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Exploring integration and migration dynamics: the research potentials of a large-scale longitudinal household study of refugees in Germany

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Forced migration has intensified in the 21st century, driven by conflicts, persecution, and political instability in regions such as the Middle East, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, South-East Asia, Latin America and, most recently, Ukraine. Germany has become a primary destination for refugees within the European Union and one of the largest among the OECD countries. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, lunched in 2016, is a high-quality longitudinal household panel study that documents the arrival and integration trajectories of refugees who came to Germany during and after the 2015/16 surge. Based on a register-based random sample and conducted annually, the survey is integrated into the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) and linked to administrative data sources, allowing for population-level inference and rich longitudinal analyses. It encompasses a wide range of topics, including pre-migration biographies, flight experiences, entry and arrival procedures, legal status, and integration processes. The dataset includes approximately 22,000 individual respondents across 6,500 households, with data currently available for the years 2016 to 2021. This paper discusses the analytical potential of the dataset, highlighting areas where the data contributes to research on forced migration and refugee integration, and subsequently outlines the survey's structure, questionnaire topics, and key descriptive statistics.

Introduction

Refugee migration has surged in the 21st century, driven by conflicts, persecution, and instability in regions like the Middle East, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, and parts of South-Eastern Asia and Latin America and, recently, the Russian invasion into Ukraine. The number of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide has nearly tripled—from 41.1 million in 2010 to 122.6 million by mid-2024—with 46 million crossing international borders, marking an unprecedented scale of displacement (UNHCR, 2025). Refugees contribute meanwhile substantially to the global international migration stock of 304 million persons in 2024 (United Nations, 2025). Germany has emerged as a primary destination, with its refugee population increasing from 0.5 in 2010 to 3.2 million in 2023 (DESTATIS, 2024), raising the refugee share of the population from one to four percent in 2022 (DESTATIS, 2024). Refugee migration has become central to public and political discourse across Europe (e.g. Czymara & Schmidz-Catran, 2017; Hagelund 2020; Apaydin & Müftüler-Bac, 2021). Electoral outcomes (e.g. Dustmann et al., 2019; Vasilakis, 2019; Bredtmann, 2022) and national asylum- and other migration policies, including the reform of the Common European Asylum System (Ripoll-Servent & Zaun, 2020), have been shaped by the refugee question.

While Germany is the largest recipient of refugees among high-income countries in absolute terms, other European countries—including Austria, the Baltic

states, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland—have received similarly high or higher shares relative to their populations (UNHCR, 2025). Within the EU, Germany is the main destination for both non-European refugees and those displaced by the war in Ukraine (ibid). Despite differences in socio-demographic profiles and cultural backgrounds, refugee populations across European destinations share important similarities, both within and between these group (Aksoy & Poutvaara, 2021; Kosyakova et al., 2024). As such, the German case offers insights that are relevant beyond its borders, especially for countries that have experienced substantial inflows from non-European regions during the 2010s or from Ukraine since 2022—or both.

Against this backdrop, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey offers a critical tool for advancing empirical knowledge on refugee migration and integration dynamics. Launched in 2016, it is a longitudinal household panel survey targeting refugees and asylum-seekers who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2019, a group registered and allocated within the country through official procedures upon arrival. The survey documents their migration histories, integration trajectories, living conditions, and the socio-economic impacts on German society. It stands out for its representative sampling design based on the Central Register of Foreigners (AZR), its integration into Germany's largest household panel study (the Socio-Economic Panel, SOEP-Core, see Giesselmann et al., 2019), and linkages to key administrative data sources. Its multilingual, comprehensive questionnaires enable the collection of high-quality data from a highly diverse refugee population. With over 22,000 participants surveyed between 2016 to 2021, it ranks among the world's largest longitudinal studies on refugees, enabling analyses of integration trajectories over time and across domains such as education, employment, health, attitudes, and values.

While longitudinal data on refugees were rare prior to the 2010s, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey builds on experiences from earlier migration and refugee studies. Large-scale immigration surveys like the *New Immigrant Survey* (NIS) in the US (e.g. Jasso et al., 2000), and the *Longitudinal Immigrant Survey* (LIS) in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005) provide important design templates but focussed mostly on non-refugee immigrants given that the refugee populations to the US and Canada were rather small when those surveys were conducted. Other refugee-specific longitudinal studies—such as the *Survey of New Refugees* (SNR) in the UK (e.g. Cebulla et al., 2010), the *Building a New Life in Australia* (BNLA) study of humanitarian immigrants in Australia (e.g. Edwards et al., 2018), or regional surveys in the US (e.g. Puma et al., 2020)—offer complementary insights to the IAB-BAMF-SOEP

Refugee Survey, though typically with limited geographic, time or population coverage.

Recent European efforts such as Austris's *FIMAS* study (e.g. Landesmann et al., 2023) and the *New Refugees in the Netherlands* (e.g. Damen et al., 2022) survey follow similar sampling strategies and instruments as the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, offering strong potential for comparative research on integration trajectories and policy effects. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey itself builds upon and extends prior studies conducted in Germany, such as the *IAB-SOEP Migration Sample* (Brücker et al., 2014) and SOEP-Core (see, e.g. Giesselmann et al., 2019), which included some refugee respondents but was not designed for in-depth refugee-specific analysis. Complementary efforts like the *Refugees in the German Education System* (ReGES), part of the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), offer detailed insights into specific areas, like the educational pathways of refugee children and adolescents (Will et al., 2021), thus enriching the overall data landscape.

This paper presents the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, focussing on its empirical potential, design, and methodology. We begin by outlining the types of research questions this dataset can support and by demonstrating its relevance for both national and international scholarship. We then describe the survey's structure, sampling strategy, questionnaire content, and key descriptive features. We conclude by reflecting on the future directions and the importance of continued investment in longitudinal targeted in-depth data infrastructure to inform evidence-based refugee research and integration policy.

Research opportunities with the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey

Conducted during a period marked by rapid social and demographic changes, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey offers researchers valuable opportunities to examine the consequences of (forced) migration and the integration of refugees processes. With its multi-respondents and multi-questionnaire approach (refer to Section 3.2) the survey collects rich cross-sectional and longitudinal data on a wide array of topics and biographical details among asylum-seekers and refugees. The dataset supports empirical research in two key areas: the sociology of forced migration (Stepputat & Sørensen, 2014; FitzGerald & Arar, 2018) and the study of integration processes, ranging from classical paradigms (Gordon, 1964; Esser, 2004) to newer frameworks emphasizing multidimensionality (Ager & Strang, 2008) and the variability of integration pathways (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997). The survey enables researchers to examine these issues through

diversity-sensitive (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018) and intersectional lens (Browne & Misra, 2003; Choo & Ferree, 2010).

From global conflicts to local integration contexts

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey captures key periods of displacement arising from major global crises, including the civil war in Syria, the conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq, the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the long-standing conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The survey instruments—specifically, rich biography and person interviews (Section 3.2)—enable researchers to analyse how these events have shaped refugee experiences and migration trajectories. Detailed information on regions of origin and the timing of key migration episodes, whether directly to Germany or via transit countries, provides a foundation for comprehensive analyses that integrate detailed geographical conflict data and link them to outcomes such as health, well-being, and social and structural integration (e.g. Keita & Schewe, 2021; Van Tubergen et al., 2023).

