

STATE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION





State of Immigrant Integration – Germany

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State of Immigrant Integration: **GERMANY**

As the OECD's second largest immigrant-receiving country in absolute terms after the United States, integration is a key policy issue in Germany. The present *State of Immigrant Integration – Germany* report, the first in a new OECD series, provides an overview of the integration outcomes of immigrants and their descendants in Germany in international comparison (see **Box 1**). The report highlights the main characteristics of the immigrant population and key integration issues in Germany. The comparative analysis with other major OECD immigrant destinations provides a benchmark for identifying integration challenges and strengths in Germany.¹ The OECD Secretariat would like to thank the Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration of the Federal Republic of Germany, who has equally been appointed Commissioner for Anti-Racism in 2022, for supporting this report.

This report is based on the joint OECD-EU indicators of immigrant integration (see OECD/European Commission, 2023^[1]) and other comparative information by the OECD. Additional analyses were conducted using cross-national surveys such as the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), the EU Statistics of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), the European Social Survey (ESS) and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

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Box 1 **Definition of the immigrant population**

This report defines immigrants as individuals born outside of Germany, regardless of whether they hold German citizenship. People born in Germany are referred to as native-born. This definition recognises that while citizenship can change over time, birthplace does not. Additionally, the conditions for obtaining host country citizenship vary across countries, making international comparisons based on this criterion difficult. This report avoids the term 'immigration background' or 'immigration history' – which is often employed to refer to both immigrants and their native-born offspring (i.e. native-born children with two immigrant parents) – and analyses the integration outcomes of these two groups separately.² Indeed, the challenges faced by persons born abroad, especially those who immigrated as adults, differ from those of their children who were born and raised in the host country.



1. These are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States. They are referred to as "major destinations" in this report.

2. The terminology used in this report differs from the concept of immigrants and their direct descendants used in Germany and recommended by the Federal Government's Expert Commission on the Framework Conditions for Integration in 2021. According to this definition, individuals who immigrated themselves or whose parents both immigrated to Germany (today's territory) during the period from 1950 have an immigration history. As of 2021, nearly 19 million people in Germany have an immigration history, accounting for approximately 23% of the population.



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Executive Summary

Germany has a long history of immigration. It is the second largest immigrant-receiving country in the OECD and, by 2022, had over 14 million immigrants. In addition, since 2022, over one million beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine and about 600 000 asylum seekers have arrived in Germany, more in absolute terms than in any other European OECD country.

Immigrants come to Germany from various origin countries and socioeconomic backgrounds and for different reasons, resulting in diverse integration needs. Historically significant immigrant groups include former guest workers and their families from the Mediterranean region, alongside ethnic Germans ("*Spät*)-*Aussiedler:innen*") from Central and Eastern Europe. During the last decade, however, most immigrants arrived under the EU free mobility scheme. While the significance of this category is gradually declining, initiatives to attract foreign talent have resulted in a steady rise in the number of labour migrants from non-EU countries. In addition, Germany has become a major destination for refugees fleeing wars and persecution in their origin countries.

For two decades, integration has been a priority on the national policy agenda, and the country invests significantly in integrating new arrivals. There are signs that this strong investment has paid off. The labour market outcomes of immigrants are favourable compared to those in other countries. In 2022, the employment rate of immigrants reached a record high of 70%, significantly higher than in most other EU peer countries. The comprehensive language support, in particular, appears to have produced positive results, with immigrants in Germany showing stronger improvements in language mastery than in most other EU countries.

However, immigrants with very low levels of education (at most primary education) face challenges in integrating into German society and the labour market. This group makes up more than one-sixth of the immigrant population, and its share has increased over the last decade. Only half of such immigrants without basic qualifications are employed, and only a quarter reach an advanced level of German after at least five years in the country. While adverse conditions in their countries of origin limited access to education for many of these immigrants before migration, only a few continue their education in Germany.

Despite the strong association between the socio-economic background and educational success in Germany, children born in Germany to immigrant parents have better educational outcomes than in most other peer countries. Since the early 2000s, they experienced significant progress in their academic performance and only moderate performance drops following the extensive nationwide school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation is quite different, however, for pupils who have immigrated to Germany. Their academic outcomes lag behind those of their peers in other major destination countries, regardless of their age upon arrival. What is more, prior learning gaps to their native-born peers have widened significantly in recent years, possibly due to the Covid-19 related school closures.

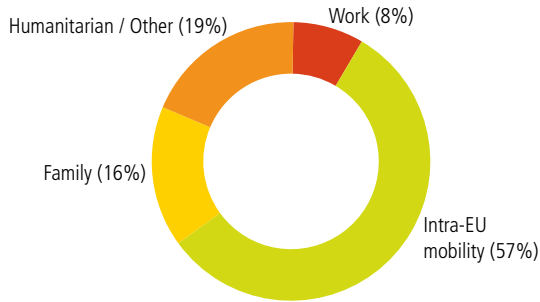
Discrimination remains a challenge. The percentage of immigrants from non-EU countries who feel that they belong to a discriminated group has increased in recent years, with one in five being affected. Other social integration outcomes and living conditions are relatively favourable, however. The share of immigrants who live in relative poverty is smaller than in most other major destination countries, and although significant gaps remain, the political and social participation of immigrants has improved significantly over the past two decades.



Key facts and figures

Germany's migration landscape is diverse

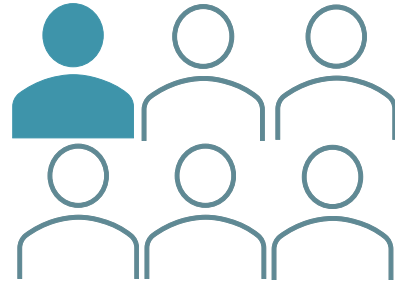
Categories of entry of permanent immigrants to Germany, 2011-2022, all ages



Since 2016, the share of intra-EU mobility has decreased, while Germany is gradually attracting more labour immigrants from abroad.

Over one in six immigrants have not gone beyond primary education

Educational level of working-age immigrants

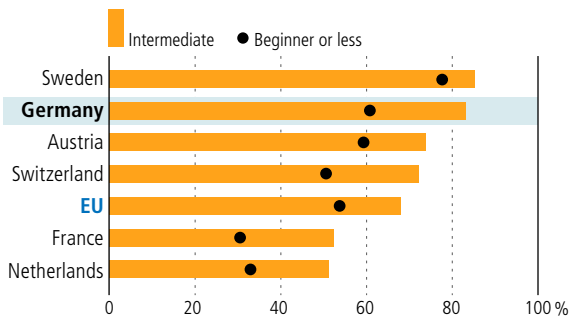


Employment rates for this group are low, but immigrants who have attained lower secondary education are already on par with their native-born peers.

4

Immigrants make good progress in language learning

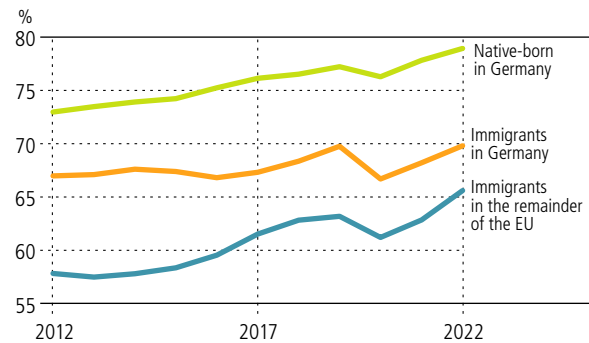
Share of working-age immigrants who achieved advanced proficiency after 5 years or more in the country, by level before migration, 2021



Over half of all working-age immigrants have attended a language course, one of the highest shares in OECD-Europe.

Immigrant employment rates are at record levels

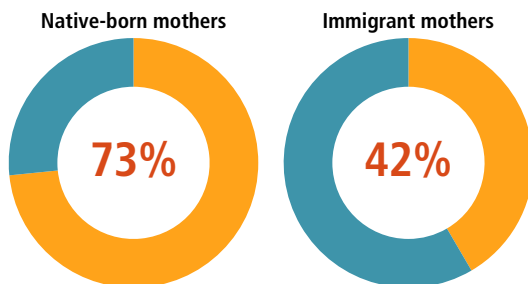
Share of working-age native-born and immigrants in employment, 2012-2022



There was significant employment growth among long-term immigrants over the past decade.

Immigrant mothers face particular challenges in the labour market

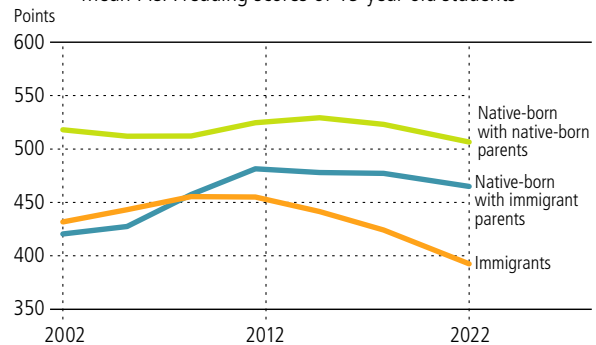
Employment rates of mothers with small children (aged 0-4), 2019



In Germany, the employment gap between immigrant and native-born mothers is larger than in most other major destinations.

Immigrant students experienced setbacks, but not native-born descendants of immigrants

Mean PISA reading scores of 15-year-old students



In 2022, students born in Germany to immigrant parents outperformed their peers in most other countries. However, the opposite was true for students who immigrated to Germany themselves.

The context for immigrant integration



Key takeaways

- Over the past 70 years, Germany has experienced several migration inflows for different reasons and from different origins, resulting in a highly diverse immigrant population.
- This diversity is also reflected in education levels. On the one hand, the proportion of highly educated immigrants has increased in recent years. On the other hand, a significant proportion of immigrants lack basic qualifications.
- The German government has increased its efforts to attract skilled labour immigrants from non-EU countries. This group is expected to further gain in importance in the future.

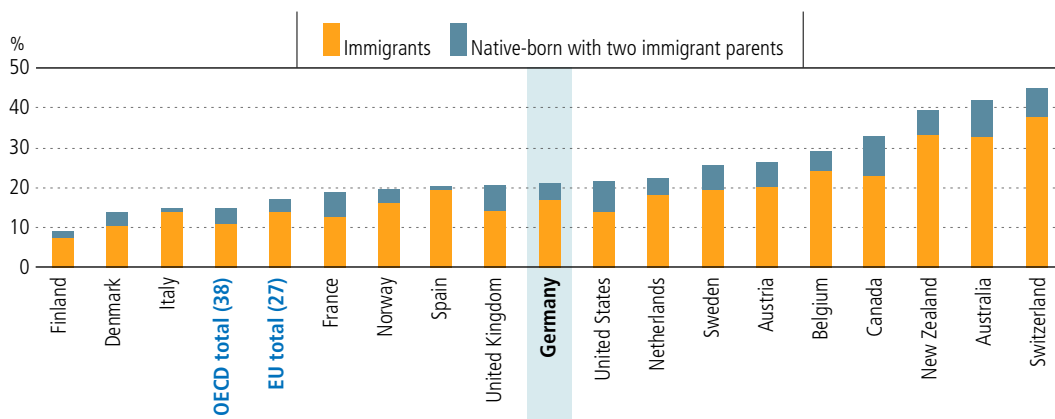
Integration outcomes depend not only on integration policy, but also on the labour market situation of the host country and the composition of the immigrant population. In particular, the level of education and the category of migration (humanitarian, labour, family, etc.) strongly influence integration outcomes, as some groups arrive with better preconditions to integrate quickly into the host country than others. Furthermore, length of residence and age at migration shape outcomes as integration into the host country unfolds over time. Against this background, this section highlights the main characteristics of Germany's immigrant population.

Immigrants constitute a significant proportion of the German population: In 2022, Germany was home to around 14 million immigrants, roughly one sixth of its population (see **Figure 1**). This marks an increase of over 4 million over the last decade. Although Germany is the OECD's second-largest recipient of immigrants in absolute numbers after the United States, the proportion of the population born abroad lags behind that of countries such as Australia or Switzerland, which host around twice as many immigrants relative to their population size.

Figure 1

Immigrants and their children make up a significant part of the German population

Share of immigrants and native-born with two immigrant parents among total population, all ages, 2021 or most recent year



Source: See Figure 1.1 of OECD/European Commission (2023)^[1].

Notes: In New-Zealand's General Social Survey it is only possible to estimate the native-born immigrant offspring as those raised by people born abroad without specifying if one or both people were actually the biological parents.



Native-born with two immigrant parents account for 5% of the German population. In addition to these figures, since 2022, over one million refugees from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection under Directive 2001/55/EC, following Russia's war of aggression against the country. Furthermore, 600 000 asylum seekers have arrived in Germany in the last two years. The vast majority have been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection, often after lengthy asylum procedures.

Around half of Germany's immigrant population comprises women according to the European Labour Force Survey 2022. Immigrants are overrepresented in the working-age (15-64) population, in particular among those of prime working-age: Around 76% of immigrants are of working age compared to only 61% of the native-born.

Around three in five immigrants have been living in Germany for over a decade, while only around one in five arrived within the last five years. Policy attention in Germany, as elsewhere, is primarily focused on the integration of recent arrivals, including refugees (see **Box 2**). Nevertheless, the ongoing reform of the citizenship law (which allows applicants for the German citizenship to retain their original nationality regardless of their country of origin, among other facilitations) also tries to address the long-term immigrant population.

