



Federal Office
for Migration
and Refugees

Social isolation among refugees in Germany

Jan Eckhard & Manuel Siegert

19th Conference “Social Monitoring and Reporting in Europe”

Demographic Challenges and Opportunities and their Impact on Individual and Societal Well-being

October 6th-8th 2025

Background

Social isolation

- ... has been identified as a risk factor for various health issues
- ... is basically a shortage of social support
- ... implies limited access to knowledge and information
- ... prevents social control and interactive self-assurance
- ... has also been related in studies to radicalization

Refugees

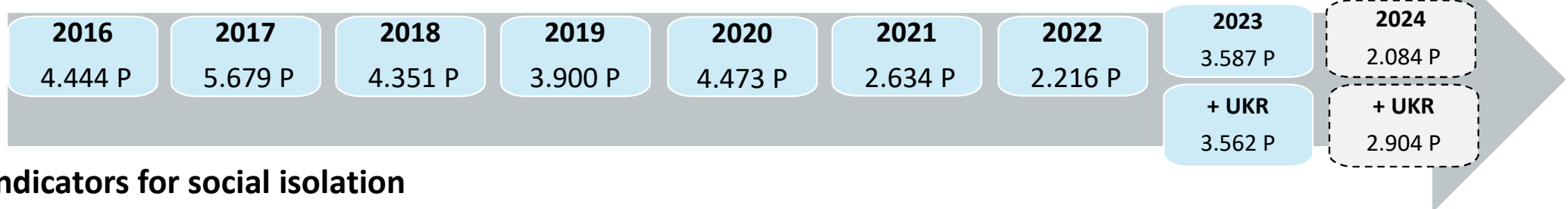
- ... are faced with the task of setting up a new life in an unfamiliar social environment
(job search, language acquisition, dealing with authorities, gaining knowledge about social institutions)
- ... therefore rely heavily on guidance and support
- This applies especially to the first period after arrival

→ Adverse consequences of social isolation are particularly severe in the case of refugees

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees

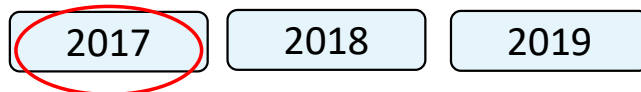
Panel Study since 2016,

Target Population: Refugees living in Germany, who applied for asylum in 2013 or later



Indicators for social isolation

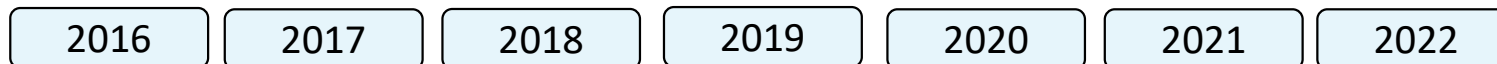
I) Close relationships („With whom do you share personal thoughts and feelings ... ?“)



II) Number of close friends



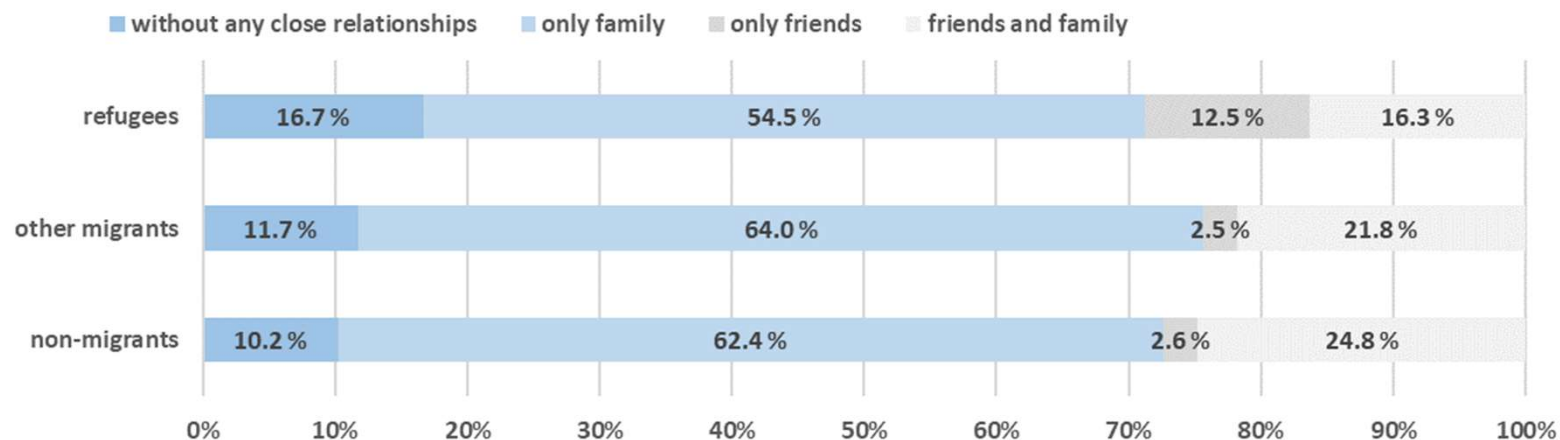
III) Frequency of Spending Time with others (non-relatives) / with Germans