Conditions in major transit countries of the conflict regions, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, and Pakistan, and shifts in asylum and refugee policies within the EU and Germany present another vein of research potential. The dataset includes retrospective data on refugees' situation in transit countries before arrival in Germany, allowing for an examination of how conditions in transit countries and legal frameworks in destination countries shape refugees' migration decisions and settlement trajectories (Gundacker et al., 2024).

Asylum and refugee policies in the EU and Germany have seen rapid changes, significantly impacting refugees' access to the territories of Germany and other EU Member States, the asylum procedure's duration and outcomes, and the integration pathways. While a detailed description of all these changes is beyond the scope of this paper, highlighting some major events might be illustrative: the emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2014/2015 partly facilitated by Turkey's internal policies, the (incomplete) enforcement of the Common European Asylum Policies (CEAS), pivotal decisions like the Merkel government's response to the refugee influx in 2015, the closure of the Western Balkan route and the EU-Turkey declaration in 2016. Moreover, Germany-specific legal and institutional adjustments, such as the 2015 designation of Western Balkan countries as safe origins, the Integration Act of 2016, modifications to the Asylum Benefit Act and changes in the administration of asylum procedures (Grote, 2018), have reshaped the legal and institutional framework governing refugees' lives, influencing everything from their mobility within the EU to their access to welfare benefits and labour markets.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey's dataset facilitates empirical analyses of the effects of this policy changes on refugees' spatial mobility, economic participation, and overall well-being. By combining individual and household-level data on the timing, risks, and routes of migration with information on legal status, employment, and integration outcomes (see Section 3.1) the survey allows for differentiated analyses of how policies have shaped refugee experiences. Additionally, it supports investigation into the regional and temporal variation integration conditions—from differences in differences in local implementation of integration policies and practices to the role of social support and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. These insights can inform policy development aimed at improving structural and social inclusion in Germany and may also contribute to broader policy debates at the EU level.

Individual perspective in the sociology of forced migration

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey provides a detailed dataset to investigate the micro- and meso-level dimensions of forced migration. Beyond the macro-level drivers of displacement, the survey enables analyses of how individual traits, family dynamics, and social networks influence migration decisions and integration trajectories. Despite increased scholarly attention to forced migration dynamics in recent years (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018; Kogan & Kosyakova, 2023), empirical understanding of these processes remains limited.

Traditional models of migrant self-selection theories (e.g. Borjas, 1987; Chiswick, 1999), which emphasize economic incentives and network effects (Tanis, 2020), are not always transferable to contexts of forced migration. In situations of persecution or conflict, refugees may exhibit reverse or altered selection processes. For instance, persecution may lead to 'reverse selection', where those from disadvantaged groups are more likely to flee (Borjas, 1987) or to reduced selection bias, as flight decisions occur independently of employment opportunities (Chiswick, 1999). The survey's dataset enables empirical tests of newer models that suggest higher origin-country risk increases the skill-selection of forced migrants (Aksoy & Poutvaara, 2021). The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey includes detailed data on respondents' countries of origins, reasons for fleeing, flight experiences, detailed flight routes, and migration-related costs (e.g. for accommodation, transport, and smugglers). This allows for empirical testing and further development of migration

selection theories. The dataset also permits analysis of how gender- and age-specific vulnerabilities, as well as persecution and human rights violations that disproportionately affect religious and political minorities, influence the selection process. This includes impacts on values and attitudes, such as religious convictions and the endorsement of democratic values and minority rights. Additionally, the traumatic experiences of war, persecution, human rights violations, and the inherent risks of refugee migration might affect the selection or even alter behavioural characteristics of the refugee population and, hence, affect chances for structural and social integration.

The survey further captures the sequence of flight episodes within families, supporting research on household risk-sharing, tied migration, and the role of social networks in determining migration routes and destinations. Its household-based design allows for a more comprehensive view of both individual and collective migration decisions-making, as well as the social structures that support refugee mobility and integration.

In addition, the dataset can be used to examine intentions to return or migrate onward, as well as long-term settlement patterns. These aspects can be analysed in comparison with voluntary migrants (de Haas and Fokkema, 2015) and in light of frameworks that conceptualize migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities (Carling & Petersen, 2014).

Individual agency and refugees' social integration

In migration studies, integration is commonly understood as the process through which newcomers become part of the host society, becoming recognized and accepted members (Alba & Foner, 2015). This process spans several dimensions – structural, social, cultural, and emotional – originally conceptualized by Gordon (1964) and further elaborated by Esser (2004). The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey offers a comprehensive empirical basis for examining these dimensions in detail, including refugees' labour market participation, social interactions and partnership formation, subjective wellbeing, language skills, national and ethnic self-identification and cultural assimilation. The dataset allows researchers to test hypotheses about how different integration domains may interact – for example, how social network structure relate to employment outcomes or how labour market success may shape language acquisition or social ties. It also provides a basis for analysing patterns of segmented assimilation and their implications for refugees' integration in Germany.

The survey captures a range of individual-level resources relevant to integration. These include human capital (such as education, labour market experience, and cognitive and non-cognitive skills); cultural capital (including language proficiency and familiarity with cultural norms); social capital (e.g. contacts size and intensity within both immigrants' ethnic communities and the broader population); as well as indicators of physical and mental health. These variables can be used to investigate how pre- and post-migration conditions shape the availability and relevance of such resources for different integration outcomes.

In addition, the survey's detailed socio-demographic data enables to adopt an intersectional lens. It supports analyses of how overlapping categories – such as gender, age, and ethnicity– interact to shape refugees' access to opportunities and exposure to constraints across domains such as employment, education, and social participation. An overview of the distribution of socio-demographic and migration biographical characteristics in the survey is provided in Section 3.5. The household panel structure allows for tracking the developments both at the individual and the family level over time, within the context of changing local policies environments and broader societal dynamics. The longitudinal design of the study combined with repeated collection of the relevant characteristics facilitates the analysis integration trajectories. This temporal dimension could be practically particularly important for understanding how refugees' lives evolve in response to institutional, economic, and social changes, as well as their own agency and adaptation strategies.

In addition to the adult-focussed modules, the survey collects data on children and adolescents in refugee households, covering domains such as education, health, and well-being (see Section 3.2). This inclusion allows researchers to examine outcomes among children with refugee backgrounds and to analyse the patterns of intergenerational transmission of resources and values, parenting practices and the role of socio-economic conditions in shaping child development and intergenerational mobility.

Methodological innovations and future directions

Integration into the SOEP-Core data

The integration of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey into the long-standing SOEP-Core household survey (see Section 3.1), enables comparative longitudinal research on refugee integration. Established in 1984, SOEP-Core provides rich, multi-topic longitudinal data on the general population in Germany, serving as a benchmark for analysing the trajectories of refugees (Giesselmann et al., 2019). This linkage supports the investigation of key assimilation processes (Alba & Nee, 1997; Kalter & Granato, 2002), including structural assimilation by examining employment and wage disparities, cultural assimilation through

host country language acquisition, and social assimilation via engagement with the majority population's networks. Comparative analyses with the native-born population and other migrant groups are facilitated, allowing researchers to examine both general patterns and specific challenges that shape refugees' integration trajectories.

