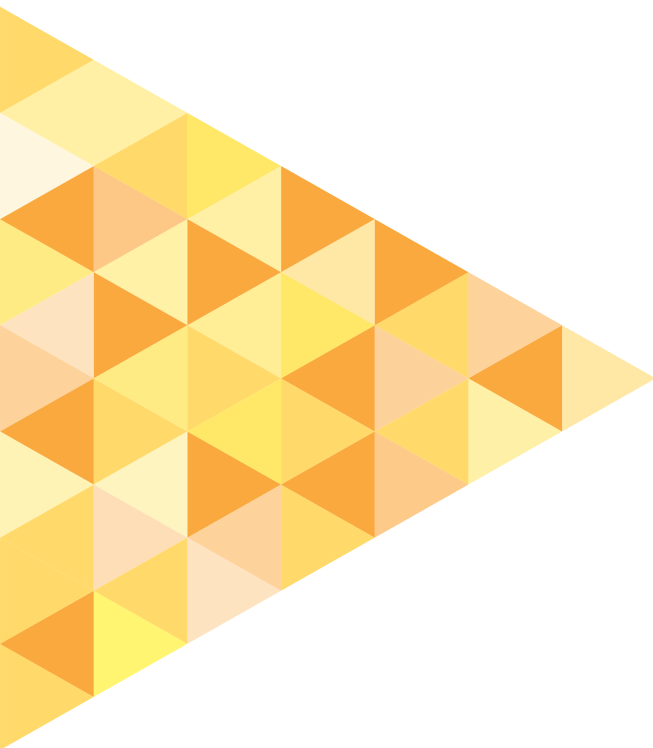
Hendrickje Catriona Windisch

Recognising refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills for use in Germany's labour market



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RECOGNISING REFUGEES' NON-FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY ACQUIRED VOCATIONAL SKILLS FOR USE IN GERMANY'S LABOUR MARKET

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Preface

The large-scale influx of refugees from the Middle East and northern Africa between 2015 and 2016 in western Europe posed important questions of accommodating and integrating the new arrivals. Education, training and access to the labour market of refugees have been at the forefront of the discussion. In this context, the question of how non-formal and informally acquired skills of refugees can be recognised is an important one. While this is not only the case for Germany, the topic of skills recognition is particularly pertinent in Europe's largest economy.

It was with interest and pleasure that I acted as an examiner for this doctoral thesis. This study is one of very few rigorous empirical investigations of mechanisms that make non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills visible. Framed by Bourdieu's theory of practice and based on an impressive amount of data, the study provides an insightful systematisation of existing recognition procedures in Europe and discusses them in the context of European Union policy on the matter. It highlights some of the particular problems of existing skills recognition approaches in Germany, including, for example, the Federal structure resulting in important differences between the sixteen Federal States of Germany.

The case studies of refugees attempting to establish themselves in Germany demonstrate their struggles with bureaucracy and a foreign education and skills system, and their various successes in navigating the system. The accounts show how refugees' foreign qualifications and skills acquired in their home countries are systematically undervalued by the German qualification and skills system. The complexity of arrangements for formal recognition of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills is identified as a barrier to integration. The study sheds light on various degrees of suitability of skills assessment and recognition procedures to capture what refugees typically bring with them when arriving in Germany.

The findings of the study are used to develop a conceptual framework for recognition processes in Germany. This framework is an important contribution because it can be used to analyse the numerous different recognition processes currently available, and more importantly, to take steps to improve them. Therefore, the findings of the study are important for both the political discussion on improved support for refugees to enter the German labour market and the practical ways in which recognition mechanisms can be made more accessible and easier to navigate.

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Abstract

The influx of asylum seekers into the European Union (EU) in 2015-2016 has turned the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) into an integration priority and challenge. In EU terminology this process is called 'validation'. Already in 2012, the Council of the EU had urged member states to create mechanisms for the validation of NFIL by no later than 2018. However, the issue has remained systematically addressed by few. Moreover, across all countries, disadvantaged groups such as refugees still benefit least from validation. Yet little is known about the reasons for this – a question to which this study aims to contribute understanding. Notably Germany has lagged behind many other countries on the issue. Germany was selected as the research site because compared to other European countries, it accepted the largest number of refugees in 2015-2016. Additionally, its highly regulated labour market and well-established dual apprenticeship system makes formal skills recognition particularly relevant for refugees who only possess non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS) as such recognition would enable these individuals to access skilled jobs that in Germany typically require formal vocational or professional qualifications.

In order to explore the impeding and facilitating factors in the recognition of refugees' NFIVOS for use in Germany's labour market, this study used unstructured informant interviews with refugees (N=7), semi-structured respondent interviews with people working on skills recognition and refugees at the operational and strategic levels (N=53), observations of advisory sessions for foreigners with NFIVOS or foreign credentials (N=14) and document analysis (N=49). In particular, this research focused on 14 case studies composed of seven refugees and seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Germany's federal state of Baden-Württemberg.

The data from this study were analysed using Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977b, 1986) with its concepts of field, capital and habitus. In so doing, it became clear that the biggest infrastructural barrier to the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS was Germany's lack of an arrangement that fulfilled this purpose in a refugee-friendly way. This could be seen as the result of Germany's selective inclusion of foreign institutionalised habitus but exclusion of foreign embodied habitus (except when the latter was supplemented by a German institutionalised habitus) in the skills recognition procedures which transform foreign habitus into German institutionalised cultural capital. Given this lack of a refugee-friendly procedure, the study makes inferences from its 14 case studies about what could fill this gap and finds that potential facilitating factors are an interplay of Germany's integration infrastructure and refugees' personal agency. As a consequence, it is argued that refugees' obstacles and facilitators in gaining formal skills recognition are the result of a mismatch and alignment, respectively, of refugees' habitus with the requirements of Germany's skills recognition field.

Acknowledgements

First it was a distant destination, now it has become the finish line. I would not have been able to complete this doctoral marathon without the support of numerous individuals and organisations along the route.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Ewart Keep and Dr Susan James Relly, for their time, feedback and encouragement. Thank you both for guiding this research from start to finish in your kind and reassuring way.

Many thanks also to my wider academic support network, including those who examined my Transfer of Status and Confirmation of Status submissions, Professor Jo-Anne Baird and Professor Hubert Ertl, Dr Nigel Fancourt and Dr James Robson. I am especially grateful to Professor Hubert Ertl and Dr Linda Morrice, who examined the final thesis. It was a privilege to discuss my research with you and to learn from your constructive comments.

I also wish to thank the institutions which provided me with funding, including the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC grant ES/J500112/1), the Pirie Reid Foundation, the Department of Education of the University of Oxford, and St Antony's College.

With my academic background in political sciences, I would not have found the research topic of this thesis without the inspiration from my policy analyst work at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. I would like to thank my former OECD colleagues, my line manager Viktoria Kis, and my project leaders Dr Simon Field and Dr Thomas Weko for having made my time at the OECD so inspirational.

This thesis would not have been possible without the participation of the seven refugees and the many experts working on skills recognition and refugees' labour market integration and their associated organisations. Many thanks to all of you for the time you gave to this research and for your willingness to share your experiences with me.

I am also deeply grateful for the support, patience and encouragement from my German and Scottish family and my wonderful friends along the way. Thank you in particular to my dearest parents Manuela and Martin and my beloved late grandmothers Nonna and Babusch for believing in me. An especially big thank you also to my twin sister Saskia and my school friend Hanna, who both completed their doctorates at the same as me and thus understood what a marathon it has been.

Finally, thank you from the bottom of my heart to John, who has been there for me during each and every step of this doctoral marathon. This has been our longest run so far and I am so lucky to be able to cross the finish line together with you!

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AiKomPass	*Anerkennung informell erworbener Kompetenzen* – Recognition of informally acquired competencies
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning (England)
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (England)
APLC	Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (England)
BA	*Bundesagentur für Arbeit* – Federal Employment Agency
Bafög	*Berufsausbildungsförderungsgesetz* – Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act
BAMF	*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* – Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
BIBB	*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* – Federal Institute for VET
BMAS	*Bundesministeriums für Arbeit und Soziales* – Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs
BMBF	*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* – Federal Ministry of Education and Research
BMI	*Bundesinnenministerium* – Federal Ministry of the Interior
BQFG	*Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz* – Vocational and Professional Qualifications Assessment Act
BpB	*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* – Federal Agency for Civic Education
BW	*Baden-Württemberg – German federal state of Baden-Württemberg*
CEDEFOP	Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DIHK	*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag* – Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce
DIW	*Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung* – German Institute for Economic Research
DQR	*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen* – German Qualification Framework
EU	European Union
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
F-BB	*Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung* – Research Institute for Work-based Learning
FBH	*Forschungsinstitut für Berufsbildung im Handwerk* – Institute for Research in Vocational Education and Training of the University of Cologne
HWK	*Handwerkskammer* – Chamber of Crafts and Trades
IAB	*Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung* – Research Institute of the Federal Employment Agency
IHK	*Industrie- und Handelskammer* – Chamber of Industry and Commerce
IHK FOSA	IHK Foreign Skills Approval Institute
IKUBIZ	*Interkulturelles Bildungszentrum Mannheim* – Intercultural Education Centre Mannheim
IQ	*Integration durch Qualifizierung* – Integration through Qualification
NFIL	Non-formal and informal learning

NFIVOS	Non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills
NIFA	*Netzwerk zur Integration von Flüchtlingen in Arbeit* – Network for the integration of refugees into work
NQF	National qualification framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PerF	*Perspektiven für Flüchtlinge* – Prospects for refugees
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment (United States)
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (Canada)
RNFIL	Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (OECD)
RVA	Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (UNESCO)
SOEP	*Sozio-ökonomisches Panel* – Socio-economic panel
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US	United States of America
ValiKom	*Abschlussbezogene Validierung non-formal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen* – outcome-oriented validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences
VET	*Berufsausbildung* – Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (EU)
WHKT	*Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag* – Umbrella organisation of West German Chambers of Crafts
ZAB	*Zentrale Stelle für die Bewertung ausländischer Qualifikationen* – Central Office for Foreign Education
ZDH	*Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks* – German Confederation of Skilled Crafts

1. Introduction

> *The integration of refugees into Germany's labour market and education and training system remains a simultaneous chance and challenge. In this respect, measures are important which help to assess and recognise refugees' skills. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is active in this area through the Federal Recognition Act for foreign vocational and professional qualifications and the ValiKom initiative which aims to establish a standardised skills recognition procedure for people with work experience but without formal credentials. (Johanna Wanka in BMBF, 2017a, translated by the author)*

In the epigraph, Johanna Wanka, Germany's Federal Minister of Education and Research between 2013 and 2018, sounds reassuring and as if everything was under control. However, at the time of the big wave of asylum seekers arriving in Europe in 2015 and 2016, European politicians and media were fretting about the so-called refugee crisis. I still vividly remember the images of crowded platforms at Munich's main train station in autumn 2015, with volunteers holding up posters welcoming the new arrivals and charities handing out food packages and water.

I would have liked to be there in Germany, my country of origin, to get involved in the migrant welcome initiatives that were quickly set up by volunteers to support the many new arrivals to recover from their exhausting journeys via the Balkans and to apply for asylum. However, being bound by my policy analyst work at the Directorate for Education and Skills at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, I could only follow the events unfolding in Germany from a distance.

It soon became clear that the sheer numbers of asylum seekers presented a challenge to often unprepared local communities. I read of overcrowded welcome centres, with people from various refugee source countries mixed together, of attacks against asylum seeker homes by racist Germans, of administrative backlogs at the regional aliens departments, of a shortage of teachers for German as a second language and of the big questions revolving around the integration of those granted refugee status.

The topic of refugees' integration within their European host society was much talked about by my OECD colleagues and me and reading about the difficulties of previous refugees in finding appropriate work compelled me to look further into the issue. It was by coincidence that, at the time of the migrant influx, I was working on a project for the OECD that investigated the ways in which skills acquired through work-based learning could be formally recognised. While my work focused on skills gained through on-the-job training as part of vocational education and training, I quickly realised the potential of formal skills recognition mechanisms to facilitate the labour market integration of refugees with non-formally and informally acquired job-relevant skills. With this in mind, I sat down and drafted my PhD project proposal. Of course, I had not been the first to think into that direction and luckily, found myself backed by other researchers and international organisations. And so, my PhD research got underway.

1.1. A European priority

The number of refugees worldwide has grown considerably in recent years, and many host countries are searching for measures to help them integrate into their host society (OECD,

2016c; UNHCR, 2018). Unlike migrants who leave their home country voluntarily, refugees have to flee ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted’ (UNHCR, 1951, p. 3). This means they have no time to prepare themselves for the move, neither linguistically nor professionally. In 2015, approximately 65 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced. Many of them sought asylum in member states of the European Union (EU), with the highest number of asylum seekers registered in Germany, the research site of this thesis (Eurostat, 2016b; UNHCR, 2016).

The famous statement, ‘We will manage it’ (*Wir schaffen das*),[1] by the German chancellor Angela Merkel led to the opening of Germany’s borders in late 2015, overriding the EU Dublin III Agreement that requires third-country nationals to apply for asylum from within the first EU country they entered (Council and the European Parliament, 2013; Die Bundesregierung, 2015). The resultant arrival of 890,000 asylum seekers in 2015 and a further 210,000 in 2016 represented the highest level of forced migration since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 (Babka von Gostomski et al., 2016; BMI, 2016, 2017; Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016b). Most came from Syria and nearly one million have been granted asylum (BAMF, 2016; BpB, 2018). They are likely to stay due to the persisting insecurity in their countries of origin (Aumüller, 2016; Gericke et al. 2018). As a result, Germany needs ways to ensure their successful socio-economic integration.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2017), asylum seekers have a pending application for asylum, whereas refugees have already been granted humanitarian protection. In this thesis, the term ‘refugee’ refers to all refugees under the Geneva Convention on Refugees,[2] beneficiaries of subsidiary

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[1] Angela Merkel first used this phrase at a press conference on 31 August 2015 after a visit to an asylum seekers’ reception centre. The full sentence she used was ‘We have managed so many things – we will manage it’ (‘*Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das*’) (Die Bundesregierung, 2015, translated by the author).

[2] A refugee, according to the 1952 UN Convention, ‘is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’ (UNHCR, 1951, p. 3).

protection[3] and persons under the principle of non-refoulement[4] (European Commission, 2019; Gil-Bazo, 2006; UNHCR, 1951, 2019). However, the application of the terminology is not clear-cut. In the German literature, terms such as 'asylum seekers and refugees' (*Asylsuchende und Flüchtlinge*), 'persons with a refugee background' (*Personen mit Fluchthintergrund*), 'persons in the context of forced migration' (*Personen im Kontext von Fluchtmigration*) and 'refugees' (*Geflüchtete*) are often used synonymously. Therefore, while this thesis focuses on refugees, quoted literature follows the wording used by the reviewed publications, which might also include statements about asylum seekers.

Importantly, in terms of the general process of integration, labour market integration has been identified as the starting point for refugees. Securing and maintaining formal employment has been found to help reduce welfare dependence and improve refugees' language skills and general well-being (e.g. Eisnecker et al., 2016; Thränhardt, 2015; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Unfortunately, evidence from across Europe has shown that refugees have struggled to enter their host country's labour market because they lacked time to prepare for their move appropriately (e.g. Fasani et al., 2018; Martín et al., 2016; OECD, 2016d). Specifically, research in Germany has documented skills waste and mismatch, and breaks in refugees' occupational biographies (e.g. Eisnecker et al., 2016; Hadeed, 2006; Hohmann, 2004). On average, it takes refugees between five and six years to reach the employment rates of persons who migrated voluntarily to join family and up to twenty years to catch up with those migrants who arrived for work or study (EMN, 2016; Eurostat, 2008; OECD, 2016c). Refugees' poor labour market integration stems from trauma and illness, insufficient local language skills, low educational attainment, and non-recognition of their foreign qualifications (Brücker et al., 2014; Euler & Severing, 2016; Johansson & Schiefer, 2016).

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[3] A beneficiary of subsidiary protection is a person who does not qualify as a refugee as defined by the 1952 Convention but who would face a real risk of suffering serious harm as defined in Art. 15 of Directive 2011/95/EU in their country of origin or of former habitual residence (European Parliament and Council, 2011).

[4] The principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm. It applies to all migrants at all times, irrespective of migration status (UNHCR, 2019).

Moreover, many refugees do not possess any evidence of their previous work experience that could be compared to job requirements in their host country because they acquired their vocational skills[5] in informal and non-formal ways (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016). They only possess non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills, abbreviated here as NFIVOS. This demographic constitutes the focus of this thesis.

1.2. A need for skills recognition arrangements suitable for refugee users

To date, little is known about the mechanisms through which refugees achieve labour market integration in Germany, partly because quantitative data often does not distinguish between refugees and other third-country nationals (Gericke et al., 2018; Johansson & Schiefer, 2016; Liversage, 2009). Policy documents by the OECD and the European Commission suggest that for recently arrived refugees to become integrated, they should be able to build on their existing skills and knowledge (e.g. European Commission, CEDEFOP, NCP ECVET/NL, & NLQF, 2016; Liebig & Degler, 2017; OECD, 2016c, 2016b, 2017a). In most European countries, mechanisms exist that grant formal recognition of foreign qualifications and, to a lesser extent, of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL). The latter is the main focus of this thesis because it is of greater relevance to the majority of the recent refugee arrivals (BA, 2018b; Babka von Gostomski et al., 2016; Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016). Such skills recognition mechanisms can facilitate either entry into the labour market, as is the focus here, or access to formal education and training (Claudia Ball, 2016). Non-formal learning is commonly defined as intentional learning outside a formal education setting, while informal learning is referred to as unintentional experiential learning (Annen, Dietzen, & Gutschow, 2012; CEDEFOP, 2014a; Gutschow, 2010).

However, evidence from European countries gathered by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) has revealed that most arrangements for the

[5] Skills are defined here as the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems (European Parliament and Council, 2008).

recognition, or in EU terminology validation, of NFIL are not targeted at migrants and refugees (CEDEFOP, 2017a). Only 10 of the 36 countries surveyed in the 2015 *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* have validation initiatives specifically for migrants in place, and very few have large numbers of migrants using the mainstream arrangements (CEDEFOP, 2017a). This stems from the fact that skills recognition mechanisms in Europe originated in a policy debate which had more concern for low-qualified EU workers than refugees. As such, European policymakers have only begun thinking of refugee users in the context of the migrant inflow of 2015 (CEDEFOP, 2016b).

Prior to this, skills recognition arrangements focused mainly on EU citizens. It was regarded as a 'panaceum for many of the problems facing contemporary Western societies' that would promote lifelong learning and better matching between skills and jobs (Diedrich, 2017, p. 730). According to the EU (CEDEFOP, 2019), '[c]itizens must be able to demonstrate what they have learned to use this learning in their career and for further education and training.' The 2012 *Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* by the Council of the EU urged EU member states to have mechanisms in place by no later than 2018 to enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their NFIL through validation and the award of full and partial qualifications (Council of the EU, 2012). Following this recommendation, in late 2013, Germany's new coalition government pledged to develop new skills recognition instruments because previous approaches had proven inadequate (Heinsberg, Müller, & Rehboldt, 2016).

However, recent updates of the aforementioned *European Inventory* have revealed uneven progress (CEDEFOP, 2017a; European Commission, CEDEFOP, & ICF International, 2014). Few European countries have systematically addressed the validation of NFIL (CEDEFOP, 2020). Germany has lagged behind many others on the issue. Reasons for this are complex but include its sector-specific approach leading to a lack of standardisation and limited public awareness of what is available (CEDEFOP, 2017b; Gaylor et al., 2015) (see for more details Section 2.4.2 of Chapter 2). Moreover, Europe's refugee influx in 2015-2016 has

made the issue of skills recognition even more pressing. Across all countries, disadvantaged groups such as refugees still benefit least from existing validation mechanisms (CEDEFOP, 2020). Therefore, for Germany and many other host countries, improving the accessibility and suitability of such mechanisms to refugees has become an integration challenge (OECD, 2017b).

1.3. Rationale for this thesis

Given that research to date has not focused on refugee users of skills recognition mechanisms, it remains unclear why refugees are benefitting less than other groups from these processes, a question to which this thesis aims to contribute understanding. For this purpose, refugees seeking skills recognition for employment purposes in Germany's federal state of Baden-Württemberg are used as examples of a disadvantaged user group in order to identify the factors that hinder and those that help them. Baden-Württemberg serves as the research site because it has a high number of recognised refugees and its thriving economy makes it comparatively more able to offer employment opportunities (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018b, 2018a; Statistisches Landesamt, 2017). Germany's labour market regulations and its dual apprenticeship system increase the relevance of skills recognition, as often only formal education and training diplomas provide access to well-paid jobs (Fasani et al., 2018; Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016; Wehrle et al., 2018). The German labour market consists largely of relatively high-skilled occupations that require formal qualifications to enter, which contrasts, for instance, with the British labour market which provides more opportunities for low-skilled workers and where qualification requirements are weaker and more fluid (Gericke et al., 2018).

Because many of Germany's recently arrived refugees only possess NFIVOS, they would benefit from mechanisms that turn their NFIVOS into formally recognised vocational qualifications. The idea behind obtaining a formal qualification through skills recognition is that,

> […] it makes it possible to relate all qualification-holders (and also, negatively, all unqualified individuals) to a single standard, thereby setting up a *single market* for all cultural capacities and guaranteeing the convertibility of cultural capital into money, at a determinate cost of labour and time. (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 187; italics in the original)

In other words, it would allow employers to assess potential refugee employees' vocational skills and experiences that they acquired abroad and would help refugees to meet the formal skills requirements for certain occupations (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016). While the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) quoted above analysed neither skills recognition nor refugees' labour market integration nor the German context, this thesis draws on his observations of 'the social mechanisms which produce and guarantee both the social value of qualifications and the positions' of qualification holders in order to conceptualise skills recognition processes in Baden-Württemberg (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 187).

Apart from the ValiKom project piloting an NFIL validation procedure and the possibility to sit a final apprenticeship exam as an external candidate under the long-established external exam, Germany does not offer a formal recognition procedure for NFIVOS. However, there are various diagnostic skills assessments that make NFIVOS visible without formally recognising them. Additionally, for those, including refugees, holding foreign credentials that relate to clearly defined occupations, there are procedures in place that grant formal recognition to these foreign vocational or professional qualifications.[6] University degrees corresponding to broader occupational profiles (e.g. social and natural scientists) are subject

[6] The two relevant laws that cover the formal recognition of foreign vocational and professional qualifications in this thesis are the Federal Recognition Act (*Anerkennungsgesetz des Bundes*) that entered into force in 2012 (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2011) and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act *(Landesanerkennungsgesetz Baden-Württemberg*, LAnGBW) in force since 2014 (Land Baden-Württemberg, 2013). While the former applies to qualifications that relate to occupations governed by federal law, the latter applies to qualifications for occupations governed by the federal state law of Baden-Württemberg (BMBF, 2019g). The Federal Recognition Act covers over 600 occupations governed by federal law, which include the 350 unregulated trades of Germany's dual VET system, 100 regulated master craftsperson occupations, and around 40 nationally regulated professions, such as medical doctor and nurse (*Pflegefachleute* including *Altenpfleger/in, Gesundheits- und Kinderkrankenpfleger/in* and *Gesundheits- und Krankenpfleger/in,* colloquially *Kranken-schwester/Krankenpfleger*) (Bibliomed, 2018; BMBF, 2019g; Braun, 2012). Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act covers about 260 professions and occupations not covered by the Federal Recognition Act. These include 160 unregulated occupations and some regulated professions such as teacher, nursing assistant (*Pflegehelfer/in*), early years teacher, social worker and engineer (BMBF, 2019g; IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2019).

to a different recognition procedure under the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) and are not the focus of this thesis (IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2017a).

This thesis analyses case studies of the ValiKom pilot project, the external exam, various diagnostic skills assessments in Baden-Württemberg and the formal recognition procedures for foreign vocational or professional qualifications in addition to case studies of refugees' experiences with them. It uses Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977b, 1986) with its concepts of field, capital and habitus, as this offers a useful lens to explore the interplay between refugees' individual characteristics and the German skills recognition context. The thesis then infers the factors that hinder and those that help refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS in Germany. By doing so, this research project contributes to the small but growing literature on refugees' integration into Germany's labour market. Additionally, it highlights common design challenges of skills recognition arrangements and identifies measures that could help overcome some of them in relation to refugees.

An overview of each chapter is provided below.

1.4. Overview of chapters

This section sets out the content of each of the following six chapters and how they are linked together.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature pertinent to the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS for employment purposes in Germany. It highlights the scarcity of qualitative studies on refugees' labour market integration and the near absence of research on skills recognition and refugees, beginning at the European level before zooming in on Germany. At the European level, it first analyses the many integration challenges that the refugee influx in 2015-2016 has raised for European host countries. By focusing on the need for refugees' labour market integration and the related difficulties, it then explains why formal skills recognition could help in this respect.

An examination of the characteristics of skills recognition arrangements, their use in Europe, and previous research on skills recognition provides first insights about their suitability for refugees. The second part of this chapter then turns to the situation of refugees and skills recognition arrangements in Germany and explains the particular relevance of skills recognition mechanisms for migrants there.

In summary, given the limited research on users of skills recognition arrangements, is unclear why refugees are benefitting less than other groups (e.g. low qualified Germans) from these processes, a question to which this thesis aims to contribute understanding through the methodology described in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter sets out the research questions of the thesis and describes the case-study based research design. The chapter first sets the scene with a description of the preliminary fieldwork in June 2017 which confirmed the suitability of Germany's federal state of Baden-Württemberg as the research site for the subsequent data collection between January and June 2018.

This led to the formulation of the following overarching research question: *What factors hinder and what factors facilitate the recognition of refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS) for use in Germany's labour market?*

To guide data collection and analysis the following two additional operational research questions were formulated: *1. How do refugees experience skills assessment and recognition processes? 2. How suitable are skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Baden-Württemberg for refugees?*

The chapter then sets out the study's exploratory conceptual framework and case study-based research design that were created to address these research questions. It moves on to detail the experience of the six-month field research which took place in the first half of 2018, including the methods used to collect and analyse data for the two sets of case studies. Finally, the chapter discusses how ethical issues were addressed before drawing attention to

the limitations of the study and the strategies that were used to increase the trustworthiness of the findings.

The following two findings chapter are based on this methodology and guided by the conceptual framework.

Chapter 4. Of Syrian tailors, Iraqi floor tilers, and Pakistani social workers

This chapter presents excerpts of the occupational life stories of seven refugees who were attempting to build a new career in Germany's federal state of Baden-Württemberg. Their introduction as the protagonists of this project's first set of case studies focuses on their respective skills acquisition in their countries of origin and their journey to Germany.

The second section of this chapter draws on Bourdieu's practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977b, 1984) conceptualising refugees' skills acquisition and their vocational skills as their attainment of habitus and the resultant occupational practices in a particular social field. Such a conceptualisation enables an explanation as to why refugees' habitus was valued as embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their contexts of origin but not necessarily in their new German environment, or field. Further, it shows why formal skills recognition could be helpful because, ideally, the process would turn refugees' habitus into German institutionalised cultural capital. This sets the scene for the chapter's central questions which are addressed in seven vignettes, namely whether these seven refugees drew on their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their attempt to enter the German labour market; and if so, whether this involved the transformation of their foreign cultural capital into German cultural capital. The analysis demonstrates the difficulties of the seven refugees in continuing their previous professional lives because, once in Germany, the value of their foreign cultural capital becomes disputed.

As the seven occupational life stories of this chapter are only a few examples of the many possible occupational pathways involving skills assessments and recognition

arrangements in Baden-Württemberg, the next chapter sheds light on a total of seven arrangements by discussing their suitability for refugee users more generally.

Chapter 5. Of skills assessment and recognition processes

This chapter explores the suitability of seven skills assessment and recognition processes for refugees in Baden-Württemberg with a view to inferring the barriers and facilitators of a refugee-friendly procedure that formally recognises NFIVOS. It first conceptualises the various skills assessment and recognition options as one of Bourdieu's social fields because of the latter's explanatory power regarding the associated practices and actors, and their interests and power dynamics. The chapter then embeds the seven occupational life stories of the previous chapter into Baden-Württemberg's wider skills recognition field, which includes the seven arrangements that serve as case studies here.

Through inference, based on refugees' experiences set out in the previous chapter, the chapter defines the suitability of arrangements for refugees as the extent to which they grant formal skills recognition, are easy to access, are accommodating towards limited German language skills and provide support throughout the process. Equipped with these indicators of suitability, the chapter then examines the arrangements in turn, drawing on interview and observation data and the scarce documentary data. While all four indicators matter, the chapter argues that the most important is whether the arrangement grants formal recognition to refugees' skills.

The chapter finds that none of them possesses all four required characteristics. It maintains that the more closely aligned arrangements are with the skills requirements of Germany's education and training system, the more selective they are in the skills they consider and the closer they come to formally recognising these skills. This is significant because the three arrangements (various skills assessments, PerF, MySkills) that possess the three other characteristics are also the procedures that grant the least formal recognition. In sum, the chapter finds the choice to be between more refugee-friendly NFIVOS assessments

that fail to provide formal recognition and those recognition arrangements that formally recognised skills recognition but that are less suitable as measured against the other three suitability indicators. These findings feed into the discussion of the study's overarching research question in the following chapter.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This chapter synthesises and discusses the implications of this study's findings for the overarching research question which centres on the obstacles and facilitating factors for refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS in Germany. It argues that these obstacles and facilitators are the result of a mismatch and alignment, respectively, of refugees' habitus with the requirements of Germany's skills recognition field. In order to explain this, the chapter presents this study's final conceptual framework that refines the basic assumptions of the exploratory framework set out in Chapter 3. It then moves on to describe the obstacles refugees encounter in the skills recognition field, as well as the facilitating factors.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

This chapter concludes with a reflection on the changing policy context in which the study is embedded, a summary of its key contributions, its limitations, and the implications of its findings for future research and policy. The chapter first acknowledges changes in the European and German policy contexts that have occurred since the early stages of this thesis. The fact that this study is embedded in a specific context and time might make some of this study's findings appear historical. Nevertheless, the research field explored in this thesis – mechanisms for the recognition of NFIVOS and foreign vocational or professional qualifications for use in the labour market and their suitability for refugees – remains pertinent regardless of the changing context because concrete policy solutions are still required.

In terms of contributions, to the author's knowledge, this study is the first to combine the topics of refugees' labour market integration and skills recognition in Germany. By doing

so it addresses both the research gaps on refugees' labour market integration and on skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Germany which existed when this research began in 2016. The chapter then details how the study's findings make contributions at four levels: namely at the conceptual with its framework and its elaboration of Souto-Otero and Villalba-Garcia's (2015) concept of 'selective inclusion'; at the individual level by giving the marginalised a voice; at the systematic level with its typology of skills recognition arrangements; and at the policy level through the study's identification of the obstacles and facilitators for refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS. Subsequently, while acknowledging the challenges and limitations of this research project the chapter also highlights the potential of the thesis to inform future research and possibly even policies.

The urgency of making mechanisms that grant formal recognition to NFIVOS more suitable for refugee users might have dissipated since the refugee influx in 2015-2016. However, the topic of skills recognition will not disappear but continue to occupy the governments and social scientists of Germany and many other countries in the future.

2. Literature review

Overview

This chapter reviews the literature pertinent to the formal recognition of refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS) for employment purposes in Germany. It highlights the scarcity of qualitative studies on refugees' labour market integration and the near absence of research on skills recognition and refugees. Section 2.1 first analyses the many integration challenges that the refugee influx in 2015-2016 has raised for European host countries, focusing in particular on the need for refugees' labour market integration and the related difficulties. Section 2.2 then explains why formal skills recognition could help in this respect. However, it also highlights refugees' marginal role in the development and current shape of such arrangements, and why this has likely affected the latter's suitability for refugee users. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 then zoom in on the German context, the research site of this thesis. The country received the largest number of asylum seekers in 2015-2016 of all EU countries and has taken steps to facilitate refugees' labour market integration. Moreover, Germany's regulated labour market makes formal skills recognition more important in comparison with other recipient countries.

2.1. The challenges of refugees' integration

As a consequence of record-high numbers of forcibly displaced people in 2015, totalling approximately 65 million worldwide, integrating different groups is a potent challenge facing many host countries. Although 85 percent of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries and only a small proportion are hosted by European states, the integration of refugees has become a key concern within European societies (Betts, Sterck, Geervliet, & MacPherson, 2017; Refugee Action, 2019; UNHCR, 2017). Indeed, mass migration and integration is seen as one of the greatest challenges facing twenty-first century Europe (Dines,

Montagna, & Vacchelli, 2018; Virgili, 2018). In 2015, Europe experienced an unprecedented influx of humanitarian migrants. Many arrived illegally by way of the Mediterranean Sea or other smuggling routes. Some 1.2 million, mostly from war-torn Syria but also from Iraq, Afghanistan and some African countries, applied for asylum in the EU (Eurostat, 2016b). This came to be widely referred to as 'the refugee crisis', partly because many countries were unprepared to handle the scale of the arrivals (Dines et al., 2018; Holzberg, Kolbe, & Zaborowski, 2018a; Virgili, 2018).

Given the often-grim conditions in asylum seekers' countries of origin, many have been granted refugee status by their European host country and are likely to stay for the long term (OECD, 2016c). In 2015, 52 percent of all asylum applications in European countries were successful, and according to Martín et al., (2016), a standard policy assumption was that at least half of all asylum seekers would remain in that country. The way Europe copes with the long-term integration of these refugees is likely to have a lasting impact on the socio-economic cohesion of host societies and the EU's liberal democratic values and principles (Virgili, 2018). In light of the scale of the new arrivals, anti-immigration discourses and previous experiences with refugees' integration, both host communities and refugees contend with considerable integration challenges (Betts et al., 2017; Bocskor, 2018; Dines, 2018; Holzberg et al., 2018a; OECD, 2016c).

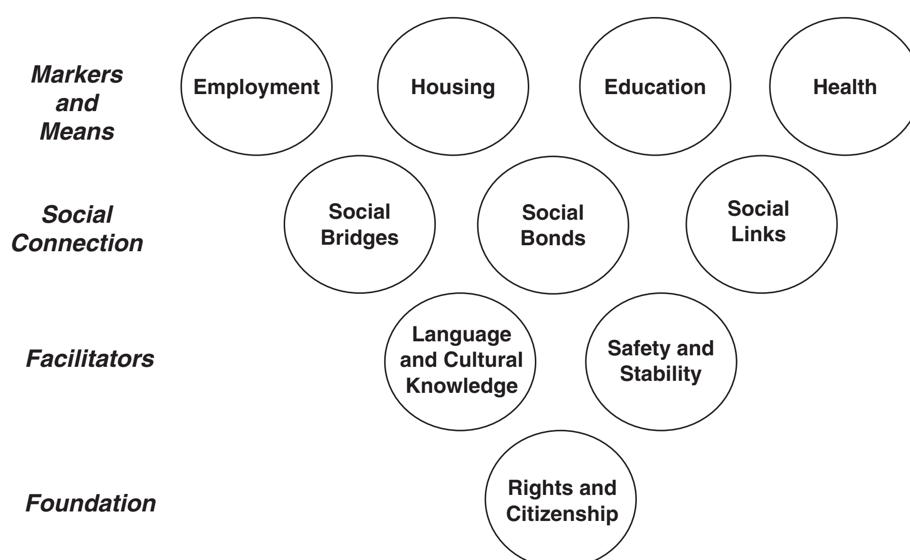
Given the focus of this thesis on refugees' skills recognition for employment purposes, after an outline of the various dimensions of refugees' integration challenge in Section 2.1.1, only the difficulties of refugees' labour market integration and the reasons are discussed in detail in Sections 2.1.2.1 and 2.1.2.2.

2.1.1. Dimensions of the integration challenge

The integration of refugees consists of various dimensions of complexity. For instance, in their framework of integration indicators commissioned by the UK Home Office in 2004 and outlined in Figure 1, Ager and Strang (2004a, p. 3) did not insert directional arrows because they

believed the relationships between the mapped dimensions remained too poorly understood. However, they and other researchers called for more research on the potential pathways and barriers to refugees' integration (Ager & Strang, 2010; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008). According to Ager and Strang (2004a, p. 5), individuals are integrated within their host society when they 'achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities.' Yet, this is a high bar to set and there are legal, socio-cultural and economic challenges to achieving this situation (Amaral, Woldetsadik, & Armenta, 2019; OECD, 2016c; Virgili, 2018).

Figure 1. Ager and Strang's framework of integration indicators (2004)



Source: Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2004). Indicators of Integration. Final report. *Home Office Development and Practice Report*. London: Home Office, p. 3.

Legal challenges lie at the 'foundation' of integration, shown at the bottom of Figure 1, and centre on questions of individuals' 'rights and citizenship' (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 3). For instance, whether persons with a refugee background are eligible to participate in integration measures depends on their residence status (OECD, 2016c). In basic terms, this can be either a temporary residence permit while their asylum application is being processed or a one- to three-year residence permit once humanitarian protection has been granted (ECRE, 2016). According to the 2016 summary of OECD countries' experiences with the integration of humanitarian migrants (OECD, 2016c), some countries allow people with pending asylum

applications, who are typically placed in reception centres, to use certain integration services. For example, asylum seekers in Denmark, Sweden and Norway can already attend basic language training. In late 2015, in response to the considerable migrant influx, Germany also opened its integration courses (600 hours of language training and 60 of civil education) to asylum seekers, but only to those deemed likely to be recognised as refugees. Once asylum seekers are granted humanitarian protection and they obtain all the rights as refugees, host countries typically become more proactive in promoting their integration. Responsibilities change, with local authorities often taking over; refugees are commonly allocated more stable accommodation and integration measures intensify or kick in. They range from a few hours of language tuition (often in countries with few refugees) to multi-year integration programmes, such as the three-year schemes in the Scandinavian countries. After such integration measures, refugees are typically channelled into mainstream instruments provided by the public employment service and the education and training system (OECD, 2016c). However, despite having obtained humanitarian protection, refugees' integration can still be jeopardised by the variation in the duration and type of that protection which can be either subsidiary protection or refugee status under the Geneva Convention on Refugees (see Footnotes 2-4 for definitions, pp. 12-13). For instance, subsidiary protection is only temporary because the host country reassesses the situation in the refugees' countries of origin after one year, which may result in their return (ECRE, 2016; Laubach, 2016; OECD, 2016c). Realising that this uncertainty reduces refugees' motivation to integrate under subsidiary protection and deters employers from hiring them, a number of European countries have reacted by making employment one of the grounds for extending protection or granting permanent right of residence (OECD, 2016c).

Socio-cultural challenges relate to the absence of what Ager and Strang (2004, p. 3) call 'facilitators' (including 'safety and stability' and 'language and cultural knowledge') and 'social connections' (for which Ager and Strang draw on Robert Putnam's (1993, 1995, 2000) interpretation of social capital which encompasses social bonds, social bridges and social links), as shown in Figure 1. Such challenges stem from traumas and social isolation as well

as fears and intolerance on both the refugees' and host societies' sides. Experiences of war and escape have left many refugees traumatised and in need of psychological support. Many feel isolated because of limited social connections to people from their host society (Putnam's social bridges), their country of origin (social bonds) and representatives of their host state (social links) (Putnam, 1993b, 1995, 2000). Some members of the host society feel threatened by the refugees' presence and cultural background which can result in behaviours ranging from landlords unwilling to rent to refugees, anti-immigration fearmongering to open acts of violence against refugees (Virgili, 2018). Populist parties have exploited the migrant influx, which coincided with an increase of terror threats and attacks across Europe, to conjure up false images, for instance of fortress Europe under attack from Muslim invaders, in order to gain support for their anti-immigration discourse (Bocskor, 2018; Malik, 2018; Tanner, 2016; Thorpe, 2018). This counter-integration behaviour has been mirrored by Islamists seeking to recruit refugees into their own radicalised groups with a view to destabilising European societies (Crone, Falkentoft, & Tammikko, 2017; Rabinovitch, 2015).

Socio-cultural and economic challenges are correlated and reinforce each other (Amaral et al., 2019). The less refugees are socially included in their host community, the less likely they are to acquire local 'language and cultural knowledge', make 'social connections' and find 'employment', shown as the left-most of Ager & Strang's (2004, p. 3) four 'markers and means' at the top Figure 1. According to recent research (Betts et al., 2017; Breaking-Barriers, 2019; Virgili, 2018), learning the local language and finding jobs that are related to their skills are among the most critical integration challenges that refugees face, with the latter further discussed below.

2.1.2. Challenges to refugees' labour market integration

Before describing refugees' labour market challenges in numerical terms, it is noteworthy that for refugees' wider societal integration, their labour market integration has been identified as the decisive starting point for the following reasons (Battisti, Felbermayr, & Poutvaara, 2015;

Bohn et al., 2016; Breaking-Barriers, 2019; Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; EMN, 2016; Fratzscher & Junker, 2015; Knuth, 2016; Liebig & Degler, 2017; Martín et al., 2016; OECD, 2016c; Thränhardt, 2015; Woellert et al., 2016; Worbs, Bund, & Böhm, 2016). For refugees, participation in working life brings structure into everyday life. It enables them to achieve financial independence and to make social contacts which are indispensable for their linguistic integration (Bevelander, 2016; Eisnecker et al., 2016; IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2017b; Martínet al., 2016; Sachverständigenrat, 2015; Thränhardt, 2015). For the host society, refugees' swift labour market integration fosters social stability and reduces the strain on the national welfare system (Döring & Hauck, 2017; Fratzscher & Junker, 2015; Martínet al., 2016). For public institutions, the cost of refugees in employment is much lower than the cost of unemployed or non-active refugees who typically receive social benefits (Martín et al., 2016). As a result, refugees' integration into their host country's labour market and the length of time that takes, are widely regarded as decisive for the long-term impact of their presence on their host society, which can range from burdensome to representing an opportunity (Ibid).

2.1.2.1. Refugees' labour market challenges in numbers

Despite the aforementioned advantages of refugees' swift labour market integration, previous experiences in European countries have shown that refugees have often struggled – although there is only limited detailed empirical research on this. The majority of academic studies have focused on the labour market integration of migrants in general and only a few have considered refugees as a separate group. One reason for this was the lack of information in labour market performance surveys on the visa categories under which immigrants were admitted to their host country. As a result, only certain editions of the Eurostat Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and some, mostly older, country studies distinguished between the labour market outcomes of refugees, other third-country migrants, and EU nationals. They allow the following picture to be painted of refugees' labour market challenges in numbers.

While unemployment rates for all third-country migrants (including family and economic migrants, students, and refugees from outside the EU) always tend to be higher than those of EU nationals, refugees are the most severely affected group (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2017; Eurostat, 2016; Fasani, Frattini, & Minale, 2018; IQ Netzwerk, 2017). This is despite the fact that most refugees benefit from unrestricted access to their host country's labour market (while European countries vary in the time when they grant asylum seekers the right to work) (OECD, 2016c). Research refers to refugees' comparably bigger difficulties in entering employment as the so-called refugee gap (Bakker et al., 2017). In 2015, the unemployment rate of 20-64-year-olds was 9 percent among EU nationals and 19 percent among third-country migrants (Eurostat, 2016a). As this Eurostat data did not single out refugees, instead a look at the ad-hoc module on the labour market situation of different migrant groups of the 2014 EU-LFS (EMN, 2016; OECD, 2016b) indicates that refugees have lower employment rates than all other migrants. On average, across the 12 European countries[7] for which reliable data was available, 55 percent of refugees aged 15-64 were employed compared to 58 percent of family migrants, 73 percent of labour migrants who had arrived without a job offer and 83 percent of labour migrants who were employer sponsored (Desiderio, 2016, pp. 5–6). Similarly, the 2008 edition of the EU-LSF revealed that refugees' labour market integration takes the longest. On average, it takes refugees six years to reach a 50 percent employment rate and converge with family migrants, and more than 15 years to reach a 70 percent employment rate and to begin to catch up with labour migrants and nationals of their host country (Desiderio, 2016; EMN, 2016; Eurostat, 2008; OECD, 2015).

However, it should be noted that these averages mask variations and exceptions between refugees and countries. The labour market outcomes of low-qualified, older and/ or traumatised refugees often lag behind other migrants for much longer (OECD, 2016c). At the same time, evidence from Norway suggested that refugees needed less time when the labour

[7] Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

market conditions were good and employment supportive measures were in place (OECD, 2012).

Still, once in employment, refugees tend to be over-represented in sectors with a large share of unskilled and low-paid jobs, such as agriculture, cleaning services, construction, hotels and restaurants, and the retail trade. They are also more likely to be over-qualified for their jobs than all other third-country migrants (Desiderio, 2016). Country-specific studies confirm these findings. The National Institute of Continuing Education found that refugees in the UK were 'up to six times more likely to be unemployed than non-refugees. That's a huge waste of untapped potential' (NIACE, 2009, p. 8). An analysis of French data that distinguished between four groups of immigrants based on their visa categories (Akgüç, 2013) found that refugees and family migrants were less likely to be in employment and earned significantly less than economic migrants, but that their labour market outcomes converged over a longer period of time. Country studies of Denmark (Damm, 2012), Germany (Constant & Zimmermann, 2005), Norway (Joyce, 2018) and Sweden (Bevelander, 2011) have produced similar evidence.

2.1.2.2. Reasons for refugees' difficult labour market integration

While, as mentioned above, the research on refugees' labour market integration is still limited, some explanations for refugees' difficulties are emerging and point to the relevance of skills recognition (Martín et al., 2016). Refugees' poorer labour market performance, compared with other migrants and host country nationals, can be only partly attributed to lower education attainment (Desiderio, 2016; Joyce, 2018; OECD, 2015). In Sweden, for instance, differences in education type and level explained only a very small part of the employment gap between nationals and refugees (Martín et al., 2016b, pp. 126-135). Other challenging factors seem to be at play and are discussed below. Although many are the same for other migrants who arrive without a job offer, refugees struggle more to overcome them (and asylum seekers even more

so)[8] because of their particular circumstances (Desiderio, 2016; EMN, 2016; OECD, 2016c; RISE, 2013; Virgili, 2018).

Compared with other migrants, those fleeing war or political instability are less able to choose their final destination and plan and prepare for their move, neither in terms of family and social networks nor learning the relevant language or contacting local employers before arrival (Desiderio, 2016; RISE, 2013). Traumatic experiences in their home country and during their precarious escape can lead to psychological distress and health problems (Obschonka, Hahn, & Bajwa, 2018; Young & Chan, 2015). The careers of many refugees are interrupted by often-long journeys to their final destination and the waiting time until they obtain the right to work in their host country (Akkaymak, 2016). With every year of temporary status, their prospects of finding meaningful employment decrease (Codell et al., 2011). This uncertainty coupled with the lack of a meaningful occupation during the waiting time can lead to boredom, frustration and a loss of self-esteem (Desiderio, 2016).

Once refugees are entitled to employment, their social housing tends to be in areas with sub-optimum job opportunities (Ibid). Compared with nationals, refugees lack fluency in the local language, local education and work experiences, understanding of the local recruitment and employment culture and access to networks which would increase their job prospects. Moreover, they can become victims of stereotyping and racism more easily (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; RISE, 2013).

In addition, and most crucially for this thesis, circumstances in refugees' home countries and new host countries complicate the recognition of their skills and qualifications. Before fleeing, they may not have completed their education and training programme (Worbs et al., 2016). They may have been unable to pack proof of their qualification and work experience. Or they may have lost the relevant papers during transit. Or their educational

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[8] Asylum seekers struggle the most because of legal restrictions on labour market access during their first months in the host country, ineligibility for labour market integration services while their asylum application is pending, and dependency on authorities' housing choices which do not always consider access to job opportunities and social networks (Brenzel & Kosyakova, 2019; Desiderio, 2016).

institutions and employers may no longer be in the position to provide references (Berger, Tusarinow, & Wünsche, 2016). Even if they have all of their educational diplomas, their host country may not recognise them and they may end up either unemployed or stuck in low-skilled occupations, a phenomenon variously called brain-waste or brain abuse (Bauder, 2003; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Liversage, 2009). Moreover, many may have acquired their vocational skills in informal and non-formal ways and have no formal proof of their job-relevant competences (Eisnecker et al., 2016; Worbs et al., 2016). The related challenges they face in their host country are discussed in Section 2.2.2 below.

The difficult labour market integration of previous refugees combined with the considerable migrant influx in 2015-2016 has increased the willingness of European recipient countries to review their integration policies and identify faster tracks to employment, among them skills recognition, to which the next section turns (Joyce, 2018).

2.2. Skills recognition to facilitate refugees' labour market integration

Policy documents suggest that the assessment and recognition of refugees' skills and qualifications facilitate their labour market integration. For example, according to the European Commission (European Commission et al., 2016), for recently arrived refugees to become integrated, they need to be able to build on their existing skills and knowledge. Similarly, the OECD work on refugees' integration proposed the need to assess and recognise their skills and foreign qualifications to make better use of their human capital in the host country (Liebig & Degler, 2017; OECD, 2016c, 2016b, 2017a). However, as with the evidence on refugees' labour market integration, most research on the recognition of skills and qualifications does not distinguish between users with a refugee background and other migrant groups (see e.g. Branka, 2016b; OECD, 2010; Schuster, Desiderio, & Urso, 2013; Werquin, 2014). So far, no research project has examined the suitability of Germany's skills recognition arrangements for refugee users.

The next sections examine the characteristics of skills recognition arrangements (Section 2.2.1) and their use in Europe to provide initial insights about the suitability of these arrangements for refugees (Section 2.2.2), before focussing on Germany in the second part of this chapter (Sections 2.3-2.4).

2.2.1. Skills recognition explained

Skills recognition is sometimes also called validation or accreditation, and its diverse terminology will be discussed in Section 2.2.1.1 below. Broadly speaking, it is a process which enables individuals to capitalise on their skills and knowledge regardless of whether these were gained in formal, non-formal or informal ways, in their own country or abroad (CEDEFOP, 2014b). Skills recognition can both facilitate access to formal education and training, and to labour market integration, with the latter the focus here (Claudia Ball, 2016; Dehnbostel, 2011; Euler & Severing, 2016). Depending on the purpose and linkage to formal education (which will be explained in Section 2.2.1.2 below) skills recognition processes can yield one of the following four benefits to candidates (Kis & Windisch, 2018):

1) identification of skills for personal development;
2) access to formal education or training and sometimes reduced programme duration through course exemptions;
3) obtaining a full or partial vocational/professional qualification or title (e.g. ‘engineer’ in Germany (BMBF, 2020b)) equivalent to that issued by the formal education and training system in order to either directly enter the labour market or to attain the full qualification through further training;
4) or obtaining a skills certificate that differs from formal education and training qualifications but that is widely recognised in the labour market.

This thesis focuses on the third and fourth benefits, that is to say on skills recognition arrangements available to refugees to help them integrate into Germany’s labour market. Such

arrangements make the vocational skills and experiences that refugees acquired abroad more visible and comprehensible to employers in their host country (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016).

2.2.1.1. The diverse terminology of skills recognition

In order to make sense of skills recognition, it is worth noting that the terminology varies widely across countries and international institutions (Singh, 2015; Werquin, 2010). For the German term *Anerkennung* (English: recognition), OECD publications use recognition, whilst the EU prefers validation and UNESCO uses the catch-all term of RVA which stands for Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (Gutschow, 2010; Singh, 2015; Werquin, 2010). In Anglophone countries, RVA is referred to as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) in England, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in the United States (US) and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in Canada (Singh, 2015).

The terminology depends on whether the skills were acquired in formal education and training settings or in non-formal and informal ways (Annen et al., 2012; Erpenbeck, von Rosenstiehl, Grote, & Sauter, 2017; Kaufhold, 2006; Schneeberger, Schlögl, & Neubauer, 2009). In England, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is called Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), while the recognition of prior formal learning is called Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) (Singh, 2015). For this thesis, it is relevant that the latter also includes the recognition of foreign qualifications. Germans use the term recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications (*Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen*) for vocational and professional skills that were formally acquired abroad (BIBB and IQ Netzwerk, 2018; CEDEFOP, 2016c; Gutschow, 2010).

