



Arrived and transnationally connected: Afghan immigrants in Germany

Summary

Many Afghan refugees have arrived in Germany over the course of the last decade. Since the Taliban regained power in 2021, the number of Afghans seeking protection in Germany has seen a renewed increase. Many immigrants are only just beginning their journey towards full integration and social participation, but given the situation in Afghanistan, they are likely to remain in Germany for the long run. At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that they continue to have connections to their country of origin. The local ties and networks in Germany, the transnational ones to Afghanistan, and the interaction between the two can provide insights into the lived experience of Afghan immigrants. The scientific staff of the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) has examined relevant questions in order to improve the understanding of their needs, potential and challenges – for example in the area of integration – and to contribute to better policy and societal responses.

The study addresses the following questions: How have Afghan immigrants settled in Germany? What challenges do they face? What do their social networks in Germany look like, what relationships do they maintain with Afghanistan and how important are these connections in their lives? As part of the project "Transnational Networks and Civil Society Activities in the Context of Forced Migration: The Afghan and Syrian Communities in Germany", the SVR's scientific staff conducted an online survey between November 2023 and April 2024 that was aimed at Afghan immigrants living in Germany. The sample allows for a comparison between two immigration cohorts: on the one hand, people who have come to Germany since 2021 – i.e. after the Taliban's takeover – and, on the other hand, individuals who arrived earlier, particularly between 2015 and 2020.

The results of the survey show that transnational relationships are an important part of daily life for many Afghans. This applies above all to connections with family members still living in Afghanistan, but also to relatives or friends in other



countries. By contrast, social contacts in Germany remain more limited. This applies both to relationships with Germans and with other Afghans living in Germany. As it takes time to build social networks, those who have been living in Germany for longer generally report more frequent social interactions. However, it is important to note that those who maintain relationships across national borders do not necessarily have fewer friendships in Germany as a result. Rather, some people have many contacts overall – both local and transnational – whereas others have fewer social interactions overall.

The life of Afghan immigrants is strongly shaped by their refugee experience as well as their length of stay in Germany. Family reunification ranks first among the most pressing challenges as indicated by the respondents. Other important issues include learning German, obtaining a secure residence permit and finding a place to live. The respondents also report negative experiences in Germany: Many feel discriminated against which can reduce their sense of belonging and welcome. According to a large majority of the respondents, German politics does not sufficiently address the concerns of the Afghan community. Nevertheless, many feel welcome in Germany and, after just a few years, feel strongly connected to their new country. In line with this finding, virtually all respondents see their medium- to long-term future in Germany and want to obtain German citizenship.

The issue of refugee migration and integration is the subject of heated debate; the political and public discourse is often sceptical, if not hostile. Refugees from Afghanistan have recently been the focus of a great deal of negative attention – often triggered by (sometimes dramatic) isolated incidents. The findings presented here, however, show that **Afghan immigrants for their part hold predominantly positive attitudes towards Germany. This should be seen as an opportunity by policymakers and civil society: They should support Afghan immigrants in overcoming practical challenges and through integration measures that promote social, civic and labour market participation.** Afghan diaspora organisations could lend their support by actively reaching out to new immigrants and by entering into dialogue with other civil society organisations and with German policymakers.