The integrated dataset also allows researchers to compare refugees with other migrant groups—such as labour or family migrants—on topics including the transferability of foreign-acquired human capital, the impact of visa types on integration trajectories, experiences of discrimination, the influence of ethnic social capital, transnational practices and the sense of belonging. These comparisons help contextualize refugee-specific experiences within the broader migration landscape.

Linkage with the administrative data
The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is linked to administrative labour market data and administrative data on participation in government-sponsored integration courses (see Section 3.3). The linkage with the labour market data enables detailed analyses of employment histories, unemployment spells, benefit receipt, and participation in active labour market programs (see Section 3.1). The high temporal resolution of the labour market (daily-level data) facilitates the use of sequence and cluster analyses to trace labour market pathways over time and examine how early experiences affect future trajectories in terms of income, job stability, or occupational mobility. The linkage to data on language courses enables analyses of how language course attendance relates to language proficiency and how course completion influences outcomes such as labour market participation and broader integration experiences. These linkages also permit evaluation of policy effectiveness by combining self-reported and administrative indicators.

COVID-19 supplementary surveys
The COVID-19 pandemic brought substantial disruptions to economic and social life, with disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations, including refugees. In response, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey was supplemented in 2020 and 2021 by targeted COVID-19 modules (Sakshaug et al., 2020), conducted alongside the SOEP-CoV special surveys (Kühne et al., 2020). These surveys covered pandemic-related developments in language course participation, employment, mental health, social interactions, and provide a basis for comparing the refugee population with the general public.

In 2021/2022, the RKI-SOEP-2 study was initiated, collecting serological and survey data from over 11,000 participants, including refugees (Bartig et al., 2023). It gathered information on vaccination status,

PCR test results, health conditions, symptoms of Long COVID, and the employment impacts. When linked with longitudinal refugee survey data, these materials allow researchers to study how the pandemic affected health and social inequalities among refugees. The combined data support analyses of pandemic effects across diverse demographic, occupational, and living environments.

Experimental survey designs
In addition to the survey data, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey incorporates innovative experimental designs to investigate the integration of refugees. In 2017, a randomized controlled trial was introduced to experimentally evaluate the effect of a mentoring program, with follow-up data showing improvements in refugees' social connections, housing satisfaction, and German language skills one year after intervention (Jaschke et al., 2022), highlighting the efficacy of targeted support. While the study documents short-term effects with these outcomes, further research could assess the program's long-term impact.

A 2018 choice experiment investigated refugees' decisions regarding vocational education, highlighting the role of credential transferability of qualifications and economic considerations on educational pursuits (Damelang & Kosyakova, 2021). Future research may examine the alignment between stated educational goals and actual behaviour but also consider how such experiments might directly inform and motivate human capital development among refugees. Future studies may also leverage the 2021 vignette experiment on naturalization intentions, which examined how liberalized legal requirements, and a more inclusive application process influenced refugees' willingness to pursue German citizenship (Kosyakova & Damelang, 2024). These data provide a basis for follow-up analyses in light of the 2023 amendments to the Citizenship Act, allowing researchers to assess whether the experimentally varied vignette dimensions are reflected in actual naturalization behaviour both among refugees and other immigrant groups.

Although experimental designs remain relatively uncommon in migration research, particularly in large-scale surveys, their integration into the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey offers novel analytical opportunities. Survey experiments complement longitudinal data by enabling causal inference and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of refugee decision-making and integration processes.

Natural experiments due to regional differences in settlement policies
The state-administered allocation of asylum-seekers to their initial residence regions combined with variations

in settlement policies across regions – including mandates directing refugees to inhabit particular zones within the host nation (see Fasani et al., 2022 for an overview) – creates conditions conducive to causal analysis for integration outcomes. Because initial place of residence is largely determined by administrative quotas rather than individual choice, local conditions can be treated as exogenous to refugees' integration outcomes. This facilitates research on how regional labour markets and institutional contexts affect economic and social integration (Fasani et al., 2022; Kogan & Kosyakova, 2023).

That is, contrary to the non-random selection of (forced) immigrants, the region-assigned residency of refugees allows researchers to sidestep selection bias in assessing the impact of regional characteristics on integration. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, with its detailed data on allocation, asylum procedure and residency (see Section 3.2), enables identification of refugees subject to specific residential and mobility restrictions. This creates the perquisites for regional and spatial analyses that make it possible to examine how context-related factors (such as labour demand and regional infrastructure) shape integration trajectories. Moreover, the dataset includes geocoded variables that can be linked to regional indicators. This enables researchers to study the influence of broader contextual factors, including the availability of language courses and childcare, the density of social networks, and the reception climate (e.g. Aksoy et al., 2023; Kanas & Kosyakova, 2023).

Take together, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data support research into how local environments function as either supportive or constraining in the integration process, helping to address questions that are difficult to study in settings where migrants choose their location of residence.

Research design of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP refugee survey

Study design and fieldwork

Up to now the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey targets refugees and asylum-seekers who arrived in Germany since 2013, with the survey waves published to date focussing on those who arrived up to 2019.[1] People who officially seek protection in Germany as refugees must first register with a government agency immediately on or after their arrival. There, they are first registered and then allocated a place within Germany. At the assigned location, those affected are accommodated in a reception facility, where they are obliged to live for up to six months, or even longer under certain conditions. Even after being accommodated in a reception facility, refugees are subject to restrictions on their choice of

place of residence, the duration of which depends in particular on their residential status and employment. This initial spatial distribution and restriction of the choice of place of residence is an important aspect that distinguishes refugees from other migrants. In addition, access to the labour market is restricted, especially during the asylum procedure.

The asylum applications of refugees are processed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), whereby the decision is based on a personal interview and of a detailed examination of documents and items of evidence. Four forms of protection are possible: a) entitlement to asylum, b) refugee protection, c) subsidiary protection or d) a ban on deportation. The rights associated with the first three forms of protection are similar; in the case of a ban on deportation, the length of stay granted until an extension is applied for is shorter and access to the labour market is partially restricted. When none of the four forms of protection can be considered, the asylum application is rejected and the person concerned must leave Germany again.[2] The sample of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey includes refugees regardless of the outcome of their asylum procedure, i.e. all four forms of protection are taken into account. To date, four random subsamples of anchor persons have been drawn from the Central Register of Foreigners (AZR) maintained by BAMF between 2015 and 2020 to construct the sample. Anchor persons serve as key respondents through whom all household members are contacted. The survey's period-staggered subsampling serves two primary purposes: to regularly refresh and augment the sample. This approach compensates for participants who become inaccessible or unwilling to continue and includes new refugee populations arriving in Germany. To ensure adequate regional representation, a two-stage sampling procedure was used. Regional clusters formed the primary sampling units (PSUs), while the secondary sampling units (SSUs) were anchor persons and their households. In Germany, local immigration offices maintain the addresses of the refugees. Their catchment areas were used as PSUs, with offices having fewer refugees combined to ensure adequate sample sizes. Specifically, each PSU included at least 300 refugees, and the grouping of offices was carried out within the borders of the federal states, and where possible, within the municipalities and counties.

