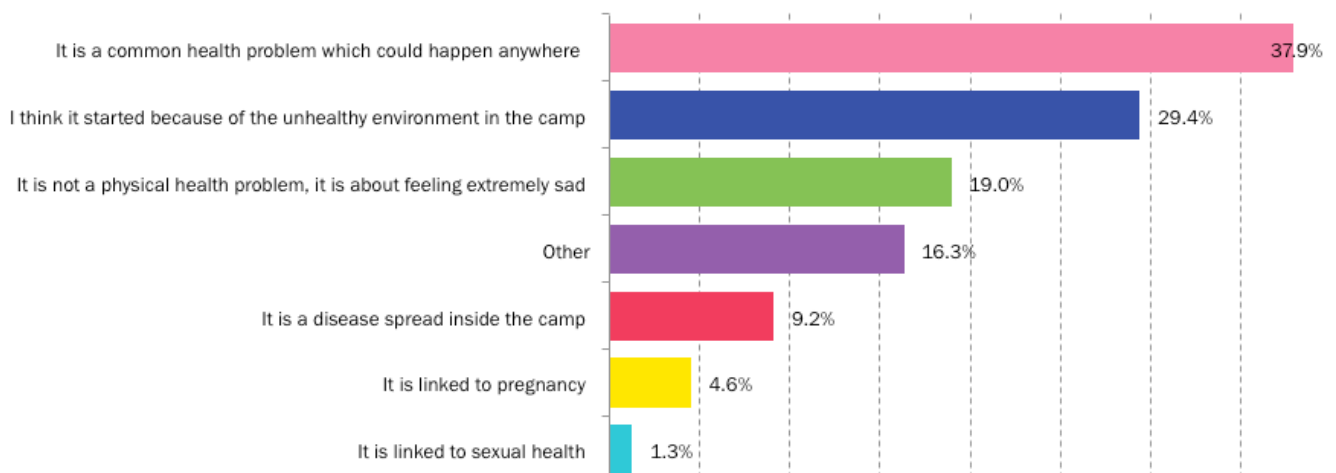
## HEALTH

40.1% (45.8% of women) had experienced health problems in their camp. Some 37.9% reported that they had suffered from a common health problem that could happen anywhere. Meanwhile, 29.4% believed that it had commenced due to the unhealthy living conditions in the camp, and 9.2% identified it as a disease spread inside the camp. 5.9% reported that the health issue was linked to pregnancy or sexual health.

Of those who had experienced health problems, 17.9% described the available medical treatment at 'bad' or 'very bad', while 36.8% said it was 'OK', 'good' or 'very good'.

One respondent expressed concerns about the camp administration's response to her health concerns, explaining, "They are very bad with the people. For example, I am not allowed to use the lift although I have a medical report that I need to use it due to an issue in my knee."

### WHAT KIND OF HEALTH ISSUE? ALL RESPONDENTS

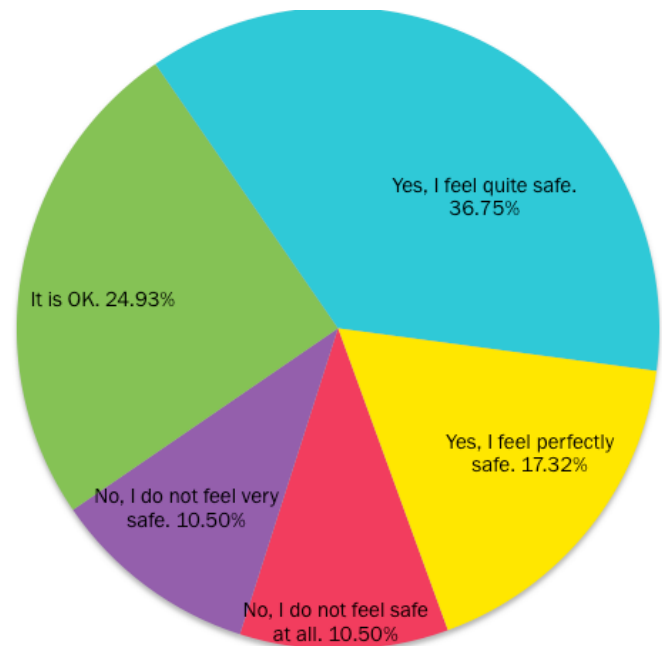


## SAFETY AND SECURITY

Respondents generally felt safe inside their camp or accommodation centre, with 17.3% reporting that they felt 'perfectly safe'. Nonetheless, 21% said they did 'not feel safe' or did not feel 'safe at all' - these respondents tended to reside in open spaces such as sports halls. One recurring theme in these centres was the absence of separate facilities for families and single people, leading to concerns about women's and children's protection. *"There is no real checking,"* said one respondent. *"Guys and families live together, and there are many different nationalities."*

67.5% (73.2% of women) reported having a secure lock on their shelter, and cited fears of theft as a major reason for feeling insecure in the camp. Others were concerned about fighting between refugees from different country groups - a phenomenon which can be exacerbated by tensions, post-traumatic stress, and difficulties of navigating the asylum process.

### DO YOU FEEL SAFE INSIDE THE CAMP? ALL RESPONDENTS



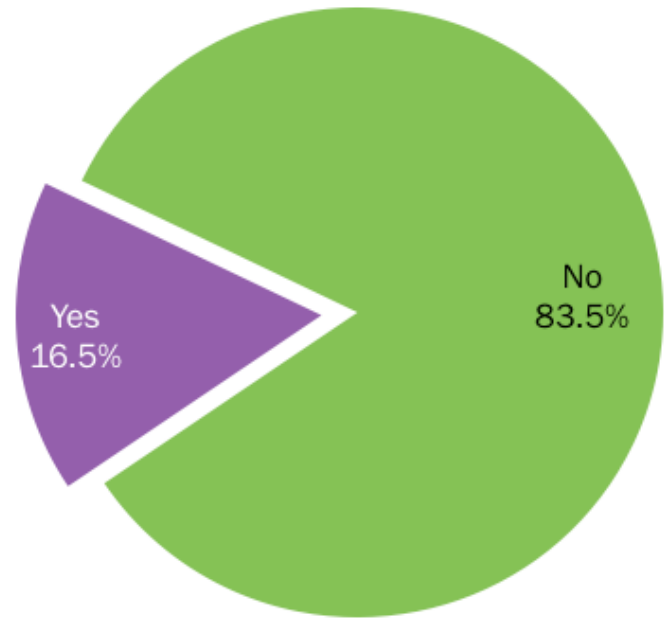
**"THEY ARE VERY BAD WITH THE PEOPLE. FOR EXAMPLE, I AM NOT ALLOWED TO USE THE LIFT ALTHOUGH I HAVE A MEDICAL REPORT THAT I NEED TO USE IT DUE TO AN ISSUE IN MY KNEE."**



Photo: Gordon Welters

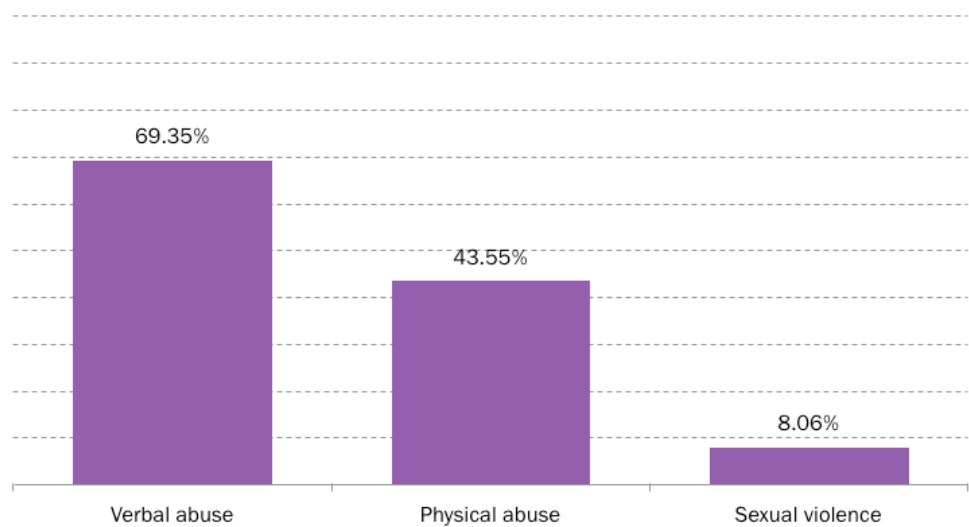
16.5% had experienced violence from someone inside the camp. 69.4% of this violence was described as physical violence, 43.6% verbal abuse, and 8.1% sexual violence. One respondent explained that a transsexual individual living in their camp suffered from a great deal of provocation and sexual harassment, while one woman said she had been approached by men and asked for “sexual favours”. A few individuals surveyed reported that the police and security staff often stand by passively when violence or fighting occurs within camps, rather than intervening to halt it.

**HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY SOMEONE INSIDE THE CAMP?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS



9.3% of respondents had heard of at least one death within their camp. This figure was significantly higher among respondents from Afghanistan (25%) and Iran (16%) than other country groups.