The previously widely used term ‘prior learning’ has now been replaced by non-formal and informal learning (NFIL), according to findings by the OBSERVAL project that created a database of validation of NFIL in European countries (Weber Guisan et al., 2013).[9] As a result,

[9] See the following website: http://www.observal-net.eu.

recent German literature speaks of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (*Anerkennung von nonformalem und informellem Lernen*) mirroring the OECD term of Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (RNFIL), while the EU refers to Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) (CEDEFOP, 2015, 2016c, 2020; OECD, 2010).

Against this backdrop, the terminology used in this thesis is *the formal recognition of informally and non-formally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS)*. The focus of the thesis is on the *vocational* or occupational[10] skills held by refugees but not reflected in a formal qualification. In relation to this, a look at the relationship between skills and formal education and training qualifications is helpful. Refugees may be skilled, that is they can perform a specific occupation, while lacking formal qualifications certifying these vocational skills.

The term *qualification* is understood here as the formal outcome of an assessment. It is obtained as a certificate, diploma or title upon the decision of a competent assessment body that the individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards or possesses the skills required for a specific job (CEDEFOP, 2014b). The qualification level, or educational attainment, is often taken as a proxy of people's skills level, as it is assumed that skills increase the more years are spent in education and training (OECD, 2013).[11]

Yet, qualifications constitute just one possible proxy or marker of individuals' skills. This, in particular, is the case regarding job-relevant skills which can be gained through NFIL. Many refugees come from countries with limited formal vocational education and training (VET) and consequently, they may not hold any formal vocational qualifications (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016). Of course, this does not mean that there are no bricklayers, carpenters or hairdressers in their home countries but that they acquired their vocational skills in informal and non-formal ways in the family business, through casual work or work experience (Euler & Severing, 2016; Neske, 2017; Rump & Eilers, 2017). For refugees to be able to build on their NFIVOS for

[10] Both terms are henceforth used interchangeably.
[11] Yet, sometimes the actual skills level differs from what educational attainment suggests. For example, according to the survey of adult skills (PIAAC Survey) by the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), while many adults with low educational attainment also score poorly in literacy and numeracy, some attain proficiency levels that could be expected of people with higher educational attainment (OECD, 2013).

employment purposes, they need to be made visible and understandable to potential employers in their host country (European Commission et al., 2016).

Formal skills recognition is understood as a procedure that involves information and guidance, identification and documentation of relevant vocational experience, skills assessment with reference to common skills standards, and the subsequent validation and certification by a competent body that is widely recognised (Branka, 2016b; CEDEFOP, 2014a; Werquin, 2014). This last point matters because without wider social recognition the formal skills recognition certificate would not have any value in the labour market (Werquin, 2010). Whether a procedure leads to formal skills recognition and whether the skills certificate is likely to gain social and economic recognition depends on its purpose and linkage to the formal education and training system, as discussed below.

2.2.1.2. Purposes and linkage to formal education and training

The literature commonly classifies skills recognition arrangements according to their purpose and linkage to the formal education and training system, which this thesis will draw on in order to put forward a typology of skills recognition arrangements in Section 5.2 and Table 23 (p. 221) (Annen & Schreiber, 2011; Dehnbostel, 2011; Gutschow, 2010; Schneeberger et al., 2009; Straka, 2005). In terms of purpose, recognition arrangements are often divided into diagnostic and summative types (Annen et al., 2012; Bowman, 2003; CEDEFOP, 2015; Gutschow, 2010; Schuster et al., 2013; Singh, 2015). The diagnostic or formative type, here referred to simply as skills assessment, aims at personal development and tends to capture the candidates' skills in an inclusive way through informal skills assessments, such as conversations and portfolios, which do not lead to a formal skills recognition certificate (Gutschow, 2010; Singh, 2015).

The summative type, here referred to as skills recognition, is often only selectively inclusive in its skills recognition. It assesses the equivalency of candidates' skills against the requirements of the formal education and training system. Only candidates' skills that match the skills requirement are included and formally recognised; those that do not match are

excluded and remain unrecognised (see Section 2.2.2.3 for more on selective inclusion). The assessment of skills may include documentary evidence (e.g. proof of work experience) and direct assessment (e.g. written, oral or practical tests, or workplace observations). The resulting skills certificates may be identical or different to formal qualifications (CEDEFOP, 2014b; European Commission et al., 2014; Gaylor et al., 2015). Summative skills recognition procedures typically cover all or some of the following phases (CEDEFOP, 2014a; Dehnbostel, 2011; Werquin, 2010):

1. information and guidance,
2. identification of vocational experience,
3. documentation,
4. skills assessment,
5. and validation and certification of the assessment results.

Regarding the linkage to the formal education and training system, research papers often distinguish between divergent and convergent types (Andersson, Fejes, & Ahn, 2004; Harris, 1999; OECD, 2010; Singh, 2015; Werquin, 2010). In the latter, the skills assessment, requirements and certificate converge with the existing education and training system. In the divergent model, the skills recognition procedure and certificate are independent of that formal system (Gutschow, 2010; Singh, 2015).

After these definitions and classifications, that are essential for the subsequent development of a skills recognition typology, skills recognition in Europe is discussed below in order to highlight refugees' marginal role in the development and current shape of such arrangements.

2.2.2. Skills recognition in Europe and refugees

Refugees as potential users of skills recognition arrangements have only gained the attention of European policymakers since the migrant inflow in 2015-2016. This section illustrates that many arrangements originated prior to this, in a European policy debate which was more

concerned about the plight of lowly qualified EU workers than refugees (Section 2.2.2.1). Consequently, until the migrant influx in 2015-2016, few European countries had taken the needs of users with a migrant background in the design of arrangements into account and even more recently, many still do not have many refugees using validation mechanisms (Section 2.2.2.2). Moreover, the literature on skills recognition, though not exclusively focused on refugees and Europe, suggests that most mechanisms seem to disadvantage foreigners (e.g. Andersson & Guo, 2009; Diedrich & Styhre, 2013) (further discussed in Section 2.2.2.3).

2.2.2.1. Europe's development of skills recognition

Skills recognition, or in EU terminology validation, has come to be seen as a promoter of lifelong learning and better matching between skills and jobs. However, its integration potential for third-country migrants has not played any major role in its development in Europe, as is argued below. In 2000, *the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* by the European Commission emphasised the need to 'significantly improve the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly non-formal and informal learning' (European Commission, 2000, p. 4). The 2004 *Common European Principles on Identifying and Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning* provided European countries with the first guidance for the development of validation mechanisms that would be comparable across borders (Council of the EU, 2004). Moreover, in 2004, the first edition of the *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (here referred to as *European Inventory*) was published to share insights into current country practices. It has since been updated six times (2005, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016 and 2018). In 2020, the *European Inventory* covers 36 countries[12] of which most have taken part in the EU 2020 Cooperation Process, the EU's ten-year jobs and growth strategy until 2020 (CEDEFOP, 2020).

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[12] The 2018 Inventory included the following country reports: 28 for the EU (including separate reports for French- and Flemish-speaking Belgium); four for the countries in the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland); three for the UK (England and Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland); and also reports for Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Turkey.

Also in 2004, in the context of the *Education and Training Strategy 2010*, the EU introduced learning outcomes as an underpinning principle for European cooperation and reform in national education and training systems. This shift away from learning inputs to a focus on outcomes has proved crucial in seeking to attribute value to all learning, irrespective of how it has been acquired. The subsequent adoption of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2008 triggered the introduction of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) based on learning outcomes, which could help clarify the role of skills recognition measures in national qualification systems (CEDEFOP, 2016a). In NQFs, countries can promote NFIL as an acceptable route to obtaining formal qualifications and better labour market outcomes (Andersson, Fejes, & Sandberg, 2013; CEDEFOP, 2017c). The German NQF (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen*, DQR) was launched in 2013 and discussions on how to reference the outcomes of NFIL to the DQR are still ongoing, as a possible procedure and criteria for referencing are being tested in a pilot project (Ball, 2019).

In 2009, the *European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning* were released, with the stated politico-economic rationales of comparability and transparency across sectors and countries, increased mobility and competitiveness and lifelong learning (CEDEFOP, 2009, 2015; Dehnbostel, 2011). The 2009 and 2015 editions of the guidelines set out the four phases of validation, from identifying relevant experiences, documenting and assessing those, to the delivery of a partial or full qualification. Additionally, they summarised insights into validation practices at European, national and sectoral levels and highlighted the critical choices to be made by stakeholders at different stages of the process (CEDEFOP, 2009, 2015).

In 2012, this trajectory resulted in the *Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* by the Council of the EU (Council of the EU, 2012) which urged member states to have mechanisms in place by 2018 to enable individuals to have their NFIL validated and obtain a full or partial qualification. The EU, for the first time, set a time horizon in this field of action and established a clear correlation between the availability of recognition procedures and an increase in the employability and learning motivation of unqualified workers and socially

disadvantaged persons (Gaylor et al., 2015). Both of these aspects are discussed in the next section that explores the current implementation of validation mechanisms in Europe.

2.2.2.2. Uneven implementation across countries, sectors and user groups

The aforementioned deadline by the 2012 EU Council recommendation aimed to stimulate EU countries into taking corrective actions. However, according to the three latest updates of the *European Inventory on Validation of NFIL (European Inventory)* dating from 2014, 2016 and 2018*,* member states have only gradually placed skills recognition higher on their policy agenda and implementation has been uneven across countries, sectors and most notably user groups, including migrants and refugees (CEDEFOP, 2017; CEDEFOP, European Commission, & ICF, 2019; European Commission, CEDEFOP, & ICF International, 2014).

According to the 2016 *European Inventory* (CEDEFOP, 2017), some countries were striving for comprehensive national validation arrangements, while others preferred sector-specific approaches. However, it remains unclear which type of approach encourages broader participation. Eight countries,[13] including Finland, France and Spain, have already set up national arrangements encompassing all sectors and thirteen countries,[14] including Austria, the Netherlands and Portugal, are in the process of developing such arrangements. Germany belongs to the fourteen countries[15] which have only sector-specific approaches. It also falls into the group which lack national coordination of their validation arrangements. This contrasts with countries such as France, where the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Vocational Training coordinates the national validation framework, and with countries with combined national and regional coordination mechanisms, such as Spain and Switzerland, both with regional governance structures, and Denmark and Norway, both decentralised countries with

[13] Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, Romania and Spain.
[14] Austria, Flemish Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey.
[15] French Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, UK-England, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Scotland and UK-Wales.

autonomous training providers. The 2016 *European Inventory* observed that many validation strategies were only in their early implementation stages and more needed to be done regarding resourcing and staffing (CEDEFOP, 2017). Meanwhile, according to the 2018 updated *European Inventory* (CEDEFOP et al., 2019), in all 36 countries, validation arrangements are now available in at least one broad area (either in education and training or the labour market or the third sector) and that the main challenges for the future would be to build on existing good practices and to improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Like in 2014 and 2016, in 2018, the formal education and training system has remained the main developer of validation schemes, while validation initiatives in the labour market are increasing but still less common. Validation in education and training is mostly used to gain either credits towards qualifications or access to education programmes or exemptions from parts of courses and less so to obtain a partial or full qualification. In the labour market contexts of many European countries, validation can now lead to a formal qualification (CEDEFOP et al., 2019). Compared to other education subsectors, those institutions and providers closest to the labour market, including initial and continuing vocational education and training, have provided validation more often and have been prioritised for public funding (CEDEFOP, 2017). As such, it is not surprising that the two most commonly reported rationales for funding prioritisation relate to the labour market, namely ‘reducing unemployment’ and ‘improving the match between people’s skills and jobs’ (CEDEFOP, 2017, p. 37).

According to the 2018 *European Inventory* (CEDEFOP et al., 2019), despite improved data collection and monitoring procedures of the use of validation, data on specific aspects of validation, such as participation, type of outcome, user characteristics, success rate and length of procedure, remains limited. Overall, the upward trend in user numbers observed in 2016 seems to have continued into 2018. The available data suggests that most users are adult learners and that now more jobseekers and individuals at risk of unemployment than employed persons use validation. The use of validation is conditioned by countries’ social priorities and regulations. For instance, the French validation system is mainly used by already highly qualified individuals, while over recent years, Portugal has geared its arrangements towards

low-qualified citizens (Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015).

The 2018 *European Inventory* echoes the previous findings regarding the use of validation by low-qualified and low-skilled persons. Although some of these people are using validation, more efforts are still required in reaching disadvantaged groups such as migrants and refugees. While the offer of validation arrangements or project-based initiatives for migrants/refugees has increased in the surveyed countries since 2016, the 2018 data suggests that migrants and refugees are still not making much use of validation opportunities. In 2018, nearly half of all 39 surveyed European countries provided validation arrangements or project-based initiatives for migrants/refugees, up from just over a third of all countries in 2016 (CEDEFOP, 2017; CEDEFOP et al., 2019). This has probably to do with the asylum seeker influx in 2015-2016. In Sweden, for example, where enhancing the assessment and recognition of immigrants' formal, non-formal and informal learning has long been a priority area, funding has been boosted in reaction to a sharp increase in asylum seekers. Projects have focused on developing better validation tools for the public employment service to make skills acquired in other countries more visible and transparent to Swedish employers and to fast track skilled immigrants into professions with strong labour market demand (e.g. early years teachers, doctors, nurses and pharmacists) (Sandberg, 2017). However, by 2018, only in four countries (Finland, Italy, Turkey and the Netherland) migrants and refugees have become dominant validation users. One reason for this might be that many validation offers only target highly qualified/skilled newcomers and not the low qualified/skilled, unemployed or underemployed migrants/refugees. For instance, in Finland and the Netherlands systematic skills recognition happens largely in the higher education sector.

Not only have few European countries developed validation procedures with migrants and specifically refugees in mind, but, additionally, the next section shows that most mechanisms seem to disadvantage foreigners.

2.2.2.3. Selective inclusion

Most academic studies on skills recognition have not specifically focused on refugees and are not limited to NFIL but include various groups of migrants and the recognition of foreign qualifications. However, they have identified characteristics that are likely to affect refugee users in similarly negative ways. Skills recognition processes that lead to formal skills certification are summative and tend to be only selectively inclusive (see Section 2.2.1.2). The ways in which refugees learned and applied vocational skills in their home country might reduce the value of their skills in the eyes of the host country leading to their skills being devalued and even decredentialised.

Many European validation practices are selectively inclusive at two levels: First by only including certain user groups, and second by only focusing on certain skills. According to Souto-Otero and Villalba-Garcia (2015, p. 594), this 'selective inclusion' is based on a polarisation in validation. At the user level, validation arrangements divide migrants into two classes:

> while those defined as high-skilled find it easier to get their competences recognised by employers and governments, those outside that category see themselves encumbered with difficulties and pushed towards the bottom. This leads to a polarisation in the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences between the "high-skilled" and the "non-high skilled". (Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015, p. 600)

This analysis seemed to imply that most European validation arrangements included the highly skilled, while they excluded the low skilled or devalue their skills.

While this may be true in many cases, other evidence has suggested that even highly skilled migrants experience the exclusion of some of their skills through selective skills recognition. This selective inclusion at the skills level has been variously called decredentialisation, devaluation, deskilling and a Procustean approach to the recognition of prior learning. The latter term was coined by Harris (1999, p. 127) who observed the selective recognition of 'those aspects of an individual's prior learning which "fit"/match prescribed outcomes or standards'. Procustes, a ruler in Greek mythology, made everyone try to fit into his bed: if too short, he would stretch them, if too long, he would chop off their feet. Analyses

of immigrant professionals' difficulties in gaining recognition of their foreign credentials and experience in Canada and Sweden found that skills recognition divided between 'accepted and non-accepted professionals' and 'acceptable and non-acceptable knowledge and competence' in order to 'fabricate the desirable immigrant' (Andersson & Guo, 2009, pp. 429–430; Diedrich & Styhre, 2013). This suggests that host countries might be rigid when comparing refugees' NFIVOS or their foreign vocational or professional qualifications with the skills requirements of the local reference occupation for recognition purposes.

Decredentialisation and devaluation stem from a deficit model of difference, under which the skills, particularly of those from less developed countries, often the source countries of refugees, are considered inferior or even invalid. Decredentialisation happens when migrants are not able to practice in their professions and have to acquire additional occupational training in the host society (Lerner & Menahem, 2003). In her study of equivalency assessments of foreign vocational or professional qualifications in Germany, Sommer (2015, p. 365) observed that qualifications obtained in the periphery, i.e. awarded by poor countries, tended to be considered of less value than the German reference qualifications, 'not equivalent' and/or 'not assessable', while those from EU countries and the richer nations were trusted and recognised. Holders of assumingly inferior foreign qualifications were often advised to attend bridging measures or to pass assessments in order to reach or prove equivalency with the skills requirements of the German reference occupation. Similarly, Sprung (2013) described the skills devaluation of highly skilled immigrants in Austria at jobcentres and adult education institutions: they were sent to vocational training that, while related to their original skillset, was geared towards jobs at lower skills and wage levels. She found that skills that were difficult to map onto the host country's skills requirements were often lumped under an unspecified category called 'other' and thereby became invalid. Diedrich (2017, p. 735) also noted 'an excess of non-usable skills' in RPL practices, which he called 'overflows'. Migrants' idiosyncratic skills that were embedded in the 'there and then' were ignored, while a lack of skills and knowledge in the 'here and now' was brought to the fore (Diedrich, 2017, p. 734).

Andersson and Guo (2009, p. 428) contended that 'when the validation discourse is something candidates have to learn rather than something that acknowledges what they already know, the result can be control and exclusion.' Sommer (2015, p. 367) called this the 'symbolic dominance' of the rich nations which positioned themselves as the know-it-alls regarding the value of foreign qualifications. She hereby drew on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and his theory of symbolic violence by the state. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is one of four generic forms of capital which conveys power and social standing to its holders, with the other three being economic capital (e.g. money and property), social capital (e.g. acquaintances and networks) and symbolic capital (e.g. legitimacy, authority and prestige). In his view, cultural capital can exist in three different states: objectified cultural capital (e.g. books); embodied cultural capital (e.g. skills and knowledge), which is of particular relevance to this thesis; and institutionalised cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications, which is also relevant here (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence is key to his sociology of power which describes forms of domination that are silently accepted by those being dominated as they take them for granted. Bourdieu's prime example of symbolic violence by the state is the tacitly accepted idea that only the national education system can award qualifications:

> Official nomination, in other words the act by which one grants someone a title, a socially recognized qualification, is one of the most typical demonstrations of that monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence which belongs to the state or to its representatives. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 135)

In the same vein, the fact that migrants' host countries have the power to determine the value of migrants' skills and foreign qualifications and that migrants accept this state of affairs (most likely because they lack economic or social forms of capital) can be seen as a further display of symbolic violence.

These examples of decredentialisation and devaluation point to the situatedness of learning, knowledge and skills recognition arrangements, which may raise particular challenges for refugees because of differences in the working environments of their home and host countries (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Michelson, 1996). According to Michelson (1996, p.

194), learning happens, and knowledge is produced in specific social contexts. Similarly, Bourdieu's habitus, which describes the dispositions that generate one's perceptions, appreciations and behaviours and that act as a bridge between subjective agency and objective social position, is initially formed in the family (Bourdieu, 1977b). However, it is formal education that has the most important influence because it is there that habitus assumes an institutionalised form that reflects a person's various positions in different social spheres, or fields (e.g. field of politics, field of employment) (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 71). As a result, skills recognition might work according to culture-specific, 'oppressive taxonomies of knowledge and the power relationships they enact' (Michelson, 1996, p. 194) leading to the devaluation of candidates' skills that were acquired in a different socio-cultural context. Other researchers have used a situated learning and knowledge perspective to examine the validation of prior learning of immigrants in Canada, Italy, South Africa and Sweden (e.g. Andersson & Guo, 2009; Bencivenga, 2017; Diedrich, 2017; Harris, 1999b). Their research has also highlighted that skills recognition is not a series of technical 'innocent and benevolent procedures' that objectively assesses skills but that it is a highly political activity (Harris, 1999, p. 125).

Moreover, skills recognition can be racialised and gendered (e.g. Guo, 2015; Shibao Guo & Shan, 2013; Morrice, 2011; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007; Williams, 2007). For instance, according to Diedrich and Styhre (2013), the validation of prior learning in the UK and Canada did not overcome prejudice against overseas qualifications, particularly those gained in low-income countries. Andersson and Guo (2009) cited a number of studies from Canada that showed that non-recognition of prior learning and workplace experience was the major factor for the downward mobility of migrants.

In summary, given the limited research on refugee users of skills recognition arrangements one can only infer from the evidence on migrants generally speaking that non-recognition and selectively inclusive skills recognition might also risk reinforcing social inequalities between refugees and nationals of their host society. It might entrench refugees' weaker position in the labour market and place them in lower status jobs. On the other hand, different skills recognition arrangements may also contribute to refugees' socio-economic

inclusion within their host country. The next section begins exploring this ambiguity in the German context.

2.3. Germany's integration challenges

In late summer 2015, after a visit to a reception centre, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel publicly appealed to the empathy of all Germans, referring to the right of asylum and the national task of granting protection to those who deserve it. She encouragingly declared that 'we have managed so many things – we will manage it' (*Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das*) (Die Bundesregierung, 2015).[16] However, Germany's subsequent temporary open-door policy and acceptance of nearly one million refugees raised new and exacerbated long-standing integration challenges.

These challenges have ranged from asylum seekers' registration and accommodation, asylum procedures, their integration into Germany's labour market, education and training, and overcoming racial prejudices (Funk, 2016; Hanewinkel, 2015; Thränhardt, 2015). Regarding the asylum procedures, Germany was not prepared to cope with the scale of the new arrivals with insufficient staffing leading to backlogs (Funk, 2016; Hanewinkel, 2015; Obschonka et al., 2018; Virgili, 2018).

In 2015, only half of the registered asylum seekers could apply for asylum, amounting to 441,899 applications (see Table 1 below). In 2016, the number of asylum applications rose to 722,370 (BAMF, 2016, p. 20). Table 1 below also shows that more than one third of all asylum-applicants came from Syria, followed by Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea and Pakistan (BAMF, 2016, p. 20). In 2015, refugee status was granted to around one third of all applicants. In 2016, slightly more obtained that same status, in addition to almost one quarter who received subsidiary protection (BAMF, 2016; BpB, 2018). According to Germany's Asylum Law (§3 and §4 in BMJV, 2018), refugees are granted asylum or protected refugee status for three years

[16] In May 2019, Angela Merkel was awarded an honorary doctorate from Harvard University partly because of her welcoming of migrants and refugees (Harvard Gazette, 2019).

and subsidiary protection for one year, with extensions possible. It is estimated that roughly half of the 2015-2016 arrivals will remain in Germany for the long-term (Aumüller, 2016).

Table 1. Number of asylum applications and applicants' countries of origin

	2015	2016
Total asylum applications	**441,899**	**722,370**
Syria	35.9 %	36.9 %
Afghanistan	7.1 %	17.6 %
Iraq	6.7 %	13.3 %
Iran	-	3.7 %
Eritrea	2.5 %	2.6 %
Pakistan	1.9 %	2.0 %
Balkans	25.7 %	2.1 %
Nigeria	-	1.8 %
Russia	-	1.5 %
Others	17.5 %	16.5 %
Unknown	2.7 %	2 %

Source: BAMF. (2016). Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2016. Asyl, Migration und Integration. Nuremberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees], p. 20. BpB. (2018). Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland [Numbers on asylum in Germany]. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education].

The reactions to the migrant influx varied. Some used the so-called 'refugee crises' to heat up the ongoing integration debate about questions of national identity and religious pluralism and reacted with hostility towards the incoming people (Die Bundesregierung, 2015; Holzberg et al., 2018a; Karakayali, 2018). Others interpreted Germany's open-door policy and migrant welcoming culture (*Willkommenskultur*)[17] as a sign of a positive cultural change (Karakayali, 2018). While the Federal Republic of Germany has experienced various types of immigration, it was only in the late 1990s, after decades of denying the obvious (see e.g. Holzberg, Kolbe, & Zaborowski, 2018b; Kaya, 2013; Staas, 2015), that German politicians started to officially recognise that Germany had become a country of immigration.

Prior to the most recent large-scale arrival of asylum seekers, Germany had experienced at least the following three types of immigration. Germany's most prominent wave of immigration dates back to the period between 1955 and 1973, when 14 million guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) arrived as a result of agreements with Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece and

[17] For a discussion in German about Germany's migrant welcome culture see Kösemen (2017).

Spain. However, Germany's approach to this post-war labour migration proved an obstacle to integration, as the government expected these migrants to return home, which approximately 11 million did (Bither & Ziebarth, 2016). The arrival of 4.5 million ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states, so-called *Aussiedler*, constituted another migrant influx. It also started in the post-World War era but happened mainly in the early 1990s (Ibid). Additionally, in the early 1990s, Germany experienced a peak in asylum seekers when around 400,000 arrived in 1992 fleeing from the wars in the Balkans (Ibid; Ziegler, 2016).

Today, Germany is the largest immigration destination country in terms of absolute numbers in the EU and the second-largest among OECD countries behind the United States (though relative to population size it ranks 11th in the EU and 15th among OECD countries) (Eurostat, 2019; OECD, 2016a). Germany's population with a migrant background (i.e. at least one foreign-born parent) amounts to 19 million inhabitants, of which the 2.8 million persons with a Turkish background are the largest group and represent approximately 15 percent (BMI & BAMF, 2019, p. 193).

In spite of these considerable migration movements, it was only Germany's 2005 Immigration Act that made the promotion of migrants' integration a federal responsibility (Bither & Ziebarth, 2016). Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that, according to a 2018 study by the University of Duisburg-Essen (DW, 2018b), among the 2.8 million people with a Turkish migrant background in Germany more felt more strongly connected to Turkey than to Germany (BMI & BAMF, 2019, p. 193). Despite the increasing educational success of second-generation Turkish migrants, they still experience discrimination in education and training (Jeon, 2019; Scherr, Janz, & Müller, 2013; Schneider, Yemane, & Weinmann, 2014), difficulties accessing skilled jobs, and are overrepresented in unskilled occupations and among the unemployed (Granato, 2006).

Moreover, it was only in response to the most recent arrival of asylum seekers that in June 2015, Chancellor Merkel (FAZ, 2017) finally acknowledged that 'Germany is a country of immigration' (*Deutschland ist ein Einwanderungsland*) that would require a better migrant welcoming culture and that refugees' integration would shape Germany's socio-economic

cohesion (Virgili, 2018). Consequently, measures to facilitate refugees' labour market integration have gained political attention.

2.3.1. Facilitated access rights to Germany's labour market

As more than two-thirds of Germany's 2015-2016 arrivals were of working age, enabling them to find employment quickly has become an integration priority. This has led Germany to ease labour market access for certain groups with a refugee background (Aumüller, 2016; Bohn et al., 2016; Brücker, Hauptmann, & Sirries, 2017; Thränhardt, 2015; Woellert et al., 2016; Worbs, Bund, & Böhm, 2016). The right to access Germany's labour market depends on the person's residence status, which can be divided into four main categories,[18] of which the first three are referred to here as asylum seekers and the last one as refugees (BMJV, 2018; Brücker, Schewe, & Sirries, 2016; Pfeffer-Hoffmann, 2016; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018a):

1. persons seeking asylum;
2. persons with a temporary residence permit waiting for decision on their asylum application (*Aufenthaltsgestattung*);
3. persons with exceptional leave to remain for humanitarian reasons (*Duldung*); and
4. persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection with respectively a three or one-year residence permit (refugees).

Refugees (the fourth group) benefit from unrestricted access to Germany's labour market and education and training measures immediately after asylum has been granted. According to the EU Qualification Directive (European Parliament and Council, 2011, article 26), they are authorised 'to engage in employed or self-employed activities subject to rules generally applicable to the profession'.

During the past decades, the other three groups were structurally excluded from Germany's labour market through initial or total employment bans (Aktion Bleiberecht, 2015; Pfeffer-Hoffmann, 2016). However, in the face of lengthy asylum procedures and the benefits

[18] While many more sub-categories exist.

of early integration, legislative changes between 2014 and 2016 now also allow certain asylum seekers to access the labour market and employment promoting measures (Brenzel & Kosyakova, 2019; Bundesregierung, 2016; Johansson, 2016; Thränhardt, 2015; Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016a). In 2014, Germany's federal government reduced the waiting time before employment was possible from nine to three months for asylum seekers with good prospects of remaining in Germany (*mit guter Bleibeperspektive*), that is from countries for which success rates for asylum requests are at least 50 percent (currently Syria, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia) (BAMF, 2017a). Asylum seekers from countries legally defined as safe countries of origin (e.g. West Balkan countries and Senegal) are still barred from labour market access, unless their asylum claim is granted. Germany's first-ever Integration Act (*Integrationsgesetz*)[19] of July 2016 further improved access for asylum seekers to jobs and vocational training. Moreover, the preferential treatment for German and EU citizens over third-country nationals in the job market, the so-called job priority check (*Vorrangprüfung),* was suspended in most regions until August 2019. This sought to facilitate refugees' employment search because the Federal Employment Agency (BA) no longer assessed whether there were other job applicants with priority over them who should get the job (BMAS, 2016; BMWi, BMAS, & BA, 2017). The suspension is in line with lessons learned from a study by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) (Eisnecker et al., 2016) that had surveyed 750 persons who had previously arrived as refugees in Germany and that highlighted the importance of speedy labour market integration.

So far, few studies have empirically investigated the effects of these changes (DIHK, 2018; Johansson, 2016). It seems unlikely that they will by themselves be sufficient to increase the labour market participation of people with a refugee background given that even those with unrestricted labour market access have struggled, as set out in the next section.

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[19] See for an overview of the most important new regulations Rump and Eilers (2017, pp. 54–55).

2.3.2. Refugees' struggle in the German labour market

Both refugees who had arrived long before the influx in 2015-2016, for instance the refugees from the Balkans, and recent arrivals have struggled to find (appropriate) employment in Germany (Aktion Bleiberecht, 2015; Aumüller, 2016; Aumüller & Bretl, 2008; Brücker, Liebau, Romiti, & Vallizadeh, 2014; Euler & Severing, 2016; Lukas, 2011; Thränhardt, 2015; Worbs & Bund, 2016b; Worbs, Bund, & Böhm, 2016; Ziegler, 2016). The few existing studies on previous refugee arrivals in Germany (e.g. Brücker, 2016; Eisnecker et al., 2016) observe trends that align with the Europe-wide findings that were discussed in the above Section 2.1.2.1. Compared to other migrant groups, refugees need more time to integrate into the German labour market. It is only after 15 years that their employment rates match those of other migrants (Brücker, 2016, p. 30).

Yet, despite this convergence of employment rates over time, the income of persons with a refugee background remains permanently lower than that of other migrant groups in Germany. Thus refugees more often end up in poorly paid jobs and/or work below their qualification levels (Brücker, 2016; Eisnecker et al., 2016). For instance, 15 years after arrival in Germany, their monthly income is still EUR 300 lower compared to other migrants (Brücker, 2016, p. 30). In 2014, among working refugees holding a university degree, 71 percent were overqualified for their job, which is well above the EU average of 60 percent (OECD, 2016b). Even those refugees with qualifications in sectors with a labour shortage have rarely found employment which corresponds to their competencies (Hadeed, 2006; IAB, 2015a; Johansson, 2016; Thränhardt, 2015; Worbs & Bund, 2016a, 2016b).

While there is only limited research on this, Germany-specific reasons for refugees' poor labour market integration seem to include a lack of proficiency in German, insufficient guidance on how to overcome the many bureaucratic regulations pertaining to job search and employment, lack of knowledge about Germany's job application process, employers who are hesitant to employ refugees because they lack information about the administrative process, low educational attainment, no documented evidence of their foreign qualifications and the

lack of recognition of their foreign credentials (see Section 2.1.2.2 for more on refugees' labour market challenges) (BA, 2018b; Brücker, 2016; Brücker et al., 2014; Brücker et al., 2016; Euler & Severing, 2016; Johansson & Schiefer, 2016; Virgili, 2018).

The risk of refugees remaining a disadvantaged group also exists among the 2015-2016 arrivals. Although their labour market participation is increasing, it is still low compared to German nationals. Germany's jobcentres (*Jobcenter*) help refugees seeking work, while employment agencies (*Arbeitsagenturen*) are responsible for asylum seekers with a good prospect of remaining. The responsibility for many asylum seekers has now transitioned from employment agencies to jobcentres, as nearly one million have been granted asylum and subsidiary protection (BAMF, 2016; BpB, 2018; Euler & Severing, 2016; IAB, 2016; Pfeffer-Hoffmann, 2016). Most of them are men, under the age of 35 and from Syria (BA, 2018a). They have gradually appeared in the labour market statistics (Brücker et al., 2017). The category 'person in the context of forced migration' (*Personen im Kontext von Fluchtmigration*) was only added to the statistical reporting of the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA) in June 2016 (BA, 2017a). Prior reporting only referred to citizens from the most important source countries of asylum seekers (*Staatsangehörige aus den wichtigsten Asylherkunftsländern*) (BA, 2017a). The new category includes not only persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection (refugees), but also persons with a temporary residence permit waiting for the decision on their asylum application and persons with exceptional leave to remain for humanitarian reasons (BA, 2019a).

Table 2 below illustrates that both the overall number of persons in the context of forced migration registered with a jobcentre or an employment agency and the number among them registered as unemployed decreased between July 2017 and April 2019, the most recent data point. According to recent employment statistics, by February 2019, 299,000 persons from the

main source countries of asylum seekers in Germany[20] had found employment,[21] which presented an increase of 85,000 compared to the previous year (BA, 2019b, p. 12). In June 2018 (more recent data is not yet available), 27,000 were apprentices among those persons from asylum seeker source countries who had found employment – an increase of 13,000 refugee apprentices compared to 2017 (BA, 2019b, p. 11). While this shows that a growing number of persons from the main source countries of asylum seekers in Germany are finding jobs, their overall employment rate at 31.7 percent remains low compared to 68.7 percent among German nationals (BA, 2019b, p. 12).

Table 2. Forced migrants registered with the public employment service

	07/ 2017	08/ 2018	12/ 2018	04/ 2019
Persons in the context of forced migration registered with jobcentres and employment agencies	492,000	477,000	456,000	455,000
Of whom registered as unemployed	185,000	197,000	175,000	189,000
Percentage of all unemployed persons	8%	8%	8%	8%

Source: (BA [Federal Employment Agency], 2017a, p. 7, 2018a, p. 8, 2018b, p. 8, 2019b, p. 8).

Forced migrants have accounted for eight percent of the unemployed people since early 2017, with small increases more recently. The steady eight percent stemmed from three developments: there were fewer new arrivals; more and more found employment; and many were still attending integration courses. By contrast, a growing number have now completed their course attendance and are temporary unemployed while searching for jobs (BA, 2019b, p. 8). Most unemployed refugees are young men seeking employment in low-skilled sectors such as the cleaning, logistics and food processing sectors because of their limited proficiency in German and possibly because they do not hold formal vocational or professional qualifications which would enable them to access Germany's more skilled sectors (BA, 2017a, 2018a, 2018b, 2019b).

Against this background, the next section turns to skills recognition in Germany.

[20] Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Iran, Eritrea and Pakistan (BA, 2019b, p. 12).
[21] Specifically employment within the scope of national insurance which is the case for most employment, except for self-employed persons, civil servants, judges, soldiers and workers in minor employment holding so-called mini jobs (Sozialversicherungspflicht.info, 2018).

2.4. Skills recognition in Germany

In Germany, skills assessment is seen as a possible solution to help refugees' labour market integration (Aumüller, 2016; BA, 2017b, 2018a; BMBF, 2016a, 2017a; BMWi; BMAS; BA, 2018; Braun & Lex, 2016; Brücker, 2016; Fendel & Romiti, 2016; Knuth, 2016). However, despite its particular relevance in the German context, as will be argued in the next Section 2.4.1, formal skills recognition – the most formal form of skills assessment – is likely to prove difficult for refugees, as will be shown in Section 2.4.2.

2.4.1. The particular relevance of formal skills recognition in Germany

Formal skills recognition seems to be particularly relevant for refugees in Germany for at least the following two reasons. Firstly, many of the recently arrived refugees possess NFIVOS and secondly, compared with countries such as the UK, Germany has a highly regulated labour market. According to the representative IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey[22] (Babka von Gostomski et al., 2016), as many as 70 percent of the surveyed 4,800 recently arrived refugees had already gained work experience in their country of origin. At the same time, the survey revealed a polarisation in their educational attainment (BA, 2018b, p. 6). At the lower end, 13 percent indicated no schooling at all and 12 percent attendance of only elementary school. In the middle, around 40 percent attended secondary education but without necessarily completing it, and between 20-30 percent hold a vocational qualification (Brücker, 2016; Fendel & Romiti, 2016; Neske, 2017). At the upper end, around 17 percent participated in tertiary education (BA, 2018b, p. 6).

These findings among refugees of the most recent wave in 2015-2016 are similar to trends in qualification and skills levels observed in the representative 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample of refugees and other migrants who had already lived in Germany for an average of 18 and 16 years, respectively (Eisnecker et al., 2016). Of those refugees surveyed

[22] Conducted by the Research Institute of the Federal Employment Agency (IAB), the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP).

aged 24 years or older on arrival, 55 percent had no formal vocational qualification at all, and 20 percent held a university qualification. At the same time, 86 percent had gained vocational experience abroad, on average they had worked for around 14 years (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016, pp. 294–295). Consequently, these new and older data from across Germany as well as new data from Baden-Württemberg (see e.g. Statistisches Landesamt, IFM, & Ministerium für Soziales und Integration, 2018) suggest that many more refugees possess NFIVOS than foreign vocational credentials for which they could seek formal recognition. This is not surprising as the model of dual VET that links learning on the job and at vocational schools is not widespread outside Central and Northern Europe, and in refugees' countries of origin, many people acquire their job-relevant skills through NFIL on the job (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016).

Moreover, the regulated nature of Germany's labour market increases the potential benefits of refugees' formal skills recognition because holding a German qualification or proof of equivalency with the German reference qualification is advantageous for employment (Adacker, Benzer, & Döring, 2016; Kis & Windisch, 2018). For instance, research has revealed that the formal recognition of refugees' foreign vocational or professional qualifications can shorten their re-entry into the occupation they exercised in their country of origin by up to 17 months (Pfeffer-Hoffmann, 2016, p. 46). The 2017 report on Germany's Federal Recognition Act (see for more information pp. 59-60) found in a survey of 812 users (including persons without a refugee background) that 72 percent believed to have achieved a better occupational position and earn around 40 percent more than before the formal recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications (BMBF, 2017a, p. 1).

A large percentage of Germany's workforce[23] falls within regulated occupations (Koumenta, Humphris, Kleiner, & Pagliero, 2014), which involve legal barriers to entry into these occupations, often with the objective of ensuring public safety and quality of service

[23] Germany regulates 86 occupations, belonging to the ten EU countries with the highest workforce share (26-43 percent) in regulated occupations (Koumenta et al., 2014).

(Braun, 2012). As will be illustrated in the case studies in Section 4.2.3, for those with aspirations to practice a regulated occupation, there is thus a strong incentive to acquire a particular vocational or professional qualification either through formal skills recognition or education and training (Keep & James, 2012). In Germany, occupational regulations apply to the category of professionals (e.g. medical doctors, engineers, architects and lawyers), to running a business in the crafts and trades sector and the industry and commerce sector, which requires a master craftsman title (e.g. master electronics technician), and to around 42 vocational occupations that have to do with people's safety, including carers for the elderly, nurses, early years teachers, driving instructors, and pharmaceutical technical assistants (BA, 2019c; Koumenta et al., 2014; Wollnik, 2012). Interestingly, with respect to foreign engineers, they can practice engineering in Germany without formal recognition of their foreign degrees (BMBF, 2020b). However, the title 'engineer' (*Ingenieur/Ingenieurin*) is protected in Germany and can only be borne after successful recognition of a candidate's foreign engineering degree by the respective regional Chamber of Engineers (Ingenieurkammer Baden-Württemberg, 2018).

Even in unregulated occupations, where a formal qualification is not a legal precondition for working, formal skills recognition may be helpful in order to provide employers with a better understanding of one's skillset (Euler & Severing, 2016; Gaylor et al., 2015). Importantly for this thesis, this is the case for around 350 unregulated occupations within Germany's dual vocational education and training (VET) system, also known as the apprenticeship system[24] (BMBF, 2012b). To avoid confusion, it is worth noting that, for instance, the occupation of the electronics technician is unregulated (discussed further in the refugee case study in Section 4.2.3.1), while that of the master electronics technician is regulated. The reasoning behind this difference is that someone who completed an apprenticeship in the crafts and trades sector (e.g. an electronics technicians) can only work

[24] The only exception is the pharmaceutical technical assistant (PTA), which, while being a dual VET occupation, is a regulated occupation because it involves the handling of potentially harmful substances (Wollnik, 2012).

as an employee and does thus not act fully independently. By contrast, holders of a master title in the crafts and trades (e.g. master electronics technicians) have additionally attended postsecondary VET and are thus entitled to run their own business, for which they bear full responsibility and for which they can employ others under their guidance (Wollnik, 2012). As a result of Germany's well-established VET system, even without education requirements to practice in an unregulated VET occupation, employers may expect a German apprenticeship qualification or a confirmation of equivalency with the German reference qualification. The data collected for this thesis will shed further light on this issue (see Section 4.2 of Chapter 4, Section 5.2 of Chapter 5, and Section 6.1.2 of Chapter 6).

Moreover, findings by the PIAAC Survey (OECD, 2013; see also Footnote 11, p. 36) show that an increase in non-certified vocational skills does not lead to improved employment opportunities for low-qualified persons in Germany. This contrasts with the UK where the unemployment rate decreases the higher the occupational skills regardless of low qualification attainment (see Figure 6 in Heisig & Solga, 2014). A possible reason for this difference could be that, compared to the UK, employers in Germany rely more on candidates' formal qualifications than on work experience to infer their skills levels (Gaylor et al., 2015; Heisig & Solga, 2014). Another factor to explain the difference could be the UK's less regulated labour market. Compared with the UK, Germany's labour law contains much stronger protection against individual and collective dismissals under either regular or temporary contracts.[25] Consequently, German employers may be less likely than British employers to risk hiring unqualified workers (OECD.Stat., 2016).

2.4.2. Germany's slow implementation of skills recognition arrangements

While skills recognition is of particular relevance in the German context, Germany's implementation of the 2012 Council recommendation to develop NFIL validation procedures

[25] According to the OECD, the degree of employment protection against dismissals is above OECD average in Germany and lowest in the Anglo-Saxon countries (OECD.Stat., 2016).

has lagged behind other countries and most German arrangements were set up without refugees in mind. Therefore, there is precious little literature on skills recognition in Germany, and hardly any on migrants in general, let alone on refugees' use of such arrangements. According to a comparative study by the Bertelsmann Foundation that rated validation of NFIL in nine European countries[26] (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015; Gaylor et al., 2015), both Germany and the UK did worst in all five aspects of validation scrutinised, while Finland, France and Norway obtained the best scores[27] (for an overview see p. 62 in Gaylor et al., 2015). Given the limited literature on the topic, the following Sections 2.4.4.1-2.4.4.5 discuss the findings of the 2015 Bertelsmann study, best case practices drawn from the *European Inventory on Validation of NFIL* and updates from the (most recent) 2018 *European Inventory on Validation of NFIL* country report on Germany (Ball, 2019) in order to illustrate Germany's implementation challenges regarding legal foundations, procedures and instruments, financing, institutionalisation, and support structures.

2.4.4.1. Legal foundations

Legal foundations are important in ensuring that validation results are binding and transferable. In 2015, before the migrant influx turned skills recognition into an integration priority, the Bertelsmann study found Germany's legal foundations of validation arrangements wanting. It only gave it a C (from strong A to weak D) because the country only had (and still does) statutory regulations limited to certain procedures in place (Gaylor et al., 2015). The 2018 CEDEFOP country report (Ball, 2019, p. 4) similarly observed that '[a] comprehensive system of recognition that defines uniform procedures and includes a legal basis as well as regulations on financing services and counselling does not yet exist'. France, meanwhile, is an example of national validation system. There has been a legal right to validation of NFIL, called *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE), for persons with at least three years of experience

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[26] Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the UK. See seven country reports in English here: https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/careers-via-competences/project-news/study-on-validation-of-competences-released-in-brussels/.
[27] Scores went from strong A to weak D.

since 2002. Per year, around 25,000 persons obtain qualifications equivalent to those in formal education and training through validation (Michel & Looney, 2015, p. 20). However, Ball (2019, p. 4) notes that a comprehensive validation system 'is a significant challenge due to the German federal structure'.

According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2015),Germany could create a legal basis for the validation of NFIL similar to its already existing Federal Recognition Act (*Anerkennungsgesetz des Bundes*), which is the abbreviated title of the 'Law to improve the assessment and recognition of professional and vocational education and training qualifications acquired abroad' (*Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Feststellung und Anerkennung im Ausland erworbener Berufsqualifikationen*) in force since 2012 (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2011),[28] and the various Recognition Acts (*Landesanerkennungsgesetze*) by Germany's 16 federal states (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015).

The entry into force of the Federal Recognition Act in 2012, and the subsequent alignment of the federal states' Recognition Acts to it, has brought about two major changes (IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2019). For the first time, Germany now offers assessment and recognition procedures for foreign vocational or professional qualifications accessible to all foreigners, not only EU migrants but also third-country nationals. Secondly, the Federal Recognition Act and the Recognition Acts of the federal states now also contain standardised criteria and a uniform procedure for the equivalency assessment of foreign vocational qualifications that relate to the 350 training occupations of Germany's dual VET system thanks to the introduction of the so-called 'Vocational Qualifications Assessment Law' (*Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz*, BQFG) into their respective first articles (BMBF, 2020a).

The Recognition Acts at federal and federal state level allow for an equivalency assessment between candidates' foreign vocational or professional qualifications and the skills requirements of the German reference occupation which results in a formal confirmation of

[28] See BMBF (2017, p. 18) for milestones in the development of the Federal Recognition Act.

either full, partial or no equivalency (BMBF, 2016b, 2017a, 2019h; OECD, 2017a). While the Federal Recognition Act covers foreign qualifications that relate to federally governed vocational occupations and professions, the Recognition Acts of Germany's federal states relate to occupations and professions governed by the federal state laws (see for more details Footnote 6, p. 17). Both the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (*Landesanerkennungsgesetz Baden-Württemberg*, LAnGBW), which is the abbreviated title of the 'Law for the recognition of foreign professional and vocational qualifications in Baden-Württemberg' (*Gesetz für die Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen in Baden-Württemberg)* (Land Baden-Württemberg, 2013), are further discussed in the following chapters, in particular in Section 5.2.4.2 of Chapter 5.

However, the development of these laws took a long time, which suggests that the creation of a legal basis for NFIL validation may be equally slow. Germany's Recognition Acts are embedded in the European integration process that has brought about a series of multilateral agreements for the mutual recognition of vocational or professional qualifications, with the earliest dating back to the 1970s. The latest European legislation in this respect is Directive 2013/55/EU on the recognition of vocational or professional qualifications, which amended Directive 2005/36/EC after evaluations had revealed deficits in recognition practices in European countries (Englmann & Müller-Wacker, 2014; European Parliament and Council, 2005). In Germany, the 2007 study *Brain Waste* (Englmann & Müller, 2007) sparked a public debate about better use of migrants' skills. Prior to 2007, there was no official data and little information on procedures for the recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications. The publication made the first comprehensive contribution to the topic and has become a standard reference. It pointed out shortcomings such as the limited suitability of existing recognition measures for refugees. In 2007, Germany signed the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention,[29] which, among other things, promoted the recognition of refugees'

[29] Its full name is Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

university degrees for work purposes. However, the 2007 National Action Plan for Recognition remained vague about the need to review a possible expansion of recognition procedures for so-called ‘document-less’ applicants, meaning those cases common among refugees in which documented evidence of obtained vocational or professional qualifications is missing (KMK and BMBF, 2007, p. 5). The subsequent policy debate paved the way for the 2012 Federal Recognition Act and the various Recognition Acts of Germany’s federal states which address this issue through their so-called other procedures (see Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2011, Article 1, §14; and Land Baden-Württemberg, 2013, Artcile 1, §14) (Ball, 2016; Braun, 2012; Englmann & Müller-Wacker, 2014; Pfeffer-Hoffmann, 2016).

2.4.4.2. Procedures and instruments

With improvements required on legal grounds regarding NFIL validation, Germany’s procedures and instruments are also not yet firmly established. In its assessment, the 2015 Bertelsmann study gave Germany the lowest score D because its provision was found to be diverse, delivered via what were often only short-lived schemes, and lacked standardisation and quality assurance (Gaylor et al., 2015). This impression was confirmed in the most recent *European Inventory on Validation of NFIL* country report on Germany which found that ‘validation in Germany can still be described as a colourful mosaic of local, regional, sectoral and national approaches’ (Ball, 2019, p. 4). For instance, there are various diagnostic skills assessment arrangements in place that are not standardised and do not lead to formal skills recognition (further discussed in Section 5.2.1.1 of Chapter 5). However, for validation arrangements to be visible, understood and sought after, they need to be permanent with standardised procedures that yield meaningful results (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015).

Good examples are Finland and Denmark. The former has offered a standardised three-stage validation procedure called ‘personalisation’ since 2007. It comprises skills identification and documentation, assessment, and the award of competence-based vocational qualifications for adults, called *Näyttötutkinnot*. Candidates can reach the targeted *Näyttötutkinnot* either through sufficient evidence of NFIL or by attending necessary training

and passing customised competence-based tests. Around 33,000 competence-based qualifications are annually awarded, which are almost as many as school-based vocational qualifications (Karttunen, 2015, p. 15). According to the Bertelsmann study (2015), Denmark's two-stage model has transfer potential for Germany. Its legally regulated validation procedure of two stages makes it easier for groups unfamiliar with formal learning to enter training or work. Individuals' skills are documented in reference to existing qualifications on a certificate which can then be used as orientation either for further education and training or direct employment (Aagaard, 2015).

Since 2015, Germany has sought to address the issue of standardisation of procedures and instruments with the ValiKom pilot project, further discussed in Section 5.2.2.3.

2.4.4.3. Financing

Financing arrangements are a crucial aspect of validation arrangements as they influence their attractiveness and user groups. Across Europe, financing arrangements include national government, company-based and private approaches, sometimes with combinations of these within a single country (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015). Finland has a national state financing arrangement where the validation costs are covered by the Ministry of Education and Culture for candidates in work and the Ministry of Labour for unemployed persons (Karttunen, 2015).

In the 2015 assessment by the Bertelsmann study, Germany only obtained a D for its financing of validation because participants were often required to pay out of their own pocket (Gaylor et al., 2015). The study suggested a mixed financing arrangement with income-dependent support (e.g. through the Federal Student Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*, BAFöG) or training funds) and possibly also employers' contributions (e.g. through paid leave), as practiced in the Netherlands and France (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015).

Moreover, since 2018 the MySkills software package has been available at public employment agencies for unemployed persons free of charge, as has the online self-assessment AiKomPass for people working in the metal and electronics industry (both detailed

in Sections 5.2.2.1 and 5.2.2.2).

2.4.4.4. Institutionalisation

Institutionalisation is defined here as the degree to which rules and responsibilities for arrangements are clearly developed and established. It is essential for public acceptance of validation procedures (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015). Unsurprisingly, given the above, Germany scored a C on institutionalisation. While the Bertelsmann study acknowledged clearly assigned responsibilities for certain procedures, it considered the overall degree of institutionalisation insufficient (Gaylor et al., 2015). Similarly, Ball (2019, p. 12) notes that '[t]here is no central institution or a standardised institutional framework for the overall coordination of the different validation approaches […]' (Ball, 2019, p. 13).