To ensure meaningful comparisons between subgroups, the survey employed strategic oversampling of certain refugee groups. Refugees with granted protection were given higher inclusion probabilities due to their increased likelihood of staying in Germany, making them of particular interest for the study's objectives. Additionally, the inclusion probabilities were adjusted based on the refugees' country of origin and gender.

Table 1 Net Case Numbers and Response Rates along Subsamples and Waves

	Date of Arrival	Wave 2016		Wave 2017		Wave 2018		Wave 2019		Wave 2020		Wave 2021	
		N	RR	N	RR	N	RR	N	RR	N	RR	N	RR
Household level (anchor person)													
Subsample 1 (M3)	Jan 2013	1,673	0.41	1,089	0.61	979	0.63	823	0.65	764	0.74	410	0.47
Subsample 2 (M4)	- Jan 2016	1,600	0.43	1,259	0.71	1,058	0.66	941	0.69	832	0.75	448	0.48
Subsample 3 (M5)	Jan 2013 - Dec 2016	–	–	1,519	0.51	1,005	0.63	929	0.62	812	0.69	423	0.45
Subsample 4 (M6)	Jan 2013 -Jan 2019	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1,141	0.38	382	0.33
Person level (adults)													
Subsample 1 (M3)	–	2,205	0.77	1,535	0.50	1,360	0.49	1,147	0.48	979	0.50	632	0.37
Subsample 2 (M4)		2,239	0.72	1,892	0.56	1,569	0.49	1,436	0.52	1,211	0.51	773	0.37
Subsample 3 (M5)		–	–	2,252	0.79	1,422	0.48	1,317	0.47	1,067	0.47	662	0.36
Subsample 4 (M6)		–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1,216	0.63	567	0.29

Notes: N number of realized cases; response rate RR calculated as RR2 according to AAPOR with all surveyable households and all surveyable adults in the households, respectively, being the reference set, see https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf.
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey integrated in SOEP v39; datasets 'hbrutto' for household level (variable 'hergz' for 2016-2020 and 'haarpor' for 2021) and 'pbrutto' for person level (variable 'pergz' for 2016-2020 and 'paaror' for 2021). Stata do-files available under available under https://github.com/bieneSchwarze/StudyPaper_IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Refugee-Survey.

For instance, refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq were prominently featured in the first two subsamples, those from Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia in the third (for further details, see Jacobsen et al., 2019; Kühne et al., 2019), and from East and West Africa in the fourth (for further details, see Steinhauer et al., 2023). Women were also oversampled compared to men.

The sampling strategy allowed for population-level inference, but non-response and attrition can still introduce bias. To mitigate this challenge, the survey design incorporated two corrective mechanisms. First, the AZR sampling frame provides basic information (e.g. age, gender, country of origin, legal status) for both respondents and non-respondents, facilitating adjustments for non-responders. Second, interviewers recorded contextual information on all sample addresses, including the housing type and the neighbourhood conditions, enabling detailed post-stratification and calibration of design weights.

Asylum-seekers and refugees who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2019 are an integral part of the SOEP-Core's target population of private households in Germany. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey naturally complements the SOPE-Core, with this integration reflected in the derivation of design weights and adjustments for under-coverage (Siegers et al., 2022). Both, the person- and household-level survey weights,[3] alongside (predominantly) comparable questionnaires with the SOEP-Core (see Section 3.2), facilitate joint analyses of the refugee sample with

all other SOEP-Core samples (as discussed in Section 2.4.1). The standard guideline for using survey weights states that weights are essential for descriptive statistics aimed at population-level assertions. However, the applicability of survey weights for statistical inference varies depending on the research design. For instance, weights designed for specific populations within a particular year may be less suitable for life-course analyses (for a comprehensive guidance on the use of survey weights, see Solon et al., 2015).

During the survey, there were wave-specific non-responses and permanent attrition. Table 1 outlines the subsamples, including person- and household-level response rates and sample sizes. By 2021, the survey encompasses six annual waves and included 6,421 households with 22,271 individuals – 58 per cent of whom are adults. Household-level response rates ranged from 33 to 75 per cent across waves, while individual (adult) response rates ranged from 29 and 79 Per cent. For example, the initially high willingness of refugee households to participate declined over time, falling below the levels observed in other SOEP-Core samples (Jacobsen & Siegert, 2023). This trend is primarily due to a compositional effect: once socio-demographic and interviewer characteristics are controlled for (in regression modelling), refugees' predicted response probabilities are higher than for other immigrants and are similar to the general population in the SOEP-Core. Understanding the factors that contribute to data loss due to non-response and attrition

enables appropriate statistical analyses. For example, regression modelling can be used to calculate nonresponse adjustment factors, which are then applied to derive survey weights adjusted for non-response (see, e.g. Siegers et al., 2022). Additionally, insights into the determinants of non-response can be directly incorporated into statistical modelling, either by formulating a corresponding selection equation alongside the primary model or directly integrating the relevant factors as independent variables.

The fieldwork was conducted by KANTAR Public (2016–2020) and infas (from 2021). The primary data collection method of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Prior to each wave, anchor persons received a postal letter outlining the study's aims and informing them of upcoming contact by interviewers. The letter included a brochure with information on selected study topics. The study's multilingual website (https://www. leben-in-deutschland.de/)[4] provides additional resources in Arabic, English, and German. Since 2021, in addition to CAPI, the survey has incorporated computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) and computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI). These modes help reduce field time and alleviate survey burden on respondents. Table 2 presents the usage rates across modes.

The survey institute responsible for conducting the IAB-BAMB-SOEP Refugee Survey prioritized the recruitment of interviewers proficient in the respondents' languages and expanded this pool over the course of the study. In the early waves, many interviewers had limited prior experience in large-scale scientific surveys, which posed potential risks to data quality. To address this, the survey institute implemented comprehensive interviewer training programs, provided detailed manuals, and established mentorship structures for or less experienced staff. Fieldwork quality was further supported through regular supervision and review procedures. A general support hotline was also available to address interviewers' and interviewees' questions.

To facilitate communication and ensure data quality, all study materials, including the questionnaires (see Section 3.2 for details), were translated into the major languages spoken by the refugee population (see Table 3). Interviewers were typically fluent in participants' native or closely related languages. In cases where a language match was not possible (such as in remote rural areas), bilingual interviews were conducted using both German and the respondent's language, with interviewers using bilingual translation aids to facilitate communication. From 2016 to 2021, 96 per cent of all interviews (24,485 of 25,449 interviews) were conducted in a language other than German.