Box 2 **Germany offers extensive integration support for new arrivals from third countries**

While Germany's integration support covers a number of areas (e.g. housing, health, employment), a general 700-unit (45 minutes each) integration course forms the core of its programme for third country nationals and immigrants benefitting from social support. It consists of 600-units of language training (see **Box 5**) and a social integration course ("*Orientierungskurs*"). With 100 units dedicated to this topic, Germany provides one of the longest social integration courses in the OECD.

Although Germany does not provide individualised integration pathways, adult immigrants can receive individual integration counselling, including anonymous referrals, online or at one of the 1473 service centres.

Germany offers broad access to its standard introduction measures and provides these as early as possible on. For example, in contrast to many other OECD countries, a recent reform allows asylum seekers in Germany to attend integration courses. More generally, like many other long-standing destinations, the country offers and furthers develops pre-departure measures to set realistic expectations and equip newcomers with basic knowledge of the country prior to their arrival. From 2026 onwards, pre-departure measures can be offered in selected third countries under § 45b of the revised Skilled Immigration Act, passed by the Germany Federal Parliament and the Federal Assembly in 2023. These measures aim to assist individuals planning to migrate to Germany as skilled workers or apprentices. They include advisory services on legal migration to Germany, language courses, courses on cultural orientation, and services that accompany skilled workers from their countries of origin to municipal advisory services in Germany.

Source: OECD, 2023^[2].

After World War II, Germany has experienced several significant and diverse migration inflows, which have shaped its migration landscape until today.

From the 1950s until the economic downturn in 1973, Germany implemented "guest worker" policies to address labour shortages during the post-war economic expansion. These policies attracted mainly men from the Mediterranean region. Instead of staying temporarily as originally intended, many ended up settling, with their families joining later.



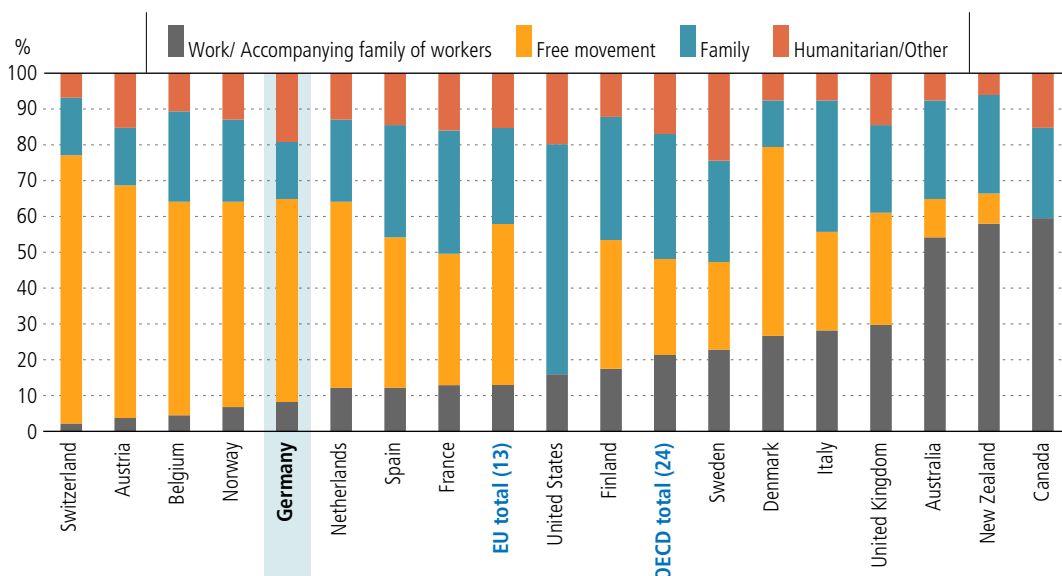
In addition, with the fall of the Iron curtain in the late 1980s, Germany experienced a large inflow of ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, commonly referred to as “(Spät)-Aussiedler:innen”, with numbers reaching almost 400 000 in 1990. However, subsequent measures aimed at limiting the arrival of ethnic Germans and declining diasporas have resulted in a steady decrease since the mid-1990s (Liebig, 2007^[3]).

Since the late 1980s, Germany also became an increasingly important destination for refugees and asylum seekers. In the early 1990s, Germany experienced a significant spike when it provided a temporary status (“Duldung”), which is not a residence permit, to over 600 000 people fleeing the Yugoslav wars. Around 350 000 people left the country again in the years following the Dayton Peace Accords. After a period of relatively low numbers of asylum applications from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, asylum applications rose again, reaching 1.4 million in 2015, 2016 and 2017, mostly from people fleeing Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In response to the increased inflow of refugees, political efforts were made to reduce the number of new arrivals, resulting in a steep and continuous decline in the following years. However, this downward trend came to a halt in 2020 when the number of asylum seekers started to increase significantly. In addition, over 1 million people from Ukraine were granted temporary protection.

Despite the focus on humanitarian migration in the public debate, by far the most important category of migration to Germany during the last decade has been the intra-EU free mobility (see **Figure 2**). In particular, the two eastern EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007 led to an increase in migration flows from the EU area to Germany, which peaked in 2016. Since then, numbers have fallen somewhat. However, intra-EU free mobility still accounted for around half of the 640 000 immigrants who entered Germany on a long-term or permanent basis in 2022 according to the OECD’s standardised migration statistics (not considering the beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine). Most of these immigrants from the EU have come from Central and Eastern Europe for employment reasons.

As a result of declining EU free mobility flows to Germany, coupled with an ageing population and widespread labour shortages, the German government has increased its efforts to attract skilled labour immigrants from non-EU countries. Although non-EU labour immigrants and their families accounted for only 8% of all permanent inflows between 2011 and 2022, their proportion has been steadily increasing and reached 14% in 2022. This category is expected to further gain in importance in the future.

■ Figure 2 ■
Immigrants from the EU accounted for the bulk of permanent immigration to Germany
 Categories of entry of permanent immigrants, 2011-2022, all ages

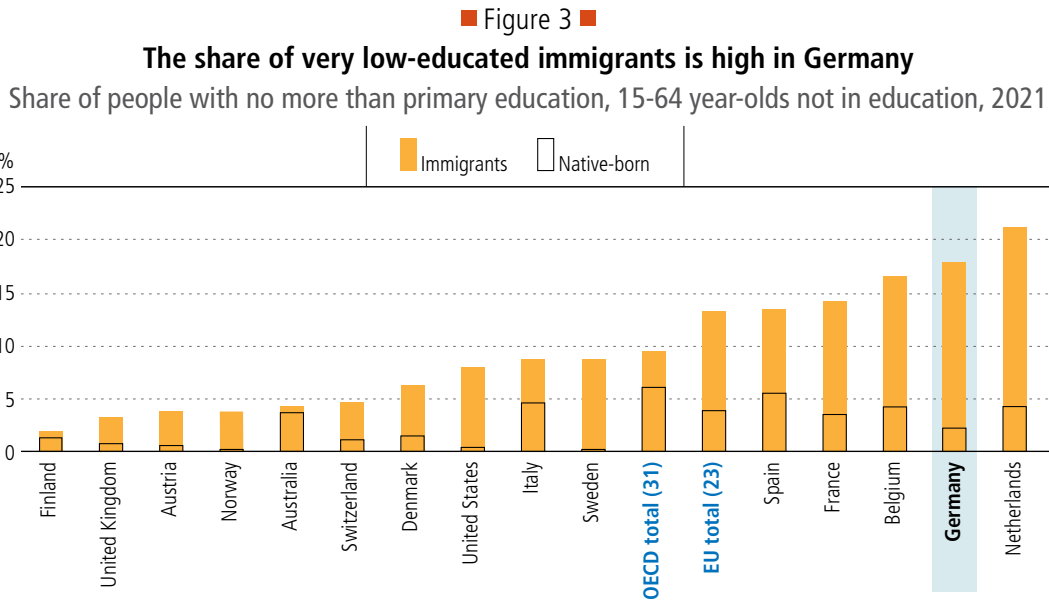


Source: OECD Statistics – International Migration Database (IMD) 2011-22.



The diverse mix of different immigrant arrivals in Germany is also reflected in terms of countries of origin. While Poland is the main country of origin, around two in three working-age immigrants have come from outside the EU, mainly from Türkiye, the Russian Federation, and Syria. This contrasts with countries like France, which receive fewer refugees and where migration flows are shaped by former colonial ties, resulting in a more uniform immigrant population in terms of language and region of origin.

Partly due to the high proportion of refugees, the educational level of working-age immigrants in Germany is relatively low in international comparison. Refugees often had limited or no access to education prior to migration due to protracted wars or conflicts in their origin countries (see section III.2). As shown in **Figure 3**, more than one in six working-age immigrants, and over one in five immigrants from outside the EU, have completed primary education at most. This is one of the highest proportions among OECD countries and poses particular challenges for integration. What is more, the share among the native-born is negligible (2%). While the demographic characteristics of this group resemble those of the overall immigrant population in terms of age and gender, they are overrepresented among humanitarian immigrants (37%) and underrepresented among EU immigrants (11%). Furthermore, the proportion of immigrants with a university degree in Germany remains modest at just over a quarter, despite an increase over the last decade. This figure is lower than in all other major destinations, except for Italy.



Note: The United States only excludes people who are still in education for the age group 16-54.

Source: EU-LFS 2021 (2019 for United Kingdom). United States: CPS 2020. Australia: ASEW 2020.



Harnessing the potential of immigrants

Key takeaways

- The current employment rate of immigrants in Germany is 70%, higher than in most other EU peer countries and the highest on record.
- While immigrants in Germany make good progress in terms of language acquisition, challenges persist for those with very low levels of education. This group also has low employment rates, while those who managed to complete lower secondary education have employment rates comparable to those of the native-born.
- Germany lags behind most other major destinations in upgrading the skills of its workforce despite the high number of immigrants with low levels of education.

Finding a job that matches their qualifications and acquiring relevant skills not only has a positive impact on the overall integration and well-being of immigrants, but also enables them to make a positive contribution to the economy. This chapter outlines the labour market integration of immigrants and their skills acquisition.

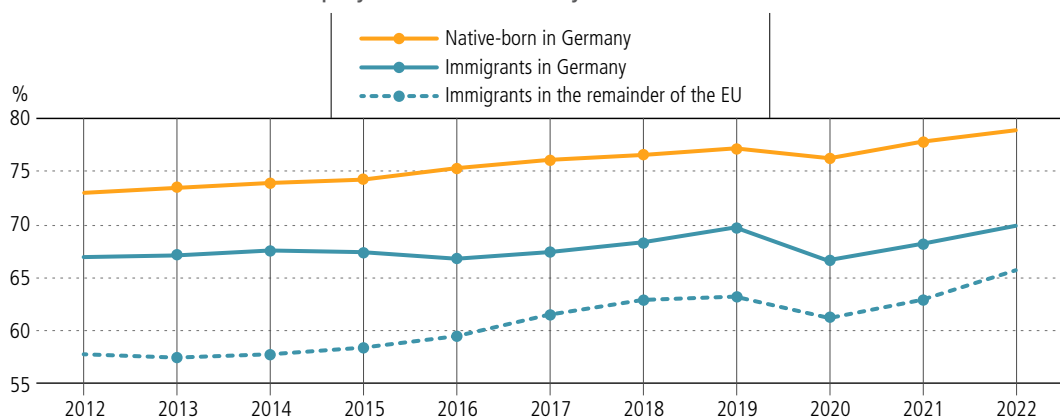
II.1. Fostering labour market integration

The successful labour market integration of Germany's 11 million working-age immigrants is an important element in the country's strategy to alleviate labour shortages. Overall, the labour market outcomes for immigrants in Germany are positive in international comparison. At 70%, the employment rate of immigrants is significantly higher than in most other EU peer countries.

■ Figure 4 ■

Immigrants' employment rates in Germany have rebounded to pre-pandemic record levels following the initial COVID-19 decline

Employment rates, 15-64 year-olds, 2012-2022



Note: Following the breaks in the time-series of the EU-LFS resulting from updated labour status definitions in 2021, an adjusting methodology was applied to 2012-2020 figures to ensure comparability over time. For more details, please refer to Annex 1.B. of OECD/European Commission (2023_[11]).

Source: EU-LFS 2012-2022.



Over the past decade, the employment rate of immigrants in Germany has increased, as the country recovered from the Great Recession of 2007-08 (see **Figure 4**). However, employment growth was weaker in comparison to immigrants in the remainder of the EU and that of the native-born, widening prior gaps. This can be partly attributed to the large number of new arrivals, particularly refugees, whose access to the labour and training markets is limited during the initial stages of the asylum procedure and whose integration into the labour market takes more time (see [Section III.2](#)). By contrast, among immigrants who have been residing in Germany for at least ten years, employment growth was comparable to that of the native-born population.

In the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrants in Germany experienced a stronger decline in employment rates compared to the native-born, partly due to their concentration in the hard-hit hospitality sector. However, by 2022, immigrant employment rates rebounded, reaching the record level seen prior to the pandemic.

Despite high overall employment rates among immigrants, labour market outcomes vary greatly across different educational levels and migrant categories, with some groups requiring particular policy attention.