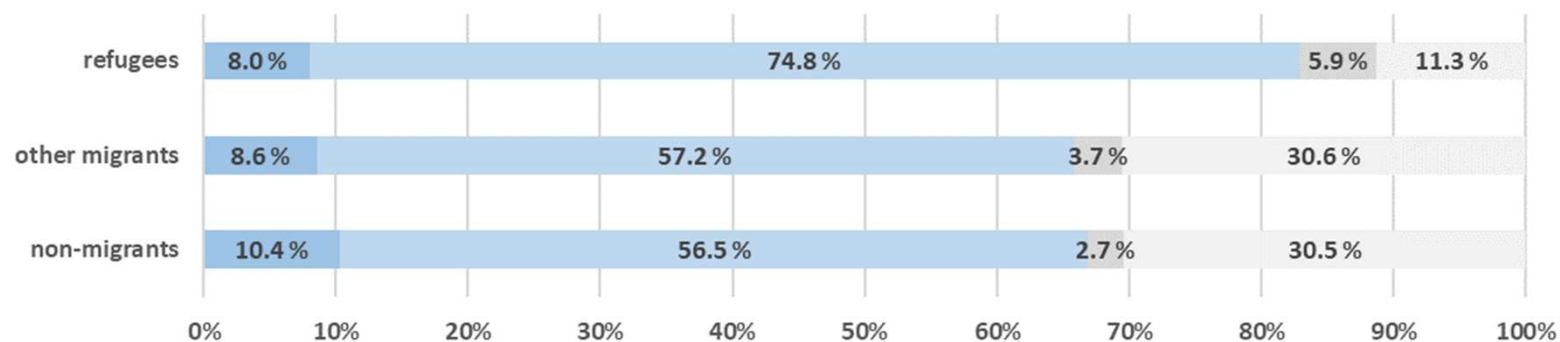
 = data for comparison with non-refugees is available (German Socio-economic Panel)

Existence of close relationships (2016/2017)

