

Germany: Two-thirds of Syrian refugees unable to support themselves



Many Syrian women in Germany are unable to get jobs because of childcare duties | Photo: Annegret Hilse/Reuters

Syrians are the main beneficiaries of refugee protection in Germany, yet many are still forced to rely on state welfare to survive. New figures show that only around 35% of Syrians of working age are able to make a living.

After a decade of conflict in Syria it seems unlikely that the refugees who fled abroad will be able to return home soon. In Germany, where a large proportion of Syrian refugees have applied for protection, many have found it hard to make a living. Official unemployment figures show that nearly two-thirds (65%) of Syrians who are able to work actually rely either entirely or partially on receiving public

benefits.

This means that Syrians are much more likely than other migrant groups to be receiving Hartz IV benefits, as they are known in Germany: Only about 37% of migrants from Somalia and 44% of Afghans are on welfare, according to statistics from the Federal Employment Agency.

Things seem to be moving in a positive direction for Syrians, however. The proportion receiving state benefits is lower than last year: in March 2020 it was close to 70%. Since then, many have got jobs as doctors – according to the German Medical Association, Syrians now make up the largest group among foreign doctors, with 4,970 employed throughout the country last year.

As of April 2021, about 27% of Syrians in Germany were of working age. Those attending integration courses or professional language courses are not included in unemployment figures but are counted as “underemployed”. But benefits are also paid to those who earn so little that they cannot support themselves on their income.

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Unemployment despite high protection rate

“The figures from the Federal Employment Agency show that we still have a lot to do in the area of integration,” German interior spokesperson for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Mathias Middelberg, told the *dpa* news agency.

Middelberg pointed out that the proportion of Syrians receiving state benefits remained high *in spite* of their relatively good chances of being granted protection in Germany. In other words, he suggested, having secure status does not lead to better integration into the labor market.

More should be done to help “those already living here who are entitled to protection ... especially in the area of labor market integration, ... instead of providing incentives for low-skilled and unskilled immigration, like the Greens want,” Middelberg added.

Many in low-pay jobs

One reason for the relatively high proportion of Syrians receiving benefits, according to a study done by the Employment Agency last year, is that refugees often lack documents with formal qualifications and are employed in areas with “pay in the lower pay range.” According to the agency, a quarter of Syrian refugees had attended universities or vocational training institutions, and 16% had a degree. Among Syrians who were born in Germany, however, four-fifths had vocational or academic degrees.

“In general, we see that the unemployment rate among refugees is always particularly high in the first years of residence,” said Panu Poutvaara, a member of the German Expert Council on Integration and Migration.



For most Syrians who arrived in Germany as children, returning to Syria to live is out of the question | Photo : Picture-alliance/dpa/S.Willnow

Syrians top the list of nationalities of new arrivals in Germany since 2015. Compared with other nationalities, a large proportion (about 40%) have been women. Poutvaara, who heads the ifo Center for Migration Research, says this could also play a role in the relatively high unemployment rate. She says many Syrian women are not able to join the labor market because they have to look

after small children, adding that cultural reasons may also play a role.

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In Germany, as elsewhere, the COVID-19 outbreak led to fewer employment opportunities, making integration into the labor market even harder for migrants and refugees, including Syrians. Even those migrants who were employed tended to be worse affected by the pandemic than the general population, as very few have jobs which allow them to work from home. However, Poutvaara told *dpa*, she remains convinced that the positive trend in labor market integration will persist, and the proportion of Syrian refugees receiving state benefits will continue to decline in the coming years.

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Source:

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/33597/germany-two-thirds-of-syrian-refugees-unable-to-support-themselves>

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