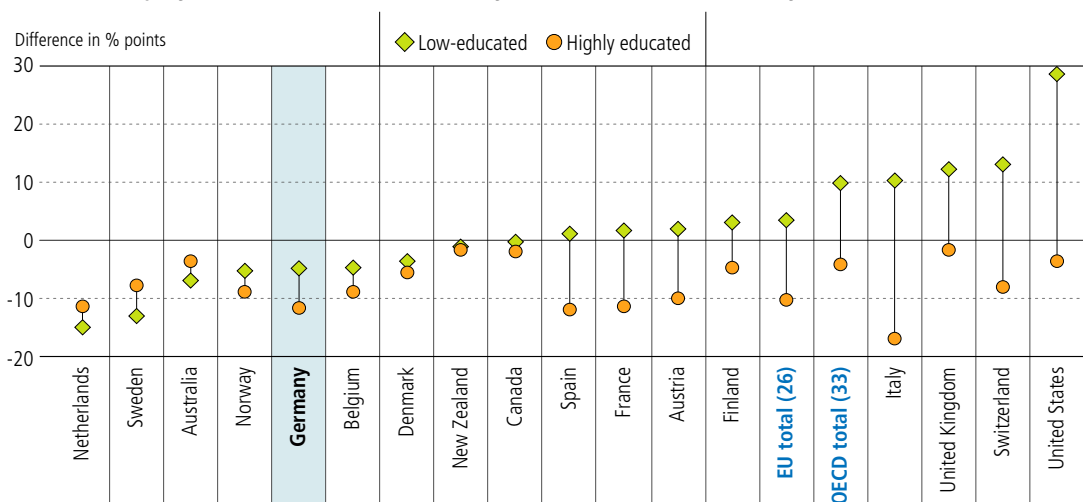
Immigrants with very low levels of educational attainment, i.e. primary education or less, face difficulties in the labour market, with only one in two in employment. Those who managed to obtain lower secondary schooling have much higher employment rates which are, at 66%, comparable to their native-born counterparts. While part of the difference can be explained by the over-representation of humanitarian migrants among the very low-educated, immigrants in the same migration category experience significantly better employment outcomes when they have completed lower secondary education. Around 54% of humanitarian migrants and 74% of EU migrants with lower secondary education are in employment, compared to 42% and 67%, respectively, of those with only primary education.³

Employment rates are much higher among highly educated immigrants but significantly fall short of the very high employment rates of their native-born peers (80 versus 91%). In fact, gaps are much wider than among the low-educated (see **Figure 5**). Although this pattern holds true virtually everywhere, the employment gap among the tertiary educated is larger in Germany than in most other major destination countries. Moreover, among highly educated immigrants who are employed, a third work in jobs that do not match their qualification level. This proportion is almost twice that of the native-born and has increased by 7 percentage points over the last decade.

■ Figure 5 ■

Employment gaps with the native-born are widest among highly educated immigrants

Difference in employment with the native-born by level of education, 15-64 year-olds not in education, 2021



Notes: The United States only excludes people who are still in education for the age group 16-54. The United Kingdom calculates rates for the age group 16-64.

Source: EU-LFS 2021. Australia: ASEW 2020. The United Kingdom, Canada & New Zealand: National LFS 2021. United States: CPS 2021.

3. The strong positive association between having completed lower secondary education and employment also holds when controlling for gender, age, duration of stay and migration category.



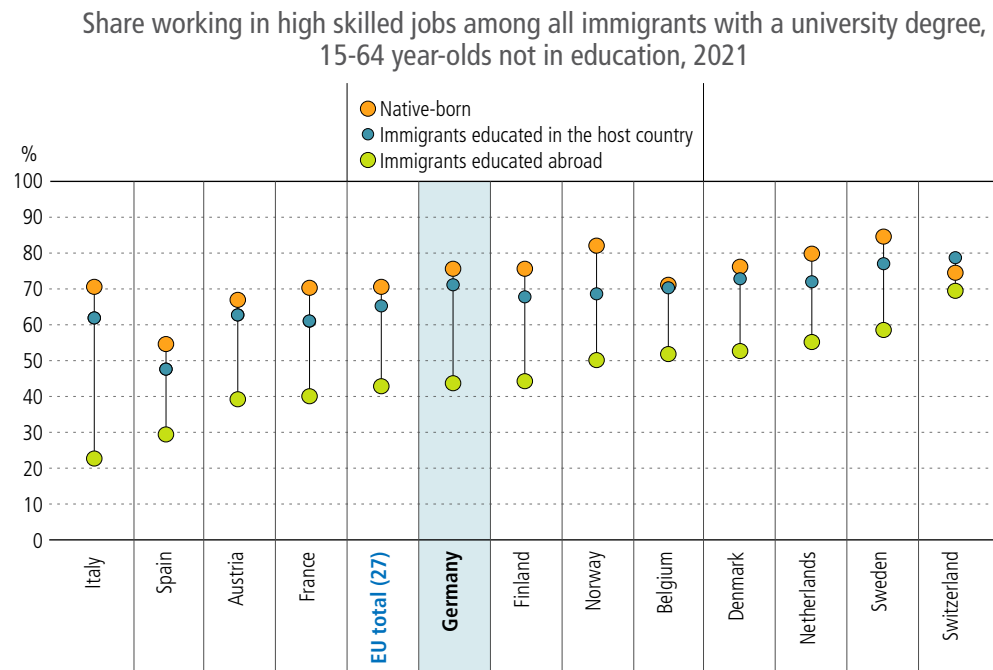
The high value placed on formal certifications in Germany hampers access to skilled jobs for immigrants who have obtained their qualifications abroad. In regulated professions and trades, immigrants with foreign qualifications face restrictions in practising their professions unless they have their qualifications recognised. But even in non-regulated occupations, foreign qualifications are often devalued by employers. In addition, migrant applicants often lack domestic references or work experience, leaving employers uncertain about their skills and competences.

While a lower return to foreign qualifications can be observed in all major destinations, the issue is particularly pronounced in Germany. The share of immigrants with a foreign university degree working in highly skilled jobs lags 28 percentage points behind their peers with a German degree (see **Figure 6**). The better language skills of the latter only explain part of the gap. Among those with an advanced or higher level of German, immigrants with a German degree are still 18 percentage points more likely to work in a highly skilled job than their peers with a foreign degree.

As a result, a significant part of migrant labour remains untapped. If immigrants with a foreign university degree had access to high-skilled occupations at the same rate as their native-born counterparts, Germany would have over 600 000 more people working in high-skilled occupations.⁴ Especially immigrants with non-EU qualifications face barriers to unfolding their skills potential. Unlike their peers with EU tertiary qualifications, they do not benefit from automatic or at least facilitated recognition. Consequently, only 38% of immigrants in Germany who hold a university degree from outside of the EU are employed in an occupation commensurate with their level of education.

Immigrants with a foreign university degree and at least partial recognition of their qualifications fare better in the labour market, even after controlling for differences in age, gender, origin of qualifications, field of study, reason for migration and language proficiency. In Germany, they are 9 percentage points more likely to find skill-adequate employment than their counterparts without recognition.

■ Figure 6 ■
Immigrants with a foreign university degree struggle to find jobs that match their skills, particularly in Germany



Source: EU-LFS 2021.

4. Only 42% of the roughly 1.9 million immigrants with foreign university degrees work in highly skilled jobs, compared with 74% of the native-born. If the proportion of immigrants with foreign university degrees working in highly skilled jobs was 32 percentage points higher, over 600 000 more immigrants would be employed in high-skilled occupations.



Immigrants seem to be at least partially aware of the formal structure of the German labour market. They are more likely to perceive the recognition process as necessary, and the lack of formal recognition as a problem, than in other EU countries. In addition, the proportion who reported to have sought recognition is higher in Germany than in all other major European destinations with the exception of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, despite significant efforts to improve the recognition of foreign qualifications (see **Box 3**), only one in four immigrants with foreign qualifications in Germany reported to have obtained recognition, indicating that important barriers remain.

Box 3 **Over the past decade, Germany has greatly facilitated the recognition of foreign qualifications**

Facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications has been a prime objective of integration policy in Germany over the past 15 years. The 2012 'Recognition Act' made assessment and recognition offers more accessible and equitable. In the past, these were often restricted to German nationals, EU citizens or ethnic Germans ('(Spät)-Aussiedler:innen'). Regardless of nationality, it established a legal right to the evaluation of around 600 qualifications in non-regulated and in regulated professions under the auspices of the federal government. The central government set up a multi-channel support structure, including an online portal, a recognition app and a hotline, to help potential applicants navigate through the recognition process. The 2020 'Skilled Immigration Act' brought further improvements for skilled workers from third countries. Skilled workers with a concrete job offer and employers hiring foreign skilled workers can use the 'accelerated procedure for skilled workers' to speed up administrative procedures. Furthermore, a Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA) was established as the central point of contact in the recognition process for skilled workers applying for professional recognition from abroad. The establishment of the new centre also aims at increasing the transparency of the recognition process.

Source: OECD, 2017^[4], OECD, 2021^[5].

Of the approximately 800 000 immigrants who reported having applied for recognition of their qualifications, only three-quarters reported that their qualifications had been at least partially recognised. This percentage, based on self-reporting, places Germany at the lower end of the scale among major European destinations. Of the 1.5 million immigrants who had not applied, 15% cited cost and complexity and 9% limited awareness of the process as barriers.



II.2. Promoting skill acquisition

Learning German confers significant advantages in the labour market and for the social integration of immigrants (see **Box 4**). Nearly two-thirds of working-age immigrants in Germany, residing in the country for 5 years or more, report advanced proficiency in German. Although this proportion is slightly lower than in the remainder of the EU, Germany stands out in terms of the significant progress immigrants make in language acquisition (see **Figure 7**). Unlike countries such as France, Belgium and Spain, where colonial legacies influence migration patterns, language skills are much lower upon immigrants' arrival in Germany and only a small fraction speaks German as their mother tongue.



Box 4 Limited German proficiency is a major obstacle to skilled labour migration and integration in Germany

Results from the second wave of a recent OECD longitudinal online survey of 30 000 people from abroad who seek to come to Germany for employment reveal important barriers with respect to the German language. Around 44% of prospective immigrants and 51% of those now living in Germany see knowledge of German as a major barrier that could prevent/have prevented them from coming to Germany and working there. Furthermore, participants who now live in Germany list the lack of knowledge of German as the most important obstacle for everyday life (65%) and job search (54%). When asked what advice they would give to friends interested in migration, the most common answer is the recommendation to learn German early. Likewise, 55% of immigrants abroad and 48% of immigrants in Germany express a desire for more language learning support. In addition, some 67% of respondents abroad would like to see more job advertisements in English.

The importance of German language skills for integration is also widely acknowledged by the German public. According to the 2021 Eurobarometer, almost 9 in 10 people consider the ability to speak German an important factor for the successful integration of immigrants.

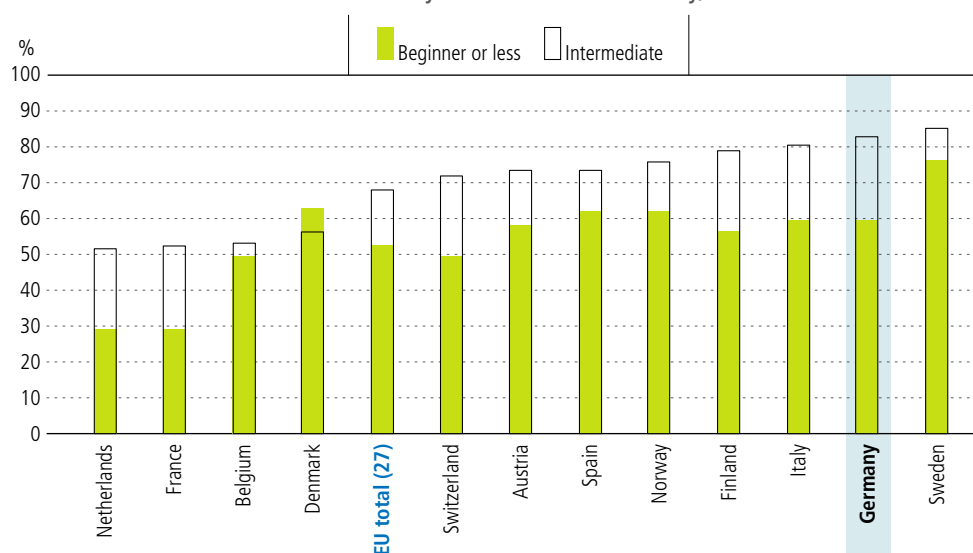
Source: OECD, 2023^[6].

13

■ Figure 7 ■

After five years, more than four out of five immigrants with an intermediate level reach fluency in Germany

Percentage of immigrants with advanced host-country language proficiency who had beginner or intermediate language skills before migrating, immigrants aged 15-64 with at least 5 years in the host-country, 2021



Source: EU-LFS 2021.

Attending language courses can facilitate the learning process and, as **Box 5** shows, Germany offers a comprehensive programme. Indeed, more than half of all working-age immigrants have attended or are currently attending a language course, a proportion surpassed only by Luxembourg and the Nordic countries (among European countries with available data for 2021).

Although immigrants in Germany make considerable progress in language acquisition considering their low starting points, some do not achieve sufficient proficiency. Immigrants with no more than primary schooling,



in particular, face difficulties in learning German, despite nearly two-thirds of them reporting participation in language courses. Without additional investment in their education, they may lack the fundamental skills and literacy levels required to learn a foreign language. After living in Germany for five years or more, 48% self-assess their German language proficiency at beginner's level or below, and only 25% report advanced German skills. The Nordic countries, which offer personalised integration pathways, fare much better in this respect, with the proportion of beginners among the very low-educated ranging from 20% to 36%.