Men

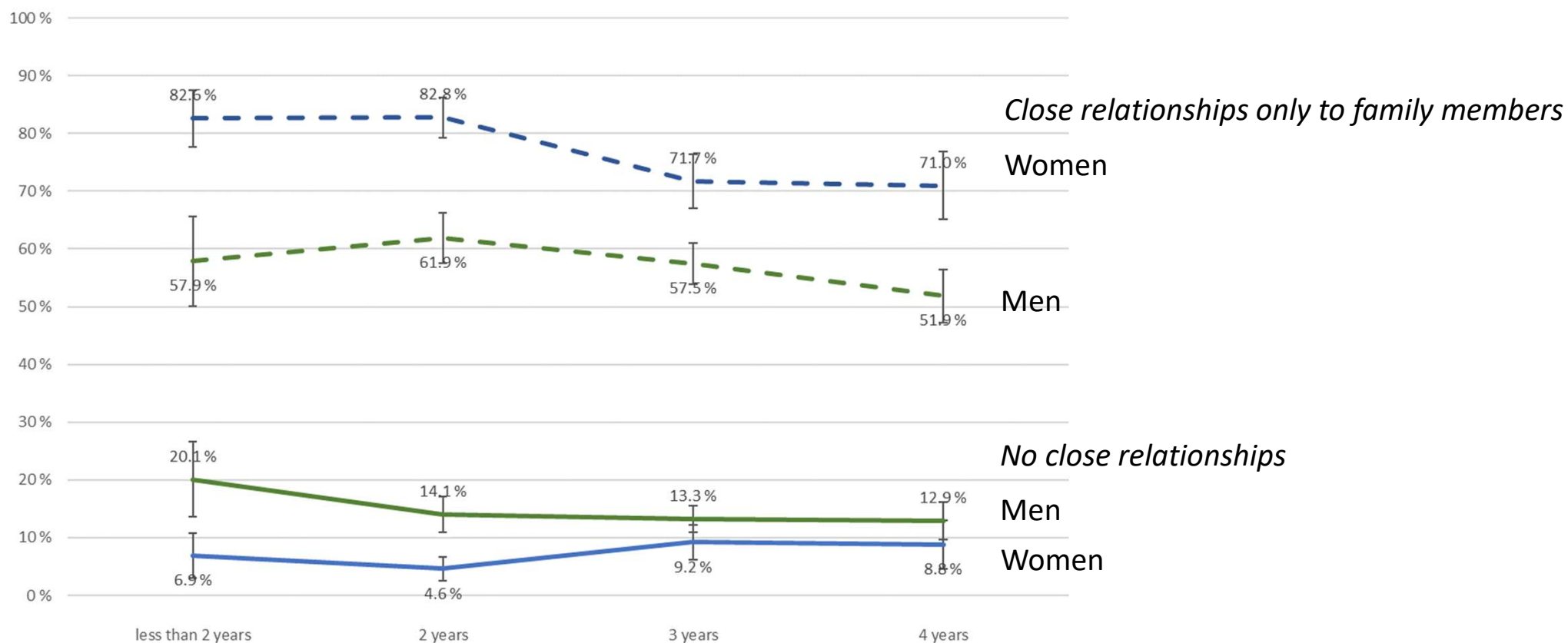


Women



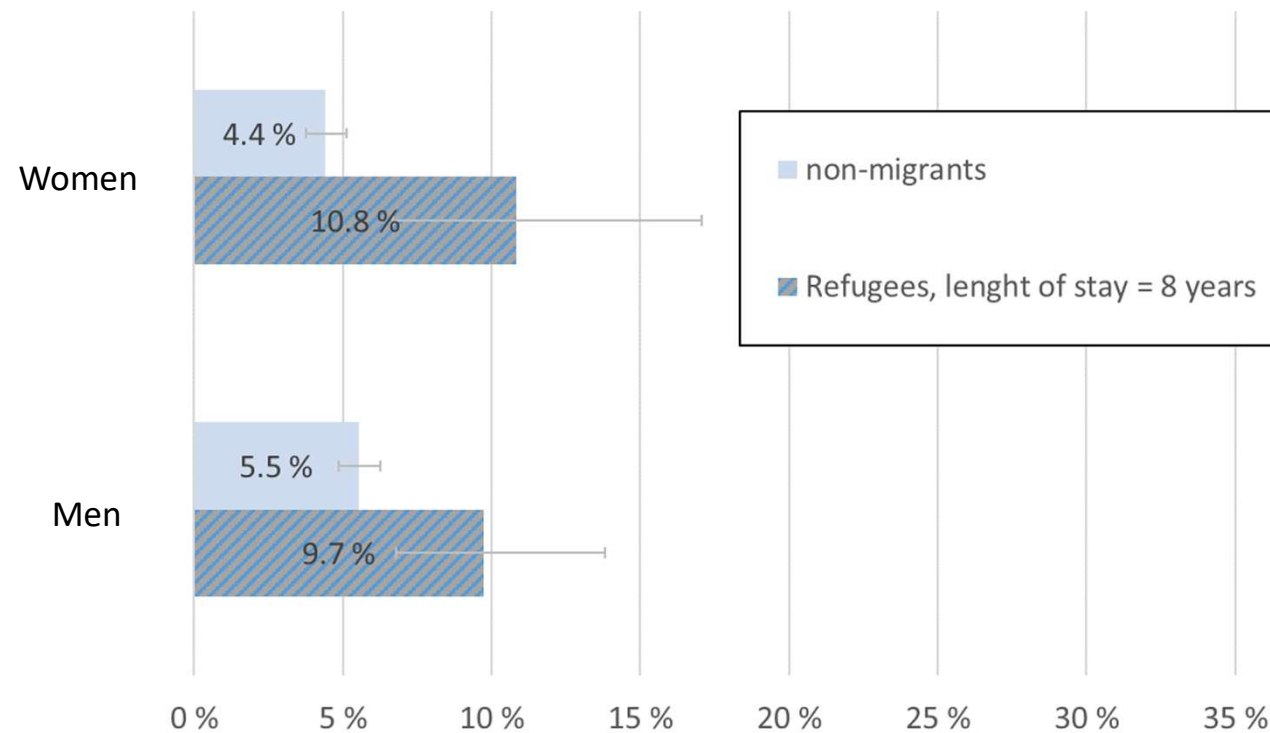
Data: IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Survey of Refugees 2017, German Socio-economic Panel 2016

