

**Final Report**

**SUPPORTING  
REFUGEE FAMILIES.  
A SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS  
OF THE FAMILY  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
WELCOME WITH IMPULS,  
HIPPY AND OPSTAPJE**

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We would like to thank all the children, parents, home visitors and coordinators who participated in this study for their time, support and openness, and for allowing us to join the home visits and group meetings for observations. The participating children were between 18 months and 6 years of age. Between the pages of this report, we included pictures created by them to give the reader an impression of how they perceived the home visits and home visitors.

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Entdecken, lernen, gestalten. Frühe Bildung in der Familie.

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# ABSTRACT

Canada and Germany both received a significant number of refugee families from 2015 to 2018 (Korntheuer et al., 2020). Between January 2014 and December 2018, approximately 144,000 refugee children under the age of seven arrived as asylum seekers in Germany (Gambaro et al., 2019a). Recent research reports indicate that refugee mothers need more flexible and individualized programs or peer-to-peer approaches for an effective support structure. Furthermore, a different outreach strategy is essential for the inclusion of families (BMFSFJ, 2018; Mörrath, 2019).

This research study examines the role of family education programs in supporting successful integration trajectories for refugee families in Germany. Existing programs such as Welcome with IMPULS (Willkommen mit IMPULS; Wml), Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and Opstapje have been investigated for transferable success factors. We aim to better understand the living situation of refugee families in Germany and the role of family education in their inclusion in the host society. Our mixed-methods approach included qualitative interviews, participant observation, an online survey and quantitative participant data provided by the program administrators.

The number of participating families from source countries of asylum seekers in IMPULS programs such as HIPPY and Opstapje in Germany increased from 351 families in 2015 to 719 in 2018. The participant data reveals that this trend is mostly explained by the steady increase in the number of participants from four countries of origin: Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan. The number of participating families from Syria increased sevenfold in the period reviewed.

Drawing on our analysis of 22 family cases, seven program sites and an online survey (N=68), we identify five central functions of the programs for the inclusion of refugee families: i) building trust: emotional stabilization through long-term relationships with home visitors; ii) building bridges: connecting with institutions of the host society; iii) fostering children's cognitive, linguistic and emotional skills; iv) reducing communication barriers by encouraging trust in the family language; and v) promoting reflections on gender roles, family work and gainful employment. We describe limits and challenges to the programs, such as standardized materials for heterogeneous families and the brief amount of time allotted to the individual home visits. Our concrete recommendations for action aim to increase the awareness of diversity and intersectionality in family education programs. We propose eight concrete steps for providing programs that are better adapted to the needs of families with a refugee experience.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*Today, we sat down with the home visitor and she started to play, and they put the food together, and they cooked together and played together. I felt that she [the daughter] interacted a bit. I liked that. I felt that her personality is becoming stronger and that this will allow her to be not shy or scared of people.*  
(Transcription, RK\_2)

In this quote, Nadia, a mother of a two-year-old daughter, shares the positive effects of the Opstapje program on her child. Nadia and her husband fled from the war in Syria. About four years ago, they arrived in Germany, where they had their daughter Mahdia.

Mahdia's parents were among the many individuals and families that arrived in Germany during the so-called "Summer of Migration" in 2015. The sudden influx of people seeking protection at that time increased awareness among policymakers and educators of the need for integration in every area of education. Since then, German and international practitioners, organizations and public entities have been trying to develop needs-based and tailor-made solutions to support the inclusion of families with refugee experiences.

This study, funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, examines the situation of refugee families in Germany and the impact and implementation of family education programs. It aims to better understand the life situation of refugee families in Germany and the role of family education in their inclusion in the host society. On the basis of its results, we elaborate promising practices, necessary frameworks and recommendations for action.

## **Canada and Germany are facing similar challenges**

Canada and Germany both received a significant number of refugee families from 2015 to 2018 (Korntheuer et al., 2020). Between January 2014 and December 2018, approximately 144,000 refugee children under the age of seven arrived as asylum seekers in Germany (Gambaro et al., 2019a). Canada resettled over 120,000 refugees between 2015 and 2018, about one-third of whom came from Syria (Pritchard et al., 2020, p. 14). Canada has generally aimed to resettle the most vulnerable persons; this

process prioritizes complete families, women at risk and LGBTI people (IRCC, 2018). For example, more than 25,000 Syrian refugees were resettled during the first wave from November 2015 to January 2016. Over 50% of this population was younger than 18 years of age, most of whom belonged to families with 4–6 members (40%). Among the families that had arrived, 765 had over six members (IRCC, 2018, p. 19). Canada also received high numbers of asylum seekers: 50,000 in 2017 and 55,000 in 2018. A disproportionately high number (26%) of asylum seekers in 2017 were children aged between 0 and 14 (Pritchard et al., 2020; Statistics Canada, 2019).

Recent studies in Germany have demonstrated that the new refugee cohort has integrated well, particularly into the labour market (Brücker et al., 2019). More than 78% of refugee women in Germany are mothers according to a recent study (BMFSFJ, 2019), and a growing body of evidence shows that refugee mothers face different barriers to inclusion in a host society (Brücker et al., 2019; Worbs and Baraulina, 2017). Access to language instruction and the labour market is strongly related to gender and family situation. An important challenge for the families is limited access to early childhood education and childcare (Gambaro et al., 2019b). This has also been the practical experience of the NGOs in Canada and Germany—Mother Matters and IMPULS Deutschland e.V., respectively—that initiated this study.

## **What is the role of family education programs in improving the success of integration trajectories?**

Recent research reports claim that refugee mothers need more flexible and individualized programs or peer-to-peer approaches for an effective support structure. Furthermore, a more tailored outreach strategy is essential for the inclusion of families (BMFSFJ, 2018; Mörath, 2019).

This research project aims to analyze the role of family education programs in supporting successful integration trajectories for refugee families. We investigated existing programs in Germany such as Welcome with IMPULS (Willkommen mit IMPULS [Wml]), Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and Opstapje for transferable

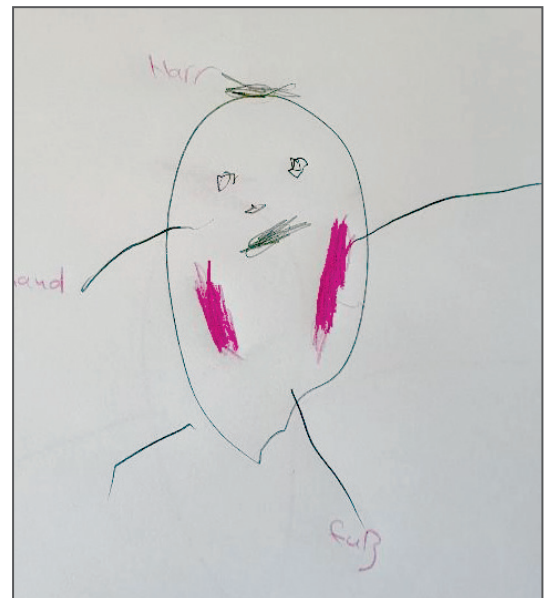
success factors. Our mixed-methods approach included qualitative interviews, participant observation, an online survey, and quantitative participant data provided by program administrators.

Our primary goal has been to determine if family education programs can create social connections as important mediators for successful integration trajectories based on Ager and Strang's (2008) conceptual framework of refugee integration. We ask if these programs act as social bridges that connect families to members of the host society and build social bonds that establish relationships with members from their ethno-cultural, linguistic or religious community. We also inquire into whether the programs create social links and facilitate access to institutions of the host society. Our evaluation criteria are also defined by the conceptional and strategic goals of the IMPULS programs. These programs aim to strengthen parent-child relationships and parental agency as well as support the children's development through a holistic early childhood-education program (IMPULS Deutschland Stiftung e.V., 2018).

### Outline of the report

First, this report provides a brief description of the existing knowledge about the situation of refugee families in Germany (section 2). Germany received a large number of refugee families from 2015 to 2018. These families mostly arrived as asylum seekers; only a small number entered through resettlement and humanitarian admission programs. Legal frameworks and procedures of the asylum system along with individual and other structural factors can restrict the opportunities for parents and children with refugee experiences. Family education programs such as HIPPY and Opstapje are bridges to the host society for migrant families. Second (section 3), we show how our mixed-methods study was conducted to explore the living situation of refugee families in Germany and evaluate the role of family education programs in successful integration trajectories.

We discuss our results in sections 4, 5 and 6. We begin by offering a short overview of the families with refugee experiences in the IMPULS programs HIPPY, Opstapje and Wml (section 4). We then outline the role of the family education programs for this target group (section 5) after first exploring and contextualizing the living situation of refugee families in Germany (5.1). We identify five central functions of the programs for the inclusion of refugee families and describe the limits and challenges to the programs (5.2) based on our analysis of 22 family cases, seven program sites and an online survey (N=68). We summarize our results by assessing the extent to which the programs met the evaluation criteria (5.3) and then discuss them in detail (section 6). Finally, our concrete recommendations for action (section 7) aim to increase the awareness of diversity and intersectionality in family education programs. We propose eight concrete steps for providing programs that are better adapted to the needs of families with refugee experiences.



Painting of Aminas's daughter 4 years old

## 2. THE SITUATION OF REFUGEE FAMILIES IN GERMANY: THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

### 2.1 Facts and figures about refugee families in Germany

In countries like Germany and Canada, the responses to forced displacement vary considerably due to the countries' geographical proximity to sites of conflict, their migration trajectories as well as their national policy contexts and humanitarian commitments. Hence, the legal definitions and categories of refugees differ between these nations. In Germany, asylum seekers usually request refugee status upon arrival in the country. Other refugee-protection programs at the national and European levels, such as the humanitarian admission program and the resettlement and relocation programs, are less well known and protect a smaller number of refugees. The largest proportion of the refugee population is accepted through an in-country asylum claim (Korntheuer, 2017). Conversely, Canada is a country with many years of experience in resettlement. Their support programs mostly focus on resettled refugees and not on asylum seekers (Hynie et al., 2019).

Traditionally, refugees have been legally defined based on the Geneva Refugee Convention. However, this definition can be criticized on grounds of its failure to consider the diversity of reasons and processes that cause forced migration. (Labour) migration and forced migration should not be understood as binary opposites because the experiences of existential poverty and armed conflicts as well as the hope of accessing education and attaining economic prosperity often overlap in individual cases (Scherr and Scherschel, 2019). The Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt) in Germany uses the term "migrants seeking protection" to define a broader group that includes asylum seekers, accepted refugees, people with what is called "tolerated" status (Duldung)<sup>1</sup> as well as resettled refugees (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019, p. 5). For this study, we chose the term refugee population to categorize this group that includes families who are seeking protection according to a broad range of legal bases.

Figure 1 offers a quantitative overview of the refugee population in Germany. While there has been a steady rise in the numbers of "migrants and children seeking protection", the numbers of newly arriving asylum seekers have decreased considerably since 2016. As of December 31, 2018, over 167,000 "migrant children seeking protection" under the age of six were living in Germany. Between January 2014 and December 2018, approximately 144,000 refugee children under the age of seven arrived in Germany as asylum seekers (Gambaro et al., 2019a). The most common country of origin among the refugee population is Syria (745,645) followed by Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019, p. 148).

A written expertise by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend; BMFSFJ) provides insight into the family structure of refugee families in Germany. There are clear differences between men and women's marital status. The vast majority (81%) of refugee women are married, whereas the number is 47% for men. At 81%, most refugee women migrate to Germany accompanied by their family, whereas 53% of men travel to Germany alone. Among women, 78.4% have at least one child under 18; more than half of the refugee mothers (51.8%) have at least one child under six years of age. The report also provides some information about family size: 36% of the women have three or more children under 18 years of age. Fifteen percent of the refugee mothers but only 6% of the fathers are single parents. Nine percent of the refugee parents have at least one child living abroad (BMFSFJ, 2019, p. 14ff.). Separation from their children affects refugee families' life satisfaction the most. If one or all of their children live abroad, it has a substantial negative effect on the well-being of the parents (Gambaro et al., 2018, p.224).

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<sup>1</sup> If the application for asylum is refused but there are still deportation restrictions (e.g., no travel document is available), the person is generally granted the so-called Duldung "tolerated" status. This is merely a suspension of deportation and translates to a highly uncertain legal status (Korntheuer, 2017).

Westphal et al. claim that forced migrants are “doing family” in restrictive structures and a transnational context (Westphal and Aden, forthcoming; Westphal, Motzek-Öz and Aden, 2019). Contrary to a modern and scientific understanding of family as a concept that refers to diverse intergenerational ways of life, in the context of forced migration it is common to assume a traditional, conservative conception that defines family as a father, a mother and their children. This restrictive definition does not reflect the realities of many refugee families and even “nuclear” families are limited by law, for example, by restricted options for family reunification (Westphal et al., 2019). In many cases, refugee families are dispersed and scattered in

different regions of the world. Maintaining the continuity of the family unit across different places and time requires transnational forms of family communication and interaction. “Doing family” in this context thus means the reconstitution and strengthening of family bonds through constant (video) calls, Whatsapp messages or financial remittances (Westphal and Aden, forthcoming).

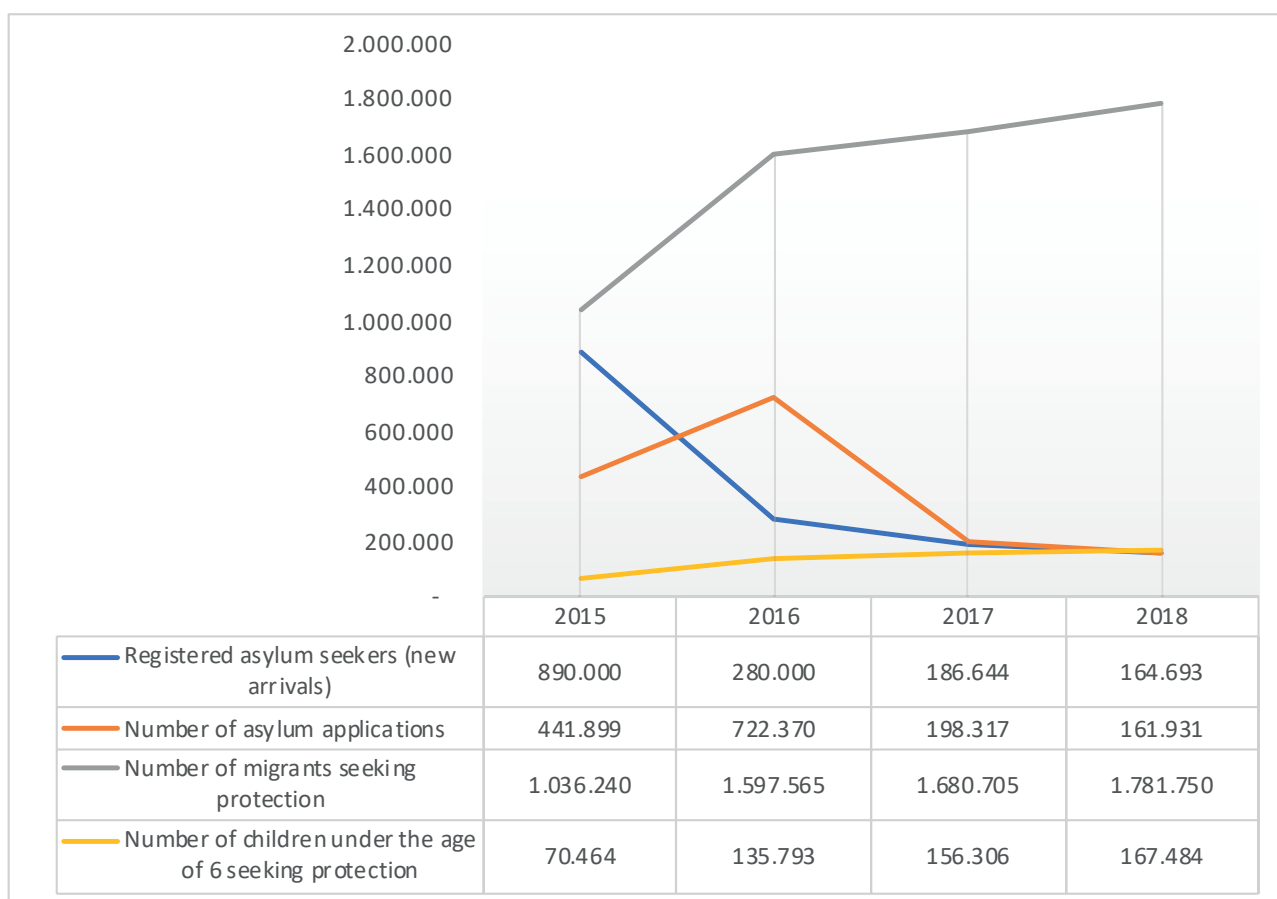


Figure 1: Refugee population in Germany.

Note. Data from Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019b; Statistisches Bundesamt 2019



## 2.2 Restricted opportunities: Participation of refugee families in the host society

Most refugee families arrive in Germany as asylum seekers. Restrictive asylum policies can lead to unstable and difficult living conditions that prevent their participation in the host society. According to the Asylum Seekers Benefit Act (AsylBLG), asylum seekers are provided with housing (mostly in mass shelters), basic healthcare and basic income or benefits in kind. The length of the asylum process determines how long the refugee families are subjected to these living conditions. Prolonged instability concerning refugees' legal status can have serious implications for their mental health and well-being (Lewek and Naber, 2017, p. 9). Asylum seekers are registered subject to a residency requirement (i.e., they are not allowed to leave the district of the reception facility). After transitioning to a more permanent accommodation, they are usually housed in city or municipal shelters ranging from smaller units with only a few families to mass accommodation with a few hundred spaces. The implementation of a new reception model, the reception, decision, distribution, and return centres (Aufnahme-, Entscheidungs-, kommunale Verteilungs- und Rückführungszentren), since 2018 can aggravate the situation of newcomer families. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge; BAMF), asylum seekers, irrespective of their countries of origin and prospects of staying in Germany, are obliged to stay in these new centres until a decision is made regarding their refugee claim (maximum of 18 months or, in the case of families with children, nine months) (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019a).

Accepted refugees are allowed to move out of the refugee shelters and into private housing. They can access social assistance, state-funded language and integration courses as well as qualification programs through the job centres and the state employment agency. Nevertheless, they face fundamental challenges and barriers like housing shortages in the major urban areas (Korntheuer and Hergenröther, 2020).

Participation in and access to important sectors of the host society, such as healthcare, housing, the labour market and education, is a process that is influenced by multiple individual and structural factors. The following sections discuss two important and interlinked aspects of the current state of research: i) the limited access to language courses and the labour market for refugee mothers and ii) the restricted educational participation of refugee children.

Access to language courses and the labour market not only enables refugee women to participate in social life but also fosters self-determination (Babeyeva et al., 2018, p. 58). However, a variety of studies evidenced barriers for women, especially refugee mothers (BMFSFJ, 2018; Brückner et al., 2019; Gambaro et al., 2019a; Liebig and Tronstad, 2018; Worbs and Baraulina, 2017). A recent study by the German Institute for Economic Research (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung; DIW Berlin) shows the increasing participation of the refugee population in language courses and the labour market (Brückner et al., 2019). Nevertheless, access to language skills is strongly related to an individual's gender and family situation. Whereas 48% men without children have good or very good language competencies, only 19% of the refugee mothers do (Brückner et al., 2019). Twenty-seven percent of the refugee men were employed in the second half of 2017, but only 6% of the refugee women were. Employment rates of refugee mothers with young children are particularly low (3%) (Brückner et al., 2019).