Box 5 Germany provides a comprehensive language training programme

As in almost all OECD countries, language training is the main component of Germany's introduction programme for newcomers and represents the bulk of targeted government spending on immigrant integration. Immigrants generally receive 600 units (45 minutes each) of language tuition with an additional 300 units available if participants are unable to reach the language target (CEFR B1). Special language courses lasting up to 1200 units are available for women, young people, parents, and immigrants with literacy needs. Participation in language courses is compulsory for newly arrived humanitarian, family and labour immigrants from third countries with insufficient knowledge of German, as well as for long-term residents with special integration needs who receive social benefits. Unlike in Austria or the Netherlands, immigrants are not obliged to reach a minimum level of language proficiency within a specified time after arrival. Instead, Germany incentivizes successful completion by reimbursing 50% of the costs if immigrants pass the end-of-course exam within two years.

In addition to the basic programme, Germany has been offering vocation-specific language courses since 2016. These courses are aimed at social benefit recipients that are either unemployed, jobseekers or trainees, who have completed compulsory schooling and have an intermediate level of German (CEFR B1). Immigrants in employment are also eligible but must pay 50% of the cost if their income exceeds a certain threshold. These courses provide language tuition tailored to the workplace, such as email writing and workplace communication. Specialised courses are available for individuals seeking professional recognition in long-term care and medicine, as well as those who require subject-specific German language skills in technical or commercial fields.

Source: OECD, 2021^[7], Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2021^[8].

Besides language knowledge, immigrants differ from the native-born population in terms of their education and skill levels. The share of low-educated immigrants in Germany is almost four times higher than that of the native-born. Even though most immigrants arrive as adults, gaps with the native-born can be reduced through adult education and training.

However, participation in adult education and training in Germany is lower than in most EU countries. This also applies to the participation of immigrants. In 2021, fewer than one in ten prime working-age immigrants (aged 25-54) reported participation in formal or non-formal education⁵ in the four weeks before the survey (see **Figure 8**). This is the lowest percentage among major European destinations, except for Italy. What is more, participation among immigrants with no more than primary education is minimal, at less than 3%. This is significantly lower than in other major destinations (again with the exception of Italy) and stands in stark contrast to Sweden and the Netherlands, where at least one in five very low-educated immigrants reported participation.

5. Non-formal education refers to institutionalised learning activities outside the formal education system with the aim of improving the knowledge, skills and competences of individuals, excluding on-the-job training.

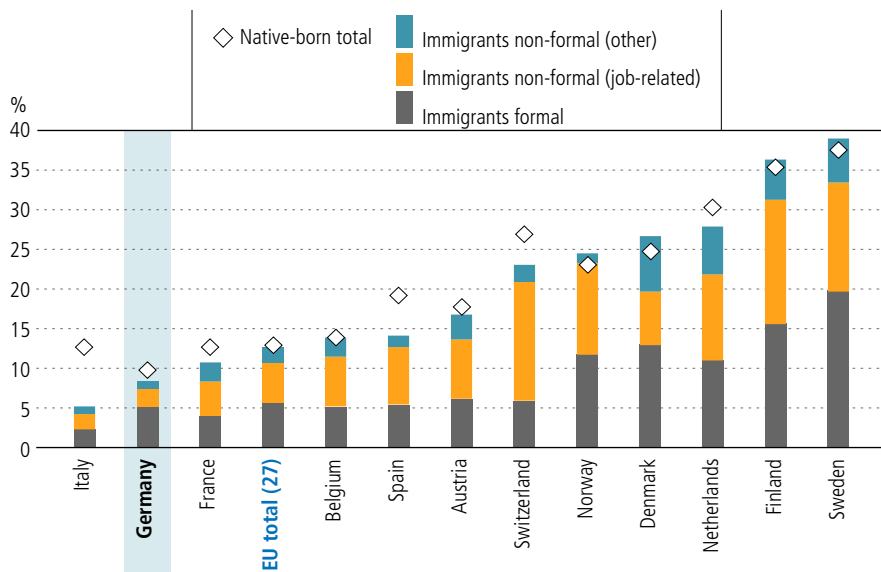


The low participation rates in formal and non-formal adult education in Germany pose challenges in meeting evolving skill demands, for both native-born and immigrants. However, the issue is concerning for the latter. In addition to their lower average level of education, immigrants who have been educated and trained in a different environment tend to require additional training to align their skills with those needed in the host country. Moreover, immigrants face a higher risk of job loss if their skills no longer match the demands of the labour market. Previous research has shown that immigrants in Germany are more likely to experience adverse consequences due to technological change (Giesing and Rude, 2022^[9]).

■ Figure 8 ■

Participation in adult education and training is low in Germany

Self-reported participation in adult education and training in the last 4 weeks, 25-54 year-olds, 2021



Source: EU-LFS 2021.





Addressing specific vulnerabilities

Key takeaways

- Immigrant mothers with young children face a staggering employment gap of 31 percentage points compared to their native-born peers, which might be partly attributable to barriers in accessing public childcare and socioeconomic factors.
- Refugee women are a particularly vulnerable group in the German labour market, with an employment rate of 32%, significantly lower than their counterparts in other countries.
- The academic performance of children born in Germany to immigrant parents has improved significantly since the early 2000s, while outcomes declined among those who immigrated themselves to Germany.

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This section highlights integration outcomes of three vulnerable groups: immigrant women with young children, refugees and others in need of protection and children of immigrants.

III.1. Accounting for gender and family aspects

Almost half of the migrant population in Germany are women, a diverse group with often under-utilised potential. Similar to migrant men, they are over-represented at the lower end of the educational spectrum. Over 36% have low levels of education, with half of them not having gone beyond primary school. This contrasts sharply with native-born women, of whom only 11% have low levels of education, while the vast majority (61%) have upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. The percentage of women with a university degree is the same for immigrants and the native-born (27%), as more highly educated women immigrated to Germany over the last decade.

Although migrant women have slightly better educational outcomes and language skills than migrant men, their position in the labour market lags behind significantly, with a gender gap three times larger than that among the native-born. If the gender gap among immigrants were to be reduced to the level of the native-born, an additional half a million women would be in work. Among employed immigrant women, more than half work part-time (51%), the highest proportion in the OECD (bar Switzerland) and slightly more than among the native-born (48%).

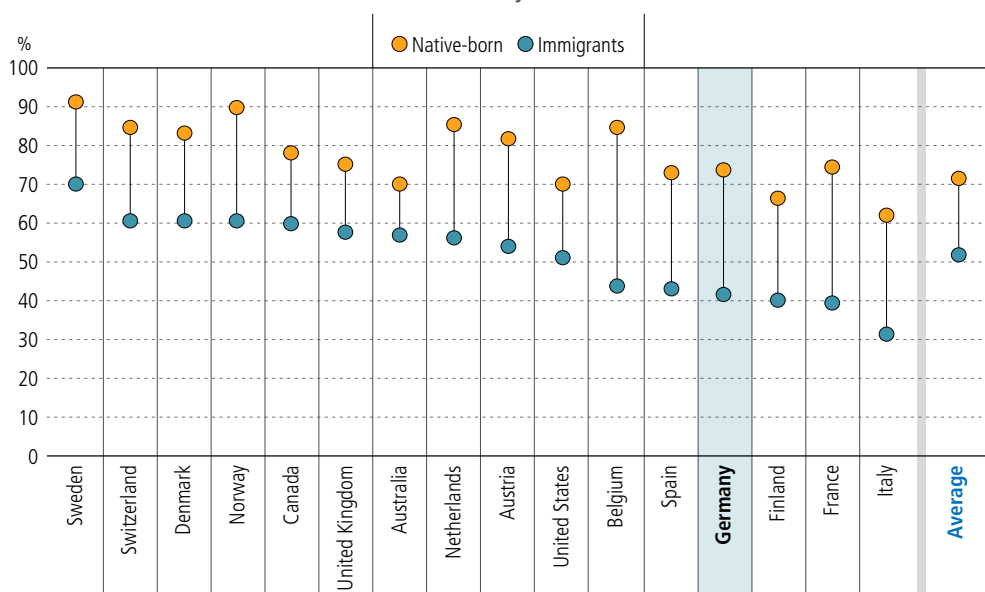
While childbirth is often associated with lower employment rates for women – the so-called child or motherhood penalty - recent OECD work has shown that this effect is much more pronounced for immigrant women, in particular in Germany (OECD, 2023_[10]). Only around two-fifths of immigrant women with young children (0-4 years) are employed, which contrasts sharply with above-average employment rates among native-born mothers in the same age group (25-54 years) (see **Figure 9**). Employment rates for non-EU born women with small children are even lower, with just over a third being employed. Although part of the gap is due to higher fertility rates and lower educational attainment among immigrant women, a large gap (24 percentage points) remains even after controlling for differences between the two groups in terms of age, education level and number of children. The employment gap between mothers with young children and childless women is also twice as large for immigrant women compared to their native-born counterparts (-30 percentage points versus -15).



■ Figure 9 ■

The employment gap between native-born and immigrant mothers with very young children exceeds 30 percentage points in Germany

Employment rates of native-born and immigrant mothers with at least one child aged 0-4, 2021 or latest year available



Note: Data cover women aged 25-54 (15-64 in Switzerland). Mothers are defined as women with at least one child aged 0-4 (0-5 in the United States and 0-6 in Canada and Switzerland).

Source: See Figure 5.2 in OECD (2023₁₀).

In addition to socio-demographic characteristics and individual preferences, unfavourable labour market conditions in the sectors in which immigrant mothers are concentrated may hamper them from taking up employment after childbearing (OECD, 2023₁₀). Immigrant mothers tend to be over-represented in elementary occupations, with cleaners and helpers being the most common category. In Germany, almost one in four immigrant mothers with children under the age of 15 work in elementary occupations, more than three times the share among their native-born counterparts. The low wages in these occupations provide fewer incentives for mothers to return to work after childbirth. Additionally, temporary contracts are four times more prevalent among immigrant mothers in elementary occupations than among their native-born peers, and often do not guarantee a job after maternity leave.

Maternal labour market participation also depends on family policy support. As immigrant mothers are less likely to rely on family or social networks for childcare support, the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is crucial for reconciling childcare responsibilities with paid work. Several OECD countries have therefore implemented specific measures to increase the uptake of ECEC among disadvantaged and immigrant families, who often face access barriers (see **Box 6**).





Box 6 OECD countries rely on a variety of measures to increase immigrant families' access to childcare

To increase access to ECEC, some countries have prioritised increasing the supply of childcare, by investing in infrastructure. In some cases, central governments provide financial support to ECEC mainstream services to promote the inclusion of children from minority backgrounds, or prioritise investment in remote or disadvantaged areas (Australia, Belgium). Many countries have also made their ECEC systems more affordable for disadvantaged young children through financial subsidies, vouchers or free access for certain age groups.

In addition to accessibility, the provision of inclusive services is crucial for engaging with immigrant families. For example, Denmark supports the language learning of children between the ages of two and three in and outside ECEC and provides additional training for staff in communication, language and trust-building skills. In Germany, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) focuses on improving access to parental support for immigrant parents with children of pre-school age. FEAD also funds the work of counsellors/outreach workers to support the integration of disadvantaged new arrivals.

Some countries have tried to remove intercultural barriers through the translation of information leaflets or interpretation services (Austria, Norway), referral services (Australia, Ireland), the provision of bicultural services, intercultural training for staff and the recruitment of staff from minority communities. Others have active recruitment policies (Belgium, Norway). Finally, some countries carry out language testing of children at an early age to ensure that they do not fall behind if they do not attend ECEC (Denmark, Korea, Norway).

Source: OECD, 2023^[10].

Most countries provide free early childhood education and care (ECEC) at least in the year before children start primary school. This is associated with an increase in mothers' employment rates when the youngest child turns five years old. The largest employment gains for both native- and immigrant mothers are observed in Germany, together with Finland and several countries in Central and Eastern Europe. These countries have some of the longest paid parental and care leave available to mothers, suggesting that both native-born and immigrant mothers are responding to policies that encourage childcare at home.

In addition, Germany faces frequent shortages in the supply of public ECEC places for very young children, which disproportionately affects immigrant families. Unfamiliarity with the system and the lack of binding standardised criteria for the allocation of childcare places may hamper immigrants' access to childcare. As a result, formal childcare is used more frequently for children under the age of three in native-born families than in immigrant families (OECD, 2023^[10]).

III.2. Promoting the integration of refugees

For over 30 years, Germany has been a key destination for refugees, with significant peaks in the early 1990s and mid-2010s. More recently, Germany has also received over a million people escaping Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine - more than any other country. The 2021 European Labour Force Survey includes information on humanitarian immigrants based on self-declared reason for migration.⁶ However, it does not yet cover individuals who fled the war in Ukraine.

6. Consequently, the data might include both recognized refugees and asylum seekers (i.e., people who have applied for but not yet obtained formal refugee status). Nonetheless, the coverage of asylum seekers is likely to be limited as they often reside in collective accommodation and, as a result, are not represented in the survey. For the sake of simplicity, individuals reporting migration for "international protection purposes" are collectively referred to as "refugees" in this section. People who were born in an EU or EFTA country and reported to have immigrated for humanitarian reasons are excluded from the analysis.



The survey covers almost 1.7 million refugees aged between 15 and 64 years old who reside in Germany. Almost two-thirds of these working-age refugees are men. Men are also strongly overrepresented among refugees in the Nordic countries (except for Finland), Italy and Austria, whereas Spain and France have a more balanced gender distribution among their working-age refugee population.