**WHAT KIND OF VIOLENCE?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS



## DESTITUTION

The research identified a number of alarming cases where accommodation was lacking altogether. One respondent told researchers that he didn't have a place to live, so he sleeps in a Syrian café. When seeking help from the local authorities in Neukölln, he was told: *"You are a Muslim. Go sleep in a mosque."* Another respondent explained that her husband had been expelled from the camp by security staff just a few days prior to the

research study. The security staff believed that the husband had physically abused his wife, checked her body for evidence against her will, but found no evidence. The woman herself was accused of lying, and her wish to live with her husband was ignored. The husband now lives in a metro station, despite suffering from heart problems.

A network providing informal housing for refugees has started operating in Berlin, specifically catering for those who seek to leave their shelter and move into an apartment. Asylum seekers legally have the right to move into a government-funded apartment after six months of applying for

asylum (previously three months). However, given the shortage of housing in Berlin, some groups have begun to take advantage of this opportunity.

Some respondents referred to this network as a 'housing mafia' which profits from refugees and asylum seekers who are desperate to access a better living situation than provided in their current camps.<sup>10</sup> One respondent explained, *"I need 3,300 euro to pay to a broker in order to find me a flat to leave the camp, and it is obvious that we do not have this amount of money. We are stuck in camps."*



Photo: Gordon Welters

<sup>9</sup> This information has been confirmed by major media outlets, e.g.: <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/black-market-brokers-target-refugees-327936>

## VIOLENCE BY POLICE AND SECURITY STAFF

Violence by police or security/military officials can be part of everyday life for refugees and displaced people in some parts of Europe. However, only 9.8% of respondents (10.8% of women) in Berlin had experienced this form of violence during their time in Germany. The level of violence experienced was fairly even across country groups.

About one quarter of respondents described general police treatment of refugees as 'very good', while 38.5% said it was 'good' and 25.9% 'OK'. Only 6.7% described police treatment of refugees as 'bad' or 'very bad'. 72.1% of respondents said they had never seen another refugee being hurt by officials, and only 5.6% said they had seen this occur 'often' or 'very often'. Meanwhile, 2.3% of respondents had been arrested during their time living in German camps.

**"POLICE IS GOOD BUT I HAD A PROBLEM WITH SECURITY STAFF."**

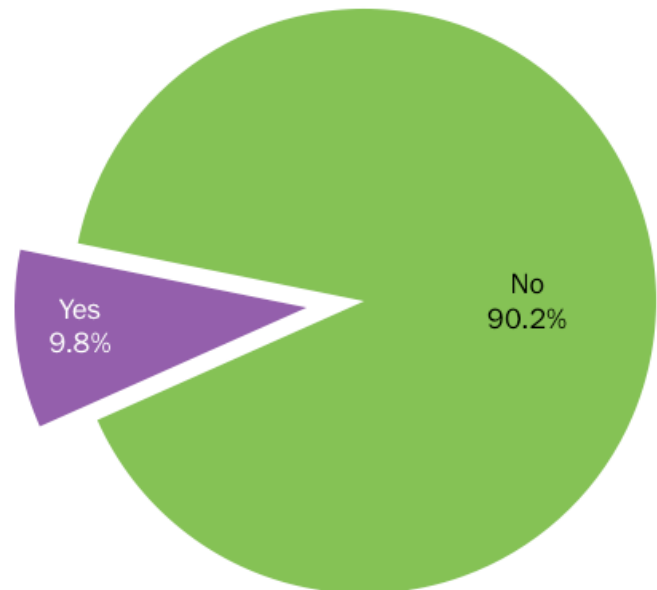
The majority, 76.3%, of those who had experienced police violence described this as verbal abuse. Some 21% had experienced physical violence and, alarmingly, 7.9% reported experiencing sexual violence by police, military or security staff.

It transpired from interviews that most of the violence was caused by security staff rather than police. One respondent explained, *"police is good but I had a problem with security staff."*

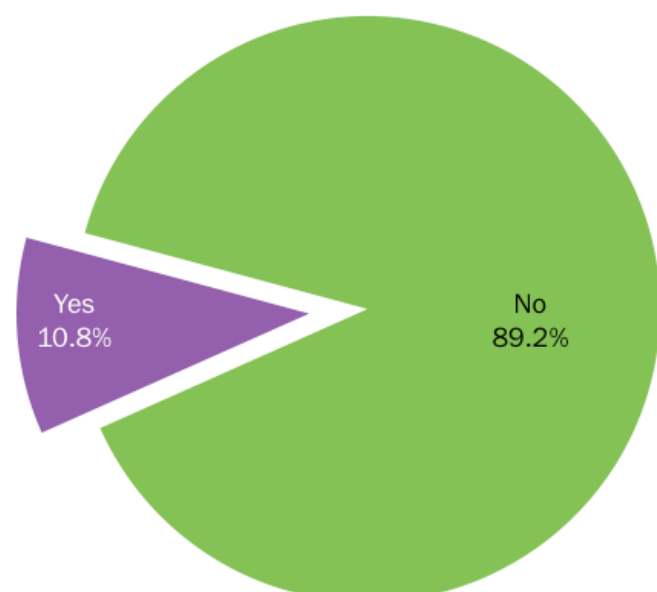
Another described the physical violence he had experienced: *"I got beaten by 10 security men. They broke my fingers and bruised my body and face. I was in pain for a long time and my back still hurts."*

Others told accounts of less severe physical violence by security staff, including hitting or slapping individuals who broke camp rules. One reported, *"security staff at [my camp] pushed me"* and another said *"they hit a refugee for not arranging the dirty dishes well"*. Another explained, *"camp security people were loud in the night. I complained and they kicked me out. I slept on the street. The next night I could go back to the camp with the help of a journalist"*.

### HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED POLICE VIOLENCE IN GERMANY? ALL RESPONDENTS



### HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED POLICE VIOLENCE IN GERMANY? WOMEN ONLY



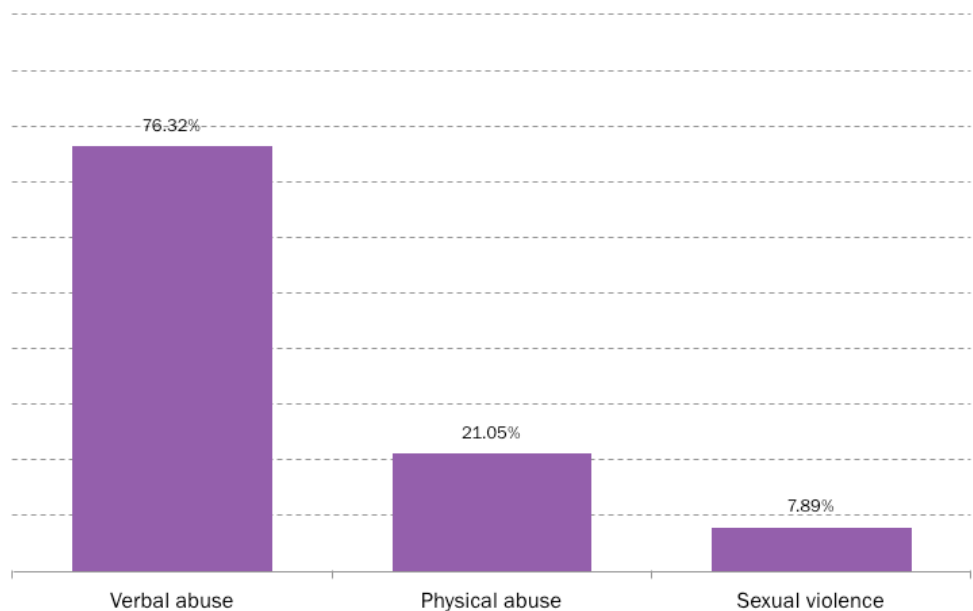
<sup>10</sup> This information has been confirmed by major media outlets, e.g.: <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/black-market-brokers-target-refugees-327936>

A number of respondents said they faced police violence while in the 'sozialamt' - the social welfare centre - including one who recalled that the security staff hit a refugee until he fainted due to the pain. However, others explained that a number of staff have been removed following such negative reports.

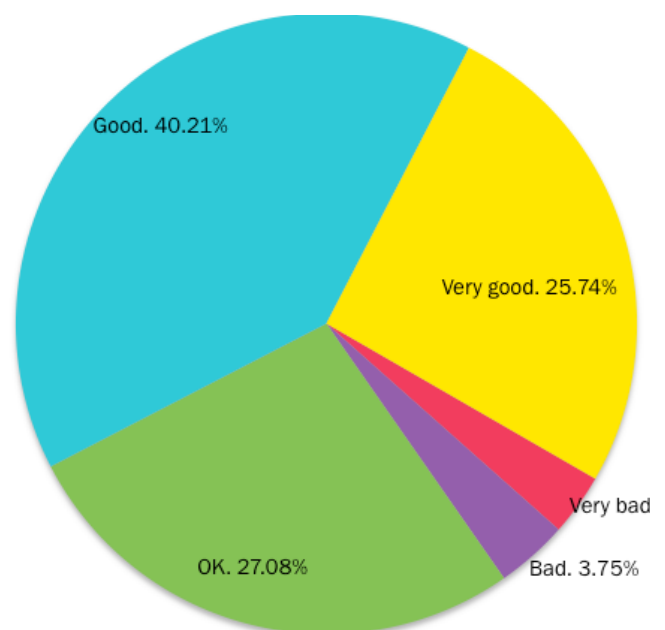
A significant number of respondents reported that treatment by security staff was worse for certain groups of people, including Afghans, Iranians and Pakistani refugees, however RRDП has not verified these claims.