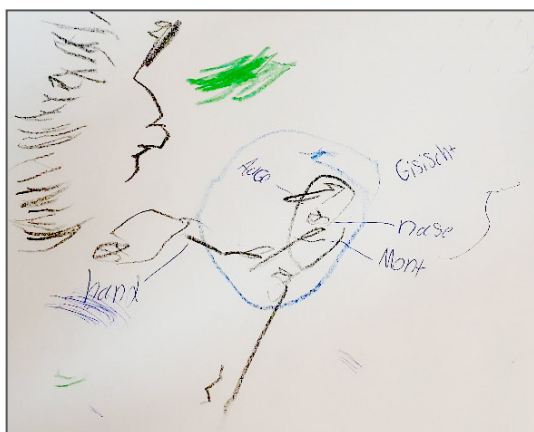
The barriers to their employment can be grouped under the following categories:

- qualification: lack of formal and recognized certificates and work experience
- psychological experience: traumatic experiences before, during and after forced migration
- family: focus on family and care work
- cultural milieu: traditional gender roles
- structural limitations: restricted access to language courses, lack of childcare during the courses and limited accessibility to early childhood education for younger children

The key seems to be giving children the earliest access to the education system. However, this is also associated with clear difficulties, as refugee children and youths face significant barriers to their educational participation (El-Mafaalani and Massumi, 2019; Korntheuer, 2016; Korntheuer and Damm, 2019; Pavia

Lareiro, 2019, p. 3).

Access to education depends both on the federal state in which the child lives and their country of origin (Abdallah-Steinkopff 2018, p. 20; El-Mafaalani and Massumi 2019, p. 10). Their possibilities of accessing early childhood education do increase along with the duration of their stay, particularly after moving out of refugee shelters (Gambaro et al., 2019a, p. 809). When the children of refugee families finally have the opportunity to make use of early childhood education facilities, both they and their parents benefit from such participation and see increased social integration and improved feelings of well-being. Around 60% of refugee children attend a daycare centre or kindergarten by the age of three. At ages four and five, this increases to 72%. Nevertheless, the attendance rates of refugee children are significantly lower than the national average of 90–95% (Gambaro et al. 2019a).



Painting of Amime's son, 3,5 years old

## 2.3 The state of research on migrant and refugee families in family education programs

After the “Summer of Migration” in 2015, there was an increase in general awareness of the integration needs of individuals and families with a refugee experience. In their recent volume on family education and migration in Germany, Geisen et al. (2019, p. 9) stated that “migration has grown to be an obvious and signaling topic for providers of parenting and family education programs.” Nevertheless, there is a significant and clear lack of empirical evidence on the role of family education in the integration trajectories of refugee families. So far, the few publications that have addressed family education for the refugee population have mostly referred to the results of studies on families with a general migration experience (Fischer, 2019) or to practical experiences in the field (Abdallah-Steinkopff, 2018).

Lüken-Klaßen and Neumann (2019) analyzed 50 interviews with practitioners in the field of family education. They identified five central barriers for refugee families: i) language and communication barriers, ii) specific stressors related to forced migration, iii) limited experience with social work, iv) different value systems and v) inappropriate program implementation. To foster the inclusion of refugee families, they proposed strengthening intercultural competencies and a greater awareness of power imbalances through increased training activities for staff members along with strengthening community and neighbourhood networks. The authors define refugee families as a target group with specific needs. Nevertheless, refugee families are heterogenous. The advantages of targeted support programs and the disadvantages of homogenizing “refugee families” must be carefully considered (Lüken-Klaßen and Neumann, 2019, p. 201). Fischer (2019) similarly proposes an intersectional approach instead of an isolated focus on gender, age, education status or migration experience. Targeted approaches risk essentializing and “othering” families. Building on the normative basis of human rights, she calls for recognition, anti-discrimination/anti-racism, participation and empowerment as guidelines for action in the educational practice with diverse families (Fischer, 2019, p. 33).

Refugee families are vulnerable to exclusion. Their access to important resources and spheres of the host society such as education, housing, health, the labour market and politics is limited by legal structures and institutions (section 2.2). Families with migration or refugee experience face organizational and informational barriers when trying to access family education programs. Peer-to-peer approaches and outreach work have been proposed as measures to increase access to and participation in (family) education for such marginalized populations (BMFSFJ, 2018; Fischer, 2018; Fischer, 2019). Community- and neighbourhood-based approaches have been shown to be successful for socially deprived and marginalized families (Fischer, 2018). The HIPPY program, which makes use of home visits, has been discussed as a promising practice (Fischer, 2019). Amirpur, by contrast, criticizes HIPPY for using these outreach strategies and intruding on the private family sphere. She argues that home visits might create the basis for a trusting partnership between families and institutions but at the same time enable a more invasive and direct public access to the families. These situations can be particularly dangerous if normative notions of “the traditional family” are applied to the heterogeneous family realities (Amirpur, 2019).

A few reports that evaluate HIPPY, Opstapje and another family education format “Rucksack program” are available in Germany. HIPPY and Opstapje are both internationally implemented programs. They aim to support parenting skills, foster family bonds and help children transition into preschool and school by, for instance, improving their language and literacy skills.

HIPPY was initially developed in Israel in 1969 to support migrant families with high needs. The evaluation of the HIPPY program in Bavaria in 2008 showed that the members of the participating families benefited significantly. The main reason the parents took part in the program (73%) was that it supported their children’s German-language acquisition (Bierschock et al., 2009, p. 27). The evaluation found not only an improvement in sociability, creativity and German-language skills among the children but in their mother’s language skills as well. An increase in literacy activities such as the frequency of reading and communication were observed. The longer the families participated, the more likely the parents were to take the time to do the exercises and have them become an

integral part of their everyday life. For the mothers, it had the additional effect that they became more confident and maintained more social contacts with Germans (Bierschock et al., 2009).

The evaluation of the Opstapje program by the German Youth Institute in 2004 yielded similar results. Immediately after the end of the program, children’s language and cognitive skills had increased significantly (Izyumska, 2013, p. 34f.). However, a follow-up evaluation in 2005 demonstrated that “the improvements achieved in children returned to their original level” nine months after the end of the program (Izyumska, 2013, p. 42). Thus, long-term support for families and their children is highly recommended.

However, Opstapje has been criticized for its lack of materials in the family languages (Izyumska, 2013, p.42). The Rucksack program is based on a family education program that was first implemented in the Netherlands. It works with parents as bilingual assistants in a peer-multiplier approach. It supports migrant families by offering educational materials in their respective mother tongues and through group meetings and homework exercises. The peer-multiplier approach and the strong focus on family language strengthens literacy activities in the families and empowers mothers and former participants who take on the role of bilingual assistants (Roth et al., 2015). Empowerment, is cited as a central method of the program that is strongly based on building relationships between bilingual assistants and the mothers (Roth, 2015).

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MIXED-METHODS EVALUATION STUDY

#### 3.1 Study design

The exploration of the field was realized by means of a mixed-methods research approach and a systemic evaluation model (Kuckartz et al., 2008; Kuckartz, 2014; Lamprecht, 2012; Döring and Bortz, 2016). This included case studies based on qualitative interviews and participant observation, an online survey and an analysis of quantitative participant data from 2015 to 2018. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods brings multiple perspectives to such an analysis and enhances its validity by connecting and combining the data sources (Kuckartz, 2014).

Our evaluative practice was not strictly limited to an organizational or institutional focus, as substantiated by Lamprecht (2012). Evaluation should generate knowledge at the individual, institutional and socio-political levels. The evaluation process can stimulate the reflection processes of parents, home visitors and coordinators. IMPULS can use the results for its organizational development. Simultaneously, the results can also be fed into scientific and public discourses through a broader and qualitative–responsive evaluation practice (Lamprecht, 2011, p. 280f.). As a consequence, the evaluation criteria were based on the conceptional and strategic goals of the

IMPULS programs as well as on a broader theoretical foundation of Ager and Strang's (2008) integration concept.

Systemic evaluation practice takes into account program input, process and outcomes and adds a strong focus on the context in which the program is implemented (Döring and Bortz, 2016). By knowing more about the life situations of refugee families in Germany, one can better understand the resources, challenges and needs that should be addressed through the program concept and its process.

Figure 2 gives an overview of the research process. The basis for the development of the study design and data-collection instruments was an initial meeting with the Canadian and German research partners (Mothers Matter Canada, IMPULS Deutschland e.V.) and a pre-study that consisted of field visits, observations of home visits and exploratory interviews as well as field conversations with coordinators, home visitors and parents in November 2018. Data collection started in February 2019 and was based on three data sources: i) an analysis of IMPULS participant data from 2015–2018; ii) an online survey with 68 WmI, Opstapje and HIPPY program site coordinators; and iii) qualitative case studies of 22 families and seven program sites

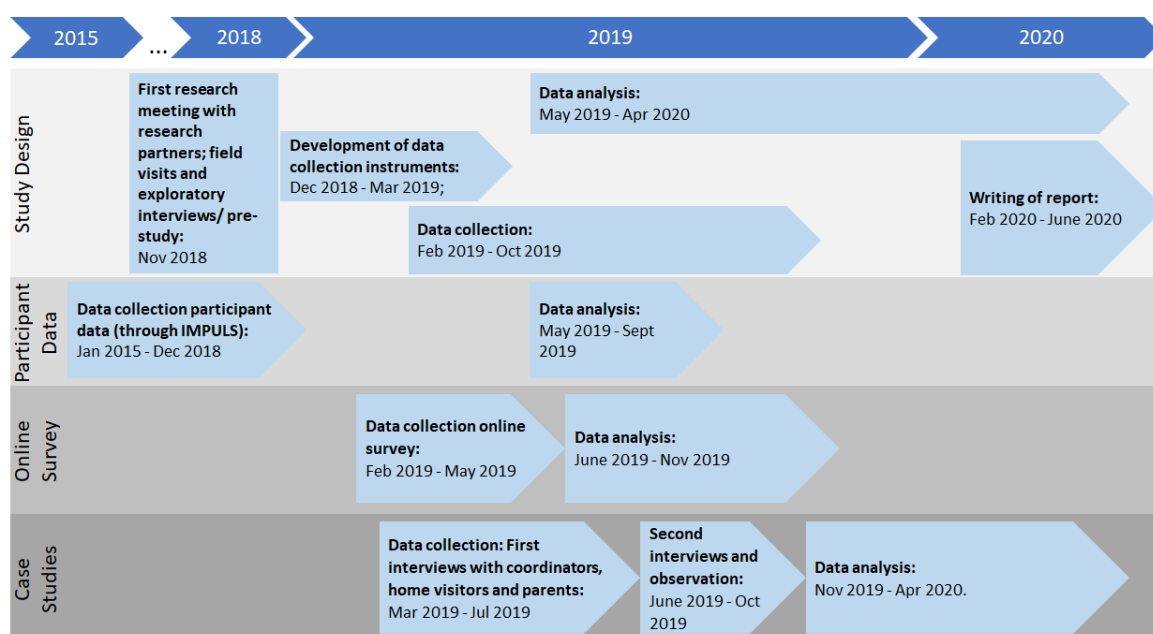


Figure 2: Research process and data sources.

based on 55 interviews and field observation. The data was collected and analyzed in a tightly interlinked, iterative process (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) that combined the results from the different data sources. After submission of the preliminary report in April 2020 and the final report in October 2020, various measures to mobilize and disseminate knowledge gained from the study will be carried out until August 2021. These include writing academic publications, presentations at conferences, brief multilingual summaries of the results and recommendations for action along with a short multilingual video directed at participating parents and home visitors.

### 3.2 Theoretical framework and evaluation criteria

The common concepts of integration (e.g., Esser, 2006) might not be the best suited to analyze the integration trajectories of refugee families. Based on these models

often limited functional indicators such as labour-market integration and language skills are applied to determine successful integration. The integration model developed by Ager and Strang (2008), by contrast, adopts a holistic approach that accounts for a broader range of individual and social factors. Its more comprehensive approach can significantly expand the available knowledge about the integration pathways of the families. Ager and Strang (2008) provide a conceptual framework of refugee integration that define ten core domains. In this framework, integration trajectories are shaped through social connections such as social bridges to the host community, social bonds to ethnic and religious communities and social links to institutions of the host society. Integration as a whole is framed by “connections between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services” (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 181). Our study draws on this model and uses social connections as one of its evaluation criteria for integration. Additionally, our evaluation matrix is informed by the

Table 1: Evaluation criteria

Note. Based on Ager and Strang, 2008; IMPULS Deutschland Stiftung e.V., 2018.

Evaluation criteria for the successful integration through social connections	Conceptual and strategic evaluation criteria of IMPULS programs
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social bridges: enable and strengthen social connections and relationships with members from the host society</li> <li>2. Social bonds: enable and strengthen relationships with members from the ethno-cultural, linguistic or religious community</li> <li>3. Social links: enable and enhance access to institutions (e.g., daycare and preschool, schools, language courses, healthcare providers, social assistance)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Children receive holistic support in their development (e.g., motor, socio-emotional, literacy and cognitive skills; self-confidence and curiosity; German-language acquisition)</li> <li>2. Strengthens parent–child relationship</li> <li>3. Strengthens parents’ skills and self-confidence</li> <li>4. Empowers parents and children and develops their self-efficacy</li> <li>5. Children experience their parents as active educational agents</li> <li>6. Promotes healthy behaviours and the prevention of disease</li> <li>7. Strengthens network building and access to communities and neighbourhoods</li> <li>8. Improves educational opportunities and educational equity for the children</li> <li>9. Trains individuals to become home visitors in order to foster their labour-market integration</li> </ol>

conceptional and strategic goals of the IMPULS programs. Variations between the different programs examined in this study (i.e., HIPPY, Opstapje, Welcome with IMPULS) notwithstanding, nine common program goals can be defined (IMPULS, 2018, p. 14ff.). The following table (Table 1) offers an overview of the two sets of evaluation criteria.

### 3.3 Research questions

The study examines the living situation of refugee families in Germany and the impact and implementation of family education programs for this target group with the aim of identifying and elaborating promising practices and necessary framework conditions as well as deriving recommendations for action. Our research questions refer to the evaluation criteria described above. They are grouped under three leading questions:

#### i) How are parent–child interactions/family relations shaped through displacement?

- What does the daily life of refugee families look like?
- What are the challenges and resources for refugee families?
- How does the displacement process impact family relations and parent–child interactions?
- What is the role of the social bonds in ethnic and religious communities?

#### ii) What is the role of family education programs in the integration process?

- How are the families connected to the host society and educational institutions of the host countries (social bridges/social links)?
- How do families perceive their participation in the family education programs (what do they see as effective support/challenges and what should be changed)?
- What are the outcomes of the participation of refugee families in the program? How are these connected to the strategic and conceptual goals (see Table 1)?
- How are family relations influenced by participating in the program?

#### iii) What are the promising, transferable practice approaches to support the integration trajectories of refugee families?

- How are the family education programs implemented, and how does this affect the success of the support offered to the different target groups?
- What are the success factors for effectively implementing the programs?
- How can these success factors be transferred to other contexts?

### 3.4 Data collection and sample

Our mixed-methods evaluation study is based on three methodological pillars:

#### 1) Analysis of data of participants in the IMPULS

programs HIPPY and Opstapje from 2015 to 2018: This analysis served to identify a pattern of change in the number of families from specific countries of origin in recent years. It also sought to determine the areas in which these families participate in these programs as well as dropout rates.

#### 2) Analysis of an online survey conducted in 2019:

Sixty-eight locations associated with HIPPY, Opstapje and Welcome with IMPULS provided detailed information on participating refugee families. These data detail the living situation and the language skills of these families. They indicate the accessibility of the programs, the necessary framework conditions and the ways in which the programs are implemented for successful participation.

#### 3) Qualitative case studies of 22 families and seven program sites:

These case studies allow us to better understand the living situations of refugee families in Germany and to evaluate the impact of family education programs on the families' integration paths. They draw on fifty-five interviews and participant observations with parents, home visitors and coordinators. Children presented their perspective on home visits through drawings.

We aimed to have two points of data collection for each of the 22 families: i) qualitative interviews with parents and home visitors and ii) participant observation and qualitative interviews with parents after at least four weeks of program participation. The response rate for the second interview phase was extremely positive, only four families were unable to take part in it.



The **qualitative sampling strategy** sought to acquire rich data from a broad range of interview partners to maximize the dimensions, variations and properties of the concepts that had been developed during the analytical phase (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). To provide a database for maximum and minimum comparisons, the sample included families from different ethnic and educational backgrounds as well as from urban and more rural areas that were participating in different family education programs implemented by distinct site partners<sup>2</sup>.

Interviews with refugee parents, coordinators and home visitors were conducted in the preferred language of the interview partners—German or their mother tongue—using semi-structured protocols. All the interviews were recorded, summarized and transcribed<sup>3</sup>. As the children, parents and home visitors in the program were being observed, each child received a gift of crayons and paper and was asked if he or she wanted to paint a picture of their home visitor or home visit. The children often seemed very excited and happy to do this. Participating children were between 18 months and 6 years in age. The parents and home visitors were asked not to interfere and let the child paint whatever they liked.

Field notes were used to document participant observation. Throughout the research process, the fact that refugee families often live under unstable and insecure living conditions was taken into account. The protection of research participants was a top priority (Clark-Kazak, 2017; Unger, 2018)<sup>4</sup>. This involved strict anonymization of the data as well as obtaining informed consent not only formally but also in a communicative process through native-speaking interviewers. In designing the leading research questions, we took care to focus on refugees' current life situation and not on traumatic experiences during their forced migration. Nevertheless, some of the

research participants wanted to express these aspects of their story as well. In these often very emotional situations, the interviewees were given the opportunity to speak out, and the interviewers expressed recognition, appreciation and respect both verbally and non-verbally.

### 3.5 Data analysis

Mixed-methods approaches combine different sources of data as well as qualitative and quantitative analysis to broaden perspectives on the research topic (Kuckartz, 2014). By combining qualitative case studies with quantitative data from the online survey and participant data, we were able to understand processes on a case-by-case level and subsequently enhance the validity of our analyses by connecting them with the results of our analyses of bigger datasets. Case-study data was analyzed using Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2011). Categories were inductively formed sentence by sentence and sequence by sequence with the analysis proceeding by comparing and contrasting the interview and observational data. We decided to use the children's drawings as illustrational sources and not for data analysis. Since video recording was not possible, because it seemed too risky for participants with unsecure legal status, interactions between interviewers and the children during data collection remained too vague and analyzing this data too speculative.

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2 For an overview of the sample, see the appendixes.

3 The majority of the transcriptions were directly translated from Arab/ Farsi/ Dari to English and written in English by the multi-lingual research assistants of the project. Since the researchers themselves conducted the interviews in the language of origin of the interviewees, it was possible for them to understand the interviews within the context of the interview situation. Nevertheless, it should be clarified that the translations of the interviews from the language of origin to English was not carried out by professional translators. To check for possible translation errors, some of the interviews were transcribed into Arabic and retranslated by a professional translator. Interview excerpts were slightly linguistically adjusted.

4 Ethical and methodological concerns in conducting research and evaluation projects with refugee families in Canada and Germany will be discussed in detail in: Korntheuer and Ohta (forthcoming): Ethics in practice and beyond: a comparative study of ethical considerations for evaluation research with refugee families in Canada and Germany. In: Ali, M.: Ethical Issues in Working with Refugee Children and Youth.