Norway is an example of clearly assigned responsibility whereby two institutions, the Directorate of Education and the Norwegian Institute of Adult Education (VOX), ensure overarching coordination of validation procedures and regional networks implement validation in conjunction with education institutions (Ure, 2015). Switzerland is an example that illustrates how awareness and acceptance of outcomes can be achieved through the involvement of different labour market actors. Validation is seen there as a cooperative task in which representatives of the different sectors and branches, the cantons and the Federal Government are all involved, each with specific responsibilities (Gaylor et al., 2015). According to the Bertelsmann study (2015), the stakeholders of Germany's dual VET system, including the chambers, and the public employment agencies could get similarly involved in validation, building on their experience with the external exam (discussed in Section 5.2.4.1).

2.4.4.5. Support structures

Low-threshold access to support structures is needed in order to provide potential skills recognition users with the necessary information about the procedure and further training opportunities. In 2015, Germany's score on support structures was ranked at the lowest level because of limited provision and low levels of public awareness (Gaylor et al., 2015). By 2018,

while awareness-raising was 'further improving in the context of the different kinds of initiatives and projects which are delivered below the legislative level' (Ball, 2019, p. 13), according to Ball (2019, p. 22) 'many people are still not aware about the available validation opportunities'.

In Finland, there are nationwide information points in addition to websites and online chats with experts. Germany's chambers and public employment agencies would be well suited to providing the necessary support structures given their nationwide presence and long-standing advisory expertise (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2015). This could be modelled on the existing IQ Network advisory service (*Integration durch Qualifizierung Netzwerk*, English: Network for the integration through qualification) for holders of foreign vocational or professional qualifications. Created in 2005 and a nationwide network since 2011, the IQ Network provides free advisory services on the recognition procedures for foreign vocational and professional qualifications. It is financed by Germany's Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*, BMAS) and the European Social Fund (ESF). There are more than 100 IQ Network service points in cities across Germany and more than 60 mobile advisory services that ensure accessibility in rural areas (IQ Netzwerk, 2018b). The advising process at IQ Network service points is explained in Sections 4.2.3 and 5.2.4.2.1.

All of the above highlights Germany's implementation challenges, although it is not the only country struggling to set up a comprehensive and efficient system for the recognition of NFIVOS. Based on an international literature review and analysis of seventeen case studies, a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Branka, 2016b, 2016a) identifies the five most common challenges of skills recognition arrangements worldwide. They include:

- understanding user needs;
- identifying and involving stakeholders;
- providing quality and accessible services;
- communicating and building awareness and participation;

- and monitoring and evaluating recognition activities' outputs and impact.

Clearly, there are a number of challenges a country is faced with, not only in setting up skills recognition mechanisms but also in serving specific user groups, such as refugees. Against this background, formal skills recognition is likely to prove difficult for refugees in Germany.

2.5. Concluding remarks

This literature review has analysed the need for and challenges of refugees' swift labour market integration and explained the facilitating role that formal skills recognition could play in this respect, especially in the German context. However, it also highlighted Germany's slow implementation of skills recognition arrangements, which has had implications for the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS. At the time of drafting (2016-2020), apart from a pilot project and the external exam, Germany does not offer a procedure that formally recognised NFIVOS and therefore there is precious little literature on this. Moreover, there have been no studies exploring the suitability for migrants, let alone refugee users, of measures that make NFIVOS visible without formally recognising them and that granted formal recognition to foreign vocational or professional qualifications. This thesis has sought to address this research gap.

The next chapter turns to the thesis' research questions and describes its research design and data collection and analysis methods used in practice to address these questions.

3. Methodology

Overview

This chapter sets out the research questions and design of this study and describes how data was collected and analysed. The guiding research questions are presented in Section 3.1. They were formulated after an initial literature review and preliminary fieldwork in Germany which is summarised in Section 3.2. Section 3.3 sets out the exploratory conceptual framework and case study-based research design which guided the subsequent data collection and analysis, respectively described in Sections 3.4 and 3.5. Section 3.6 then explains how the ethical issues involved in the study were addressed before turning to its limitations and quality criteria in the final Section 3.7.

3.1. Research questions

After the review of the extant literature and identification of knowledge gaps, and the preliminary exploration of the field discussed in the next section, the following overarching research question was formulated:

What factors hinder and what factors facilitate the recognition of refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS) for use in Germany's labour market?

From this overarching research question, two operational questions were derived to guide the data collection and analysis:

1. How do refugees experience skills assessment and recognition processes?
2. How suitable are skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Baden-Württemberg for refugees?

These operational research questions are addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 before returning to the overarching research question in the discussion of Chapter 6.

3.2. Preliminary fieldwork

Given the sparse academic literature on refugees' skills recognition in Germany (Chapter 2), it seemed expedient to conduct preliminary fieldwork to develop the research design of this thesis. I undertook a two-week pilot in June 2017 to gauge the feasibility of data collection in Baden-Württemberg, one of Germany's sixteen federal state, which has accepted the third largest number of asylum seekers since late 2015 (BAMF, 2017b; Focus, 2016). This involved identifying the most pertinent skills assessment and recognition arrangements, issues faced by stakeholders involved in these arrangements, and potential study participants.

3.2.1. Establishing first contacts and gaining access

I did not have any established contacts available in Baden-Württemberg, despite my previous research on behalf of the OECD on the recognition of skills acquired through work-based learning which had also touched on mechanisms in Germany (Kis & Windisch, 2018) (see the beginning of Chapter 1 on researcher positionality). As a result, I had to identify my first study participants through internet searches guided by the knowledge gained from my initial literature review. I chose eight individuals because of their coordination roles and representative functions (see Section 3.4.1 for more on sampling), and send them an introductory email in which I presented my research intention and requested an informal meeting to learn about their work, discuss the feasibility of my study, and obtain contact recommendations. It was encouraging when I received replies from all eight contacted persons and could arrange meetings with five of them. Their work focused on the recognition of foreign vocational and professional qualifications and the assessment of NFIVOS. Table 3 below provides an overview. For the appointments with them, I travelled by train across Baden-Württemberg, an area slightly bigger than Belgium, which was a useful warming up exercise for the many train journeys to come during my subsequent six-month data collection. With the intention of covering specific topics while providing opportunities for my interviewees to go into detail, I

opted for a semi-structured interview format (Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 1998) and discuss the findings of these initial interviews in the next section.

Table 3. Overview of interviewees during preliminary fieldwork

	Preliminary research 20 June – 1 July 2017				
Level	**Title**	**Name**	**Code**	**Function**	**Institution / City**
Strate-gic	Mr	Ertunc	E-IQCoor	Coordinator of the IQ Network of Baden-Württemberg	IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg Mannheim (English: Network for the integration through qualification)
Opera-tional	Mrs	Rey	AQ-IQFrei1	Advisor on the recognition of foreign qualifications of IQ Network Freiburg	Kompetenzzentrum für die Beratung zur Anerkennung ausländischer Abschlüsse und Qualifikationen Freiburg (English: Competence centre for advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications)
Opera-tional	Mrs	Gronau	AQ-IQStu1	Advisor on the recognition of foreign qualifications of IQ Network Stuttgart	Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO) Stuttgart (English: National workers' welfare association)
Opera-tional	Mrs	Rudel	AQ-IQStu2	Advisor on the recognition of foreign qualifications of IQ Network Stuttgart	AWO Stuttgart
Opera-tional	Mrs	Herman	T-Med	Coordinator of training programmes for medical doctors with foreign qualifications	Bfw Stuttgart (English: Vocational further training facility)
Opera-tional and strategic	Mrs Dr	Breu-sing	S-ValiKom	Coordinator of VALIKOM pilot project in Baden-Württemberg	IHK Stuttgart (English: Chamber of Industry and Commerce)

Legend: AQ = Advisors for foreigners seeking recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualification; E = Regional and national experts; S = Staff at bodies conducting skills assessments; T = Training providers for skills recognition candidates
The interviewees' proper family names are listed, as no interviewee opted for a pseudonym.
Source: Author.

3.2.2. Findings

The interview with Mr Ertunc (21 June 2017), the coordinator of the regional IQ Network headquartered in Mannheim, confirmed that the IQ Network is an important player in the skills recognition landscape in Baden-Württemberg. As explained in Section 2.4.4.4, the IQ Network (*Integration durch Qualifizierung Netzwerk*, English: Network for the integration through

qualification) is a national advisory service for holders of foreign vocational or professional qualifications. For the period 2015-2018, the IQ Network prioritised the provision of advisory services and up-skilling courses for skills recognition candidates – at the time of our interview, most were provided for health care professionals – and intercultural training for regional actors, both of which are potentially important aspects in refugees' skills recognition. Mr Ertunc knew all stakeholders relevant to the recognition procedure for foreign vocational and professional qualifications under Germany's Federal Recognition Act (for occupations governed by Federal Law) and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (for occupations governed by Baden-Württemberg's law) and functioned as a gatekeeper. He kindly promised to facilitate access to future interview partners, including the regional IQ Network centres and cooperation partners, such as the Chambers of commerce and industry (IHKs) and the Chambers of crafts and Trades (HWKs), jobcentres, municipalities, VET colleges and training providers. Additionally, aware that my main interest lay in measures for the recognition of NFIVOS accessible to refugees, he encouraged me to look at the online self-assessments software packages MySkills and AiKomPass, the PerF programme for refugees, and the external exam.

The interviews with the advisors of the IQ Network centres in Freiburg and Stuttgart, Mrs Rey (26 June 2017), Mrs Gronau and Mrs Rudel (28 June 2017), confirmed that many of the people currently seeking advice about the recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications have a refugee background. Between 2015 and 2016, the IQ Network centres in Baden-Württemberg observed increasing interest from refugees, rising from 40 percent to 70 percent of all requests (Gronau and Rudel, 28 June 2017). The interviewees also mentioned a number of challenges and advantages in the advising of refugees, detailed in Section 5.2.4.2.1 of Chapter 5.

The interview with Mrs Herman (23 June 2017), coordinator of training for foreign physicians at the further education institute Bfw (*Berufsfortbildungswerk,* English: Vocational further training facility) in Stuttgart, confirmed that some of their training participants have a refugee background and that there had been an increase in doctors from Iraq and Syria. Doctors whose foreign qualifications do not fulfil all the skills requirements of the German

medical diploma are obliged to pass a knowledge exam (*Kenntnisprüfung*) (BMBF, 2016a). Given the complexity and language requirements of the exam, many foreign doctors wishing to practice in Germany participate in preparatory training such as the eight-month one offered by Bfw. Demand has in fact repeatedly exceeded the provider's training capacity, according to Mrs Herman.

The interview with Mrs Dr Breusing (23 June 2017), the coordinator of the ValiKom pilot project in Baden-Württemberg headquartered at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (*Industrie- und Handelskammer*, IHK) in Stuttgart, highlighted the political relevance of mechanisms that make NFIVOS visible. While the ValiKom pilot initially only targeted low-qualified but skilled Germans, since 2015, it has been opened up to refugees. The eight chambers of both sectors (Industry and commerce (IHKs) and crafts and trades (*Handwerkskammern*, HWKs) participating in the Germany-wide pilot each accepted 20 candidates (see for more details Footnote 47, p. 185). In Baden-Württemberg, one ValiKom participant was a refugee. Subsequent to our fruitful interview, unfortunately, the national project leader of ValiKom did not give permission for future research collaboration; therefore, further insights about the potential usefulness of ValiKom for refugees were gained from other sources.

My preliminary fieldwork confirmed the suitability of Baden-Württemberg as the research site for subsequent data collection. In the face of the migrant influx in 2015-2016, I found skills recognition to be a topic of political concern that had not yet been researched. Through my interviews I discovered that the infrastructure for the formal recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications was well established and used by refugees. At the same time, my interviewees confirmed the impression that I had gained from the literature that, apart from the ongoing ValiKom pilot project and the possibility to sit a final apprenticeship exam as an external candidate under the provisions of Germany's long-established external exam, Germany did not offer a procedure that formally recognised NFIVOS. This was likely to pose a problem for many of the recently arrived refugees who did not possess formal vocational or professional qualifications but who had acquired their vocational skills in informal

and non-formal ways. Nevertheless, according to my interviewees, there were a number of diagnostic skills assessments that would make NFIVOS visible without formally recognising them, including various non-standardised approaches, the PerF programme for refugees, the new MySkills software package for use by the public employment service, and the AiKomPass self-assessment software in the metal and electronics industry. Given the lack of analyses of the suitability of Germany's skills assessment and recognition arrangements for refugees, focusing my study on this aspect seemed appropriate. In view of the existence of the well-established procedures for the recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications, I decided to also include analysis of the latter in order to infer challenges and facilitating factors that could equally apply to the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS. The willingness of my first interviewees to share their experiences and to put me in touch with other relevant stakeholders rightly indicated that questions of access to study participants would not be critical during my data collection.

Overall, my initial field exploration helped me to formulate the above-mentioned research questions for which I developed a case study-based research design that is described below.

3.3. Research design

Informed by my literature review and preliminary fieldwork, I created the exploratory conceptual framework explained below and a case study-based research design in order to obtain the evidence required to address my research questions.

3.3.1. The exploratory conceptual framework

The exploratory conceptual framework explained here reflects my understanding of my research field after the initial literature review and preliminary fieldwork and before my extended data collection in Baden-Württemberg. Mapping the variables, factors and theoretical concepts, which at that time, seemed likely to be meaningful, helped me to focus my

subsequent data collection and analysis. Additionally, its exploratory nature allowed me to update the framework as my understanding of the field grew more nuanced (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Through an iterative process of analytical induction (see Section 3.5.3) I was able to transform this exploratory framework into this study's final conceptual framework presented in Figure 8 (p. 213) in Section 6.1.1 of Chapter 6 that is grounded in my data and reflects my research findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Smelser & Baltes, 2001).

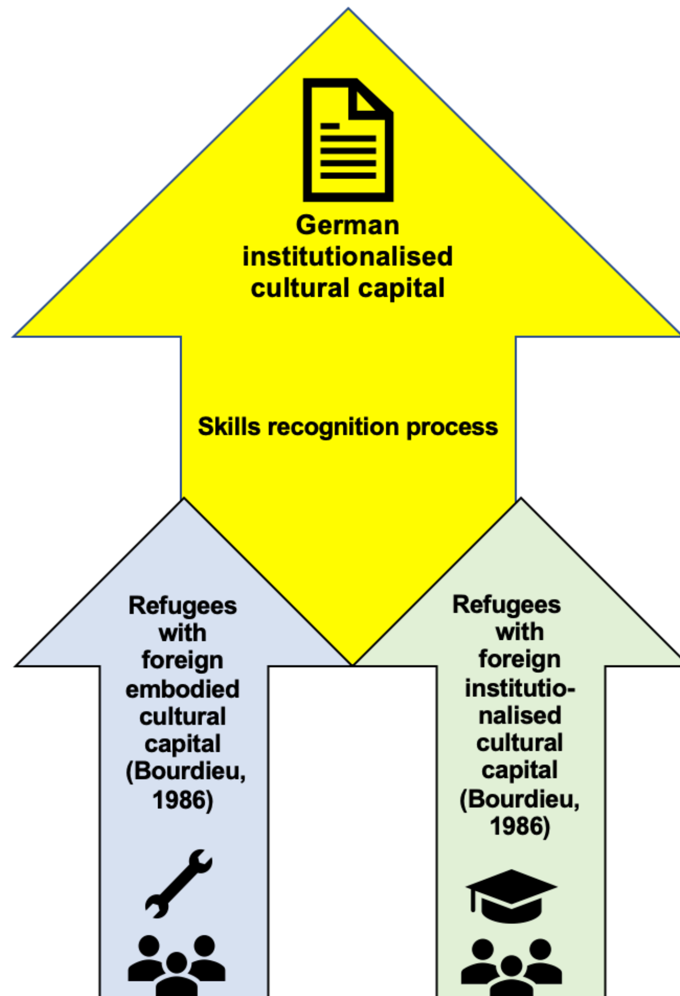
As explained in Chapter 2, my focus on refugees' skills recognition is set in the wider context of their integration into Germany's society. While integration encompasses dimensions as diverse as employment, housing, education and health (Ager & Strang, 2004, 2008, 2010), the scope of this thesis is limited to employment. In line with policymakers and researchers (see e.g. European Commission et al., 2016; Liebig & Degler, 2017; OECD, 2016c, 2016b, 2017a), I argue that the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS is beneficial for their goal of finding a job related to the skills that they hold and is of particular relevance in Germany's regulated labour market where often only formal education and training diplomas provide access to well-paid jobs (Fasani et al., 2018; Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016; Wehrle et al., 2018) (see for more details Section 2.4.1).

In turn, I do not seek to verify this benefit but rather focus on and analyse skills recognition itself as a process prior to refugees' entry into Germany's labour market. My focus on the process is justified because most existing research has been concerned with the effects of skills recognition on individuals, groups, organisations and countries (Diedrich, 2017). However, skills recognition is more than just a result, it is a multi-stage process (Bencivenga, 2017; Diedrich, 2017; Michelson, 1996). As little attention has been paid to this process so far, my research seeks to shed light on the practices, actors, interests and power dynamics involved in the skills recognition process in Baden-Württemberg.

Against this background, my exploratory framework in Figure 2 depicts an open-ended process that refugees seeking skills recognition embark on and that ideally culminates in employment. I postulated that refugees' NFIVOS as well as their vocational or professional

qualifications can be considered cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense (1986) (see Section 2.2.2.3 on Bourdieu).

Figure 2. The exploratory conceptual framework



Source: Author.

Despite overlaps with the concept of human capital, popularised by economists such as Gary Becker (1975; 1976), Bourdieu's cultural capital is broader and helps reveal social inequality (Aziz, 2015). Rather than merely indicating knowledge and technical skills measurable by formal training and economic productivity, Bourdieu's cultural capital designates a wide range of cultural resources (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Nee & Sanders, 2001). They include formal educational credentials (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) in addition to manners, tastes, language style (see Bourdieu, 1984), and notably informal knowledge of relevance to this thesis (see Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu (1984), when these cultural resources are valued by their holders' social settings (or fields) and can

be converted into other forms of capital (economic and social), they become cultural capital and confer social distinction to their holders. Importantly, as cultural capital is acquired through being part of a particular class it creates a sense of collective identity. As a result, cultural capital becomes a source of social inequality because certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others and can help or prevent social mobility (Aziz, 2015). According to Wagner (2010, p. 70), Bourdieu intended his cultural capital concept to expose 'the way in which social stratification, particularly class-based inequality, was acquired, perpetuated, and reinforced'.

While Bourdieu mentioned neither NFIL nor vocational skills as cultural capital, I conceptualised refugees' NFIVOS and vocational and professional qualifications acquired in their home countries as foreign 'embodied cultural capital' (shown in blue in Figure 2) and foreign 'institutionalised cultural capital' (shown in green in Figure 2) (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 244; 247). This conceptualisation seems justified because, in their home countries, refugees' NFIVOS and vocational and professional qualifications were valued and recognised as cultural capital. This allowed them to exchange their cultural capital into economic and social capital, in the form of employment and social networks, to ensure their socio-economic standing (Swartz, 2018). However, as discussed in the literature review of Chapter 2, Germany, as refugees' new host country, is likely to question the value of their foreign cultural capital, possibly leading to their decredentialisation or the devaluation of their qualifications and skills. In a way, this questioning of refugees' cultural capital can be seen as a way in which social inequality between nationals of developed and less developed nations is perpetuated and reinforced (Wagner, 2010). Germany as the highly developed economy makes it difficult for persons from less developed countries to gain recognition of their foreign cultural capital and to access skilled jobs that confer social distinction.

There have been numerous attempts to theorise cultural capital in migration studies (e.g. Erel, 2010; Nee & Sanders, 2001; Zhou, 2005), although not with a specific focus on refugees' NFIVOS and foreign vocational or professional qualifications. This thesis follows in the footsteps of Umut Erel (2010, p. 649) who criticised human capital approaches and instead put forward Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital because of its capacity to explore

migrants' dynamic role and agency 'to form and transform cultural capital' while being sensitive to power relations. She used the image of migrant's rucksack to point out the advantages of Bourdieusian approaches to cultural capital. According to her (Erel, 2010, p. 649), while human capital theorists conceptualise cultural capital 'as a key', Bourdieusian scholars see it as a 'treasure chest consisting of language skills, knowledge about customs and lifestyles, professional qualifications etc.' that migrants put into their rucksacks. Once in their country of immigration, migrants unpack their rucksack and, according to human capital approaches, would see if their key fits the 'keyhole' of the country's cultural system. By contrast, Bourdieusian approaches would expect migrants to engage in bargaining about the value of their cultural treasures with the country's institutions and people. While their treasures would often be undervalued, migrants could add new skills and treasures to their chest in order to create mechanisms of validation of their cultural capital (Erel, 2010).

In the same vein, refugees with NFIVOS and foreign credentials in Baden-Württemberg proactively seek recognition of their foreign cultural capital. As explained above, refugees holding formally recognised foreign or German institutionalised cultural capital are likely to fare better in Germany's labour market than those with only foreign embodied cultural capital or with unrecognised foreign institutionalised cultural capital. With this in mind, I propose to conceptualise the skills recognition process (shown in yellow in Figure 2) as refugees' attempt to transform their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). In order to explore the associated practices, actors, interests and power dynamics, I draw on Bourdieu's sociological work (Bourdieu, 1977b, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996) which revolves around his different forms of capital (cultural, social and economic) and his other key concepts of habitus, dispositions, field and symbolic violence already mentioned in Section 2.2.2.3.

With this exploratory conceptual framework in mind, I developed the case-study research design below to identify obstacles and enabling factors in the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS in Baden-Württemberg.

3.3.2. Case studies

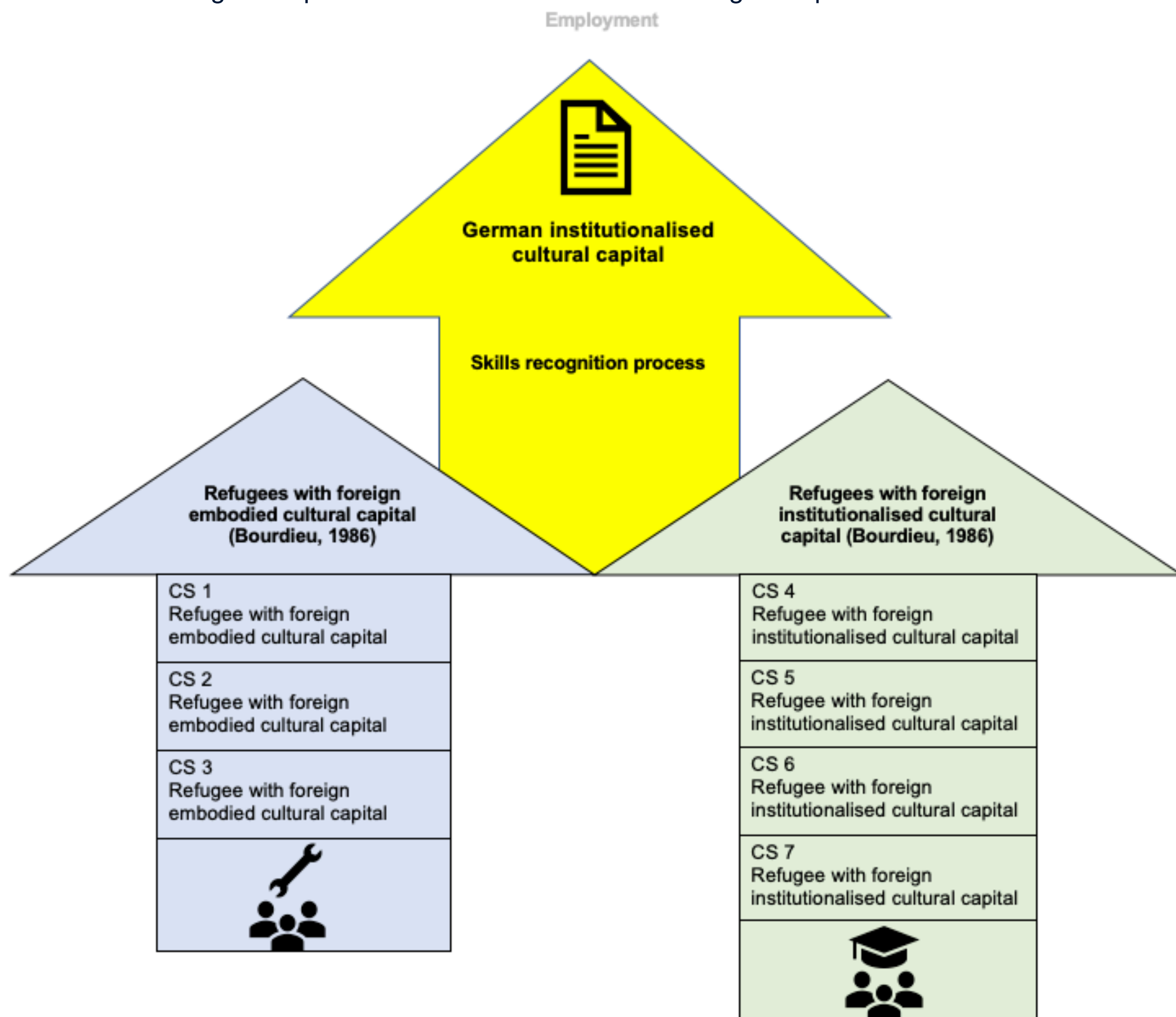
In order to collect data to answer the research questions, I created two sets of multiple case studies, focusing on individual refugees (the blue and green lower part of the exploratory conceptual framework in Figure 2, p. 75) and the available skills assessment and recognition processes in Baden-Württemberg (the yellow upper part in Figure 2). Case studies seemed to be appropriate because they involve an 'empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon [the skills recognition process in this thesis] within its real life context [of newly arrived refugees in Baden-Württemberg] using multiple sources of evidence [which are explained in the next Section 3.4]' (Robson, 2002, p. 146). By triangulating these different data sources for each case study as well as selecting multiple case studies per case study set I intended to add credibility to my findings and make them more transferable and dependable (on this see also Sections 3.7.2 and 3.7.3) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

3.3.2.1. Case study set of individual refugees

My first multiple case study set consisted of seven case studies of individual refugees. It provided data for my first operational research question about refugees' experiences of skills assessment and recognition processes. As illustrated below in Figure 3 and detailed in Section 3.4.2.1, my final sample included three refugees who possessed foreign embodied cultural capital (shown in blue) and four refugees who held foreign institutionalised cultural capital (shown in green).

Figure 3. Case study set 1 of refugees

RQ1: How do refugees experience skills assessment and recognition processes?



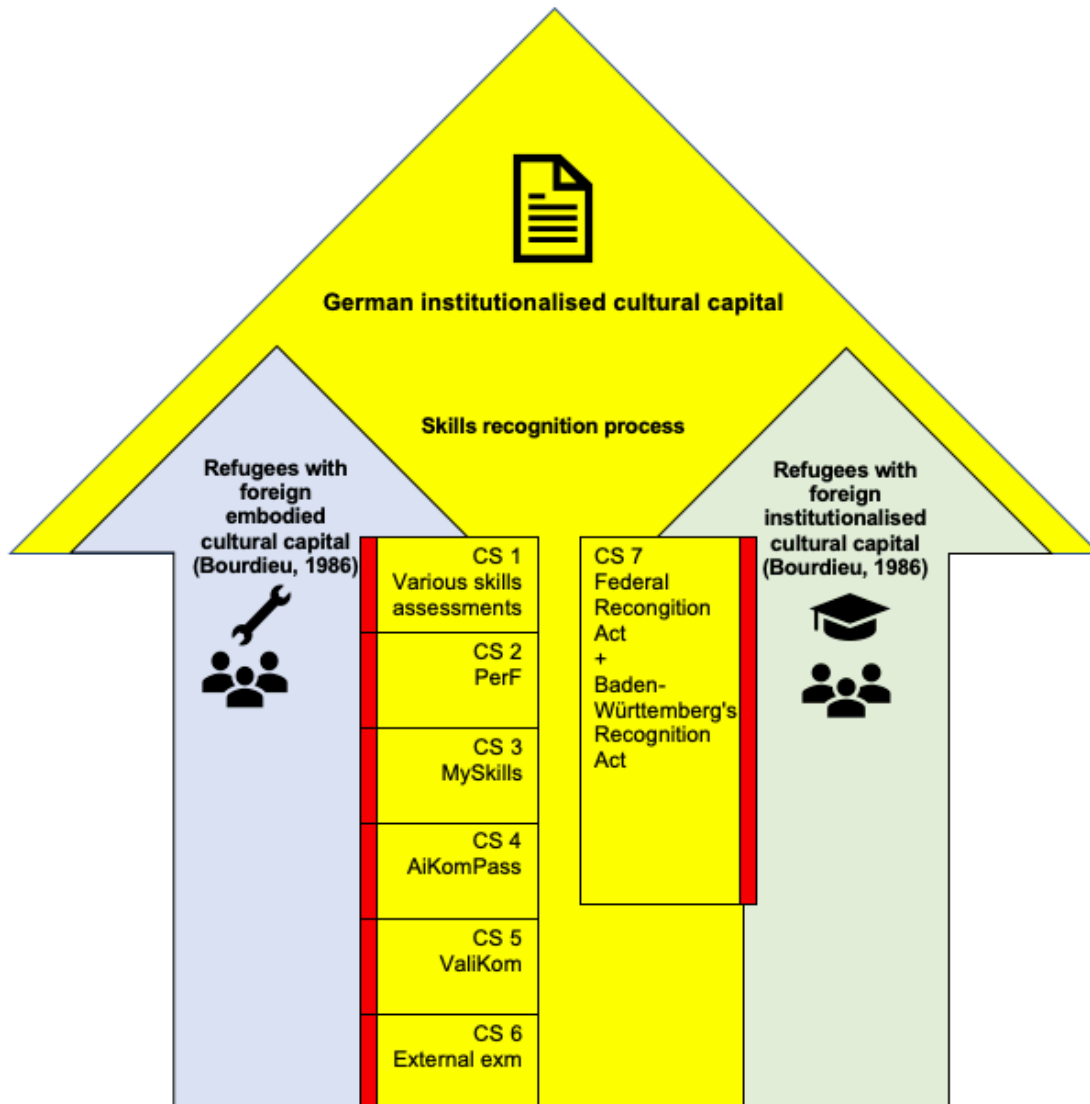
Source: Author.

3.3.2.2. Case study set of skills assessment and recognition arrangements

My second set of case studies addressed my second operational research question about the suitability of skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Baden-Württemberg for refugees. I defined the suitability for refugees as the extent to which the characteristics of an arrangement meet refugees' needs, expecting to learn about refugees' needs from my first case study set (on this see Section 5.2). In Figure 4 below, the suitability is shown as the red overlaps between, on the one hand, seven arrangements, which functioned as case studies in this case study set, and, on the other hand, refugees with foreign embodied (in blue) and with institutionalised (in green) cultural capital.

Figure 4. Case study set 2 of skills assessment and recognition arrangements

RQ2: How suitable are skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Baden-Württemberg for refugees?



Source: Author.

In order to identify the challenges and aspects that made an arrangement un/suitable for the recognition of refugees' NFIVOS, I decided to use as my case studies the seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements mentioned by the literature and my informants during the preliminary fieldwork (see Sections 2.4.2 and 3.2.2). Four of these arrangements were merely diagnostic skills assessments that were accessible to refugees with NFIVOS but, crucially, lacked a formal recognition aspect. In Figure 4, they are numbered as case studies 1-4 and touch the blue arrow to the left that represents refugees' foreign embodied cultural

capital. They included various non-standardised skills assessments, the PerF programme that helped refugees identify their vocational skills through job placements, the MySkills skills assessment software that informed staff of the public employment service about jobseekers' skills, and the AiKomPass skills self-assessment in the metal and electronics industries in Baden-Württemberg. Case studies 5 and 6 both came closer to formally recognising NFIVOS and consisted of the ValiKom pilot project that aimed to establish a procedure for the validation of NFIL and the external exam that allowed skilled candidates without prior formal vocational education and training to sit the final apprenticeship exam of a recognised trade of Germany's dual VET system.

In addition, case study 7 revolved around the recognition procedures for foreign vocational or professional qualifications under Germany's 2012 Federal Recognition Act (*Anerkennungsgesetz des Bundes*)[30] and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (*Landesanerkennungsgesetz Baden-Württemberg*, LAnGBW)[31] that was adapted to the Federal Recognition Act. Although the procedures granted formal recognition to foreign vocational and professional qualifications (rather than NFIVOS), visible as the green box in Figure 4, I hoped to gain insights that would be of relevance also to a discussion about the obstacles and facilitators of the formal recognition of refugees' foreign embodied cultural capital.

It is important to note that university degrees corresponding to broader occupational profiles (e.g. social and natural scientists) are subject to a different recognition procedure under the Central Office for Foreign Education (*Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen*, ZAB) and were not the focus of this thesis (IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2017a). Vocational

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[30] The Federal Recognition Act (see for legal text Bundesrepublik Deutschland (2011)) is an omnibus act that comprises several laws and amendments to existing laws and relates to over 600 occupations and professions governed by federal law. Its first article comprises the Federal Vocational and Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (*Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz*, BQFG) and the remaining articles explain adaptations and amendments to professional and vocational laws, such as the Crafts and Trades Regulations Code and the Federal Medical Code and the Nursing Act (BMBF, 2019g).

[31] The Recognition Act of Baden-Württemberg (see for legal text Land Baden-Württemberg (2013) governs at regional level the formal recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications that relate to occupations and professions not covered by the Federal Recognition Act (BMBF, 2019i).

and professional qualifications are those that relate to clearly defined occupations. At the time of data collection in early 2018, Germany's Recognition Act related to over 600 occupations governed by federal law, which included the 350 unregulated trades of Germany's dual VET system, 100 regulated master craftsperson occupations, and around 40 nationally regulated professions, such as medical doctors (BMBF, 2019g; Braun, 2012). Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act covered about 260 professions and occupations not covered by the Recognition Act but governed by the federal state law of Baden-Württemberg. These included, among others, 160 unregulated occupations and regulated professions such as teacher, nurse, early years teacher, social worker and engineer (BMBF, 2019g; IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2019). Under both laws, the recognition procedure assessed the equivalency of the foreign vocational or professional qualifications with the German reference qualifications and could result in the confirmation of full, partial or no equivalency.

The next section describes my approach to the collection of data for these two sets of case studies.

3.4. Data collection

I chose multiple data collection methods for the sets of case studies. They included unstructured informant interviews (N=7) and semi-structured respondent interviews (N=53), observations (N=14), and document analysis (N=49). I used interviews to learn about stakeholders' experiences with skills assessment and recognition processes, observations to understand their actions, and document analysis to contrast these first-hand findings with secondary sources (Robson, 2002).

I collected data for six months between January and June 2018 in Baden-Württemberg, the third placed German federal state in terms of the number of persons seeking protection (after North-Rhine-Westphalia and Bavaria) and of recognised refugees (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018b, 2018a). By the end of 2016 when this doctoral research began, there were 1.6 million persons seeking protection in Germany, of whom 190,100 were in Baden-

Württemberg. This represented 1.7 percent of the state's population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018b). The state's thriving economy promised to make the region comparatively more able to offer refugees employment opportunities than other federal states (Statistisches Landesamt, 2017).

As a result of the German context of this study, most data were collected in German and required translation. The implications of this together with my sampling approach and my three data collection methods will be discussed below.

3.4.1. Sampling approach

Given time and resource constraints, I used purposive sampling for documents and study participants that seemed relevant for my two sets of case studies. Such non-probability sampling appeared suitable, as I did not intend to make statistical generalisations beyond my sample (Robson, 2002). Its main drawback was the risk of introducing data bias given that I chose the documents myself and preselected study participants whose contributions were then voluntary (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Related to this issue, I will discuss the transferability of my findings in Section 3.7.2.

I found many of my study participants through interviewees at regional agencies and charities. This 'snowball sampling', described by Robson (2002, p. 142) as a type of purposive sampling, meant that my study participants were largely composed of people at or in touch with these organisations. Given that engagement with these services is dependent on knowledge of German, all of my refugee interviewees ended up being sufficiently proficient in German to participate in my interviews without the help of a translator.

My sampling started with determining the three analytical levels listed in Table 4 below, to which I could assign my study participants. Moreover, I created preliminary interviewee categories which, by the end of my fieldwork, amounted to the 12 categories, described and coded [in square brackets] also in Table 4.

Table 4. Analytical levels and interviewee categories

Analytical level	[Code] Interviewee categories
Refugee	[RefQ] Refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications
	[RefS] Refugees without qualifications but with NFIVOS
	[Ref] Refugees without either foreign vocational or professional qualifications or NFIVOS
Operational	People working with refugees and/or on skills recognition: [AS] Advisors who help refugees to receive recognition of their NFIVOS at IQ Network service points
	[AQ] Advisors who help refugees to receive formal recognition of their foreign qualification at IQ Network service points or the Chambers of Crafts and Trades (*Handwerkskammern*, HWKs) and Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*Industrie- und Handelskammern*, IHKs)
	[Job and AA] Staff at the public jobcentres and employment agencies (*Arbeitsagenturen*, AA)
	[T] Training providers
	[S] Staff at bodies conducting skills assessments
	[D] Staff at competent authorities deciding about the outcome of applications for the recognition of foreign vocational credentials at the HWKs and IHKs, the regional Chamber of Pharmacists, the regional Chamber of Engineers, and Stuttgart and Tübingen Regional Councils
	[Emp] Employers
	[V] Volunteers and professional coaches of volunteers who support refugees' labour market integration
Strategic	[E] regional and national experts on skills recognition arrangements, for instance at the regional Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration in Stuttgart, the Federal Institute for Vocational Research (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung,* BIBB) in Bonn and the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag,* DIHK) in Berlin

Source: Author.

Apart from the refugee interviewee category which would obviously feed into my first case study set, I did not predetermine for which specific case my other interviewee categories would provide data. Naturally, people at the operational and strategic levels appeared useful sources for the seven case studies of skills assessment and recognition arrangements of my second case study set. However, subsequent data analysis proved that I could often use data from any one interview for several cases. For instance, data from my interview with the deputy division manager of the Chamber of Crafts and Trades (HWK) Mannheim Mr Kettner (21 February 2018) fed into the following three case studies: the Syrian assistant electrician Mr Alyoussef (Section 4.2.3.1), the various skills assessments (Section 5.2.1.1), and the PerF programme (Section 5.2.1.2).

I considered email to be the most appropriate way of establishing contact because it allowed the recipients time to consider whether they felt comfortable with the idea of becoming a study participant. In my introductory email, I presented myself and my research project, attached my project description and consent form for their information (see Appendix 1 (p. 275) and Appendix 2 (p. 277)), and requested an interview appointment. Aware of possible language issues, I kept communication straightforward in initial written exchanges with refugees.

For my six-month period of data collection in 2018, I first drew on my initial informants from my preliminary fieldwork in June 2017 (see Section 3.2) to identify further study participants. Notably, the aforementioned coordinator of the IQ Network of Baden-Württemberg Mr Ertunc acted as a helpful gatekeeper by putting me in touch with valuable contacts.[32] After careful background screening, most of the persons I contacted served me as interviewees and some also as observation participants. In turn, many of them referred me to further prospective study participants (Yin, 2009).

I concurrently continued using purposive sampling for the interviewee categories for which I still lacked participants. In addition, my previous work for the OECD and one of my Transfer of Status examiners, Prof. Ertl, helped me gain access to experts at the national strategic level because I could refer to previous work cooperation and Prof. Ertl provided an invaluable reference. There were only two instances in which I struggled to gain access. They included the aforementioned refusal from the national project leader of the ValiKom pilot project to grant me permission to work with the regional ValiKom coordinator, whom I had already interviewed during my preliminary fieldwork (see Section 3.2.2); and difficulties to access situations of skills assessments, as further described in the framework of my observations in Section 3.4.2.1. Overall, my study participants were more prepared than I had anticipated to share their experiences with and opinions about skills assessment and recognition arrangements and to help me find further study participants.

[32] I only used pseudonyms for persons who wished so.

My purposive sampling resembled theoretical sampling used in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as it was not predetermined quota sampling but evolved during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Coleman & O'Connor, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During my initial data analysis in the field, I discovered new dimensions that steered me towards collecting further data. After six months of fieldwork, consisting of 60 interviews with 74 interviewees, 14 observations and 49 documents detailed below, I reached a point that resembled data saturation. Few new individuals were being referred to me, evidence started to repeat itself and cursory data analysis suggested that I had sufficient material to address my research questions.

The next section turns to my data collection through interviews.

3.4.2. Interviews

Among my interviewees, I distinguished between those with and those without a refugee background. Based on this distinction, I opted for two interview techniques because I required different types of information and had to consider language issues. With refugees, I conducted unstructured interviews, or what Powney and Watts (1987) term informant interviews. I deemed this to be a suitable technique because my primary concern were their experiences with skills assessment and recognition processes, their life stories and opinions. By letting the conversation develop freely I aimed to make them feel at ease and open up to me (Johnson, 2001; Mathers et al., 1998). The last point was of particular importance because it involved building trust and overcoming language issues. During the interviews, my refugee informants spoke German (and in one case English) and not their native languages. While they had learned German as a second language, I am a German native speaker (and very familiar with the English language) and therefore found myself in a linguistically comparatively more comfortable position than my interlocutors. By opting for an unstructured interview, I sought to empower them both as active subjects and linguistically because this interview method allowed them to choose the level of detail and pace of their accounts (Temple & Young, 2004; UK Data

Service, 2019). Section 3.6 on ethical issues will further discuss aspects of language in the interviews.

Given that all of my interviewees without a refugee background were German native speakers, I did not have to address possible language imbalances with them. As a result, I opted for semi-structured respondent interviews which allowed me to seek specific responses to a set of predetermined open-ended questions. Compared to structured interviews, this technique offered me greater freedom to modify my enquiry according to the interview situation (Robson, 2002). For instance, I could probe my respondents to elaborate on their initial replies or to follow up on interesting topics introduced by them (Mathers et al., 1998). Section 3.7 will describe how my data collection methods may have affected the trustworthiness of my data.

The next two sections explain my interview sample and the interview process.

3.4.2.1. Interviewee sample

As noted above, in total I conducted 60 interviews with 74 interviewees. Seven interviews were unstructured informant interviews with eight refugees and the remaining 53 were semi-structured interviews with 66 respondents at the operational and strategic levels. Table 5 below provides an overview of my final interviewee sample. It also displays the three analytical levels, already described above, the interviewee's category and code, the number of interviewees in each interviewee category, and the interview focus.

I conducted informant interviews with eight refugees of whom three had acquired NFIVOS and four held foreign vocational or professional qualifications. One additional refugee possessed neither which led me to exclude this Syrian teenager from my first case study set, leaving seven in-depth studies of refugees (see Chapter 4). The remaining 66 respondents at the operational and strategic levels were mainly part of my second case study set (see Chapter 5). However, some also contributed to my refugee case studies when they had been in direct contact with one of my refugee informants. While two thirds of my 74 interviewees were women, only one quarter of my eight refugee interviewees was female. This is most likely a

reflection of the fact that in Germany, more women work in the German social service sector and that most refugees who arrived in 2015-2016 were male (BpB, 2013; Rich, 2016).

My final interview sample varied from my initial sampling plan. While I had originally aimed at around 40 interviews, the final total was 60 interviews (with 74 interviewees). This stems from the fact that more actors than anticipated populated the skills recognition landscape in Baden-Württemberg.

After Table 5 below, the next section sheds light on my interview process and follow-up activities.

Table 5. Final interviewee sample

Analytical level	Interviewee category	Code	#	Interview focus
Refugee	Refugee with NFIVOS	RefS	3	Incentives for engaging in skills recognition, hopes, career goals, obstacles, work experience in Germany
Refugee	Refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications	RefQ	4	Incentives for engaging in skills recognition, result of application, career goals, obstacles
Refugee	Refugee without NFIVOS and foreign qualifications	Ref	1	Hopes, career goals, obstacles, work experience in Germany
Operational	Employers at small, medium and large enterprises	Emp	6	Experience with refugees as trainees and employees, adaptation of company to refugee employees
Operational	Volunteers and professional coaches of volunteers supporting refugees' labour market	V	4	Experience with refugees' labour market integration and use of volunteering
Operational	Staff at employment agencies (employment agencies and jobcentres) referring refugees with vocational skills to appropriate actors	AA and AAJob	6	Refugees' demand for skills recognition, funding arrangements, strengths and challenges and possible improvements
Operational	Advisors for foreigners seeking recognition for their foreign vocational or professional qualification (e.g. at IQ Network recognition service points, Chambers of Crafts and Trade / Industry and Commerce)	AQ	8	
Operational	Staff at regional agencies deciding about applications for the recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications (e.g. Stuttgart and Tübingen Regional Councils, BaWü's Chamber of Pharmacists, BaWü's Chamber of Engineers, Chambers of Crafts and Trades, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, FOSA Institute)	D	6	Typical steps of skills recognition procedure, workload, staffing, perception of use of skills recognition to refugees, obstacles and possible improvements
Operational	Training providers for skills recognition candidates	T	4	Experience with refugees using training, challenges and possible improvements
Operational	Advisors for refugees without foreign vocational or professional qualifications but work experience (e.g. at chambers, IQ Network service points, charities, education providers)	AS	9	Experience with refugees, their career goals, strengths and weaknesses of Germany's education and labour market
Operational	Staff at bodies conducting skills assessments	S	7	Experience with skills assessments and refugees them, strength and challenges
Strategic	Regional and national experts	E	16	Use of skills recognition measures to refugees
		TOTAL	**74**	

Source: Author.

3.4.2.2. Interview process

My interviews required preparations, implementation and follow-up work. Preparations involved logistical arrangements, background readings, and the development of interview guides containing sets of both generic and interviewee-specific questions, which some interviewees requested prior to our interview (see for a sample Appendix 4 (p. 283)).

My interviews generally lasted 30-60 minutes. I conducted all but one interview in German. The exception took place in English at the request of my refugee informant, Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah. When I spoke to refugees, I was careful to avoid misunderstandings by expressing myself in simple and slow-paced German.

In terms of interview structure, I divided my unstructured informant interviews into two, and my semi-structured interviews into four parts. During the introductory part in both interview types, I aimed to establish trust and build the confidence of my interviewees. I began by introducing my research topic and explained the consent form and invited the interviewees to present themselves. The second interview part differed between unstructured and semi-structured interviews. I would ask my refugee informants to tell me about their work in their home country and their experience with skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Germany. In my semi-structured interviews, after the introduction, I always raised questions that the interviewees almost certainly knew about to make them feel comfortable. Subsequently, I would raise more challenging questions. Towards the end, I left space for my respondents to ask questions.

More than two thirds of my 60 interviews were in person and involved me travelling by train to 14 different cities in Baden-Württemberg.[33] The rest were by phone to minimise travel expenses. Most of my 53 respondent interviews took place in their offices and some in meeting rooms. Of my seven informant interviews, I conducted two at the refugees' homes, one on a

[33] These included from south to north Freiburg, Konstanz, Radolfzell, Meersburg, Friedrichshafen, Singen, Ulm, Tübingen, Rottweil, Calw, Stuttgart, Heilbronn, Heidelberg and Mannheim.

bench in a market square, one at a café, and two in training institutes. My telephone interviews differed from in-person meetings, as my respondents often wanted to get to the point more quickly, meaning there was less time to build trust through initial casual talk (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I therefore used my introductory email to reassure prospective phone interviewees that it was safe to talk to me by pointing out the people who had advised me to contact them.

Two thirds of my interviews were one-to-one meetings. The rest involved two or three interlocutors which meant that not only my questions but also the relationship between the interviewees influenced what was said (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I never requested more than one person to attend my interviews, but sometimes team leaders brought knowledgeable staff members in, as happened for instance at the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs of Baden-Württemberg, or staff members arrived accompanied by their superiors. All participants of my multiple-person interviews seemed attuned to each other and complemented each other's answers.

I always took notes during the interviews which forced me to listen carefully and helped me formulate follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although this thesis is written in English, I preferred to take the notes in German because, given the German-speaking environment, this was the easiest and fastest way of recording. In addition, when my interviewees granted permission, I also audio recorded, ensuring this was as unobtrusive as possible, which added authenticity to my data. Most interviewees appreciated being recorded as it ensured that I would communicate their statements accurately. I did not audio record, however, when the material was personal, as was the case for all of my interviews with refugees.

Directly after the interviews, I always jotted down field notes (in German) to document my impressions. In cases where I only had notes, I also reread them straight away, wrote down in full paraphrased points, and typed them on my computer. In all other cases in which I had audio recordings; I transcribed the interviews on the days on which I did not conduct interviews. While the transcriptions were very time-consuming, they provided me with an accurate record

of my interviews and doing so in the field facilitated initial data analysis which informed further data collection.

I did not translate my entire transcriptions into English in order to preserve all the original meanings and nuances (Birbili, 2000; Temple & Young, 2004). However, during the drafting process, I translated direct quotations from German into English, a point further discussed in Section 3.5 after explaining my approach to observations and document analysis.

3.4.3. Observations

I chose observations to collect data that would complement the findings from interviews and document analysis. Rather than relying only on second-hand accounts, I aimed to collect first-hand experience of actors' behaviour in the skills assessment and recognition process using analytical induction, and to verify whether what was being done corroborated what had been claimed in the interviews and documents.

I sought an 'observer-as-participant role' (Gold, 1958 cited in Robson, 2002, p. 198) meaning that I did not take an active part in the situation under observation but that my role as an observer was clear to at least some of the participants from the start (Robson, 2002, p. 198). In practice, the advisors who I observed always knew what the purpose of my presence was. This allowed me not only to observe them working but also to ask questions during breaks. I left the advisors the choice as to how they presented me to their advice-seekers. Some introduced me as a doctoral student, while others preferred to avoid both confusing the advice-seekers and losing time over explanations and simply presented me as a trainee advisor. In both cases, I did not actively participate in the advisory session. However, I still had a role because my presence changed the environment. These so-called 'observer effects' (Robson, 2002, p. 208) raised issues about the credibility of my data, which will be further explored in Section 3.7.1.

The next section explains my sampling approach to the observations.

3.4.3.1. Observation sample

As aforementioned, I also used purposive sampling for the selection of my observation participants, drawing on interviewed informants to gain access to situations of observational interest. I asked interviewee categories AQ, T, S and AS (see Table 5, p. 89) for permission to attend guidance sessions for persons seeking formal recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications, training sessions for skills recognition candidates, skills assessments, and guidance sessions for refugees without foreign qualifications but with NFIVOS.

Unfortunately, it was neither possible to observe training sessions nor skills assessments due to concerns of the respective gatekeepers about the possible impact of my presence on these situations. Consequently, I only observed advisory sessions. Given that there was repetition of activities, I could directly compare between sessions by the same and by different advisors, which I believe rendered my findings more trustworthy. Table 6 below shows that I conducted 14 observations to gain insights for both of my case study sets. All observations focused on advisory sessions, held in German, open to advice-seekers with a refugee background. I distinguished between two sessions that targeted refugees holding only NFIVOS and 12 advisory sessions that were attended by people holding foreign vocational or professional qualifications. Of the latter, nine involved refugees and three were attended by foreigners without a refugee background. I treated the latter as a control group in order to detect differences and similarities between them and refugees.

Table 6. Final observation sample

<table>
<tr><th>Analytical level</th><th>Observation topic</th><th>Code</th><th>Quantity</th><th>Observation focus</th></tr>
<tr><td>Refugee + operational</td><td>Guidance session for persons seeking formal recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications
Attended by refugees</td><td>ORefQ</td><td>9</td><td rowspan="3">Venue and context
Behaviour of participants
Quality of interaction</td></tr>
<tr><td>Operational</td><td>Guidance session for persons seeking formal recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications
Attended by persons WITHOUT a refugee background</td><td>ONoRefQ</td><td>3</td></tr>
<tr><td>Refugee + operational</td><td>Guidance session for refugees without foreign qualifications but with NFIVOS</td><td>ORefS</td><td>2</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="right">TOTAL</td><td>14</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Source: Author.