Refugees' duration of stay strongly influences their integration outcomes.⁷ Forced migrants generally have had no time to prepare for life in the host country, particularly in terms of language acquisition, and thus tend to require more time than other immigrant groups to fully integrate into the host country.

In Germany, most refugees (65%) have only entered the country within the previous decade, with important peaks in 2015 and 2016, while a quarter have been living in the country for over 20 years. By contrast, in most other European OECD countries, refugees with less than 10 years of residence constitute a smaller proportion of the refugee population. For instance, they comprise approximately 50% of the refugee population in the Netherlands and Italy, and only 20% in Switzerland.

The educational attainment of refugees in Germany is lower than in other major European destinations. More than half (57%) of all refugees of working age (excluding those in education) have completed at most lower secondary education, with over a third having completed at most primary education. In addition, only around 15% hold a university degree. By contrast, in Sweden, for example, twice as many refugees have a university degree and the share of those with at most primary education is half that of Germany.

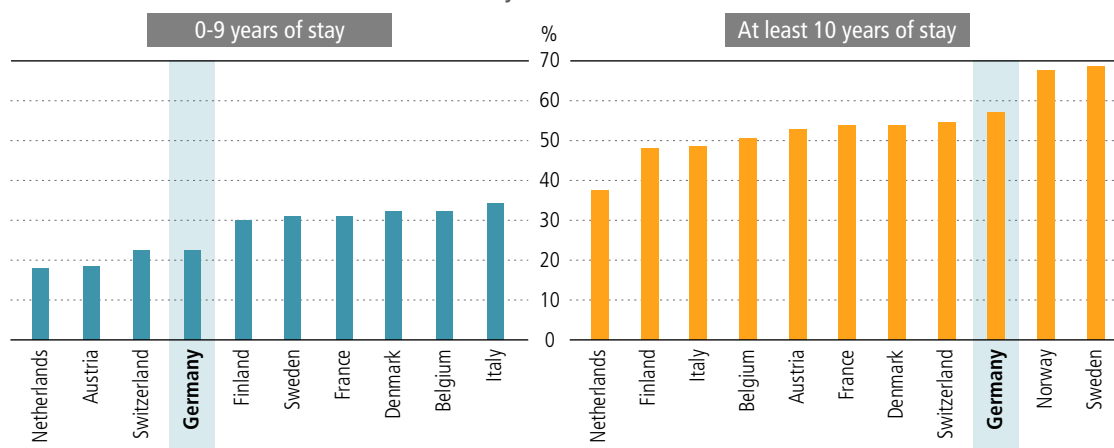
The cohort of refugees who arrived to Germany within the last decade in particular tends to have low educational qualifications. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP-survey among refugees arriving to Germany between 2013 and 2016 suggests that a significant percentage of them faced interruptions in their educational pathways due to protracted conflicts in their origin countries and long journeys to the host country, often involving multiple transitional residences (Brücker, Kosyakova and Schuß, 2020_[11]), (Edele et al., 2021_[12]). Moreover, in contrast to countries such as Sweden, many refugees did not continue their educational trajectory after migrating to Germany.

Virtually all refugees in Germany arrive without any knowledge of German, but their language skills improve significantly over time. According to **Figure 10**, refugees who have been in Germany for at least 10 years have relatively high language proficiency compared to most other countries, with almost 60% reporting fluency in German. However, for refugees who arrived in the last ten years, outcomes are less favourable.

■ Figure 10 ■

Long-established refugees have higher language proficiency everywhere but particularly in Germany

Self-reported advanced or mother tongue host-country language proficiency of refugees by duration of stay, 15-64 year-olds, 2021



Source: EU-LFS 2021.

7. For several countries, disaggregating outcomes by duration of stay is not possible due to small sample sizes.



While the proportion of refugees who report advanced language skills is higher in Germany than in Austria or the Netherlands, Germany still lags behind the Nordic countries, which have invested heavily in structured integration programmes. The latter fare similar to Belgium and France, where a relatively high proportion of refugees are native French speakers.

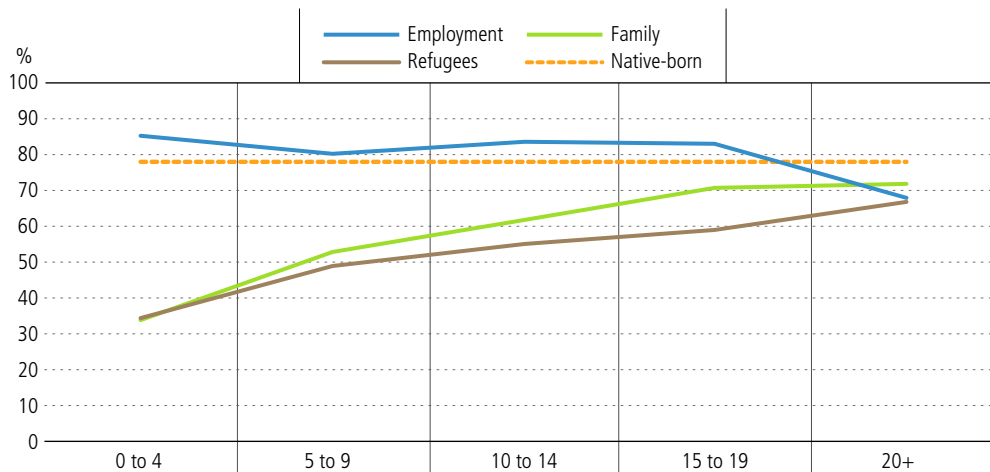
As refugees with less than 10 years of residence in Germany are still developing their language skills, it is not yet clear whether they will achieve similarly favourable results to cohorts who have been in the country for longer. On the one hand, the more recent cohort benefits from a better support structure and reports much higher rates of participation in language courses than refugees who arrived over a decade ago (84% versus 60%). On the other hand, more recent arrivals have lower educational qualifications, which may pose challenges for language learning. Indeed, refugees with a primary-level education tend to have significantly lower language skills compared with those who completed lower secondary education. This suggests that investing more in refugees' education could also improve their language skills.

As a consequence of their forced migration, refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market, but their outcomes improve over time.⁸ Initial employment rates of refugees in Germany are very low (34%) but increase strongly after the first 5 years. For those with more than 20 years in the country, employment rates are twice as high as for recent arrivals. Nevertheless, they remain well below those of the native-born population (see **Figure 11**). Family immigrants, who also tend to arrive with a weak attachment to the labour market, follow a similar trend but show stronger employment gains as duration of stay increases. By contrast, immigrants who come for employment purposes exhibit very high employment rates upon arrival (85%), which remain relatively high and gradually decline once they approach retirement age.

■ Figure 11 ■

Employment outcomes of refugees strongly improve over time

Employment rate by reason for migration and years of residence in Germany, 15-64 year-olds, 2021



Source: EU-LFS 2021.

Highly educated refugees in Germany face more obstacles in finding a skill-adequate job than in other major destination countries (see **Figure 12**). Less than three out of five refugees with a university degree are employed, and almost half of those who are employed work in positions for which they are formally overqualified. Conversely, the employment rate of low- and medium-educated refugees is comparable to that of refugees in the EU overall.

8. Note that these data do not track the same individuals over time. Differences in employment rates may also be due to varying characteristics of migrant cohorts.

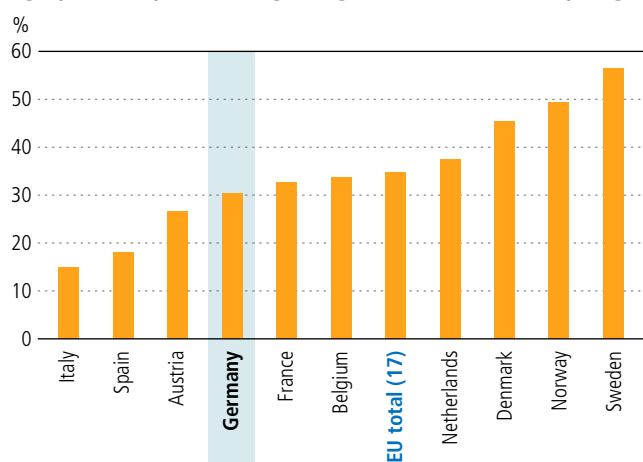


Although refugees' formal qualifications are discounted virtually everywhere, over-qualification rates are particularly high in Germany. Part of this may be due to the importance placed on recognizing foreign qualifications in the German labour market, which exacerbates the problem of refugees lacking documentation for their diplomas and qualifications. Furthermore, language skills play an important role in the German labour market and may present a barrier for refugees seeking high-skilled jobs. In a survey conducted by the OECD, the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees, about 80% of employers in Germany indicated that very good language skills are necessary for highly skilled positions in their firm. Additionally, 40% of respondents required very good and 52% good language skills for medium-skilled jobs (OECD, 2017_[13]).

■ Figure 12 ■

Less than one in three highly educated refugees work in jobs that match their qualifications

Share working in highly skilled jobs among refugees with a university degree, 15-64 year-olds, 2021



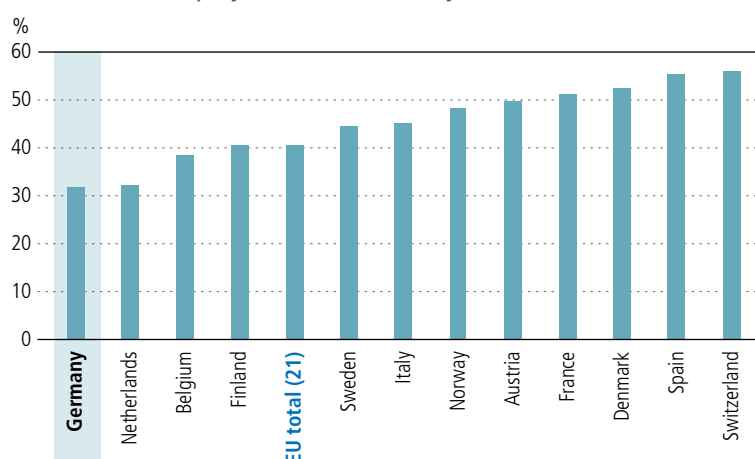
Source: EU-LFS 2021.

Another group which requires specific attention are refugee women. Previous OECD work has shown that they face a "triple disadvantage" due to cumulative obstacles related to their immigration status, refugee status and gender (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018_[14]). While bringing them into employment is a challenge everywhere, their employment rates are particularly low in Germany, with less than a third being employed (see **Figure 13**).

■ Figure 13 ■

Refugee women are a vulnerable group on the labour market, particularly in Germany

Employment rates, 15-64 year-olds, 2021



Source: EU-LFS 2021.



More so than for refugee men, refugee women's employment rates vary widely according to their level of education. In Germany, over half of medium and highly educated refugee women are employed, compared to only two in five low-educated women. As a result, the gender gap between refugee men and women is widest among those with low levels of education.

III.3. Ensuring equal opportunities for the children of immigrants

After a strong increase over the last decade, over one in four children and youth under the age of 34 have either immigrated to Germany or have two immigrant parents. The number of native-born children aged below 15 with two immigrant parents exceeds the number of children born abroad, totaling nearly 2 million compared to less than 1 million. Conversely, among individuals aged 15 to 34, the opposite is true, with over 1 million native-born with two immigrant parents, in contrast to almost 4 million immigrants in this age group.

In major EU destinations, including Germany, children of immigrants are overrepresented in socioeconomically disadvantaged families, leading to disparities in resources and opportunities compared to their peers with native-born parents. While they are less susceptible to relative poverty in Germany than in most other major destination countries, gaps with the children of the native-born are still substantial.⁹ Approximately one in three children of immigrants experience such conditions, nearly three times the rate among their peers with native-born parents. If children with migrant parents experienced the same incidence of poverty as their counterparts with native-born parents, more than half a million children would be lifted out of relative poverty. Similar to native-born households, children growing up in single-parent immigrant households are most at risk, with almost half experiencing relative poverty.

Immigrants' increased risk of poverty, combined with their concentration in urban areas and larger average household sizes negatively affect their own and their children's housing conditions. In Germany, approximately one in four children with immigrant parents live in overcrowded accommodation, regardless of whether the parents are from EU or non-EU countries.¹⁰ This share is around four times higher than for those in native-born households and places Germany in the middle of the country distribution.

Children of immigrants often face obstacles to accessing education, such as language barriers, discrimination or socioeconomic disparities. Furthermore, they are less likely to be enrolled in ECEC in spite of the benefits which this conveys for children's social, linguistic and cognitive development. Even those born and raised in the host country tend to encounter barriers and consequently perform worse in school than their peers with native-born parents. This is the case in most major European destination countries.

In Germany, native-born children of immigrants performed better in the PISA test than their peers in most other European destinations (see **Figure 14** for reading proficiency; similar results hold for math scores). This is in contrast to the early 2000s, when the performance of native-born children of immigrants was worse than in most other major destinations, and gaps with their peers with native-born parents were more than twice as large as they are currently.