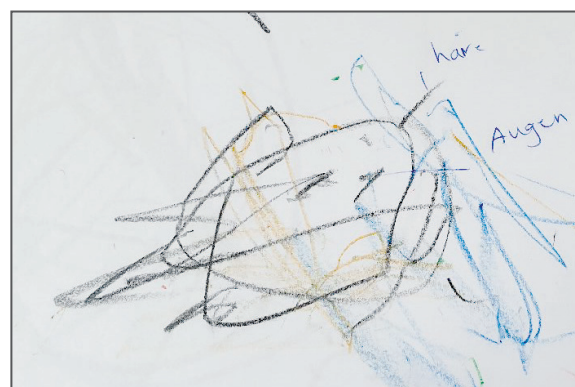
## 4. FAMILIES WITH REFUGEE EXPERIENCE IN THE FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### 4.1 Overview of the three programs in focus

HIPPY and Opstapje are both internationally implemented and licensed family education programs. They aim at supporting parenting skills, fostering family bonds as well as encouraging successful transitions into preschool and school by, for instance, improving language and literacy skills (see the evaluation criteria outlined in Table 1). The programs' target groups are families in difficult and socially deprived or disadvantaged living situations. In Germany, both programs have a strong focus on families with migration experiences. HIPPY was first developed in Israel in 1969 to support migrant families with high needs. Opstapje is an adaption of an early prevention and support program for migrant families in the Netherlands (Bierschock et al., 2008; Jyrzick et al., 2005).

Both programs rely on home visits combined with group meetings. Home visitors, mostly with the same ethno-cultural background, such as mothers or fathers themselves, meet parents once every two weeks at home. During these approximately 45-minute to one-hour meetings, parents and home visitors review and interact with educational materials. In the Opstapje program, the home visitor, parents and child(ren) play and interact together on the basis of the provided materials. Bi-weekly group meetings are also offered at community centres. HIPPY is based on a so-called triangularity approach whereby the working and learning relationships between three interacting agents—the site coordinator, the home visitor and the participating parent(s)—are the main elements of the program (Bierschock et al., 2008, p. 7). Conversely, Opstapje includes the children in the play activities of the home visit. Between meetings, parents must spend 15 minutes per day with their child doing activities from the curriculum. The home visitors are mostly local community members and, if possible, past participants of the programs, who are trained to carry out the program.

Opstapje supports families with children from six months to three years of age in an 18-month program<sup>5</sup>. HIPPY is designed for families with children from three to six years of age, and families can participate in it for up to two years<sup>6</sup>. Welcome with IMPULS is a three-month adaption of these two programs and is offered to refugee families with children between less than a year and six years old. The program works with materials from Opstapje and HIPPY as well as everyday objects. Home visits and group meetings can be offered but are not required. The program is thus implemented in a more flexible manner. Some sites choose to offer either only group meetings or home visits or a combination of both. Table 2 provides an overview of the three programs, the sample size of the participant data and the online survey.



Painting of Hossein and Khulud's son 3,5 years old

<sup>5</sup> This analysis included the Opstapje Baby program.

<sup>6</sup> This analysis included the Kids 3 program.



Table 2: An overview of the programs and sample sizes

	<b>HIPPY/Kids 3</b>	<b>Opstapje/Opstapje Baby</b>	<b>Welcome with IMPULS</b>
Age of the children	3 to 6 years	6 months to 3 years	6 months to 6 years
Length of program	12 months (Kids 3), up to 60 weeks (HIPPY)	12 months (Opstapje Baby), 18 months (Opstapje)	Flexible but with a minimum of 12 weeks
Number of group meetings	Up to 12 (Kids 3), bi-weekly (Hippy)	Up to 20 (Opstapje Baby), Up to 30 (Opstapje)	Flexible
Home visits	Up to 18 (Kids 3), bi-weekly (HIPPY)	Up to 40 (Opstapje Baby), Up to 45 (Opstapje)	Up to 12
Program design (as stated in concept)	Group meetings combined with home visits. Home visitor interacts with parents  Professional social worker coordinating program implementation	Group meetings combined with home visit. Home visitor interacts with parents and children  Professional social worker coordinating program implementation	Flexible: Home visitor interacts mostly with parents and children  Collaboration of volunteers and home visitors
Materials	Books, cards with learning and play activities, play materials (Kids 3)  12 learning units books and workbooks, craft and writing supplies, play materials (HIPPY)	Books, cards with learning and play activities, play materials	Books, cards with learning and play activities, play materials
Number of sites in Germany (06/2019)	39 (HIPPY) 17 (Kids 3)	46 (Opstapje Baby) 62 (Opstapje)	21
Sample online survey	27	33	9
No. of refugee families participating at these sites in 2019	188	292	84

Note: \*Number of families from source countries of asylum seekers. Countries considered: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Syria.

## 4.2 General results on program attendance, challenges and outcomes for refugee families

### 4.2.1 Program attendance

To analyze the general participation trends of refugee families, we referred to the participant data for HIPPY (including Kids 3) and Opstapje (including Opstapje Baby) from 2015 to 2018 along with the data from our online survey that involved 68 participating program sites.

To analyze the participant data, we defined five different groups according to the mothers' countries of origin. The statistics from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019b) and the specified source countries of refugees were used as a guide for defining the groups. The families with mothers from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and Syria were set as participants from "source countries of asylum seekers". The data on families originating from Turkey, the Russian Federation and Pakistan were included in "others", even though they figured in the top 10 source countries of asylum seekers in Germany

from 2015–2018 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019b). We decided to exclude these families from the "source countries of asylum seekers" category since a high percentage of families from these countries of origin living in Germany don't have refugees experiences, and specific data on their legal status was not available. Nonetheless, the data of participants who were from the selected set of "source countries of asylum seekers" can only serve as a proxy for participating refugee families given that some families without a refugee experience might be included.

The number of participating families from the selected source countries of asylum seekers in Germany increased from 391 families in 2015 to 719 in 2018. Close consideration of the data reveals that this trend is explained mainly by the steady increase in the number of participants from four countries of origin: Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan. The number of participating families from Syria increased sevenfold in the period under review (Table 3).

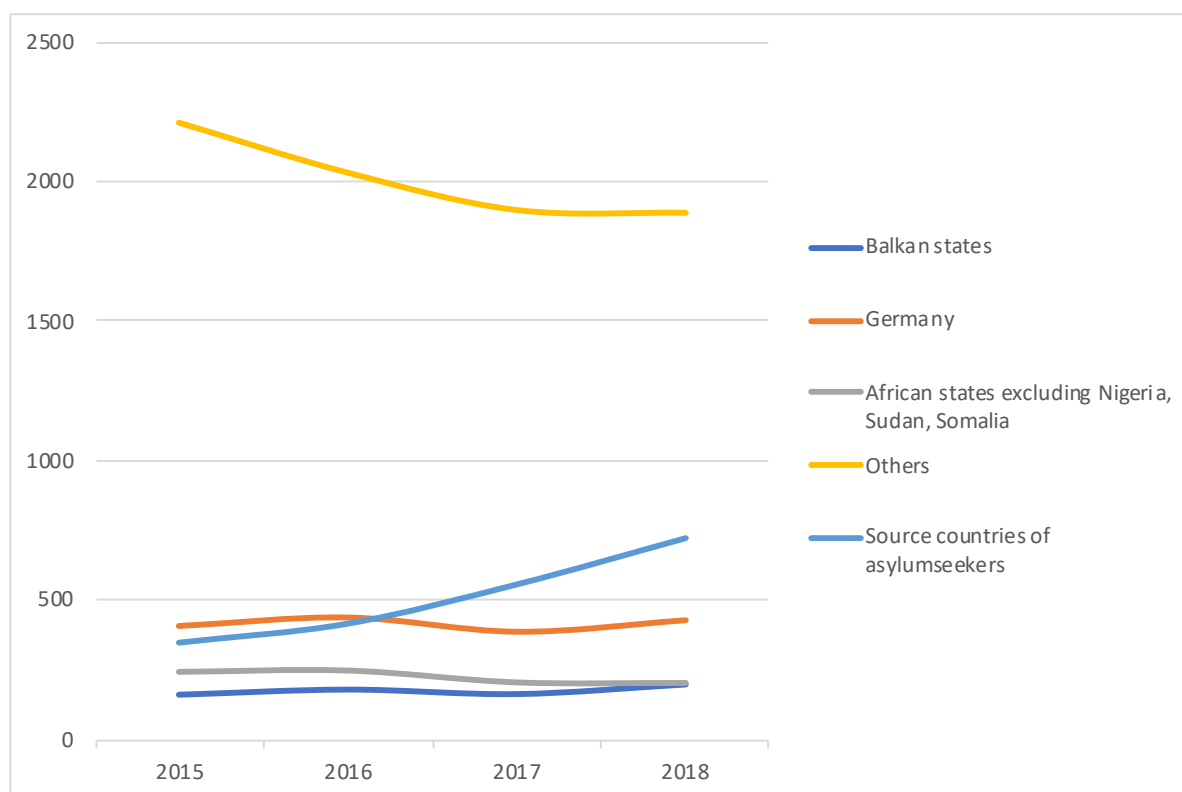


Figure 3: Trends in participant numbers in HIPPY and Opstapje 2015–2018.

Note. Data from IMPULS, participant data. Source countries of asylum seekers defined as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and Syria.

Table 3: Participants by source countries asylum seekers 2015–2018.

Note. Data from IMPULS, participant data.

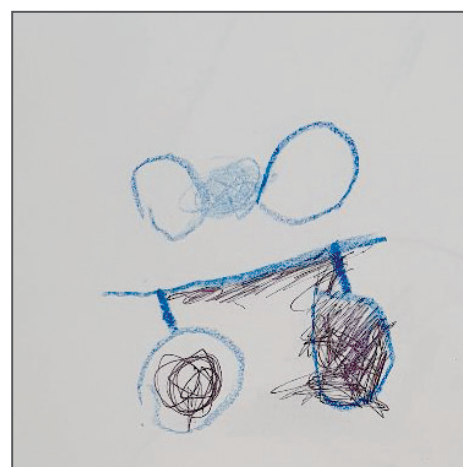
	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Afghanistan</b>	81	92	121	138
<b>Eritrea</b>	11	20	31	35
<b>Nigeria</b>	47	35	28	20
<b>Somalia</b>	18	21	18	24
<b>Sudan</b>	5	5	12	15
<b>Syria</b>	48	113	222	357
<b>Iraq</b>	112	110	97	104
<b>Iran</b>	29	22	27	26
<b>Total participants by source countries</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>719</b>
<b>Others</b>	3,026	2,897	2,650	2,710

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The number of participants from the Balkan states, Germany and “African countries excluding Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan” remained stable, while it declined in the case of “other countries of origin”.

Based on the type of program, the largest noticeable increase in participation among refugee families was in the programs Opstapje and Opstapje Baby. Long-term participant data is only available for regular IMPULS programs. For the bridging program Wml, nine program sites participated in the online survey and stated that over 80 refugee families participated in 2019.

Families from source countries of asylum seekers mostly participated at sites in urban areas. Nevertheless, exactly hundred refugee families also participated in 2018 at sites in small cities and rural areas with populations of less than 20,000 inhabitants. The qualitative data indicate significant potential for supporting the integration trajectories of refugee families by implementing the program in rural areas (see section 5).



Painting of Soha's son, 5 years old

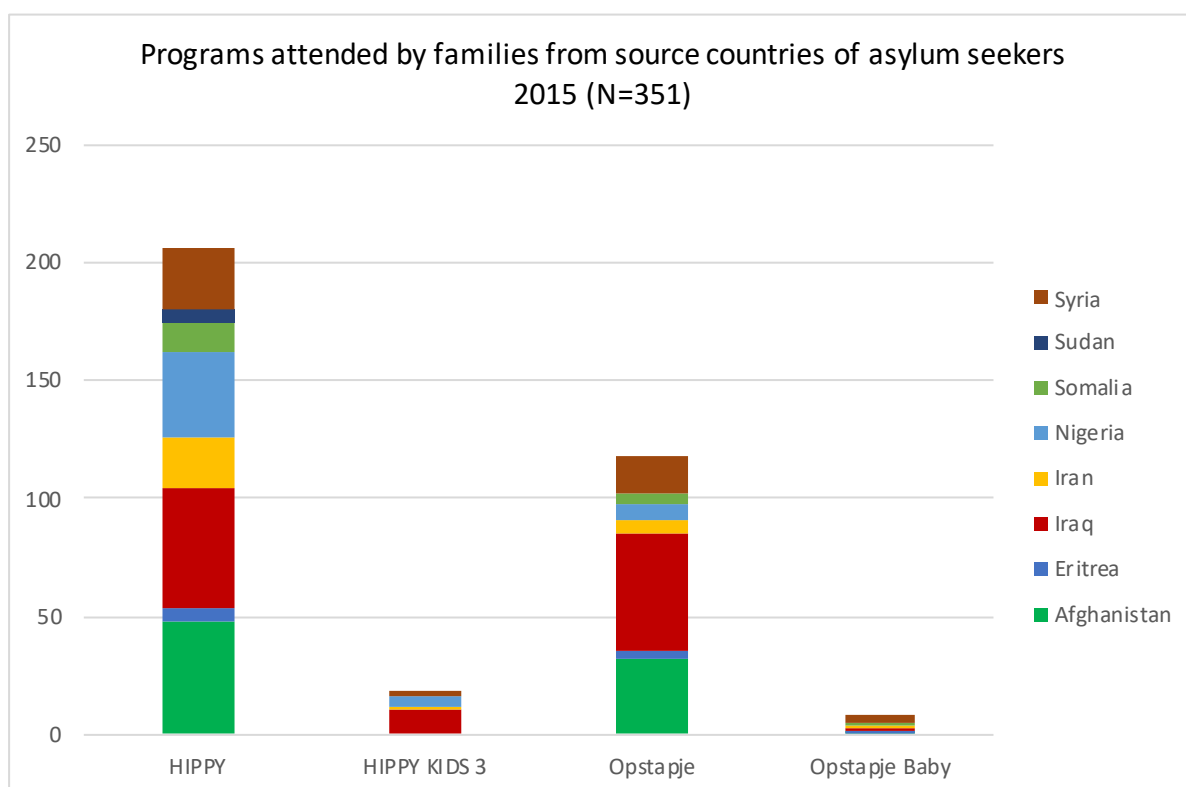


Figure 4: Programs attended by families from source countries of asylum seekers in 2015

Note. Data from IMPULS, participant data.

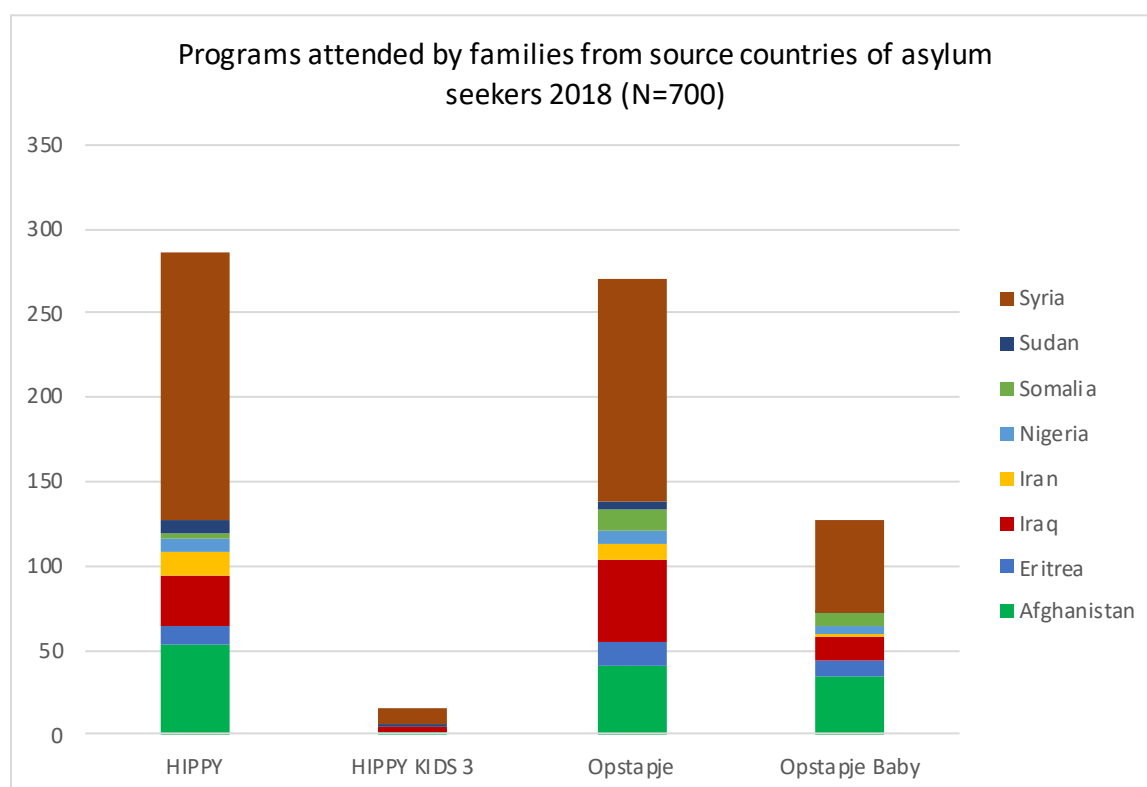


Figure 5: Programs attended by families from source countries of asylum seekers in 2018.

Note. Data from IMPULS, participant data.

## 4.2.2 Access to the programs for refugee families

Sites that participated in the online survey responded that refugee participants accessed Opstapje mainly through private networks and word-of-mouth recommendations (87.5%) along with referrals from other agencies (81.3%). Flyers (37.5%) and the Internet (9.4%) played a less important role. HIPPY had slightly different results. Families learned about the program mainly through word-of-mouth recommendations (79.1%) and referral from other agencies (75%). While flyers (58.3%) also seemed to reach the target group, the Internet (12.5%) played a slightly stronger but still subordinate role. Similarly, for Wml, the vast majority of participating refugee families learned about the program through private networks and recommendations (77.8%). Referrals from agencies (44.4%) played a lesser role than in the other programs. Flyers and the Internet seem to be the least important source of recruitment for the Wml program.

## 4.2.3 Challenges and dropout

Psychological stress, a move by the family, a change of home visitors, the housing situation and preoccupation

with one's legal situation were particularly detrimental to refugee families' complete participation in their respective programs (Figure 6).

According to further answers provided by the site coordinators in the online survey, the main reasons for a decision of the families to discontinue the participation was relocation or a lack of time.

Dissatisfaction with the program (10.2%) and conflicts with the coordinators or home visitors (6.1%) are not as frequently the reason for a participant's decision to drop out. This finding is supported by the qualitative data (see section 5.2.1). More than half (51%) of the responding sites in the online survey stated that refugee families did not terminate the program earlier than non-refugees. Our analysis of the participant data yielded slightly different results.

The available data on program completion, dropout and continuation in 2018 shows that families from source countries of asylum seekers had the highest dropout rate (9.9%) followed by German participants (9.1%). A total of 250 program participants from 3,429 participating families terminated the program prematurely (7.3%), whereas the vast majority continued to participate in the programs (69.7%) or successfully completed them (23%).