Three of the four involved advisors and four of the 11 advice-seekers with a refugee background were women, reflecting the situation already noted in my interview sample in Section 3.4.2.1. My final observation sample varies slightly from my initial sampling plan, stemming from the fact that I could only gain access to guidance sessions.

3.4.3.2. Observation process

The preparations for my 14 observations involved arranging appointments and travelling to the venue. I travelled by train to Radolfzell, Rottweil, Stuttgart, and twice to Mannheim. Most advisory sessions under observation took place in the offices of the advisors I had previously interviewed. When the sessions were part of a decentralised service, as was the case in Radolfzell and Rottweil, I met the mobile advisors in charities which were partners of the advisory service. The advisor and I always welcomed the advice-seekers and introduced ourselves. More than two thirds of the advice-seekers were accompanied by someone they knew, most often a volunteer helper, sometimes a family member.

At the request of the advisors, I did not audio record the advisory sessions, but took notes. As explained in the above Section 3.4.2.2, I preferred to take these observation notes in German. During my early observations, I started with descriptive observations (Robson,

2002). With the aim to create low-inference descriptors to ensure data dependability (Seale, 1999), I paid attention to eight descriptive dimensions listed in Table 7.

Table 7. Dimensions guiding the descriptive observations

Dimension	Related questions
Space	Where? The venue, the room, the context?
Actors	Who is present?
Activities	What is being done?
Time	What is the sequence of the observed activities?
Objects	What physical objects play a role?
Speech	What is being said?
Feelings	What is the atmosphere like? Actors' attitudes?
Goals	What are the actors attempting to accomplish?

Source: Author modelled on Spradley's (1980) nine descriptive dimensions.

The next stage involved looking closely at my descriptive observation records. In order to make sense of what was going on, I tried to identify concepts that I had already read about or developed new ones. During later observations, I defined new dimensions more focused on my research questions, set out in Table 8.

Table 8. Dimensions guiding the focused observations

Dimension	Related questions
Advisor's preparedness	How prepared is the advisor for each advice-seeker? Have they prepared specific material in advance?
Advice-seekers' informedness	How informed are the advice-seekers about the skills recognition process? What type of questions do they ask about it?
Advisor's approach	What is the advisor's sequential approach to the meeting?
Advisor's clarity	How understandable are the advisor's explanations? In terms of content and presentation?
Advisee's initiative	How proactive is the advice-seeker?
Advisor's – Advice-seeker's conclusions	What are the advisor's recommendations? How does the advice-seeker react?
Relationship	Has the relationship between those observed changed during the time of the observation? If so, how?

Source: Author.

In later observations I attended to both my low-inference descriptors and more focused dimensions. This helped me cope with the complexity of the observed situations and increased the dependability of my observational data (Robson, 2002). Reflection on my role and the credibility of my data can be found in Section 3.7.

I prepared detailed records shortly after each observation to ensure data accuracy and completeness. Each record contains descriptive and more focused notes, my impressions and interpretative ideas, and reminders to look for additional information.

My analysis of my observation records and further data collection were intertwined. I started analytical induction after my first observations when I was able to formulate an initial definition and hypothetical explanation of the advisory sessions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Robson, 2002). I studied subsequent advisory sessions in the light of these to determine whether they fitted further evidence and reformulated them, if they did not (Smelser & Baltes, 2001). My confidence in them increased with the number of situations that fitted the evidence. My final assertion and explanation are as follows:

Assertion: In the advisory sessions, trained advisors provide advice to refugees seeking recognition of either their foreign vocational or professional qualifications or their undocumented work experience. In the first case, such recognition ideally takes the shape of formal recognition by an authority, and in the second case, employment and upskilling training ideally lead to a formal qualification.

Explanation: Advising is required because foreigners, and in particular third-country nationals such as refugees, lack knowledge of Germany's VET system and qualification-focused labour market. In order to put their vocational skills to good use, the German Government considers formal recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications and social recognition of vocational skills through direct recruitment as desirable. However, given the young average age of most recently arrived refugees, the advisors commonly recommend engaging in a VET programme either in parallel to a procedure for the recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications or, in cases where the candidate does not hold any vocational or professional qualifications, instead of direct employment.

In addition to gathering data from interviews and observations, I also used documents.

3.4.4. Document analysis

Document analysis, as a systematic procedure to review and evaluate documents, not only enabled me to gather facts and background information prior to my interviews and observations but also to triangulate interview and observational data to discover new meanings and relevant questions. Documents often provided me with details that informants had forgotten and allowed me to track changes and developments over time (Bowen, 2009). The first steps of my document analysis process were inspired by Bowen (2009) and O'Leary (2013):

- I gathered pertinent documents (N= 49) through Internet searches and study participants and stored them in my Mendeley referencing software. These included project descriptions and reports, event reports, academic articles and articles in mass media. Most documents were written in German, only around 20 percent were in English (see for on overview of the documents Appendix 3 (p. 279)).
- I explored the documents, while being aware of possible biases. Similar to the social constructivist paradigm, I viewed texts as social facts (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). Rather than firm evidence, texts were produced for a specific purpose and audience and constructed particular representations of what they reported (Silverman, 2007; Yin, 2009).
- Guided by my conceptual framework, I reduced the abundance of material to focus on what appeared to be the most relevant information.
- I analysed the reduced documentary evidence, as described in the next section.

3.5. Data analysis

I analysed my data with a social constructivist attitude (Gergen, 1999), using first and second cycle coding and, within Srivastava and Hopwood's iterative data analysis framework (2009), cross-case analysis, and analytical induction (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I consider my knowledge of the research site 'as the result of relational processes' between my study participants and me 'out of which common understandings emerge' (Gergen, 1999, p. 55).

Rather than trying to find an objective truth, I acknowledge my positionality in this process and in this study's translations, with which this section begins.

3.5.1. Translation issues

Translations were inevitable in this thesis as it was largely based on data collected in German but presented in English. Within the social constructivist paradigm, translating what my interviewees said was problematic because no translation could resolve the political issues involved in representing others (Temple, 1997; Temple & Young, 2004). Translation thus risked jeopardising the credibility of my data, an aspect further discussed in Section 3.7.1. Therefore, I decided to delay the translation of my data for as long as possible in order to preserve the original meanings and nuances because German speakers might construct different ways of seeing social life than English speakers (Temple, 1997; Bogusia Temple & Young, 2004). As a result, I decided against translating my nearly 60 interview transcriptions into English and analysed them in German as they were. It was only during the drafting process that I translated verbatim extracts from my German data, for instance quotations from my interviews. I opted mostly for free rather than literal translations. Although this involved the risk of misrepresenting the meaning of my conversational partners, I chose free translations to ensure the readability of the text (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I will discuss ways in which I still sought to ensure the quality of my translations in Section 3.7.1.

3.5.2. First and second cycle coding

My data collection and first and second cycle coding with the NVivo12 software were intertwined. While still in the field, simultaneous to transcribing interview recordings and processing observation notes, I started coding my transcriptions, observations, fieldnotes, and selected documents.

In a first step, I assigned codes to data chunks in order to summarise them and gain an overview. Some of my codes were deductive and derived from my literature review and

research questions. Other codes emerged progressively alongside my evolving conceptual framework (see Section 3.3.1). According to Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014), such inductive codes are better grounded in the data because they do not try to force-fit the data into pre-existing codes. I distinguished between six code categories, listed in Table 9, which I used as labels for coded sections in addition to the respective deductive or inductive code. For instance, for an evaluative code, this system looked like this: *EC: positive view of ValiKom*. This labelling of codes according to code categories facilitated my subsequent second cycle coding. I coded in English because this thesis is written in English. Unlike my translations of longer quotations, for my *in vivo* codes, I opted for literal translations because it was more important to me to do justice to my participants' short utterances than to improve the readability (Birbili, 2000; Temple & Young, 2004).

Table 9. Overview of code categories used

Code category	Reason
Descriptive code (DC)	Helpful to provide an inventory of topics
In vivo code (IVC)	To honour my study participants' voices
Values code (VC)	To discover their experiences and opinions
Evaluation code (EC)	To identify data that assigns judgment
Causation code (CC)	To discern motives, interrelationships and processes
Hypothesis code (HC)	To (dis)confirm hypotheses and theories

Source: Author modelled on Saldaña (2013).

During my second cycle coding, I used three pattern codes to subsume my six code categories into fewer units of analysis (so-called 'nodes' in the NVivo software), as illustrated in Table 10. This helped me condense my data and discover new leads for further data collection and laid the groundwork for my cross-case analysis described in Section 3.5.4 (Elliott, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2013).

Table 10. Overview of pattern codes

Pattern code	Subsuming the following code types
Themes	DC, IVC, VC
Causes/explanations	EC, CC, HC
Theoretical constructs	HC

Source: Author modelled on Saldaña (2013).

Throughout my coding, I used the annotation and memo options of the NVivo software (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Short annotations allowed me to record my ideas about the data and some of them also became the material of memos in which I tried to synthesise my reflections into higher level analytical meanings.

The following iterative data analysis framework helped me to keep on track with my research objectives.

3.5.3. Iterative framework for qualitative data analysis

In using Srivastava and Hopwood's iterative framework for qualitative data analysis (2009) and analytical induction (Gergen, 1999), I sought both to let my sources speak for themselves and foreground my role in the exploration of refugee users' experiences with skills assessment and recognition arrangements and their suitability for refugee users. The iterative framework comprised the following three questions that provided me with reference points to explicitly engage with my analytical induction process:

- Q1: What are the data telling me?
- Q2: What is it I want to know?
- Q3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?

Answering these questions as I browsed through my data helped me clarify my research lens (see my exploratory conceptual framework in Section 3.3.1) and to formulate initial assertions and explanations of instances in my data (Q1). I then tried to connect them with my research objectives (Q2) and to refine my analytical focus by identifying gaps in my understanding of what was going on (Q3). Subsequently, I looked at additional data from interviews, observations and documents (see data and method triangulation below) and repeated the process of going through Q1-Q3. This allowed me to find answers to my knowledge gaps in the data and to rework my definitions and explanations to reflect relevant findings (Smelser & Baltes, 2001).

As my data consisted of multiple case studies, I needed to compare within and between them, as explained below.

3.5.4. Cross-case analysis

My two sets of multiple case studies (explained in Section 3.3.2) required cross-case analysis. I combined case-oriented and variable-oriented approaches to my cross-case analysis to ensure that I knew my individual case studies well and could generalise from them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). My methods for each approach are displayed in Table 11 and described below.

Table 11. Methods used in case- and variable-oriented approaches to cross-case analysis

Approach	Methods used
Case-oriented	Case study overviews Vignettes Decision modelling Method and data triangulation
Variable-oriented	Conceptual overviews of case studies Method and data triangulation

Source: Author modelled on Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014).

3.5.4.1. Case-oriented approach to cross-case analysis

I looked at configurations, causes and effects within my 14 cases. I ordered them in clusters and created overview tables so that I could compare across cases. I divided my first set of seven refugee case studies into two clusters, the three refugees who possessed NFIVOS (Table 12) and the four refugees who held foreign vocational or professional qualifications (Table 13).

Table 12. Case study overview: refugees with NFIVOS

#	Title	Name	Code	Age	Home country	Skills acquired in home country	Arrival in Germany	City	NFIVOS assessment		Education		Traineeship		Apprenticeship		Job	
									Formal recognition	Without formal rec.	School	Uni	Skills-related	Unrelated	Skills-related	Unrelated	Skills-related	Unrelated
1	Mr	Kobani	RefS 1	30-35	Syria	Tailor	2007	Konstanz	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
2	Mr	Dawod	RefS 2	20-25	Syria	Photo-shop owner	10/2015	Calw	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
3	Mr	Omar	RefS 3	20-25	Iraq (Kurdistan)	Floor tiler and metal worker	12/2015	Tübingen	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

Source: Author.

Table 13. Case study overview: refugees with foreign vocational/professional qualifications

#	Title	Name	Co.	Age	Home country	Skills acquired in home country	Arrival in Germany	City	NFIVOS assessment		Education		Traineeship		Apprenticeship		Job	
									Formal recognition	Without formal rec.	School	Uni	Skills-related	Unrelated	Skills-related	Unrelated	Skills-related	Unrelated
1	Mr	Alyoussef	Ref Q1	25-30	Syria	Assistant electrician	Late 2015	Heidelberg	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
2	Mr	Sharbat	Ref Q2	45-50	Syria	Dentist	06/2014	Meersburg	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
3	Mrs	Jabour	Ref Q3	35-40	Syria	Teacher (maths)	06/2014	Meersburg	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
4	Mr	Ullah	Ref Q4	30-35	Pakistan	Social worker	12/2013	Ulm	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

Source: Author.

In my second case study set, I divided the seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements under study into six assessment and recognition schemes for NFIVOS and the procedures for the recognition of foreign vocational and professional qualifications (Table 14).

Table 14. Case study overview: skills assessment and recognition arrangements

Assessment and recognition schemes for informally and non-formally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS)						**Recognition procedures for foreign vocational and professional qualifications**
Various skills assess-ments	**PerF** (Prospects for refugees)	**MySkills**	**AiKomPass** (only metal + electronics industries)	**ValiKom** (only pilot project)	**External exam**	Germany's **Federal Recognition Act** (including the skills analysis) and **Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act**

Source: Author.

The 14 vignettes in Sections 4.2 and 5.4 of Chapters 4 and 5 describe Tables 12, 13 and 14 in narrative form, highlighting actions and series of events that I took to be representative of my 14 case studies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Through examination of similarities and differences across the cases, I sought to determine the specific conditions under which a finding occurred and used decision modelling to display the pathways available to refugees seeking skills recognition in Baden-Württemberg (see Figure 6 (p. 163) and Figure 7 (p. 167) in Chapter 5).

3.5.4.2. Variable-oriented approach to cross-case analysis

While drafting Chapters 4 and 5, I looked for variables and themes that cut across my 14 cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). While I derived some of them from my exploratory conceptual framework (see Section 3.3.1), I found others through the above-mentioned data coding and analytical induction. I then created conceptual overviews of my case studies. They are displayed in Table 16 (p. 152) and Table 22 (p. 210) in Chapters 4 and 5.

In both my case-oriented and variable-oriented approaches to my cross-case analysis, I triangulated methods and data sources (Denzin, 1988; Patton, 1999). For instance, regarding advisory sessions, I was able to compare data from relevant documents, interviews and observations. For my data source triangulation, I used the data sets that had emerged on the same phenomenon in multiple sites and by different persons. Rather than seeing triangulation as a method for data verification, I used it to discover new meanings and produce a richer account of my research field.

With a view to systematise my thinking into explanations, throughout my iterative data analysis, I used analytical induction (already mentioned in Section 3.5.3). I generated assertions and explanations based on parts of my data, which I revised when I discovered disconfirming evidence. With Q3 of the iterative framework in mind, I then moved on to elaborate generalisations that cover the consistencies discerned in my data. In search of confirmation, I compared these generalisations with existing statements and theories in the literature.

Below I discuss ethical issues of my doctoral study before turning to its limitations.

3.6. Ethical issues

As the researcher I was responsible for my research ethics, even when my study participants were unconcerned about them (Neuman, 2011). I aimed to conduct my research with the highest ethical standards and with special care and sensitivity, following the professional ethical guidelines of the British Education Research Association. The project proposal submitted before the Transfer of Status examination received ethics clearance through the Central University Research Ethics Committee.

All of my study participants were over eighteen years of age. I provided them with an information sheet and consent form in German (see Appendix 1, p. 275, and Appendix 2, p. 277), which I usually attached to my introductory email, so that they had time to review and sign before our meeting. If they had not yet signed the consent form before we met, I would

explain to them the nature of my study and the potential benefits and drawbacks of participation. Contributing to my interviews and observations was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the project at any point. The interviews were only recorded when the interviewees agreed to it. I asked my research participants whether they wished to be referred to by their proper name or a pseudonym. If anonymity was preferred, while transcribing the interviews, I replaced proper names with pseudonyms. If requested, I shared drafts of relevant sections of the research document with my study participants for their review. In order to make the interview a pleasant experience for my participants, I tried to limit interviews to between 30 and 60 minutes. When conducting an observation, I attempted to be as discrete as possible so as to minimise my impact on the situation. All collected interview and observation data is stored on my password-protected computer. The study participants interested in my research results will be provided with a digital copy of the final thesis.

I did my utmost to protect my study participants from any harm, for instance not deceiving them about the research purpose and taking special precautions when working with refugees who might have had traumatic experiences and whose German was sometimes not fluent. As mentioned in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 on my sampling approach and my interviews, all of my refugee informants were sufficiently proficient in German to participate in my interviews without a translator. Yet, I was still aware of the language imbalance between their German as a second language and my comfortable position as a native speaker. I tried to address their linguistic disadvantage by conducting unstructured informant interviews that allowed them to set the pace and depth of our conversation. It is likely that some information got lost because of our use of German or they might have shared more information with me in their native language. However, firstly, I would have struggled to find and pay for translators who would have been willing to travel with me across Baden-Württemberg. Secondly, given that German is the language of Germany’s bureaucracy, our interview situation gave me a realistic idea of possible difficulties faced by refugees to express themselves during the different stages of their skills recognition processes and the power dynamics that might have

occurred. Whilst this approach to interviews might be perceived as exigent for interviewees, it was based on necessity.

In other instances, I found myself wondering what the researcher's proper behaviour would look like. Should I remain the neutral observer or should I become personally involved and intervene? Confronted with my refugee informants' moving life stories, I could not but opt for the latter and sought to help them whenever I could. As I will describe in the next chapter, I supported the assistant electrician Mr Alyoussef to take the right course of action in his complicated skills recognition process. I also put the Syrian family of Mr Sharbat and Mrs Jabour in touch with my parents who live nearby. In addition, I helped the boyfriend of my first refugee informant, the teenage sister of the Syrian tailor Mr Kobani, to get maths tuition so that he could pass his apprenticeship tests and become an optician; and my family in Konstanz now always gets clothes altered at Mr Kobani's local tailor shop. Even if my refugee informants had been less generous with their time and personal experiences, I believe it is the social responsibility of everyone in Germany to help people who have suffered and lost their homes integrate into their new host society.

Regarding my research positionality, I hope that my vignette in the very beginning of Chapter 1, my clearly stated exploratory and final conceptual frameworks in Sections 3.3.1 and 6.1.1, and the description of my data collection and analysis process in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 have helped to demonstrate the ways in which my professional background, assumptions, sampling decisions and analytical techniques have shaped my research (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997).

I describe the limitations and quality criteria of this thesis in the next section.

3.7. Limitations and quality criteria

Given that in qualitative research, much depends on the researcher's skills of interviewing, observing, recording, translating and analysing, my skills, attitudes and personal background undoubtedly affected my research (Ruby, 1980). A different researcher using the same

research questions might have collected different evidence and might have come to different conclusions.

I was the data collector, translator and analyst of the present qualitative study which gives potential for researcher bias and may raise questions about the trustworthiness of my findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In order to allow for a trustworthiness assessment, I consider the following three trustworthiness criteria: credibility, or the confidence in the truth of my findings; transferability, or the degree to which my findings can be transferred to other contexts; and dependability, or the degree to which my findings are consistent over time and spring from my original data. The terminology of these criteria to describe truth value, applicability and consistency of research was coined by Lincoln and Guba (1982; 1985) and differs deliberately from that used in quantitative research. Given the ontological and epistemological differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches, the quantitative trustworthiness criteria of internal validity, external validity and reliability seem unsuitable to judge qualitative research (Anney, 2014; Krefting, 1991). My strategies to increase the trustworthiness of my qualitative study are summarised in Table 15 and described below.

Table 15. Overview of strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness of this study

Trustworthiness criteria	My strategies for enhancing trustworthiness
Credibility	• Reflexivity • Reduction of my observer errors and biases • Ensuring quality of my translations • Prolonged engagement • Multidisciplinary approach • Persistent observation • Triangulation • Use of verbatim extracts • Reduction of subject biases and errors • Reduction of my observer effects: minimal interaction • Reduction of my researcher bias: member checking
Transferability	• Comparison of sample to demographic data • Nominated sample • Thick description
Dependability	• Triangulation • Back translation and consultation with other bilingual speakers • Peer examination • Audit trail

Source: Author drawing on Korstjens & Moser (2018), Krefting (1991) and Lincoln & Guba (1985).

3.7.1. Credibility

The credibility of my findings depends on me as the researcher, the trustworthiness of my data, and the extent to which my account is grounded in that data.

3.7.1.1. Credibility as researcher

Given the inevitability of perceiving, selecting, translating and analysing through my own prism of experience and perspectives (Wallace, 2013), there was the potential for me to introduce what Robson calls 'observer errors and biases' to my data and findings (2002, p. 66). Possible pitfalls abounded. For instance, my conceptual framework in Section 3.3.1 is based on my own assumptions about the importance of refugees' integration within their host society. The conceptual framework in turn guided me to look at my data in only one of many possible ways. My previous three-year work experience with the OECD influenced my purposive sampling of study participants and documentary evidence. Various biases and errors could also have occurred during my observations due to selective attention and memory, as well as during my translations because translating involved decision-making with a direct impact on the credibility of my research (Birbili, 2000). Moreover, my proactive assistance to the aforementioned Mr Alyoussef may have altered his skills recognition trajectory (see the case study of the electrician assistant in Section 4.2.3.1 of the next chapter). A degree of subjectivity is therefore built into my findings, which will never be the description of a pre-existing reality but rather, they are my study participants' and my joint interpretation of the research questions (Annells, 1996; Charmaz, 2000).

Luckily, I share characteristics of a 'good qualitative researcher-as-instrument' as described by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014, p. 42) to recognise and minimise my observer errors and biases. I am knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). As I was both the researcher and translator, I tried to ensure the comparability of meaning between my original German data and my English translations through my knowledge of the language and culture of the people under study and my fluency

in English as the writing-up language (Birbili, 2000; Deutscher, 1968; Vulliamy, 1990). While the first was straightforward with my 66 German respondents, given that German is my own primary language and I grew up in Germany, it was less obvious with my eight refugee informants, whose cultures I did not know well and who only spoke German as their second language, a point to which I return in the next Section 3.7.1.2. My six months in the field, so-called 'prolonged engagement' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304), allowed me to become familiar with the setting of Baden-Württemberg's skills assessment and recognition arrangements and granted me sufficient time to test for misinformation and preconceptions (Robson, 2002).

To keep an open mind, I used a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on my academic background in political sciences and social anthropology and work experience in education policy analysis (Robson, 2002). I gained in-depth knowledge of the field through 'persistent observation' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). While transcribing interviews and processing my field and observation notes, I developed and revised codes and themes and theorised about them.

I triangulated methods and data sources to produce a comprehensive account of the factors that hinder and the factors that facilitate the recognition of refugees' NFIVOS for use in Germany's labour market (Denzin, 1988; Patton, 1999). The analysis of my three analytical levels alerted me to the existence of multiple realities which I quoted verbatim to truthfully represent them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Yet, as discussed below, the credibility of my study is not simply guaranteed by me as the researcher but equally depends on the credibility of my collected data.

3.7.1.2. Credibility of the collected data

Given that people generated the data I gathered, another obvious question regards the credibility of that data. For instance, were my interviewees telling the truth (Wallace, 2013)? There are various reasons why their responses might have been inaccurate. They might have aimed to please me by giving answers they thought I wanted to hear, what Robson calls 'subject bias' (2002, p. 66). We might have misunderstood each other. Or they might have

been ill-informed, making ‘subject errors’ (Robson, 2002, p. 66). I mitigated these risks by encouraging interviewees to be honest and by avoiding leading questions. Through purposive sampling, I also attempted to select at least three credible informants for each of my 12 interviewee categories (see Table 5 (p. 89) in Section 3.4.2.1) (Schutt, 2006). Regarding my seven refugee informants who only spoke German as their second language, I made sure that we understood each other correctly by speaking slowly and clearly and encouraging them to ask for clarifications and by doing so myself. Moreover, as six of the seven refugee interviewees were men from patriarchal societies who may have felt uncomfortable talking about personal matters to me as a woman, I sought to let them decide what to disclose without pushing them for further details.

Yet, when people recount parts of their life stories, they are also narratively constructing who they are in the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). This may lead them to unknowingly create a ‘biographical illusion’ overstressing their own agency and omitting personal shortcomings and structural conditions (Bourdieu, 2000). Aware of this potential narrative distortion, I followed Bertaux (1997) in building up a body of unstructured interviews, which resembled life story interviews, with refugees who shared similar circumstances. In this way, my interview data offered insights into refugees’ situated actions and pathways which related not only to their own situation but also their wider contexts in which their lives unfolded.

Similar problems arose in my observations: How genuine was the behaviour of my observation participants? How would they have behaved if I had not observed them (Wallace, 2013)? Although I did not actively participate in the advisory sessions I observed, I still had a role in them and might have affected the situation. As explained in Section 3.4.3, the advisors and some of their advice-seekers knew of my researcher status and might have reacted to it. With a view to minimising such ‘observer effects’, I sought ‘minimal interaction’ with the people I observed and often physically positioned myself out of their way and avoided eye contact (Robson, 2002, p. 208).

Regarding my document data, my analytical approach, described in Section 3.4.4, protected me from viewing them as firm evidence and triangulation of comparable sources helped me to see them as social facts (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004) and to identify their purpose and intended audience (Silverman, 2007; Yin, 2009).

However, even if I can demonstrate the credibility of my collected data, how did I reduce my possible biases during analysis?

3.7.1.3. Reducing researcher bias

The credibility of my findings can be tested by whether my study participants can recognise their experience in my account. However, for two reasons I only made limited use of such member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Torrance, 2012).

First, with a view to avoiding misrepresentation and allowing for co-construction of meaning, already during interviews, I often recapped what my interviewees had said so that they could correct my summary. Between the advisory sessions that I observed, I asked questions to better understand what the advisors had intended through their actions. In most cases, I did not consider it necessary to obtain respondent validation later because my descriptive observation notes contained only minimal inferences and my verbatim interview transcripts were inference-free. Only when participants had explicitly requested to review their descriptive data did I return it to them.

Second, at later stages of my research process, respondent validation became more difficult. It no longer involved a simple review of my descriptive data but required my German-speaking study participants to carry out higher conceptual analysis in English. As a result, I carefully selected only a few informants for member checks of my interpreted data (Krefting, 1991).

Are my findings transferable to other contexts?

3.7.2. Transferability

Ensuring the transferability of qualitative findings is challenging. As explained in Section 3.4, I chose non-probability sampling and relatively small samples and can thus not make statistical generalisations. The difficulty with much qualitative research, mine included, is its situational uniqueness. As the group studied may not relate to other groups, conclusions may not be transferable. According to Krefting (1991), the transferability of the findings then depends on the representativeness of the informants of that particular group.

- So, how representative were my refugee informants of all refugee users of skills assessment and recognition arrangements;
- and how representative were my respondents of the various skills assessment and recognition processes under consideration?

Of the 18 refugees I encountered, more than two thirds were from Syria, two thirds were male, and 75 percent were under 35 years old. Comparison with comprehensive population data on refugees from Germany's federal government confirmed that my refugee sample was representative of the broader demographics of refugees in Germany (BA, 2018b; Neske & Rich, 2016; Rich, 2016).

Demonstrating the representativeness of my respondents in the second case study set is more difficult. The respondents I encountered thanks to the contact recommendations from Mr Ertunc could be considered a nominated sample, which is a sample representative of the phenomenon under study selected by an insider (Krefting, 1991). Yet, rather than being representative, I would call them relevant. The same goes for the other respondents I chose through purposive sampling.

According to Lincoln and Guba (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it is not the researcher's job to provide an index of transferability but to provide thick description[34] that enables others to make a transferability judgement. Following their advice, I described in detail

[34] The term was first used by Ryle (1949) and later by Geertz (1973).

my study participants, the research site and the skills assessment and recognition processes under consideration (Li, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7.3. Dependability

In order to ensure the dependability or consistency of my findings, in addition to the aforementioned method and data source triangulation, I also used back translation and consultation with others, peer examination, and an audit trail. In order to avoid translation-related problems, I used both back translation of quotations drawn from my German data and consultation with other bilingual speakers about the use and meaning of words identified as problematic (Birbili, 2000; Deutscher, 1968). Peer examination allowed me to present my evolving study design, working hypotheses and emerging findings before my DPhil supervisors and fellow doctoral candidates to receive feedback (Krefting, 1991; Noble & Smith, 2015).

With the aim to make my research process transparent, I developed an audit trail which described my research steps from the start of my research project, via methodological decisions, data sampling, collection, recording and translation to analysis (Guba, 1981). My data, including my verbatim interview transcripts, observation notes and field notes is also accessible on request. This should allow others to assess the repeatability of my study (Kielhofner, 1982).

3.8. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have presented my study's research questions and the case-study based research design. I first set the scene with a description of the preliminary fieldwork in 2017 which informed the research questions and confirmed the suitability of Baden-Württemberg as the research site. I then described my exploratory conceptual framework which has guided my data collection and which I have refined throughout the research process to reflect emerging findings. A case-study based research design seemed a suitable way to obtain the required evidence. It took the shape of two sets of multiple case studies, with each addressing one of

my two operational research questions. I then depicted my six months in the field where I collected and started analysing qualitative data for my two case study sets. I analysed my data with a social constructivist attitude by means of first and second cycle coding and, within an iterative data analysis framework, cross-case analysis and analytical induction. The chapter then addressed the ethical issues of my research, including researcher positionality, before I drew attention to its limitations and the strategies that I used to increase the trustworthiness of my findings.

The next chapter turns to the evidence on refugees' experience with skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Baden-Württemberg.

4. Of Syrian tailors, Iraqi floor tilers, and Pakistani social workers

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Konstanz, 13 April 2018
We settled down at the kitchen table, his younger sister Berivan closed the door to muffle the sound of the cheerful family dinner that continued outside on the balcony. She had first mentioned her brother's story during my very first interview in January 2018 at the local Chamber of Industry and Commerce overlooking Lake Constance. Three months and 28 interviews later, Mr Kobani sat opposite to me in his flat, in which he lived with his Israeli wife and little daughter. He relived his childhood in Syria when his late father had taught him the tailoring trade.

Calw, 1 May 2018
Three weeks later, 100 miles north, Mr Dawod waited for me at the bus stop in his new hometown, somewhere on a winding road in the Northern Black Forest. He was a young refugee from northern Iraq who, on his employment advisor's suggestion, had kindly agreed to share his past and his experience since his arrival in Germany with me. It was May 1, 2018, a national bank holiday in Germany. We walked through quiet streets past idyllic Black Forest houses to his studio. A friend of his greeted us at the doorstep and quickly withdrew behind his computer screen. Mr Dawod apologised and explained that his friend did not yet speak much German and that they were producing a documentary that they had shot at a wedding in the neighbouring village the previous weekend. We sat down at the dinner table and dived into Mr Dawod's life story.

Ulm, 23 May 2018
A month later, 80 miles to the west, I sat with Mr Ullah on a bench in the shade of an old oak tree in a dreamy square in the city of Ulm. It was a hot early summer day and the only noise came from a gathering in the nearby synagogue. Mr Ullah was silent for a moment; he had just described how his social work in support of girls' education had led to his persecution by Islamist extremists and his escape from Pakistan.

Overview

This chapter presents the occupational life stories of seven refugees who are attempting to build new careers in Germany. Section 4.1 introduces them as the protagonists of this project's first case study set by focusing on their respective skills acquisition in their countries of origin and their journey to Germany. In Section 4.2, drawing on Bourdieu's practice theory (1977b, 1984), the chapter suggests conceptualising refugees' skills acquisition and their vocational skills as their attainment of habitus and the resultant occupational practices. This enables an explanation as to why refugees' habitus was valued as embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their contexts of origin but not necessarily in their new German environment and why

formal skills recognition processes could be helpful. This sets the scene for the chapter's central questions explored in seven vignettes, namely whether these seven refugees drew on their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their attempt to enter the German labour market; and if so, whether it involved transforming their foreign cultural capital into German cultural capital.

The chapter argues that it is difficult for refugees to continue their former professional lives in Germany because the value of their skills – which are part of their cultural capital – comes under dispute there. It identifies skills recognition arrangements as the location in which this questioning of refugees' foreign cultural capital crystallises most clearly. It also suggests that refugees' difficulties in establishing themselves professionally in Germany often stem from three common challenges, namely the characteristics of Germany's skills assessment and recognition arrangements, refugees' initially limited German language skills, and their (at the outset) modest social capital. Finally, the chapter maintains that refugees can partly overcome their difficulties and better navigate Germany's bureaucratic challenges by augmenting their social capital and adjusting their habitus.

4.1. Refugees' skills acquisition back home and journey to Germany

The experiences of the seven refugees at the heart of this chapter illustrate how the ways in which vocational skills were acquired and subsequently practiced shape their life stories. As the skills acquisition varies across occupations and countries, a move into a new national context inevitably impacts on people's social and professional lives (Desiderio, 2016; EMN, 2016; Nee & Sanders, 2001; OECD, 2016c; Virgili, 2018). Although this study focuses mainly on the latter, previous research has highlighted that refugees, like many other people, tend to define themselves through their work (Petriglieri, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). Consequently, an inability to re-establish their earlier careers risks threatening their self-worth and is thus inextricably linked to their social lives.

The first three of the seven refugees presented below acquired their vocational skills in informal and non-formal ways in their home countries. Their NFIVOS are what Bourdieu (1986, p. 244) would refer to as foreign 'embodied cultural capital' because, he asserts (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245, additions in square brackets by the author),

> [c]ultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation [i.e. formal education and training], and therefore quite unconsciously [i.e. informally]. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as pronunciation, characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value.

The NFIVOS of these refugees were 'long-lasting dispositions of the[ir] mind and body' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). These dispositions were valued as embodied cultural capital in their home contexts because their fellow citizens were willing to pay for their related occupational services. However, they had to leave their home contexts behind and found themselves in a new German environment which was likely to question the value of their dispositions, as will be explained below.

4.1.1. Presentation of three refugees with NFIVOS

Mr Kobani was a Kurdish Syrian tailor in his mid-thirties. He learned how to tailor from his father who ran a well-established tailor's shop in the northern Syrian city of Kobanî. His activism for Kurdish independence required that he flee from political persecution and arrived in Germany in 2007. His parents and siblings joined him in 2015 in the framework of a family reunification programme.

Like Mr Kobani, Mr Dawod was also Kurdish and from Syria but younger, in his twenties. During his schooldays, he had started to run a photo shop with his cousin and thereby acquired skills in photo and film making. When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, Mr Dawod quit his computer technology degree after just one year of studies. This reflects the situation of many other young refugees who, before fleeing from their country of origin, were unable to complete their formal education and training (Worbs et al., 2016). Together with his older brother Mr Dawod then fled to Turkey, while the rest of their family stayed behind in Syria. He

lived in Turkey for three years repairing mobile phones, mending clothes and learning Turkish. When Germany opened its borders in late 2015, he paid human traffickers for a dangerous sea crossing and arrived in Germany in October 2015.

Mr Omar, also in his early twenties, was a Yasidi – an ethno-religious minority group – from Mosul in northern Iraq. After completing school, he worked for 18 months as a floor tiler in his uncle's business, from whom he learned the trade. However, he found the work too solitary and developed a chronic knee pain and quit the occupation. For the next two years, he earned money as a metal worker for various Turkish companies, acquiring the required skills through learning by doing. When the Islamic State conquered his area, he fled with his family, first into the mountains, then, aided by Kurdish fighters, across the Syrian border. After a short return to Iraq, he and his family found refuge in a refugee camp in Turkey for 16 months. While his parents and siblings stayed there, he was able to leave the camp and worked for half a year in Istanbul where he learned Turkish. After three unsuccessful attempts with human traffickers, he and his family made it across the Aegean Sea to Greece and arrived in Germany in December 2015.

In contrast to these three men who did not possess any documented evidence of their NFIVOS, the following four individuals held vocational or professional qualifications which they had acquired through formal higher education in their countries of origin. They possessed what Bourdieu would refer to as foreign 'institutionalised cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247).

4.1.2. Presentation of four refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications

Mr Alyoussef was in his late twenties and from Damascus where he had graduated from a technical upper-secondary school and then obtained an assistant electrician diploma after a two-year degree at the Technical Institute of Damascus. He subsequently worked for three years at his cousin's electronics store before doing his military service which he deserted at

the onset of the Syrian civil war. To avoid being drafted by the military, he fled from Syria together with his two older brothers and arrived in Germany in late 2015.

Mr Sharbat and Mrs Jabour were a married couple from northern Syria close to Lake Assad with two young daughters. He was in his late forties and a dentist with 17 years of work experience. She was in her late thirties and had worked for 14 years as a maths teacher for 12-15-year-old students. As Christians, they had been targeted by Islamists when the Syrian civil war started. After enduring more than a year as internally displaced persons, in June 2014 they decided to escape and managed to board a flight to Germany.

Mr Ullah was a social worker in his early thirties from the Himalayas in northern Pakistan. After his master's degree in Social Work his job focused on education for girls and women. This was anathema to local Islamist extremists who threatened his life. He first fled to Islamabad but was found by his pursuers. Fortunately, he was able to pay for an expensive visa to seek safety in Germany. Although he had been in Germany since December 2013, he was still waiting for a definite decision on his asylum application.

The following sections discuss whether these seven refugees were able to uphold their former professional lives in Germany and whether formal skills recognition played a role in this.

4.2. Refugees' use of their foreign cultural capital for employment purposes

Applying a Bourdieusian lens, did these seven refugees draw on their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their attempt to enter the German labour market; and if so, did this involve the transformation of their foreign cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital? These questions are addressed below in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3. They are justified because, as set out in the exploratory conceptual framework (see Section 3.3.1), this study zooms in on the process of refugees attempting to gain recognition of their vocational skills, based on the assumption that formal skills recognition could help them find a job relevant to their skills in Germany. As explained in Chapter 2 and summarised with an added Bourdieusian twist below in Section 4.2.1, this focus is relevant given that formal skills

recognition is particularly important in Germany's highly regulated labour market and given the challenges that previous refugees to Germany have faced in accessing the labour market.

4.2.1. The relationship between refugees' cultural capital, habitus and field

4.2.1.1. The importance of formal skills recognition in Germany explained with Bourdieu

Formal skills recognition matters in the German context because often only formal education and training diplomas provide access to well-paid jobs due to Germany's labour market regulations and its dual apprenticeship system (on this see also Sections 2.4.1 and 6.1.2) (Fasani et al., 2018; Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016; Wehrle et al., 2018). This is likely to be of concern to many refugees, who, as in the cases of the first three of the refugees introduced above, do not hold any formal proof of their NFIVOS. Although this did not seem to hamper their working lives in their countries of origin, in their new German environment their foreign embodied cultural capital 'may be called into question at any time' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247).

This questioning has to do with the situatedness of their NFIVOS (already touched on in Section 2.2.2.3) which can be explained by means of Bourdieu's (1977b, 1984) sociological concepts of habitus, practice, field and capital. Although Bourdieu wrote little about skills, this thesis views refugees' NFIVOS (and their foreign vocational or professional credentials, as will be illustrated below) as an expression of their habitus, which is:

> a socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field – and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world. (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 81)

Thus, individuals' habitus is embodied and moulded by their social environment, or field. It shapes their dispositions to see their field, think about their field and act in their field, and thereby they learn their 'rightful place in the social world, where [they] will do best given [their]

dispositions and resources, and also where [they] will struggle'[35] (Maton, 2008, p. 58, referring to Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471).

Back in their home countries, refugees occupied their 'rightful place in the social world' (Ibid) and felt like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996, p. 127). Besides speaking the local languages and practicing local customs and traditions (Bourdieu, 1984), their habitus generated occupational practices, such as tailoring, developing photos and films or tiling floors, which were valued by their field. Thanks to that social recognition, their occupational habitus became embodied cultural capital which they could exchange into economic capital because they could sell their vocational services.

Refugees' forced migration entailed leaving their 'rightful place in the social world' (Maton, 2008, p. 58). In Germany, their habitus does not necessarily match their new societal environment, they feel like a 'fish out of water' (Morrice, 2007b, p. 161) and experience what Bourdieu would call a 'hysteresis effect' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 78). Their habitus is misaligned with their new surroundings. Contrary to their field of origin, their new German context no longer automatically perceives or appreciates their NFIVOS as embodied cultural capital.

Would it help these refugees if they possessed foreign vocational qualifications? A look at the other four of the above-introduced refugees shows that even they would benefit from formal skills recognition. Through attendance of formal higher education in their countries of origin, they acquired 'an institutionalized form' of habitus (Moore, 2008, p. 105), which Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) would refer to as 'cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed [vocational and professional] qualifications […]'. While their credentials were valued as institutionalised cultural capital in their home contexts, their new German environment might call the value of their institutionalised habitus into question in a manner similar to the

[35] Bourdieu was mainly interested in the way habitus helped societal structures to reproduce, for instance, with working class children not even envisaging attending higher education because their dispositions would tell them not to (see Bourdieu, 1977a).

questioning of the occupational embodied habitus of the aforementioned three refugees who lacked vocational qualifications.

This demonstrates that both refugees with NFIVOS and with foreign credentials could benefit from formal skills recognition that turns their foreign cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital, i.e. German vocational or professional qualifications. This transformation would improve German employers' understanding of their skills levels because it 'makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Moreover, as highlighted in Sections 4.2.3.2-4 below, German institutionalised cultural capital or a confirmation of equivalency with such is a legal requirement to practice one of Germany's regulated occupations. The field in which the related formal skills recognition processes take place, Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field, will be described in Section 5.1.1 of the next chapter.

Additionally, as a number of the case studies in this chapter will illustrate, some refugees do not limit themselves to unpacking their foreign cultural capital and seeing whether it could be turned into German institutionalised cultural capital (Erel, 2010). Instead, as argued by Erel (2010), and laid out in this study's exploratory conceptual framework (Section 3.3.1), refugees with NFIVOS in particular are likely to engage in bargaining about the value of their cultural capital and to create their own validation mechanisms which do not rely on powerful state institutions but on their new social environment.

4.2.1.2. The integration struggle of previous refugees explained with Bourdieu

Bourdieu's concepts (1984) of habitus, practices, capital and field can also be used to bolster the emerging explanations for refugees' difficult labour market integration (already mentioned in Sections 2.1.2.1 and 2.3). Because of their flight from the immediate threat of war, political instability or persecution, refugees have limited influence over their final destination. As a result, they often cannot plan and prepare for their move, neither in terms of social networks nor learning the language of their host country nor making contacts with local employers before arrival. Consequently, on arrival, their habitus and their associated practices risk being

misaligned with their new German field. This manifests itself for instance, in only speaking their mother tongue and lacking German language skills and in knowing how to get a job in their home country but being ignorant about German job application processes (BA, 2018b; Brücker, 2016; Brücker et al., 2014; Brücker et al., 2016; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Euler & Severing, 2016; Johansson & Schiefer, 2016; Virgili, 2018). Their initial lack of habitus aligned with their new German surroundings can also make them susceptible to stereotyping and racism and lead to their social withdrawal (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; RISE, 2013).

In addition, many refugees suffer from trauma and health problems that can hold them back from proactively seeking employment (Virgili, 2018). Although none of the seven refugees mentioned any mental or physical issues, their experiences back home and during their often-precarious escapes will likely have affected them permanently. Furthermore, the careers of many refugees are interrupted by often-prolonged journeys to their final destination and the waiting time until they obtain the right to work (Desiderio, 2016). The experience of the dentist Mr Sharbat, discussed below, was a case in point.

Moreover, many refugees lack social capital in Germany which they can draw on in order to adjust their habitus in the form of learning German and about local customs (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248; Gericke et al., 2018; Nee & Sanders, 2001). This was the case for all seven of the refugees assessed in this study although, as described below, the Syrian tailor already had a cousin living in Germany and the married Syrian couple chose Germany because they had already spent holidays there. While Putnam's concept of social capital (Putnam, 1993b, 1995, 2000) (see Section 2.1.1) has had more influence in migration studies than Bourdieu's take on it, combining Putnam's ideas with Bourdieu's theorising of social capital helps shed light on the wider socio-economic context (Erel, 2010). According to Erel (2010, p. 646), compared to Putnam, Bourdieu's social capital concept – with its focus on the interaction between different forms of capital – allows a better understanding of how individuals are positioned in their social field because '[a] capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996, p. 101) (for Bourdieu's field concept see Section 5.1.1). Even if social capital

may be insufficient on its own, ‘it is a leverage to expand and acquire other forms of capital that are needed to obtain employment’ (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018, p. 38).

Lastly, and of most relevance, circumstances in both refugees’ home country and new host countries may complicate the recognition of their skills and qualifications. Before fleeing, they may not have been able to complete their education and training programme (Worbs et al., 2016), as was the case of the above-mentioned Syrian media specialist. Many refugees may also have been unable to retain proof of their qualifications and work experience; or they may have lost the relevant papers during transit; or their educational institutions and employers may no longer be in the position to provide all the required references or even still exist (Berger, Tusarinow, & Wünsche, 2016). While not uncommon among recent Syrian refugees in Germany, luckily none of the four refugees with foreign qualifications in this study faced this difficulty. Even if refugees have all their educational diplomas, their host country may not recognise them for reasons of cultural differences and/or mistrust in the education and training systems of less developed countries, i.e. differences between fields (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). Although qualified, they may end up either unemployed or in low-skilled occupations, being subjected to brain-waster or brain abuse jobs (Bauder, 2003; Liversage, 2009). Moreover, due to the field-specific ways of learning, many may have acquired their vocational skills in informal and non-formal ways and may lack any form of formal proof of their job-relevant competences, as was the case of the aforementioned Syrian tailor, the Syrian media specialist and the Iraqi floor tiler and metal worker (Eisnecker et al., 2016; Wehrle et al., 2018; Worbs et al., 2016). All of these refugees would need a way to demonstrate their skills and have them formally validated (Berger, Tusarinow, & Wünsche, 2016)

Against this background, the following sections explore not only how the seven refugees of the study drew on their foreign cultural capital in Germany but also whether this involved their social capital and adjusting their habitus to their new German surroundings.

4.2.2. The three refugees with NFIVOS

The first three of the following seven vignettes describe the occupational pathways of the refugees with NFIVOS and, where relevant, their experiences with skills assessment and recognition arrangements. Their respective foreign embodied cultural capitals fell into occupations that were not regulated in Germany, namely tailoring, photo media, floor tiling and metal work. That meant that formal skills recognition was not mandatory should these refugees have wished to pursue their trades in Germany (BMBF, 2019h). However, as suggested in Section 2.4.1 of the Literature Review, it was possible that formal skills recognition could help them find jobs related to the skills they held because it would allow German employers to better understand the level and nature of their vocational skills.

4.2.2.1. The Syrian tailor Mr Kobani

Far from being shaped by a process of formal skills recognition, Mr Kobani's pathway was paved by his social capital and German language skills which brought him social skills recognition. Mr Kobani sought asylum in Germany because he already had a cousin living there who had conveyed a positive image of the country. Yet, when he arrived in Germany in 2007, his first impression of the country was that of an overcrowded asylum camp near Düsseldorf, where the inhabitants were continuously surveyed and prohibited from working. Because his arrival in Germany predated the war in Syria, his case for asylum involved a complicated legal procedure. After a waiting period of three long years in that asylum camp, Mr Kobani was eventually granted asylum and a work permit. He was finally free to move around in Germany. A Syrian friend in Konstanz invited him to visit and Mr Kobani fell in love with the city on the shores of Lake Constance. His social bonds with other Syrians who already knew life in Germany helped him to understand the country's labour market.

However, to integrate professionally Mr Kobani also required social links, social bridges and German language skills. When he started searching for a job in Konstanz, he had to seek advice at the local jobcentre: 'Before I came to Germany, I had no idea about Europe and could

not imagine Germany's complicated bureaucracy. I had just assumed everything would be like in Syria' (Kobani, 13 April 2018). This statement illustrates how much Mr Kobani felt like the 'fish out of water' in his new German setting (Morrice, 2007b, p. 161). The Syrian culture allows for improvisation in acquiring and developing skills and careers and relies on *wasta*, a culture of using social capital to find jobs (Ramady, 2016). The German culture, by contrast, is rule-based with a highly regulated labour market that expects individuals to follow bureaucratic job application procedures and to possess institutionalised cultural capital (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018).

Fortunately, one factor that helped him draw on his Syrian tailor skills even in Germany was that he had learned German during his three-year waiting time in the asylum camp. According to Bourdieu (1984), language is part of a person's habitus. In Germany, German language skills are embodied cultural capital because they confer advantages to its speakers, for instance in the form of better employment prospects and higher earnings (Bither & Ziebarth, 2016). Yet, many refugees struggle to learn German quickly (Kroh, 2016), which turns learning the language and communicating with locals into a 'stressor' during their integration (Baranik, Hurst, & Eby, 2018, p. 121).

His acquisition of this embodied German cultural capital, coupled with the advice from his jobcentre advisor, enabled Mr Kobani to proactively pursue work opportunities. It was through reaching out to German locals that he found the business that he would eventually take over. This business buyout suggests that Mr Kobani's family back home in Syria must have been relatively well off to provide him with the necessary financial capital. This speaks to Nee and Sanders' (2001, p. 407) observation that immigrants who bring with them financial capital 'enjoy a head start in establishing family businesses'.

Despite this apparent advantage, Mr Kobani (13 April 2018) noted that 'to acquire a business is only the beginning. The next important step is to establish a clientele.' While self-employment as a tailor does not require a state license, Germany's VET system offers a tailor master craftsman qualification that prepares for running one's own business. Aware of this, Mr Kobani knew he competed with local tailors who might find it easier to attract customers thanks

to their title. Yet, formal recognition of his NFIVOS was not an option for him given that the ValiKom pilot project had not even been set up at that time (further discussed in Section 5.2.2.3) and that he did not know about the external exam option (see Section 5.2.4.1).

It is important to note the differing situations of freelance tailors and tailors in factories. Most German textile manufacturers have outsourced their production to low-wage countries and the few that still produce locally, such as the clothing manufacturer Trigema and the mountain sport equipment producer VAUDE,[36] have struggled to find skilled tailors. As skills matter the most to both companies, they have also started to recruit persons without vocational qualifications after work trials, effectively recognising their NFIVOS. Since late 2015, both companies have employed asylum seekers[37] and refugees. According to Mrs Grupp (21 June 2018) and Mrs Fiedler (6 July 2018), in mid-2018, eight percent of Trigema's staff had a refugee background and two percent of VAUDE's staff, with many of them working in the tailoring division. All of these tailors were men who had learned to tailor at a young age back home. Mrs Grupp (21 June 2018) remarked that, '[s]ince many are used to piecework; they work very quickly,' which seemed to make them eminently employable.

Given his past in the family tailor business, Mr Kobani only ever considered a career as a freelance tailor in Germany. As formal skills recognition was not an option for him because of institutional barriers, he had to rely on his own personal agency and his underlying entrepreneurial mindset (Bakker et al., 2017; Obschonka et al., 2018). He saw social recognition of his tailoring skills as the only route to gaining customers' trust. After fruitless attempts to get a foot into Konstanz's big carnival market, he participated in a skills assessment

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[36] Neither of these two companies headquartered in Baden-Württemberg have outsourced production abroad. Trigema uses this as an advertisement slogan: 100% made in Germany (Grupp, 21 June 2018). VAUDE uses this fact to improve working conditions in the textile industry and to make the manufacturing process more environmentally friendly (Fiedler, 6 July 2018).