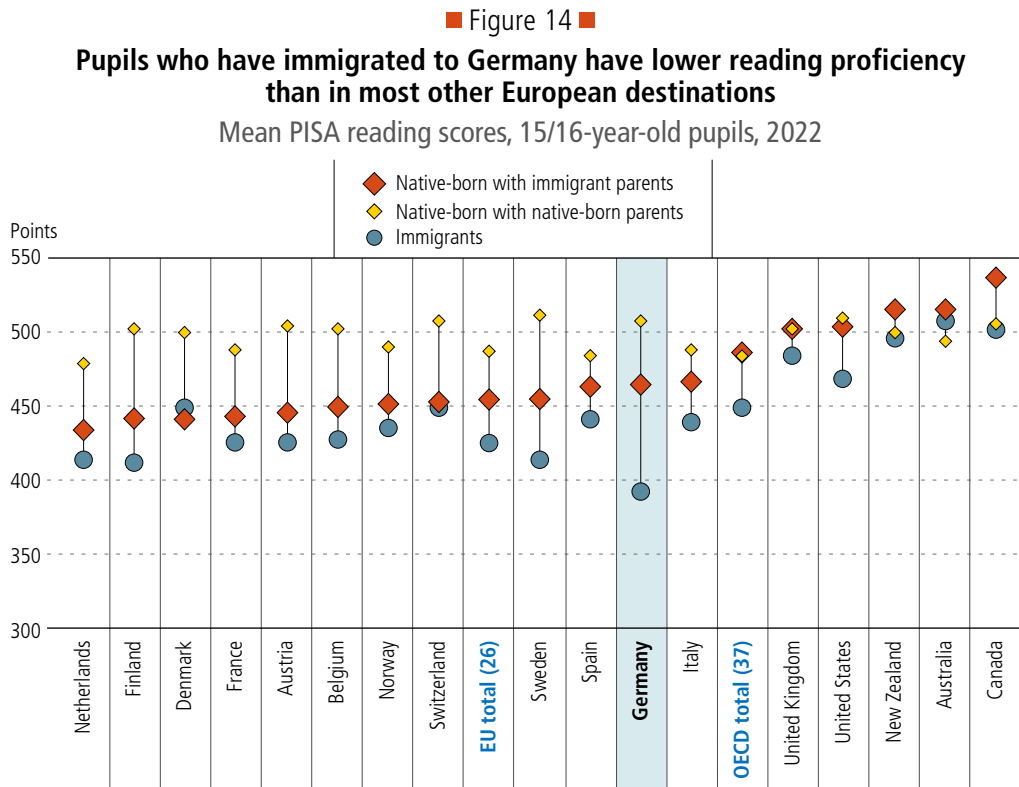
The situation is different for children who were themselves born abroad. They face additional challenges at school, such as learning a new language or adjusting to a new learning environment. Refugee students face even more hurdles as they often have to cope with psychological distress. Furthermore, many did not receive adequate schooling prior, during and after their migration due to wars or violent conflicts in their countries of origin and prolonged stays in refugee camps and reception centers.

9. The relative poverty rate (or at-risk-of-poverty rate) is the proportion of under-16 year-olds living below the country's poverty threshold. The Eurostat definition of the poverty threshold used in this publication is 60% of the median equivalised disposable income in each country (see Indicator 4.2 in OECD/European Commission (2023) for further details).

10. A home is considered overcrowded if the number of rooms is less than the sum of 1 living room, plus 1 room for each single person or the couple responsible for the household, plus 1 room for every 2 additional adults, plus 1 room for every 2 children.



Immigrant students perform on average over 100 points lower in reading and math (approximately equivalent to the learning gains of several school years) than pupils with native-born parents. Around three in five immigrant students do not achieve basic reading proficiency compared with one in six students born in Germany to native-born parents.¹¹ Moreover, the average reading and math scores of immigrant students in Germany are lower than those in virtually all other major destination countries, even after controlling for their socioeconomic status and the language spoken at home.



Note: Caution is required when interpreting estimates for Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met (see OECD, 2023c for more information).

Source: OECD, PISA 2022 Database.

The challenges faced by immigrants taking the PISA exam vary depending on their age at arrival in the host country. In Germany, due in part to the large inflow of refugees in 2015/2016, most immigrant students arrived in the host country after the age of 6, while only a quarter began primary school in the country. Thus, the share of students who experienced disruptions in their educational trajectory is particularly large.¹²

However, immigrant pupils in Germany perform worse than those in other major destination countries, regardless of when they arrived (see **Figure 15**).

Furthermore, PISA reading scores in Germany show a strong decline in the current wave, particularly among immigrants (see **Figure 16**). This decline has exacerbated existing disparities between immigrant students and those born in Germany. After significant improvements in the 2000s, the decline in academic performance of immigrant students began in 2015 and intensified in 2022. While PISA scores also dropped OECD-wide for native-born students, declines were much more pronounced for immigrant students in Germany.

11. PISA uses eight proficiency levels to identify the competences of pupils. The minimum level of proficiency is defined as scoring at least Proficiency Level 2 (see OECD 2023c for more information).

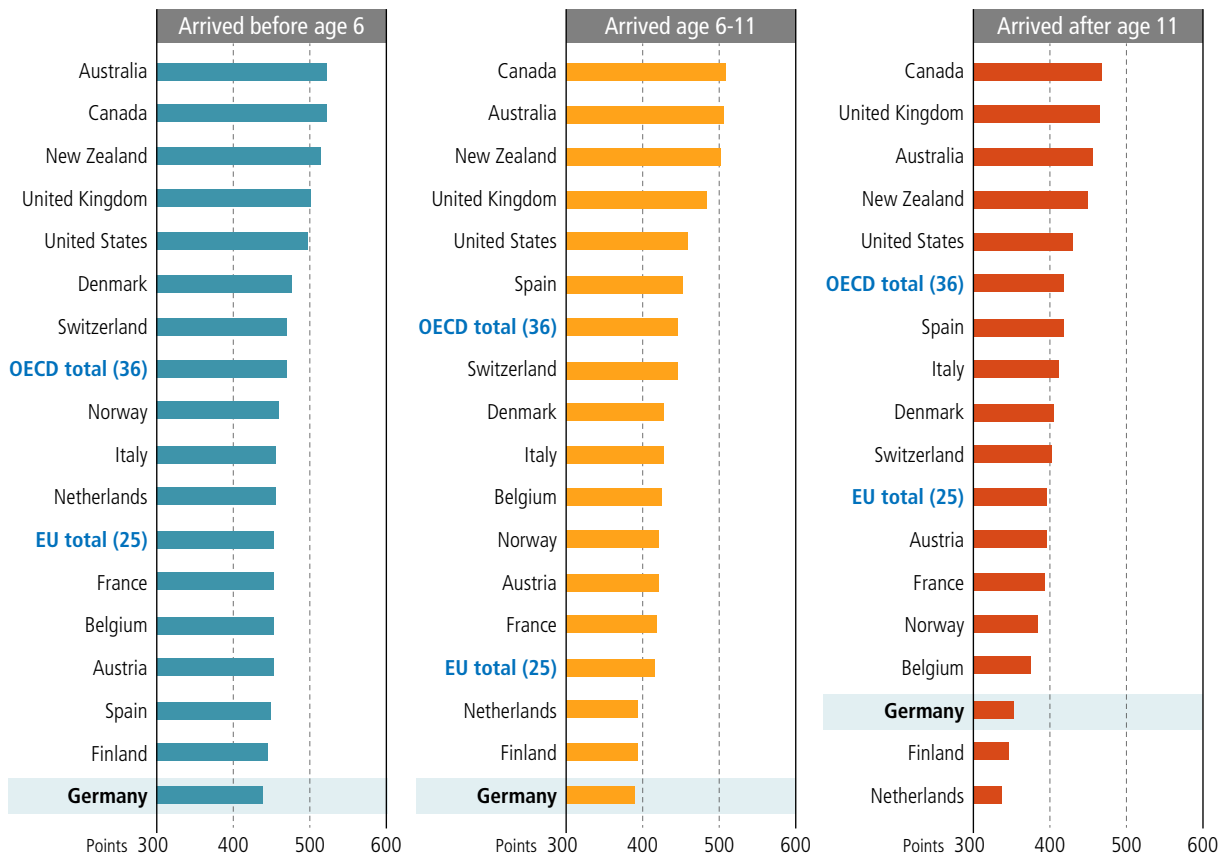
12. While in some *Länder* newly arrived immigrant pupils are immediately placed in mainstream classes, in others they are initially placed in separate classes, at least for some subjects ("*Willkommensklassen*", "*Vorbereitungsklassen*", "*Vorkurse*", "*Brückenklassen*", etc.).



Figure 15

Irrespective of when they arrived, immigrant pupils in Germany score lower on the PISA reading exam than their counterparts elsewhere

Mean PISA reading scores, 15/16-year-old pupils, 2022



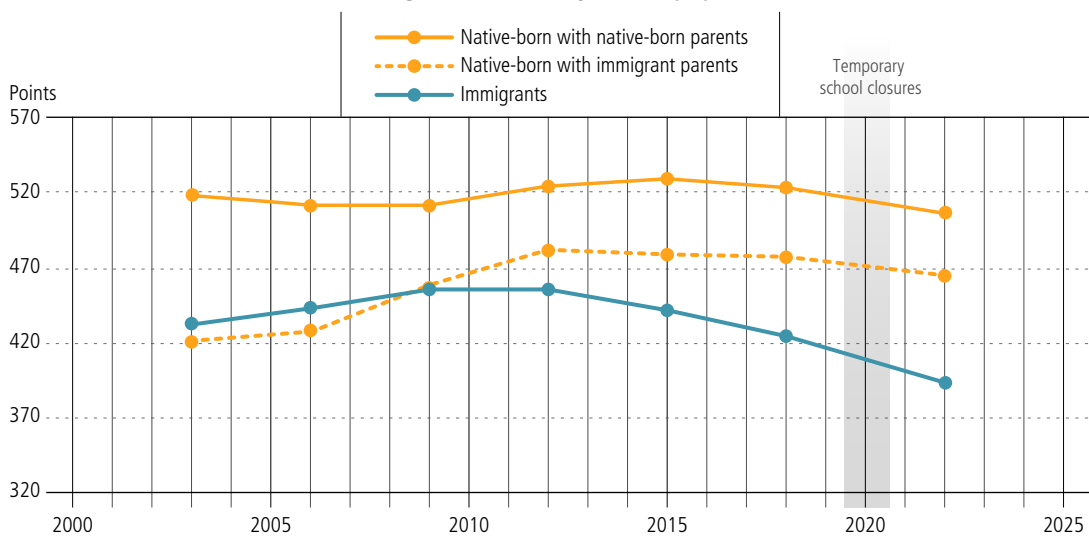
Note: Caution is required when interpreting estimates for Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met (see OECD, 2023c for more information).

Source: OECD, PISA 2022 Database.

Figure 16

Germany's PISA reading scores have strongly declined since 2015 among immigrant students, but native-born children of immigrants fare much better than in the early 2000s

Mean PISA reading scores, 15/16-year-old pupils, 2003-2022



Source: OECD, PISA Database 2003-2022.



Although the present analysis does not allow to pinpoint the cause of the significant performance drop in 2022, prior research suggests that nationwide school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which were comparatively extensive in Germany, led to learning losses, particularly for disadvantaged students (e.g. Maldonado and De Witte, 2022^[16]); (Engzell, Frey and Verhagen, 2021^[17]). Possible reasons for the challenges they faced include the lack of a conducive learning environment at home, limited opportunities for parents to telework and support their children, and prior learning gaps that make it difficult to follow the school curriculum remotely. Additionally, language barriers and less familiarity with the school system may have compounded these issues for immigrant students (OECD, 2020^[18]), (OECD, 2022^[19]).

To enable young people with immigrant parents to reach their full potential in the education system, OECD countries have implemented policies tailored to their specific needs (see **Box 7**).

Box 7 **OECD countries address educational barriers for young people with immigrant parents in several ways**

OECD countries follow different approaches to support the integration of young people with immigrant parents into the education system:

- **Ensuring that all children begin their education on an equal footing.** OECD countries have improved the affordability and accessibility of ECEC and developed initiatives to raise awareness of immigrant parents about the importance of pre-school learning. Examples include home visit programmes, provision of learning resources and information, recruitment of specialised staff, and training for pre-primary staff to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children. Furthermore, countries provide language screening and support. In Germany, the age at which children are screened for language difficulties varies across the *Länder*. For instance, in the Land of Hesse, routine language screenings are conducted in all ECEC institutions when children turn four. Those who have language difficulties receive one year of special support in the form of a preparation course ("*Vorlaufkurs*") before entering primary school.
- **Providing flexible education pathways for young people who arrive after the start of primary education.** Several countries have postponed or raised the age of sorting students into different tracks (e.g. Poland, Spain). The German Land of Bavaria raised the compulsory age for vocational schools from 18 to 21, and in some cases to 25, in response to the high inflow of refugee youth in 2015/16. Some OECD countries have introduced time-limited reception or language classes for newly arrived students, as well as supplementary information and orientation on the education system and environment for both students and their parents. Canada developed programmes to acquaint immigrant and refugee students with the school environment before the school year begins. Mentorship from teachers, settlement workers, and peer leaders helps students build relationships, achieve academic goals, improve social and language skills, and integrate into the broader community.
- **Reducing the concentration of disadvantaged youth with immigrant parents or mitigating the negative consequences of such concentration.** The city of Copenhagen, for example, has encouraged immigrant parents to choose a school with a student population that is not predominantly made up of children of immigrants, and vice versa. Participating schools provided preparation and training for teachers and integration specialists or translators with migration experience. Other OECD countries have taken steps to improve the learning environment and education quality in schools where disadvantage concentration exceeds the national average. For example, New Zealand allocates funding to schools to meet the needs of students whose parents are refugees. Such support includes bilingual tutors in mainstream classes, education coordinators, and liaison workers to better connect schools with families and communities.

Source: OECD, 2021^[20].