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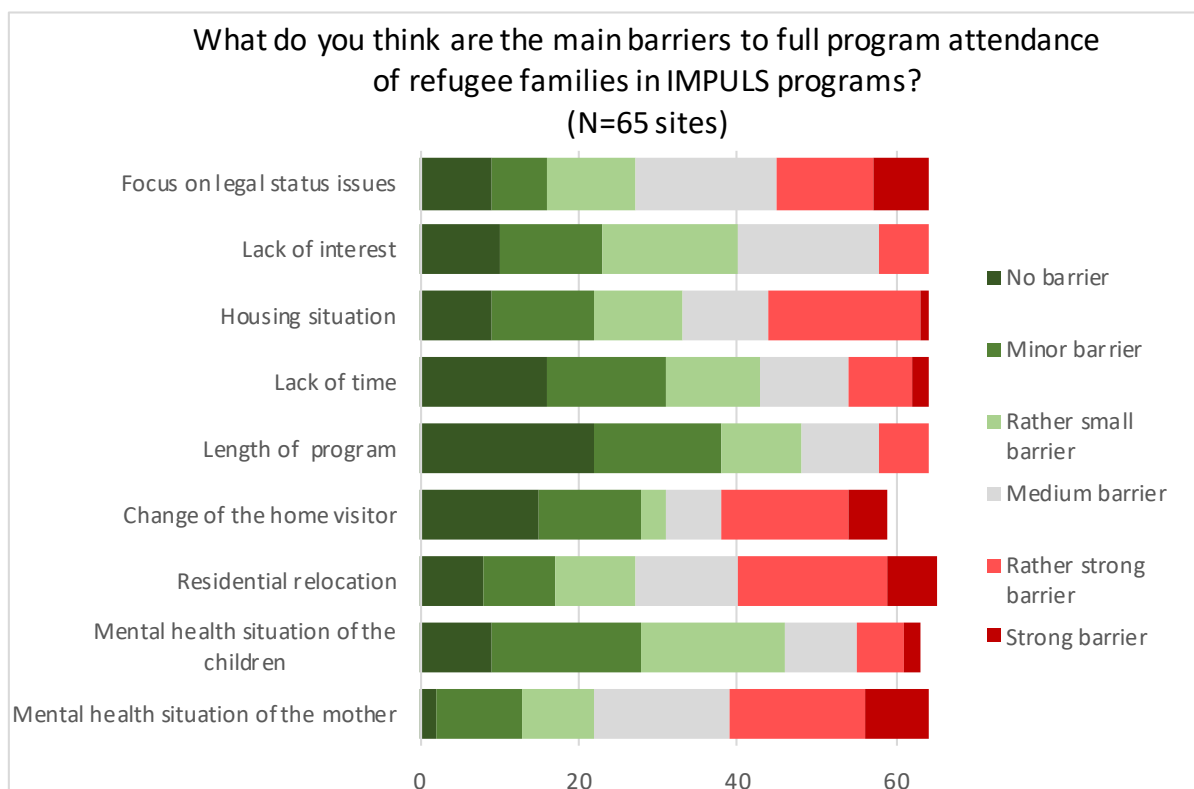


Figure 6: Challenges and reasons for dropout. Note. Data from online survey.

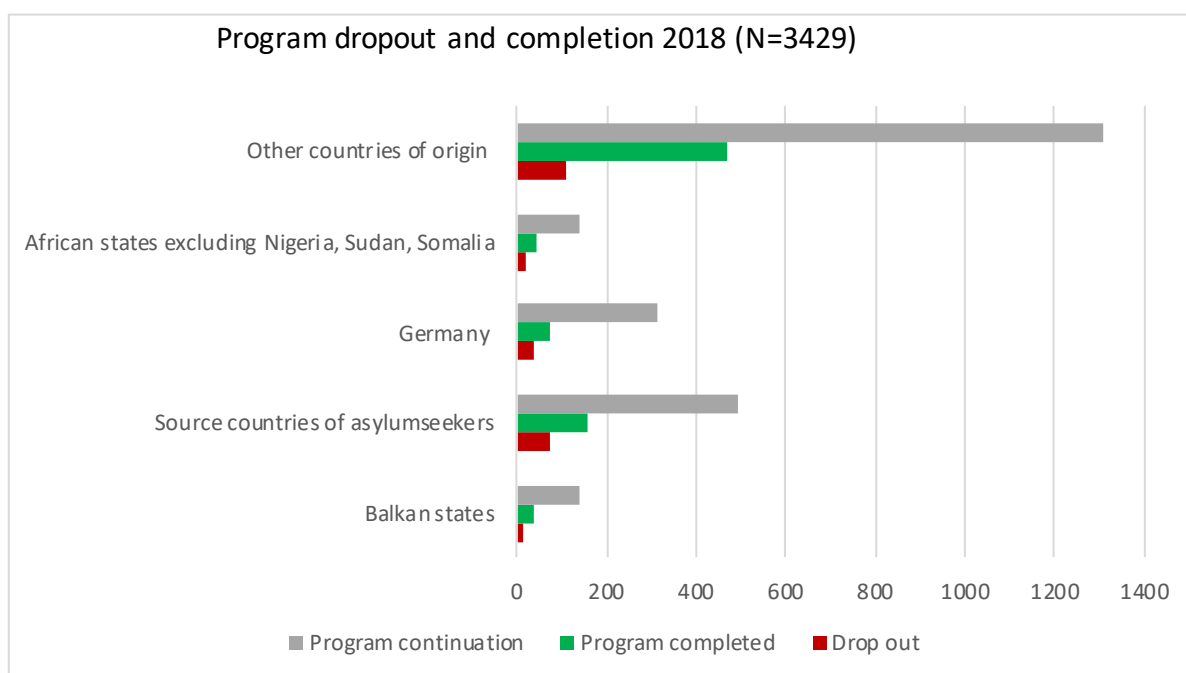


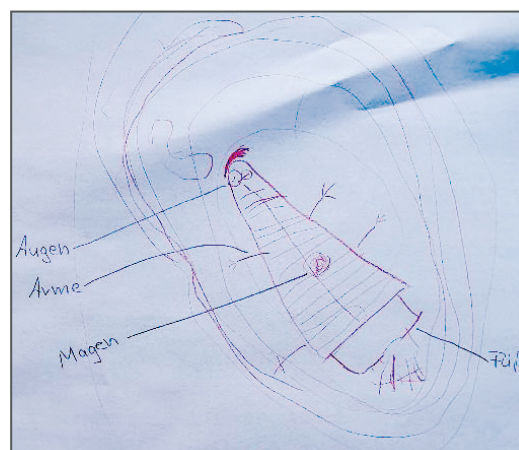
Figure 7: Dropout, completion and continuation, 2018. *Note.* Data from IMPULS, participant data.

#### 4.2.4 Program-specific challenges

The survey respondents made several suggestions to improve refugee families' access to Opstapje. These suggestions included improving the staffing ratio; providing informational material, books and the program website in several languages; hiring more home visitors who speak the respective families' languages; augmenting the program funding; or offering meeting rooms closer to the participants' homes. Additionally, they said that better training for the home visitors would be beneficial.

Only six sites responded to the question about possible improvements in Wml for refugee families. These respondents, too, suggested to provide informational and program materials in several languages as well as to extend the duration of sessions and recruit more participants as multipliers.

In the case of HIPPY, the respondents perceived the main obstacle to providing the program to refugee families to be unclear or insufficient funding. A lack of participants or changes in personnel was not seen as a difficulty. The respondents saw further potential for improvement in the materials used, which could be more varied and more clearly tailored to the living environment of refugee families. Some of them (N=20) suggested simplifying the content and shortening the time needed to complete the program to improve the retention of refugee families in the program.



Painting of Elham's son, 4 years old

#### 4.2.5 Program outcomes

Responding sites in the online survey stated that participating in IMPULS programs improves the mothers' and children's German-language skills, enhances emotional stability and enables them to maintain contacts outside the family or establish contacts with German institutions and to a lesser extent with the participants' own ethno-cultural community. Supporting labour-market integration and assistance in finding accommodation have minor impacts that are not within the purview of the program goals (Figure 8).

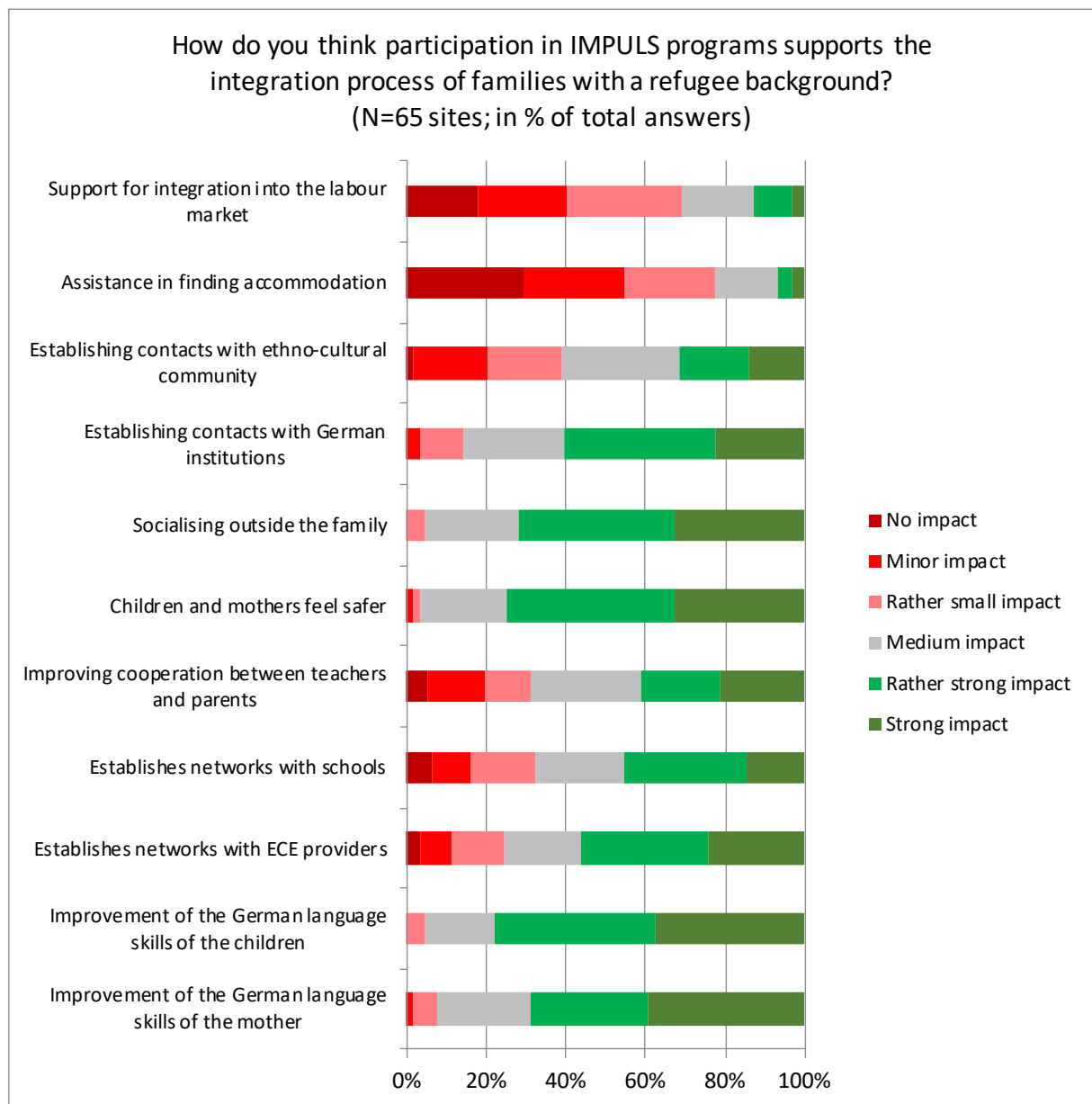


Figure 8: Program effects on the integration of refugee families. *Note.* Data from online survey.

## 5. THE ROLE OF FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE INTEGRATION TRAJECTORIES OF REFUGEE FAMILIES, IN GERMANY

### 5.1 The difficult life situations of families with refugee experience

In this section, we will first present essential results of our study by referring to three exemplary cases. We will then specify central aspects of the life situation of our interview partners.

For the purpose of presenting our cases, we would like to introduce three of our interview partners: Patricia, who participates in Opstapje in a large urban centre in the south of Germany; Om Samar, who participated in Wml in a medium-sized city in the north of Germany; and Soha, who lives in a rural area in central Germany and participated in Opstapje and HIPPY. The following table offers an overview of the important dimensions of their cases.

Patricia has been living as a single mother with her two

sons, aged four and five, in a large German city (1.5 million inhabitants) for two years and has been participating in Opstapje for about a year. Patricia lives in a mass shelter for asylum seekers and is originally from Nigeria. The family's uncertain legal residence status characterizes and determines many areas of their life. The living situation, spatial confinement and sharing of the kitchen and washrooms are stressful, and the state of waiting for decisions and changes only adds to it. Patricia describes a life of social isolation, difficult living conditions in their accommodation and constant fear of deportation. To protect herself and her children, her experiences have taught her to be suspicious of people and institutions. Patricia had to leave two of her children in her country of origin. The transnational family and care work required to maintain contact with them also marks her everyday life. Patricia never had the opportunity to go to school in her country of origin. In Germany, she has only

Table 4: Case dimensions

Case dimensions	Case 1: Patricia and her two children	Case 2: Om Samar and her three children	Case 3: Soha and her two children
Program(s) attended	Opstapje	Wml	Opstapje/HIPPY
Age of children and type of family unit	4 and 5 years old; single-parent family; two other children abroad	5, 3 and 2 years old; family with two parents	5 years and 18 months old; family with two parents
Rural/urban area	Large urban centre in the south of Germany	Mid-sized city in the north of Germany	Rural area in central Germany
Housing	Mass shelter	Private apartment	Two-story apartment building for refugees
Legal status	Asylum seeker without permanent status	Accepted refugee	Denied asylum seeker: so-called "tolerated" status (Duldung)
Country of origin	Nigeria	Syria/Kurdistan region	Algeria
Use of family language in program	German as a program language	One of two family languages (Arabic) in the program	Family language (Arabic) in the program



recently been able to enrol in a language course. Linguistic barriers in speaking and writing have led to a feeling of insecurity and exclusion that has increased Patricia's mistrust of others. In her everyday life, Patricia has to sign papers that she cannot understand. She fears that employees of the shelter and the welfare office will fool her into deportation or take her children away. Patricia has limited supportive contact with others. In addition to the home visitor, she names one friend from the same country of origin. For Patricia, the family and its future are at the centre of her life. She keeps her children close to her and takes good care of them. She hopes for a good future for her children in Germany. It unsettles her when her children want to speak to her in German. The younger son cannot understand her when she uses her mother tongue. The family's language insecurity contributes to the feeling of powerlessness and strains the mother-child relationship through communication barriers. Patricia questions the nonviolent upbringing demanded in Germany because she perceives it as weakening her position vis-à-vis her older son. For example, he threatens to call the police if she yells at him. Patricia cannot assess this threat. She is not fully familiar with her parental rights in Germany and has repeatedly had the experience of not being able to assert her own views and interests when she contacts public authorities.

Om Samar is a Kurdish woman from Syria who participated with her children in Wml. She and her family had to leave Syria because of the war. She now lives with her three children and husband in a medium-sized city with 168,000 inhabitants. The German authorities moved her and her family to this city because it has a special school and her older daughter has a hearing disability. Social isolation and alienation predominate the family's life situation. During the first interview she was very stressed and expressed her negative feelings towards the city, the neighbourhood and the general lifestyle of the place. She had no friends except one woman she met in the park. Furthermore, she had nothing to do except care for the children and clean the house. Om Samar was not employed in Syria either. However, her life was full of social relationships with her family, her friends and the neighbourhood community. Om Samar felt isolated and useless in her new life. She could not attend a

German-language school before sending her children to kindergarten. She had no social relations in the city and missed her family in Syria. Her challenging mental-health condition was gleaned from her responses to the interviewer. She was happy to talk to someone from Syria, but it brought her close to tears. She was clearly willing to send her daughter with a hearing disability to a special school. However, she was angry and sad that she had to move to this city because of the school. In the previous village where she lived for nine months before coming to the city, she had found a small Syrian community that reduced her feelings of alienation and isolation to a certain extent. Above all, she could not speak good German yet, which reinforced her feelings of vulnerability when communicating with people or managing her daily activities like reading letters or attending meetings. In the second interview, Om Samar was more positive. Her children had started kindergarten and she was going to attend language school soon. She was also very pleased with her daughter's progress at the special school. Since social relations are very important in Om Samar's life, she was happy to meet some Syrian women who also sent their children to kindergarten. She also participated in a monthly meeting where some mothers met. However, she was not able to attend another IMPULS program because this site only offered Wml.

Soha and her family's daily life is strongly influenced by an uncertain legal situation and discrimination. Soha is a 22-year-old woman with two children—a five-year-old and an eighteen-month-old. She left Algeria two years ago with her husband and one child. Her first place of arrival was in another European country. Subsequently, they moved to Germany, where she gave birth to her second child. Since their first country of arrival was another European country, the family has not yet been accepted as a refugee family (owing to the Dublin Convention<sup>7</sup>). The other reasons for the uncertainty surrounding the family's legal status remain rather vague. From the way Soha expresses herself, it became obvious that the whole situation was unclear to her and that she feared her family's case would be processed unfairly. However, she cannot influence the proceedings in any way. According to Soha, their asylum claim was denied after an Algerian family living in their neighbourhood in the rural area

<sup>7</sup> Under the Dublin Agreement, asylum seekers that have been registered in the EURODAC database in another European country can be returned to the country of their first arrival/registration. The country of first arrival in the European Union is responsible for processing the asylum application (Korntheuer, 2017).

discriminated against her and her husband. Soha was physically attacked by the Algerian woman in the street. Her husband was attacked by two men and saved by a bus driver who called the police. Additionally, the Algerian women sent threatening messages to Soha's phone. And yet, after all these incidents, it was Soha who received a deportation order from the German authorities. They have to pay a lawyer to appeal the deportation order. These situations and the emotional insecurity they have caused, have negatively impacted the family's life.

Soha's family moved into their current apartment in 2018, one year prior to the interview. Before that, they had to constantly move from one camp to another. When they moved into the current two-story house, they had to share it with a Syrian family whose children attended school. Living with this family increased the pressure on Soha's family since their children were going to school every day, whereas her five-year-old was not offered a spot at the local kindergarten. This situation increased the feelings of discrimination and helplessness in the child and the parents. Moreover, it was culturally difficult for Soha to live in the same house with an entire family, especially since she is a veiled woman. However, the Syrian family recently moved to another house. Soha now shares the house with an elderly woman and things are much better. Another positive development is that her child has been attending kindergarten for several months now and is very happy about it. Soha cannot speak German and usually has no translator during her visits to the social-welfare office. Soha and her husband seemed to suffer from trauma due to their current situation; she cried during the entire interview and even before it began. Nevertheless, she refused to stop the interview because she felt as though she had to speak out. Recently, she randomly cut her hair because she felt helpless. Her husband stays in his room most of the day. Soha said that her husband has decided to stay home and do nothing as a strategy to avoid new problems. He helps Soha with some tasks, like taking care of the children when she is outside or bringing the child home from kindergarten. However, Soha is responsible for most of the housework.