[37] Although both companies wish to keep all of their employees with a refugee background, issues with their residence titles make planning difficult. In early 2018, VAUDE together with the Härle Brewery launched an initiative to stop the deportation of asylum seekers who contribute to the local economy (Thieme, 2018). Meanwhile, the initiative has gained the support of more than 150 companies in South West Germany, including small businesses but also the giant screw manufacturer Würth. Together these companies represent 50 billion Euros annual turnover and employ more than 550,000 people, among them 2,050 refugees (Unternehmer-Initiative, 2020).

by Switzerland's largest menswear manufacturer Strellson which is headquartered in Kreuzlingen, across the border from Konstanz. He did not need to provide them with a vocational diploma but instead convinced them through his NFIVOS and speed. 'I have never had to show any certificates to work as a tailor in Germany' (Kobani, 13 April 2018). Subsequently, he became the go-to tailor for the Strellson store and six other big clothing shops in Konstanz, which meant that they referred their customers to him when alterations were needed. Helped by his charisma, his business was going so well that he was able to employ two full-time tailors and to cooperate with a vocational school, offering short traineeships to students.[38]

Interestingly, after 11 years in Germany, Mr Kobani no longer thought of himself as a refugee. His family responsibilities added to this impression because, since his family reunification in 2015, he had been the main breadwinner for his parents and three younger siblings. This meant he and his tailor business were the family's both economic and social capital which reduced the costs of his Syrian family members settling in Germany. In line with previous research (e.g. Nee & Sanders, 2001), Mr Kobani's long working days, his family members' unpaid work in his tailor shop, and his teenage sister's commitment to strive for academic excellence are common family strategies of newly arrived immigrants.

In summary, Mr Kobani's pathway, including his move to Konstanz and setting-up his own tailor's store, is at the same time both an outlier and a symptomatic case. On the one hand, it proves that formal skills recognition is not necessarily needed in Germany's unregulated occupations: Germany's skills assessment and recognition arrangements did not play any role in Mr Kobani's pathway choice. On the other hand, his pathway clearly illustrates that, in the absence of formal skills recognition, a high level of personal initiative is required to establish oneself professionally in Germany. Mr Kobani's ability to create and use social capital led to his 'path of re-entry' into his previous occupation (Liversage, 2009, p. 209) because it allowed him to gain social recognition of his tailoring skills from his customers. His proactivity

[38] He was not qualified to train apprentices because he did not hold a German master tailor certificate.

encompassed reaching out to Germans and building social bridges thanks to his German language skills and drawing on social bonds with other Syrians. This is in line with other recent research on refugees' labour market integration in Germany, which highlights that refugees need to proactively embrace job opportunities, ideally with an entrepreneurial mindset (e.g. Obschonka et al., 2018). The literature also shows that many immigrants seek self-employment because it is considered the most promising route to upward mobility (Nee & Sanders, 2001).

In contrast to Mr Kobani who, after 11 years in Germany no longer considers himself a refugee, both Mr Dawod and Mr Omar arrived in Germany more recently when the country was gearing up to welcome more than one million asylum seekers. This new context was somewhat more hospitable towards refugees than at the point of Mr Kobani's arrival in 2007, at least regarding the provision of German language courses and integration measures.

4.2.2.2. The Syrian photoshop owner Mr Dawod

Germany's welcoming context in late 2015 enabled Mr Dawod to build strong social links with the German authorities which paved his pathway. When, together with 28 other asylum seekers, he was transferred to Calw in the northern Black Forest in December 2015, officers from the District Office helped him to attend his first German language course. By coincidence he then met Mrs Öfinger-Hellwich who, at the time, was the local coordinator of the PerF programme (*Perspektiven für Flüchtlinge*, English: Prospects for Refugees) (see for PerF Section 5.2.1.2 of the next chapter). She placed him into PerF which allowed him to receive more language tuition, participate in an induction to Germany's education and training system and labour market, and attend his first six-week prior skills-related traineeship and a job-searching briefing. The PerF programme did not formally recognise his NFIVOS. Nevertheless, Mr Dawod appreciated the interest the PerF staff took in his experience with his photo shop in Syria to ensure a good match with his subsequent traineeship. He chose a work placement with the digital media design company Gieske in Pforzheim where he completed the assigned tasks without difficulty because, as he explained: 'I had already worked for nearly nine years

with exactly the same computer programmes in Syria' (Dawod, 1 May 2018). Although he would have liked to stay at Gieske, the company would have wanted him to attend an apprenticeship to become a recognised digital media designer, for which a B2 level in German[39] and a work permit were required, neither of which he possessed at the time. A Bourdieusian notion of cultural capital helps to explain the company's preference to recruit someone who would attend an apprenticeship over someone with job relevant NFIVOS (Erel, 2010). According to Bauder (2003), the company exercised nationally-based protectionism, only trusting those skills acquired through local professional experience in the framework of German formal education and training.

Once Mr Dawod was granted refugee status, he attended the obligatory integration course, consisting of 600 hours of language training and 60 hours of civil education (OECD, 2016c), and subsequently a nine-month B1 language course. According to the BAMF (Rich, 2016, p. 10), both of these are 'particularly important in order to facilitate participation in society and access to working life in Germany.' In addition, Mr Dawod (1 May 2018) considered that 'asking locals for information and gaining work experience in Germany are very important.' Thanks to his outgoing nature and the support of a German neighbour, he then secured a six-week summer job as a photographer at a local construction centre. It was there that he built another crucial social bridge by meeting the daughter of his future landlord, which led him to rent a studio in Calw.

Aware that he would need to obtain a B2 German certificate to start an apprenticeship, he went to his local jobcentre advisor who helped him enrol in a six-month B2 language course. His advisor also referred him to Mrs Öfinger-Hellwich, who, by then, had left her PerF position and now worked for the local IQ Service Point KAFU, which focused on labour market integration of persons with a refugee background. According to her Syrian colleague Mr

[39] The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an international standard for describing language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language.
See for explanations of proficiency levels: https://www.ema.europa.eu/documents/other/language-skills-self-assessment-grid_en.pdf.

Zammam (9 April 2018), who has worked for KAFU since its establishment in 2016, up to early April 2018, they had advised 270 persons with a refugee background, mostly male aged under 35 from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, with a successful transition rate into the labour market of 30 percent.

Subsequently, Mrs Öfinger-Hellwich and Mr Zammam arranged regular meetings with Mr Dawod to help him write applications for apprenticeships and eventually also for jobs. He explained that,

> I applied for various apprenticeships, for instance in warehouse logistics and restaurant management, but as I only received negative responses, we decided that I should also look into manual jobs. I have had interviews at three companies, and all require an internship before recruitment. (Dawod, 1 May 2018)

According to the two KAFU advisors, '[o]ften people come to us with high expectations to succeed professionally in Germany. This is particularly the case with Syrian refugees. We then find it difficult to lower their expectations to a realistic level' (Öfinger-Hellwich and Zammam, 9 April 2018).

Eventually, after a five-week internship at a local car components supplier, Mr Dawod was offered regular shift work at their assembly line, which he was going to begin the day after the interview for this study. He was glad to finally earn money and no longer rely on social welfare: 'While this means that I am no longer a client at the jobcentre, my advisor there assured me that I could always come back for help and I am still in close contact with Mrs Öfinger-Hellwich' (Dawod, 1 May 2018).

However, his new job was unrelated to his NFIVOS. He still saw himself as a digital media designer and sometimes volunteered as a photographer and filmmaker at local events. He was thankful for the PerF traineeship opportunity at the digital media company Gieske. Owing to his insights into the company, he hoped to start a three-year apprenticeship there, possibly starting in September 2019.

In summary, similar to Mr Kobani, Mr Dawod's pathway was shaped mainly by his social capital, his German language skills and his self-efficacy. The latter, understood as 'the broad and relatively stable confidence in one's ability to deal with different demanding situations'

(Obschonka et al., 2018, p. 176), is a central aspect of proactive personalities and especially important when starting a new life in a different country (Bandura, 2001). Yet, whereas Mr Kobani chose 'the path of re-entry' into his former occupation and for doing so created social bridges with German customers, Mr Dawod opted for the paths of 'ascent' and hopefully soon of 're-education' (Liversage, 2009, p. 209), and his social links with the German authorities proved to be the most decisive. According to Liversage (2009, p. 212), migrants embark on 'the path of ascent' if they are unable to work in their former occupation and instead 'enter unskilled or semi-skilled work and ascend from there into better labour market positions,' possibly by means of re-education in Mr Dawod's case. In terms of decisive social links, the support from his KAFU advisor markedly paved his trajectory from his informal skills assessment via prior skills-related traineeships to his skills-unrelated job, and hopefully to his future skills-related apprenticeship.

Similarly, Mr Omar's course of action in Germany was influenced greatly by his social links with the German institutions, his learning of the German language and by his proactivity, as set out below.

4.2.2.3. The Iraqi floor tiler and metal worker Mr Omar

Mr Omar's eagerness to master the German language shaped his pathway choice. When Mr Omar and his extended Yasidi family arrived in Tübingen, their asylum applications were still being processed. As he was therefore not yet eligible for formal language tuition, he attended free German classes provided by volunteers at a Christian charity. According to Gericke et al.'s findings in Germany (2018), it is often volunteers who provide early integration support. Mr Omar (25 June 2018) explained that '[t]here, I learned how to solve problems in Germany and new words every day, in particular thanks to an elderly lady who spoke a bit of English.' The elderly lady also encouraged him to join the local voluntary fire brigade to meet more young people. He built additional social bridges thanks to a Facebook group entitled 'New in Tübingen'.

After a year, he was granted refugee status which enabled him to take part in an integration course and two language programmes at A2 and B1 level, which he completed as the best of his class. He then successfully asked his jobcentre advisor to continue with a B2 language course to prepare for an apprenticeship. When he did not succeed in the final B2 exam, his advisor suggested he obtain a lower secondary school leaving certificate at the nearby charity Bruderhaus Diakonie, to further improve his knowledge of German but also of English and maths. The Bruderhaus Diakonie is one of eleven projects of NIFA, the Umbrella Network for the Integration of Refugees into Work (*Netzwerk zur Integration von Flüchtlingen in Arbeit*, NIFA) (for more on this see Section 5.2.1.1 of the next chapter). NIFA's four-year objective between 2015 and 2019 was to improve the employability of 1,800 women and persons with a refugee background aged under 27 by helping them into either education and training or employment (Welt and Karaburun, 26 February 2018). This objective is important because in Germany, young people with a migration background struggle more than others to secure apprenticeship placements (Bergseng, Degler, & Lüthi, 2019; Jeon, 2019).

As a result, between late 2017 and June 2018, Mr Omar caught up on German lower secondary education at the Bruderhaus Diakonie, together with other refugees and German youths from disadvantaged backgrounds. At the time of the interview for this study, he had just learned that he had passed all his final exams and that his teachers had particularly appreciated his final written work about his experience at the voluntary fire brigade. He explained his achievement as '[h]aving the will to achieve something is enormously helpful' (Omar, 25 June 2018).

Similar to Mr Dawod, Mr Omar never counted on having his previous work experience formally recognised in Germany but chose 'the path of re-education' (Liversage, 2009, p. 209). Moreover, not only had his knees suffered from the work, he also believed that the working standards and weather conditions between Iraq and Germany differed too much for him to transfer his skills: 'Here in Germany, floor tilers do an apprenticeship and for work in metal construction, you also need to be qualified and go through a formal recruitment process' (Omar, 25 June 2018). With these differing customs in different social fields in mind, he decided

to start an apprenticeship in a new vocational field subsequent to his schooling. In doing so, he demonstrated a 'strong career adaptability' which Obschonka et al. (2018, p. 174) observed as an important personal agency factor in refugees' successful integration into their host society.

The Bruderhaus Diakonie had arranged several traineeships for Mr Omar to see different trades, including one with a roofing contractor, one with a parquet layer, and another one at a hotel. As he enjoyed the latter work experience the most, he applied for a three-year apprenticeship in the hotel industry: 'I sent out four applications. I did not hear back from three, but one hotel accepted me, and I'll start my apprenticeship there this August' (Omar, 25 June 2018). He was grateful for his helpful social bridges and the jobcentre's support and the learning opportunities which allowed him to call Tübingen his new home and to change his vocational career.

In summary, Mr Omar's pathway, including his lower-secondary education in Tübingen, his skills-unrelated traineeships as well as a skills-unrelated apprenticeship, was shaped mainly by his focus on learning German, his many social bridges and his social links with the jobcentre and the Bruderhaus Diakonie, and his own proactivity. Another important aspect of Mr Omar's integration pathway was his family which had arrived with him in Germany. His family offered him a sense of home even in the completely new German context (Nee & Sanders, 2001), an advantage that the Syrian assistant electrician in the next case study did not have.

Taken together, it might be thought surprising that not one of these three refugees with NFIVOS sought formal skills recognition. Yet, as aforementioned, none of their vocational skills fell into any of Germany's regulated occupations and made formal skills recognition a legal requirement to practice. Secondly, the skills assessments in which they took part did not allow for the formal recognition of their skills. For instance, Mr Dawod's participation in the PerF programme included only a skills assessment that did not lead to formal skills certification. As a result, for both Mr Dawod and Mr Omar completing a German apprenticeship, which was

prior skills-related in Mr Dawod's case and prior skills-unrelated in Mr Omar's, seemed to be a vocational pathway offering promising prospects (Adacker et al., 2016). With much more pertinent work experience than the other two, Mr Kobani succeeded to establish himself professionally without a formal vocational qualification. According to Liversage (2009, p. 216), the choice for the 'path of re-education' is tied to the time frame of individuals' lives. If refugees' skills are unsuitable for entering their host society's labour market, 'being young' like Mr Dawod and Mr Omar facilitates the choice for the educational route. Similarly, the 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample of refugees who had already lived in Germany for an average of 18 years (Eisnecker et al., 2016) also found that in particular, young refugees earned vocational qualifications in Germany in order to increase their chances of getting more highly qualified jobs (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016, pp. 295–296, see Tables 6 and 7).

The three pathways of Mr Kobani, Mr Dawod and Mr Omar contrast with those of the other four refugees, who all looked into the possibility of gaining formal recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications.

4.2.3. The four refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications

The procedures in place under Germany's Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act grant formal recognition to foreign vocational or professional qualifications that relate to federally or respectively regionally governed occupations. The professional qualifications of three of the four refugees discussed in this section matched occupations that were regulated in Germany (BMBF, 2019h). That meant that the refugee dentist, teacher and social worker, should they have wished to continue to pursue these careers in Germany, were legally required to achieve full equivalency with their respective German reference qualification under the Federal Recognition Act in the case of the Syrian dentist and under Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act in the cases of the Syrian teacher and Pakistani social worker (BMBF, 2019h). In the case of the assistant electrician, formal skills recognition was not mandatory because his German reference occupation was unregulated. However, it was still

advisable in order to improve his chances of good employment (as highlighted in Section 2.4.1). His case is explored in the first of the following four vignettes.

4.2.3.1. The Syrian assistant electrician Mr Alyoussef

Mr Alyoussef's pathway was chiefly influenced by Germany's Federal Recognition Act because the formal recognition of his Syrian qualification fell under its legal scope. It related to one of the 350 recognised trades of Germany's dual VET system which are governed by federal law (BMBF, 2019g, 2019j).

On first encountering Mr Alyoussef during an observation for this study in February 2018, he sought advice about the recognition of his Syrian assistant electrician diploma at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) in Mannheim. This was already his second of three skills recognition advisory sessions, which highlights the complexity of the issue. His jobcentre in Heidelberg had first referred him to the IQ Network service in Mannheim. In turn, they had recommended him to seek more technical advice at the IHK Mannheim. They had also pointed out that he could work as an assistant electrician without formal skills recognition but that he would be at a disadvantage compared to those with an electronics technician[40] apprenticeship certificate. This shows the heavy emphasis in Germany's labour market on German institutionalise cultural capital (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). Mrs Kautzmann (6 March 2018), the personnel manager of the electronics contractor Dektro Abel in Mannheim, also explained that,

> [t]here is no need to employ assistant electricians in our company because our 17 apprentices do their job early in their training. And often, an electronics technician apprenticeship certificate is required because of safety concerns, for instance, when carrying out repairs in public institutions. The same goes for participation in advanced trainings.

As a result, Mr Alyoussef went to the skills recognition advisor Mrs Specker at the IHK Mannheim, where an observation for this study took place that day. She first enquired about

[40] In 2003, the VET occupation electrician was renamed and has since been referred to as electronics technician (Bauer, 2019).

Mr Alyoussef's professional objectives in Germany. He replied in broken German '[a] job or an apprenticeship as an electrician, depending on what is possible (Alyoussef, 22 February 2018).' She explained in slow German that rather than starting from scratch and completing a 3.5-year-long apprenticeship, he could apply for formal recognition of his Syrian assistant electrician diploma under the Federal Recognition Act. This would take the form of an assessment of equivalency with the German reference occupation (for more details see Section 5.2.4.2 of the next chapter).

Based on the description of his completed modules, his profile[41] seemed to fit two of Germany's various specialisations: Electronics technician for industrial engineering (*Elektroniker für Betriebstechnik*) and electronics technician in energy and building technology (*Elektroniker für Energie und Gebäudetechnik*) (BMBF, 2019c, 2019d). The competent recognition bodies differ between the two specialisations because the first falls under the industrial and commercial sector and the associated equivalency assessment is regulated by the centralised IHK Foreign Skills Approval (FOSA) Institute, whereas the second belongs to the trades and crafts sector and the equivalency assessment is conducted by local Chambers of Crafts and Trades (HWK). In order to clarify which of the two specialisations would match his skills better, Mrs Specker advised Mr Alyoussef to consult her colleagues.

As she expected the recognition procedure of his Syrian assistant electrician's diploma to take until July, she suggested a two-pronged approach:

- Firstly, to apply for the apprenticeship that corresponded most closely to his skillset. For this he would need to obtain formal recognition of his Syrian school certificates (translated into German) from the Stuttgart Regional Council. She gave him the contact details of colleagues at her IHK and the HWK Mannheim who would help him in the application process.
- Secondly, to apply for an equivalency assessment under the Federal Recognition Act at the adequate responsible body.

[41] See previous footnote.

Mr Alyoussef seemed attentive throughout the advisory session and Mrs Specker promised to share a meeting summary by email to help him make sense of all the information. Yet, even for a German native speaker, the volume of information seemed overwhelming. In the debriefing after the observation for this study, she noted that '[he] lacks a volunteer helper to support him' (2 February 2018).

According to four volunteers and volunteers' coaches to support refugees' integration (Stricker, 15 May 2018; Malania-Göltl, 8 June 2018; Walther, 8 May 2018; Goldstein, 23 June 2018), Germany's so-called migrant welcoming culture in 2015-2016 meant that thousands of Germans got involved in helping the newly arrived asylum seekers to settle in. Mr Stricker explained that in many communities, volunteers set up associations, such as his AK Asyl Calw, that provided refugees with a venue to meet German volunteers and get help, ranging from filling in forms to finding accommodation, language tuition or a job.

With a view to supporting these volunteers, the Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the IQ Network promptly started offering volunteers' training that revolved around handling trauma, information sharing, and the recognition of foreign qualifications. Three examples are the BILO project coordinated by Mrs Malania-Göltl in Stuttgart that trained volunteers to become employment integration pilots for refugees; the Klever IQ project created by Mrs Walther that aimed to encourage cooperation between volunteers and officials in the field of integration; and workshops about the recognition procedures for foreign vocational or professional qualifications by IQ Network service points. The volunteers often accompanied 'their' refugee to appointments, such as advisory sessions about the recognition of their foreign qualifications (Gericke et al., 2018). In the 11 observations of advisory sessions with refugees for this study, four were accompanied by their volunteers. However, all interviewed advisors (e.g. Ehrenreich, 11 May 2018; Specker, 22 February 2018; Gronau, 15 February 2018) noticed that by mid-2018, fewer volunteers accompanied refugees than previously, probably because by then, most refugees had reached a German level sufficient to understand the provided information on their own. Possibly, it also reflected a decrease in volunteers' eagerness to help (Alzaher, 2018).

Mrs Specker's remark about Mr Alyoussef's lacking social bridges proved true at an encounter three months later.[42] It turned out that he had partly misunderstood her suggestions because of his limited fluency in German. He had only submitted his school certificate to Stuttgart Regional Council for formal recognition and erroneously thought he needed to wait for the result before taking further action. The main reason for his misunderstanding was that he had no one to guide him step-by-step. Since he spent his time mainly with other young Syrian refugees and missed his Syrian family, which had comprised 'strategic resources' in the form of social capital back in Syria, his German had not improved much since the last encounter in February (Nee & Sanders, 2001, p. 389). While compatriot refugees provide emotional support, exclusive socialisation with them increases cultural segmentation and slows down the acquisition of local embodied cultural capital and social bridges so necessary for integration into the host country's mainstream society (Morrice, 2007; Russell, Holmstrom, & Clare, 2015).

Fortunately, though belatedly, the researcher of this study could help him to take the necessary next steps. Certainly, this personal involvement had ethical implications. The researcher not only felt compelled to help Mr Alyoussef because he struggled with Germany's complicated bureaucracy and language, but she also considered it her social responsibility to support someone who had lost his home and would benefit from integration into German society (on ethics see also Section 3.6). The researcher and Mr Alyoussef got back in touch with Mrs Specker who confirmed that an application for an equivalency assessment was already possible without the formal recognition of his school certificate. They then arranged meetings with his jobcentre and the HWK Mannheim to ensure that he would apply for skills recognition in the appropriate specialisation and that the jobcentre would cover the procedural costs of 500-600 Euro.

[42] Due to laws on data protection, neither the skills recognition advisors in the 14 observations nor the author of this study were allowed to follow up with the advisees, unless they got back in touch on their own initiative. For that reason, nothing is known about the subsequent steps taken by the observed advisees except for Mr Alyoussef's, as he had shared his contact details after the observation in February 2018.

As the fieldwork in Germany for this study ended before these various meetings, Mr Alyoussef described his further steps on the phone. His appointment at the HWK Mannheim led him to apply for an equivalency assessment with the German reference occupation 'electronics technician in energy and building technology'. Given that this specialisation fell under the trades and crafts sector, the HWK Mannheim also acted as the decision-making body and processed his application. The result was partial equivalency. He was thankful that the HWK then also helped him find a traineeship to prepare for his skills analysis that would potentially provide evidence of full skills equivalency. As will be further detailed below and in Section 5.2.4.2.4.2. of the next chapter, the skills analysis is Germany's first statutory option for the recognition of NFIVOS (Berger, Lewalder, & Schreiber, 2014). Mr Alyoussef's traineeship at an electronics company allowed him to familiarise himself with the working routines of electronics technician in energy and building technology in Germany. Unfortunately, he did not succeed in the skills analysis, as he could not demonstrate sufficient NFIVOS to compensate for a number of required skills that were missing on his Syrian assistant electrician's diploma. This outcome is evidence of Germany's deep-level specialisation that exists in the Germanophone VET systems (also including Austria and Switzerland) (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Hillmert, 2006).

Several interviewees painted the following picture of the skills analysis: According to the deputy division manager of the HWK Mannheim Mr Kettner (21 February 2018), the HWK Mannheim had accumulated experience with the skills analysis since 2011. Along with Hamburg, Mannheim was the first HWK to join the Prototyping project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) to create assessment procedures for the skills analysis. They remained involved when the project was extended as Prototyping Transfer between 2015-2017.

According to Mrs Nekoui, the advisor for Prototyping Transfer and training measures at the HWK Mannheim (31 January 2018),

> the skills analysis is an option for candidates in two cases: Either insufficient written proof of their foreign vocational qualification, for instance when a list of attended

> modules is missing. Or if their foreign credentials do not fulfil all the skills requirements of the German reference qualification.

Mr Alyoussef's situation reflected the latter instance. Typically, Mrs Nekoui then put the candidate in touch with a relevant master craftsman to discuss their work experience and NFIVOS. Based on this conversation the master craftsman would devise a customised skills analysis to assess the undocumented skills that the candidate claimed to possess. Work samples were the most common form and usually took between a couple of hours to a day:

> But we have also had skills analyses for dental technicians that took a week and up to two weeks for goldsmiths. Where possible, two candidates are tested at the same time to reduce pressure and organisational costs. So far, Prototyping funding has been available but future arrangements still need to be negotiated. The costs vary between occupations, ranging from 50 to 2,700 EUR. The way they are covered depends on candidates' circumstances. Refugees registered as unemployed are usually supported by their jobcentre because a skills analysis costs less than an entire retraining. (Nekoui, 31 January 2018)

The assessment result would differ from a final apprenticeship exam in that it would compare the candidate's current skills level with the skills requirements of the German reference occupation. In case of deficits, the candidate would obtain a confirmation of partial skills equivalency and a recommendation for bridging measures to attain full equivalency.

In summary, Mr Alyoussef's pathway, including his advisory sessions, application for formal recognition of his Syrian assistant electrician qualification, skills-related traineeship and his skills analysis, was shaped by the Federal Recognition Act. As the following skills recognition endeavours by three other refugees will illustrate, sadly, it is not surprising that Mr Alyoussef only achieved partial equivalency. In line with Sommer's findings on Germany's Federal Recognition Act procedure (2015, p. 365), qualifications obtained in less developed countries, such as Syria and Pakistan, tended to be considered of less value than the German reference qualifications.

Mr Alyoussef's difficulties in navigating the procedure also point to the importance of proficiency in German and in having social bridges who can provide support. His case also illustrates that in the absence of social capital via the family, refugees and other immigrants tend to rely more on social bonds within their own ethnic community as a substitute for the social support traditionally provided by the family (Nee & Sanders, 2001). In Mr Alyoussef's

case, his almost exclusive reliance on friendships with other Syrians was not conducive to improving his German.

The next three case studies revolve around the three refugees whose foreign institutionalised cultural capital fell into legally regulated occupations which meant that they required confirmation of full equivalency in order to practice. As they arrived in Germany before Mr Alyoussef, they had more time to improve their German and build social networks.

4.2.3.2. The Syrian dentist Mr Sharbat

Similar to Mr Alyoussef, Mr Sharbat's pathway was marked by the requirements of the Federal Recognition Act because the formal recognition of his Syrian dentistry diploma fell under its legal scope (BMBF, 2019e). However, he was navigating his ongoing recognition procedure more successfully, partly because he had been more prepared for life in Germany. Before the Syrian civil war, Mr Sharbat had already attended several dentist training courses in Germany, had heard about the possibility to gain formal recognition of foreign dentistry diplomas, and liked the country. This influenced his later choice to seek asylum in Germany.

Upon arrival, he and his wife Mrs Jabour quickly realised how decisive German proficiency would be for their integration. They immediately started learning the language, first on their own and once they had been granted refugee status in German courses. They no longer spoke Arabic with their children in the belief that this would help them become fluent more quickly. For Mr Sharbat, acquiring proficiency in the German language was 'a salient marker of distinction' within recently arrived refugees from Syria (Erel, 2010, p. 654). He saw the potential of transforming the cultural capital of 'speaking German well' into economic capital, for himself in the form of employment as a dentist and for his wife and his daughters for their professional futures (Sharbat, 16 April 2018).

Mr Sharbat's level of German also played a role in his skills recognition pathway. After referral from his jobcentre to an advisory service in Meersburg, in spring 2016 he submitted his application for recognition of his Syrian dentist qualification to Stuttgart Regional Council in charge of the medical health professions. In the interview for this study, Mr Sharbat appreciated

the existence of Germany's Federal Recognition Act but found the associated procedure too impersonal. His contact at Stuttgart Regional Council provided information about the procedural steps but no customised support.

He was also critical of regulatory changes in the health professions that affected his situation. This reflects the findings of Wehrle et al.' s study (2018, p. 89) of the identity threats and coping mechanisms of refugees in Germany, in which 31 interviewed refugees mentioned 'bureaucracy to impede their selves and hinder their integration'. Mr Sharbat had just reached a B2 level in German when the language requirement to practice dentistry was increased to C1. Moreover, due to the occurrence of falsified Syrian diplomas, since mid-2016 all Syrian dentists and doctors had been required to directly pass a knowledge exam at a level comparable to the second German state exam. To put all medical professionals from Syria under such general suspicion substantiates Sommer's (2015) observation that Germany would trust qualifications acquired in third countries less than for instance, those gained in other EU countries.

Prior to this change, it would have been easier for Mr Sharbat, as his dentist diploma would have been assessed for equivalency with the German dentistry qualification. The likelihood was that any skills discrepancies would have been counterbalanced by his extensive work experience. However, although he was granted permission to work for two years under supervision, the new regulation meant that he had to reach C1 level in German (which he spoke fluently by the time of the interview for this study) and also prepare for and pass the knowledge exam. His case demonstrates that the recognition of foreign diplomas can vary over time, a scenario which Liversage (2009, p. 212) also observed with two Bosnian lawyers. Both were refugees in Denmark. While one got lucky and gained full accreditation, the other one had her law degree 'institutionally devalued' only slightly later because the procedures had changed in response to the large influx of Bosnian lawyers.

Regarding Mr Sharbat's exam preparations, he explained that,

> [t]here are two exam preparation providers in Germany, one in Freiburg and one in Berlin. The preparatory courses are expensive. Given that my wife and I now both earn money, we no longer receive welfare support. As this also means that the jobcentre

> would not cover the costs of a preparation course, I have been studying on my own. (Sharbat, 16 April 2018)

The lack of literature aimed specifically at learners like him, as well as the fact that certain topics were new to him and that he had to juggle work, family, and studying, made preparation challenging. Fortunately, he knew another Syrian dentist who had already successfully passed the knowledge exam and whom he could phone for advice.

Apart from this social bond, Mr Sharbat's other social bridges also helped him on his pathway to skills recognition. A colleague at a local school, where he temporarily worked as a maths tutor for Arabic-speaking refugees, helped him find his current employment as a supervised dentist:

> Her husband, a retired dentist, put me in touch with a dental practice in Friedrichshafen. I went there to present myself and the lead dentist and I got on well. The first few days of my work trial were rather difficult. It took me a moment to get back into the intricate manual work, as I hadn't done it for four years. But then in December last year, I was fortunately hired. (Sharbat, 16 April 2018)

While this temporary employment granted him insights into dentistry in Germany and a salary, it also meant that the jobcentre stopped supporting him and he would have to bear the entire 1,300 Euro exam fee, scheduled to take place in summer 2018. He considered this set-up to be counterproductive because it failed to incentivise refugees with foreign qualifications to become employed prior to undergoing a skills recognition procedure.

In summary, Mr Sharbat's pathway, including his preparation for the dentistry knowledge exam and employment as a supervised dentist, was shaped by the rigid regulations under the Federal Recognition Act and a general suspicion by the German decision-making authority regarding the trustworthiness of Syrian dentistry qualifications. He had to submit himself to preparations for a demanding knowledge examination because he had chosen the 'path of re-entry' into his previous job which required foreign practitioners to hold a confirmation of full equivalency with the German dentistry qualification (Liversage, 2009, p. 209). In face of his uncertain professional future, his optimism and proactivity resembled what Kreiner and Sheep (2009 quoted in Wehrle et al., 2018, p. 84) call 'identity threat jujutsu', i.e. a behaviour that turns threats into positive movement in order to both retain one's threatened vocational

identity and to improve the relationship between oneself and one's environment. While his learning German and tutoring refugee children helped him build social bridges and find his temporary dentist job, such proactivity could only achieve so much; it did not render Germany's skills recognition arrangements more flexible.

The following case study of Mr Sharbat's wife presents an occupation in which it is even more difficult to gain formal recognition.

4.2.3.3. The Syrian maths teacher Mrs Jabour

Mrs Jabour's occupational pathway was ultimately markedly changed due to the skills requirements of the teaching profession in Baden-Württemberg. In contrast to the recognition of foreign qualifications in the health professions which fall under Germany's Federal Recognition Act, professions in education and the social services (e.g. teachers, early years teachers and social workers) are governed by federal state law. Consequently, Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act applied both to her case and that of the Pakistani social worker in the next and final vignette of this chapter (BMBF, 2019i; Land Baden-Württemberg, 2013).

Despite having worked in Syria as a lower-secondary maths teacher for 13 years, Mrs Jabour opted for a career change in Germany and began a three-year apprenticeship in early years teaching in September 2017. In the interview for this study, she explained why she had decided against an application for recognition of her Syrian maths teacher's qualification and staying in the teaching profession: 'Back in Syria, in a context of teacher shortage, I completed a fast-track, two-year teachers training in maths at a university of applied sciences' (Jabour, 16 April 2018). Given the brevity of her training and her university type, her skills recognition advisor in Meersburg had been doubtful whether her maths qualification would be recognised at all. Even if it had been partially recognised by Tübingen Regional Council responsible for the teaching profession, she would have needed to study at least a second subject, if not more, in order to become a teacher in Baden-Württemberg. This would have required both C1 German competency and the ability to self-fund her studies. Another option would have been to teach in the private education sector. This would only have required formal recognition of

her university degree by the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB), which merely asserts the duration of university attendance and does not comment on the content of the foreign university degree.

Faced with these options her preference was to change career. As she struggled to learn German and needed to support her family financially, she opted for the three-year remunerated apprenticeship in early years teaching. Her social bond and link, namely her husband Mr Sharbat and her jobcentre advisor, respectively, encouraged her in that decision. Mrs Jabour's choice reflects Nee & Sanders' findings (2001, p. 391) that '[i]n the case of recently arrived immigrants, individualistic tendencies [such as to pursue the required additional university studies] are often subordinated to family concerns and interests.' While only a B2 level was required to start the apprenticeship, according to her (Jabour, 16 April 2018),

> I was wrong to believe that knowing German well wouldn't be so important as an apprentice in early years teaching. The texts that I have to read contain rather demanding pedagogical theory and philosophy.

At the time of the interview, she spent two days a week at a vocational school and three days at a nursery. Her apprenticeship allowed her time to improve her German and to gain a German vocational qualification, both of which were important as she and her husband saw their future in Germany.

Mrs Jabour knew that she was representative of many refugees with a teaching qualification in only one subject yet with extensive teaching experience who first hope that Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act could help them work again as teachers. However, the requirement of Germany's teaching system for teachers to have studied two school subjects and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act excluding work-based learning to compensate for a missing second subject are problematic. These provisions in fact decredentialise these foreign teachers because they are no longer able to teach in their new contexts (Lerner & Menahem, 2003). As a result, once advised, many Syrian teachers would have to choose between studying another subject or a career change.

Two other teachers from Syria encountered during observations for this study found themselves in a situation similar to Mrs Jabour's. One, Mr Ibrahim, was a maths teacher from Syria who would have liked to work as a teacher in Germany. However, his four-year maths degree and his lack of a Syrian pedagogical teaching licence meant that he would first need to study a second subject and take specific pedagogy modules in order to become a lower-secondary teacher in Germany.[43] His IQ Network advisor Mrs Gronau (15 February 2018) presented him with the following two options: to work as a maths tutor in the private education sector or to start a maths-oriented apprenticeship, for instance in the banking sector. The latter option would require him to demonstrate his skills in a skills analysis, as he lacked documented evidence of both his four-year maths degree and his ten-year teaching experience due to the Syrian civil war.

In a similar vein, Mr Ahmadi, who held a four-year BA's degree and a teaching degree in chemistry and had taught for seven years, had his degree classified by the skills recognition advisor Mrs Kieser as a lower secondary chemistry teacher, albeit he too lacked a second subject (13 April 2018). Corresponding to the advice given to Mrs Jabour and Mr Ibrahim, Mrs Kieser described to him the following four possibilities: He could study a second subject and attend a one-and-a-half-year teacher traineeship. Alternatively, he could go into private education, for which he might need a short training, for instance if he wanted to teach at a Rudolf Steiner School. Alternatively, he could opt for a career change, for example through pursuing either a chemistry-oriented apprenticeship, for instance in sewage technology, or, directly searching for employment in the chemical industry.

In summary, Mrs Jabour's decision against an application for recognition of her Syrian teacher qualification and her choice to embark on 'the path of re-education' in the form of a prior skills-unrelated apprenticeship (Liversage, 2009, p. 209) were triggered by Germany's extensive skills requirements for teachers, which *de facto* decredentialised her. Her markedly

[43] In order to teach at upper-secondary school in Germany, one needs a three-year BA's degree and a two-year MA's degree in two school subjects, including pedagogical modules, and in addition to a 1.5-year teacher traineeship.

changed occupational pathway exemplifies Germany's strict occupational regulations that require persons practicing regulated professions to meet high German language and technical skills.

The next refugee case study concludes this section on a relatively positive note because Mr Ullah was able to gain full recognition of his Pakistani qualification – though only after a devaluation of his foreign qualification in the form of confirmation of only partial equivalency with the German reference profession and additional mandatory training in Germany. He was working as a recognised social worker at the time of the interview for this study.

4.2.3.4. The Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah

At least two factors explain why Mr Ullah's occupational pathway was successful in terms of gaining formal skills recognition. Of the four refugees with a foreign vocational or professional qualification, he had been in Germany for the longest period of time. Additionally, he was strongly supported in his skills recognition endeavour by his social link Mrs Ehrenreich from the IQ Network service point in Ulm.

When he arrived in Germany in December 2014, he 'felt like a pathetic new-born baby because I couldn't speak any German' (Ullah, 23 May 2018). He lacked an important embodied cultural capital required for navigating his new social field. After three months in an asylum centre, Mr Ullah was granted subsidiary protection and obtained a temporary residence permit. He was assigned to Ulm, where he started attending a German A1 language course. One day, someone came into the class to present the advisory service for persons holding foreign vocational or professional qualifications. After a fellow student translated the presentation to him, he recognised that this was his opportunity to pursue his career as a social worker in Germany. However, when he went to see Mrs Ehrenreich for the first time, he struggled to understand her:

> I more or less went hibernating after that first meeting. I needed to improve my German, which I did, mainly thanks to a group of elderly ladies in a café that I regularly went to. Once I had achieved B1 in German, I went back to [my IQ advisor] several times and

> she very kindly helped me fill in and submit the application forms to Stuttgart Regional Council in 2014. I knew that Germany's legal framework for social work differs from the one that I had studied and worked in back home. In Pakistan, the law is under the umbrella of Islamic rules. But still, I didn't want to give up my dream to work as a social worker in Germany. (Ullah, 23 May 2018)

His application led to a confirmation of partial equivalency and recommendations as to what to do to reach full equivalency. This result serves as another example of the devaluation of third-country qualifications by German decision-making authorities similar to Mr Alyoussef' s case.

Mr Ullah once again sought Mrs Ehrenreich's advice and she encouraged him to attend university classes on social work, reach a B2 German level, and do traineeships to become familiar with the local realities. Finding traineeships turned out to be the most challenging aspect of his obligatory compensatory measures (*Ausgleichsmaßnahmen*). Many institutions wanted to know about his religious beliefs, and most were also unpaid. The remunerated traineeship he finally found was a lot of work for little money, but it opened doors to further work placements:

> I first worked with 25 unaccompanied minors from Pakistan and Afghanistan, then as a mentor at a youth hostel, and then at a youth centre, where I produced a documentary about the youths spending their free time there. Finally, I got to work for Scharivari which is another youth centre run by the city of Ulm. Young Greeks, Egyptians and Moroccans meet there, and I can speak English with them, which is still easier for me than German. (Ullah, 23 May 2018)

The way Mr Ullah used his embodied cultural capital of foreign language and intercultural skills to access this intercultural job with ethnic minorities is typical especially of migrant women (Lutz, 1991), but it often offers limited upward carrier mobility (Liversage, 2009).

After 18 months of compensatory measures, he submitted the related traineeship and university references together with a police certificate of good standing to Stuttgart Regional Council. In parallel to waiting for their response, he passed a job interview and was offered a maternity cover post at Scharivari, which he accepted, as all other potential employers always wondered about his religion. Since his confirmation of full equivalency in September 2017, he had worked at Scharivari as a recognised social worker. In Mr Ullah's opinion, his recognition procedure focused only on him formally acquiring the skills required for the German social worker qualification and did not consider any of his NFIVOS. Without Mrs Ehrenreich's support

he would not have managed to find and complete the required compensatory measures. He observed that,

> Although I feel it is an achievement that I got that professional recognition, it does not help me as much as I had wished for. In other occupations, for instance engineering, the recognition certificate opens well-paid jobs. But in my case, my religion and limited fluency in German are still handicaps to get a permanent job as social worker. (Ullah, 23 May 2018)

On the one hand, his observation points to Germany's problem of low salaries in the social services. On the other hand, it also puts into perspective his professional success in Germany even though his Pakistani measures of success might differ from those of a European reader (Werbner, 2000).

As for his future, he would like to do a PhD after the end of his current contract in August 2019. However, he remarked that,

> As far as I know, the only doctoral scholarships available for refugees are reserved for Syrians. And I do not even know if I can stay in Germany for good. I haven't been granted a permanent residence permit but live from one six-month extension to the next. This uncertainty is a nightmare. (Ullah, 23 May 2018)

Despite being in such limbo, Mr Ullah still concluded the interview in the belief that with motivation one can achieve something in Germany.

In summary, the requirements of Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act shaped Mr Ullah's recognition process. This process took more than three years. It started with his application for an equivalency assessment of his Pakistani social worker qualification, continued with its devaluation in terms of a confirmation of only partial equivalency with the German reference qualification and his 18 months of compensatory measures to achieve full equivalency, and finally resulted in his skills-related job. Without his supportive social link Mrs Ehrenreich and his social bridges who helped him improve his German, he would not have succeeded in meeting all of the strict skills requirements for a confirmation of full equivalency with the German social worker qualification. However, language issues were still likely to impact his vocational 'self-worth' because not speaking German completely fluently would risk diminishing his value in his social work which centred on communication (Wehrle et al., 2018,

p. 90). Moreover, Mr Ullah's case also illustrates that successful skills recognition is not a guarantor for a well-paid job, let alone a permanent residence permit.

4.3. Concluding remarks

This chapter has presented excerpts of the occupational life stories of seven refugees who were attempting to build a new career in Germany. Their introduction as the protagonists of this thesis' first set of case studies focused on their skills acquisition in their country of origin and their journey to Germany. It ranged from a Syrian tailor who had acquired his vocational skills in non-formal and informal ways to a Pakistani social worker who had gained his professional competencies at university.

Drawing on Bourdieu's practice theory (1977, 1984), the chapter suggested conceptualising refugees' skills acquisition and their vocational skills as their attainment of habitus and the resultant occupational practices. This enabled an explanation of why refugees' habitus was valued as embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their contexts of origin but not necessarily in their new German environment. The habitus underlying cultural capital is context- or field-specific, i.e. aligned to one of Bourdieu's social fields. As a result, formal skills recognition promised to be helpful because it would ideally turn refugees' habitus into German cultural capital. This set the scene for the chapter's central questions of whether these seven refugees drew on their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in their attempt to enter the German labour market; and if so, whether it involved transforming their foreign cultural capital into German cultural capital.

In line with other recent research on refugees' labour market integration in Germany (Gericke et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018), the analysis demonstrated the difficulties the seven refugees faced in continuing their previous professional lives because the value of their cultural capital became disputed there. It identified skills recognition arrangements as the location in which this questioning of refugees' foreign cultural capital crystallised most clearly. Based on refugees' occupational pathways, the chapter suggested that refugees' difficulties in

establishing themselves professionally in Germany often stem from three common challenges, namely the characteristics of Germany's skills assessment and recognition arrangements, refugees' initially limited German language skills, and their initially modest social capital.

The chapter maintained that refugees can partly overcome their difficulties and better navigate Germany's bureaucratic challenges by augmenting their social capital and adjusting their habitus. This is in accordance with other recent findings on refugees' integration into German society (e.g. Obschonka et al., 2018) which also identified personal agency as a crucial success factor.

Refugees' challenges and attempts to overcome them are discussed below, while Table 16 summarises the specific findings of the seven refugee case studies.

Table 16. Conceptual overview: refugee case studies

#	Name	Using foreign cultural capital	Characteristics of skills assessment and recognition arrangements	German language skills	Social capital		
					Social bridges	Social bonds	Social links
Refugees with NFIVOS							
1	Mr Kobani	Yes	Not helpful	B2	Helpful	Helpful	Slightly helpful
2	Mr Dawod	No	Slightly helpful	B2	Helpful	Slightly helpful	Helpful
3	Mr Omar	No	Not helpful	B2	Helpful	Slightly helpful	Helpful
Refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications							
1	Mr Alyous-sef	Yes	Helpful	B1	Slightly helpful	Not helpful	Helpful
2	Mr Shar-bat	Yes	Slightly helpful	C1	Helpful	Helpful	Helpful
3	Mrs Jabour	No	Not helpful	B2	Helpful	Helpful	Helpful
4	Mr Ullah	Yes	Helpful	B2	Helpful	Slightly helpful	Helpful

Source: Author.

4.3.1. The characteristics of Germany's skills assessment and recognition arrangements

Germany's characteristics of skills assessment and recognition arrangements present both obstacles and opportunities to refugees seeking to use their foreign cultural capital in the German labour market. In Germany's regulated occupations, formal skills recognition is indeed the only way to practice what they had learned in their countries of origin. As a result,

bargaining about the value of their foreign cultural capital with the dominant institutions, as suggested by Erel (2010) would have been of no use. Of the four refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications, three were affected by occupational regulations. By seeking skills recognition, they became subject to stringent skills requirements and complicated procedures under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act. This led to the devaluation and even decredentialisation of their foreign credentials which implied the need to attend compensatory measures, prepare for a knowledge exam, pass the skills analysis, or even go back to study. As a consequence, only one of these three refugees eventually worked at the same level as back home in Pakistan. The Syrian dentist was still aiming to gain recognition of his Syrian qualification, while, faced with Germany's inflexible teaching regulations and demanding language requirements, the Syrian maths teacher opted for a career change.

No such legal pressure for skills recognition exists in the unregulated occupations of Germany's dual VET system, under which Mr Alyoussef's Syrian electrician assistant qualification and the NFIVOS of the three refugees without foreign vocational credentials fell. However, the cases of Mr Alyoussef and Mr Dawod, who possessed NFIVOS in media design, confirmed the assumption (see Section 2.4.1) that the existence of Germany's well-established apprenticeship system would increase the incentives to undergo formal skills recognition even for unregulated occupations. Due to safety concerns, Mr Alyoussef would not have been easily recruited as an assistant electrician without formal skills recognition and therefore, tried to pass the skills analysis. The digital media company Gieske refused to hire Mr Dawod without an apprenticeship qualification, possibly due to nationally-based protectionism (Bauder, 2003). In these instances, even for unregulated occupations, the VET system functioned as a gatekeeper in the German labour market because employers seemed to consider VET qualifications as a quality insurance.

Yet, there was no recognition procedure suitable for refugees with NFIVOS. The above-mentioned PerF programme only comprised a purely diagnostic skills assessments that lacked a formal recognition aspect. Of the two NFIVOS recognition procedures mentioned in Section

3.3.2.2. on case studies, the ValiKom project was only at pilot stage and inaccessible to refugees (see Section 5.2.2.3) and the three refugees holding NFIVOS were not informed about the option of the external exam, possibly because it would have proven inappropriate for them, a point further discussed in Section 5.2.4.1. As a result, those with NFIVOS were urged to attend an entire apprenticeship programme. Of the three refugees with NFIVOS, the oldest refugee, the Syrian tailor, found ways around this recommendation thanks to his personal ingenuity through which he created his own validation mechanisms which did not rely on Germany's dominant institutions but on his customers' social recognition of his tailoring skills (Erel, 2010). Unlike him, the two younger refugees with NFIVOS were prepared to follow the guidance and embarked on 'the path of re-education' in order to gain German institutionalised cultural capital (Liversage, 2009, p. 209). Given that Mr Omar never intended to continue in his previous jobs, mainly because he had not developed an occupational identity in either of them, he opted for an apprenticeship unrelated to his prior skills (Zikic & Richardson, 2016). While the Syrian media specialist Mr Dawod decided to earn money in a low-skilled job at the time of the interview, he was still planning to pursue a prior skills-related apprenticeship.

4.3.2. Refugees' German language skills

Moreover, in order to draw on vocational or professional skills acquired abroad, but also to navigate life in Germany more generally, German proficiency is a prerequisite (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). To Bourdieu (1984), language is part of a person's habitus and becomes embodied cultural capital when it confers advantages to its speakers. Not one of the seven interviewed refugees would be where they were career-wise in early 2018 without their knowledge of German. However, most of them found learning German challenging, with many mentioning how they struggled to pass the B2 language exam. According to Kroh (2016, p. 391) who analysed survey data on refugees who had arrived in Germany between 1990 and 2010, this is not surprising. Because of the unplanned nature of their migration, refugees' knowledge of German is typically very poor on arrival and needs time to grow.

Indeed, their experiences illustrate that learning a foreign language – acquiring a new habitus in Bourdieu's terminology – requires personal initiative and time even more so than simple access to language tuition. Of the seven refugees, Mr Kobani was the only complete autodidact whose German was fluent after 11 years in Germany. Most others combined formal language tuition with reaching out to social bridges who helped them to further improve their German. Mr Alyoussef represents the other extreme, as he only attended language classes and did not mingle much with Germans, and still struggled to express himself in German. To be fair, compared to Mr Kobani's arrival in Germany in 2007, Mr Alyoussef spent a shorter period of time in Germany. He arrived in late 2015 like Mr Dawod and Mr Omar who, however, already spoke German much more fluently during the interviews for this study, notably thanks to their eagerness to learn the language and proactivity in making German friends. On this, Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. (2018) provided insights from Austria, where it was easier to connect to locals in rural areas than in urban areas. Interestingly, both Mr Dawod and Mr Omar lived in more provincial areas than Mr Alyoussef – possibly another reason for the latter's relative social isolation.

4.3.3. Refugees' social capital

Building social capital is equally important and daunting. Having social bonds with persons from the same country of origin can be helpful early in the integration process, such as Mr Kobani's cousin and friend. However, Mr Alyoussef's difficulties in learning German, partly due to his many Syrian friends in Heidelberg, suggest that social bonds should not be limited exclusively to fellow refugees. As the case studies demonstrate, it is most often social bridges with German nationals, such as the elderly ladies in Mr Omar and Mr Ullah's cases or work colleagues of Mr Sharbat and Mrs Jabour's, who can help refugees to acquire knowledge of the German language and culture. Whether a refugee meets an extraordinarily helpful person in one of Germany's administrative bodies who acts as a social link seems to be a question of luck. In three of the seven cases such social links played a decisive role, namely Mrs Öfinger-

Hellwich for Mr Dawod, the Bruderhaus Diakonie for Mr Omar, and Mrs Ehrenreich for Mr Ullah. Findings from Austria also show that particularly dedicated employees in organisations working with refugees 'made a radical difference' for them (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018, p. 38).

In addition to the challenges of acquiring proficiency in German and building social capital, drawing on one's own foreign cultural capital, both embodied and institutionalised, also requires proactivity, ingenuity and determination (Bandura, 2001; Bandura, 1994; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Obschonka et al., 2018). These qualities helped some of the refugees to adjust and expand their habitus to their new German environment. Without these attributes Mr Kobani would not have succeeded in setting up his tailor's shop and establish his customer base in Konstanz; Mr Sharbat would not have become employed and be preparing for the knowledge exam in dentistry; and Mr Ullah would not be working as a social worker for the City of Ulm. While the floor tiler and metal worker Mr Omar was not determined to draw on his vocational skills, he was eager to learn the German language and customs and quite happily seized the opportunity to start a prior skills-unrelated apprenticeship in the hotel industry.

As these seven occupational life stories were only a few examples of the many possible occupational pathways involving skills assessments and recognition arrangements in Baden-Württemberg, and in order to convey a holistic impression of Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field the next chapter will shed light on a total of seven arrangements by discussing their suitability for refugee users more generally.

5. Of skills assessments and recognition processes

Stuttgart, 23 June 2017
This was only my second interview of my pilot – and little did I know at the time that it would be the most exclusive insight into the potentially most promising skills recognition arrangement because subsequently the ValiKom project board in Cologne would not grant me permission to further work with Mrs Dr Breusing. She received me in a sun flooded meeting room of the impressively modern building of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Stuttgart located at the foot of one of the city's numerous vineyards. I quickly understood her enthusiasm for the ValiKom pilot procedure as she pointed out its many advantages over previous attempts to assess NFIVOS, namely that it combined a self-assessment with a practical skills demonstration and had the backing from the chambers, both the Chambers of Crafts and Trades and the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, which meant that the resulting skills certificates were likely to be meaningful to employers.