To detect potential irregularities in data collection, the study group developed and employed statistical tools that analyse paradata, such as time stamps and other falsification indicators (Schwanhäuser et al., 2022; Schwanhäuser & Olbrich, 2024). These tools are regularly used during the field periods. Suspect cases were flagged during fieldwork and reviewed in consultation with interviewers, if needed, respondents. When data quality concerns could not be resolved, re-interviews were conducted. Between 2016 and 2021, approximately two to seven percent of interviews were flagged for closer examination. These procedures reflect the study's systematic efforts to ensure data reliability and integrity.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP study population represents a classical hard-to-survey population. Refugees are often highly mobile, particularly in the early stages of resettlement. Thus, follow-up interviews in later waves require targeted and extensive tracking measures. Among other strategies, the study team conducted regular address updates through the German postal system to maintain contact with participants across waves.

Questionnaires and related datasets

The questionnaire design of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey builds on the framework of its host study, the SOEP-Core. This integration facilitates using synergies by embedding the refugee survey instruments within a well-established survey development process. The SOEP-Core has operated as a high-quality large-scale longitudinal household panel in Germany for nearly four decades. Aligning with this infrastructure ensures both methodological rigor and comparability across population groups. The refugee survey's questionnaires are designed to allow direct comparison with the autochthone population in Germany and other migrant groups included in the SOEP-Core (e.g. resettlers and ethnic German repatriates from the former Soviet Union and Turkish labour migrants). Like SOEP-Core, the refugee survey consists of five main instruments (see Table 2).

The *household questionnaire*, administered annually to a household reference person aged 18 or older, collects data on housing, household income and expenses, school attendance, childcare. The *individual questionnaire*, also annual, covers subjective and objective life circumstances such as education, employment, leisure activities, health, values and attitudes. In addition, adolescents aged 12 years and older are actively surveyed on their development in the areas of language proficiency, health, personality, education and vocational training, leisure activities and social networks. A separate *biography questionnaire*, is administered once to each first-time respondent, collecting retrospective data on forced migration, legal status, and education and employment histories prior to arrival in Germany.

Table 2 Questionnaires of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey

Questionnaire	Topics	Respondent	Survey rhythm	Average duration in min.	Completeness of instruments (2021)	Survey mode (portion in 2021)	Dataset name
Household questionnaire	Housing, household-related income and expenses, school attendance, care of children living in the household	Head of household (one person aged 18 or older)	Annually	25	100%	CAPIbyPhone (57%), CAPI (33%), CATI (10%)	hl, kidlong
Individual questionnaire (up to 2021 the 'Person (P) Questionnaire for Repeat Respondents')	Subjective and objective characteristics of life such as education, employment, leisure time activities, physical and mental health, attitudes	Person aged 18 or older	Annually	45	76%	CAPIbyPhone (58%), CAPI (28%), CATI (5%), CAWI 2, CASI (6%)	pl
Biography questionnaire (up to 2021 the 'Person and Biography (PB) Questionnaire for First-Time Respondents')	History of forced migration, legal status, first residence, individual history in different areas of life.	Person aged 18 or older	Once	35	65%	CAPIbyPhone (45%), CAPI (22%), CAWI (11%), CASI (22%)	biol
Youth questionnaire	Background, languages, health, personality, education and vocational training, leisure activities, networks	Pre-teens and teens between the ages of 12 and 17	Annually since 2023, previously every 2-3 years	25	47%	CAPIbyPhone (56%), CAPI (22%), CATI (6%), CAWI (12%), CASI (4%)	jugendl biopupil
Child questionnaire	Health, personality, skills development, school attendance, childcare	One parent provides information on all children in the household between the ages of 0 and 11	Annually since 2022, previously every 2-3 years	15	85%	CAPIbyPhone (61%), CAPI (31%), CAWI (4%), CASI (4%)	bioagel

Notes: CAPI: Computer Assisted Personal Interview, CAWI: Computer Assisted Web Interview, CASI: Computer Assisted Self-Interview, CATI: Computer Assisted Telephone Interview, CAPIbyPhone: Special form of CAPI on the phone during Corona time. All dataset names refer to the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey integrated in SOEP version v39. The naming remains the same in the following waves/versions.

In addition, two instruments focus on younger household members. The *youth questionnaire*, completed by adolescents aged 12 to 17, captures information on language skills, health, personality traits, education, vocational training, leisure activities, and social networks. The *child questionnaire*, completed by one parent, gathers data on children under 12 years, including health, personality, skills development, schooling, and childcare.

These instruments allow for both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of refugee households and their members. The total survey duration per household varies depending on household's size. The household questionnaire takes approximately 25 minutes; individual interviews last around 45 minutes; the biography module approximately 35 minutes. The youth and child instruments require 25 and 15 minutes, respectively.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and full instrument completion cannot always be achieved. Nonetheless, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey maintains relatively high completeness: In 2021, 100 per cent of household questionnaires were complete, along with 76 per cent of personal interviews.

Table 3 Number of Interviews of Adults, along Waves and offered Languages

Wave	German/ English	German/ Arabic	German/ Farsi	German/ Pashtu	German/ Urdu	German/ Kurmanji	German/ French	Without any translation
2016	727	2,891	571	47	77	152	-	-
2017	630	3,871	790	48	98	133	-	21
2018	366	3,310	528	33	56	51	-	30
2019	108	3,119	373	28	30	51	-	195
2020	216	3,538	344	15	27	20	39	274
2021	48	1,951	201	-	-	-	-	437

Note: Individual questionnaires counted. '-' language not offered.
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey integrated in SOEP v39, wave specific p-data files (variable 'pspvers') for 2016-2020 and instrumentation data set (variable 'start_language') for 2021. Stata do-files available under https://github.com/bieneSchwarze/StudyPaper_IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Refugee-Survey.

Completion rates for biography, youth, and child questionnaires were 65, 47, and 85 per cent, respectively. Missing one-time instruments like the biography questionnaires are reattempted in subsequent waves. To maximize completeness, the study employs a mixed-mode design. Respondents may complete in person with an interviewer (in CAPI mode), online independently (in CAWI mode), self-administered in the presence of an interviewer (on a tablet in CASI mode), or by phone (in CATI mode), with this latter option being an exception. During the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), a phone-based adaptation of CAPI (CAPIbyPhone) was used as the main mode due to contact restrictions. Table 2 presents the shares of modes realized by questionnaire type in 2021. The table further includes the names of the datasets where the data from the five questionnaires of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey are located.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is integrated into the standard data generation and provision process of the SOEP-Core. Data processing follows standard quality assurance protocol, including:

1. **Metadata Check**: The raw data delivered by the survey institute are cross-referenced checked against metadata specifications to ensure completeness and accuracy.
2. **ID Check**: Respondent and household identifiers are verified by comparing survey data with gross sample data and previous wave records, ensuring correct assignment of IDs.
3. **Integration Check**: The data are transformed into both wide format and long formats, with consistency checks applied at each stages. These include verifying variable labels, valid values, and frequency distributions across waves.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey provides a broad set of variables presented in a user-friendly manner, tailored for research on migration and integration. Included among these variables are identifiers capable of pinpointing specific demographic groups within the respondent pool, such as *germborn, corigin, immiyear, migback*, and *arefback*, all contained within the *ppathl* dataset. The general SOEP-Core infrastructure also includes datasets relevant to migrants and refugee research, such as *bioimmig* (offering detailed information on individual migration histories), *camces* (providing standardized coding of educational attainment for migrants and refugees using computer-assisted methods), and *bioresidrefinG* (including data on refugees' residence histories in Germany).