As these short profiles make clear, families with refugee experiences are highly heterogeneous. All the same, we can identify numerous aspects in these three cases that characterize the lives of many of our interview partners:

- Emotional uncertainty and fears due to a precarious legal status
- Living spaces and housing accommodations that are not suitable for families and children
- Social isolation and limited contact with the host society
- Language and communication barriers that lead to a feeling of being exposed, oppressed and helpless along with experiences of discrimination
- Traumatic experiences of violence and loss (before, during and after forced migration) and consequently a lack of trust in institutions and other people along with the heavy burden of new changes in life and new relationships breaking up again
- Family and care work as a transnational everyday activity
- Difficult mental-health situations of parents
- Family language insecurities and the fear of harming the educational opportunities of one's children by speaking one's mother tongue
- An unstable housing and living situation, such as constantly moving houses or changing shelters
- Resilience and hope for the future, particularly evident in the educational aspirations for the children
- Contact with their ethno-cultural, linguistic or religious community as an important resource

## 5.2 How do family education programs influence the inclusion of refugee families?

### 5.2.1 Building trust: Emotional stabilization through long-term relationships with home visitors

#### **The home visitor as a central support person in the host society**

Building trust is challenging and takes time. Our interviews and observations demonstrated that home visitors build trusting relationships with families and their children in most cases. Feeling recognized and safe is an important first step toward including refugees and asylum seekers into the host society. This can be substantially fostered by regular home visits.

All parents, regardless of their backgrounds, expressed that they struggle to support the education of their children, which is why they welcomed the home visitors in the first place. The regular visits served to build confidence and rapport. This trust helps the

parents to cope with the challenges they face and gives them hope for the future. Patricia, a single mother, was referred to the Opstapje program by the youth welfare office, which initially made her feel anxious about the home visits. However, the home visitor quickly gained her trust because she explained the meaning of letters and documents to Patricia, thereby strengthening her ability to act and react to the youth welfare office. With the help of the home visitor, Patricia was able to access a German literacy course. This was another important step in reducing her feelings of being helpless and trusting in her own abilities. The home visitor empowered Patricia in difficult situations, such as when she was afraid of the youth welfare office taking her children away:

*She [the home visitor] told me: Do you know the paper you signed? I said no, I can't read I can't write. They [the youth welfare office] told me to sign; that's why I signed. (...) She said: no, don't be afraid; when I saw you, I knew that you are a strong woman, because what they told me is not what I see in the children.*  
(Transcription, RK\_4)

The home visitor is the only German person with whom Patricia has had positive contact for months, while a German volunteer quickly disappeared from her life some time ago.

Our cases and online survey underscore that the home visitors are the central support persons in the host society. The parents especially emphasized that their contact with German-speaking home visitors reduced linguistic barriers, promoted the linguistic development of their children and provided a positive contact with a

person from the host society. As for home visitors who speak the family language, among their central functions was to provide emotional support and foster optimism toward the future. These home visitors become important role models and set an example for how it is possible to manage successful integration pathways. Other central support aspects of the home visits, regardless of the language in which they are conducted, include fostering skills and the general development of the children; networking with daycare, schools and other institutions; and creating a positive atmosphere and joy.

The importance of home visitors speaking the family language for successful participation in the IMPULS programs is also evident in the evaluations of the online survey.

### **The home visit as a central element in establishing trust with refugee families**

The home visit is clearly a central element of the programs for refugee families. In many cases, bringing these programs into the homes of the families, the very hub of their everyday life, helps to build relationships between parents, children and home visitors. Many of the interviewed families described the visit as a positive highlight of an otherwise socially isolated everyday life. They associated the visit with their positive experiences of the social relationships that they had been used to before fleeing their countries of origin, when many families used to be a part of tightly connected larger families and neighbourhood networks. Back in their countries of origin, everyday life used to be full of frequent "family visits." Additionally, the encounter between the home visitors

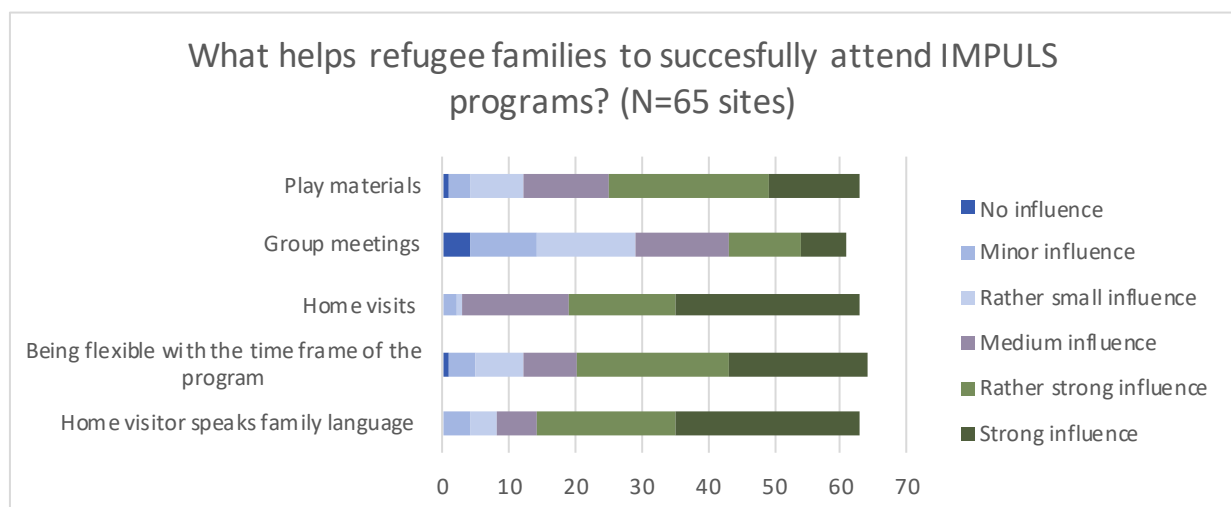


Figure 9: Primary resources for successful program attendance

Note. Data from online survey.

and parents in their own apartment or accommodation is positively differentiated from the experience of visiting other German institutions, where they often feel marked as “refugees.”

### 5.2.2. Building bridges: Connecting with institutions of the host society

#### The impact of the program on the access to central institutions: Early Childhood Education (ECE) providers and language courses

In this study, the desire to be better connected with members and institutions of the host society emerged as a concern for almost all the interviewed parents. The home visitors who were interviewed also highlighted the importance of mothers’ social contacts. The program coordinators and home visitors did inform the parents about possible activities for families within or outside their organization. In spite of these efforts, the refugee parents’ sense of exclusion from important institutions of the host society, such as early childhood education providers and language schools, is a recurring topic. In some cases, it is not within the remit of the home visitors or coordinators to enable this access. This is reflected by the answers to the online survey (see Figure 8). Almost one-quarter (24.2%) of the respondents found that the family education program had limited to no impact on building networks between refugee families and ECE providers. For schools even more (32.3%) of the survey respondents found that the family education program contributed little to nothing toward establishing relationships between refugee families and the schools of their children.

Lama is a young mother from Syria with a two-year-old daughter and a newborn baby. They live in a large city in northern Germany. She acquired a solid educational background in her country of origin and later came to Germany through a family reunification process. However, she cannot continue to study German because there is no daycare for her daughter. Lama and her home visitor made multiple attempts to enrol her daughter in an ECE facility. Lama is convinced of the importance of her daughter learning and adapting to the new society and culture through early childhood education, and she is eager to develop her own language skills and professional career. However, even the home visitor could not help her access the institution. The home visitor has been trying to find

some informal alternative, as she describes in this interview:

*She [the home visitor] told me about the playgroup, and she went with me. She is trying to find a place for my daughter in the kita [ECE facility], but this is what she can do, she cannot force them to give me a place. Now everybody is telling me that I do not have a right to put my daughter in the kita. (Transcription, NH\_10)*

Amime is a young mother of two who left Syria four years ago because of the conflict there. She has not been able to attend a language school since arriving in Germany and will have to stay at home for another year because of her newborn. Meanwhile, her husband managed to pass the C1 level in German and found a job at a school. Amime stated:

*When I came, I was pregnant with Ahmed. The school did not accept me because I had no residency. Then when I got the residency, I was in my eighth month, so they did not accept me to be enrolled. After this was my maternity, and so on. (Transcription, NH\_15)*

Nevertheless, six of the 22 families described that they had been successfully supported by the home visitor in registering their children in the kindergarten or ECE facility. Once childcare was solved, they were able to participate in other activities or attend German courses.

### Reducing language barriers through the programs

The lack of language skills makes some mothers feel powerless and unable to access institutions of the host society. Everyday tasks such as making appointments with doctors or going to the job centre become major challenges. Tuba, a mother of three who left Afghanistan three years ago, described her experience at a doctor’s appointment as follows:

*A very hard day, when I was so upset that I was there and searched so long, and could not find the right place. The day after that, my husband called again and got another appointment, and again I went there and again could not find the place (sigh). I felt so bad that my daughter was crying so much, and I said to myself damn it that I cannot talk German and cannot find or ask anybody for the right answer. (Transcription, NT\_5)*

However, the situation seems to be better for mothers who came to Germany in the process of family reunification. Their husbands have typically already

attended language school and can speak German well. This gives the mothers the opportunity to start attending language school and share parental responsibilities with their husbands. Saleh, who came to Germany from Iraq as he fled ISIS persecution of the Yesidi population in 2014, now cares for his six children while their mother, who came later with the children, is learning German at a language school. He also found support at the local job centre. His counsellor asked him to stay home to give his wife the opportunity to attend language courses.

Especially for those who lack access to explicit language instruction, the family education programs can also contribute to reducing language barriers. The programs' home visits and weekly contact with someone outside the family are essential for fostering the language skills of mothers who are socially isolated. This is substantiated by Sara, a Syrian woman, discussing her home visitor's support:

*I am surprised by myself. Like how did I become so courageous? How am I talking? I was not sure of them [family program] coming to me, because I don't know German. I barely finished the A2. But she [the home visitor] motivates me when she comes to me. Like I need this word and I have to memorize it and I memorize more. I have a motivation to learn more words and improve my German so I can talk when they come to me or I go to them. I am more excited towards the language now. Before, since I was staying home and not talking with anyone, I was feeling that I am losing the vocabulary. I am staying alone and with Arabic groups (---) our neighbours and so (---) I found myself forgetting (---) the program helped me a lot. (Transcription, RK\_6)*

### **Connecting through group meetings and other leisure activities**

During the interviews, mothers spoke of being active in different group meetings or engaging in other activities. They intended to learn German sufficiently to be able to integrate faster and find employment in Germany through these activities. The programs' group meetings appear to have a positive impact on women's social networks. Mothers often mentioned enjoying these meetings. However, not all of the program sites offer group meetings. Instead, mothers were able to participate in other gatherings, such as a *Frauentreffen* (women's meeting) in a café or a weekly breakfast with other mothers, which helped them discover common interests and build new relationships. Excursions and

celebrations at the end of the programs also played an important role. Various mothers and home visitors mentioned a multi-day trip organized at one of the sites as a positive highlight of their new life in Germany. Such activities and possibilities were mostly mentioned by mothers who lived in a medium-sized or a large city. After interviewing families who were living in remote areas and small villages, it was apparent that becoming connected was even more challenging there and the programs' group meetings were sometimes the only opportunity for mothers to network. One of the researchers' memos of an interview with Amina, a Syrian mother from a small village, substantiates this:

*She did not leave this place during the 3 years of her residency. This is mainly because of her husband's situation and because they do not know where to go and how to get there. She feels as if she is stuck in this small place. She has no friends; she is not involved in any activities rather than the mother meetings of this program. Amina expressed that she really likes these meetings because they are the only opportunity to communicate with other women. (Memo, NH\_14)*

Group meetings are valued especially by parents in remote areas who cannot contact other parents, mothers who are no longer recent newcomers in Germany and those with a solid educational background. However, the most vulnerable among our interview partners seemed to find these activities to be less important than the regular home visits. This result is supported by the online survey responses (Figure 8).

### **5.2.3 Fostering children's cognitive, linguistic and emotional skills Supporting the high educational aspirations of refugee parents**

Almost all the parents in this study wanted their children to improve their learning and education. They stated that their children could improve considerably in this regard by joining the program and through home visits. Mohamad and his wife did not get the opportunity to go to school in Afghanistan, their country of origin. Now they live with their six children in a small city in Germany. They are illiterate and hope for a better future for their kids. Education is a recurring topic of interest among the parents:



*Mother: I am happy when I see my child learn something.*

*Mohamad: I am happy for my children. Sometimes I yell and tell them: your mother and I are both unschooled and we are like blind people since we cannot read at all. You should study and improve; don't abandon your paper and pencil. (Transkript, NT\_7)*

### Parents recognizing play as an important educational tool

Understanding the purpose of children's play differs from one family to another. It is influenced by the cultural and social understanding of play in the parents' countries of origin and their own childhood experiences along with what they have observed and experienced since arriving in Germany. Some parents stated that the purpose of children's play in their countries of origin is entertainment rather than education. A home visitor and a mother of four who left Syria three years ago explained that this concept has changed for some refugee families in Germany. Through the programs and kindergarten, parents understand the importance of play as a learning tool for children:

*Because we as mothers from Arabic countries, we think this toy is only for fun and free time (...) This toy has a meaning or one can learn many shapes, can learn colors, can learn big and small. (Transcription, NT\_14)*

Additionally, ways to play differ between Germany and countries of origin. Some mothers mentioned that their own parents did not have time to play with them during their childhood, whereas other mothers had different experiences of playing with their fathers. Most commonly, however, the parents used to play outside the house with other kids when they were children. Playing with other children outside does not work for most of refugee children in their new living spaces in Germany because of the cold weather, the housing situation, and not having their siblings and relatives around them. The educational programs (Wml, Opstapje and HIPPY) address this problem by helping the parents learn more about the possibilities and importance of playing with their children and showing them ways to do so in their new living environment. Most parents expressed that they enjoyed being able to play with their children at home visits—especially parents whose children were too young to attend kindergarten or had not yet found a place in an ECE facility. They were comfortable with having someone help prepare the children for the next

step in their early childhood education. Saleh, who takes care of his six children while their mother attends a German course, mentioned the importance of the HIPPY program as a preparatory phase for kindergarten:

*I believe that this program is very helpful for my daughter to learn German words and colors and to prepare her for going to kindergarten. At the moment, she is waiting for a place in kindergarten, and this program is the only way for her to learn anything. (Memo, NT\_13)*

### Providing essential support for illiterate parents

Additionally, these educational programs are a great help for single and illiterate mothers and illiterate refugee parents in general. Some have no other family members to support them in their new locations, and they are afraid of not having adequate language and literacy skills to teach their children. Therefore, they were concerned about their children's education before the program, particularly in light of the fact that securing the best possible education for their children in Germany is one of their primary goals. Participating in the education program relieves the parents of this concern to a certain extent. They now have at least one person (the home visitor) who is familiar with the educational system in Germany, and they notice that home visitors improve their children's skills during home visits. The parents of six children who left Afghanistan four years ago said:

*We will be happy when our children can study and achieve a good place in society. We know very well what it means to be illiterate. Since we arrived in Germany, I am very happy when I see that my children can go to school, and I am so proud of them. (Transcription, NT\_7)*

At the same time, a lack of appropriate materials for illiterate parents was also mentioned as an important challenge of the programs (see 5.2.6).

### Empowering children and parents through flexible and situation-oriented play opportunities

The home visitors achieve several goals through the play sessions with the parents and their children. One of these is strengthening the parents' relationship with their children by involving either one or both of the parents in the visit activities. During one of the

observation sessions, the field researcher explained the dynamics between the home visitor, the mother and the child:

*The home visitor asked the mother to fetch baking utensils, and then she took the ingredients out of her own bag, including moulds. The mother looked happy, and she laughed together with the home visitor. (Participant observation, NT\_20)*

Additionally, the home visitors often adapt their play methods to better suit the family. In a Syrian family where the mother gave birth to a newborn baby, the home visitor adapted the play method to strengthen the older child's relationship with his newborn sister.

*The home visitor and the child come into the living room; Mona shows him a picture frame and explains to him that she would like to decorate it with pictures of him and his sister. She shows him some previously developed pictures and asks him to choose two pictures for them. The child chooses a picture of his face and a picture of his little sister, and the home visitor holds him in her arm while they work with hot glue. They try to glue some flowers and things for decoration around the frame. (Participant observation, NT\_23)*

Patricia, a single mother, wanted to support her children more but was worried that her illiteracy would prevent her from doing so properly. The home visitor showed her ways to support her children and brought appropriate materials and games. They also played games with her sons that were familiar to Patricia from her own childhood, such as cooking with spoons, mugs and natural materials. Here, the home visitor took what she and the mother were developing together and incorporated it into the play situation.

### **Fostering children's emotional and motivational skills**

The participating parents explained that the educational programs improve their children's skills on several levels. Some of the children became more socially competent after enrolling in the program. Nadia, the mother of a two-year-old child, explained the positive effects of the program on her daughter's personality:

*She is not playing directly with the kids, she did not learn how to do that yet. But she is playing with the toys that are present inside. This strengthens the personality of the kid. Also, what I felt with my*

*daughter, is that she has trust in those people now. In the beginning, she was not talking if we meet a new person. Today, no, we sat down with the home visitor and she started to play, and they put the food together, and they cooked together and played together. I felt that she interacted a bit. I liked that. I felt that her personality is becoming stronger and that this will allow her not to be shy or scared of people. (Transcription, RK\_2)*

Another improvement that the parents noticed in their children's skills was related to how the children were motivated to learn new things. Most of the parents expressed how pleased they were that their children were being encouraged to use scissors, cut paper, sing songs, play with memory cards and solve puzzles.

### **5.2.4 Living a multilingual family life: Reducing communication barriers by trusting in the family language The change in family roles and power dynamics through language barriers**

Some of the parents and their children have experienced discrimination and have been unable to defend themselves because of their lack of proficiency in the local language. Others have been confronted with situations where they have been asked to sign papers in institutions without fully understanding the content of these papers. A lack of proficiency in the language also affects the relationship between parents and their children. Children who can speak German better than their parents are the main translators. This can negatively affect the relationship of trust and power between the children and their parents.

#### **Recovering parental agency**

Experiences of discrimination and of not being able to express and defend themselves (5.1) among family members negatively affects the relationship between parents and children as well as the family's relationship with their new community. These conditions increase emotional instability and can make the parents feel that they are unable to manage and control their lives and their relationships with their children. Programs such as Wml and Opstapje help re-establish trust among the family members and the family's position in the society. Home visitors are foundational to creating this positive effect.

Having a home visitor who speaks the parents' language and German at the same time gives parents

the opportunity to express their feelings and challenges. Additionally, it helps some mothers practice German with the home visitor and to freely inquire about the meanings of some words in their mother tongues. Nada, a mother of four, said that she greatly benefits from the multilingual play sessions with the home visitor and the children:

*The home visitor speaks Arabic and German. It is good for me, since she speaks the word in German to the children and I repeated it in Arabic, so we speak both languages but German more than Arabic.*  
(Transcription, NH\_9)

The results of the online survey show that a combination of the family language and German is common in most of the home visits in refugee families (66%). A significant percentage of the families received home visits in German only (28%), whereas home visits exclusively in the family's language were a minority (6%). None of the responding sites used another, third language for communicating during the visits.

Some of the parents were actively exercising parental agency by asking the home visitor to continue speaking to the children in their mother tongue so that they would not forget it. One of the home visitors, mentioned experiencing this situation in one of the families:

*The home visitor said, "I don't teach Ahmad German. I am not allowed to talk German with him (---) because his father said I had to talk with him only in Arabic." He believes that otherwise he will forget his Arabic. He thinks he will learn German in kindergarten anyway.*  
(Participant observation, NT\_23)

### Feeling confident about speaking the family language with the children

Some of the parents in newly arrived multilingual families were confused about which language to speak with their children. They wanted them to learn German but were also afraid that the children would forget their mother tongue. In the case of Patricia and her two children, the younger son could not understand his mother's first language. The family's language insecurity contributed to a feeling of powerlessness, and the communication barriers strained the mother-child relationship.