> *Tübingen, 20 March 2018*
> *It was more than half a year late and I was already well advanced in my empirical data collection in Baden-Württemberg. I had arrived early by train in Tübingen for my 21st interview and was cold after having stretched my legs for half an hour in the neighbourhood of the charity Bruderhaus Diakonie. The coffee that the project leader Mr Haller and the head trainer Mr Merz offered me in their team meeting room full of teaching material was warmly welcome. They complimented each other in what they explained to me about their approach to diagnostic skills assessment. Their charity had the advantage of having in-house trade workshops which allowed them to task their own master craftsmen in the occupational fields of metal, wood, paint and household to test refugees' NFIVOS.*

Stuttgart, 12 June 2018
27 interviews and three months later, 30 miles to the north of Tübingen back in Stuttgart. It was a brief respite from the heat wave, and I even needed my umbrella for the few hundred meters from the tram to the building of Stuttgart Regional Council. After a short wait with the receptionist, I was led to the office of senior executive official Mr Wirth in charge of applications for the formal recognition of foreign qualifications in the medical health professions. At the peak in 2016 they had received nearly 2000 applications of which 1415 came from persons with qualifications gained in third countries, possibly refugees. At the time, there was only one administrator in charge of dealing with applications, but in response to this extremely high demand, they recruited additional staff.

Overview

This chapter explores the suitability of seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements or schemes for refugee users in Baden-Württemberg. It aims to make inferences about the barriers and facilitating factors of a refugee-friendly procedure that formally recognises NFIVOS. Section 5.1 first proposes to conceptualise the various skills assessment and recognition options in Baden-Württemberg as one of Bourdieu's social fields because of the

latter's explanatory power regarding the practices and actors and their interests and power dynamics involved in the skills recognition process. The chapter then embeds the seven occupational life stories of the previous chapter into Baden-Württemberg's wider skills recognition field which includes the seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements that serve as case studies in this chapter.

Section 5.2 first defines the 'suitability for refugee users' of an arrangement. Based on the findings of the previous chapter, it identifies the following four characteristics that arrangements must possess in order to be suitable for refugees: they need to provide formal skills recognition; be accessible; be accommodating towards limited proficiency in German; and provide support throughout the skills recognition process. Subsequently, the chapter uses these characteristics as indicators to examine the seven arrangements in turn. While all four indicators matter, it argues that the most important for the purpose of refugees' swift labour market entry is whether the arrangement grants formal recognition to their skills. Four broad skills recognition scheme types are put forward which progressively converge with the skills requirements of Germany's education and training system and into which the seven arrangements are grouped.

The chapter finds that none of the seven arrangements possesses all four characteristics. It maintains that the more closely aligned arrangements are with the skills requirements of Germany's education and training system, the more selective they are in the skills they consider and the closer they come to formally recognising these skills. This is significant because the three arrangements (various skills assessments, PerF, MySkills) that possess the three other characteristics are also those which grant the least formal recognition. In sum, the chapter finds the choice to be between refugee-friendly NFIVOS assessments that fail to provide any formal recognition and those recognition arrangements that come closer to formal skills recognition but that are less useful as measured against the other three suitability indicators.

5.1. Overview of refugees’ possible pathways

Although already intricate in themselves, the refugees’ occupational pathways in the previous chapter illustrated only some of the numerous possibilities open to refugees with job-relevant skills in Baden-Württemberg. As outlined in Section 3.3.2 on case studies, this chapter uses seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements as case studies in order to infer the challenges and facilitators of a refugee-friendly procedure that formally recognises NFIVOS. Based on the literature (see Section 2.4.2) and study participants’ information, this section locates these seven arrangements together with refugees’ aforementioned trajectories into work within the numerous possible pathways of Baden-Württemberg’s skills recognition field, described below.

5.1.1. Baden-Württemberg’s skills recognition field

It is proposed to conceptualise the various skills assessment and recognition options in Baden-Württemberg as constituting one of Bourdieu’s social fields which make up the social world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). According to Bourdieu (2005), in order to understand a social phenomenon, such as a skills recognition process, it is insufficient to merely look at what was said and happened. It is additionally necessary to examine the social space, or field, in which the phenomenon occurs because of the interdependence between the field, actors’ capital and actors’ habitus already discussed in Section 4.2.1 of the previous chapter. He defines a field as:

> […] a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. (Bourdieu, 1998a, pp. 40–41)

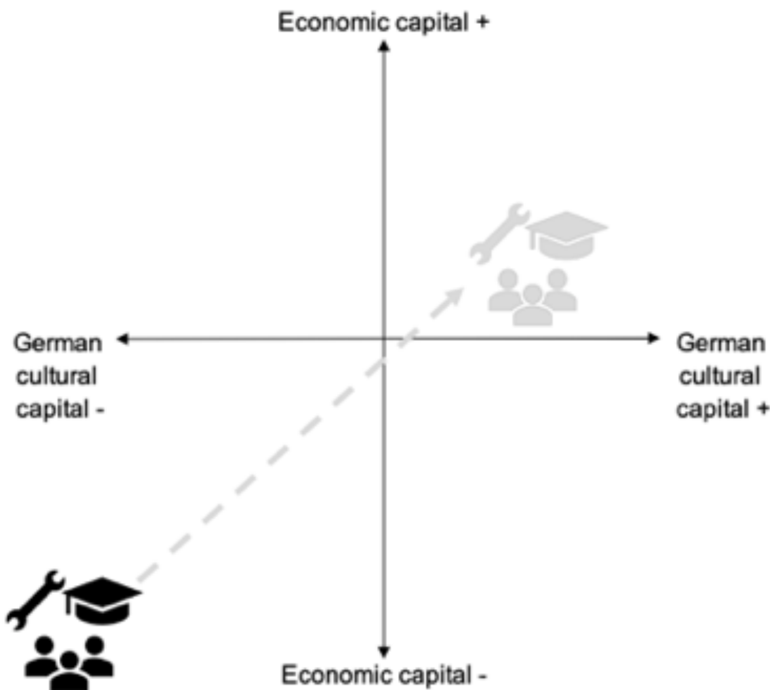
In addition, he also maintains that what is happening in the field is a competitive struggle for the accumulation of capitals, ‘which are both the process within and product of, [the] field’ (Thompson, 2008, p. 69). Consequently, this chapter examines Baden-Württemberg’s skills recognition field in order to shed light onto its practices and actors, and their interests and

power dynamics around the process and production of German institutionalised cultural capital.

Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field revolves around the transformation of persons' NFIVOS or foreign vocational or professional qualifications into German institutionalised cultural capital in the form of German skills certificates or confirmations of equivalency with the German reference qualifications. The rationale for this transformation lies in actors' belief in the high value of German institutionalised cultural capital (on this see Section 6.1.2 of the next chapter), which allows the holder to exchange it with economic capital across different fields, for instance, permitting them to obtain attractively-paid employment related to their prior skills in Germany's labour market (Moore, 2008, p. 102).

According to Bourdieu (1988a), cultural and economic capital are two poles in a social field, with peoples' social position determined by their relationship to these two poles. As shown in Figure 5 below, these poles can be expressed by two intersecting axes where the vertical is economic capital (from plus to minus) and the horizontal axis is cultural capital (from plus to minus). Both together are highly advantageous for people's social positioning in terms of status and power (Thomson, 2008). Each social field attributes 'distinction' to certain outputs (e.g. to a certain way of speaking but not to popular dialects) (Bourdieu, 1984).

Figure 5. Diagram of Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field



Source: Author adapted Bourdieu, P. (1988a). *Homo Academicus. P. Collier (trans.)*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 270 [Original: 1984 Homo Academicus (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit)].

Using Bourdieu's field as a scholastic device for this study implies that in Germany, certain skills sets and qualifications are more highly valued than others, i.e. they have a comparatively higher economic return in the labour market. This applies to two levels in the skills recognition field. First, compared to foreign skills and qualifications, those acquired in Germany are more valued and bring higher economic returns. Second, certain German qualifications, for instance a dentist qualification, lead to higher salaries, i.e. a bigger economic capital, than some other German qualifications, for example a hairdressing qualification. Due to its high exchange value, actors in the skills recognition field are willing to struggle over the production and distribution of German institutionalised cultural capital – an issue this chapter will explore.

As will be illustrated, Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field is composed of actors who have their own interests and stakes in the seven skills recognition processes under consideration. As shown in Figure 5 above, refugees enter Baden-Württemberg's skills

recognition field in an attempt to change from their position of non-holders to holders of German cultural capital in order to improve their employment chances, i.e. chances of accumulating economic capital. Moreover, given that the skills recognition field exists in relationship to other fields, it is possible that the interests of actors from the formal education and training field and the labour market field also come into play (Moore, 2008). Although the skills recognition field is hierarchical, with powerful institutions influencing to a considerable extent what happens within it, it still leaves space for individual agency (Thomson, 2008).

According to Bourdieu (1984, p. 71), the field is governed by a set of unwritten 'rules of the game', which everyone in that field has to learn through time and experience and within which there is a certain leeway for agency and creativity. Yet, compared to those who have grown up in Germany and/or worked in the skills recognition field, recently arrived refugees are disadvantaged as they lack what Bourdieu (1994, p. 93) calls 'the feel for the game'. Bourdieu warns that the notion of a game must be treated cautiously:

> You can use the analogy of the game in order to say that a set of people take part in a rule-bound activity, an activity which, without necessarily being the product of obedience to rules, obeys certain regularities . . . Should one talk of a rule? Yes and no. You can do so on condition that you distinguish clearly between rule and regularity. The social game is regulated, it is the locus of certain regularities. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 64)

As a result, the 'the feel for the game' is a feel for these regularities in the skills recognition field. Bourdieu argues 'the habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature' (1994, p. 93). This echoes the argument in Section 4.2.1 of the previous chapter. For refugees, who have habituses moulded by social fields completely different to those in Germany, it takes prolonged immersion to develop the right 'feel for the [skills recognition] game' by adjusting their habitus to the field requirements.

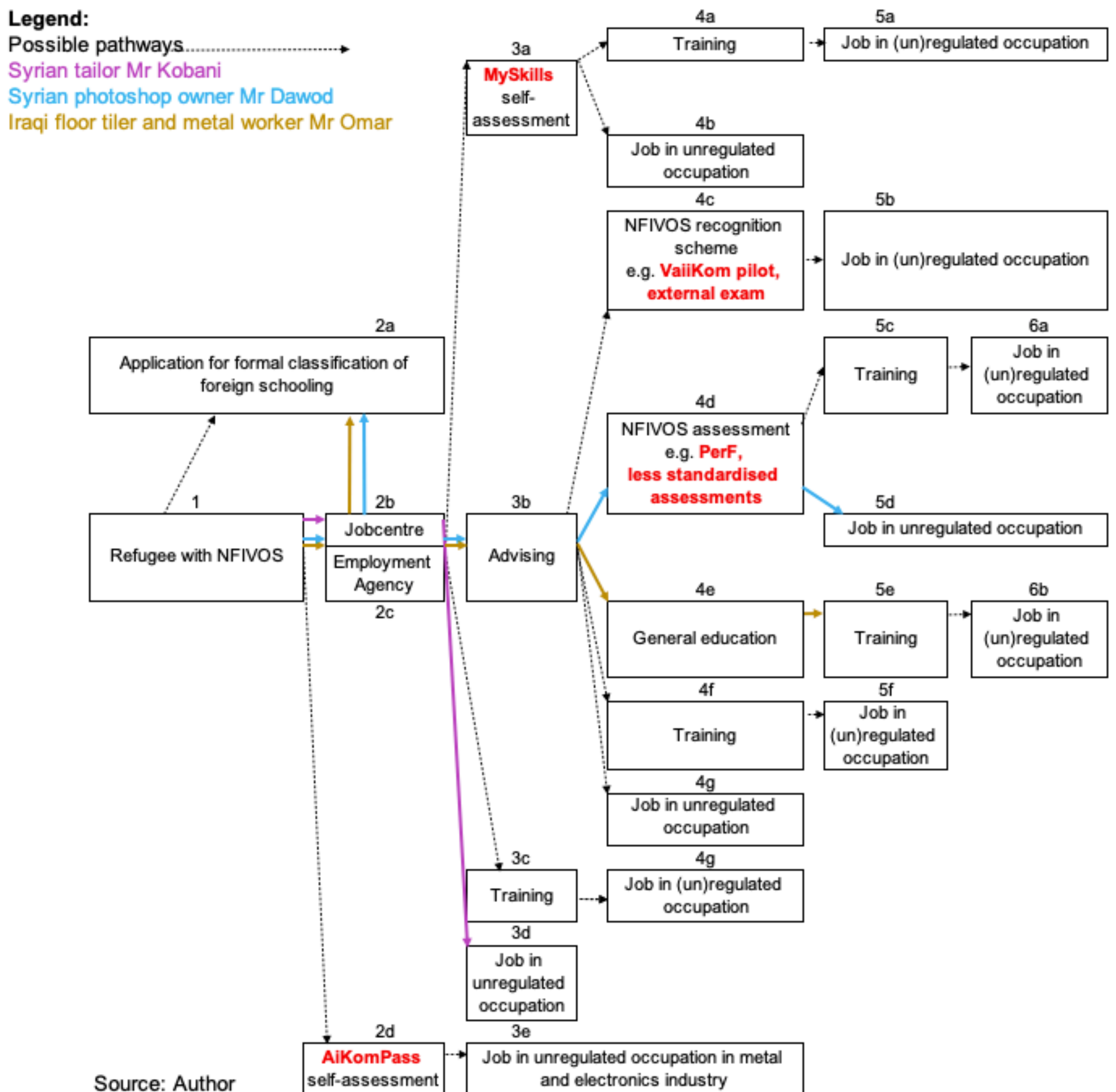
The next two sections explain refugees' numerous possible occupational pathways in Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field.

5.1.2. Possible occupational pathways of refugees with NFIVOS

Figure 6 below depicts the occupational pathways of the three refugees who only possessed NFIVOS (in pink, blue and yellow lines) together with additional options for persons with

NFIVOS (in dashed lines) in Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field. These include the six assessment and recognition schemes for NFIVOS (highlighted in red) which are the focus of this chapter. The trajectory of the Syrian tailor Mr Kobani is shown in pink, that of the Syrian photoshop owner Mr Dawod is blue, and that of the Iraqi floor tiler and metal worker Mr Omar is yellow.

Figure 6. Possible occupational pathways of refugees with NFIVOS



Source: Author

As shown in Figure 6, the first steps of refugees with NFIVOS (Stage 1) in Baden-Württemberg could either lead them to the public employment service (Stages 2b and 2c) or to a computer screen (Stage 2d). If they are directed to Stage 2d, then the following illustrates this path.

(Stage 2d) If they happened to have previously worked in the metal and electronics industry, which was neither the case for Mr Kobani nor Mr Dawod nor Mr Omar, they could pass the skills self-assessment **AiKomPass** on the internet, further discussed in Section 5.2.2.2 below. Whether it would help refugees find a job in an unregulated occupation in Baden-Württemberg's metal or electronics industry (Stage 3e) would depend on the attitude of possible employers (Baron, 19 February 2018).

In (Stage 2d) and (Stages 2b and 2c), refugees would be advised to have their documented foreign schooling formally classified because potential employers and education and training providers would want to know their educational level. For the formal classification of their educational attainment, refugees would need to submit their translated school certificates to Stuttgart Regional Council (2a) (Specker, 22 February 2018; Wolf, 7 March 2018).

In terms of (Stages 2b and 2c), rather than making use of the AiKomPass, most refugees, including this study's three refugees with NFIVOS, would be more likely to seek advice about employment opportunities at the local jobcentre (Stage 2b) or employment agency if they were still asylum seekers (Stage 2c). Moreover, for (Stages 2b and 2c), the public employment service staff could present them with the following options (Walschburger & Meschede, 1 February 2018):

Option A. (Stage 3a) If their vocational skills fell under one of the thirty vocational profiles covered by the **MySkills** software package, they could pass this digital self-assessment. As set out in Section 5.2.2.1 below, MySkills would compare their skills with those required for the respective vocational profiles and would inform the staff whether to recommend training (Stage 4a) before entering the labour market (5a), or to directly find a job in an unregulated occupation (Stage 4b) (Ringer & Messner, 27 March 2018).

Option B. (Stage 3b) The jobcentre staff could also refer the refugees to special advisory

services for people without formal vocational or professional qualifications, for instance at the IQ Network service points, Chambers of Crafts and Trades (HWKs), Chambers of Industry and Commerce (IHKs), charities and education providers (Rolko, 31 January 2018; Schneider, 14 May 2018; Yildrim & Münch, 21 February 2018). After receiving this advice, the refugees would then have to decide whether to:

- participate in an assessment or recognition scheme for NFIVOS (Stages 4d and 4c). Ideally, this would formally recognise their NFIVOS (Stage 4c) and lead to a job in an (un)regulated occupation, such as tested in the **ValiKom** pilot project and further explained in Section 5.2.2.3. Alternatively, their NFIVOS could allow them to directly sit the **external exam** of the dual apprenticeship system, success in which, however, would usually require attendance of formal preparatory courses, as detailed in Section 5.2.4.1 (Gutschow, 7 June 2018). However, it would be more likely that they participate in a diagnostic skills assessment (Stage 4d) that would not lead to any formal recognition (Kettner, 21 February 2018). Such an assessment could be the **PerF** programme, in which Mr Dawod took part and which is further described in Section 5.2.1.2, or other even **less standardised assessments**, discussed in Section 5.2.1.1. Such diagnostic skills assessments would help the refugees decide whether to attend training (Stage 5c) before entering employment (Stage 6a) or to directly find a job in an unregulated occupation (Stage 5d).
- attend general education (Stage 4e), as happened to Mr Omar, before enrolling in training (Stage 5e) and getting a job in either a regulated or unregulated occupation (Stage 6b).
- Or to attend training (Stage 4f) before a job in an (un)regulated occupation (Stage 5f).
- Or to directly find a job in an unregulated occupation (Stage 4g).

Option C. (Stage 3c) The public employment service staff could also directly refer the refugees to attend training (Stage 3c), before finding a job in either a regulated or unregulated occupation (Stage 4g).

Option D. (Stage 3d) Or they could encourage them to directly work in an unregulated occupation.

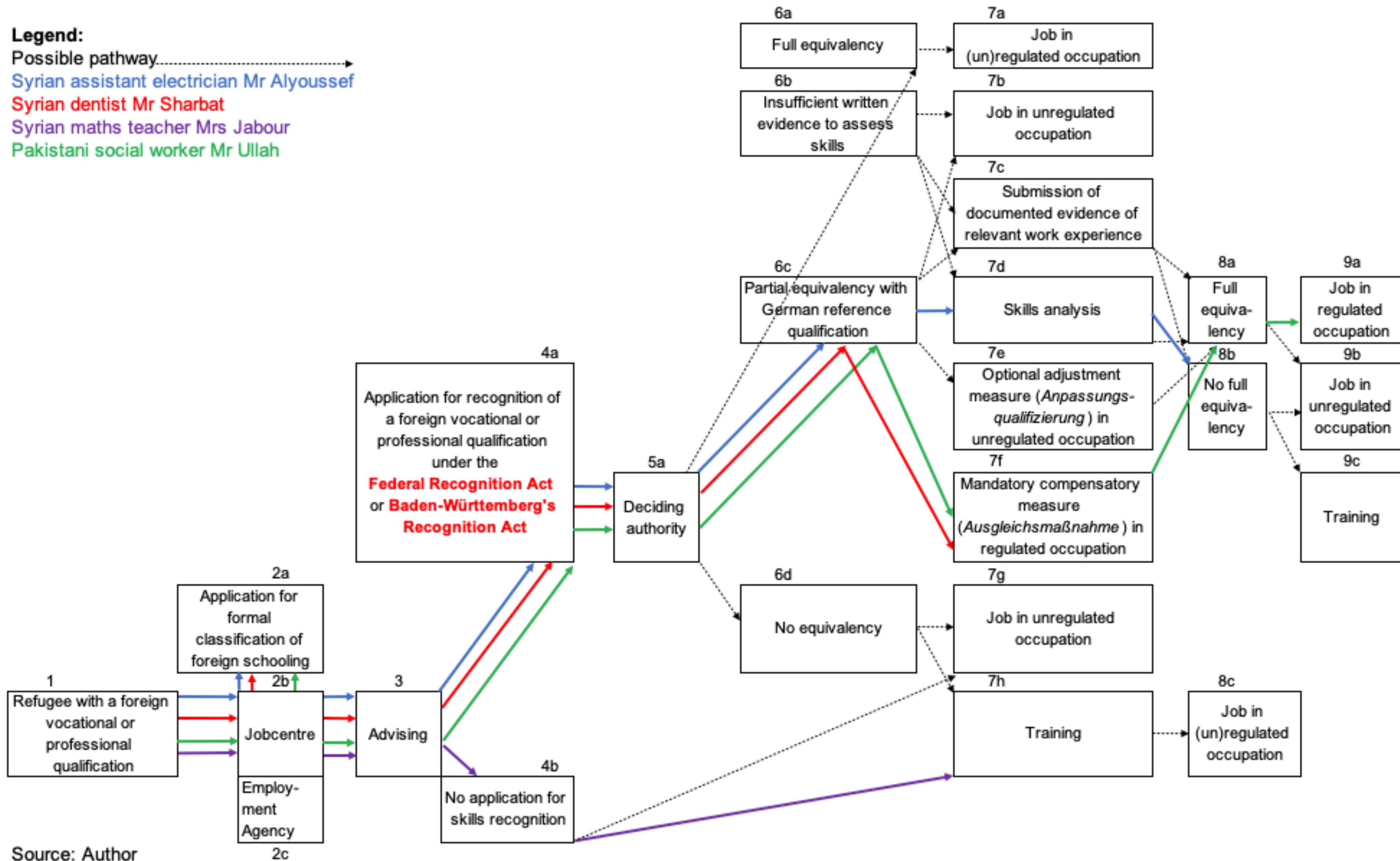
As illustrated by the four refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications in the previous chapter, there were also various possible pathways open to holders of foreign institutionalised capital which are illustrated below.

5.1.3. Possible occupational pathways of refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications

Figure 7 below shows the numerous possible occupational pathways of refugees holding foreign vocational or professional qualifications in Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field. The trajectory of the Syrian assistant electrician Mr Alyoussef is shown in blue, that of the Syrian dentist Mr Sharbat is red, that of the Syrian maths teacher Mrs Jabour is purple, and that of the Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah is green. Further possible pathways are indicated as dashed lines.

According to the findings of Chapter 4, such refugees were likely to draw on their foreign institutionalised cultural capital in order to find a job related to their prior skills. In two of the four cases, this involved its transformation into German institutionalised cultural capital under the Federal Recognition Act for federally governed occupations and professions (such as Mr Sharbat's dentist qualifications), or under Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act for occupations governed by federal state law (such as Mr Ullah's social worker credentials) (BMBF, 2019g).

Figure 7. Possible occupational pathways of refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications



Source: Author

As depicted in Figure 7, similarly to refugees with NFIVOS, most refugees holding a foreign vocational or professional qualification would seek advice about employment opportunities at the local jobcentre (Stage 2b) or at the employment agency (Stage 2c) if they were still asylum seekers. They would most certainly also be advised to submit their school certificates to Stuttgart Regional Council for formal classification of their educational attainment (Stage 2a).

Yet, in contrast to those possessing only NFIVOS, the public employment service staff would likely refer them to the advisory service for persons seeking recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications (Stage 3), further explained in Section 5.2.4.2 below (Gebert, 11 April 2018; Günthert, 2 February 2018; Jauch, 23 February 2018; Walschburger & Meschede, 12 February 2018). This service was offered by various bodies, including the recognition service points of the IQ Network, the HWKs and the IHKs. After receiving advice (Stage 3), the refugees would then have to decide whether to apply for skills recognition (Stage 4a) or not (Stage 4b):

For (Stage 4b), if they did not apply, as was Mrs Jabour's case (see Section 4.2.3.3), they would have the choice between training (Stage 7h) or directly finding an unregulated job (Stage 7g). Training could involve education or vocational education and training at upper-secondary (i.e. apprenticeship) or postsecondary level (e.g. exam for the master craftsperson's diploma) or university studies in order to obtain a German qualification that could either be related or unrelated to their foreign qualification and that would help them to eventually find a job in either a regulated or unregulated occupation (Stage 8c). If the refugees decided to directly enter the labour market, they would risk ending up working below the level of their foreign vocational or professional qualification and could not work in regulated occupations that have a legal qualification requirement (Kieser, 13 April 2018; Wolf, 7 March 2018).

(Stage 4a) If they opted to apply for the recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualification under the Federal Recognition Act or Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act, they would submit their application to the appropriate competent authority

(Stage 5a). Depending on their vocational or professional field, these included Stuttgart Regional Council (e.g. medical and social professions), Tübingen Regional Councils (e.g. teaching), Baden-Württemberg's Chamber of Pharmacists (e.g. pharmacists and pharmaceutical technical assistants), Baden-Württemberg's Chamber of Engineers, local Chambers of Crafts and Trades (e.g. trade and crafts occupations), and the IHK FOSA Institute (Foreign Skills Approval Institute of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry) (e.g. occupations in industry and commerce). The application would cost between 100 and 600 EUR depending on the occupation and the processing effort. Often the refugees' jobcentres would cover the costs (Kieser, 13 April 2018).

(Stage 5a) The decision-making authority could either:

- confirm **full equivalency** (Stage 6a) with the German reference qualification, which, depending on the regulation of the respective occupational field would allow the refugee to apply for a job in a regulated or unregulated occupation (Stage 7a).
- or, in case of **insufficient written evidence to assess refugees' skills** (Stage 6b), recommend either finding a job in an unregulated occupation (Stage 7b) or submitting documented evidence of relevant work experience (Stage 7c). Or, if the latter is not possible, it could encourage the candidate to pass the skills analysis (*Qualifikationsanalyse*) (Stage 7d).

  Stages 7c or 7d could in turn lead to full equivalency (Stage 8a), partial equivalency (Stage 6c) or no equivalency (Stage 6d).
- or confirm **partial equivalency** (Stage 6c) with the German reference qualification. While refugees seeking to practice a regulated occupation, could only do so if they achieved full equivalency (Stage 8a), refugees intending to work in an unregulated occupation would have the choice between either directly searching for an unregulated job (Stage 7b) or attaining full equivalency (Stage 8a).

  For full equivalency (Stage 8a), both refugees with work intentions in regulated and unregulated occupations could either submit documented evidence of relevant work

experience (Stage 7c) or pass a skills analysis (Stage 7d) (see Section 5.2.4.2.4.2) to demonstrate the missing skills or attend optional adjustment measures (for unregulated occupations) (*Anpassungsqualifizierung*) (Stage 7e) or attend mandatory compensatory measures (for regulated occupations) (*Ausgleichsmaßnahmen*) (Stage 7f).

Stages 7c or 7d could either lead to full equivalency (8a) or be unsuccessful and not lead to full equivalency (Stage 8b), as was the case of the electronics assistant as Mr Alyoussef described in Section 4.2.3.1. In the latter case, candidates could then either look for work in an unregulated occupation (Stage 9b) or attend training (Stage 9c).

Stage 7f: The compensatory measures could comprise additional university studies and traineeships, as was the case of the Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah (see Section 4.2.3.4), or the knowledge exam for foreign doctors and dentists in Mr Sharbat's case (see Section 4.2.3.2). They would ideally lead to the confirmation of full equivalency (Stage 8a) which would be legally required for the exercise of a regulated occupation (Stage 9a) and advantageous in unregulated jobs (Stage 9b).

- or find **no equivalency** at all (Stage 6d) which would mean the candidate could either directly search for an unregulated job (Stage 7g) or attend training (Stage 7h) before working in a regulated or unregulated occupation (Stage 8c).

5.2. The suitability of skills assessment and recognition processes for refugees

The illustrations in the previous section have highlighted the intricacies of the many possible occupational pathways open to refugees in Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field. This next section progresses the analysis by addressing this chapter's central question: How suitable for refugee users are those seven processes in the above-depicted option trees which comprise skills assessment and recognition aspects?

Table 17 below displays these arrangements, distinguishing between the six assessment and recognition schemes for NFIVOS (to the left) and the recognition procedures

for foreign vocational and professional qualifications (to the right). While the details of the table are explained below, it is worthwhile noting the absence of skills recognition Type III in the table. Type III was not of immediate relevance to this thesis because rather than aiming at direct labour market integration, it is used for accessing formal education and training (see Section 5.2.3).

Table 17. The seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements under study

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">Assessment and recognition schemes
for informally and non-formally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS)</th><th>Recognition procedures
for foreign vocational and professional qualifications</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">No formal recognition</td><td colspan="3">Formal recognition</td></tr>
<tr><td>Various skills assess-ments</td><td>PerF
(Prospects for refugees)</td><td>MySkills</td><td>AiKomPass
(only metal + electronics industries)</td><td>ValiKom
(only pilot project)</td><td>External exam
(but only if total equivalency with skills require-ments of VET prg.)</td><td>Germany's Federal Recognition Act
and
Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Skills recognition
Type I</td><td colspan="3">Type II</td><td colspan="2">Type IV</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">Diagnostic + inclusive of all NFIVOS <-----------------------> Summative + selective in skills recognition</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Author.

As outlined in Section 3.3.2 on case studies, the suitability for refugee users of an arrangement is defined as the extent to which its characteristics meet refugees' needs. Based on the findings of the previous chapter, the following four characteristics are identified that arrangements must possess to be suitable for refugees. They need:

- to provide formal skills recognition;
- be accessible;
- be accommodating towards limited proficiency in German;
- and to provide support throughout the skills recognition process.

For instance, it would have been impossible for the Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah to become employed as a social worker in Germany without the opportunity to obtain formal skills recognition under Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act and the accessible and supportive IQ service point in Ulm in the form of Mrs Ehrenreich, who was accommodating towards his slowly improving German language skills (see case study in Section 4.2.3.4).

These four characteristics are used as indicators to examine the seven skills assessment and recognition processes listed in Table 17, drawing on data from interviews and observations with study participants at the operational and strategic levels, and on the scarce documentary sources available on this under-researched topic.

While all four indicators matter, the most important for the purpose of refugees' swift labour market entry is undoubtedly whether the arrangement grants formal recognition to refugees' skills. It is argued that this becomes more likely, the more closely an arrangement is aligned to Germany's formal education and training system, which illustrates the close relationship between Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field, its education and training field and its labour market field. This alignment is understood to be the extent to which the arrangements use the same skills requirements as in formal education and training. The suitability examination below will illustrate that the arrangement furthest to the left in Table 17 (various skills assessments) is the least aligned with the skills requirements of Germany's formal education and training system, while the three procedures furthest to the right grant formal recognition to NFIVOS and foreign vocational and professional qualifications using the skills profiles of German reference occupations for their increasingly meticulous equivalency assessment. Moreover, based on the characteristics of skills recognition arrangements presented in Section 2.2.1.2 of the Literature Review, four broad skills recognition types are put forward into which the seven arrangements can be grouped (second to last row in Table 17). Types I to IV progressively converge with the skills requirements of Germany's formal education and training system. While assessments of Type I are diagnostic and capture all or

most of candidates' NFIVOS without formalising them, those of Types II to IV become increasingly summative and selective in the skills they formally recognise.

The different types are detailed below as part of the analysis of the suitability of the seven skills assessment and recognition arrangements for refugee users as measured by the four indicators, starting with those arrangements least structured and most diagnostic falling under Type I. An overview of the proposed skills recognition typology is provided in Table 23 (p. 221) in Section 6.2.2 of the next chapter.

5.2.1. Skills recognition Type I (NFIVOS)

Skills recognition arrangements of Type I assess NFIL and NFIVOS for the purpose of candidates' personal development. The EU refers to this as 'skills audit' which aims to help frame a career or training plan (CEDEFOP, 2014a, p. 241). The assessment is diagnostic, often comprising self-reporting of skills (e.g. portfolios) and does not include formal validation and certification by a recognised body (Annen et al., 2012). German examples of relevance to refugees possessing NFIVOS include the various skills assessments provided by third-party training providers in Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field and the PerF programme funded by the Federal Employment Agency and also implemented by such third-party training providers. Both are discussed below.

5.2.1.1. Various skills assessments

At the time of data collection in early 2018, many organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees in Baden-Württemberg offered the latter access to informal diagnostic skills assessments. Typically, advisors who had been trained in the use of simple and easy-to-understand German language conducted these assessments through in-depth conversations or arranged additional work placements where employers tested candidates' skills practically. While the approach was accommodating towards refugees' foreign habitus, the assessments results did not lead to any formal skills recognition of use in other social fields. However, they

were often used as a baseline to customise further training measures in the education and training field for which the organisations provided support.

Examples included the 11 organisations forming the NIFA (*Netzwerk zur Integration von Flüchtlingen in Arbeit*) network in Baden-Württemberg which was dedicated to the integration of refugees into work. Of these 11, the following three were interviewed for this case study:

- The religious charity Bruderhaus Diakonie in Tübingen (already mentioned in the case of the Iraqi floor tiler and metal worker in Section 4.2.2.3) (Bruderhaus Diakonie, 2019);
- ‘Staying through work’ (*Bleiben mit Arbeit*) in Konstanz (AWO, 2019);
- and ‘Work and VET for asylum seekers and refugees’ (Arbeit und Ausbildung für Flüchtlinge) in Freiburg (Projektverbund Baden, 2019).

All nine representatives of these organisations that were interviewed were confident that they provided sufficient support. This confidence was also shared by respondents at the strategic level. For instance, the coordinators of NIFA, Mrs Welt and Mrs Karaburun, described as one of the network’s strengths the refugees’ long-term supervision by qualified staff: ‘The skills assessment presents in fact only one component of a whole supervision package that aims to improve the supervised refugees’ employability’ (26 February 2018). Many of the advisors worked closely with local employment agencies, jobcentres and volunteer associations. For instance, the advisor of ‘Staying through work’ in Konstanz, Mrs Willi (9 May 2018), explained that,

> employment agencies and jobcentres are tasked with case management, yet they have only time to refer persons with a refugee background to charities like mine where my colleagues and I have sufficient time to listen and provide customised advice.

She also described her cooperation with the local volunteer circle ‘Save me’ which nearly overstretched its human capacities when asylum seekers and refugees’ demand for support peaked in 2016: ‘At the time the legal framework of asylum seekers’ rights to access the labour market changed quickly and volunteers struggled to keep up with the changes’ (Willi,

9May2018). The advisor at the project 'Work and VET for asylum seekers and refugees' in Freiburg, Mrs Schneider (14 May 2018), observed that,

> [n]ew advisory services accessible to refugees mushroomed in response to the migration influx in 2015. But as many such initiatives were only short-lived, it has left some persons with a refugee background stranded. Through our close links with the employment agency and jobcentre, we try to ensure that those can find us who had previously been looked after by projects that no longer exist.

Given that the skills assessments by these various organisations lacked a formal recognition aspect and standardisation, the NIFA coordinators in Baden-Württemberg set up a working group to identify best practice across their 11 member organisations. However, because of staff turnover in participating projects, at the time of our interview, they could only share a flow chart of the typical skills assessment procedure of the Bruderhaus Diakonie in Tübingen.

According to the Bruderhaus Diakonie project leader and its head trainer, Mr Haller and Mr Merz respectively, the procedure would begin by determining the refugees' personal situation and whether they would want to retrain or enter the labour market in an occupational field they were already familiar with. In the case of the latter, Mr Merz would normally have the candidate sit a maths test and undertake some exercises in motoric skills and craftsmanship. One advantage of the Bruderhaus Diakonie over partner projects was their in-house trade workshops, which allowed them to task their own master craftsmen in the occupational fields of metal, wood, paint and household to test refugees' NFIVOS. Informed by the practical test results, Mr Merz would then either help candidates find appropriate employment, most often as assistants to master craftsmen, or place them in one of the charity's various education and training programmes.

A similarly practice-oriented skills assessment was designed by the Chamber of Crafts and Trades (HWK) Mannheim in 2015-2016 accessible to persons with a refugee background who were being sponsored by their employment agency or jobcentre. The deputy division manager at the HWK Mannheim Mr Kettner (21 February 2018) explained that for one week, master craftsmen at the HWK Training Academy could test candidates' vocational skills in the

construction or metal field. However, at the time of the interview for this case study, less than 20 refugees had made use of the offer, probably due to the large number of alternative measures such as the PerF programme which is discussed below.

Other skills assessments often emerged on a case-by-case basis. For instance, in the case of an electronics shop owner from Pakistan, Mr Kettner considered a skills assessment similar to the skills analysis under Article 1, § 14 of the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (see Section 5.2.4.2.4.2 below) and the ValiKom pilot procedure (see Section 5.2.2.3 below) most appropriate in order to gauge the candidate's skills level before offering further advice and guidance.

Other skills assessments could take the form of work trials by companies, including those at Switzerland's largest menswear manufacturer Strellson, the clothing manufacturer Trigema and the sport equipment producer VAUDE in Southern Baden-Württemberg, mentioned in Section 4.2.2.1 of the previous chapter. While these work trials did not lead to any formal skills certification, they allowed refugees to prove their NFIVOS in tailoring. As a result, some of the refugees were hired by the companies for whom a skilled workforce mattered more for their business' success than having a formally qualified workforce (Fiedler, 6 July 2018; Grupp, 21 June 2018).

Compared to these various refugee-friendly, but unstandardised skills assessments, the PerF programme discussed below was slightly more standardised but also lacked a formal skills recognition aspect.

5.2.1.2. PerF

In response to the migrant influx in late 2015, the Federal Employment Agency (BA) launched the nationwide PerF programme (*Perspektiven für Flüchtlinge; English: Prospects for refugees*) that sought to offer employment prospects to refugees. The 12-week programme explicitly targeted refugees, providing them with German language training and personal support and an informal on-the-job skills assessment (BA, 2017b; BMBF, 2016a). This offer

helped refugees to adjust their habitus to their new German field and acquire valuable insights into German culture and language. Nevertheless, the PerF skills assessment did not lead to formal skills recognition. Moreover, access was limited to those who were referred by their employment agency or jobcentre to third party training providers who executed PerF on the BA's behalf.

According to Mr Kettner from the HWK Mannheim, if PerF had been used correctly, refugees would already have attended an integration course and have reached at least the A1 level of language skills in German when embarking on the PerF programme. However, in late 2015, he witnessed premature placing of asylum seekers and refugees into PerF:

> When the local employment agency tasked us to help find work placements for PerF participants, my colleagues struggled because the new arrivals hardly spoke any German. As a result, we could only place two of the 100 participants for a six-week traineeship in the crafts and trades sector. (Kettner, 21 February 2018)

Half a year later, the situation had changed. When the education and training provider IB in Stuttgart started offering PerF to asylum seekers, their participants had already acquired some basic German language skills and appreciated the additional daily language lessons (Ministerium für Wirtschaft Arbeit und Wohnungsbau Baden-Württemberg, 2017, 2018). At the same time, 'participants' varying language levels were challenging for our teachers to juggle' (Dannenmann, 6 February 2018).

Regarding the provision of support, the IB deputy division manager Mrs Dannenmann, for instance, always allowed ample time to get to know her new PerF participants' vocational history and made efforts to find them appropriate work placements.[44] Sometimes this proved difficult. For instance, when PerF participants had work experience in the commercial field but did not meet the language requirements for working in Germany's retail sector. In Mrs

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[44] Surprisingly, Dannenmann also encountered asylum seekers who had accumulated substantial work experience in one or several jobs but did not seek recognition for their previously acquired vocational skills. Rather, they were keen to try something different or were indifferent about the sort of new job as long as they would earn money. In such cases, she advised to look into an occupation with labour shortages that would suit the candidates' language level.

Dannenmann's view, PerF's skills assessment in a real working environment was particularly helpful because '[i]t is nearly impossible to understand what someone's skills are when they are only described in words and often only in broken German' (Dannenmann, 6 February 2018). At the end of the work placement, workplace supervisors would fill in standardised assessment reports about the participants' vocational and social skills, performance and willingness to learn. While these reports did not formally recognise participants NFIVOS, they were intended to inform both PerF participants and their jobcentre or employment agency advisors about the usability of their NFIVOS in the German labour market.

The feedback from many employers had been positive. Mrs Dannenmann noted that many crafts businesses affected by a skilled labour shortage, for instance, in floor tiling and painting, even attempted to recruit PerF participants. She remarked that '[i]n addition to technical skills, social competences are equally decisive. Employers want employees who are punctual, reliable and most of all motivated.' PerF allowed them to get to know potential future employees. While recruitment sometimes worked, in other cases there were bureaucratic obstacles because asylum seekers, for instance from Nigeria and Gambia, were not easily granted refugee status and work permits.

Equally, many PerF completers, such as the former photoshop owner Mr Dawod in the Black Forest (see Section 4.2.2.2), were grateful for having had the opportunity to partake in PerF. In Mrs Dannenmann's opinion (6 February 2018),

> [w]hat is good about the PerF measure is that it is short. Many persons with a refugee background are keen to work here, want to earn money, and say explicitly that they no longer want to be supported by the state. They are not interested in going back to school or attending an apprenticeship. If any education, they would prefer university studies because in many countries, vocational training does not have a good reputation.

An IB internal evaluation of their first PerF implementation between mid-2016 and late 2017 found that, while not PerF's main focus, around 40 percent of PerF completers had found either education and training or work (Dannenmann, 6 February 2018).

In 2017, the BA stated that the participation rate in the PerF programme was significantly under-estimated. According to the numbers submitted by nationwide PerF providers, by April 2017, 3,200 persons with a refugee background had participated in PerF, 2,400 in PerjuF (the special PerF for young refugees), and 500 PerjuF-H, the spin-off of PerF for young refugees in the crafts and trades (BA, 2017a, p. 13). According to the figures of the IB Stuttgart (Dannenmann, 6 February 2018), since the end of their first PerF round in late 2017, fewer persons with a refugee background had applied. Mrs Dannenmann assumed that the majority of capable people had already participated in the first round, while the less motivated would be hard to reach and struggle to learn German.

In order to support the BA's own staff at public employment agencies, the BA developed a skills assessment software package called MySkills which falls under the second skills recognition type set out below.

5.2.2. Skills recognition Type II (NFIVOS)

Skills recognition of Type II is primarily found in continuing vocational training. It leads to certificates that do not correspond with the formal education and training system. Skills assessments can be diagnostic or summative in reference to skills criteria often defined by an occupational sector. Literature on adult education in Germany refers to such skills recognition arrangements as competency profiling (*Kompetenzbilanzierung*). It typically includes the identification and documentation of NFIVOS, but the extent to which validation by a recognised body takes place varies (Kirchhöfer, 2004; Strauch, 2008). Examples of relevance to refugees include MySkills by the Federal Employment Agency (BA), the AiKomPass by Baden-Württemberg's metal and electronics industries, and the ValiKom pilot project by Germany's chambers, all further explored below. These procedures highlight the variety of actors that provide skills assessments in Baden-Württemberg's field of skills recognition.

5.2.2.1. MySkills

From the outset, MySkills was designed with refugee users in mind seeking to overcome the language barrier of previous skills assessments (BA, 2017b, 2017c, 2018c). While its simulation and picture-based approach was accommodating towards refugees' different language habitus, it is unclear whether its digital nature was disconcerting to some. Moreover, at the time of data collection for this study, access to the MySkills software package was restricted to those registered with the public employment service and only possible on service-internal computers. Additionally, its skills self-assessment did not lead to any formal skills recognition and the PES staff involved in the process offered only limited follow-up support.

The project coordinator of MySkills at the Research Institute for Work-based Learning (F-BB), Mrs Hecht (19 March 2018), explained that the BA developed MySkills in cooperation with the Bertelsmann Foundation between mid-2016 and mid-2018 in response to the influx of asylum seekers who came from countries where vocational skills were often acquired in informal and non-formal ways (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016). These asylum seekers faced the challenge that other foreigners had previously experienced in Germany: the difficulty of making their vocational skills visible in a labour market dominated by qualification holders of Germany's well-established dual VET system (Fasani et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018). Therefore, MySkills addressed the need for a tool with which the NFIVOS of persons with limited German language skills could be assessed quickly against the skills requirements of Germany's vocational profiles. However, it did not lead to a formal skills certificate and, according to the job advisor Mrs Jauch at the employment agency in Stuttgart (23 February 2018), employers were unlikely to accept a printed MySkills assessment result as a skills certificate. In her view, many employers only trusted in certificates issued from the chambers, which points to one of the comparative strengths of the ValiKom pilot project, which is described below in Section 5.2.2.3.

According to Mr Ringer and Mr Messner from the Regional Directorate of the Federal Employment agency in Stuttgart (27 March 2018), who had both been involved in the piloting

of MySkills in Baden-Württemberg in early 2017, MySkills successfully avoided many of the typical pitfalls of other skills assessments, such as language barriers, the participants' limited literacy or illiteracy, and their unfamiliarity with technical terminology. At the time of the interview for this study, MySkills was available in the six languages most spoken by migrants in Germany, including German, English, Russian, Turkish, Arabic and Farsi. Rather than text-based, it worked mainly using images and video simulations of practical on-the-job situations. Once completely rolled out, the assessment was intended to cover 30 vocational occupations, including car mechanic, salesperson, farmer, carpenter, cook and construction worker. Mr Messner explained that 'these occupations were chosen because they are not heavily regulated, require neither a clean criminal record nor extensive documentation and are often practiced by people with a refugee background' (27 March 2018).

As the skills self-assessment was computer-based and did not take place in a real-life situation like in the PerF programme, the assessment results were generated quickly. This time-saving aspect mattered because advisory sessions at employment agencies tended to be brief, a fact on which several interviewees commented. Given advisors' heavy caseload and tight appointment schedule, they usually could not provide the support that persons with a refugee background needed. Referring those who struggled to express themselves in German to take the four-hour online test saved the advisors time and the test results informed the direction of their further counselling. For example, Mrs Jauch (23 February 2018) described that on one occasion, an asylum seeker from Gambia believed that he was fully capable to work as a carpenter in Germany. Had she solely relied on her conversation with him, she would not have been able to assess the fit of his skills profile with Germany's occupational requirements so adequately. The MySkills assessment result helped her advise him to undertake further training. In Mrs Hecht's opinion (19 March 2018), MySkills could improve mutual understanding:

> Participants see how their vocational skills compare to their German reference occupation and they may have to lower expectations regarding employment

> opportunities. The job advisor, in turn, learns about the asylum seekers' skills to an extent that would not have been possible due to language barriers.

If needed, advisors also referred their clients to other service and training providers with more staff and time resources, as was the case in most of the aforementioned refugee case studies.

However, the MySkills software was not a silver bullet. Other actors in Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field, such as the interviewed IQ Network advisors, expressed regret that MySkills was not accessible to them to gauge their candidates' skills because it was for exclusive use by the PES. Moreover, Mrs Hecht from the F-BB and Mr Wolters from Südwestmetall argued that the best scenario would be for the computer-based skills assessment to be complemented by a practical skills demonstration, possibly resembling the one used in the ValiKom procedure described below.

Unlike MySkills, the AiKomPass was not designed by Germany's Federal Employment Agency and with refugee users in mind but rather was developed by two industrial sectors as a skills self-assessment for unqualified workers.

5.2.2.2. AiKomPass

Just like the various assessments and MySkills discussed above, the AiKomPass is another example of a skills assessment that was developed by actors relatively far removed from Germany's formal education and training system. On the one hand, this makes it less surprising that the skills assessment result did not lead to formal skills recognition. On the other, the AiKomPass could also be considered as a first step towards the creation of industry-specific certificates that, to a certain extent, would present competition in the skills recognition field.

In contrast to the restrictive access to the MySkills software, the skills self-assessment AiKomPass (*Anerkennung informell erworbener Kompetenzen*) was freely accessible on the internet.[45] However, compared to the 30 occupations covered by MySkills, the AiKomPass

[45] Available here: https://www.aikompass.de.

only applied to refugees with NFIVOS in the metal and electronics industries and who already had a good command of the German or English language because it was text-heavy. Whereas the public employment agency advisors using MySkills provided some support, given the online nature of the AiKomPass, it did not provide any follow-up guidance.

Funded by Baden-Württemberg's Ministry of Finance and Economy, the AiKomPass was developed between 2012 and 2015 by the AgenturQ, the agency for further training of Südwestmetall, the employers' association of Baden-Württemberg's metal and electronics industries, and IG Metall, Germany's largest workers' union (AgenturQ, 2018). It was originally designed for low-qualified workers in Baden-Württemberg's metal and electronics industry who sought to make their sector-relevant informally acquired competencies visible. More recently, the occupational fields of production and logistics were added. Workers in these areas could use the printed assessment result in staff appraisal talks in order to claim a higher wage, for example.

In the interview for this case study, the CEO of the AgenturQ, Dr Baron (19 February 2018), doubted that the AiKomPass software would be helpful for recently arrived refugees with work experience in these sectors. While its online nature provided easy access, it did not offer any support and guidance. Furthermore, many recent refugee arrivals would struggle with the text-based assessment format due to language issues.

At the time of data collection in early 2018, it was possible that this situation would change. In order to improve the accessibility of the tool, including to refugees, the AgenturQ in cooperation with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) translated the AiKomPass into English, French, Italian and Swedish (https://www.aikompass.de). Although they had also attempted a translation into Arabic, faced with translation difficulties of specific terminology, they eventually settled on English and the languages of the three European countries with most asylum seekers. According to Dr Baron, some regional employment agencies used the AiKomPass software in their advisory sessions. Yet, it was not possible to identify how many persons with a refugee background had already clicked through the self-

assessment because no personal data of the software users was stored (AgenturQ, 2018; Baron, 19 February 2018; Labour-INT, 2018).

According to Mr Wolters from the division for further education at Südwestmetall (14 March 2018), the AiKomPass illustrated the potential of industry to create not only skills assessments but possibly also skills recognition certificates. This would finally break with the tradition of the formal education and training system monopolising skills recognition mechanisms in the form of the apprenticeship and master craftsperson's exam (for more on this, see 6.1.2 in the next chapter). As the industry-driven skills recognition certificates could be less stringent than, for instance, those by the chambers, they could also benefit refugees. To Dr Baron's mind (19 February 2018), '[t]he AiKomPass would ideally result in a skills validation in the form of a partial qualification.' While the chambers were opposed to such partial qualifications, ideally, workers would be able to build on them through further training measures in order to gain all the skills required in an occupation of the dual education and training system. Dr Baron could also imagine combining the AiKomPass with the ValiKom procedure discussed in the next section in the event that the latter was rolled out after its pilot stage.

5.2.2.3. ValiKom

Ideally computer-based skills self-assessments like MySkills or the AiKomPass would be complemented by a practical skills demonstration and in-person support similar to the procedure trialled in the ValiKom[46] pilot project (*Abschlussbezogene Validierung non-formal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen*). However, in practice such a combination was unlikely given the different and partly competing driving forces behind each of these skills assessments, with the Federal Employment Agency the force for MySkills, Baden-

[46] The ValiKom website is also available in English: https://www.valikom.de/en/home/.

Württemberg's metal and electronics industries for the AiKomPass, and Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) as well as the chambers for ValiKom.

Moreover, as a pilot project, ValiKom was not widely accessible for refugees at the time of data collection for this study in early 2018. Even had it been available, refugees with limited German language skills would have struggled to follow the language-heavy procedure. Two key advantages of ValiKom over MySkills and the AiKomPass was the buy-in from the chambers which not only developed the ValiKom assessment process themselves, but which also issued the resultant skills certificates, which resembled formal NFIVOS recognition.