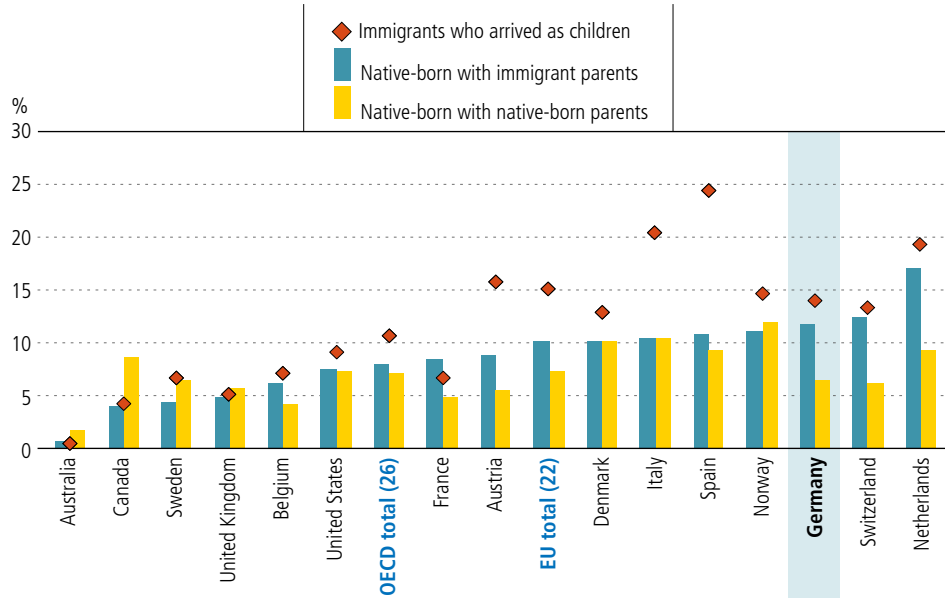


The challenges faced by students with immigrant parents in the education system are also evident in their higher likelihood of dropping out of school prematurely. More than one in ten young people (15-24) born in Germany to immigrant parents and one in seven who immigrated to Germany as a child are not in formal education nor training and have not completed more than lower secondary education (see **Figure 17**). This is twice the share observed among youth with native-born parents.

■ Figure 17 ■

Young people with immigrant parents are twice as likely as their peers with native-born parents to leave school prematurely

Share of youth (aged 15-24) neither in education nor training, and who have gone no further than lower secondary school, 2021 or most recent year available



Note: The figures for the United Kingdom are not fully comparable with other countries, as the distinction between offspring with immigrant parents and offspring with native-born parents rests on self-declared ethnicity.

Source: EU LFS 2021. Australia & Canada: Census 2016. United Kingdom: National LFS 2020. United States: Current Population Survey (CPS) 2020.

Similarly, youth with immigrant parents face challenges in transitioning from school to work. This may be due to a lack of social networks, limited knowledge of the labour market, discrimination and other factors. In Germany and other major European destinations, they are at a higher risk of being NEET (not in employment, formal education, nor training). Around one in eight young people who arrived in Germany as children or were born in Germany to immigrant parents are NEET, compared to one in fourteen with native-born parents. However, these figures are not high in international comparison.



Building equal and inclusive societies

Key takeaways

- While immigrants are overrepresented among people facing relative poverty in Germany, poverty levels and the gap with the native-born are smaller than in most peer countries.
- The German public widely acknowledges the economic contributions of immigrants, with nearly half holding a positive opinion on the economic impact of immigrants. However, progress in integration often goes unnoticed, leading to less positive views on integration.
- A substantial part of non-EU immigrants (20%) and young native-born with immigrant parents (23%) feels part of a group that is discriminated against in Germany, yet public awareness of this issue is limited compared to other countries.

Ensuring that immigrants have equal access to resources and opportunities helps building more inclusive and cohesive societies. It is a prerequisite for immigrants to thrive in society. This section analyses the differences in living conditions (housing and income) between immigrants and the native-born population. It then examines public perception challenges, immigrants' experiences of discrimination and their political and social participation. In contrast to labour market outcomes and education, there is less internationally comparable data available on social integration outcomes. However, the limited evidence suggests that outcomes in Germany are not unfavourable when compared to its peer nations, positioning the country in the middle of the distribution for most indicators.

IV.1. Promoting equal living conditions

Virtually everywhere across the OECD, immigrants have a lower median annual disposable household income than the native-born.¹³ In Germany, non-EU immigrants who are employed have around 20% lower incomes than their native-born peers with the same formal level of education, while the incomes of EU immigrants are 12% lower. This places Germany in the middle of the country distribution.

Immigrants are also over-represented among those living in relative poverty, i.e. with an income below 60% of the median income. More than one in four immigrants experience relative poverty compared to less than one in six native-born. Although this gap is significant, both poverty levels and the gap with the native-born are smaller than in most other countries with a significant share of low-educated immigrants.

In international comparison, however, Germany performs less well in preventing in-work poverty, and immigrants are particularly affected. Over one in four employed low-educated immigrants from outside the EU and nearly one in five of their EU-born peers face in-work poverty, compared to one in seven of their native-born peers. This phenomenon may be attributed in part to the relatively large low-wage sector and the high prevalence of part-time work among women (Hanesch, 2019_[21]).

13. A household's annual disposable income is total earnings per capita from labour and capital adjusted by the square root of household size. Median income divides all households into two halves: one receives less and one receives more.



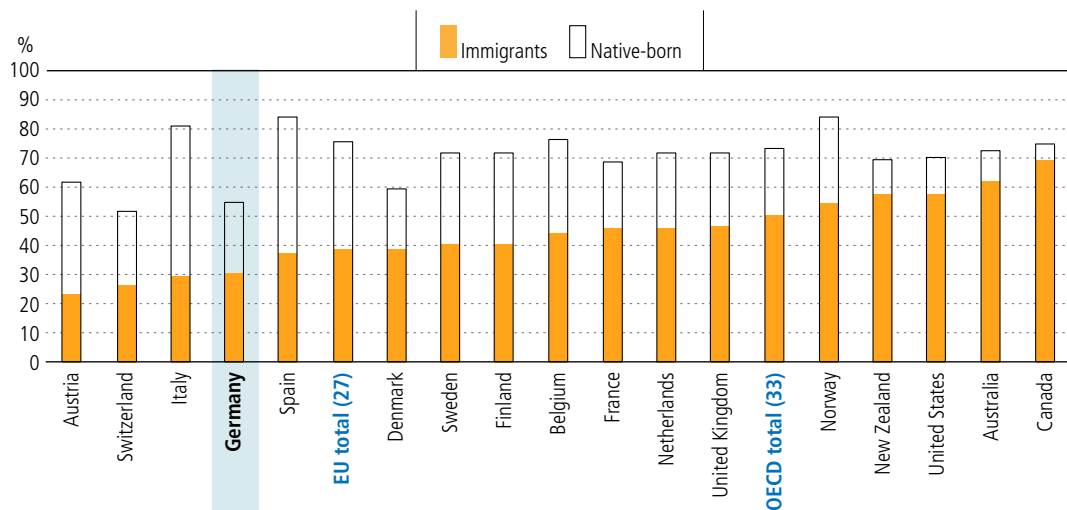
Housing problems are also more prevalent among immigrants than the native-born, especially among immigrants who arrived within the last decade. Although only a small number of immigrants in Germany are considered overburdened by housing costs (allocating more than 40% of their disposable income to rent), they often do not find suitable housing for their, on average, larger households. Around 28% of immigrants who arrived less than 10 years ago live in overcrowded housing (see section III.3 for a definition), the highest share among major destinations, save Austria and Italy. For immigrants who arrived earlier, as well as the native-born, shares are much lower, amounting to 11% and 5%, respectively.

Moreover, immigrants are less likely to own a home compared with the native-born. While the German housing market in general is characterised by low ownership rates, immigrants face particular challenges, with only 30% owning a home (see Figure 18). This rate is one of the lowest among major destination countries and just over half the rate of the native-born population. Even immigrants who have been living in the country for more than ten years are much less likely to be homeowners than the native-born, at 40% compared with 54%. Immigrants may face obstacles when buying property due to lower financial means, limited knowledge of the housing market, and discrimination. The absence of housing inheritance and different preferences and behaviours may also contribute to the disparity.

■ Figure 18 ■

Home ownership rates among the native-born in Germany are nearly double those of immigrants

Rates of home ownership, 16-year-olds and above, 2021 or most recent year available



Note: Data for Canada cover populations aged 15 years and over.

Source: EU-SILC 2021 (2018 for the United Kingdom). Australia: SIH 2017-18. Canada: Census 2016. New Zealand: HES 2021. United States: ACS 2019.

IV.2. Addressing public perception challenges

Host society attitudes and behaviours shape the success of integration efforts: While positive attitudes can create an environment conducive to social, economic and cultural integration, negative attitudes can lead to social exclusion, discrimination and may undermine immigrants’ engagement in the host society.

According to the European Social Survey (ESS), attitudes towards immigrants in Germany present a mixed picture: The native-born population has a more positive view on immigrants’ *economic* impact than in almost all other major destinations, with nearly half holding a positive opinion in 2020.¹⁴ However, attitudes are more negative in Germany than in most other major European destinations when it comes to whether “immigrants make the country a better or worse place to live in”. Only slightly more than one in four (27%) of the native-born in Germany had a positive view. Half reported no particular view and 23% a negative view.

14. This indicator refers to the native-born 15-year-olds and above, with a score from 7 to 10 (on a scale from 0 bad to 10 good) to the question: “Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]’s economy that people come to live here from other countries?”.



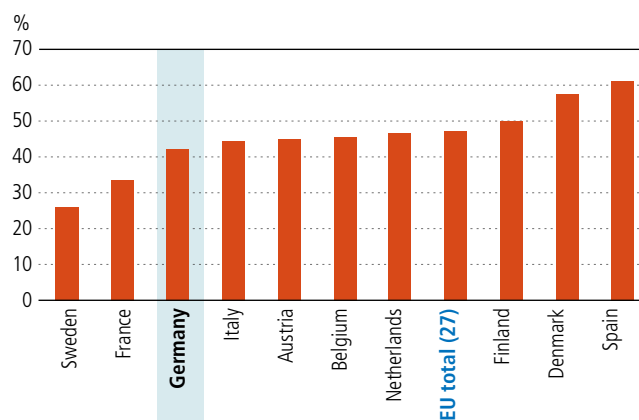
As in many other countries, native-born attitudes towards immigration in Germany became more supportive in the 2010s. In particular, views on the economic impact of immigrants in Germany were more positive in 2020 than in 2010.

At the same time, however, many people in Germany did not perceive the positive trends in integration outcomes over this timeframe. For example, as shown by the Eurobarometer 2021, less than a third of EU citizens in Germany are aware of the strong increase in the employment rate of non-EU citizens (7 percentage points) over the last decade. In line with this, the overall perception of integration in the host-society in Germany is rather pessimistic: Only around two-fifths of EU citizens in Germany consider the integration of non-EU immigrants at national level to be very or fairly successful (see **Figure 19**).

■ Figure 19 ■

In Germany, views on the integration of non-EU immigrants are less positive than in most other countries

EU citizens who think that integration is very or fairly successful, 15-year-olds and above, 2021



Note: Estimates are not weighted.

Source: Eurobarometer 519, 2021.

IV.3. Tackling discrimination

While actual discrimination is difficult to measure, many surveys capture individuals' subjective perceptions of being discriminated against. Self-perceived discrimination not necessarily reflects exposure to discrimination, but also depends on individuals' awareness and ability to detect discrimination and their expectations of equal treatment. Therefore, it is an important marker of social cohesion.

In Germany, almost one in five non-EU immigrants of working age identifies as a member of a group that is discriminated against based on ethnicity, nationality or race according to data from the ESS from 2012 to 2020 (see **Figure 20**). This puts Germany in the middle of the distribution among major European destination countries. EU immigrants are generally less likely to perceive discrimination, with only around 8% in Germany considering themselves as part of a group that is discriminated against.

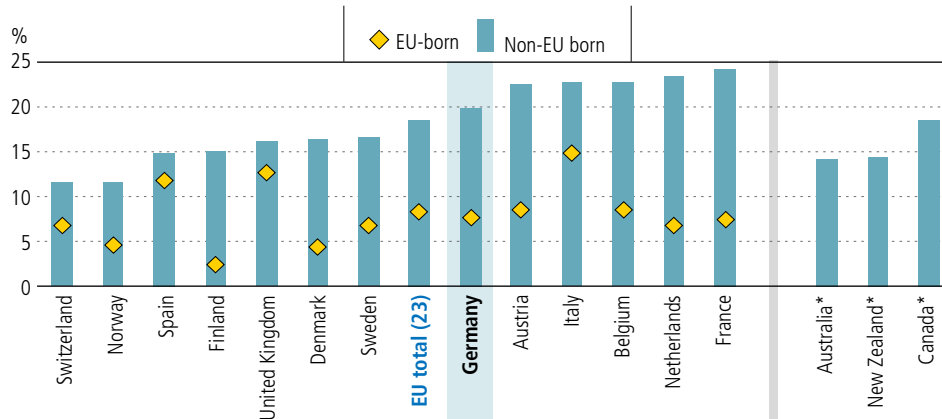
In virtually all major destinations, perceived discrimination is particularly acute among the children of immigrants who were born in the host country (aged 15-34). In Germany, 23% of them report belonging to a group that is discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, nationality or race, compared with 14% of immigrants in the same age group who arrived as children (see **Figure 21**). This can be partly explained by the fact that better integrated and educated people are more likely to engage in intergroup comparison, tend to harbour greater expectations of equal treatment and better understand processes of discrimination (OECD, 2024^[22]).