A frequently and explicitly mentioned topic among eight mothers and three home visitors was that parents are encouraged to continue speaking their mother tongue with their children. Home visitors explained the positive psychological effects of communicating with the children in their family language. Such advice relieved the mothers, eased their worries about their relationship with their children and reduced their insecurity and uncertainty about using their mother tongue at home. Additionally, this advice encouraged them to develop social relationships with people who speak the same language.

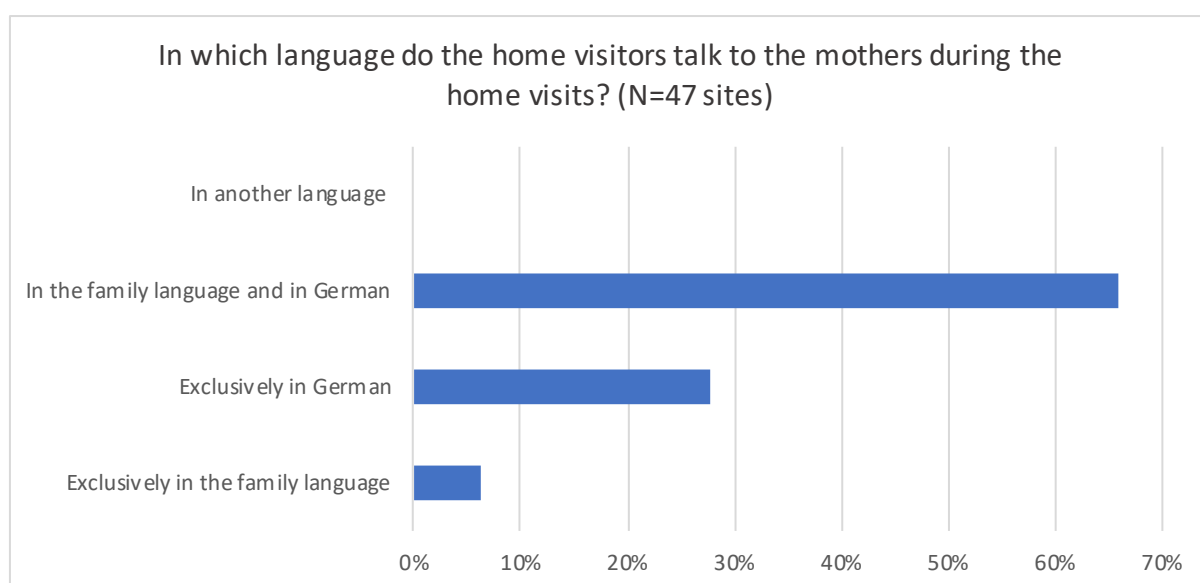


Figure 10: Language used during home visits.  
Note. Data from online survey.



Some of the home visitors with a German background were interested in learning the languages of the families. They expressed that learning the family's language would help them better understand family relationships and the family context, which would provide additional tools to become more involved during the sessions. Such initiatives reflected the level of involvement of the home visitors and their positive attitude towards the family language.

### 5.2.5 Fostering reflections on gender roles, family work and gainful employment

#### Gender roles and responsibility for family and care work in the new life situation

Many mothers describe being the main person responsible for housework, taking care of the children and organizing the family schedule (e.g., doctor's appointments). Some of them did not even mention their husbands during the interviews. The husband was absent from the daily activities inside the home because he was studying, going to school or working. Sara described a very clear delineation of responsibilities in and outside the house for her as a mother and her husband. These traditional roles seemed to be reinforced by their new responsibilities and life situation in Germany:

*Here in Germany there is a lot of bureaucratic work that needs time and effort. So he is responsible for everything outside the house and I am responsible of everything inside the house, like taking care of the kids [...] even grocery shopping is his responsibility. (Transcription, RK\_1)*

Kholud, a Syrian Kurdish woman who arrived in Germany with her husband three years ago, expressed in the interview her own exhaustion from just being a mother and a wife:

*I wish to live a different life, I wish to sit alone just for an hour per day, I cannot do this, and it is always about the housework, the children and my husband. I am really looking for just an hour alone, go outside or register in a gym. (Transcription, NH\_13).*

In comparison to the difficult situations that they might have faced in their countries of origin, living in Germany was seen as an opportunity, especially by families that have been able to attain a stable legal

status. Still, the change from an extended family network to a nuclear family responsible for all tasks of family and care work poses a major challenge, as Hossein points out:

*Everything in Germany is better than in Syria, except our social life in Germany. There is no contact to family and relatives (Transcription, NT\_10)*

Which tasks are performed by which family members is a multifactorial process. In Amime's family, who came as resettlement refugees, the father assumed responsibility for contact with those outside the family, since he already spoke the language at the C1 level. The mother described the relationship with her husband as an important resource. She is the main person responsible for the family and care work within the house, but he supports her emotionally and with the kids. By contrast, Saleh, a father from Iraq, took care of his six kids to give the mother space to attend a German-language course. Nada, a young Syrian mother of two, took a proactive role in fostering the relationship between her children and their father, which her husband welcomed. Family roles and responsibilities seem to be open to discussion and change as described in this quote:

*Nada: [...] there are now many awareness programs for the dads to tell them that they have important roles. I always open the videos and make my husband listen. So his relationship is improving. This old cultural background is getting deleted and there is a better relationship with the dad.*

*Interviewer: Do you feel your husband is happy with that?*

*Nada: Yes a lot. He is seeing the difference. He is so happy with my older son and how he talks in conversations. We discuss stuff. Before we had a kind of angriness. (Transcription, NH\_1)*

In a rural environment with few public transport options available, it can be a challenging task to organize one's family life and share parental responsibilities around activities like language courses and kindergarten. Soha described how she and her husband organize their daily life according to a tightly structured schedule. Her husband is responsible for picking up their son from kindergarten and taking care of him until she returns from her language course at 5pm.

## Mothers reflecting on their future plans

Most of the refugee mothers reflected on their own prospects and future plans as mothers and as women. Regardless of their educational background, they are aware that there are certain steps they should follow to develop their career plans in Germany as migrants. Nadia, a Syrian woman who studied data management and programming in Syria, explained her plan for developing her career in Germany as follows:

*I have to develop myself because I stopped working for long time. I graduated and then moved to Turkey where I worked in a field different than programming, so I've been far for some time from the world of programming and analyzing data. I have to do "Weiterbildung" [training] which will make me stronger and then I can enter the labour market. (Transcription, RK\_2)*

Other mothers who had obtained fewer educational qualifications in their country of origin also stated similar goals for their own future in Germany. These included attaining their German-language certificate, practicing the language, having more social relations, taking part in training and finding a job. Some of the mothers conceived of their new life situation as an opportunity to develop their professional life and as a chance to turn former future plans into reality, as Sara stated:

*I am very comfortable in the present. Since my childhood I always wanted to travel and study abroad. I was thinking of France, but then the crisis happened and my husband went to Germany. I always wanted to live in Europe because there are rules that I like a lot but that are not applied in our Arabic countries, which annoys me. I am very happy because my childhood dream became true, but I am also sad because the war made it true. (Transcription, RK\_6)*

Some mothers had expected to start learning the language and working as soon as they arrived in Germany. However, these plans, which they saw as a way of compensating for the lost years they spent in war zones or moving from one country to another in search of security, did not correspond to the reality of being a new migrant and a new mother in a new country like Germany. The migration process, their precarious legal situation and the search for adequate housing are therefore important challenges that mothers and families have to negotiate in order to start planning for the future on a personal and family level.

Many of the mothers were happy to be enrolled in the family education programs since they felt that they as well as their children were benefiting through fostering their skills. Meeting other mothers and home visitors provided space for conversation and reflection on their current life situation and future plans. These topics were strongly linked to gender roles and responsibilities for family and care work. Anyhow one should ask whether, by targeting mothers as the primary parental caretaker, the educational programs are reinforcing the stereotypical gender role of women as just mothers. The only case in which the father was more involved in the program than the mother was Saleh, who came to Germany from Iraq. Otherwise, it was mostly mothers who were participating with their children.

## Pregnancy and motherhood as a challenge to language acquisition

Another challenge that most interviewed women faced when planning their own professional development is motherhood as migrants. This was especially true for women who became pregnant and gave birth to their children in Germany. This maternity process forced some of them to discontinue the German courses they had started; on occasion this came down to regulations that prevent pregnant women and migrants from attending language school. Amina, for example, is a Syrian-Kurdish woman who fled Syria in 2014 and married in Turkey, where she gave birth to her first child. She moved to Germany three years ago and was pregnant when we interviewed her. Amina felt helpless because she was not able to continue attending a German-language course to develop her language skills.

*I went to a language school for four months, but when they knew that I am pregnant they asked me to stop going. I told them that I am newly pregnant and do not want to stop coming to the school because usually they ask the woman to stop coming to the school in her seventh month of pregnancy, but I was vomiting a lot so they said it is better to stay home because I missed many classes. (Transcription, NH\_4)*

Other mothers were not able to continue their German courses for other reasons, such as not being able to find a place for their little children in kindergarten. Many of these women are married and live with their husbands. From the perspective of the family unit, the steps required for successful integration seem clear: Since the fathers must also attend the German courses

or are already employed and therefore cannot look after the children, the mothers typically postpone their personal plans to learn the language or find employment. Amime, who fled Syria with her husband, still cannot attend German language course after three years in Germany. Her husband, on the other hand, has completed the highest language level and is now working in a school.

For some mothers, the IMPULS programs were their only link to society. Some of them are new mothers and new migrants who might not have the necessary tools (e.g., language, social relationships) to communicate with people and institutions. Most of the women were content to meet other mothers and children during the mother meetings. Moreover, they saw these programs as an opportunity for them to continue practicing their German language skills, which they should and indeed want to learn and practice to make progress in their professional and social lives. Spending a few hours per week during the home visit with the home visitor and the child proved to be very useful for many mothers. They learned new German words and sometimes communicated in German with the home visitors. To a certain extent, this practice relieves some of the women who feel that they have been left behind in their careers and skills. Nada, a mother of four children who fled from Syria to Germany with her husband and child, explained that she finds the programs (Wml and HIPPY) beneficial on a personal level as both a mother and a woman. Nada was planning to achieve a certain level of language proficiency and start working as a nurse (this was also her field of study in Syria). Nada's near-term goal was to make sure that her children are registered at kindergarten and that they are learning well, after which she intended to start working on her own skills.

### **Becoming a home visitor as a professional aspiration**

Other mothers were inspired by the work of home visitors. They decided to develop a plan to become home visitors themselves. They liked the role of the home visitor as a person who can help and support other families, who can develop their children's play and learning skills and even become a friend of these families. These mothers would not be aware that such a career or profession existed without participating in the educational programs. Sainab, for instance, is a young mother who moved from Somalia to Germany more than five years ago. She and her children have participated in the Opstapje program since 2016.

Sainab expressed her positive feelings about the program, the home visits and the playtime strategies. Moreover, she articulated that she aimed to become a home visitor herself. The same goes for Tuba from Afghanistan, a mother of three children. She moved to Germany with her husband four years ago. Tuba explained that she aimed to be a nurse or a home visitor. She wanted to be in the position, where she is the one helping other mothers.

*The home visitor is great, and I wish I could be like her. Helping people and teaching them this is very nice. I hope someday I could be like her. (Transcription NT\_5)*

## **5.2.6 Limits and challenges for refugee families**

### **Diverse participants and standardized materials and program structure**

The interviews and observations in this study have demonstrated that there is wide diversity of cultures, educational backgrounds, living and legal situations among the interviewed families.

This diversity was often mentioned by home visitors, and they emphasized that they aimed to be flexible with each family. However, the program materials and the time that they were expected to spend in the home were not aligned with this need for flexibility. Sometimes, instead of focusing on one child, they were able to involve a brother or sister who had not yet been enrolled in the program and in consequence needed more time for the visit. Home visitors also noted that they often had to use a different language to communicate with each family, requiring a flexible handling of the program materials in German language.

Another diversity-related theme that should be mentioned is the sheer range in the parents' education. This can make it difficult for some parents to understand the purpose of the programs' materials or to read and understand the programs' books, while for other parents materials seemed to be too easy. Some interviewees mentioned that their children found the material very boring; others noted that they could not help their children without a home visitor as they could not read the book or did not understand it. For illiterate parents, the program material, which was mostly rooted in the written word, proved to be a barrier. Some home visitors suggested having a variety of materials to choose from according to the child's or

family's needs.

Furthermore, home visitors believed that some parents could not comprehend the aim and the strategy of the program. This is substantiated by a Farsi-speaking home visitor:

*They [migrants' families] are diverse. For some of them, it is easy to understand, but a few of them understand very little about the aim of program. But all in all, 99% of them are very content and happy with the program. Maybe 1 or 2% of them think that we are wasting their time, and it is hard for them to keep scheduled appointments. Especially for those who are single-parents. (Transcription, NT\_1)*

A suggestion that was voiced was implementing flexible programs with broader and more flexible time limits for the visits or with the possibility of playing with more than one child at the same time. The Wml program, in which all the family members are sometimes involved and the home visitor is allowed to work with the other children during a visit, provides a more flexible structure. On the other hand, coordinators thought it was critical to note that Wml employs a collection of materials from the other regular programs HIPPY and Opstapje. If families transfer to those other programs after the bridging program, they are already familiar with some of the program materials.

Some parents' suggestions for the activities in HIPPY program include developing a more interactive didactic implementation. The materials from the HIPPY program were described as being more complex than Opstapje's and too difficult for some of the refugee families. Simplifying the program materials and orienting them more directly toward the lives and environments of the families was suggested in the online survey as well (see 4.2.4). The complexity of the HIPPY materials might therefore be one of the reasons that participation among families from source countries of asylum seekers mainly increased in the programs Opstapje Baby and Opstapje between 2015 and 2018 (Figure 4). Additionally, some home visitors and parents suggested having the Opstapje cards and the books for the programs in the family languages:

*Home visitor: And I think sometimes it would be a good idea to have those, we had that once, books, they were also available in Turkish.*

*Interviewer: That is in several languages then; in the family languages as well?*

*Home visitor: Sometimes that's quite nice, for the [Opstapje] cards for example. As I said, if I have a family that hardly speaks whether I give them the [Opstapje] cards or not. They will never translate all of this, and sometimes it is not worth giving it. (Transcription, 8\_AN)*

### Lack of time

One of the recurring themes is the insufficient time allotted to the home visit. Most of the mothers and home visitors reported that 30 to 45 minutes was too short a time for them. Every single group—parents, home visitors and coordinators—frequently expressed the need to have more time for the weekly home visits. One of the Arabic-speaking home visitors described her view about the time given to the home visit:

*I think that this program is really good for the whole family, the mother and children, it really helps the mother to customize a specific time to play with the children. I find that the session time is a little bit short, it is now 30–45 minutes, I think it will be better to make it one hour, since I need time with the children and with the mother, also I need sometimes to have conversation with the mother about general things and this is important to build a trust relation. (Transcription, NH\_3)*

The shortage of time also has negative impacts on the children's learning situation. This is described by Sara, a Syrian mother of two, who participated in Opstapje and HIPPY:

*Sara: The problem is that the duration of the visit is very short. It ends very fast, what will you do for the kid during it? It starts with the welcoming and then giving the toy and when the kids starts to interact with it the time is over. The duration is very short.*

*Interviewer: That's the main problem?*

*Sara: Yes. If it was for one hour, things could be better. I would prolong the time. (Transcription, RK\_6)*

### Stronger focus on the needs of the refugee mothers

Mothers often mentioned that they would like to have more time for things like conversations with the home visitors, asking for help translating a letter or treating them like guests and serving them tea. A home visitor suggested the possibility of supporting mothers by informing them about the different healthcare services or other activities for social networking and better integration into the host society. She stated:

*Another suggestion: Since these families open their homes to us, we could also help them answer their questions and solve their problems. I wish this program would offer us more possibilities for helping them; for example, we could provide them with the names of different contacts that might be useful to them. (Transcription, NT\_1)*

The families' opportunities to network were also frequently mentioned because mothers often felt very isolated. This desire to make friends and meet new people came not only from mothers who lived in small cities and villages but also from those who lived in large cities. However, the families who lived in the villages were considerably more limited in their ability to participate in meetings or activities. In the interviews, many parents expressed a desire to have more opportunities to attend different community gatherings and meetings to feel less lonely. Moreover, some mothers were suffering from very difficult mental health situations owing to their experiences before, during and after leaving their countries of origin. Many of them experienced the loss of family members, war and the difficult situation as newcomers with an uncertain legal status (see 5.1). Home visitors quickly became important sources of support, but they were equipped with neither the professional skills nor the right program structure to fulfil the needs of the most vulnerable among the interview partners.

### **Difficult work conditions, overburdening and the professional skills of home visitors**

It is a challenge for home visitors to build trust with the family while simultaneously maintaining their own professional boundaries to provide the home visit as a part of a structured learning program. Home visitors and parents constantly mentioned that their support is not limited to the program goals or content. Indeed, home visitors support parents in many different matters. For instance, they accompany parents to appointments, translate letters and official forms and help register children in ECE facilities and parents in language courses. They organize clothing and household items and, in some cases, even find new housing for the families. In the interviews, home visitors constantly reflected on their inner conflict over witnessing the diverse needs of the families and their own limitations in meeting those needs. The higher the family's needs and the fewer networks and support systems that were available, the more pressure they felt to be the ones responsible for addressing essential

needs that might otherwise not be met. A home visitor in a rural area explained her situation:

*From a humanitarian point of view, for example, I would do everything for them. Everything they say. Yes, I would. But considering the time and the mental burden, I cannot afford to do everything, because at some point it is too much for me. (Transcription, NT\_12)*

For some home visitors, it is more difficult to deal with the difficult life stories of the families and to not take them back home. This is often because of the home visitors' own personal experiences with (forced) migration, as mentioned here by an Iranian home visitor:

*I keep thinking of the families and the children even when I am at home. I am always thinking of families who escaped the war and I understand their suffering. (Transcription, NH\_3)*

Most of the home visitors were trained for the program delivery to some extent, but not all of them saw these trainings as a positive and valuable asset. Some of the home visitors had a professional background in the social, pedagogical or psychological field, which they had acquired in their countries of origin. This seemed to be highly beneficial for the program implementation and families. On the other hand, it is worth asking if such professionals with valuable language skills should be working as home visitors and not as educators, social workers or psychologists, for instance. Flora, a home visitor, clearly saw having the professional skills and the migration experience as a huge advantage:

*I believe both. Because without training—I don't know. That's a good question so I went to college. I studied psychology and I attended many seminars on social behavior, integration, languages, mother tongues. And I think if you have the knowledge and your experience, then it is a good combination. (Transcription, 5\_RK)*

Some mothers with a solid educational background questioned the professional knowledge of the home visitors who had no professional training in the field of education. For instance, Sara, a mother from Syria:

*But the point is that I felt that she is not really an expert. Not expert in dealing with kids. But in general, she is a good person. She is a mom at the end of the day so she has an experience with kids. But as*



*education, like the teachers in the kindergarten study their profession and they have knowledge about it. (Transcription, 6\_RK).*

Most of the home visitors claimed to enjoy being part of the program and working with the parents and children. However, they were critical of the working conditions such as the limited hours, the poor salary and the need to make use of their own resources in rural areas (such as their own cars) to reach out to the parents. Some home visitors expressed a desire to be remunerated for the extra time that they spend with the families to help them with their needs.