For spatial analysis, anonymized geographic identifiers are available for both households and individuals. These enable linkage with regional indicators, such as population density or poverty rates, at multiple geographic levels, including federal states, regional planning areas, counties, municipalities, and zip codes.

Linkage with the labour market and integration courses data

The data of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey are linked to two administrative data sources, further enhancing its research potential beyond its large-scale longitudinal design.

First, the survey is linked to the Integrated Employment Biographies (IEB) of the German Federal Employment Agency, which provide detailed daily records on employment, earnings, benefit receipt, and participation in labour market programs (Antoni et al., 2023). Across all survey waves, about 86 per cent of the roughly 10.000 respondents asked for consent agreed to data linkage. Of these, 84 per cent were successfully linked and had at least one spell recorded in the IEB, yielding a total of 6,955 individuals with administrative (un)employment histories.

Second, the survey is linked to the BAMF's Integration Course Business File (InGe), which documents

participation in integration courses, course structure, providers, and final exam results ('Deutschtest für Zuwanderer'). Consent for this linkage has been requested since the 2019 wave. Since then, 87 per cent of the approached respondents provided consent, and 86 per cent of them could be successfully linked, resulting in 3,194 matched cases.

Beyond their use for empirical analyses, the administrative linkages also enable validation of survey responses against official records, thereby improving measurement quality and supporting more precise analyses of employment histories, integration course participation, and other core dimensions of refugee integration.

Data ethics, privacy, and access

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey collects not only factual information on socio-economic demographics like origin, age, gender, marital status, housing, and income, but also data on attitudes, experiences, including reasons for flight and subjective well-being. Sensitive topics are addressed with care. To avoid causing psychological distress, the survey deliberately refrains from asking about specific traumatic events such as exposure to violence, war or loss of family members or relatives. Instead, reasons for fleeing are captured in broader categories such as 'war', 'persecution', and 'forced recruitment in the country of origin'. Similarly, questions on flight experiences focus on general events like robbery or arbitrary detention. Interviewers receive dedicated training to handle these topics sensitively and are familiarized with the potential vulnerabilities of the target population. Fieldwork is closely monitored through regular, which help identify and address challenges early. To reinforce voluntary participation, questions about flight experiences are preceded by a filter item that explicitly gives respondents the option to opt out. The filter reads: 'Next, we have a few questions about experiences related to your flight. Some of these questions may touch on negative experiences. Would you like to proceed with answering these questions, or would you prefer not to?' (Response options: yes/no).

Before the main survey began, a pilot study was conducted to test the accessibility and appropriateness of the questionnaire (Brücker et al., 2016). This included interviews 123 refugees from major countries of origin and 26 experts in refugee support work. The study pilot found no evidence of significant psychological or physical strain among participants (Brücker et al., 2016). Ongoing monitoring during fieldwork (including long-term assessments) has similarly revealed no indications that the survey questions result in psychological distress among respondents.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey adheres to the same strict data protection protocols as the SOEP-Core: Participation is voluntary, and individuals retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time. All data are anonymized to prevent re-identification. Respondents receive a detailed data protection statement and must provide informed consent before participating in the longitudinal study.[5] Moreover, the respondents have been informed that their participation or non-participation will not affect a possible asylum procedure or their legal status in Germany.

Researchers affiliated with universities or research institutions can access data free of charge for academic and educational purposes. Access requires signing a user agreement,[6] and upon approval, the data can be securely download through a designated website-based data transfer system hosted by the SOEP Research Data Centre (RDC).[7] Access to the data with regional identifiers requires an expanded data distribution contract and an expanded data protection concept[8] or could be accessed through guest researcher workstations at the SOEP RDC. Access to datasets linked to administrative records, such as IEBs, is provided through the RDC of the IAB. SOEP offers various forms of user assistance, including hotlines, websites, and educational programs, which encompass support for the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey as well.

Socio-demographics of refugees

The socio-demographic overview of the refugee population captured in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey offers valuable insights into key characteristics such as age, gender, education, origin, residence status, and household composition across survey waves. By presenting background information at both the individual and household level, it becomes clear how these socio-demographic and migration-related characteristics form an essential basis for analysing refugees' living situations, integration processes, and social participation patterns. This overview also highlights the considerable research potential of the dataset, as outlined in Section 2. Table 4 presents the distribution of adult respondents by age, sex and educational attainment across survey years (weighted figures in the Appendix Table A1). Because of refreshment samples in 2017 and 2020 and attrition over time (see Section 3.1), the absolute and relative sample characteristics vary by wave. Across all waves, the sample is skewed towards younger age groups, with between 47 and 62 per cent under the age of 35 and only 14 to 23 per cent are older than 45 years. The gender ratio is relatively stable, with men accounting for 59 to 64 per cent of respondents. Regarding educational attainment prior to migration (measured by the ISCED 2011 educational classification), around 39 to 43 per cent had low education levels (ISCED 0–1), while 11 to 13 per cent had a tertiary degrees (ISCED 6–8).

Table 4 Socio-demographics of adult respondents along all waves from 2016 to 2021

	Wave											
	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%
Age Groups												
18-25	1,097	24.6%	1,538	27.5%	1,065	24.3%	814	20.8%	952	21.3%	501	19.0%
26-35	1,628	36.5%	1,909	34.1%	1,444	33.0%	1,269	32.5%	1,469	32.8%	749	28.4%
36-45	1,130	25.3%	1,329	23.8%	1,125	25.7%	1,082	27.7%	1,213	27.1%	781	29.6%
46-59	536	12.0%	697	12.5%	633	14.5%	625	16.0%	712	15.9%	493	18.7%
60+	73	1.6%	122	2.2%	109	2.5%	116	3.0%	127	2.8%	112	4.2%
Sex												
Men	2,773	62.1%	3,363	60.1%	2,640	60.3%	2,350	60.2%	2,851	63.7%	1,552	58.9%
Women	1,692	37.9%	2,232	39.9%	1,736	39.7%	1,556	39.8%	1,622	36.3%	1,084	41.1%
Education before Moving to Germany												
ISCED 0	828	20.0%	1,035	19.8%	765	18.9%	746	20.9%	896	23.0%	452	20.3%
ISCED 1	778	18.8%	1,075	20.5%	852	21.0%	755	21.2%	755	19.9%	456	20.5%
ISCED 2	952	23.0%	1,230	23.5%	962	23.7%	815	22.9%	879	22.5%	506	22.8%
ISCED 3/4	1,024	24.8%	1,235	23.6%	969	23.9%	811	22.8%	905	23.2%	522	23.5%
ISCED 6/7/8	550	13.3%	661	12.6%	510	12.6%	437	12.3%	446	11.4%	287	12.9%

Note: ISCED-coding: 0 = Less than primary education/No school; 1 = Primary education; 2 = Secondary Education; 3/4 = Secondary Education II/Post-secondary non-tertiary education; 5 = Short-cycle tertiary education (but not found in data); 6/7/8 = Bachelor's/ Master's/ Doctoral or equivalent level.
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey integrated in SOEP v39; datasets 'biol', 'pgen', 'pl', and 'ppathl' (age groups based on the variables 'gebjahr' and 'ple0010_h'; sex based on the variable 'sex'; education based on the variables 'lb0183', 'lb0228', 'lr3076', 'lr3078', 'lr3079', 'plj0709', 'pgpsbila', and 'pgpbbila'). Stata do-files available under https://github.com/bieneSchwarze/StudyPaper_IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Refugee-Survey.

