



# Stories of Integration

Exploring the experiences of refugees and immigrants integration into the labour market, education & training environments and society

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## Overview

Although immigration rates in Germany have been constantly high for decades, particularly since 2015, many immigrants still face problems integrating into social and economic life. Refugees especially are confronted with a rather restrictive legislation regarding residence and working permissions. Without a residence permit it is hard to get a job and many employers do not want to hire refugees because of bureaucratic hurdles and refugees' uncertain future prospects. Due to this, refugees need special support and consultancy for labour market integration. A number of projects and initiatives to support this integration have been established across Germany, including the MAMBA scheme in Muenster.

To gather insights into refugees and immigrants' integration into the labour market and Germany society in general, we worked with a group of people from a range of different countries including Syria, Afghanistan and Romania who are now currently living in Ingolstadt. Their stories of integration focus on their journey to becoming part of German society and what they have done to integrate, such as learn the language, access the education system and try to find work. Their stories details some of the challenges involved in this process such as asylum regulations and restrictions, and also how certain elements of the system can be problematic or frustrating (i.e. food stamps). Their stories also touch upon why they came to Germany and what they aspire to do in the future.

## Integrating into German society

In his story, [Hossam](#) describes how he came to Germany with his family to start a new life away from the war and suffering in Syria. He now has some good friends in Germany, including German friends, and that since arriving, he and his family have been given everything they need to make their new start in Germany. [Mohamed](#) is also originally from Syria and too fled the war. He too is appreciative of the freedom, peace and friendliness of German society, and his goal is to study and give something back to Germany. [Ismael](#), who two years ago also moved to Ingolstadt to again flee the war in Syria, has also had a positive experience of integrating into German society. In his story Ismael describes how although he had to repeat his 11<sup>th</sup> Grade in Germany and he initially struggled to communicate because he didn't speak the language, he now speaks fluent German and feels much more like he belongs in society. Talking about his interest in German social and political issues, he says that *"I am a part of this society and I have to participate now... what happens affects me as well although I'm not German"*. His goal is become a computer scientist. Ismael's story highlights the importance of learning the language of the society that you are

integrating into in order to communicate and settle in. This sentiment is echoed in many of the Stories of School from Sweden. In these stories, the young people describe how learning Swedish helped them to settle into a new school in a new country.

What emerges from these stories is that the people telling their stories of integration want to be a real part of the society that they are coming into. Looking at the insights we gathered from the young people's integration into the Swedish education system in the Stories of School report, we can see how it is important for newcomers to society to feel welcomed and that they have the opportunity to develop and give their capacities to the country that they have moved to. [Oana](#), who herself moved to Germany from Romania and now works with unaccompanied migrant children, describes how it is important that society is patient with newcomers. She explains that people don't really understand how difficult life in Germany can be for these young people, and that satisfying their "*material needs*" is not enough. People need the support and affections of family and friends to feel like they belong somewhere. Oana argues that is only when people "*feel respected and loved*" that they will be successful.

## Barriers to integration

In another story [Oana](#) describes how feeling unwelcome can affect people's integration into society. Speaking specifically about young men, Oana suggests that they feel that they have restraints on them when being in public as everybody looks at them. [Shaked](#) who is originally from Afghanistan, describes some of the difficulties for refugees who are integrating into German society in his stories. Before fleeing the war and coming to Germany, [Shaked](#) had been working for Coca-Cola and finding work there was quite easy. However, this has become much more difficult in Germany because his high school diploma and legal documents were not accepted. He also describes how having not permanent residence and not identity card hinders him in finding employment. These factors and the declining of his application in 2016 have had implications on how much he can settle into German society. [Shaked](#) describes how he is unable to find work, attend language courses or find vocational courses, and he has had to teach himself German without any help. In his story, he describes how he survives on food stamps and that this makes him feel "*shameful*" and "*tiny*". Similarly, although [Mohamed](#) is keen to give back to German society, but a lack of residence permit is preventing him from accessing educational programmes that will enable him to do this.

## Working life

Refugees who have found work, such as [Mohammed](#) who is a heating installer, seem to be more positive about their integration into society. Mohammed plans to continue his training with the company that he is with and progress his career. Similarly, [Hossam](#) who is a professional dancer

has been able to find work as a dancer at a festival and wants to pay Germany society back for what it has provided to his family through his art. This suggests that through having a role in society in which their capacities are recognised, people feel much more valued and want to give back more. This is echoed in some ways in the Stories of Our Neighbourhood, in which people, such as [Dirk](#) and [Arina](#), take pride in their jobs and roles in society.

[Click here](#) to view the extracts from these stories and [click here](#) to view the feature story.

## InnoSI Themes

**Early stage interventions** can change people's **life course perspectives**. Without such interventions it is likely that the social disadvantages people face will increase through their lives, and can also result in the intergenerational transfer of poverty and disadvantage. As [Ismael's](#) and [Mohammed's](#) stories demonstrate, access to education and work training programmes have support them to become a positive part of German society. Despite the situations that have caused these young men to flee their home countries, their stories suggest that the plans that they have for their futures seem much more positive and will enable them to use their skills to positively benefit German society. Similarly, [Hossam's](#) positive integration into German society through being able to use his artistic practice at a festival and through making good friends, could have positive implications for his whole family. In both [Shaked's](#) story and [Mohamed's](#) account of his life in Germany, we are told about the various restrictions they are facing that are disabling their integration into German society. Since these stories were collated Shaked has been granted the right to stay in Germany and has been supported in this battle through local support of individuals and services. Without such intervention and support it can be difficult for people to overcome the challenges that they are facing and change their life course.

## Summary of Insights

- Giving back:** Access to support that meets their material needs, a good network of peer and family support and work, training, education opportunities are all contributing factors to making people feel welcomed and valued in society. When newcomers to societies are enabled to fully integrate, they feel a strong sense of wanting to 'give something back'.
- Restricting Integration:** When there are restrictions put on people that create barriers to them fully engaging in society as other people do (i.e. work restrictions, different economical support such as food stamps rather than employment benefits etc.), people find integrating into society much more difficult. [Shaked's](#) experience particularly highlights how such barriers can have an impact on people's sense of identity and their overall wellbeing.