A number of respondents reported that they had experienced police violence before arriving in Berlin. One said, "In Frankfurt, the police undressed us. They were violent physically and verbally, and they took our passports and money away. Then they let us go without documents, and without explaining anything."

### WHAT TYPE OF POLICE VIOLENCE? ALL RESPONDENTS



### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE POLICE TREATMENT OF REFUGEES IN GERMANY? ALL RESPONDENTS



**"I GOT BEATEN BY 10 SECURITY MEN. THEY BROKE MY FINGERS AND BRUISED MY BODY AND FACE. I WAS IN PAIN FOR A LONG TIME AND MY BACK STILL HURTS."**

# CHAPTER FOUR

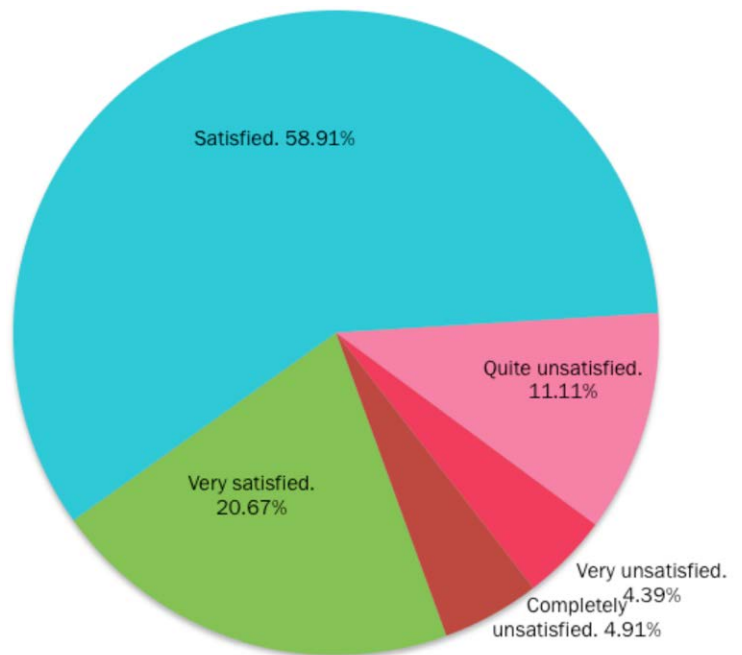
## INTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY

Having arrived in a new country and begun to manage everyday life, integration is often seen as the next crucial step. Although integration cannot be easily defined and measured, RRDIP investigated the way refugees and asylum seekers feel about Germany, and the way they perceive themselves in the society.

79.6% of all respondents said they felt either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' in Germany. The figures are broadly similar across all nationalities, and slightly higher among women (85.5%). However, fewer respondents said that they feel happy in Germany. In total, 45.9% of all respondents reported feeling either 'very happy' or 'happy' in Germany, with women being once again slightly above the average (51.8%).

This question triggered a significant discrepancy among nationalities. Only 33.5% of Syrians said they felt 'very happy' or 'happy', while Afghans (73.2%) and Pakistanis (77.8%) said the same. A number of respondents cited separation from family as being a key factor affecting their level of satisfaction in Germany, explaining that this can affect their ability to study, work, or start building a new life. As one Iraqi man said, "I am satisfied in Germany, but I am unhappy that my family is not here and I cannot go back to see them because in Iraq there is war." A Syrian respondent told our researchers that the staff at the foreigners' registration office had been dismissive when he enquired about the possibility of bringing his wife from Lebanon. The staff reportedly responded: "I would never have left my wife alone in the first place if I was in your situation. But maybe you had your own motives."

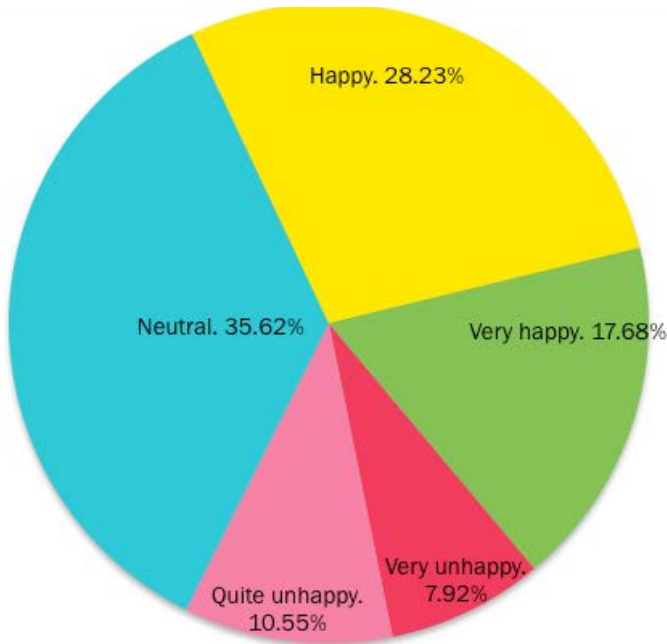
### WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION IN GERMANY? ALL RESPONDENTS



**"I AM SATISFIED IN GERMANY, BUT I AM UNHAPPY THAT MY FAMILY IS NOT HERE AND I CANNOT GO BACK TO SEE THEM BECAUSE IN IRAQ THERE IS WAR."**



## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING IN GERMANY? ALL RESPONDENTS

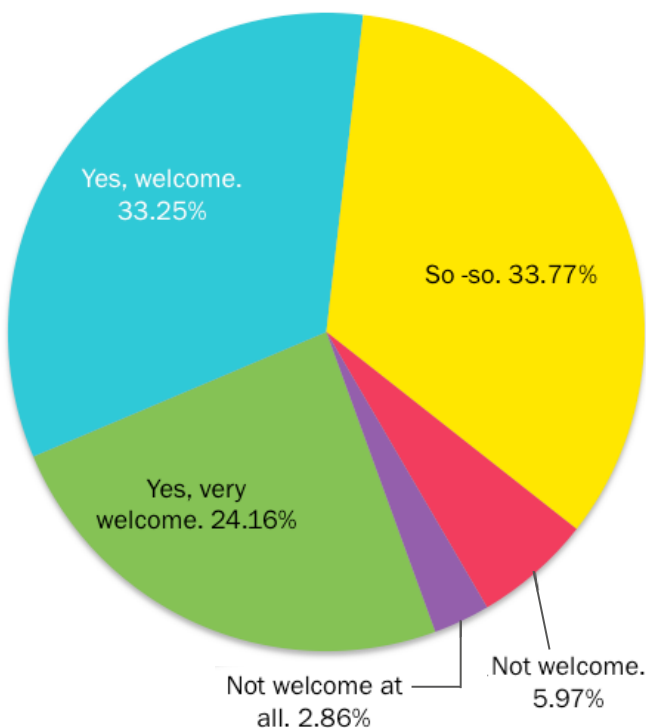


The majority of respondents said they feel 'welcome' living as part of German society - 24.2% reported feeling 'very welcome', and 33.3% 'welcome'. However, 33.8% said they feel 'so-so'. Only 8.8% of all respondents said they feel 'not welcome' or 'not welcome at all'.

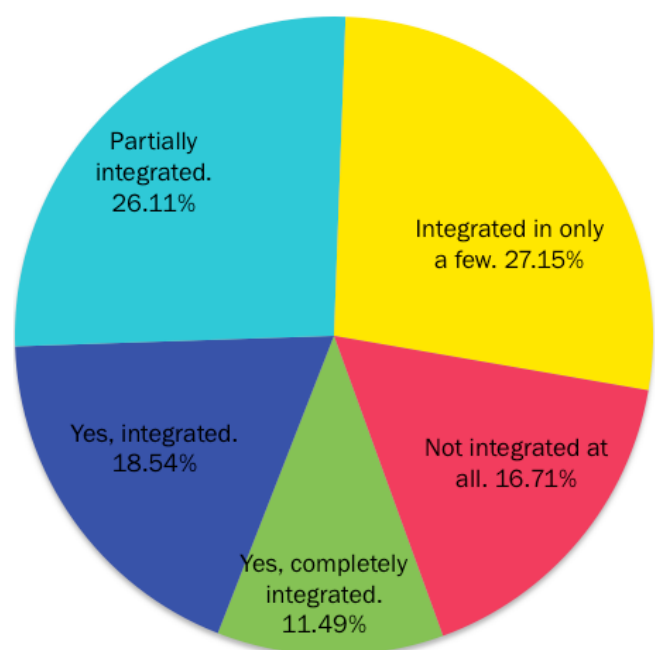
Perceptions and opinions diverges more among respondents when asked about integration. 11.5% feel 'completely integrated' and 18.5% 'integrated', while at the same time 26.1% feel only 'partially integrated', 27.2% 'integrated only in a few aspects' and 16.7% 'not integrated at all'. We found that these results varied significantly among different country groups. One 19 year-old Eritrean man explained "I do not feel integrated at all, since I do not have any contact to German people and I do not have any German friends."