### **Greater awareness of vulnerabilities that are rooted in the refugee experience**

Refugee families often experience trauma and loss. Furthermore, they live in difficult situations that make them vulnerable to exclusion from society and mental health problems (see 5.1). For such families, home visitors often become the central support figures in their lives—and rather quickly too. Besides providing emotional stability, these relationships also create dependencies. Home visitors feel overburdened. Their personal boundaries and limits are not taken into account. This can lead to a situation that makes ending the relationships between a home visitor and families especially risky, on one hand, and more probable, on the other. One topic mentioned in the second round of interviews was the sudden disappearance of home visitors. Two mothers who were interviewed stated that their home visitor had stopped visiting them after consistent, regular home visits. This left the mother and child surprised and puzzled. For families that have already experienced loss and the breakup of important relationships, sometimes in tragic ways, this can be a challenging moment. The trust and relationship between the families and the home visitor is often very strong. Therefore, an abrupt end to the visits can hurt the families emotionally. Our online survey showed that the home visitor's early termination is mostly triggered by them taking up training or other employment, followed by other and private reasons, whereas conflicts with the families played only a minor role (7.3%).

Another important aspect to consider is program transition, for example, from Wml into HIPPY or Opstapje, or from Opstapje to HIPPY. The decision to offer Wml at institutions that do not have the opportunity to transfer families into the regular programs of Opstapje and HIPPY should be carefully assessed, as this would typically lead to a break in the home-visitor–family relationship within a matter of just three to four months.

## **5.3 An overview of the evaluation criteria: Building social connections and meeting program goals**

This section discusses the evaluation criteria and offers an overview of the extent to which they are met through the program implementation. This is done by referring to the results presented in sections 4 and 5<sup>8</sup>. The program sites and family cases analyzed in this study are heterogeneous and diverse. Hence, the following overview of the evaluation criteria is only able to show the general trends that can be observed in most of the sites and cases and the extent of the impact of their implementation.

### **5.3.1 Evaluation criterion that does not apply or applies only in part**

Whether the qualifications acquired in becoming and working as a home visitor improves this group's opportunities in the labour-market was a criterion that could only be partly evaluated based on the current results. Our analysis suggested that home visitors are typically adequately trained for their professional activities in the program (see 5.2.6). Early termination of the program by the home visitor is mostly caused by their pursuing further training or gaining other employment. The change to another workplace could be caused by a promotion (owing to their skills developed as a home visitor) or the difficult working conditions of the home visitors in the program (5.2.6). However, a reliable evidence-based evaluation of this criterion would require additional data.

<sup>8</sup> For the assessment of the criteria, we developed a scale of 1 to 4: 1 (criteria are not met), 2 (criteria are partly met), 3 (criteria are mostly met) and 4 (criteria are fully met). We added 0 for criteria that do not or only partly apply.

### 5.3.2 Evaluation criteria partly or mostly met through program implementation

Home visitors from the same ethno-cultural background can be a central figure for fostering social bonds with other families and individuals from the same religious, linguistic or ethno-cultural communities. Group meetings also provide this opportunity to many participants, even to families that cannot be provided with a home visitor who speaks the family language. Even though the programs can serve to establish such contacts, the interviewees and respondents to the online survey mentioned this less frequently as a goal and an outcome of program participation (see Figure 8; 5.2.1; 5.2.2) than contacting people and institutions from the host society. Another aspect that was proposed in the interviews and online survey as a way of improving the program was strengthening the family language through materials in the mother tongue (7.4). Maintaining the family language should be seen as an important tool for establishing social bonds.

Refugee families often expressed feelings of being powerless and helpless in their current living situation (see 5.1). Two closely interlinked criteria—parents and children experiencing self-efficacy and empowerment and children experiencing their parents as active educational agents—are attained when home visitors, parents and children develop situation-oriented play together and the children receive support geared toward promoting their emotional and motivational skills (5.2.3). Increasing emotional stability through long-term relationships and connecting with other parents through group meetings and institutions of the host society can empower the parents (5.2.1; 5.2.2). An important aspect of bolstering parental agency is the reassurance from home visitors that speaking the family language is not harmful to the educational prospects of the children (5.2.4). For a stronger attainment of these criteria, program materials and program structure need to be handled in a flexible manner (5.2.6). Parents should be further involved in developing the program structure and materials so as to be able to include their own resources and experiences (7.6).

Refugee parents have a high risk of experiencing mental-health challenges on account of their experience before, during and after forced migration (see 4.2.3; 5.1). Worries about family members that are still in conflict zones or dispersed all across the world

lead to a constant, daily transnational family and care work that can further impact their well-being (2.1; 5.1). The programs promote health by emotionally stabilizing the parents and by connecting the families with other institutions (5.2.2). Home visits as an outreach strategy and central element of the program play a very important role in reaching the most vulnerable families (5.2.1). Addressing the families' emotional needs is not limited to the parents. Home visitors also employ play situations to enhance the emotional and motivational skills of the children (5.2.3). However, the time constraints, program structure and competencies of home visitors can limit the mental-health support (5.2.6) that the programs are able to offer. To strengthen the families' emotional stability, this evaluation also suggests a stronger focus on the needs of the mothers and more strongly including the aspect of transnational family and care work in program materials and group meetings (7.3; 7.5).

### 5.3.3 Evaluation criteria mostly to fully met through program implementation

Participation in the programs strongly affects network building and access to communities and neighbourhoods. Besides facilitating connections with the ethno-cultural, linguistic or religious community (social bonds; see 5.3.1), the family programs involve a variety of processes that support the participants in building social bridges (i.e., relationships with people from the host society) and establishing social links (i.e., connections to institutions of the host society). They make a major contribution to decrease language barriers (5.2.2) and improve the German-language skills of mothers and children (Figure 8). For many parents, participation is a first step toward establishing social connections within their neighbourhood and their new living situation. Home visitors from Germany were frequently mentioned as an early and positive connection with a person from the host country (5.2.1). Through home visits and group meetings, participating parents gain access to a variety of institutions and informal networks (5.2.2). Many families describe themselves as being socially isolated and experiencing language and emotional barriers to networking and connecting with others in their new living environments (5.1). The home visit is an important and appropriate outreach strategy to include these families in their new communities. Moreover, the parents describe the home visit as a positive highlight of their

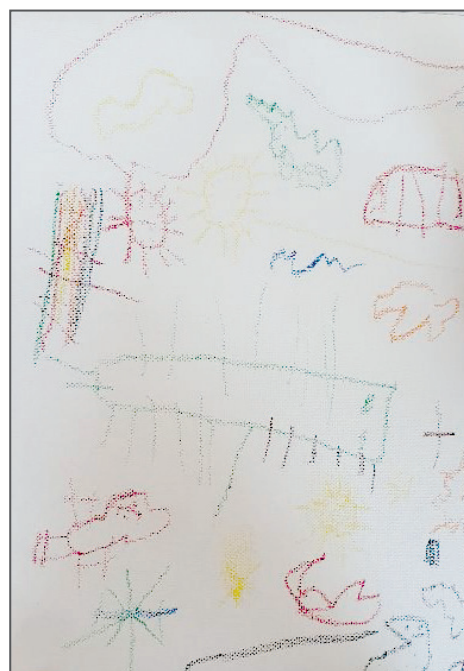
family life and an opportunity to act as an active host rather than a passive recipient of support (5.2.2). This perception is reinforced by mothers and fathers being addressed as parents and not refugees in this situation. Families from source countries of asylum seekers have a slightly higher dropout rate in the regular IMPULS programs than other groups. Access to the programs is mainly gained through word of mouth and referrals from other agencies (see 4.2.2). It can be assumed that it would be very challenging for these families to attend programs successfully that rely mainly on meetings at centres and institutions. Furthermore, results indicate that group meetings play a less important role for these families than home visits (5.2.1).

There are some limits to the capacity of these programs to create social links to the institutions of the host society. The programs can only support access to important institutions of the host society such as ECE providers and language courses if the latter are available in that particular city or village (5.2.2). Furthermore, program coordinators and home visitors need to consider and act responsibly because, for these families, the emotional risks of disrupting newly established relationships is very high (7.2).

Participating children receive a holistic early childhood education program to support their development. Both the online survey and case studies show a broad and important direct impact on the children through the play situations during the home visits and an indirect impact by strengthening the skills of their parents. It is through the program that parents learn about the importance of play-based interactions and can experience them directly during the home visits (see 5.2.3). German-language skills and emotional and motivational skills are among the most frequently mentioned competencies that children gain through the program (Figure 8; 5.2.3). In some cases, access to formal educational institutions is not possible for the families. In these cases, parents see the IMPULS programs as a temporary substitute for formal education—as the only possibility of preparing their children for their next step in school or preschool (5.2.3). However, there are some coordinators, home visitors and parents that ask for improvements of the materials that are used and question the cost of the licensed materials and programs (5.2.6; 4.2.4). They

suggest developing or providing mother-tongue materials as well as material of a more interactive nature (7.6).

Enhancement of educational opportunities and equity for the children of participating refugee families who are especially vulnerable to exclusion and suffer from restricted educational opportunities (see 2.2). After the Summer of Migration in 2015, the number of participating refugee families increased quickly and considerably (4.2.1). Our online surveys and case studies show a broad variety of positive effects on parent–child interactions, social connections and the skills of the children and parents. However, the improvement of educational opportunities and equity can be limited through the structural context, such as the availability of formal early childhood education, language learning opportunities for parents, legal-status insecurity and the housing situation in refugee shelters (2.1).



Painting of Matin's son, 5 years old



## 6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Our study has yielded significant results that contribute to the current state of academic research and provide relevant information for the field of practice. They address an important research gap: participation in family education programs for refugee families and their importance for the inclusion of parents and children in the host society. Below, these results are contextualized within the academic discourse by focusing on four central aspects.

### 6.1 “Doing” transnational family in a restrictive environment

Our interview partners reconstructed their daily family life as being shaped by restrictive legal structures and institutions. Emotional insecurity as a result of their uncertain legal status and the burden of living in mass shelters or living spaces that are unsuitable for families and children was a constant topic in the interviews. From an interactionist-theoretical perspective, family is constituted by constant social practice such as interaction/communication between the family members. They are “doing family” rather than having it defined by legal and socio-structural frameworks. That said, family interactions and relations in the context of forced migration are nevertheless strongly influenced by asylum/migration law such as family reunion policies; separation from and loss of family members before, during and after forced migration; and changing family roles through the displacement process (Westphal et al., 2019). Transnational family and care work were characterized as an important daily task by mothers and fathers in our study. In accordance with the current state of research, separation from close family members such as children or grandparents negatively affects their well-being and mental health (Gambaro, Kreyenfeld, Schacht and Spieß, 2018). (Re)constituting the relationships through frequent calls and messaging is a resource and a burden for our interviewees at the same time. Feeling lonely and socially isolated in the new place of living contributes to challenging mental-health situations. However, in comparison with the difficult situations they have faced in their countries of origin, living in Germany is often seen as an opportunity—especially by the interviewed families that have been able to

attain a stable legal status. Still, the change from an extended family network to a nuclear family responsible for all tasks associated with family and care work is another important challenge. In their analysis of long-term statistical data, Gambaro et al. (2018) showed that refugee women rated their current life satisfaction higher (7.2 out of 10) than in their retrospective life-satisfaction rating before war, crisis or conflict (6.5 out of 10) despite potentially stressful situations such as living in shared accommodations, uncertainty regarding the outcome of their asylum procedure and the future, discrimination and xenophobic threats and struggles with the German language. Our interview partners described sharp contrasts between a social life full of networks with their extended family and neighbourhood interactions before their forced migration and their social isolation or forced cohabitation in mass shelters at their new place of living. In these situations, home visitors seem to quickly become central support figures. In many cases, they are addressed more as friends or “new family” than as pedagogical professionals who enter the family home to conduct a learning program.

Which tasks of family and care work are performed by which family members is a multifactor process that is influenced among other things by the order in which the family members arrived in Germany and whether the family lives in an urban or rural environment. Family and gender roles can change in the process of forced migration too. The effects on parenting and new responsibilities for children, the loss of status for fathers as former providers and protectors of the family and new vulnerabilities as well as possibilities for mothers have all been described in the available research (Westphal et al., 2019). Many mothers interviewed for our study described being the main person responsible for the tasks inside the home, such as housework, taking care of the children and organizing the family life. However, in some cases, couples and families are able to open up new spaces for reflection, discussion and changes in family responsibilities. By contrast, certain structures of the host country—such as lack of access to early childhood education and care as well as limited access to language courses for pregnant women and mothers with small children—reinforce traditional gender roles.

Parenting norms in the new environment, such as a stronger focus on the autonomy of the children, were questioned or critiqued by some of our interviewees and supported by others, but in none of the interviews was it mentioned as a reason for not registering their children in an ECE facility. Nor was it cited as a reason for families preferring to have the children close to the parents at home to prevent them from possible harm outside the family sphere. Refugee mothers in our study were strongly limited in their own educational and professional possibilities and aspirations by the lack of access to early childhood education and daycare. The causes of limited access to early childhood education in our study are clearly related to structural/institutional barriers and not cultural or individual ones.

## 6.2 Essentializing refugee families and target-group approaches

Resilience and post-traumatic growth have been shown to be important resources for families and individuals with a refugee experience in the current research (Maywald, 2018). In our study, parents strongly connected their hopes for the future with educational aspirations for their children. Close family relationships, the sharing of responsibilities between spouses, relationships with communities and program attendance emerged as further important resources. Reflecting critically on our study design and its results, we might have not devoted as much attention to the resources of these families as we have to the structural and individual challenges that they are facing and thus contribute to the essentializing of refugee families as a vulnerable group. So-called migrant families have been essentialized, homogenized and approached from a deficit-oriented perspective in the past (Armirkpur, 2019; Böhmer, 2019; Leiprecht, 2018). Refugee families are subject to discrimination and threatened by incorrect diagnoses and inappropriate pathologizing of their parenting behaviour and family structures by educational institutions and youth offices (Abdallah-Steinkopff, 2018). Reproducing images of vulnerable and burdened refugee families contributes to these discourses and might constitute a perception of refugee families as being a homogeneous target group.

Looking at concrete family cases in our study and analyzing in detail the role of the programs in each case reveals the complexities of their life situations and the diversity of the families. We see how intersectional processes of inclusion and exclusion (Leiprecht, 2018; Riegel, 2018) and subsequent opportunities for successful integration trajectories are structured along differences in gender, (dis)abilities, educational status and literacy, ethno-cultural community, rural versus urban environments and legal status. Population with a (forced) migration experience is very heterogeneous. For the family and parent education programs, families should be considered parents and children first and foremost and not labeled as “refugees,” as Lüken-Klaßen and Neumann (2018, p. 201) conclude from their study in this field. In line with this conclusion, our interview partners positively differentiated the home visits from their experiences in German institutions such as the job centre, where they felt they were marked and sometimes discriminated against as “the refugees.”

Our interview partners were highly heterogeneous but, as we could demonstrate by contrasting the different family cases, they face similar structural challenges and sometimes similar situations of discrimination. Nevertheless, it should be questioned if a target-group approach for family education adequately addresses their needs. Of the programs in focus, only the bridging program Wml targets refugee families. HIPPY and Opstapje are either focused on migrant families or toward families with high needs depending on the actual site and the organization that is implementing the program. The analysis of the participant data clearly shows mothers with a German background to be a constant minority across the regular IMPULS programs, while the majority of participants have migration experiences. Organizational and conceptional aspects such as providing home visits in the family language can encourage a target-group focus. Yet, as Böhmer (2018) argues, we need to reconsider if the heterogeneity of the targeted group (such as refugee families) is more pronounced than what is assumed to be the common needs of a group labeled in this way. However, creating inclusive programs that recognize the resources and needs of diverse individuals and social groups is an extremely demanding organisational task, one that requires a common normative basis of human rights and that builds on equity, anti-discrimination/anti-racism, participation and empowerment as guidelines for action in its educational practice (Fischer, 2019, p. 33).

### 6.3 The political dimensions of family education in the context of forced migration

Providing structures for empowerment means recognizing the political dimension of family education. Parents' resistance to oppression and discrimination should be strengthened by offering spaces for reflection, information and tools (Armirpur, 2019). If family education is based on the guidelines for action mentioned above (Fischer, 2019), it needs to be grounded in the concrete resources and challenges of its participants. For those who work with refugee families, this means that issues of transnational family life, family reunification, experiences of discrimination and legal restrictions all need to be addressed in the programs. Family education with refugees cannot be apolitical in this highly politicized field. It needs to create opportunities for reflection, open up space for self-organization and strengthen the public voices of parents and children with a refugee experience.

Recognizing the political dimension also means reflecting on the self-positioning of the program and the program employees. A constant review of its own structures, images, norms and standards is necessary. Family education programs are part of the education system and a society that is structured by hegemonic power relations such as nationalism, patriarchy, racism and capitalism (Riegel, 2018). Being aware of this should encourage us to reflect on the extent to which stereotypes are strengthened and resources go unrecognized in the programs—for example, by not including the language skills of the families or defining mothers (and not fathers) as the primary target group of the programs. Another critical aspect that emerged in our study pertains to the nature of employment as a home visitor. The question here is whether the home visitors, who themselves are mostly migrants, are in precarious employment relationships or if this employment contributes to further qualifying and empowering those working in these positions. Our data and results were indecisive in this respect.

The extent to which a political understanding of family education was evident at the program sites and described by parents, home visitors and coordinators varied, but it was generally not mentioned as a central concept. Therefore, we propose strengthening this component in our recommendations for action through anti-bias/anti-racism training for home visitors and coordinators, recognizing transnational family ties,

creating spaces for reflection, implementing a parent steering group, adding materials in family languages and improving the working conditions of the home visitors.

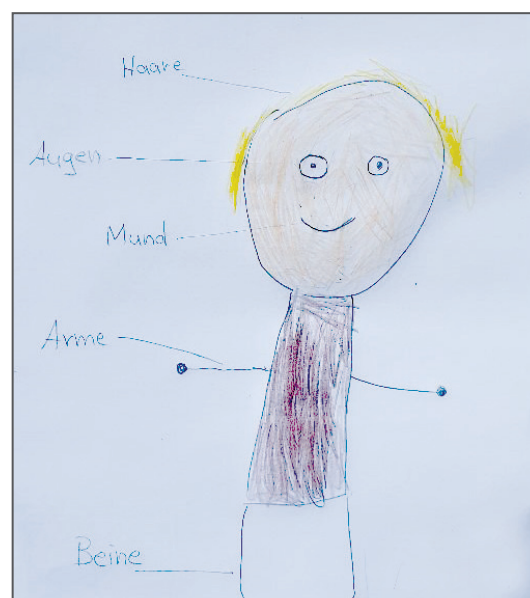
### 6.4 Methods of outreach and the peer-to-peer approach

Fischer (2019, p. 45) defines three types of barriers for families with migration or refugee experience to family education programs. These are marginalized life situations (e.g., an uncertain legal status, housing in mass shelters); individual inhibitions (e.g., a lack of information, communication barriers) and institutional barriers (e.g., a lack of employees competent in family languages, complex bureaucracy). She discusses the HIPPY program with its peer-to-peer approach and outreach strategy of home visits as a promising practice. In our study, many families described themselves as socially isolated and stated that they experienced language and emotional barriers to networking and connecting with others in their new living environment. The home visit is an important and appropriate outreach strategy to include these families in their new communities. Parents describe the home visit as a positive highlight of their family life and an opportunity to act as an active host rather than a passive recipient of support. Participants are addressed as parents and not refugees in this situation. In their narratives, they associate the home visit with the positive experiences they recalled before their forced migration when they were still part of an extended family or neighbourhood network. Abdallah-Steinkopff (2018) describes this change in family structure from extended family networks to a nuclear family as one of the main challenges for refugee families: "The moral development of the children is encouraged by the parents, but also by the grandparents and close relatives. The family, especially mothers, grandmothers and aunts, serve as advisors for education" (Abdallah-Steinkopff, 2018, p. 48)<sup>9</sup>.