With funding from the BMBF, the 2015-2018 ValiKom pilot project had tasked eight chambers of both sectors – industry and commerce (*Industrie- und Handelskammern*, IHKs) and crafts and trades (*Handwerkskammern*, HWKs) – to explore the potential of a skills assessment similar to the skills analysis stipulated under Article 1, § 14 of Germany's Federal Recognition Act and Article 1, § 14 of Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (detailed in Section 5.2.4.2 below) to formally recognise the NFIVOS of persons without vocational qualifications (Oehme, 2017).[47] Although it was unclear how many refugees participated in the ValiKom pilot – no data was available that showed how many refugees were among the 160 participants (BMBF & BIBB, 2017b; Berger et al., 2016) – many interviewees saw great potential in a possible follow-up project (e.g. Baron, 19 February 2019; Breusing, 23 June 2017; Hecht, 19 March 2018; Kettner, 21 February 2018; Tews, 24 May 2018). While ValiKom had been launched initially to address the need of low-qualified but skilled Germans for a

[47] In 2015, the project board, composed of the BMBF, the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), tasked eight chambers, four IHKs and four HWKs, to conduct the pilot. The Umbrella Organisation of the West German HWKs (WHKT) coordinated the project and the Institute for Research in VET of the University of Cologne (*Forschungsinstitut für Berufsbildung im Handwerk*, FBH) monitored it (Oehme, 2017). The three-year pilot started with a literature review of validation mechanisms and a survey of employers to clarify the need for action. Since mid-2016, the IHKs in Stuttgart, Halle-Dessau, Munich, Cologne and the HWKs in Dresden, Hannover, Munich and Münster have developed and tested a procedure to identify, assess and certify job-relevant skills in reference to the occupational profiles of the dual apprenticeship system. The aim was to sub-divide these occupational profiles into skillsets, which were listed in questionnaires that candidates filled in to identify their NFIVOS. By the end of the test phase, these occupation-specific questionnaires were planned to be ready for use in other chambers (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag et al., 2018).

formal recognition mechanism for NFIVOS, in response to the migrant influx in late 2015 refugees were added to its target group.

Yet, despite ValiKom's apparent appeal, it was resource-intense and very language-heavy. According to the coordinator of the ValiKom pilot project in Baden-Württemberg Dr Breusing (23 June 2017), whilst two of her 20 pilot participants had a refugee background, neither of them were new arrivals but had been in Germany for many years and already spoke German fluently. Dr Breusing (23 June 2017) remembered that, '[d]uring the selection of participants I had to decline access to a refugee because his German was not yet good enough. A good command of German is indispensable for participation in ValiKom.'

Under the pilot, the ValiKom assessment process started with an initial advisory session to discuss the candidate's skills, career objectives and financial means. Once the person's suitability for ValiKom was established, the ValiKom advisor explained the procedure in detail. According to the leader of the division 'Recognition of foreign qualifications and skills assessment' at the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), Mrs Tews (24 May 2018), persons were considered suitable when they had a solid amount of work experience in their occupation and were too old to start an apprenticeship, i.e. aged at least 25. An evaluation of the pilot revealed that most participants were aged 35-45 and had worked on average for 11 years in their field. Most were employed and their employers actively supported them gaining formal recognition of their NFIVOS through ValiKom. The application included a skills self-assessment, a description of the reference occupation broken down into the components of a typical work routine and a CV. In Dr Breusing's experience (23 June 2017), 'even German native speakers struggle to describe their own vocational skills.' Refugees would have needed considerable support to ensure they understood and used the occupation-specific terminology correctly. In the case of a follow-up after the end of the pilot, upon submission of the application candidates would be charged a participation fee (Breusing, 23 June 2017).

Subsequently, the ValiKom advisor needed to find a technical HWK or IHK expert (i.e. master craftsperson or industry and commerce specialist) to screen the application and meet the candidates to go through the skills areas that they would like to have validated (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, DIHK, DHKT, & BMBF, 2018). Once again, language skills were important here (Breusing, 23 June 2017). Based on this discussion, the expert then created a customised skills assessment which built on the insights of the Prototyping project, which Section 5.2.4.2.4.2 will touch on, and consisted of practice-oriented tasks. Ideally, the assessment took place in the candidate’s own workplace. The resulting IHK or HWK certificate listed the demonstrated skills and explained the extent to which they were equivalent to the related German occupational profile (Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag et al., 2018). According to Mrs Hecht (19 March 2018),

> [t]he buy-in by the chambers (IHKs and HWKs) is a significant advantage of ValiKom compared to previous projects. Because the chambers developed the ValiKom procedure themselves, they would not see it as undermining their cherished dual VET qualifications.

This statement might suggest a possible tension between the ValiKom creators and other skills assessment providers, such as the Federal Employment Agency having developed MySkills and the metal and electronics industry offering the AiKomPass. However, this study could not verify this potential conflict and so further investigation would be warranted.

The deputy division manager at the HWK Mannheim Mr Kettner stated that, after having contributed to the Prototyping project, the HWK Mannheim would be interested in offering the ValiKom procedure if the BMBF was interested in rolling it out. He attested that,

> [m]any more among those who come to seek advice about the recognition of their vocational skills are potential users of arrangements for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning than candidates for the external exam or the Federal Recognition Act. (Kettner, 21 February 2018)

For instance, Mr Kettner could have easily referred a refugee who had run an electronics store in Pakistan for many years given that the Federal Recognition Act procedure was out of question because he had never attended any formal training, and his chances to succeed in the external exam would have been slim.

This external exam, Germany's most traditional skills assessment of NFIVOS, is explained under skills recognition Type IV, after a short overview of Type III.

5.2.3. Skills recognition Type III (NFIVOS and foreign qualifications)

Skills recognition of Type III was not of immediate relevance to this thesis because rather than aiming at direct integration into the labour market field, it is used for accessing the formal education and training field. The candidates' NFIL and NFIVOS are compared to skills criteria defined by the formal education and training system through summative assessment. Skills recognition grants access to formal education or training programmes, waiving some of the entry qualification requirements and sometimes reducing the programme duration. Germany is one of a number of European countries which have apprenticeship schemes that allow for reduced duration if the candidates can prove they already have the required skills. Refugees are potential beneficiaries, especially if their foreign vocational or professional qualifications are not or only partially recognised and they need complementary training, or if they only hold occupation-relevant NFIVOS (Kis & Windisch, 2018).

5.2.4. Skills recognition Type IV (NFIVOS and foreign qualifications)

Skills recognition arrangements of Type IV are closely linked to the field of formal education and training and involve summative assessment and selective inclusion of those skills that are aligned with that system. They allow individuals to obtain a formal qualification or a confirmation of equivalency without completing any associated training programme in one of two ways: through access to a final qualifying exam based on relevant NFIVOS or through recognition of a foreign vocational or professional qualification. Similar to other countries with a long-standing tradition of apprenticeships such as Austria, Norway and Switzerland, under the provision of Germany's external exam individuals can directly access the final

apprenticeship exam (Kis & Windisch, 2018). Germany's Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act exemplify the second way. These are discussed below.

5.2.4.1. The external exam

Germany's external exam (*Externenprüfung*) is probably the least refugee-friendly instrument because it only grants formal skills recognition if candidates possess all skills necessary to pass the final apprenticeship exam, otherwise no skills recognition is granted at all. Passing the external exam requires candidates to possess an institutionalised form of habitus (consisting of knowledge of occupation-specific theory, language and behavior) that refugees are unlikely to acquire without completing an apprenticeship which, however, would defeat this validation instrument's objective (Bourdieu,1984). The external exam aims to encourage skilled persons to gain a vocational qualification specifically without having to attend a consecutive two- to three-year apprenticeship. Based on summative assessment of relevant documented work experience – candidates have to have worked in the target occupation for at least one and a half times as long as the duration of the apprenticeship – it allows them to directly sit the final apprenticeship exam related to their previous work experience (Annen et al., 2012; Gutschow, 2010). This means that those seeking skills recognition of their NFIVOS and those who have attended a formal dual VET programme sit the same exam. According to Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia (2015, p. 600),

> This is done to assure the quality of the outcomes, reduce the costs of tests and give equal status to the qualifications acquired through validation – a system which is also common in several other European countries. However, immigrants are clearly likely to face specific challenges in relation to this type of validation practice.

In the case of the external exam, these challenges relate to both access to the exam and the exam itself. Information, advice and guidance about the external exam is provided by the competent authorities which are Germany's chambers. They decide about the admission to the external exam based either on standard evidence, such as job references, attestations of employers and work contracts, or alternative evidence, including written information about

previous relevant work experience by the applicants themselves, references from customers or documents about incomplete VET training (Claudia Ball, 2016). Given that this evidence of relevant work experience has to be in writing, it is likely to present an obstacle to accessing the external exam for refugees with limited proficiency in German.

With a view to facilitating exam access for various target groups, Germany's employers' associations have developed modular approaches leading to the external exam (BMBF, 2019a). They include *Jobstarter Connect* for which occupations were itemised into training modules (*Ausbildungsbausteine*) to allow young adults to gain a partial skills certification (*Teilqualifizierung, TQ*) in preparation for the external exam (Baethge & Severing, 2015; BMBF, 2019f; Schöpf, 2015). The same training modules were later used under the quality label *A partial qualification better!* (*Eine TQ besser!)* to encourage low-qualified workers to obtain a VET qualification through the external exam (BMBF, 2019a; Dpa, 2017). In 2016 in response to the migrant influx, *TQplus for migrants* was launched which offered occupation-focused language training and integration mentors (Nachqualifizierung.de, 2019). After initial scepticism by the chambers who feared the TQ approach would undermine their dual VET system, some chambers started offering *TQ*s and *TQplus* at the time of data collection for this study (Baethge & Severing, 2015; Dpa, 2017).

Despite these attempts to facilitate the access to the relevant final apprenticeship exam for external candidates, the rigid structure of the exam itself is likely to be a major obstacle for refugees to succeed. Even if chamber staff informed them about the exam modus, they would struggle because their NFIVOS, a form of domestic habitus, are unlikely to suffice in their own right to pass the exam (Bourdieu,1984). One of the difficulties for external exam candidates generally speaking lies in the theoretical aspects of the exam that internal candidates, i.e. apprentices, would be taught during their school-based education and that NFIVOS are unlikely to shed light on. As a result, the Chambers commonly offer preparatory courses that focus on these theoretical aspects. While the participation in these courses is voluntary, according to findings by Annen & Schreiber (2011), it appears indispensable for successful

exam completion. In Bourdieu's words (1984) candidates' domestic habitus in the form of NFIVOS has to be supplemented by an institutionalised habitus in the form of theoretical knowledge in order to succeed in the exam. Nonetheless, these preparatory courses require a time and financial investment that could put off potential participants.

Additionally, there are the extra challenges that the German technical terminology and Germany's dual VET examination modus pose to foreigners, which would require the acquisition of both occupation-specific language skills and institutionalised habitus. According to the previously quoted deputy division manager at the HWK Mannheim Mr Kettner (21 February 2018), 'the external vocational exam is inappropriate for persons who are unfamiliar with the examination style of Germany's VET system and whose knowledge of the German language is limited.' He remembered that,

> in around 2007-2008, we offered a special course in preparation of the external exam. Fifteen hairdressers from Turkey with the ambition to run their own hair salons here were required to first obtain the apprenticeship qualification through the external exam before achieving the master craftsman's diploma. Yet, of the fifteen only two successfully passed the external exam. (Kettner, 21 February 2018)

Against this background, the external exam provides a clear example of a process that requires a certain linguistic and social habitus. According to Bourdieu's analysis of inherent inequalities in the French education system that help reproduce societal structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1988; Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1975; Naidoo, 2004), examiners are likely to advantage examinees of the same social class making it more difficult for those who are more distant to the examiners' social class to pass the exam. Following this line of argument, those attending an apprenticeship acquire the appropriate institutionalised habitus to pass their final exam, while those sitting that same exam as external candidates do not know the appropriate terminology, behaviour and tacit traditions of the field and are therefore liable to be disadvantaged (Bourdieu, 1977b; Moore, 2008).

At the time of data collection for this thesis, there was no data on external exam candidates with a refugee background due to a lack of information on applicants' nationality. Estimates based on the available information about the country of schooling suggested that

under five percent of the approximately 30,000 annual applicants were foreigners (BMBF, 2016b; Heinsberg et al., 2016). Similarly, the extent to which refugees had benefitted from the listed modular approaches leading to access to the external exam was unknown.

Despite having been hailed as Germany's 'major instrument' for the recognition of NFIL since its inception in the Vocational Training Act of 1969, the external exam has not been without criticism (Claudia Ball, 2016, p. 1). For instance, 60 percent of the 324 national experts surveyed by the Federal Institute for VET (BIBB) (Velten & Herdin, 2016, p. 17) considered the external exam to be insufficient as a validation instrument. To them, the set-up did not formally recognise candidates' NFIVOS in their own right but was merely the means for skilled individuals without prior formal vocational training to access the relevant final apprenticeship exam (Ibid).

Others have been less critical while voicing the need for reform of the external exam. According to Mrs Gutschow (7 June 2018), research associate at the BIBB, Germany could have avoided the political debate about the recognition of NFIL following the 2012 Council *Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* that prompted the EU countries to have such mechanisms in place by no later than 2018 (see Section 2.2.2.1). Rather than simply pointing to its external exam, possibly undertaking some reforms, Germany's Federal Government decided to embark on developing the ValiKom procedure, already described in Section 5.2.2.3. To Mrs Gutschow's mind (7 June 2018),

> the external vocational exam needs an overhaul because it should be opened up to partial qualifications. The fact that it only distinguishes between either possessing all skills of an occupational profile or none, makes it an unrealistic instrument. Most low-qualified persons, including refugees, possess some knowledge and skills and it would be more motivating to allow for them to be recognised as partial qualifications.

Against this background, the BIBB released a recommendation in favour of the introduction of partial qualifications in March 2018 (see BIBB, 2018). This is not to be confused with the above-mentioned partial qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*, TQ) which are only steppingstones to accessing the external exam and not partial qualifications in themselves. BIBB's suggested partial qualifications would break with the chambers' tradition that had for a long time viewed

their VET qualifications as indivisible. Meanwhile, the chambers have become more tolerant as attested to by their ValiKom approach which leads to chamber-issued skills certificates below the level of full VET qualifications.

Taken together, none of these six NFIVOS assessments meet all four characteristics which an arrangement would need to possess for it to be suitable for refugee users. While some, such as the PerF programme, score highly in terms of accommodation towards limited German and the provision of support, only the ValiKom project and the external exam grant formal skills recognition. However, external exam candidates would only gain formal skills recognition if they possessed all skills necessary to pass the relevant final apprenticeship exam. While ValiKom does formally recognise candidates' skills below the level of a full VET qualification, it was only at pilot stage at the time of this research project and, like the external exam, involves a language barrier.

Against this background, the following section explores the suitability for refugee users of the processes under Germany's Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act) that grant formal recognition to foreign vocational or professional qualifications.

5.2.4.2. Recognition procedures for foreign vocational or professional qualifications

Germany's 2012 Federal Recognition Act was described as a milestone in Germany's integration policy by Annette Schavan, Germany's Federal Minister of Education and Research at the time (BMBF, 2012a). Subsequently, federal state laws such as Baden-Württemberg's 2014 Recognition Act were adapted to it (IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2019).[48] For the first time, these laws granted all holders of a foreign vocational or professional

[48] While the 2012 Federal Recognition Act applies to qualifications that relate to occupations governed by federal law, Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act applies to qualifications that relate to occupations governed by the federal state law of Baden-Württemberg (BMBF, 2019g). The Federal Recognition Act covers over 600 occupations governed by federal law, which include the 350 unregulated trades of

qualification, irrespective of their residence status,[49] the right to an equivalency assessment of their foreign credentials with the German reference vocational or professional qualifications (Claudia Ball, 2016; Liebig & Degler, 2017; Pfeffer-Hoffmann, 2016). This was likely to improve migrants' employment prospects and to allow them to reach their full potential (Kogan, 2012).

Before the entry into force of the Federal Recognition Act, very few refugees had attempted to obtain formal recognition of their foreign credentials (Eisnecker et al., 2016). According to refugee respondents in the 2013 IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (Eisnecker et al., 2016) who had already lived in Germany for an average of 18 years, lack of information, missing documents and administrative barriers had held them back. Moreover, back then, German authorities had been much more likely to reject applications by refugees (35 percent) than by other migrants (16 percent). This might have been because of cultural differences and/or mistrust in the education and training systems of less developed countries (i.e. differences between social fields) (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Sommer, 2015). As a result, refugees had been more likely to take up jobs below their skills levels (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016, p. 398).

Despite the focus of the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act on foreign formal education and training (rather than NFIVOS), their established procedures provided valuable insights for a discussion about the obstacles and facilitators of the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS. In the next Sections 5.2.4.2.1-4, their procedures for the formal recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications are divided into four typical processes (including advising, application, decision on the

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Germany's dual VET system, 100 regulated master craftsperson occupations, and around 40 nationally regulated professions, such as medical doctor and nurse (BMBF, 2019f; Braun, 2012). Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act covers about 260 professions and occupations not covered by the Federal Recognition Act. These include 160 unregulated occupations and some regulated professions such as teacher, nursing assistant, early years teacher, social worker and engineer (BMBF, 2019g; IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2019).

[49] Prior to its entry into force in 2012, only EU migrants had the right to an equivalency assessment of their foreign vocational or professional qualification with the respective German qualification (Liebig & Degler, 2017, p. 89).

application, and the outcome and its consequences) in order to assess their suitability for refugee users. In short, notwithstanding the structural improvements brought about by these two laws, it is argued that the four processes making up their recognition procedure were complex and only partially suitable for refugees.

5.2.4.2.1. The advising process

This section contends that while in-person advising and the application documents are accessible to refugees holding relevant foreign credentials, a good command of the German language is indispensable to attend and complete them successfully. Refugees are likely to seek information and advice about the recognition of their foreign vocational or professional qualifications (Statistisches Landesamt & Ministerium für Soziales und Integration, 2019). In order to make information easily accessible, the BMBF provides a comprehensive online information portal called '*Anerkennung in Deutschland*' (Recognition in Germany),[50] available in 10 languages. Moreover, in 2016, the BMBF launched a homonymous smartphone application available in German, English and refugees' five most common languages (BMBF, 2017a). As described in Section 4.2.3 of the previous chapter, no refugee interviewed for this study mentioned the website or app. Yet, most sought in-person advice about their recognition options at one of the various advisory bodies mentioned in Section 5.1.3 and further detailed below.

5.2.4.2.1.1. Advising in numbers

As a result of the migration influx in 2015, at IQ service points across Germany both the share of advice-seekers with a refugee background and the overall number of advice-seekers increased. Table 18 below shows that the overall volume of Germany-wide IQ service users grew from 25,553 in 2015 to 40,863 in 2016 and peaked at 42,480 in 2017. In 2018, the total user volume dropped to 30,516, probably because fewer refugees still required the service.

[50] The website can be found here: https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/index.php.

Concurrently, refugees' share of Germany-wide IQ service users – the IQ Network only started to record users' residency status in June 2015 – grew from an estimated 20 percent in late 2015 to 38 percent in both 2016 and 2017 and dropped to 33 percent in 2018 (BMBF, 2017a; IQ Netzwerk, 2018b). Two thirds of these refugees were Syrians, with most of them seeking recognition for a university diploma in medicine or engineering (BIBB and IQ Netzwerk, 2017; BMBF, 2017a; IQ Netzwerk, 2018a).

Table 18. IQ advising on the recognition of foreign vocational/professional qualifications

	2015	2016	2017	Up to 09/2018
Persons with a refugee background		15,702	16,281	10,007
Other persons	25,553	25,161	26,199	20,509
Total	**25,553**	**40,863**	**42,480**	**30,516**

Source: IQ Netzwerk. (2018b). Das Förderprogramm IQ in Zahlen - September 2018. IQ Netzwerk.

This Germany-wide trend also reflected the situation in Baden-Württemberg. According to the latest data (Statistisches Landesamt & Ministerium für Soziales und Integration, 2019, pp. 6, 14), the overall volume of IQ advising in Stuttgart, Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Ulm rose from 3,457 migrants in 2013 to 8,518 in 2017 and the share of Syrian advice-seekers grew from 1.5 percent in 2013 to 25 percent in 2017.

5.2.4.2.1.2. Advising under observation

These statistics were confirmed by the advisors interviewed and observed for this study, as they noted that refugees with foreign vocational or professional qualifications eventually found their way to advisory sessions (Gronau, 15 February 2018; Kieser, 13 April 2018; Rudel, 28 June 2017; Specker, 22 February 2018; Wolf, 7 March 2018). According to the IQ advisor in Stuttgart, Mrs Rudel (28 June 2017), '[f]ortunately, the resultant heavy workload at IQ Network centres has been countered by new recruitments.' Twenty[51] of the 74 respondents covered by

[51] (Berger, 11 June 2018; Braun, 2 May 2018; Bühler, 15 May 2018; Ehrenreich, 11 May 2018; Garada, 6 March 2018; Gronau, 15 February 2018; Grüner, 14 June 2018; Hauck, 29 March 2018; Herman, 23 June 2017; Hüseyin, 21 June 2016; Kettner, 21 February 2018; Kieser, 13 April 2018; Nekoui, 31

this doctoral research, who all had expertise on the formal recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications evaluated the accessibility to information, guidance and the provision of support positively.

In comparison with EU foreigners or other third-country nationals, refugees seemed to find it more difficult to communicate by phone or email and preferred in-person advising. According to Specker (31 January 2018), Ehrenreich (11 May 2018) and Kieser (13 April 2018), refugees appeared eager to hear about their possibilities, but many had comprehension problems, mainly because of the German language but also because of the sheer volume of new information. For that reason, during observations, advisors usually spoke in simple German and promised to share a meeting summary by email.

All nine refugees encountered during observations for this study had arrived in Germany in late 2015 and attended advisory sessions in early 2018 (see Table 19 below). In terms of access, most attended at the behest of their jobcentres, charitable associations, language teachers, or volunteers, with four accompanied by such volunteer helpers. Whereas the two electricians from Syria sought advice at the IHK in Mannheim, all other sessions were provided by the IQ Network Baden-Württemberg. They took place at the IQ service point in Stuttgart and in the small towns of Radolfzell and Rottweil as part of the decentralised IQ service to reach refugees in rural areas.

The main purpose of the advisory sessions is to help foreigners understand their skills recognition options. It usually started with determining whether candidates' foreign vocational or professional qualifications falls under the scope of the Federal Recognition Act or the Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (see on the occupations covered Footnote 48, pp. 193-194) (BMBF, 2016b, 2017a, 2019h; IQ Netzwerk, 2018b; OECD, 2017a). Neither regulated the recognition of university degrees corresponding to broader occupational profiles (e.g.

January 2018; Rey, 26 June 2017; Rudel, 28 June 2017; Wirth, 12 June 2018; Schimmel, 2 May 2018; Specker, 31 January 2018; Tews, 24 May 2018; Wolf, 7 March 2018).

mathematician, chemist or economist)[52] (BMBF, 2019g). The case of the Syrian electronics assistant (see Section 4.2.3.1) illustrated that it was not always straightforward for the advisors to identify the appropriate German reference qualification (i.e. occupation) and the related authority responsible for the skills recognition process.

Table 19. Likely pathways of refugees encountered during observations

#	Name	Title	Skills acquired in home country	DE level	Skills recog-nition	Edu.	Traineeship		Appren-ticeship		Job	
					Likely (L)	L	L	Skills-related (Sr)	L	Sr	L	Sr
1	Ableben	Mrs	Pharmaceutical technical assistant from Iraq (Kurdistan)	B1	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
2	Abrash	Mrs	Electrician from Syria	A1	N		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
3	Abrikesh	Mrs	Nursing assistant from Syria	A1							Y	N
4	Ahmadi	Mr	Teacher (chemistry) from Syria	B1	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
5	Ali	Mr	Business administrator & accountant from Syria	B1	Y	Y						
6	Alyoussef	Mr	Electrician assistant from Syria	B1	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
7	Ibrahim	Mr	Teacher (maths) from Syria	A2	N						Y	N
8	Munamet	Mr	Car mechanic from Syria	B1	Y		Y					
9	Omar	Mr	Teacher (English) from Iraq (Kurdistan)	B2							Y	N

Scales: Yes (Y) – No (N)
Source: Author.

Subsequently, advisors typically provide information about the application process. In the observations, they highlighted that not only certified translations of the foreign qualification diploma but also an overview of the modules that had been attended would be required. In some cases, they also predicted only partial recognition given the brevity of training undertaken (Gronau & Rudel, 28 June 2017; Rat, 26 June 2017; Specker, 31 January 2018).

Where applicable, the IQ and IHK advisors also presented alternative or simultaneous training and job options. Table 19 illustrates these options. For instance, Mr Wolf advised Mrs

[52] They are subject to a different recognition procedure under the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) and are not the focus of this research project (IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2017a).

Ableben, a young Iraqi woman with a qualification as a pharmaceutical technical assistant (PTA) to apply for recognition. While waiting for the outcome of her application, she could attend a traineeship at a pharmacy to familiarise herself with the local working routines and improve her German. Additionally, she could apply for a formal PTA apprenticeship to start in September 2018, by which time she would have achieved the required B2 language level and obtained the authority's equivalency assessment of her Iraqi vocational diploma with the skills requirement of a German PTA, possibly leading to a shortening of her apprenticeship (Wolf, 7 March 2018). By contrast, someone like Mrs Abrash had little chance of gaining anything through the recognition process. A Syrian electrician in her forties, she had more than twenty years of work experience but held a vocational diploma which lacked any details about the modules she had studied. As a result, Mrs Specker advised her to find a traineeship in an electrician's store, where her skills could find social recognition on-the-job, either through direct recruitment or by virtue of an employer's reference for employment elsewhere (22 February 2018).

As described in Section 4.2.3 of the previous chapter, following the advisory sessions, the refugees needed to ponder their options, perhaps aided by their volunteer helpers, and to decide what course of action to take. All of the interviewed advisors agreed that after unprecedented engagement levels, fewer volunteer helpers now accompanied refugees than previously to the advisory sessions. Due to laws on data protection, the advisors were not allowed to follow up with their advisees, unless they got back in touch on their own initiative. As a result, the advisors did not know exactly how many of their advisees actually submitted a skills recognition application.

5.2.4.2.2. The application process

Refugees tended to need more support and time in the application process than EU foreigners and other third-country citizens because of language barriers and greater difficulties in

submitting the required documents. Twenty respondents[53] with expertise on the recognition of vocational or professional qualifications emphasised the importance of a good grasp of German for the recognition process. According to Ehrenreich (11 May 2018) and Ertunc (21 June 2017), refugees often required several sessions and more help in filling in the application forms. Some refugees, such as the Pakistani social worker in Section 4.2.3.4, came to Ehrenreich's advisory sessions when they were linguistically not yet ready.

While for most occupations, applicants are not required to submit proof of their proficiency in German, in order to work in Germany there is no way around learning the language (BMBF, 2012b). For instance, when foreign doctors and dentists apply under the Federal Recognition Act, the assessment of equivalency of their foreign medical diplomas with the German reference qualification normally precedes the C1 German test in technical terminology that is required in order to practice. However, as explained in Section 4.2.3.2, the Syrian dentist was not eligible for the equivalency assessment but was asked to sit the knowledge exam for which prior successful completion of the same C1 test was mandatory (Wirth, 12 June 2019). When foreign teachers apply under Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act, no proof of German is required for the equivalency assessment of their foreign teaching diploma. However, at the point of recruitment as a teacher in Germany, a C2 language diploma is indispensable (Grüner, 14 June 2018).

Also, applicants with a refugee background more often struggle to submit all the documents required for the application. For example, the criminal record check and certificate of good standing are mandatory for the license to practice medicine in Germany. The coordinator of training programmes for medical doctors with foreign qualifications, Mrs Herman (23 June 2018), observed that when the Syrian criminal record could not be provided,

[53] (Berger, 11 June 2018; Braun, 2 May 2018; Bühler, 15 May 2018; Ehrenreich, 11 May 2018; Garada, 6 March 2018; Gronau, 15 February 2018; Grüner, 14 June 2018; Hauck, 29 March 2018; Herman, 23 June 2017; Hüseyin, 21 June 2016; Kettner, 21 February 2018; Kieser, 13 April 2018; Nekoui, 31 January 2 018; Rey, 26 June 2017; Rudel, 28 June 2017; Wirth, 12 June 2018; Schimmel, 2 May 2018; Specker, 31 January 2018; Tews, 24 May 2018; Wolf, 7 March 2018).

the whole recognition process stalled. However, according to Mr Wirth from Stuttgart Regional Council in charge of the recognition of foreign medical diplomas (12 June 2018), when the candidate's country of origin was at war, they would try to strike a balance between regulations and people's needs. In such cases, they considered it sufficient when the candidates could convincingly demonstrate their fruitless efforts to retrieve the needed documents and declared on oath that they had not committed any crimes.

Despite these difficulties, the increase of advice-seekers with a refugee background did seem to translate into more subsequent applications from refugees. Although official statistics on the Federal Recognition Act did not distinguish between users with and without a refugee background (BMBF, 2016a; Berger et al., 2016; CEDEFOP, 2016c; Liebig & Degler, 2017), applicant characteristics collected in a central database, regarding nationality and country where the foreign vocational or professional qualification was obtained, made estimates possible (BMBF, 2016b). According to the latest Germany-wide data, in 2015, the number of applications by nationals from refugees' main source countries (Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan) increased by 25 percent compared to 2014 (BMBF, 2017b, p. 41).

5.2.4.2.3. The decision process

The decision process takes place in the competent authority. In Germany as a whole, not only the share of applicants with a refugee background but also the overall application volume increased, from 17,500 in 2014 to 19,000 in 2015 and 29,200 in 2018 (BMBF, 2017a). At the time of the interviews for this study in early 2018, this had led to overloaded decision-making authorities. IQ advisors as well as participants of an IQ conference about refugees' labour market integration hosted in Stuttgart in September 2017 criticised Stuttgart Regional Council for delays. According to the Federal Recognition Act (BMBF, 2012b; Brücker, Rother, Schupp, & Babka von Gostomski, 2016; IAB, 2015), skills recognition procedures should take three months at maximum. However, the staffing at Stuttgart Regional Council was insufficient to

cope with the raised application numbers, especially for the above-mentioned classification of school certificates, which affected many skills recognition procedures.

Which competent authority would decide about the outcome of an application for the recognition of a foreign vocational or professional qualification depended on the applicants' vocational or professional field (BMBF, 2019b). In Baden-Württemberg, the various competent authorities were differently affected by the migrant influx. For instance, the equivalency assessments of foreign vocational qualifications that fell under Germany's dual VET system were conducted either by local Chambers of Crafts and Trades (HWKs) when the reference occupations belong to the trades and crafts sector or by the centralised IHK FOSA, the Foreign Skills Approval (FOSA) Institute of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (IHK), when the reference occupations fell under the industrial and commercial sector (BMBF, 2012b). Moreover, regarding reference professions, Stuttgart Regional Council was in charge of the medical health professions; Tübingen Regional Council for teachers; Baden-Württemberg's Chamber of Pharmacists for pharmaceutical occupations and Baden-Württemberg's Chamber of Engineers for engineers (Bühler, 15 May 2018; Garada, 6 March 2018; Grüner, 14 June 2018; Wirth, 12 June 2018).

According to the senior executive official at Stuttgart Regional Council, Mr Wirth (12 June 2018), it was likely that the increase in applications in the medical health processions in 2016 (when they started a new reporting system) stemmed from the influx of asylum seekers in 2015. Table 20 below shows the shares of applications for qualifications gained in third countries for 2016 and 2017 – Stuttgart Regional Council did not identify refugees among applicants but distinguished between qualifications obtained in the EU and in third countries. Wirth explained that at the peak of application in 2016 when they received nearly 2,000 applications of which 1,415 were from persons with qualifications gained in third countries, there was only one administrator in charge of recognition applications of foreign doctor, dentist and pharmacist qualifications, and that additional staff members had to be recruited to meet the high demand.

Table 20. Foreigners' application for license to practice medical health professions (2016-2017)

Qualification	Total applications		Gained in third country (percentage of total applications in respective discipline)	
	2016	**2017**	**2016**	**2017**
TOTAL	**1,954**	**1,648**	1,415	1,111
Doctors	1,728	1,388	1,294 (75%)	920 (66%)
Dentists	112	119	67 (60%)	79 (66%)
Pharmacists	114	141	54 (47%)	112 (47%)

Source: Regional Council Stuttgart, Division 95.

Similarly, between 2016 and 2017, Baden-Württemberg's Chamber of Engineers had to react to a 40 percent increase in applications by creating a new position dedicated to the recognition of foreign engineer degrees. Of the 682 foreign applications in 2017, a third came from Syrian applicants who were also likely to have a refugee background (Ingenieurkammer Baden-Württemberg, 2018). Compared with these pronounced increases in application volumes in the medical health professions and the engineering profession, according to the official Mrs Dr Grüner (14 June 2018), the amount of foreign teachers' applications at the Tübingen Regional Council seemed more manageable at the time of data collection for this study. While Baden-Württemberg was with around 420 applications per year much more sought-after by foreign teachers than other federal states with often only 20 annual applications, its application volume was still comparably low. More than half of Baden-Württemberg's foreign teacher' applications came from third countries, and since 2016, increasingly from Syria (Grüner, 14 June 2018).

5.2.4.2.4. The outcome

The competent authorities communicate the outcome of their equivalency assessment of refugees' foreign vocational or professional qualifications by letter in German, the comprehension of which, as previously noted, required familiarity with rather specific technical terms. As visible in Figure 7 (p. 167) of Section 5.1.3, the outcomes of the assessments differ depending on whether the foreign qualifications in questions related to German regulated or unregulated occupations. In both occupational types the outcome could be either 'full

equivalency with the German reference occupation', 'insufficient evidence to assess', 'partial equivalency' or 'no equivalency'. However, in case of confirmation of 'partial equivalency' candidates in unregulated occupations had the choice to attend an adjustment measure (*Anpassungsqualifizerung*) (Stage 7e), while those intending to practice a regulated occupations were obliged to engage in compensatory measures (*Ausgleichsmaßnahmen*) (Stage 7f) (BMBF, 2012b, 2014, 2015a, 2016a; Ekert, Larsen, Valtin, Schröder, & Ornig, 2017). This stems from the fact that only the confirmation of full equivalency with the German reference qualification would grant legal access to a regulated occupation (e.g. medical doctor). By contrast, one could work in an unregulated occupation (e.g. hairdresser) when one's foreign vocational qualification overlapped very little with the German reference credential (Ministerium für Integration Baden-Württemberg, 2014). As a result, in an unregulated occupation the option to follow up with an adjustment measure in order to achieve full equivalency is optional, but could yield a career advantage (Ekert et al., 2017).

Of interest here is that, according to the latest annual report on the Federal Recognition Act (BMBF, 2017a, p. 56), persons with foreign vocational qualifications that related to unregulated occupations are among those who have benefitted most from the changes brought about by the new law. This is because it has helped them to make their foreign vocational qualifications visible to potential German employers, and has allowed them to attend occupation-specific advanced training activities that, even in unregulated occupations such as car mechanics, are only accessible to holders of a confirmation of full equivalency with their German reference qualification (Ekert et al., 2017; Stannek, 8 March 2018).

Unsurprisingly, the other group that has benefitted most from the Federal Recognition Act are third-country nationals holding foreign vocational or professional qualifications (BMBF, 2017a, p. 56). The 2017 report on the law (BMBF, 2017a, p. 40) noted that Germany-wide between 2012 and 2015, more than two thirds of all applications from citizens from refugee source countries resulted in a confirmation of full equivalency. It concluded that 'this shows that the Federal Recognition Act is also an effective instrument for the swift labour market

integration of refugees' (BMBF, 2017a, p. 14). However, Table 21 below, drawing on data from across Germany, displays variation in the outcome of equivalency assessments of vocational or professional qualifications from third countries which may be refugee source countries.

Table 21. Germany-wide outcomes of equivalency assessments of vocational/professional qualifications gained in refugee source countries 2012-2015 (in %)

Country (n = assessments) / Outcome	TOTAL (n = 3,045	Syria (n = 1,995)	Iran (n = 756)	Iraq (n = 222)	Afghanistan (n = 72)
Full equivalency	65.3%	75.7%	62.8%	66.4%	56.3%
Compensatory measure required	23.85%	20.2%	23.6%	22%	29.6%
Partial equivalency	7.2%	2.3%	9.7%	7.2%	9.9%
No equivalency	3.6%	1.8%	4.0%	4.5%	4.2%

Source: BMBF. (2017). Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2017. Bonn: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung [Federal Ministry of Education and Research], p. 40.

Table 21 shows that before achieving full equivalency with their German reference qualification, nearly a quarter of all refugees still had to attend mandatory compensatory measures, and some of the 7.2 percent with partial equivalency would have the option to undergo the skills analysis, with the implications of both discussed below.

5.2.4.2.4.1. Mandatory compensatory measures and optional adjustment measures

Refugees whose application has resulted in a confirmation of partial equivalency receive advice about follow-up measures after the reception of their application outcome at IQ service points and the chambers (Ekert et al., 2017). Such measures would ideally lead to the confirmation of full equivalency with the German reference qualification, as was the case of the Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah (Section 4.2.3.4). They include mandatory compensatory measures (*Ausgleichsmaßnahmen*) for refugees with foreign qualifications in Germany's regulated occupations, and optional adjustment measures (*Anpassungsqualifizerung*) for holders of qualifications that relate to unregulated German occupations.

Although such measures are accessible to refugees, their suitability for them depends on language tuition and costs. For example, unlike the Bfw in Stuttgart, at the time of writing, the training for foreign doctors at FIA in Freiburg did not include a language course. The costs associated with training could present an obstacle to attendance.[54] This was the case for the Syrian dentist Mr Sharbat who could not afford a preparatory course for his mandatory compensatory measure which was the knowledge exam in dentistry. Costs also affected the decision of foreign teachers whether to go back to university to fulfil Germany's second school subject requirement (Grüner, 14 June 2018). While there were no tuition fees at universities in Baden-Württemberg in 2018, living costs had to be covered and only persons under the age of thirty-five were eligible to student loans under BAfög (*Berufsausbildungs-förderungsgesetz*), Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act. If foreign teachers had studied two subjects but lacked work experience, at the time of writing, they had three compensatory options that were variedly funded: either an aptitude test in the form of demonstration lessons after four weeks of sitting in on classes, or a free but unpaid full-time adaptation training course of twelve months with the same aptitude test in the end, or a three-year remunerated work placement without a final aptitude test. At the time of the interview with Dr Grüner (14 June 2018), most candidates, including those with a refugee background, opted for the unpaid adaptation training course. However, the share of those opting for the three-year paid work placements was increasing, possibly because skills recognition advisors had only recently been informed about this option.

5.2.4.2.4.2. The skills analysis

Both refugees whose German reference qualification relate to either one of the 350 unregulated occupations of Germany's dual VET system under the Federal Recognition Act

[54] The Baden-Württemberg Stiftung trialed a three-year model pilot project until early 2018 which offered EUR 1.6 million to support skills recognition candidates for instance regarding their compensatory or adjustment measures (Ekert et al., 2017). Understandably, interviewees regretted the end of this financial support.

or one of the 160 unregulated occupations covered by Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act and refugees whose foreign qualification fall into a regulated master trade or advanced vocational occupation under the Federal Recognition Act could choose to pass the skills analysis (*Qualifikationsanalyse*) (BMBF, 2017a).[55] However, the skills analysis would require them to have a sufficiently strong command of German to understand the tasks given (Nekoui, 31 January 2018).

The skills analysis constitutes Germany's first statutory option for the recognition of NFIVOS held by holders of foreign credentials (Berger, Lewalder, & Schreiber, 2014). It was introduced as part of the 2012 Federal Recognition Act (see Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2011, Article 1: Vocational Qualifications Assessment Law (BQFG), §14, and Article 3: Crafts and Trades Regulation Code, §50b(4)) and later also incorporated into Baden-Württemberg's Recognition (see Land Baden-Württemberg, 2013, Article 1: Vocational Qualifications Assessment Law of Baden-Württemberg (BQFG-BW), §14). It is relevant in two scenarios which are both also pertinent to refugee users:

- First, when there is insufficient written proof of candidates' foreign vocational qualification (shown as Stage 6b in Figure 7, p. 167). For instance, when refugees cannot bring all the required documents from their war-torn home country, an issue which, in 2017, the BMBF expected to escalate in the future (BMBF, 2017a).
- Second, when the competent authority identifies skills deficits compared to the German vocational reference qualification (shown as Stage 6c in Figure 7, p. 167), as happened to Mr Alyoussef discussed in Section 4.2.3.1.

In both scenarios, candidates have two options that draw on their NFIVOS to prove the required skills. Either they show documented evidence of their work experience and non-formal training (shown as Stage 7c in Figure 7, p. 167); or they could undergo the skills

[55] The skills analysis option did not apply to foreign professional qualifications governed by the Recognition Act that relate, for instance, to regulated medical professions (BMBF, 2017a). In such cases, when required documents were missing, the respective sectoral law prescribed an assessment, such as Mr Sharbat's medical knowledge exam.

analysis (shown as Stage 7d in Figure 7, p. 167) which would involve a practical and customised NFIVOS assessment (e.g. specialist interviews and work samples) by the chambers, as described in the end of Section 4.2.3.1 (Claudia Ball, 2016; Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2011; Land Baden-Württemberg, 2013).

The skills analysis draws on the insights from the Prototyping project, which the BMBF had launched even before the Federal Recognition Act entered into force in 2012. Chambers were tasked to define standards and procedures for the skills assessment of people with insufficient evidence of their foreign vocational qualifications. The project was extended in 2015 until the end of 2017, entitled Prototyping Transfer, to improve knowledge transfer and the offer of the skills analysis by the chambers. Four refugees participated in the 20 skills analyses under Prototyping Transfer (BMBF & BIBB, 2017a, 2017b). More recently, an increasing number of people from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and Eritrea, who could also be refugees, enquired about the skills analysis option at the chambers (Berger et al., 2016). However, even across all target groups, the skills analysis was not yet frequently used, with numbers only slowly growing from 60 in 2012 to 129 in 2015 (BMBF, 2017a, p. 39).

Mrs Tews from the DIHK (24 May 2018) saw in the skills analysis a well-functioning instrument, which, so far, the HWKs had used more often than the IHKs (BMBF, 2017a, p. 39). According to Mrs Berger from the BIBB (11 June 2018), this difference stemmed from the fact that Germany's IHKs had set up the IHK FOSA Institute, their centralised body for foreign skills approval, while the HWKs would process the applications under the Federal Recognition Act locally. IHKs needed to resort to the skills analysis less frequently than HWKs because the IHK FOSA Institute would often succeed in retrieving the required documentations from the education and training institutions in countries in crisis. The local HWKs, on the other hand, rather than reaching out to foreign institutions, were more likely to conduct the skills analysis. For instance, the IQ advisory service in Ulm referred a Syrian dental technician to the HWK Mannheim, the regional leading institution in this respect, where he eventually successfully passed a skills analysis (Ehrenreich, 11 May 2018). Other interviewees reported skills

analyses for car mechanics and electricians at the HWKs in Ulm, Konstanz and Mannheim and for PTAs at the Regional Chamber of Pharmacists in Stuttgart (Braun & Schimmel, 2 May 2018; Ehrenreich, 11 May 2018; Garada, 6 March 2018; Kettner, 21 February 2018).

5.3. Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored the suitability of seven skills assessment and recognition processes for refugees in Baden-Württemberg. It aimed to make inferences about the challenges and facilitators of the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS. The chapter first introduced Bourdieu's field concept as well as the seven arrangements under study by embedding the seven occupational life stories of the previous chapter into the wider context of Baden-Württemberg's skills recognition field with its manifold possible occupational pathways.

By inference from the refugee case studies, it defined the suitability of arrangements for refugee users as the extent to which they granted formal skills recognition, were easy to access, accommodating towards limited German language skills, and provided support throughout the process. Equipped with these indicators of suitability, the chapter then examined the seven processes, drawing on interview and observation data and the scarce existing documentary evidence.

While all four indicators mattered, it was argued that the most important for the purposes of refugees' swift labour market entry is whether the arrangement grants formal recognition to refugees' skills. With that in mind, four broad skills recognition types were put forward which progressively converged with the skills requirements of Germany's education and training system and into which the seven arrangements were grouped. The chapter has found that none of the seven arrangements possessed all four characteristics. The findings are summarised in Table 22 below.

Table 22. Conceptual overview: skills assessment and recognition arrangement case studies

	Assessment and recognition schemes for informally and non-formally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS)						**Recognition procedures for foreign vocational or professional qualifications**
	No formal skills recognition				Formal skills recognition		
Suitable for refugee users	**Various assess-ments**	**PerF** (Prospects for refugees)	**MySkills**	**AiKomPass** (only metal and electronics industries)	**ValiKom** (only pilot project)	**External exam**	**Germany's Federal Recognition Act** and **Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act**
Formal recog-nition	No	No	No	No	Yes, but only pilot project	Yes, but only if total equivalen-cy with skills require-ments of VET prg.	Yes
Acces-sible	Yes	Yes, but only on request	Yes, but only on request	Yes	No, because pilot	Yes	Yes, but only to holders of foreign voc./prof. qualification
Accom-modating towards limited German	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Support	Yes	Yes	Partially	No	Yes	No	Yes
Skills recognition Type I			**Type II**			**Type IV**	
Diagnostic + inclusive of all NFIVOS <------------------> Summative + selective in skills recognition							

Source: Author.

Based on these insights, it is clear that the more closely aligned arrangements are with the skills requirements of Germany's education and training system, the more selective they are in the skills they consider and the closer they come to formally recognising these skills. This is significant because the three arrangements (various skills assessments, PerF, MySkills) that possess the three other characteristics are also those which grant the least formal recognition. In sum, the chapter found the choice to be between highly suitable NFIVOS assessments that failed to provide any formal skills recognition and those recognition

arrangements that formally recognised skills but that were less suitable for refugee users as measured against the other three indicators of suitability.

Taken together these seven assessment and recognition processes provide examples of both good practices and factors hindering refugees' successful usage of them. These findings feed into the discussion of the study's overarching research question in the following chapter.

6. Discussion

Overview

This chapter brings together the findings of this study and discusses their implications for the overarching research question which centres on the obstacles and facilitating factors for refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS in Germany. It argues that these obstacles and facilitating factors are the result of a mismatch and alignment, respectively, of refugees' habitus with the requirements of Germany's skills recognition field. In order to make sense of this argument, the chapter presents this study's final conceptual framework that draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977b, 1986) which revolves around his concepts of field, capital and habitus. It conceptualises Germany's skills recognition activities as one of Bourdieu's social fields, with people struggling over the transformation of individuals' foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital as a means to improve their socio-economic positions.

6.1. The skills recognition field

As suggested in the exploratory conceptual framework of this thesis (see Section 3.3.1), the findings have shown the relevance of formal skills recognition to refugees' integration into Germany's labour market. Simultaneously, however, they have also highlighted refugees' difficulties in turning their NFIVOS and foreign vocational or professional qualifications into German institutionalised cultural capital. In this chapter, it is argued that refugees' obstacles in gaining formal skills recognition stem from a mismatch of their habitus with the requirements of Germany's skills recognition field, while the facilitating factors are the result of an alignment between refugees' habitus and the skills recognition field. An illustration of such a mismatch would be refugees' limited proficiency in the German language and consequent difficulties in

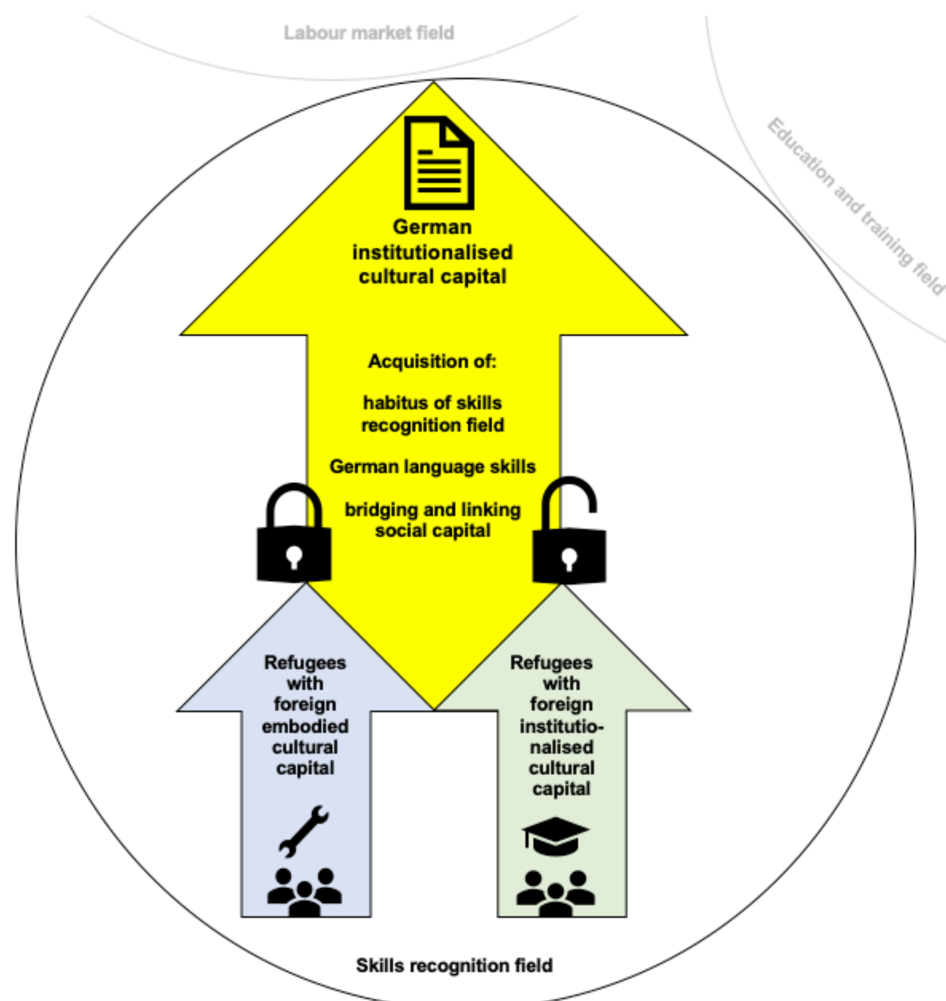
following the language-heavy skills recognition procedure under the Federal Recognition Act. An example of alignment would be their progress towards German proficiency or steps taken by the procedure to simplify language requirements.

The next section presents the final conceptual framework of this study and is followed by Sections 6.1.2 – 6.3.3 which go into the details of the framework.

6.1.1. The final conceptual framework

This study's final conceptual framework (see Figure 8) refines the basic assumptions of the exploratory version of the conceptual framework outlined in Section 3.3.1 and revolves around the argument stated above.

Figure 8. The final conceptual framework



Source: Author.

The framework draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977b, 1986) which explains the interplay of social fields (i.e. contexts) and people's individual characteristics (i.e. their habitus and material assets) that, in the ideal scenario, helps people to turn the latter into economic, cultural and social capital and achieve a favourable position in society. Through this theoretical lens (human capital theory was discussed and discarded as an alternative in Section 3.3.1), one can conceptualise refugees' forced migration from their home country to Germany as a move between social fields which have very different cultural and institutional contexts (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). According to Syrian interviewees in a study by Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. (2018, p. 40), the Syrian culture gives 'leeway for opportunistic improvisation and the ad-hoc crafting of skills and careers' and relies on 'social capital for career entry and transitions' and on 'job-relevant skills, i.e. embodied capital, but not necessarily on institutionalized capital'. The same goes for other Middle Eastern cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). By contrast, Germany's labour market is highly regulated and formalised, emphasises institutionalised cultural capital and expects individuals to follow bureaucratic job application procedures (Wehrle et al., 2018).