**"SOMETIMES OTHERS LOOK AT ME BECAUSE OF MY SKIN COLOUR"**

## DO YOU FEEL WELCOME IN GERMANY? ALL RESPONDENTS



## DO YOU FEEL PART OF GERMAN SOCIETY? ALL RESPONDENTS



**DO YOU FEEL PART OF GERMAN SOCIETY?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS

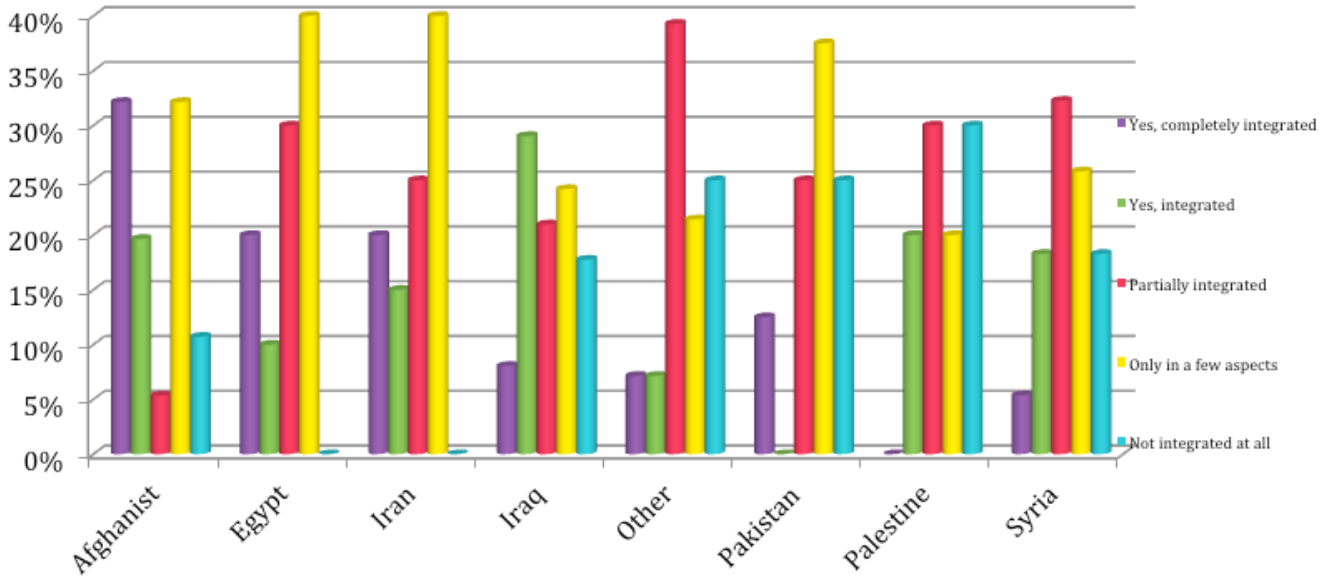


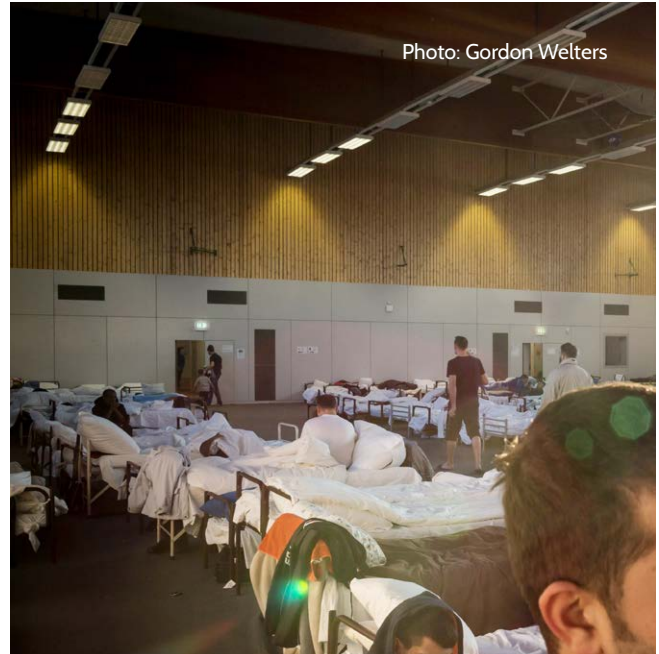
Photo: Ahmad Yasin

## CITIZEN VIOLENCE

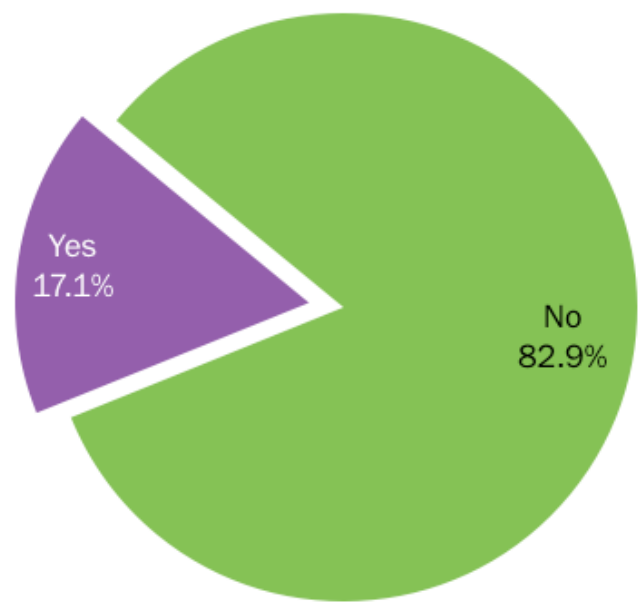
Our research indicates that racism and attacks by neo-Nazi individuals and groups were one barrier to successful integration. The latest figures from the interior minister of Germany show that there were more than 3,500 attacks against refugees in 2016.<sup>11</sup>

RRDP's survey found that 82.9% of all respondents said they had never experienced violence by German citizens - including physical, verbal, and sexual violence. This figure is roughly the same among women (82.7%) and respondents from different country groups.

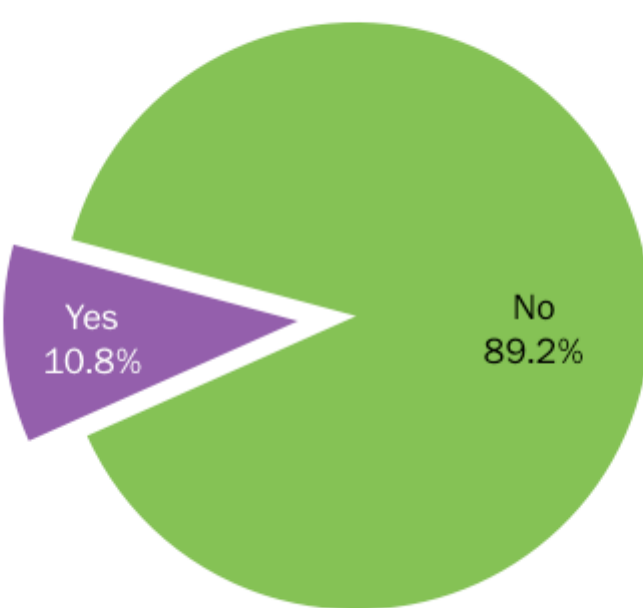
Of the 17.1% who reported experiencing violence, 18.5% said this took a physical form. "They hurt refugees, they hit them, they frighten the children," explained one respondent. "One time they forced a guy to fall off his bike. When people call the police, they come late or do not come at all. One time they injured a guy in his leg. One time there was a guy in urgent need to be taken to a hospital, but we could not because the camp was surrounded by those bad citizens." Other instances included spitting, pushing, and attacks by dogs.



**HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY CITIZENS (NOT POLICE OR SECURITY)?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS

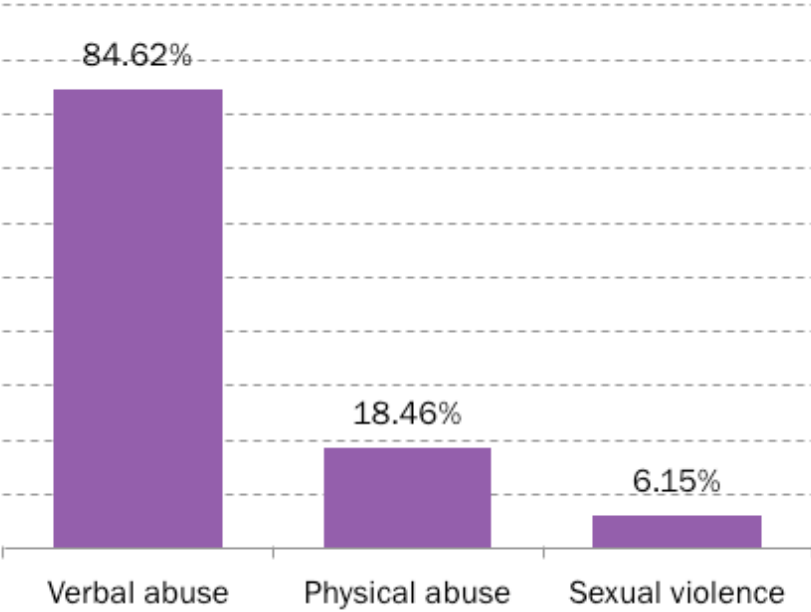


**HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY CITIZENS (NOT POLICE OR SECURITY)?**  
WOMEN ONLY



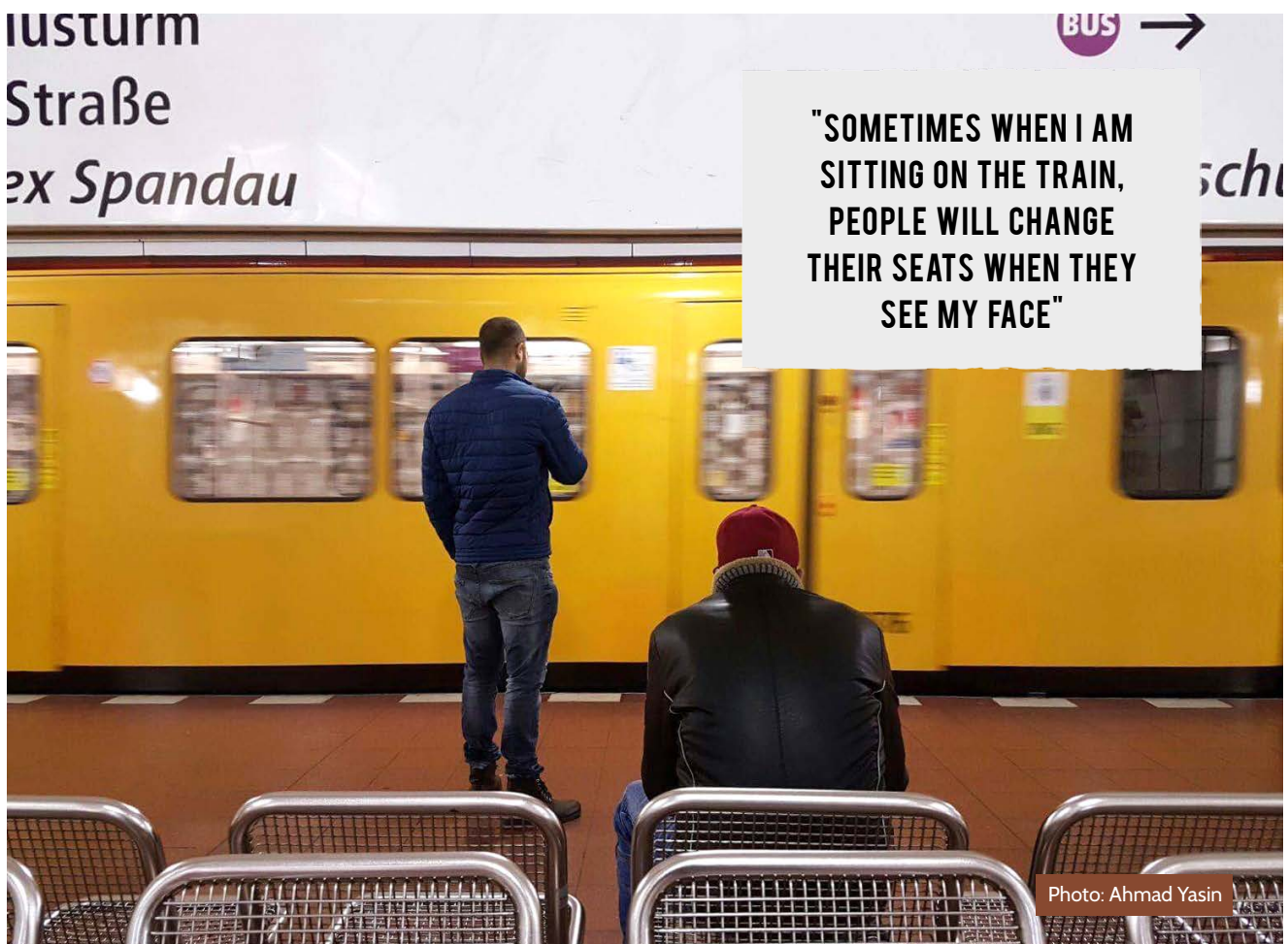
<sup>11</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/attacks-day-refugees-shelters-2016-170226170920171.html>

**WHAT TYPE OF CITIZEN VIOLENCE?  
ALL RESPONDENTS**



84.6% described their ordeal as verbal abuse, including the fear of violence from right-wing groups who sometimes surrounded accommodation centres. One Eritrean noted that *“sometimes others look at me because of my skin colour”*. Meanwhile, an Iraqi reported, *“sometimes when I am sitting on the train, people will change their seats when they see my face”*. Another said *“one time I went to meet an employee who works in the social office. After we shook hands, he washed his hands with perfume, which hurts me so much. I felt like I’m an animal or insect”*. Such incidents are likely to be under-reported, and have a negative impact on successful integration.

Citizen violence was experienced fairly evenly across country groups - about 20% of each having suffered from this problem. However, there was a slightly lower figure among respondents from Pakistan and Afghanistan, at roughly 10%. Some 17% of women reported experiencing citizen violence.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND WORK

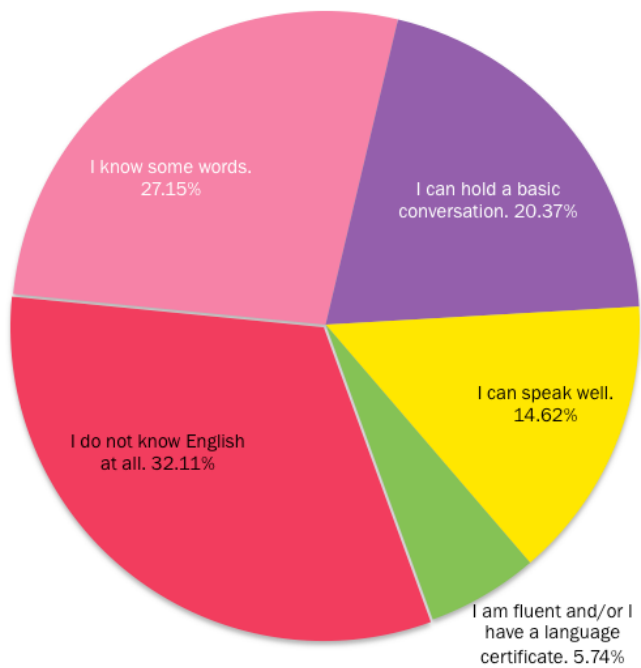
Measures such as language skills, access to education, and the opportunity to work also likely contribute positively towards feelings of integration. In terms of language skills, 14.6% said they speak both English and German 'well'. However, respondents tended to speak slightly better German than English - 20.4% reported they could 'hold a basic conversation' in English, some 31.9% said they had the same proficiency in German. 19.1% said they "do not know German" and 32.9% only 'know some words.'

Women's language skills in both English and German were significantly lower, with 61% reporting that they only 'know some words' or 'do not know German at all'. Meanwhile, 57.8% of women only 'know some words' in English or 'do not know English at all'.

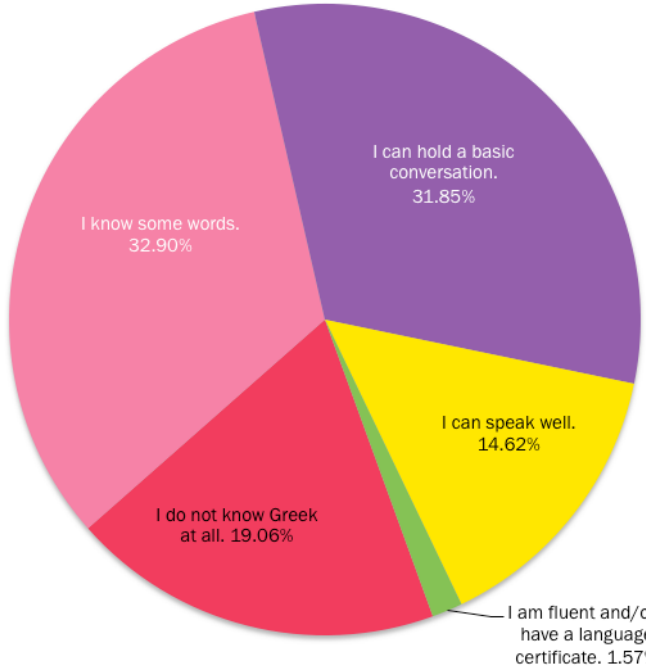
Many programs led by volunteers and aid organisations were working to bridge the gap until individuals were able to enrol on an official language course, provided once a residence permit has been granted. However,

the figures still show a crucial need for these classes - especially for women. Furthermore, while 66.7% of all respondents reported having access to education, only 53.8% of women said they could access these facilities.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LEVEL OF ENGLISH?  
ALL RESPONDENTS