Figure 20

Almost one in five non-EU immigrants in Germany reports belonging to a discriminated group

Self-reported discrimination, 15-64 year-olds, 2012-2020



Note: Data for European countries refer to the sense of belonging to a group that is discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, or nationality.

* Australian data refer to immigrants who report having experienced discrimination over the last year on the grounds of ethnicity, skin colour, nationality, race or language. Canadian data refer to immigrants who report having experienced discrimination or unfair treatment since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, because of their ethnicity, culture, race, or colour. Data for New Zealand refer to immigrants who report having been treated unfairly or having had an unpleasant experience because of their ethnicity, race or nationality in the past 12 months.

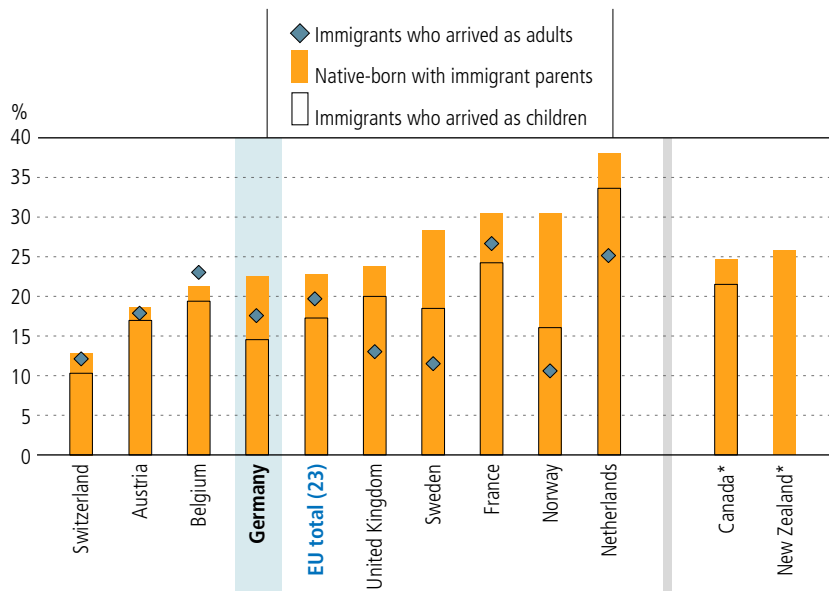
Source: European countries: ESS 2012-20. Australia & Canada: GSS 2020. New Zealand: GSS 2021.

30

Figure 21

Experiences of discrimination are most common among native-born young people with immigrant parents

Self-reported discrimination, 15-34 year-olds, 2012-2020



Notes and sources: See Figure 20.

There is only little comparative data on personal (self-reported) experiences of discrimination. In 2021, according to the EU-LFs, around one in thirteen employed non-EU immigrants in Germany reported discrimination at work because of their foreign origin. This places the country in the middle of the distribution. In a recent survey by the European Fundamental Rights Agency, people of African descent reported high levels of discrimination in Germany (FRA, 2023_[23]). Almost two in three reported at least one incident of discrimination in the year preceding the survey. Among the 13 EU countries participating in the survey, only Austria had higher levels.



Since 2012, perceived discrimination among immigrants in Germany has gradually increased. The proportion of non-EU immigrants who consider themselves to be part of a discriminated group increased by 8 percentage points between 2012 and 2018. In 2020, there was an even more significant increase in this group of 14 percentage points over 2018. However, due to small sample sizes, it remains unclear whether the sharp increase in 2020 can be associated with COVID-19-related discrimination or to a change in the survey mode in Germany from face-to-face to self-completion (web and paper). While other OECD countries have also seen an increase over the last decade, the trend has been less pronounced elsewhere.

At the same time, awareness of discrimination and its consequences are rather low among the German population. Eurobarometer data show that among EU citizens in Germany, fewer than three in five consider discrimination to be a major obstacle to the successful integration of non-EU immigrants, the lowest proportion among major EU destinations.

IV.4. Removing barriers to political and societal participation

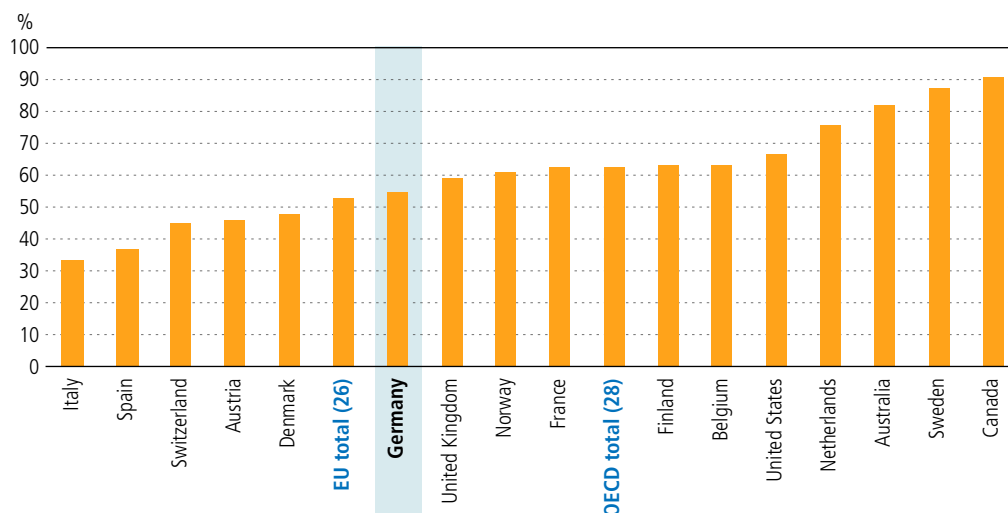
Germany has successively liberalised access to citizenship through several reforms since the beginning of the millennium. Nevertheless, in 2020, just over half of immigrants residing in Germany for more than 10 years were German nationals, a lower share than in most other major destinations (see **Figure 22**). The low rate of citizenship acquisition in Germany leaves nearly 4 million of such long-term immigrants without the right to vote in national elections and other privileges reserved for German citizens. However, the year 2021 shows a slight increase in citizenship acquisition compared with 2020, a trend that is expected to continue due to a citizenship reform further facilitating naturalisation.

As the benefits of acquiring German citizenship partly depend on immigrants' origin nationality, citizenship acquisition rates vary widely between different regions of origins. While most settled immigrants born in Europe, North America and Oceania do not hold German citizenship, 74% and 56% from Asian and African countries, respectively, do.

■ Figure 22 ■

Just over half of immigrants with more than 10 years of residence are German nationals

Host-country nationals among immigrants with at least 10 years of residence, 15-year-olds and above, 2020



Source: EU-LFS 2020 (2019 for the United Kingdom). Australia & Canada: Census 2016. United States: ACS 2019.

According to ESS data from 2012-2020, more than three-quarters of immigrants with German citizenship reported participation in the most recent election, compared with around nine-tenths of the native-born. This puts Germany ahead of many major destination countries but falls short of the high participation rates of immigrants in the Scandinavian countries as well as Belgium, where voting is compulsory.

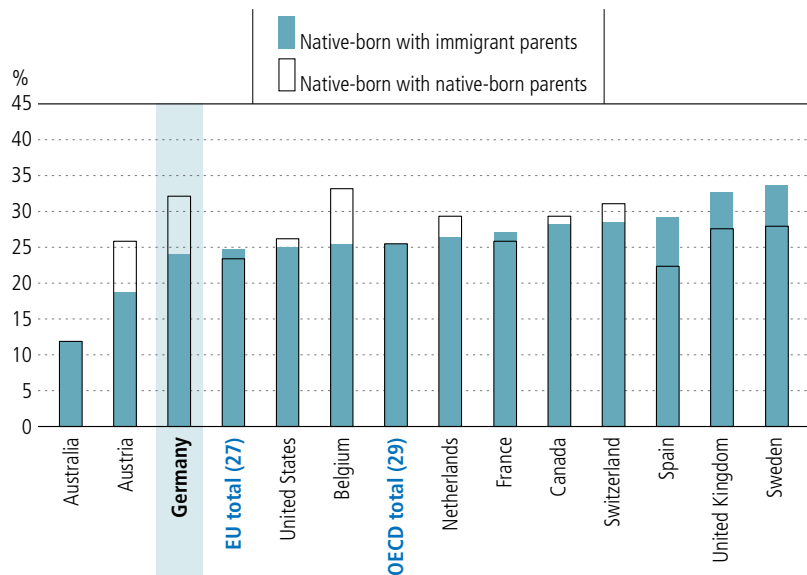


The gap in voter participation is widest between native-born young people (aged 18-34) with immigrant parents and their peers with native-born parents (72 versus 87%). However, both the turnout of young people with immigrant parents and the gap with descendants of native-born are still relatively favourable in international comparison. Furthermore, while self-reported turnout increased significantly between 2002-2010 and 2012-2020 for both immigrants and the native-born, young people with immigrant parents saw the largest improvements, by over 10 percentage points.

Native-born young people with immigrant parents in Germany are also underrepresented in the public sector (encompassing public administration, healthcare, the social services, and education). While this holds true for most major destinations, their underrepresentation is particularly pronounced in Germany: Less than one in four is employed in the public sector, in contrast to nearly one in three of their counterparts with native-born parents (see **Figure 23**).

■ Figure 23 ■

Young people with immigrant parents are underrepresented in the German public sector
 Shares working in the public service sector, 15-34 years-olds in employment, 2020/2021



Note: The figures for the United Kingdom are not fully comparable with other countries, as the distinction between offspring with immigrant parents and offspring with native-born parents rests on self-declared ethnicity.

Source: EU countries: EU-LFS 2021. Australia & Canada: Census 2016. United Kingdom: National LFS 2020. United States: CPS 2020.

In addition to discrimination and limited personal networks, the lack of German nationality among many native-born descendants of immigrants may impede their access to certain segments of the public sector. Furthermore, the disparity observed in Germany contrasts with the over-representation of young people with immigrant parents in the public sector in the United Kingdom and Sweden, which have had targeted diversity policies for the public sector for two decades.

That notwithstanding, since 2008, the share of public sector employment among native-born descendants of immigrants in Germany has increased by 6 percentage points.

Immigrants are underrepresented in various forms of civic engagement, including participation in voluntary organizations. Participation in such organizations allows them to form social ties with the local community and to improve proficiency in the country's language. It is therefore increasingly promoted as a means of enhancing integration, including by Germany – especially in sports clubs (see **Box 8**). Indeed, over the last decade, immigrants in Germany have increased their membership rates in voluntary organisations by over 30 percentage points. Despite these improvements, the gap in membership rates between immigrants and the native-born is larger in Germany than in all other major destinations. Non-EU immigrants, in particular, are



underrepresented in voluntary organisations, with only around half being members, compared with over three-fourth of the native-born. While differences in membership rates between immigrants and the native-born emerge for different types of organisations (faith, art and culture, trade unions, charity, etc.), gaps are most pronounced in sports and recreational organisations (47% compared to 30%). This discrepancy could be due to several factors, such as language barriers, knowledge gaps, or the prevalence of informal modes of social participation among immigrant communities.

Box 8 **Fostering Youth Integration and Social Participation through Sports in Germany**

In Germany, several sports-based projects actively foster the integration and social participation of young people with immigrant parents. The German Olympic Sports Federation (DOSB) provides funding and qualification measures to grass-root sports clubs to enable them to offer targeted, low-threshold support to youth with immigrant parents. Under the DOSB's nationwide 'Integration Through Sports' (IdS) programme, over 4 000 clubs across the country receive support for activities such as homework assistance, language training, assistance with visits to public authorities, and job-search.

Additionally, Germany is an active participant in the ASPIRE (Activity, Sport and Play for the Inclusion of Refugees in Europe) project, a collaborative effort involving nine European countries. This initiative focuses on developing a training module that equips facilitators from national and regional sport umbrella organizations to adapt coaching activities to the specific needs of refugees and immigrants. Furthermore, a region in South Germany (Lower Bavaria) and Austria have instituted integration prizes for sports to acknowledge associations or projects that foster inclusivity and integration.

Source: OECD, 2021^[20].





Conclusion

Germany has significantly invested in integration over the last two decades, and these efforts seem to have paid off. In international comparison, integration outcomes in Germany are favourable on many fronts. Gaps in living conditions are often smaller than in other countries and employment rates of immigrants are high in international comparison. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of immigrants who have been in the country for at least 5 years are able to speak German fluently. What is more, Germany has made significant progress in integrating children born in Germany to immigrant parents into the educational system. Their academic performance surpasses that of most other major destination countries and has improved significantly since the early 2000s.

Despite the progress made, a number of challenges remain. In contrast to the situation for native-born descendants of immigrants, there was no progress for immigrant students. Disparities in educational attainment between immigrant and native-born students have widened in recent years, possibly due to school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

More attention also needs to be paid to adult education, which could help to address educational disparities, particularly for the high share of immigrants (18%) with no more than primary education. Over half of this group fails to reach an intermediate level of German after five years or more in the country, leaving them in a vulnerable position in both the labour market and society.

Another group that requires attention are immigrant women with small children. They have lower labour market outcomes than in most other major destination countries. Difficulties in reconciling family responsibilities with paid employment and socioeconomic disparities may partly explain the high employment gaps between immigrant and native-born mothers.

With the recent inflow of over a million new arrivals from Ukraine, mostly women with children, and high numbers of asylum seekers, addressing these challenges is increasingly important.



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