Table 5 illustrates the diversity of refugee migration in terms of country of origin, year of migration, and residence status (weighted figures in Appendix Table A2). Syrian nationals form the largest group, making up 49 to 63 per cent across waves. Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea/Somalia follow, with smaller shares for other origin groups. More than half of the respondents arrived in 2015 (57 to 60 per cent), followed by the neighbouring years 2014 and 2016. The 2020 refreshment sample expanded coverage to later arrivals, increasing the share of individuals arriving in 2017 or later from 3 per cent in 2019 to 9 per cent in 2021. Although the survey primarily targets refugees who applied for asylum from 2013 onwards, around 1 per cent arrived earlier. This includes persons who had lived in Germany before seeking asylum or household members who joined anchor persons later.

As outlined in Section 3.1, the sample includes individuals with different residence statuses, ranging from those with temporary or permanent permits to those remaining in Germany under a temporary suspension of deportation ('Duldung'), with the distribution of these statuses shifting noticeably over time. In early survey waves, the share of respondents with ongoing asylum procedures was relatively high (33 per cent in 2016 and 18 per cent in 2017), decreasing to 6 and 4 per cent in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Accordingly, the proportion of respondents holding a residence or settlement permit increased from 55 per cent in 2016 to 88 per cent in 2021. The share of individuals with a temporary suspension of deportation initially stood at 7 per cent in 2016, dropped below 5 per cent from 2017 to 2019, rose again to 7 per cent in 2020 due to the inclusion of more recent arrivals, and fell to 5 per cent in 2021.

As a household survey, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey collects information on all household members, enabling detailed analyses of household-level characteristics (see Section 3.2). Table 6 presents two key indicators of refugee households: household composition and type of accommodation (weighted figures in Appendix Table A3). The most common household type across all waves is couples with children (47 to 55 per cent), including both couples with only children under 16 (36 to 39 per cent) and couples with children of mixed age groups (7 to 14 per cent). Single-person

Table 5 Migration related characteristics of adult respondents along all waves from 2016 to 2021

	Wave											
	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%
Citizenship												
Syria	2,194	49.1%	2,904	51.9%	2,410	55.1%	2,272	58.2%	2,434	54.4%	1,672	63.4%
Afghanistan	573	12.8%	760	13.6%	560	12.8%	441	11.3%	421	9.0%	185	7.0%
Iraq	578	12.9%	767	13.7%	583	13.3%	541	13.9%	521	11.6%	307	11.6%
Eritrea/Somalia	302	6.8%	370	6.6%	283	6.5%	233	6.0%	392	8.8%	118	4.5%
Iran	61	1.4%	118	2.1%	68	1.6%	55	1.4%	94	2.1%	56	2.1%
Former USSR	179	4.0%	166	3.0%	98	2.2%	74	1.9%	72	1.6%	26	1.0%
West Balkans	214	4.8%	102	1.8%	64	1.5%	47	1.2%	49	1.1%	15	0.6%
Rest Africa	121	2.7%	134	2.4%	93	2.1%	65	1.7%	254	5.7%	82	3.1%
Other/Stateless	243	5.4%	274	4.9%	217	5.0%	178	4.6%	236	5.3%	175	6.6%
Year of Migration												
2013 or earlier	534	12.0%	371	6.7%	300	7.0%	210	5.6%	209	4.9%	111	4.6%
2014	1,156	26.0%	874	15.8%	705	16.6%	575	15.3%	595	14.0%	318	13.3%
2015	2,536	57.1%	3,263	58.9%	2,517	59.1%	2,241	59.7%	2,405	56.4%	1,387	58.0%
2016	212	4.8%	980	17.7%	650	15.3%	607	16.2%	681	16.0%	359	15.0%
2017 or later	0	0.0%	55	1.0%	84	2.0%	123	3.3%	375	8.8%	218	9.1%
Residence Title												
Asylum procedure ongoing	1,444	33.1%	1,015	18.4%	551	12.9%	353	9.2%	262	6.1%	91	4.0%
Temporary permission to remain ('Duldung')	300	6.9%	259	4.7%	201	4.7%	180	4.7%	279	6.5%	108	4.7%
Residence or settlement permit	2,414	55.4%	3,967	72.1%	3,399	79.5%	3,232	84.2%	3,693	85.9%	2,003	87.9%
No residence title	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	48	1.1%	20	0.5%	21	0.5%	16	0.7%
Other Title	202	4.6%	265	4.8%	75	1.8%	57	1.5%	41	1.0%	61	2.7%

Note: Citizenship refers to the first indication of citizenship provided by the respondent, regardless of whether other nationalities were mentioned in subsequent waves of the survey.
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey integrated in SOEP v39; datasets 'pgen' and 'pl' (first citizenship based on the variable 'plj0014_h'; year of migration based on the variables 'lr3130' and 'lr3131'; residence title based on the variables 'plj0680_v1' and 'plj0680_v2'). Stata do-files available under https://github.com/bieneSchwarze/StudyPaper_IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Refugee-Survey.

households are the second most common group (between 26 and 31 per cent), of which just over 90 per cent are male households. Single-parent households consistently make up about 8 to 9 per cent of the sample. These patterns are relatively stable over time, though the share of single-person households slightly increased in 2020 following the related refreshment sample (i.e. M6).

To ensure that the refugee population in Germany was covered irrespective of their legal status and from an early stage, data collection took place in both private and shared accommodations, including reception centres. In terms of housing, the data capture the transition from collective accommodation to private housing as refugees settle over time. In 2016, 36 per cent of refugee households in the sample lived in shared accommodation; by 2021, this share had fallen to 9 per cent. This development reflects broader settlement patterns and integration trajectories within the refugee population.

Conclusion and outlook

Forced migration has long been a part of human mobility, but recent decades have witnessed substantial increases in refugee populations, particularly in Europe, driven by armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. These dynamics are likely to persist and may intensify due to global tensions, climate change impacts, and accessible escape routes, as noted by Burzyński *et al.*, (2022) and Geddes, (2015).