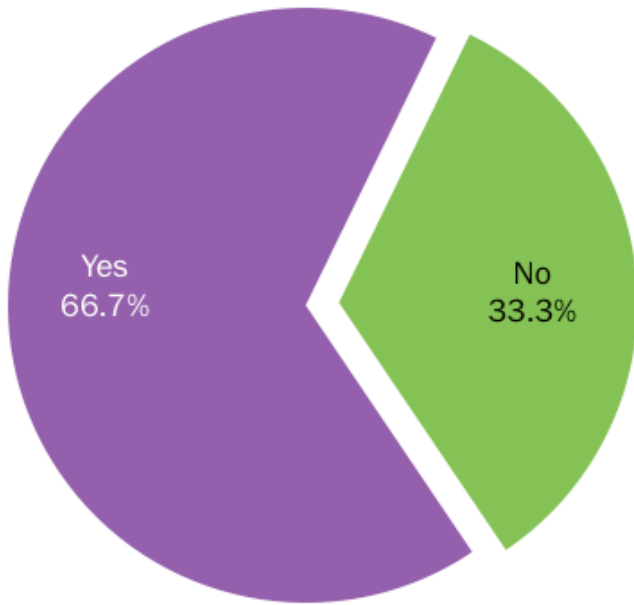


HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LEVEL OF GERMAN?  
ALL RESPONDENTS



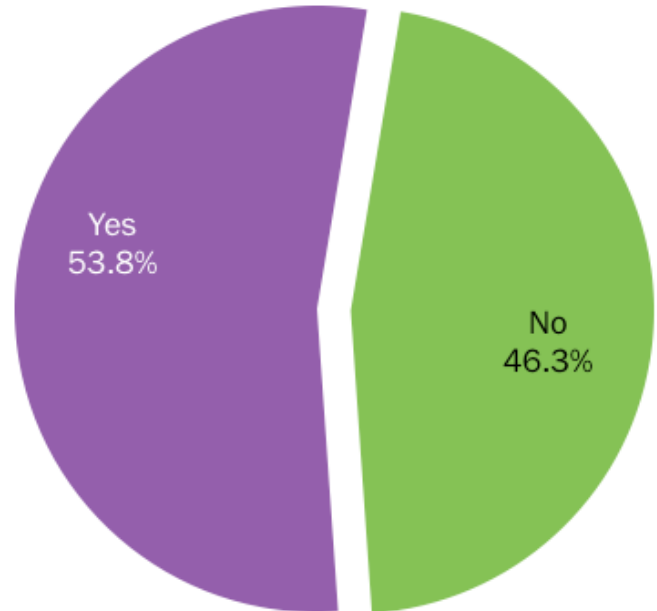
**DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO ANY FORM OF EDUCATION AT THE MOMENT?**

ALL RESPONDENTS



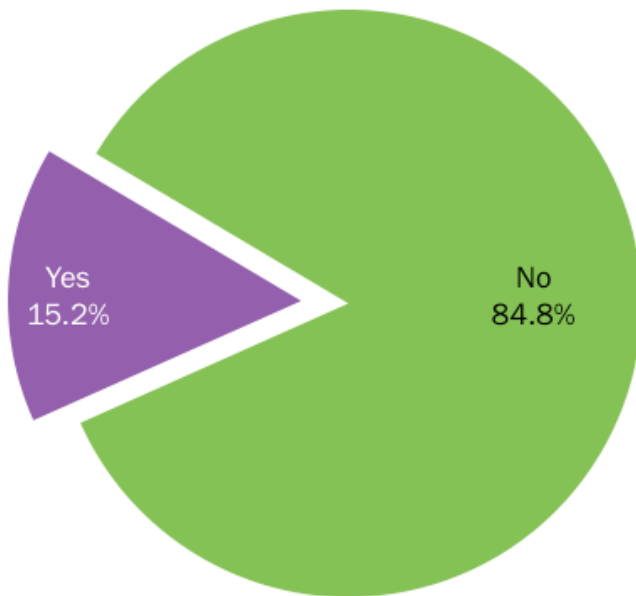
**DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO ANY FORM OF EDUCATION AT THE MOMENT?**

WOMEN ONLY

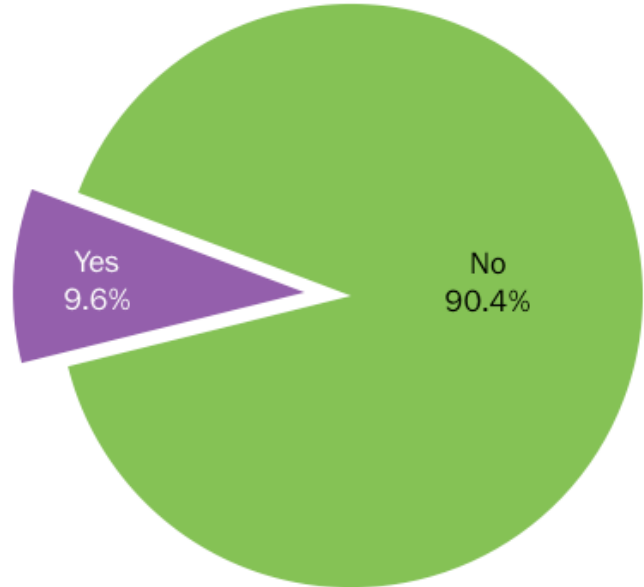


**"IF I COULD STUDY PROPERLY, I WOULD BE ABLE TO IMPROVE MUCH MORE AND THEN FIND A JOB."**

## HAVE YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK IN GERMANY? ALL RESPONDENTS



## HAVE YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK IN GERMANY? WOMEN ONLY



The same dynamics also play into the opportunity to work. Although all four types of residency permit granted in Germany provide access to the labour market and the right to employment, very few respondents had worked (including volunteering, internships and so-called 'mini-jobs' which pay 450 EUR and only require a small number of hours per week). Only 15.2% of all respondents had worked in Germany, including only 9.6% of women. One young Iraqi man mentioned there were many barriers to advance professionally: *"I can't even do my homework very well, because there are too many people living here in the sports hall. If I could study properly, I would be able to improve much more and then find a job"*. This demonstrates that providing adequate education would aid access to the labour market, and subsequently help to break down walls and foster integration into wider society.



Photo: Ahmad Yasin

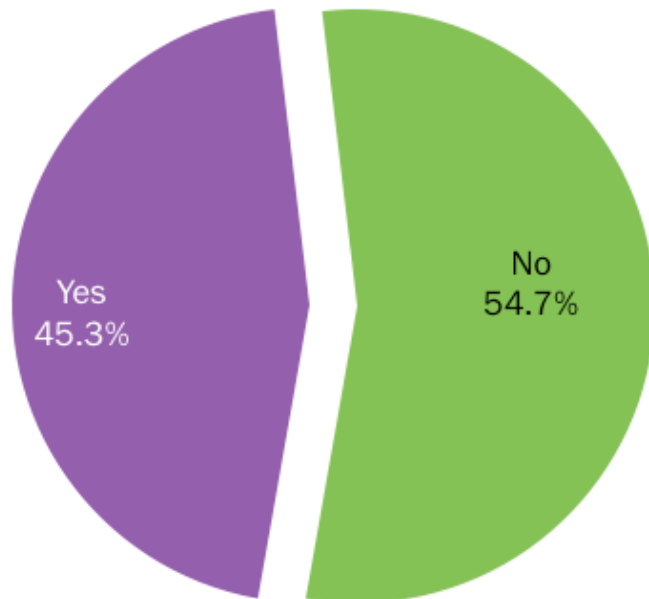
# CHAPTER FIVE

## FUTURE PLANS AND ASPIRATIONS

Despite only 21.4% of respondents regretting coming to Germany and fewer than 10% feeling 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied' with their situation, most respondents reported facing problems relating to their asylum process, living conditions or future prospects.

In light of these findings, it is concerning that 54.7% reported that they did not have access to advice about their rights and opportunities to change their situation, with this figure even higher for women at 64.6%. Among those who did have access this type of information, 43.5% obtained it from organisations in the camp, and 14.1% from the German authorities. However, 67.1% sourced this information informally, from volunteers, other refugees, or friends and family in their country of origin.