Home visitors were shown to become the central support person for families in our study. They are able to fill this void that was created by the families having to leave their extended family behind and to address the need for an education "advisor." Trust and rapport with home visitors is established during regular home visits. The vast majority of these are carried out bilingually in both German and the family language (66%) as well as in the family language alone (6%).

Relationships with home visitors who spoke in German (28%) were described as trustworthy, intense and supportive. There are isolated indications that the initial contact with German-speaking home visitors was accompanied by fears of being controlled by institutions of the host society, such as the youth welfare office, as in the case of Patricia (see page x). Nevertheless, even in this case, the mother noted that she only had this fear during the very first meeting and later felt empowered to act and resist any unwanted control by these institutional structures through the support of her home visitors. Amirpur's (2019) critique of HIPPY for using these outreach strategies and intruding on the private family sphere could therefore not be substantiated by our study results. However, our data did not allow us to determine whether the home visit and fears of being controlled by the host society's institutions might be a barrier to accessing the programs and choosing to participate in the program to begin with. Families participate in Wml, Opstapje and HIPPY on a voluntary basis, and home visits are carried out mostly in a bilingual/family language setting and with peers who have their own personal migration and/or parenting experience, not professional educators or social workers. These might all be reasons for the participating parents to define the relationship with the home visitors as being supportive and not controlling. "Recognition in the sense of social appreciation creates the feeling of belonging, a feeling of being at home,"<sup>10</sup> Fischer (2019, p. 42) states. She consequently defines social acceptance and recognition as one of her core guidelines for diversity awareness in family education. In our study, interactions and relationships with home visitors can be reconstructed as spaces where refugee families feel recognized and socially accepted and that foster emotional security, hope for the future and motivation in children and parents.

In accordance with the current state of research (Roth, 2015), relationship building is the foundation of a successful program implementation. This implies that, because of its importance and the experiences and life situation of refugee families, there is a high risk associated with the disruption of the home visitor–family relationship. Besides emotional security, these relationships can also create dependencies. This suggests the need to be aware of and regularly reflect on the power dynamics between home visitors and families as well as their boundaries. We propose offering anti-bias/anti-racism training along with interdisciplinary and psychological counselling services for home visitors as concrete recommendations for action to bolster this reflexive dimension.



Painting of Elham's son, 6 years old

<sup>9</sup> Our own translation from German.

<sup>10</sup> Our own translation from German.

## 7. CONCRETE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The IMPULS programs goals are clearly linked to a normative basis of social justice, equity and human rights (Table 1). To serve diverse families through family education programs, Fischer (2019) proposes the operating principles of recognition, acceptance, anti-discrimination, participation and empowerment. A growing awareness of diversity and intersectionality is a basic requirement for a needs- and resource-based implementation of family education programs for families with a refugee experience. As we have been able to show through this analysis of Opstapje, HIPPY and Wml, they have a high potential to support the inclusion of refugee families in Germany. The following recommendations are based on the evaluation of these three programs. These recommendations can provide an important framework for action at the intersection of family education and forced migration.

### 7.1 Provide more and tailor-made training opportunities; support coordinators and home visitors

Training and support opportunities for home visitors and coordinators that work with refugee families should include anti-bias/anti-racism elements, elements of trauma-sensitive pedagogy and information on implications of the legal status situation. Interdisciplinary or psychological counselling (supervision) for home visitors and coordinators should be offered to staff members who work with participants in challenging mental health situations.

### 7.2 Foster institutional awareness of specific risks that arise from a forced migration experience

Create institutional guidelines and procedures for dealing with sudden disruptions in home-visitor–parent–child relationships and for the transfer from bridging program (Wml) into regular programs (HIPPY; Opstapje). Extend the time for the home visits to 60 minutes for refugee families with high needs or increase the time allotment by combining the program with other existing programs. For instance, combine the role of integration assistant and home visitor to expand the available time.

### 7.3 Recognize transnational family ties in the programs and create space for political action

Include the topic of transnational family and care work in program materials and group meetings. Provide space for reflection and self-organization for parents to strengthen their empowerment and resistance—for example, with regard to restrictive laws on family reunification.

### 7.4 Create flexible and up-to-date concepts for linguistic diversity

Develop conceptual guidelines for the learning of German as a second language and promoting the family language(s) by drawing on current knowledge about language acquisition and translanguaging. Develop and/or provide materials in participants' mother tongues as well as concepts for program design and materials when working with parents who are illiterate or cannot read and write the Latin alphabet.

### 7.5 Strengthen the focus on support for refugee mothers

Link the family education program with services and supports for refugee women and mothers. Invite them to enrol for these services at group meetings. In rural areas with limited support structures, combine family education with other existing programs. Add hours as integration assistant for the home visitor to expand their time resources and responsibilities.

### 7.6 Tap into the funds of the knowledge of refugee parents to strengthen empowerment

Implement a parent steering group that provides feedback on the program structure and materials to better integrate parents' resources and experiences into the program. Further enhance the flexibility of the program implementation to foster situation-oriented play during home visits.

## 7.7 Improve the working conditions of home visitors

For a sustainable program implementation, improve the working conditions of home visitors in terms of salary, working hours and support structures through interdisciplinary and psychological counselling services. Provide possibilities for promotion and training opportunities.

## 7.8 Implement flexible programs in rural areas

Use the experiences from Wml to develop a flexible family education program for rural areas. Allow the freedom to incorporate different family members into a home visit to maximize the use of resources. Combine materials and program structures for different age groups. Organize a pick-up service for the group meetings as a standard program service.



Painting of Saleh's and Najh's daughter, 5 years old



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## APPENDIX 9.1 : SAMPLE OF CASE STUDIES

Case di- mensions	Pro- gram(s) attended	Age of children	Family unit	Rural/ ur- ban area	Housing	Legal status	Country of origin	Use of family lan- guage in program
<b>Case 1: Patricia and her two children</b>	Opstapje	4; 5 years old (older siblings in country of origin)	Single parent fa- mily, two children abroad	Big urban centre in the south of Germa- ny	Mass shelter	Asylum seeker wi- thout per- manent status	Nigeria	German as program language
<b>Case 2: Om Samar and her three children</b>	Wml	5; 3; 2 years old	Family with two parents	Interme- dium City in the North of Germany	Privat apartment	Accepted refugee status	Syria/ Kurdish	Use of family language (Arabic) in program
<b>Case 3: Soha and her two children</b>	Opstapje/ HIPPY	5 years; 18 months old	Family with two parents	Rural area in central Germany	Two sto- rey-apart- ment-buil- ding for refugees	Denied asylum seeker: so-called tolerated status "Duldung"	Algeria	Use of family language (Arabic) in program
<b>Case 4: Matin and her two children</b>	Wml/HIP- PY	5; 12 years old	Family with two parents	Interme- dium City in the North of Germany	Privat apartment	Asylum seeker with 3 years per- mission	Iran	Use of family language (Farsi) and German
<b>Case 5: Hamda and her six child- ren</b>	HIPPY	6;10; 13; 16; 18; 20 years old	Family with two parents	Small city in the south of Germany	Privat apartment	Asylum seeker with 1 year per- mission	Syria	German as program language
<b>Case 6: Elham and her three children</b>	Wml	6; 4; 2.5 years old	Family with two parents	Big city in the North of Germa- ny	apart- ment-buil- ding for refugees	Asylum seeker with 3 years per- mission	Afghanis- tan	German as program language
<b>Case 7: Marjan and her four children</b>	Wml	16; 14;13;2.5 years old	Family with two parents	Big city in the north of Germa- ny	Privat apartment	Asylum seeker with 3 years per- mission	Afghanis- tan	Use of family language (Dari) and German
<b>Case 8: Fa- himeh and her three children</b>	Wml	12; 5;3 years old	Family with two parents	Big city in the north of Germa- ny	Privat apartment	Denied asylum seeker: so-called tolerated status "Duldung"	Afghanis- tan	Use of family language (Dari) and German

<b>Case 9: Tuba and her three children</b>	Wml	9; 5; 3 years old	Family with two parents	Big city in the north of Germa- ny	Privat apartment	Asylum seeker with 3 years per-	Afghanis- tan	Use of family language (Dari) and
<b>Case 10: Sainab and her three children</b>	Opstapje	3; 4; 5ye- ars old	Family with two parents	Big city in the south of Germa- ny	Privat apartment	Accepted refugee status	Somalia	German as program language
<b>Case11: Moha- mad and his eight children</b>	HIPPY	17; 16; 10; 7; 4; 2 years old (no infor- mation on age of two oldest children)	Family with two parents	Small city in the south of Germany	apart- ment-buil- ding for refugees	Asylum seeker with 3 years per- mission	Afghanis- tan	German as program language
<b>Case 12: Erica and her three children</b>	Opstapje / HIPPY	5; 2 years old and newborn	Family with two parents	Rural area in central Germany	Privat apartment	residents with job permissi- on	Moldavia	Use of family language (Romani- an) and German
<b>Case 13: Ajjan and her son</b>	Opstapje	No infor- mation on age	Family with two parents	Privat apartment	apart- ment-buil- ding for refugees	Asylum seeker with 3 years per- mission	Somalia	German as program language
<b>Case 14: Amime and her two child- ren</b>	Opstapje,	3 years old and Newborn	Family with two parents	Rural area in central Germany	Private apartment	Accepted Refugee status	Syria	German as program language And Arabic (with the mother)
<b>Case 15: Lama and her daughter</b>	WMI	2 years old	Family with two parents	Big city in northwes- tern Ger- many	Private apartment	Reuni- fication (refugee status)	Syria	Arabic as a main language with some German
<b>Case 16: Maram and her six child- ren</b>	WMI	19;18;16; 15;12;8; 3 years old	Family with two parents	Big city in northwes- tern Ger- many	Apartment in a camp	Reuni- fication (refugee status)	Syria	Arabic as a main language with some German

<b>Case 17: Nada and her 4 children</b>	WMI Opstapje	8;3; 2; 2 years old	Family with two parents	Medium city in northwes- tern Ger- many	Private apartment	Accepted refugee status	Syria	WMI: Arabic. Opstapje: German (Arabic with the
<b>Case 18: Nadia and her child</b>	Opstapje	2 years old	Family with two parents	Medi- um City in west southern Germany	Private apartment	Accepted refugee status	Syria	German and the mother translate in Arabic to the kid
<b>Case 19: Sara and her two children</b>	Opstapje, HIPPY	4; 1 years old	the pa- rents with the kids	Medi- um City in west southern Germany	Private apartment	Reuni- fication (refugee status)	Syria	German
<b>Case 20: Amina and her two children</b>	Opstapje	4; 2 years old	Family with two parents	Rural area in central Germany	Private apartment	Accepted refugee status	Syria	German with the kid and Arabic with the mother
<b>Case 21: Hosein, Khouled and their 2 children</b>	Opstapje	3 years and 18 months old	Family with two parents	Rural area in central Germany	Private apartment	Accepted refugee status	Syria	German with the kid and Arabic with the parents
<b>Case 22: Saleh and Najh their 6 children</b>	HIPPY and Opstapje	16;13;11; 7;5;4 years old	Family with two parents	Rural area in central Germany	Private apartment	Accepted refugee status	Iraq	German

## APPENDIX 9.2: SAMPLE OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Type of interview/ observation	Urban sites < 500,000 inhabitants	Small & intermediate city sites >500,000 inhabitants	Rural sites/	Total
First interviews with parents	8	8	6	22
Interviews with home visitors	3	5	2	10
Interviews with coordinators	1	3	1	5
Second Interview with parents/ observation of home visit Children: arts based (painting home visit)	6	7	5	18
Total	18	23	14	55

## APPENDIX 9.3 INTERVIEW GUIDE: HOME VISITORS

### 1. Warm up

Would you like to tell me a bit about yourself?  
(country of origin/ how long in Germany/ educational background...)  
How did you become a home visitor?  
Did and how did it change your situation to become a home visitor?  
What are your responsibilities as a home visitor?  
(What are not your responsibilities)  
What did you learn from being a home visitor?

### 2. Context

How many families are you working with?  
Can you tell me a bit about the refugee families: how is their life in Germany?  
What should be changed about the organization of the program? (for example, working hours, numbers of families...) to improve it?  
Did you get a training to be a home visitor? Can you describe this training for me- what did you learn?

### 3. Program for the families we are interviewing

How is the program working for this family?  
What changed for the mother/ family life/ children through the program?  
Could you connect the family to institutions in Germany (school, family centres...)- how exactly did you support the family in this?  
What is easy for this family / what is hard about the program?  
Do they like the materials- what should be changed about them?  
Is this only hard/ easy for refugee families or for other families as well?  
Can you describe me a home visit – what are you doing with the family and why are you doing it?  
What language are you speaking with the mother and the children?  
Did you have any kind of difficult situation as a home visitor? Can you describe it?

### 4. Good Practice and Challenges

What makes the program valuable for you? For the families?  
What are main challenges?  
If you would be IMPULS what would you change in this program?  
If a new home visitor starts in this program tomorrow what is your advice for this person?

### 5. Wrap up

What do you like about being a home visitor?  
What are your plans for your future?



## APPENDIX 9.4 INTERVIEW GUIDE: COORDINATORS

### 1. Warm up

Can you tell me about your own background and function as a coordinator? (professional background, work experiences; migration experiences; responsibilities as coordinator)

Can you give me some general information about the program site and location? (programs at site; rural/urban; number of participants...)

### 2. Program implementation

What is being implemented? Welcome with IMPULS; HiPPY; Opstapje?

Frequency of courses?

Type of contracts with home visitors and implementation of home visits (volunteer contract, professional experiences required or not; mother tongue approach?)?

Do you have group meeting? Where? How often?

What kind of training do you offer for home visitors?

How are programs funded?

### 3. Flexibility in customizing the program

What opportunities are there to meet families flexibly or to organize group meetings flexibly?

What role does the funding play in this aspect?

### 4. Framework conditions and infrastructure

What kind of role plays the rural / urban environment for program implementation?

What kind of existing networks (volunteer work and advisory institutions) can you rely on?

Are there any kind of organized ethno-cultural, linguistic or religious communities in your networks?

What kind of institutional links to daycare centers and schools do you have established?

### 5. Evaluation and monitoring of the program

How do you obtain statistics on the program implementation?

How is the program evaluated with the participants?

### 6. First insights into program outcomes

What are benefits of programs for the families?

How would you describe the main impact on parents? the children?

Are there any effects on networks and participation in other institutions or neighbourhood networks?

How important do you think is the home visit?

Are there any other effects on the integration trajectories of the family?

For whom of the families is it possible to participate successfully and difficult to participate successfully?

What do you think are the most important factors that support and hinder integration?

What are the main challenges of working with refugee families?

What are good practice and challenges while implementing the programs?

What makes the program valuable? What is transferable?

What are the key challenges?

### 7. Interviews and further collaboration

Can you imagine participating in qualitative interviews with parents and home visitors?

When would be a good time? Which languages would be necessary for interviews? Appendix 9.4 Interview guide: Coordinators

## APPENDIX 9.5 INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARENTS

### 1. Warm up

Introduction of researcher/ Informed consent /  
 Permission to record interview  
 Short questionnaire (based on online tool:  
 demographic data on family)  
 Can you tell me about your life here in Germany as a  
 family? What does a usual day look like?  
 Please tell me a bit how everything went since you  
 came to Germany (how long have you been here/ did  
 you move/ did it take you long time to arrive in  
 Germany/ did you stay at refugee camps first)  
 Where do you live right now? What is good and bad  
 about it?

### 2. Participation in the program

Why are you participating in the program? (Motivation to participate)  
 Who did tell you about it?  
 What are you doing in the program (homevisits/ groupmeetings)  
 What do you think will be good about it?  
 What do your kids like about it?  
 Do you have any fears- what might be difficult in this program?  
 Do you like the other people – so far? What do you like about them- what not so much?  
 How about the homevisitor (what is helpful- what isn't?, language spoken during the visits; background of homevisitor similar/ connection and relationship)  
 What do you think are the responsibilities of the homevisitor?  
 Do you prefer meet at home or in another place (School, family center.... Why?)  
 What is the program about?  
 How was it so far?  
 Do you have any suggestions so far for the program?  
 Do you look at the materials with you children without the homevisitor? (how often?)  
 For how long do you play with your children with the materials?  
 What do you learn in the program?  
 What are your children learning in the program?

### 3. Family life in Germany & parent- child relationship

Please tell me about your family? (who is your family, who is here with you...)  
 Could you tell me more about you and your children- what are the things you do together?  
 (playing, reading, going to the playground, doing other programs, watching TV together....)  
 What do you think- what are your children learning from you? How can they learn this?  
 What are the three most important things your children should learn from you?  
 What makes you happy when being with your children? (please describe the situation what happened step by step)  
 What languages are you using when speaking to your children?  
 What makes you angry or sad when being with your children? (please describe the situation what happened step by step)  
 What are your responsibilities in the family/ what are the responsibilities of the children and your partner/ husband...?  
 How about family in other countries? Do contacts form part of the every day activities?  
 Do you have more relatives around that are helping with the children?  
 If you compare how you and your children were living before coming to Germany and now here in Germany- Do you think something changed between you and your children?  
 Do you still have family members in other countries?  
 How can you keep in contact with them?

#### 4. Social Connections

Contact to Institutions in Germany (Social Links)

Do you participate in any kind of programs beside the (Willkommen/ Opstapje/ Hippy)?

Have you been in a German School/ Kindergarten already? (Why not?/ Did you speak with teacher or educator how often)

Did you go somewhere to get help with housing/ language courses/ money....?

Who helped you in Germany?

What was hard or difficult?

How did people treat you in these places? (good- why, please describe; discriminated- why, please describe)

Contact to ethno- cultural or religious community (Social Bonds)

Do you know other people from your country?

Would you like to meet more people from your country (Why yes, Why no)

Do you have a meeting place you can go to? (religious community)

Contact to Germans/ in the Neighbourhood (Social Bridges)

Do you know people from Germany?

How often do you speak to other people in your neighbourhood or school and so on...?

How are the people here in Germany?

How are they treating you and your family?

Is there somebody else helping you here in Germany?

Would you be interested in coming to know more people in your neighbourhood? (What is interesting/ not interesting about it)

#### 5. Role of Playing and Learning

What kind of play do you remember from your childhood? What did you play as a kid? (were parents involved in some way?)

What do you think is different between parents and children in Germany and where you are from?

What kind of things are you doing with your children? (play/ read/ sing/ make them help ...)

What do you know about school in Germany?

What do your children need to do in school in Germany to be successful? (What do teachers want or expect the students to do in Germany?)

What does teacher want from parents in Germany?

What kind of future are you hoping for, for your children in Germany?

#### 6. Well being in Germany

Are there situations in your life you feel happy (can you tell me more about it, please describe a situation)

What is hard/ difficult about living in Germany?

Do you have any health issues (also psychological problems)

How are you managing these challenges? (feeling confident- or not)

Do you think you can find your own solutions? (How are you handling it so far)

Can you tell me about a situation that was difficult and you were able to find a solution?

Are there situations you can't do anything about?

What should change to make it better?

#### 7. Closing

If you would be the German chancellor Angela Merkel what would you change?

If you could look into the future. What would you like to see in 10 years from now? (for you/ for your children) Did I miss something- would you like to add something else?





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