Existence of close relationships, by length of stay (2017-2019)



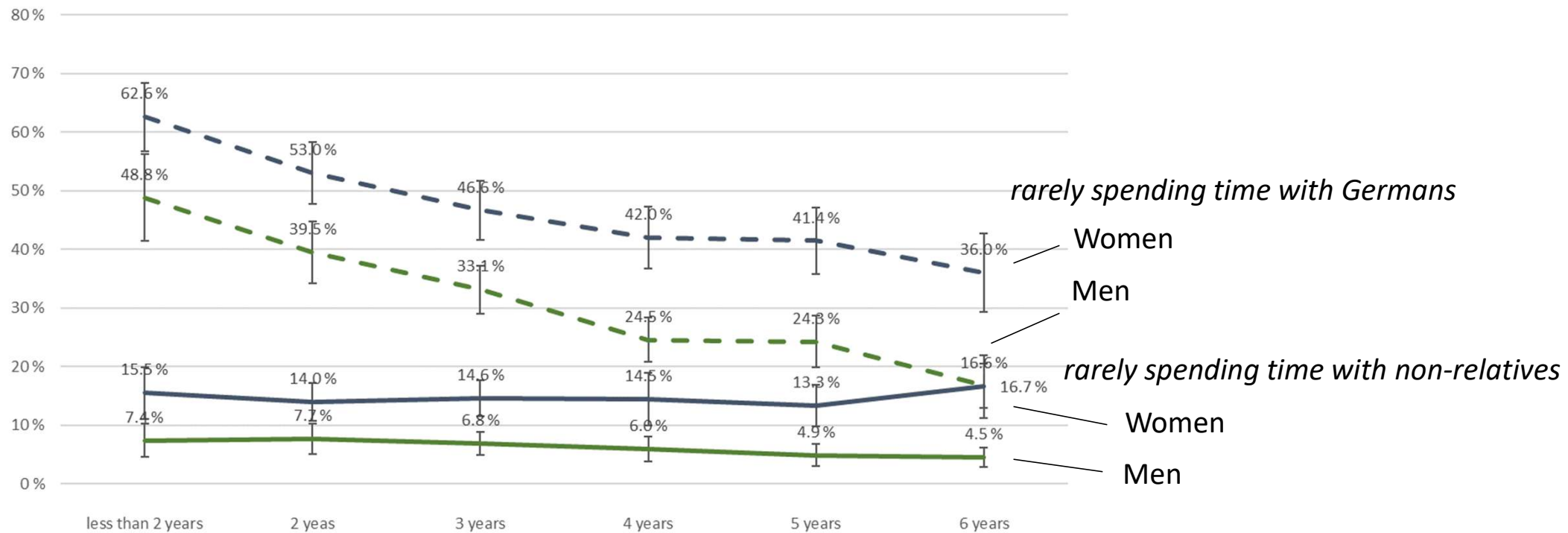
Data: IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Survey of Refugees 2017-2019

Proportion of those reporting to have no close friends (2022)



Data: IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Survey of Refugees 2022, German Socio-economic Panel 2022

Proportion of refugees rarely spending time with non-relatives/Germans (i.e. less than once a month), by length of stay (2016-2022)



Data: IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Survey of Refugees 2016-2022

Influencing factors of social isolation among refugees

Most influential factors:

- **No Partner/spouse in Germany:** high risk to be without any close relationship
- **Age:** older refugees show an increased risk of being without contact/relationships to non-relatives
- **Employment:** lowers the risk to be without contact to non-relatives and to Germans
- **German skills:** reducing effect on all types of social isolation

Further factors:

- **Health:** higher risk in case of poor health to be without contact to non-relatives and to Germans
- **Low educational degree:** less contact to non-relatives
- **Mass accommodation for refugees:** higher probability of having no contact to Germans
- **Integration course:** goes along with more contact to non-relatives in general
- **Children:** Those living with children have more contact to Germans

Recommendations

- Support of **language learning**
- Support of **labour market integration**
- Support for **projects for the social inclusion of refugees**, e.g. into associations with a special **focus on the most vulnerable groups**:
 - male refugees living without their partner/spouse
 - non-working refugee women
 - older refugees
 - refugees with health issues
 - low-educated refugees

Contact

Dr. Jan Eckhard

Researcher

Research Centre Migration, Integration and Asylum
German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

+49-911-943-24710

jan.eckhard@bamf.bund.de



Eckhard, J. & Siegert, M. (2024).
Soziale Isolation und Einsamkeit
bei Geflüchteten in Deutschland

Free download at
<https://www.bamf.de>