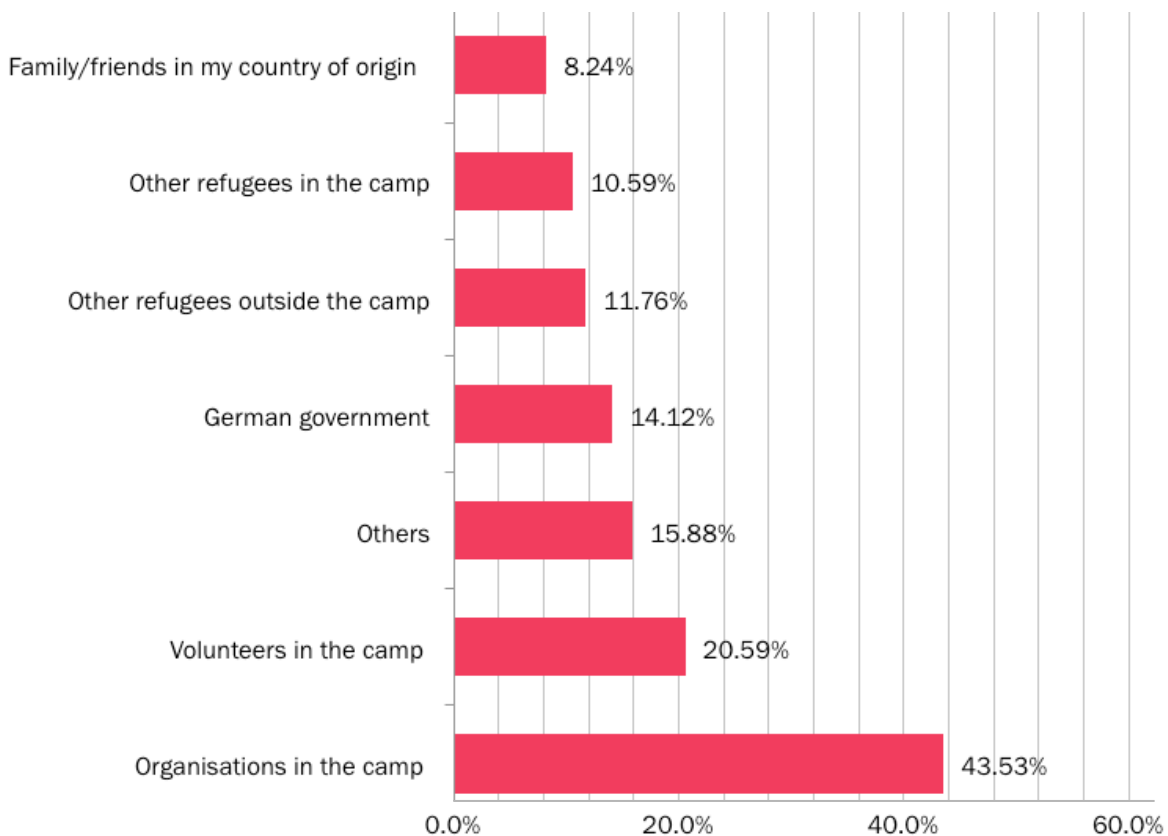
**DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO ADVICE ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO CHANGE YOUR SITUATION?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS







**FROM WHERE DO YOU OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION?**  
ALL RESPONDENTS



A similar proportion of respondents, 55.9% (67.5% of women), said they were lacking access to information about European asylum law and immigration rules. Among those who did have access to this information, 28.5% received it from organisation in the camp, 22.4% from the German authorities, and 69.7% from informal sources, which raises questions about the accuracy of the information.

### DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT EUROPEAN ASYLUM LAW AND IMMIGRATION RULES? ALL RESPONDENTS

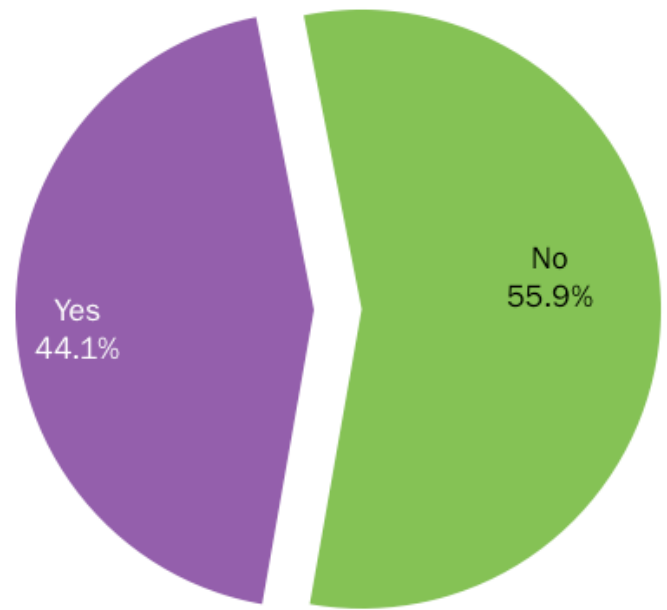
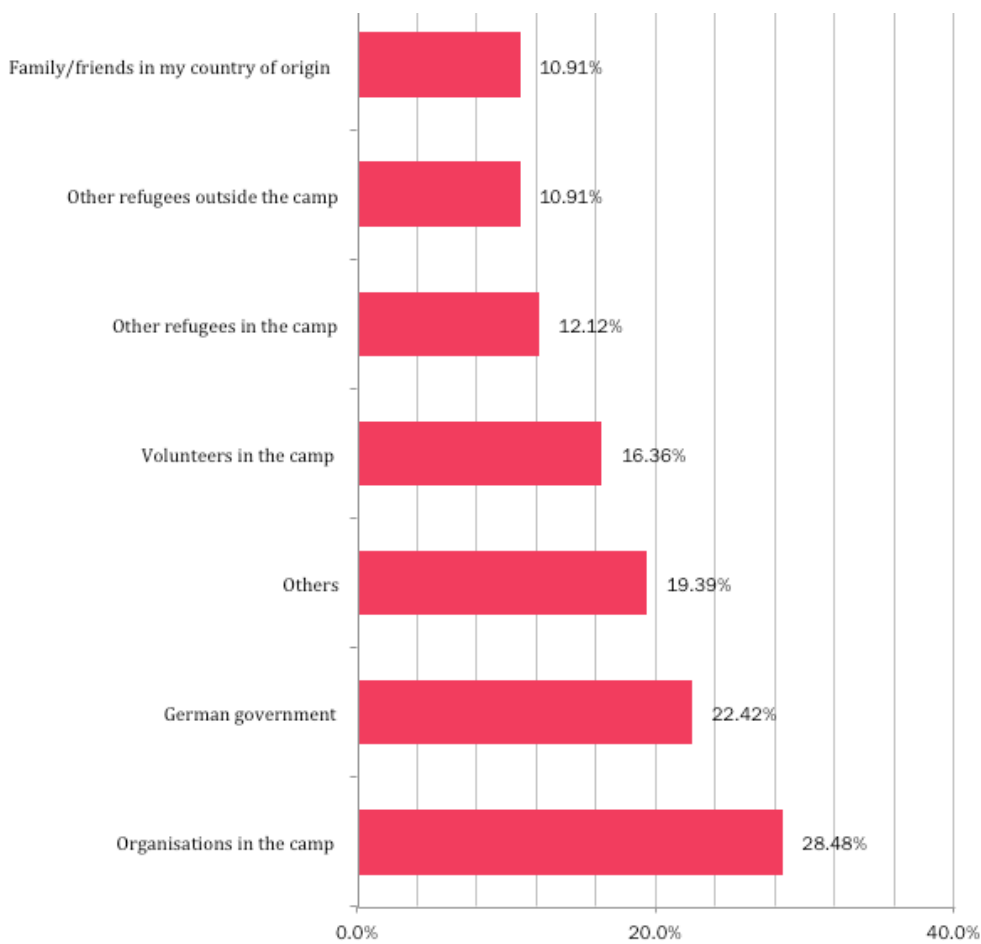


Photo: Gordon Welters



Photo: Gordon Welters

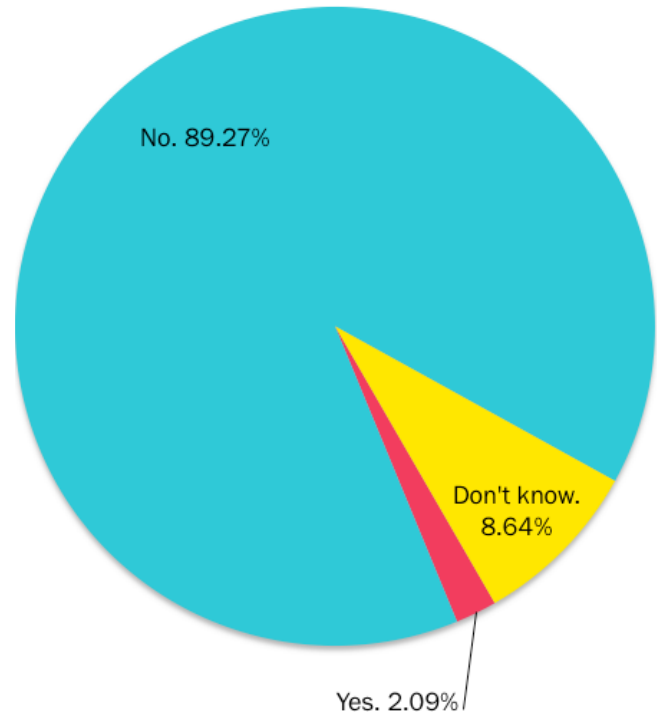
## FROM WHERE DO YOU OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION? ALL RESPONDENTS