Table 6 Household characteristics of adult respondents along all waves from 2016 to 2021

	Wave											
	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%	total	%
Type of Household and Number of Children in the Household												
Single Person Household	1,015	31.0%	1,119	29.4%	800	26.3%	694	25.8%	1,070	30.1%	424	25.6%
(Married) Couples without Children	90	2.7%	137	3.6%	108	3.6%	87	3.2%	150	4.2%	64	3.9%
Single Parents	309	9.4%	309	8.1%	275	9.0%	235	8.7%	309	8.7%	147	8.9%
Couple with Children under 16	1,273	38.9%	1,466	38.5%	1,198	39.4%	1,056	39.2%	1,272	35.9%	607	36.6%
Couple with Children older 16	36	1.1%	48	1.3%	58	1.9%	58	2.2%	106	3.0%	75	4.5%
Couple with Children younger and older 16	233	7.1%	320	8.4%	331	10.9%	355	13.2%	409	11.5%	225	13.6%
Multi-Generation Household	49	1.5%	73	1.9%	51	1.7%	37	1.4%	31	0.9%	18	1.1%
Other Combination	268	8.2%	338	8.9%	221	7.3%	171	6.3%	202	5.7%	98	5.9%
Type of Accommodation												
Shared Accommodation	1,168	35.7%	1,196	31.4%	611	20.1%	378	14.0%	483	13.6%	141	8.5%
Privat Accommodation	2,105	64.3%	2,614	68.6%	2,431	79.9%	2,289	85.0%	3,004	84.6%	1,475	88.8%
Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	26	1.0%	62	1.7%	45	2.7%

Note: The category 'other combination' for household type refers to special household types such as an apartment-sharing community. The category 'other accommodation' which is part of the accommodation types refers to dormitories and in some few cases to institutions such as retirement homes.
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees integrated in SOEP v39; datasets 'hgen' and 'hl' (type of household based on the variable 'hgtyp1hh'; type of accommodation based on the variables 'hlj0005_h' and '&hlj0005_v2'). Stata do-files available under https://github.com/bieneSchwarze/StudyPaper_IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Refugee-Survey.

A solid empirical foundation is essential to understand the situation of refugees, assess their integration into host countries, and inform policies that address the needs of both refugees and the host population requires. Within this context, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey offers a valuable data infrastructure for studying forced migration and integration. By combining a register-based random sample with high-quality longitudinal data collection, the survey enables detailed analyses of refugee experiences and integration trajectories. It facilitates research that accounts for heterogeneity and intersectionality and supports policy development grounded in empirical evidence. Covering a wide range of societal, economic, and psychosocial dimensions, the dataset provides a strong empirical basis for analysing the living conditions and aspirations of refugees.

The integration of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey into the broader SOEP-Core enhances its analytical potential for sociological research. Through harmonized questionnaires and a shared data infrastructure, the survey allows for comparative analyses between refugees households, the native population.

This setup enables the positioning of refugee experiences within broader societal and economic developments in Germany and supports research on how structural contexts shape migration and integration processes. Open access via the SOEP RDC promotes broad scholarly use and contributes to cumulative research efforts. Comparable longitudinal studies, such as *FIMAS* in Austria (e.g. Landesmann et al., 2023) and *New Refugees in the Netherlands* (e.g. Damen et al., 2022), offer additional opportunities for cross-country comparisons, especially regarding integration policies and institutional frameworks. Register-based data from Scandinavian countries can further supplement comparative analyses and provide insights into the long-term effects of different policy environments.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is an ongoing panel study, with regular sample refreshes to reflect more recent refugee movements. Following Russia's invasion into Ukraine in February 2022, a new collaborative large-scale survey study of 12,000 Ukrainian refugees in Germany was lunched by four major research institutions in Germany – the IAB, the BiB (Federal Institute for Population Research),

the BAMF-FZ (Research Center of the BAMF), and the SOEP (Brücker et al., 2023). Half of the IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP-Ukraine Survey participants together with newly sampled 800 Ukrainian refugees' households were integrated into the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey's dataset in 2023. Together with newly sampled households of recent refugees in Germany, particularly from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, the total refreshment added around 4,500 refugee households expanding the scope and representativeness of the study.

The implementation and continuity of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey are made possible through the synergistic collaboration of three institutions: BAMF-FZ, IAB, and SOEP. The BAMF-FZ provides migration expertise, particularly in German context, and access to the AZR. The IAB contributes knowledge on labour market and social welfare system, drawing on its research unit on migration and integration (INTER) and access to the register of employment histories (IEBs). The SOEP offers decades of experience in panel survey design and data infrastructure within which the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is integrated. This institutional partnership underpins the study's methodological robustness and long-term sustainability.

In summary, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is a key resource for analysing forced migration and integration in Germany. Its design, data depth, and integration into the SOEP-Core position it as an important infrastructure for migration research. As global displacement continues to evolve, this survey will remain central to understanding refugee experiences and supporting evidence-based responses to migration-related challenges.

Notes

1. This manuscript focuses on data collected prior to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine to a full-scale war in February 2022. A comprehensive description of subsequent waves of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey is reserved for future work.
2. For a detailed description of the asylum procedure in Germany, see Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2024) .
3. The household-level survey-weight is called '$hhrf' and the person-level survey weight is called '$phrf', which $ denotes the wave denominator. Both weights are given in the datasets 'phrf' and 'hhrf'. They refer to the target population at the survey year. Apart from these weights, the datasets include so called 'stay' factors on the person- and the household-level: '$hbleib' and '$pbleib'. These factors give the inverse probability of remaining in the panel while compensating for those sample entities not attending the survey in the specific survey year.

4. The respondents know the study as 'Leben in Deutschland [Life in Germany]', not as the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey since this denomination is far too technical.
5. See also the study's data privacy webpage hosted by the survey institute: https://www.infas.de/aktuelle-befragun-gen/datenschutz-fuer-befragte/ (in German).
6. The form for the data user contract can be found at https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.601584.en/data_access.html.
7. The DOI of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is: 10.5684/soep.iab-bamf-soep-mig.2022.
8. More detailed information is available at https://www.diw.de/en/diw_02.c.222519.en/.

Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are available at *ESR* online.

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Author contributions

Herbert Brücker (Conceptualization [lead], Funding acquisition [lead], Investigation [lead], Methodology [supporting], Project administration [lead], Writing - original draft [lead]), Yuliya Kosyakova (Conceptualization [lead], Data curation [supporting], Funding acquisition [supporting], Investigation [lead], Methodology [supporting], Project administration [lead], Software [supporting], Supervision [lead], Validation [lead], Writing - original draft [lead]), Nina Rother (Conceptualization [lead], Investigation [equal], Project administration [lead], Supervision [supporting], Writing - original draft [supporting]), Sabine Zinn (Conceptualization [lead], Data curation [supporting], Funding acquisition [lead], Investigation [lead], Methodology [lead], Project administration [lead], Supervision [lead], Validation [supporting], Writing - original draft [lead]), Elisabeth Liebau (Data curation [supporting], Investigation [supporting], Project administration [lead], Validation [lead], Writing - original draft [supporting]), Wenke Gider (Writing - original draft [equal]), Silvia Schwanhäuser (Data curation [lead], Project administration [supporting], Software [lead], Validation [lead], Visualization [supporting], Writing - original draft [supporting]), and Manuel Siegert (Data curation [supporting], Investigation [supporting], Methodology [lead], Validation [supporting], Writing - original draft [supporting])

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Data availability

The R files and the Stata-do files for replication of the figures given in Tables 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 are available at https://github.com/bieneSchwarze/StudyPaper_IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Refugee-Survey. All data work can be carried out directly based on the latest published data version v39 of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey (DOI:10.5684/soep.iab-bamf-soep-mig.2022).

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