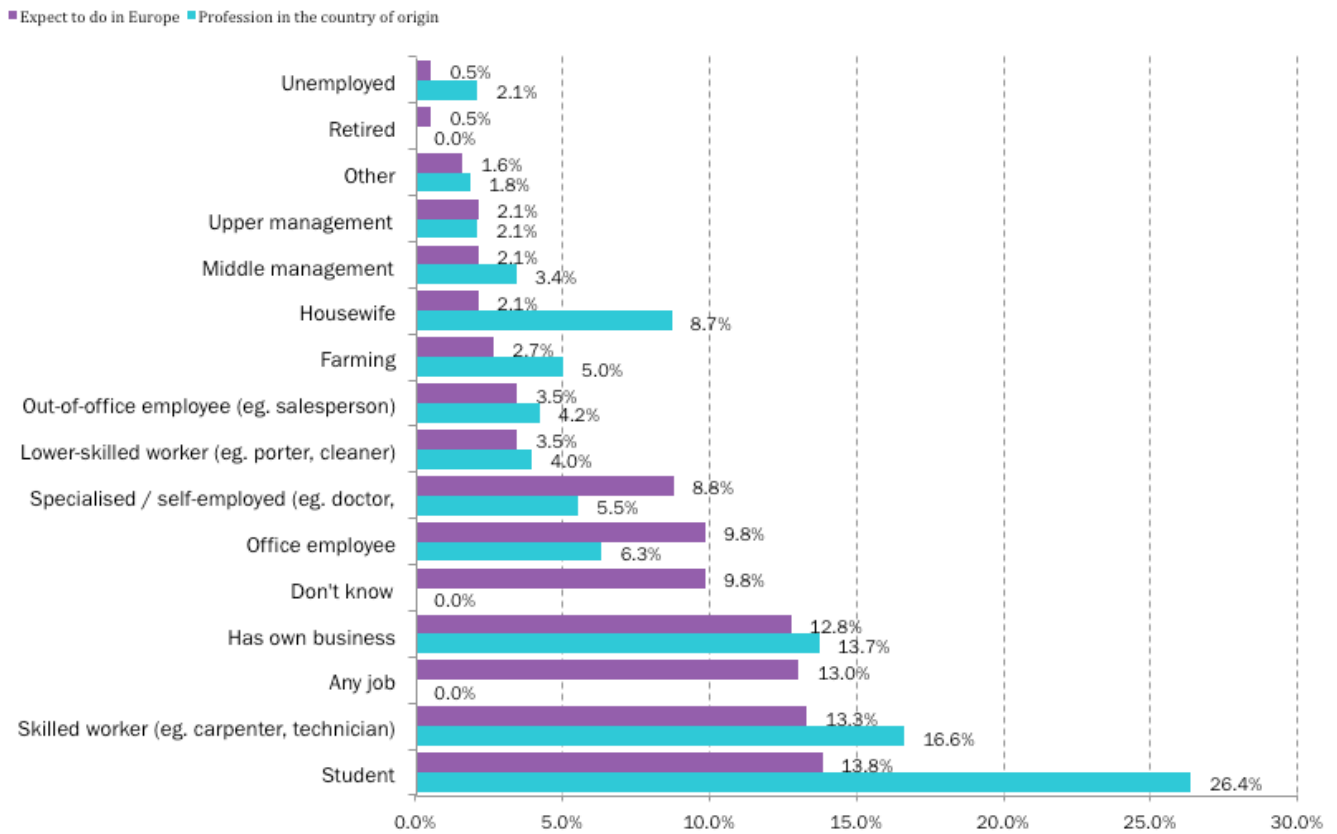
Many respondents were awaiting the outcome of their asylum application at the time of the research study. When asked whether they would be able to go back to their country, only 2.1% of respondents answered 'yes', while 8.6% said they 'don't know', and 89.2% said 'no'. A similar percentage, 89.5%, said they would not go back to their country if offered financial assistance by the German government ('voluntary return'). One Syrian man said, "I want to go back to my country, but I do not know when the war will finish."

A similar proportion of respondents, 55.9% (67.5% of women), said they were lacking access to information about European asylum law and immigration rules. Among those who did have access to this information, 28.5% received it from organisation in the camp, 22.4% from the German authorities, and 69.7% from informal sources, which again raises concerns about the accuracy of the information.

### CAN YOU GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY? ALL RESPONDENTS



**EMPLOYMENT IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND EXPECTED EMPLOYMENT IN GERMANY ?  
ALL RESPONDENTS**



The respondents expressed significant levels of ambition, and most expected to work in a similar position as they had done in their country of origin.

While 2.1% had previously been unemployed in their country of origin, only 0.5% expected to be unemployed in Germany. 9.8% expected to be office employees, and 8.8% expected to go into specialised jobs, such as doctors or lawyers.

Among women, only 2.1% of respondents expected to be a housewife in Europe, compared to 8.7% who worked as such in their countries of origin. 16.9% of women expected to go into specialised jobs, such as doctors and lawyers. Meanwhile, 13% of all respondents (15.7% of women) said they would take 'any job' in Germany, irrespective of their career in the country of origin.



# CONCLUSION

Overall, the research suggests that refugees and asylum seekers in Berlin typically face a more humane and dignifying situation than in many other places in Europe.

Despite its vast numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, Germany has implemented a partially successful approach to reception and integration. The research found particularly positive results in the following areas:

## LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH LIVING CONDITIONS:

More than a third of respondents said they were either 'completely satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their living conditions. Many of those who were less satisfied were residing in sports halls - where up to 250 people live together with little privacy - at the time of the study. However, public demonstrations to close these sports halls have recently prompted the State of Berlin Administration for Refugee Matters (Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten) to announce the closure of most of these facilities by March 2017. In their place, they plan to open improved community housing models called 'TempoHomes', as well as so-called modular accommodation for refugees.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that policy may be moving in a positive direction, and the next few months will reveal whether this move will resolve some of the urgent housing needs and problematic living conditions

## SATISFACTION WITH THEIR HOST COUNTRY

78.6% of respondents said they didn't regret coming to Germany. Although many respondents complained about the German bureaucratic apparatus, the overall mood was generally positive and most respondents were ultimately satisfied or very satisfied with being in Germany (79.6%).

## ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

15.2% of respondents had the opportunity to work - while this appears to be a low figure, it might suggest certain progress. It was previously almost impossible to work (or even conduct an internship), but all four forms of residency now permit asylum applicants to access the labour market<sup>13</sup> and the system appears to be improving gradually.

## FUNDING FOR LIVING EXPENSES

A whole 88% of respondents were receiving financial support for their living costs from the German government at the time of the study. While most respondents said it is 'not enough' or 'barely enough' (72.8%), Germany does provide more financial assistance than most other European countries.

<sup>12</sup>. <https://www.berlin.de/sen/ias/presse/pressemitteilungen/2017/pressemitteilung.555281.php>

<sup>13</sup>. <http://www.bamf.de/EN/Fluechtlingschutz/AblaufAsylv/Schutzformen/SubsidaererS/subsidaerer-schutz-node.html>

Nonetheless, there remain a number of issues that need to be addressed. These are especially related to:

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The majority of respondents had difficulties accessing suitable information relating to their rights and opportunities to change their situation, or to advice about European asylum law and immigration rules. This may partially be a result of the methods used - consultation centres rather than information being supplied in writing.

## ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

One third of all respondents, and nearly half of women, said they had not yet gained access to education. This may be a result of being stuck in the asylum process and not yet having reached a status which would enable them to access official integration courses.

## LENGTH OF TIME TO OBTAIN REFUGEE STATUS

On average, it takes 13.7 months to obtain refugee status. That means that applicants must endure a long period of waiting, during which time they are reliant on volunteer networks to access many of the official services, like integration classes.

## FAMILY LIFE

Many respondents were worried about the prospect of being reunited with family, in particular following the government's decision to end family reunification for a period of two years for those who received so-called 'subsidiary protection' after 16 March 2016 - a status which is commonly granted to all nationalities.<sup>14</sup>

## HOUSING

Respondents had stayed in emergency shelters and community housing for an average of 9.3 months, which is most likely a longer period than planned by the authorities. This is largely due to a general housing crisis in Berlin, which has led brokers to abuse the situation and charge refugees and asylum-seekers enormous sums (up to 4,000 EUR) to apply for an apartment.<sup>15</sup>

## VERBAL ABUSE

17.1% respondents said they had experienced violence by citizens - of these 84.6% said this was in the form of verbal abuse, often with racist motives. Attacks by neo-Nazis also created a general sense of fear, which was present in the minds of many of the individuals surveyed.

This demonstrates that, while there are a number of areas for improvement, the overall situation in Berlin has proven to be relatively successful. A more in-depth analysis of the conditions and processes in the city might have the potential of providing a blueprint for other European authorities - at least in certain areas where the German approach has been particularly successful.

Meanwhile, the findings also emphasise that the German government still has work to do - predominately in relation to access to information and education, speeding up the asylum process, addressing concerns of family reunion, improving housing conditions in some types of accommodation, and countering verbal abuse and attacks by citizens. It is crucial that these problem areas are addressed if Germany is to meet the humanitarian and human rights standards to which it aspires.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bamf.de/EN/Fluechtlingsschutz/Familienasyl/Familiennachzug/familienasyl-familiennachzug-node.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/black-market-brokers-target-refugees-327936>