According to Duberley, Mallon, & Cohen (2006), in transitions between fields, the relationship between individuals and the social order and the context-specific nature of their capital becomes visible. Refugees' forced movement entails the involuntary loss of their previous social position and often of their material assets. In their new German environment, their habitus (their dispositions to view the world, think, speak and act in specific ways) is out of sync with their new surroundings because it was formed within and calibrated to their position in their home society (Bourdieu, 1977b; Maton, 2008). Their successful labour market strategies from their homeland will not work in Germany. This dialectical relationship between individuals' agency and the structure of their social field is expressed in Bourdieu's formula (1984, p. 101):

[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice

As described in Section 4.2.1, when a person's habitus generates behaviours, or practices, that are valued in a particular field that habitus becomes a source of economic, cultural or social capital. All these forms of capital are symbolic (or relational) and often also context-bound because they are based on social recognition (Bourdieu, 1986; Maton, 2008). As suggested in Section 4.2, although Bourdieu wrote little about skills, one can view refugees' NFIVOS and their foreign vocational or professional credentials as an expression of their habitus. While both were valued as embodied and institutionalised cultural capital in refugees' home countries, in Germany their value becomes unclear and potentially open to dispute because they are no longer automatically recognised as legitimate (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). Refugees experience a mismatch between their habitus and their new social field, Bourdieu's 'hysteresis effect', due to which their practices secure lower returns than in their home country (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 78). To keep with Erel's (2010, p. 649) metaphor of the migrant's rucksack described in the exploratory version of the conceptual framework (see Section 3.3.1), when refugees unpack their treasure chests from their rucksacks upon arrival in Germany, their new environment challenges the value of their treasures.

On these grounds, refugees enter Germany's skills recognition field (described in Section 5.1.1) in an attempt to transform their disputed foreign cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital because that form of capital is highly valued – considered a treasure – in Germany's labour market, as explained below.

6.1.2. The German *illusio*

Germany's skills recognition field exists in direct relation to the two fields of formal education and training and the labour market (see Figure 8 above) (Moore, 2008; Thomson, 2008). As illustrated by the case studies and previous research (Fasani et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018), in Germany's regulated labour market often only formal education and training diplomas provide access to well-paid jobs. To a certain extent, Germans take the need for vocational or professional qualifications for labour market integration for granted (Mahar, 2019). This

behaviour reflects Bourdieu's '*illusio*,' by which he describes the fact 'of being caught up in and by the game of believing the game […] is worth the effort' (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 76). The game is played by Germany's education and training system and labour market and their participants and centres on acquiring formal credentials. According to Bourdieu (1977b, p. 187), 'academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital.' As a result of this '*illusio*' (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 76), in this study, Germans expected refugees to either acquire a German qualification or a confirmation of equivalency with a German reference credential, otherwise they were likely to end up in low-paid and low-skilled jobs. In this regard, and as stated in the introduction to this thesis, the idea behind obtaining a formal qualification through skills recognition was that,

> […] it makes it possible to relate all qualification-holders (and also, negatively, all unqualified individuals) to a single standard, thereby setting up a *single market* for all cultural capacities and guaranteeing the convertibility of cultural capital into money, at a determinate cost of labour and time. (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 187; italics in the original)

As a result, Germany's skills recognition field is organised around the transformation of foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital which is 'both the process within, and product, of [the] field' (Thompson, 2008, p. 69). This process is composed of people working on skills recognition processes at the operational and strategic levels, comprising advisors, assessors, decision-makers and policymakers (for a list see Table 4 (p. 84) in Section 3.4.1), and of individuals, including refugees, seeking formal recognition of their non-formal, informal and formal skills that were acquired abroad. What unites these actors is their shared belief, or *illusio*, in the relevance of German vocational and professional qualifications as an acknowledgement of the holder's possession of certain skills and knowledge (Sommer, 2015). For these actors, such qualifications and the associated occupational titles are symbolic capital which they believe labour market entrants, not least refugees, need to obtain.

In this study, refugees attempted to improve their position in Germany's labour market from the status of non-holders to holders of German institutionalised cultural capital. Pursuant

to previous research on vocational and professional identities, they sought to re-establish their earlier careers through formal skills recognition, not only for financial reasons but also to ensure the continuity of their previous occupational identities and social positions (Petriglieri, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018; Zikic & Richardson, 2016).

It would be in line with Bourdieu's field concept to argue that the skills recognition field was competitive (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996; Mahar, 2019; Thomson, 2008). However, the mere existence of this field proves that there was public interest in enabling foreigners to work at their skills level in Germany's unregulated and regulated occupations. And yet, the findings have clearly illustrated that the German structures did not make it easy for refugees to acquire German institutionalised cultural capital through formal skills recognition. There were various interests at stake regarding the production and distribution of German institutionalised cultural capital (detailed further below), which led to 'struggles over the legitimate principle of legitimation and the legitimate mode of [its] reproduction' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996, p. 76).

Most actors in the skills recognition field also accept that state institutions, such as schools, VET colleges, the chambers and universities, had the monopoly in awarding formal qualifications. A notable exception could be seen in Baden-Württemberg's metal and electronics industries which developed the AiKomPass software which could potentially be transformed into a stand-alone skills certificate and thereby break with the traditional monopoly of the state institutions to award certificates. Notwithstanding this exception, according to Sommer (2015, p. 363), most actors' acceptance goes hand in hand with the idea that the world is divided into national 'knowledge collectives'. These refer to countries' national education and training systems that are marked by culture-specific definitions of skills and knowledge (Sommer, 2017). Following this line of argument, refugees require a German state institution to confirm the equivalency of their skills and qualifications acquired in a foreign knowledge collective with their German reference qualification in order to acquire German cultural capital. This belief in the relevance of German qualifications, the state's qualification-awarding monopoly and refugees' acceptance of German institutions determining the value of

their skills and foreign qualifications is what Bourdieu (1990a, p. 135) calls the 'symbolic violence' by the state:

> Official nomination, in other words the act by which one grants someone a title, a socially recognized qualification, is one of the most typical demonstrations of that monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence which belongs to the state or to its representatives. A diploma such as a school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, valid on all markets. As an official definition of an official identity, it releases its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective. (Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 135-136)

Of course, the problem that the refugees holding foreign vocational and professional qualifications faced was that their diplomas were not 'universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital' (see in Section 4.2.3). Moreover, refugees' NFIVOS, 'the capital of the autodidact', were open to even greater dispute, because they 'may be called into question at any time' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247) (on this see also Section 4.2.1). Both refugee groups had to overcome various obstacles to gain recognition of their foreign cultural capital which are discussed below.

6.2. Obstacles for refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS

Before turning to the refugees with foreign credentials, this section first attempts to make sense of the situation in which the three refugees without foreign institutionalised but with embodied cultural capital found themselves.

6.2.1. The lack of a refugee-friendly arrangement or selective inclusion at user level

The biggest infrastructural barrier to the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS in Baden-Württemberg is Germany's lack of an arrangement that fulfils this purpose in a refugee-friendly way. This can be seen as the result of what Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia (2015, p. 594) call 'selective inclusion' in skills recognition (or validation) arrangements (touched on in Section 2.2.2.3 of Chapter 2). It is based on a division of migrants into two classes:

> Those working in shortage sectors or […] those considered to be at the high end of the productive spectrum […] are favoured. […] Meanwhile, the skills […] of those working at the middle and low added value end of the market […] and outside key sectors are treated unfavourably due to the lack of suitable systems for the validation of their NFIL. (Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015, p. 601)

This translates into Germany's division between those with foreign vocational and professional qualifications who can access the skills recognition procedure under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act and those with NFIVOS to whom currently no appropriate skills recognition arrangement is available. At the time of writing the ValiKom project is merely a pilot and not yet widely accessible and success in the external exam – the second arrangement that can potentially lead to the formal recognition of NFIVOS – usually requires attendance of formal preparatory courses which is possibly challenging for refugees with limited proficiency in German as detailed in Section 5.2.4.1.

One reason for this situation might well have to do with Germans' belief in the above-discussed qualification-awarding monopoly of the state because it might also imply that only those skills, as an expression of a person's habitus, that were acquired in formal education and training settings can be trusted and turned into capital through formal recognition. According to Bourdieu (1984), a person's habitus is initially formed in the family but it is through formal education whereby that habitus assumes an institutionalised form. In the Syrian labour market field, for instance, the domestic habitus of developing photos and films is sufficient to become embodied cultural capital because photoshop owners such as Mr Dawod would find customers. By contrast, as depicted in Section 4.2.2.2, German media design companies would only recruit persons holding institutionalised habitus. It seems that only the institutionalised form of habitus becomes institutionalised cultural capital in the German labour market field. This 'objectification' of a valued habitus into institutionalised cultural capital through the award of a qualification is very Euro-centric (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247). In refugees' home countries, vocational skills such as tailoring and tiling floors acquired through NFIL, for instance in the family business, are often considered cultural capital without the latter being institutionalised.

In line with the case study design of this thesis, having identified Germany's lack of a refugee-friendly process for the formal recognition of NFIVOS as the major obstacle, the following additional obstacles are inferred from the aforementioned four diagnostic NFIVOS assessments, the two arrangements (ValiKom pilot and external exam) that provide the sought-after formal recognition, though arguably only to a limited extent, and the procedure for the formal recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications. In addition to the finding that the latter only selectively includes those holding a foreign institutionalised occupational habitus, a systematic look at the skills recognition arrangements that were studied detects a second level of selective inclusion at play.

6.2.2. Selective inclusion at the skills level

The typology of skills recognition arrangements proposed in Section 5.2 of the previous chapter and summarised in Table 23 below suggests a selective inclusion at the skills level. While assessments of Type I, such as the various skills assessments and the PerF programme in Baden-Württemberg, are diagnostic and capture all or most of candidates' NFIVOS without formalising them, those of Types II to IV become increasingly summative and selective in the skills they formally recognise.

Souto-Otero and Villalba-Garcia (2015) identified formal skills recognition arrangements to be selectively inclusive at the user level. In addition, the case studies in Chapter 4 demonstrate that arrangements that lead to formal recognition also only selectively include certain skills. These are namely those skills that are taught in Germany's formal (higher) education and training system. For instance, the ValiKom pilot project only assesses those skills that are part of the skills set of the German reference occupational profile. Similarly, under the provisions of the external exam, permission to sit the exam is based only on those skills taught in the reference apprenticeship and success in the exam itself usually even necessitates the additional acquisition of a specific institutionalised habitus through preparatory courses prior to the exam. In the equivalency assessments under the Federal

Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act, the skills requirements of the German reference qualification are the measure of all things. Both the Pakistani social worker Mr Ullah and the Syrian maths teacher Mrs Jabour experienced a situation where only their skills that matched the German skills profiles of social worker and teacher were considered; any other additional skills that they may have acquired through their work experience went unnoticed (see Sections 4.2.3.3 and 4.2.3.4). Even the skills analysis, Germany's first statutory option for the recognition of NFIVOS, albeit exclusively accessible to holders of foreign vocational qualifications, such as the Syrian assistant electrician Mr Alyoussef (Section 4.2.3.1), focuses only on those skills deemed pertinent under the German reference occupational profile.

Table 23. Typology of skills recognition arrangements

	Type I	**Type II**	**Type III**	**Type IV**
Diagnostic + inclusive of all NFIVOS <---------------------> Summative + selective in skills recognition				
Area	Personal development	Continuing vocational training	Formal education and training	Formal education and training
Skills acqui-sition	Non-formal and informal learning (NFIL)	NFIL	NFIL or formal	NFIL or formal
Purpose	Identifying skills for personal development	Obtaining skills certificate different to formal qualification	Gaining access to formal education and training and sometimes reducing programme duration	Gaining access to final qualifying exam Or gaining confirmation of full or partial equivalency with formal reference qualification
Assess-ment	Diagnostic Inclusive	Diagnostic or summative Inclusive or selective	Summative Selective	Summative Selective
Skills criteria	Limited use	Defined by occupational sectors or by education and training	Defined by formal education and training	Defined by formal education and training
German examples	Various skills assessment PerF	MySkills AiKomPass ValiKom	Apprenticeships	External exam Federal Recognition Act BaWü's Recognition Act

Source: Gutschow, K. (2010). *Anerkennung von nicht formal und informell erworbenen Kompetenzen. Wissenschaftliche Diskussionspapiere am Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung*. Bonn: BIBB, p. 14; Kis, V., & Windisch, H. C. (2018). Making skills transparent. Recognising vocational skills acquired through work-based learning. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi:10.1787/5830c400-en.

According to Bourdieu (cited in Moore, 2008, p. 104), in a given field, some forms of habituses are elevated above others in an arbitrary manner. Such valued habituses confer advantages and become cultural capital. In light of this, in Germany's equivalency assessment of foreign vocational and professional credentials, it is not good enough to have acquired skills at a Pakistani university or a Syrian university of applied sciences or a Syrian VET college. While Mr Ullah, Mrs Jabour and Mr Alyoussef have thereby formed an institutionalised habitus, for their skills to be formally recognised and turned into German institutionalised cultural capital, they also have to be identical to and equivalent with those skills required by their German reference qualification.

6.2.2.1. Decredentialisation and devaluation of refugees' skills

As a result of this selective inclusion both at the user group and skills levels, refugees become subject to the decredentialisation and devaluation processes touched on in Sections 2.2.2.3 and 4.2. Under the associated deficit model of difference, their qualifications or NFIVOS acquired outside Germany are considered inferior and assigned to a lower educational level or even become invalid – a tendency similarly observed in Austria (e.g. Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018) and Australia (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). For instance, Mr Ullah's Pakistani social worker qualification was considered inferior to the German equivalent, meaning he had to complete compensatory measures. Since Mrs Jabour could not fulfil Baden-Württemberg's requirement to have studied two school subjects, her Syrian teacher's qualification became invalid in the German context. It is noteworthy that it is not only Syrian and other developing world teaching qualifications that fall short of Germany's two-subject teaching requirement; many teaching qualifications from highly developed countries, such as the UK, would also fail it.

Four possible explanations of Germany's tendency to decredentialise and devaluate foreign vocational or professional qualifications can be considered. One potential explanation lies in the fact that skills tend to be culture- and context-specific (Souto-Otero & Villalba-

Garcia, 2015). Refugees' NFIVOS or qualifications, as an expression of Bourdieu's habitus, were acquired in and moulded by their home culture (Bourdieu, 1986). In their social field of origin, they were valued and traded as institutionalised cultural capital such as Mrs Jabour's teacher's credentials. However, as suggested in Section 6.1.1 of this chapter, refugees' skills may be deemed to be out of sync with the requirements of their new German context, the 'hysteresis effect' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 78). German authorities not only require refugees' skills to match the rigid occupational profiles defined by the German education and training system but also seem to be choosy about how, where, and in what package the skills were gained. Of course, German authorities are not alone in practicing such selection. It can equally be found in recruitment practices of universities and companies which favour new recruits who tick all of their eligibility boxes over those who do not. One alternative to such choosiness would be to broaden the acceptance criteria. However, in reality often cultural differences, politico-economic interests and/or concerns to maintain skills standards discourage such a broadening, as discussed below.

The second possible explanation is related to the culture and context specificity of skills and lies in the notion of cultural distance. This notion might help explain why the German competent bodies more readily recognise qualifications gained in other EU member states rather than in third countries and vocational skills acquired through formal education and training rather than NFIVOS (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Sommer, 2015). As Mansfield and Mitchell (1996) note, competences in every country are defined by stakeholders who are the product of a particular culture and national 'knowledge collectives' (Sommer, 2015, p. 363) of neighbouring countries might seem culturally more familiar than those of distant countries (see also Prais, 2003, for a discussion on national differences in the understanding of mathematical competence). Following Bourdieu's logic of social reproduction through differences in accumulated capital (Bourdieu, 1984), the tendency of German authorities to devaluate and decredentialise third-country nationals' foreign cultural capital can be described as the reproduction of power relations between rich nations like Germany and states

considered to be on the economic periphery such as Pakistan, Iraq and Syria. According to Sommer (2015, p. 363), this tendency also emphasises that the third-country national can only be accepted into Germany's 'knowledge collective' through mandatory compensatory measures prescribed by German authorities. For instance, Mr Ullah's skills were only confirmed to be fully equivalent with the skills gained through the German social worker qualification after his completion of university seminars and social work placements in Germany. Similarly, candidates with NFIVOS are only accepted in the 'knowledge collective' of the occupations under Germany's dual VET system when they possess all skills necessary to pass the final apprenticeship exam as external exam candidates, which usually necessitates preparatory courses,

This notion of a sanctified German 'knowledge collective' might indeed play a role and provides a third possible explanation (Sommer, 2015, p. 363). For example, the dual VET system is characterised by a high degree of vocational specificity and geared towards upskilling of the labour force (Baethge & Wolter, 2015). According to Baethge and Wolter (2015 citing Hillmert, 2006), this fosters VET graduates' strong vocational identities, the relatively high social status of their occupations and workers' sense of professional pride. As a result, driven by a certain sense of exclusivity and need to protect occupational standards and reputation, the German Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Chambers of Crafts and Trades might be incentivised to devalue NFIVOS and decredentialise foreign vocational qualifications. The existence of Germany's well-established VET system creates an insider-outsider dynamic in the German labour market whereby access to VET occupations is restricted to insiders who hold German VET qualifications and outsiders, such as third-country refugees without such credentials, are sidelined. This resonates with the insider-outsider theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Lindbeck & Snower, 1988) which explains economic inequality and unemployment by assuming that in bargaining over wages with their employers, the insiders (the employed) have a strong position that keeps outsiders (the unemployed) out. As the insiders are already employed, they are not interested in holding wages down and

thereby expanding the number of jobs and allowing outsiders to enter into employment. The insiders' strong bargaining position stems from the high transactional costs that the employers would incur if they replaced them by outsiders (Lindbeck & Snower, 1988).

In addition, a fourth practical explanation for the decredentialisation and devaluation tendency affecting foreign qualifications in Germany could be German authorities' concern for consumers' health and safety. They might want to require foreigners to meet German skills standards in order to ensure the continued quality of services (Koumenta et al., 2014). As a consequence, devaluation and decredentialisation might affect third-country nationals more than EU foreigners because their home countries' health and safety regulations could be expected to diverge from those in place in Germany to a larger extent. For example, due to the occurrence of fake medical qualifications among refugee dentists, the German authorities did not trust Mr Sharbat's Syrian credentials and he was required to pass a comprehensive knowledge exam to prove his dentistry capabilities. In such instances, given the primacy of patient welfare involved in any form of medical practice, and the high risks involved, it is not surprising that proof above and beyond holding a certificate might be required.

Taking a step back, the reasons for the decredentialisation and devaluation tendency affecting foreign qualifications in Germany are likely to be a combination of these four explanations. Germany is not alone in struggling with the recognition of skills and qualifications of newly arrived refugees and it is difficult to identify developed countries with reasonably high status education and training systems and highly regulated labour markets that deal with these problems in a better way than does Germany (Jeon, 2019). Denmark provides an example, albeit only its well-established VET system resembles Germany's dual apprenticeship system, whilst its wider labour market is more flexible in terms of hiring practices than the German model (CEDEFOP, 2016d; Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2019). In 2016, the Danish Government took steps to ensure the systematic recognition of the qualifications and skills of newly arrived refugees. With a view to assisting accommodation centres, municipalities and integration programmes in the fast-track assessments of refugees'

skills and qualifications, the Danish Agency for Higher Education set up an advice and guidance hotline (Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2016, cited in Jeon, 2019).

Further to the selective inclusion at user group and skills levels and the associated decredentialisation and devaluation processes, the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that refugees face at least three additional obstacles, namely the complexity of German skills recognition procedures, the German language requirement and refugees' lack of the right kind of social capital. While the first two challenges are clearly conditioned by Germany's infrastructure, by using Bourdieu's theory of practice, the chapter demonstrates that all three obstacles are exacerbated by the mismatch between the skills recognition field and refugees' habitus.

6.2.3. Complex procedures

Procedures leading to formal skills recognition are complex. Neither the established procedure under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act for foreign vocational or professional qualifications nor the trialled ValiKom procedure for NFIVOS nor the external exam lack in intricacies and bureaucracy. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, even for a German native speaker the multiple options and the required bureaucratic steps described by the advisors were elaborate and daunting.

No one arrives in Germany's skills recognition field with 'god-like knowledge of the state of play' (Maton, 2008, p. 54), rather, everybody has to learn the unwritten 'rules of the game' through experience and time (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 71). Migrants who have lived in Germany for many years have an advantage over recently arrived refugees because they have had more time to acquire the appropriate 'habitus as the feel for the game' which, Bourdieu maintains, 'is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 93). The habituses of refugees and other migrants were developed and shaped in social fields very different to the German skills recognition field. However, compared to other

migrants, because of refugees' recent arrival in Germany, they more strongly experience the cultural and institutional distance between their home countries and Germany as a mismatch between their habitus and their new environment (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Kostova, 1999). As a result, refugees overall are likely to find it more challenging than other migrants to understand and follow the complex skills recognition procedures.

Mr Alyoussef's difficulties in navigating the necessary steps under the Federal Recognition Act described in Section 4.2.3.1 are a case in point. He was overwhelmed by the many options open to him and the many necessary bureaucratic measures. He should have sent out two different applications to the authorities: one for the classification of his school leaving certificate and the other one for an equivalency assessment of his Syrian assistant electrician qualification. In addition, he should also simultaneously have been in touch with the local Chamber of Crafts and Trades and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce to figure out his exact German reference occupation and to arrange for an apprenticeship. He first had to acclimatise to Germany's bureaucracy and learn about the functioning of the German dual VET system, two aspects of life in Germany that anyone who grew up there would intuitively be familiar with.

This conscious effort to acquire a certain habitus might seem to contradict Bourdieu's notion of habitus working at a subconscious level. Indeed, various authors have criticised habitus as an overly deterministic construct that leaves little room for rational behaviour, personal agency and change. However, drawing on Bourdieu's writing, Edgerton and Roberts (2014, pp. 7–8) disprove this criticism. New experiences continuously mould people's habitus, but it is in particular in moments of habitus-field mismatch, such as refugees' arrival to a new country, that people are likely to make a conscious effort to adjust their habitus to their new environment. For example, language is one element of habitus which is often purposefully adapted by migrants, as discussed below (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996).

6.2.4. The German language skills requirement

Directly related to refugees acquiring the feel for the skills recognition game is their need for proficiency in German. Its key role in refugees' social and labour market integration has already been observed by previous research (e.g. Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018) and has been reinforced by the findings of this thesis. Navigating the required steps to reach skills recognition proves difficult because arrangements tend to be insufficiently accommodating towards users with limited German language skills (on this see also overview Table 22 (p. 210) in Section 5.3). As noted earlier, this was the case with the text-heavy AiKomPass self-assessment software and the language-intense ValiKom pilot procedure, the external exam, and the procedure under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act (see Sections 5.2.2.2, 5.2.2.3, 5.2.4.1.and 5.2.4.2). While the various non-standardised skills assessments as well as the PerF programme and the MySkills software, all devised for refugee users, presented less of a language barrier, they lacked a formal recognition aspect (see Sections 5.2.1.1, 5.2.1.2 and 5.2.2.1). The same applied to the many other initiatives, often reliant on short-term funding, that were established in response to the migrant influx in 2015-2016 and that aimed at facilitating refugees' labour market entry.

As explained in Chapter 4, for Bourdieu (1984), language is part of a person's habitus and becomes embodied cultural capital when it confers advantages to its speakers. As evidence from Germany shows, German language skills are cultural capital because they translate into more positive employment prospects and higher earnings (Bither & Ziebarth, 2016). Given that German was the dominant language of the studied skills recognition field, but also of Germany's labour market field, refugees' ability to create possibilities in these fields greatly depended on their linguistic capital. Yet, many refugees struggled with the German language.

Even when refugees spoke German relatively fluently, they often needed in-person support throughout the skills recognition process because of its complexity, as illustrated in

Chapters 4 and 5. Unfortunately, partly due to heavy case load, staff at refugees' jobcentres could not always afford enough contact time for them. The ebbing away of volunteers who could support refugees' occupational arrival in Germany exacerbated this situation.

This points to refugees' lack of the right form of social capital in their new environment.

6.2.5. Refugees' insufficient social capital

In line with previous research (Ager & Strang, 2010; Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Gericke et al., 2018; Morrice, 2007), the findings presented in Chapter 4 highlighted the importance of social capital in refugees' integration process (for a detailed discussion of the different types of social capital available to refugees see Gericke et al., 2018). Bourdieu (1986) focuses on the exclusionary aspects of social capital to explain social inequality, while researchers such as Putnam (1993a, 1995) are more optimistic about its potential as an integrating force between individuals and wider social structures (Gauntlett, 2011; Siisiäinen, 2000).

Bourdieu's conception of social capital is rooted in issues of social class and the reproduction of power relations (Bourdieu, 1977b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996). According to him (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248-249),

> social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its member with the backing of the collectivity-owned [*sic*] capital […].

Social capital thus has at least three components. First, it is linked to the size of an individual's network. Second, through it, individuals gain access to the volume of capital that other members of the network already have (Ihlen, 2005). Having left their original, gradually accumulated social networks behind in their country of origin, most refugees have to build up their social networks from zero. Some can draw upon groups of their own ethnicity or nationality, what Putnam refers to as social bonds (2000, pp. 22–24). In the context of Germany's acceptance of nearly one million Syrian refugees, Syrians were able without

difficulty to bond with other Syrians, as Mr Alyoussef did in Heidelberg. However, as his case also demonstrated, this form of social capital tends to 'reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups' and does not provide the information that refugees seeking skills recognition would need to be successful (Morrice, 2007, p. 162; Russell, Holmstrom, & Clare, 2015). Such knowledge about the norms and expectations of the particular skills recognition field is more likely shared within networks that are composed of people from refugees' host society or host institutions. This form of bridging or respectively linking social capital creates broader identities, or broader habitus, and wider reciprocity, allowing refugees to get ahead rather than to merely get by with bonding social capital (Putnam, 1993b, 1995, 2000, pp. 22–24). However, building such ties with people from other circles or social classes, who are possibly higher up the social and economic hierarchy, can be daunting to refugees, especially when they struggle to speak German. According to Morrice (2007), refugees do build social bonds in their host society. Yet, the question is not merely whether refugees have social capital, but more crucially what form of social capital: 'whether it is of a form which will provide them with the ideas and "know-how" to achieve their goals' (Morrice, 2007, p. 164). While refugees' families and friends can be a vital source of information, certain kinds of knowledge, for instance, regarding the norms and expectations of Germany's skills recognition processes, might only be available through linking social capital.

Third, social capital is based on mutual recognition and thereby becomes symbolic capital (Siisiäinen, 2000). Bourdieu (1977, p. 506) notes that,

> [t]he same academic qualifications receive very variable values and functions according to the economic and social capital (particularly the capital of relationships inherited from the family) which those who hold these qualifications have at their disposal […].

This means that refugees holding a foreign vocational or professional qualification face disadvantages if they lack the appropriate social capital to gain recognition of their credentials in their host society. However, according to Mohyuddin and Pick (2016, p. 520), many migrants are aware of 'how much career social capital they had lost in migrating' and can therefore

focus on establishing and cultivating new contacts. This points to one of the factors that might help refugees gain recognition of their NFIVOS in Germany, discussed below.

6.3. Facilitating factors for refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS

In line with previous research on refugees' labour market integration (Baranik et al., 2018; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Gericke et al., 2018; Morrice, 2007) and migrants' cultural capital (Erel, 2010), this study illustrates that facilitating factors for refugees' formal skills recognition are an interplay of Germany's integration infrastructure, comprising employment-supporting measures, integration and language courses and civil society engagement, and refugees' personal agency, such as their willingness to learn the German language and about the German way of life, to engage with Germans and to be proactive. In Bourdieu's words, when refugees adjust and broaden their habitus according to the requirements of the German social field, they are more likely to reap benefits from Germany's skills recognition field.

6.3.1. Acquiring the right social capital

The results of this study indicate that refugees' acquisition of social capital can help overcome some of the above-described obstacles to gaining formal skills recognition because it helps them to adjust and broaden their habitus according to their new social field. Various studies have shown how migrants use social contacts to ease their labour market integration and career progression (see e.g. Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Gericke et al., 2018; Lehmann & Taylor, 2015; Mohyuddin & Pick, 2016; Morrice, 2007; Spence et al., 2016). However, refugees' situation in Baden-Württemberg has also illustrated that access to useful social capital is not a natural given. In Bourdieu's words, its acquisition demands 'an endless effort'. It is 'the product of investment strategies […] aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable […]' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). Consequently, refugees need to proactively build social connections in order to improve their social position in

Germany, social links (with local institutions) and social bridges (with locals) are of particular value in this respect (Gericke et al., 2018; Lancee, 2016; Putnam, 1993a, 1995).

Importantly, certain infrastructure can facilitate their creation of the form of social capital necessary for gaining skills recognition. In this study, and in line with other recent research on refugees' labour market integration (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018), an initial impetus was provided by refugees' registration with a jobcentre, which was not only required for benefit claims but also facilitated their creation of linking social capital. Jobcentre staff generally provided advice about labour market entry in Germany and often referred refugees to specialised programmes for more structured support. For instance, the Syrian dentist and the Syrian assistant electrician were sent to the IQ Network and the local chambers respectively to obtain in-depth information about the recognition of their Syrian professional and vocational qualifications, while the Iraqi floor tiler and metal worker was referred to the Bruderhaus Diakonie to gain a German school leaving certificate before starting an apprenticeship.

The expansion of the IQ Network service points, including the mobile service in the rural areas, and the mushrooming of numerous initiatives for asylum seekers and refugees in Baden-Württemberg in response to the 2015-2016 migrant influx proved to be another important opportunity for refugees to build linking social capital. Similar to other recent findings from Germany (e.g. Gericke et al., 2018), the refugees interviewed for this study reported that the support from particular social links, such as their IQ advisors, social workers and NGO employees, had been invaluable in their decision about occupational pathways in Germany. These contacts helped refugees to understand the German world of education and training and of work better and to get a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 93).

6.3.2. Acquiring knowledge of the German language and culture

Refugees' interaction with their social links in formal situations and with their social bridges in daily life also proved essential with respect to the development of their German language skills

and a better understanding of the German culture. As explained above, such skills and knowledge are embodied cultural capital in Germany, which can become part of what Mohyuddin and Pick (2016, p. 518) call a 'career habitus'. Erel (2010, pp. 656, 642) describes this as the migrants' creative construction of 'migrant-specific cultural capital' 'that builds on, rather than simply mirrors, power relations of either the country of origin or the country of migration.' She posits that migrants actively create their cultural capital to fit in with their new country of residence. In this sense, refugees learn the local language and accent in order to use them as 'national capital' that shows they belong to Germany and to create a Germany-specific career habitus (Hage, 1998, p. 53 in Erel, 2010).

Some of the refugees' German social bridges had come about by coincidence, for instance Mr Dawod's finding a landlord through an acquaintance during a summer job. Others were the intended result of refugees' proactivity. Such proactivity proved 'a core enabler of social capital acquisition' (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018, p. 38), which in turn facilitated learning German and obtaining job-relevant knowledge, crucial for fitting into their new German field. For example, Mr Sharbat who, during his temporary work as a maths tutor for Arabic-speaking refugees, learned from a colleague where he could acquire professional experience in a German dental surgery as a supervised dentist.

Additionally, other social bridges were the hoped-for-fruition of Germany's migrant welcoming culture. As explained in Section 4.2.2, in response to the increasing numbers of asylum seekers, groups of individuals established volunteer associations in support of asylum seekers' and refugees' integration, such as the AK Asyl Calw in the Black Forest. Hence, volunteers gave German tuition to two of the seven refugee informants and accompanied four of the 11 refugees encountered in observations for this study, helping them, among other things, to understand their options and complete their applications. Similarly, a recent study on Syrian and Afghan jobs seekers in Austria (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018) also observed how volunteers helped refugees to acquire various forms of embodied cultural capital and thereby contributed to their social inclusion into the local community.

In addition to refugees' more or less coincidental acquisition of German language skills through social bridges, in 2015, the German Government was quick to identify German language learning as an integration priority. Given initial difficulties of coping with the high numbers of new arrivals, the Federal Employment Agency encouraged and funded private providers and volunteer associations to offer basic language courses. While the quality of teaching varied, overall this was a fast way to reach recently arrived refugees (Hess, 18 April 2018). Subsequently, language provision was formally incorporated into the integration courses certified by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and labour-market oriented programmes funded by the Federal Employment Agency, such as the above-discussed PerF programme (see Sections 4.2.2.2 and 5.2.1.2), but run by third parties such as private companies and civic organisations (Bither & Ziebarth, 2016; Joyce, 2018). As participation in the former was mandatory for refugees, at least in theory, attendance should have encouraged them to become familiar with the German language and culture. In practice, refugees were more likely to get a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 93) in German society by engaging with their social bridges. This happened, for instance, during their work-based placements, such as Mr Dawod's at the media company as part of his PerF programme or Mr Sharbat's work as a dentist under supervision before his knowledge exam, or during their leisure time, such as Mr Omar socialising with his German friends at the local fire brigade.

The findings of this study highlight that having the right form of social capital and being more proficient in German facilitates the acquisition of the right habitus, or 'the feel for the [German skills recognition] game' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 93). Having the required habitus makes the skills recognition procedures appear less complex and easier to navigate. As Mr Ullah's case illustrated (Section 4.2.3.4), consulting the IQ Network service for advice on the recognition process and attending the necessary compensatory measures to achieve full equivalency became much more useful once he had reached a certain proficiency in German.

Yet, all of these efforts on the part of the refugees to adjust to their new environment will have been in vain, if Germany continues to deny those who only hold NFIVOS the opportunity to obtain formal skills recognition.

6.3.3. Increasing awareness of the need for a refugee-friendly NFIVOS recognition arrangement

In the medium to long term, Germany's highly formalised and regulated labour market itself is likely to become the one decisive facilitating factor in allowing for a refugee-friendly recognition of NFIVOS, as it calls for a policy response. Refugees face a labour market that requires formal qualifications and high levels of skills in many occupations (Bohn et al., 2016; Brücker et al., 2017; Fratzscher & Junker, 2015; Wehrle et al., 2018). As these conditions adversely affect job opportunities of low-qualified but skilled people, formal skills recognition becomes a necessity. Although (as noted many times in this study) Germany currently lacks an appropriate arrangement, there are signs of a rise in awareness among employers and policymakers of the need for one that is accessible to both German and foreign nationals.

The entry into force in 2012 of Germany's Federal Recognition Act and the various subsequent Recognition Acts of the German federal states can be seen as a shift in that direction. First, it has meant an opening-up of Germany's labour market to third-country nationals holding foreign vocational or professional qualifications who wish either to practice one of Germany's regulated occupations or to improve their employment chances in unregulated occupations. Second, through the skills analysis, Germany offers for the first time a procedure that takes the NFIVOS held by holders of foreign credentials into account. Third, the IQ Network advisory service is geared towards inclusivity and accessibility, with staff trained in the use of simple German and often proficient in English and sometimes even in Arabic.

Yet, as observed by the deputy division manager at the HWK Mannheim in early 2018 (Kettner, 21 February 2018), '[m]any more among those who come to seek advice about the

recognition of their vocational skills are potential users of arrangements for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning than candidates for the external exam or the Federal Recognition Act.' Similarly, Dr Baron (19 February 2018), CEO of AgenturQ which developed the aforementioned AiKomPass and is in charge of further training both of Südwestmetall, the employers' association of Baden-Württemberg's metal and electronics industries, and IG Metall, Germany's largest workers' union, highlighted the need for a formal NFIVOS assessment. He described a project (*Prospektive Weiterbildung für Industrie 4.0*) which addressed anticipated changes in the workplace through the assessment of NFIVOS:

> When the robots are released from their cages and the digital factory is upon us, […] the informal competences of yesterday' skilled workers will matter more than ever because specialist competences acquired during education and training will become less important. We will need interdisciplinary skills and employers will need to know what up-to-date technical skills and what communication and social skills their employees possess. (Baron, 19 February 2018)

There are initial approaches that go in the right direction (see Chapter 5). They acknowledge that skills acquired in non-formal and informal ways deserve visibility. However, in one way or another, they all fall short of addressing refugees' four needs, identified in this study: namely, that skills assessment and recognition arrangements grant formal recognition of NFIVOS, are easy to access, accommodating towards limited German language skills, and provide in-person support throughout the process. For instance, the external exam, despite having been hailed as Germany's 'major instrument' for the recognition of NFIL has not been without criticism (Claudia Ball, 2016, p. 1). Some experts consider it an insufficient validation instrument because, according to them, it does not formally recognise candidates' NFIVOS in their own right but is merely the means for skilled individuals without prior formal vocational training to access the relevant final apprenticeship exam (Velten & Herdin, 2016, p. 17). Others criticise that the external exam only grants formal skills recognition if candidates possess all skills necessary to pass the final apprenticeship exam, otherwise no skills recognition was granted at all. However, passing the exam requires candidates to possess an institutionalised form of habitus (consisting of knowledge of occupation-specific theory, language and

behavior) that refugees are unlikely to acquire without completing an apprenticeship which, however, would defeat this validation instrument's objective (Bourdieu,1984).

Although ValiKom presents the only procedure that formally recognises NFIVOS in their own right, at the time of this study, it was only a pilot project and not easily accessible for refugees. It was launched by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 2015, before refugees' labour market integration became a policy priority, in reaction to findings by BIBB that around two million young people (aged 20-34) lacked formal vocational qualifications in 2012 (BMBF, 2015b). For that reason, the pilot project did not explicitly target refugees but aimed to explore the potential of the skills analysis to formally recognise NFIVOS of skilled but unqualified persons generally. ValiKom's language-heavy and complicated format contrasts with the MySkills software. Its simulation-based approach was developed in response to the migrant influx in 2015-2016 by the Federal Employment Agency in an attempt to overcome barriers posed by limited German proficiency and low literacy. However, MySkills lacks a formal skills recognition aspect and the buy-in from Germany's chambers. This points to the struggles over the legitimacy to assess skills and certify skills and issue vocational qualifications waged in Germany's skills recognition field between the chambers and employer associations and between different federal institutions and ministries (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996).

Against this background, rather than creating yet another skills assessment, many interviewees of this study envisaged a combination of existing tools (Baron, 19 February 2018; Berger, 11 June 2018; Gutschow, 7 June 2018; Tews, 24 May 2018; Hecht, 19 March 2019). For instance, turning the MySkills and AiKomPass softwares into a first stage of a rolled out ValiKom procedure that addresses the four needs of refugee users.

6.4. Concluding remarks

This chapter brought together the findings of this study to discuss their implications for the overarching research question revolving around the obstacles and facilitating factors for

refugees to gain formal recognition of their NFIVOS in Germany. By drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977b), it argued that these obstacles and facilitating factors were the result of a mismatch and alignment, respectively, of refugees' habitus with the requirements of Germany's skills recognition field.

Refugees' forced migration to Germany entailed a change of social field. In the new German context, they could not just unpack their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital from a backpack because capital, as a valued form of habitus, is relational and field-specific (Erel, 2010). People surrounding them did not automatically recognise or measure their foreign cultural capital as capital. In fact, they re-evaluated refugees' NFIVOS and vocational or professional qualifications which typically became subject to devaluation and sometimes even decredentialisation.

In response, refugees developed strategies to find ways to gain recognition of their foreign cultural capital. They adjusted and broadened their habitus to match the requirements of their new social field. The broadening of their habitus necessitated a qualitative difference, as it involved acquiring proficiency in a new language and building up social bridges and links with people who could help them improve their understanding of the German culture and language. Adjusting their habitus meant acquiring additional occupational or professional skills in order to meet the skills requirements of their German reference qualification.

Yet, habitus as an analytical frame not only enabled the study to view the refugees as actively engaged in establishing themselves in their new field, it also emphasised the structures of that field which brought about refugees' experiences (Bourdieu, 1988b). These structures were made up of Germany's integration and skills recognition infrastructure. Given that integration is a two-way process, what was required was not only that refugees altered their habitus but also that the field structures became more accommodating towards refugees' needs. However, the big leap forward in the form of a refugee-friendly process that grants formal recognition to NFIVOS remains outstanding.

What follows are the conclusions of this thesis.

7. Conclusions

This chapter concludes the study with a reflection on the changing policy context in which the study is embedded, a summary of its key contributions, its limitations, and the implications of its findings for future research and policy.

7.1. The changing policy context

During the time of this research, starting in 2016 and now in 2020, the European and German policy contexts have changed. For research projects on contemporary and evolving social life, such changes complicate efforts to remain current. The fact that this study is embedded in a specific context and time might make some of this study's findings appear historical. My research focus on skills recognition emerged at the time when European countries grappled with the arrival of several hundred thousand asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa in 2015-2016. In a controversial move, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel invited these people to Germany. The country's subsequent acceptance of nearly one million refugees resulted in an unprecedented migrant welcoming culture. On the other hand, it also put a strain on Germany's public services, fuelled anti-immigration discourse and raised big questions about refugees' integration within their host society. In this context and at the beginning of this study, little was known about the mechanisms of refugees' labour market integration – a research gap I aimed to address.

Many refugees did not possess any evidence of their previous work experience because they had acquired their vocational skills in informal and non-formal ways. This demographic constituted my primary research group. Prior to refugees' arrival in 2015-2016, validation arrangements had already existed in Europe but from the outset, there had been problems about cost-effectiveness and accessibility. Across Europe, migrants had not been a

major user group. As a result, improving the suitability of skills recognition measures to refugees became an integration challenge (OECD, 2017b). Given that research had not focused on refugee users, it was unclear why they were benefitting less from such measures. My research aimed to contribute understanding to this question.

In the meantime, however, there has been a raft of academic writing about how to best incorporate refugees into European societies. At the policy level, the EU brokered a deal with Turkey that has led to a drastic decrease in the number of refugees entering Europe illegally via the Aegean Sea and seeking asylum in EU member states, including in Germany (DW, 2018a; European Parliament, 2019). In addition, Germany has introduced a more restrictive asylum policy regime. Both of these changes have somewhat lessened the urgency of solutions to refugees' oftentimes difficult economic integration, in particular because latest labour market data shows a more positive employment rate among the recently arrived refugees than initially forecasted (DW, 2019). In addition to the skills assessments described here, other initiatives promoting refugees' employment might have contributed to these positive labour market outcomes. For instance, in early 2018 when I collected data for this study, the regional Government of Baden-Württemberg had only just introduced so-called integration managers to help recently arrived refugees into employment. Given the policy was so new, there would have been limited experience of implementing the measure on the ground (Ministerium für Soziales und Integration Baden-Württemberg, 2019).

Nevertheless, the research field explored in this thesis – mechanisms for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS) and foreign vocational or professional qualifications for use in the labour market and their suitability for refugees – remains pertinent regardless of the changing context because concrete policy solutions are still required.

7.2. Summary of key contributions

To my knowledge, this study is the first to combine the topics of refugees' labour market integration and skills recognition in Germany. By doing so it addressed both the research gaps on refugees' labour market integration and on skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Germany which existed when I embarked on this research in 2016. Based on researchers' and policymakers' assumption that refugees' search for employment could be facilitated by skills recognition, or in EU terminology validation, I explored the impeding and facilitating factors in the recognition of refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills (NFIVOS) for use in Germany's labour market. At the time of completion in early 2020, my research contributes to the still small but growing German literature (e.g. Eisnecker et al., 2016; Gericke et al., 2018; Obschonka et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018; Worbs & Bund, 2016b) and international studies on refugees' labour market integration (e.g. Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Fasani et al., 2018; Liversage, 2009; Martín et al., 2016; Virgili, 2018). However, studies on processes that assess and formally recognise NFIVOS remain in short supply.

This study's findings make key contributions at four levels, namely at the conceptual (1), the individual (2), the systematic (3) and the policy levels (4):

1. At the conceptual level, this study contributes both a conceptual framework (1.1) and a conceptual elaboration (1.2). 1.1. The study's conceptual framework made sense of the impeding and facilitating factors in the recognition of refugees' NFIVOS. It built on previous attempts to explain migrants' difficulties in integrating into their host society by using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field (e.g. Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Erel, 2010; Gericke et al., 2018; Ishii, 2017; Morrice, 2007, 2011) and added this study's unique combination of topics to this body of research. I drew on and augmented Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977b, 1986) by applying it to the context of skills recognition. Marking a first in the literature, I proposed to explicitly consider vocational skills as a form of occupational

habitus. Moreover, in line with Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. (2018), this study conceptualised refugees' forced migration from their home country to Germany as a move between social fields. This helped explain why in Germany's very different cultural and institutional context, refugees could not just use their foreign embodied and institutionalised cultural capital. Like Erel (2010), I argued that they struggled to just 'unpack' their foreign cultural capital because, as a valued form of habitus, capital is field-specific. In fact, refugees experienced a mismatch between their habitus and their new social field, due to which their vocational practices secured lower returns than in their home countries. On these grounds, refugees entered Germany's skills recognition field in an attempt to transform their disputed foreign cultural capital into German institutionalised cultural capital because of the high value which is placed on that form of capital in Germany's labour market. However, due to their misaligned habitus but also because of infrastructural barriers refugees became subject to processes that devalued their skills and foreign qualifications and sometimes even led to their decredentialisation.

The difficulties that refugees encountered in their 'paths of re-entry' into their former occupations drew attention to the obstacles that skills recognition arrangements and labour market characteristics in Germany present (Liversage, 2009, p. 209). The hardship experienced in obtaining formal skills recognition, but also more generally in entering Germany's world of work underscored the cost of such endeavours. Attempts to reclaim the cultural capital value of their NFIVOS or vocational or professional credentials that they possessed in their countries of origin had indeed to be 'paid for by labour, by effort and especially by time (to move upwards is to raise oneself […]' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 232). As Erel (2010) noted, these attempts were typically not limited to unpacking their foreign cultural capital from their rucksacks but also involved repackaging their cultural capital for it to fit Germany's skills requirements.

1.2. This study also contributes a conceptual elaboration of Souto-Otero and Villalba-Garcia's (2015) concept of 'selective inclusion' to the research on validation in Europe. Souto-

Otero and Villalba-Garcia identified formal skills recognition arrangements to be selectively inclusive at the user level. This study endorses their concept because, even before refugees are subjected to the aforementioned devaluation and decredentialisation, only those whose skills come very close to meeting the formal skills requirements of Germany's education and training system are included in Germany's formal skills recognition processes. In addition to this selective inclusion at the user level, this thesis identified a second level of selective inclusion at the skills level. It demonstrated that arrangements that led to formal recognition only selectively included certain skills, namely those that were taught in Germany's formal education and training system. For instance, in the equivalency assessments under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act, the skills requirements of the German reference qualification were the measure of all things. The consequences of Germany's selective inclusion with its devaluation and decredentialisation tendencies were analysed at refugees' individual level.

2. At the individual level, this study contributes to the growing body of literature (e.g. Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Gericke et al., 2018; Morrice, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018) that gives the marginalised a voice. Through its case study design, this thesis goes beyond the statistics and gives refugees faces and voices. In the vignettes of Chapter 4, the occupational life stories of seven refugees came to life through a joint reconstruction by the refugees themselves and me as their scribe and analyst.

3. Beyond these contributions at the conceptual and individual levels, with its typology of skills recognition arrangements (see Table 23 (p. 219) in Section 6.2.2) this study also makes a systematic contribution. The typology not only provides definitions of four different types of skills assessment and recognition, but it also systematises them according to their increasing proximity to the formal education and training system. By doing so it incorporates the concept of selective inclusion and whether an arrangement grants formal recognition. It maintains that assessments of Type I, such as the various skills assessments and PerF, are diagnostic and capture all or most of candidates' NFIVOS without formalising them, while

those of Types II to IV become increasingly summative and selective in the skills they formally recognise. The two aspects considered in the typology – selective inclusion and formal recognition – lead to the next level to which this study contributes, namely that of policy.

4. At the policy level, this study revealed that skills recognition has not turned out to be the critical piece in the jigsaw puzzle of refugees' integration as widely assumed, at least not for refugees possessing only NFIVOS. The most obvious reason for this situation is Germany's lack of an arrangement that formally recognises NFIVOS in a refugee-friendly way. At the time of writing the ValiKom project is merely a pilot and not yet widely accessible and success in the external exam – the second arrangement that can potentially lead to the formal recognition of NFIVOS – usually requires attendance of formal preparatory courses and both ValiKom and the external exam are language-heavy. Only refugees holding foreign vocational or professional credentials are included in the procedures under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act that lead to a formal confirmation of equivalency with the German reference occupation. However, this study found that even they face various obstacles because the procedures under these recognition acts, among other aspects, do not meet all four of the identified indicators of suitability that refugees require. Secondly, but possibly only given the lack of refugee-friendly procedure, the recently arrived refugees possessing only NFIVOS are often too young and inexperienced in their field for skills recognition to be worthwhile. The most common preference is to encourage them to start from scratch career-wise in Germany and to place them into vocational education and training programmes.

The situation depicted in this study highlights the fact that skills recognition has remained hard to implement in a cost-efficient and refugee-friendly way. There are various obstacles, including the selective inclusion leading to the lack of an appropriate procedure, the language barrier, but also refugees' pronounced need for supportive social links who can help them understand Germany's VET system and labour market. Ultimately, this thesis was not only a study of whether skills recognition arrangements worked for refugees, but also a

study of how a major policy instrument failed to address the policy challenge of refugees' labour market integration. Notwithstanding this gloomy insight, this study also identified possible facilitators for refugees to gain formal recognition which could inform the adjustment of arrangements to the needs of refugees and other migrants.

7.3. Limitations of this study

Researching the obstacles and facilitators of the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS has not been without its challenges. In Section 3.7 of Chapter 3, I have already described the limitations of this qualitative study regarding the potential of researcher bias and my strategies to increase the trustworthiness of my findings, including their credibility, transferability and dependability.

Additional challenges concerned my methodology. Firstly, while I did my utmost to ensure their credibility, the inferred obstacles and facilitators of a refugee-friendly recognition process for NFIVOS remain only an imperfect proxy of what they could have been if an adequate NFIVOS recognition arrangement had existed.

Secondly, the time and resource constraints of my doctoral research (already introduced in Section 3.4.1) generated at least the following four limitations. I chose non-probability sampling and relatively small samples of my study participants, skills assessment and recognition arrangements and documents, which means that I cannot make any statistical generalisations from my findings. Another consequence of these constraints was the geographical limitation to Germany's federal state of Baden-Württemberg rather than a broader coverage of Germany, which might have foreclosed the discovery of additional insightful case studies. Moreover, as discussed at various points in Chapter 3, as a result of me not interviewing my study participants in their native languages or using a translator, some nuances might have been lost because of language issues. The time constraint meant that I could only document a snapshot of refuges' experiences with skills assessment and recognition schemes. I did not have sufficient time in the field to follow all of my refugee study

participants until the completion of their skills recognition pathways or the achievement of their vocational objectives in Germany's labour market.

Thirdly, the purely qualitative nature of this study could appear as a shortcoming. However, at the time of data collection in early 2018, quantitative data on refugee users of skills assessment and recognition processes was almost completely unavailable. Typically, user data was not available to the public and if it was, it often did not distinguish between refugees and other third country nationals or it was too patchy to be useful.

7.4. Future research and policy directions

By virtue of being an empirical analysis of an evolving policy issue, this thesis has the potential to inform future research and possibly even policies. As a qualitative study, it focused only on a relatively small sample of refugees and skills assessment and recognition arrangements in Germany's federal state of Baden-Württemberg in the wider context of the influx of asylum seekers into Germany in 2015-2016. Therefore, its findings about the obstacles to and facilitators for the formal recognition of refugees' NFIVOS only present a first exploration into possible future arrangements that would be suitable for that purpose.

Nonetheless, it constitutes a first step towards further investigations using the identified four indicators of suitability for refugee users (see Section 5.2) and/or the proposed skills recognition typology (see Section 6.2.2) and/or this study's conceptual framework (see Section 6.1.1). For instance, the four indicators of suitability, namely whether an arrangement provides formal skills recognition, is accessible, accommodating towards limited proficiency in German, and provides support throughout the skills recognition process, could be used to assess the suitability for refugees of further skills assessment and recognition mechanisms. In this regard of pertinence is the fact that the ValiKom pilot has been evaluated positively since my data collection, which makes its roll-out across Germany likely amid calls for such a suitability assessment. The four skills recognition types proposed in the typology could be tested by means of an examination of additional case studies. By using the conceptualisation

of a skills assessment and recognition landscape as one of Bourdieu's social fields, one could investigate the interests of the involved actors in more depth.

Such future research could be conducted in additional German federal states and over a longer period of time based on longitudinal qualitative and possibly also quantitative datasets. For example, at the time of this study, several institutions at the state and federal level started recording refugee-specific quantitative data which could be utilised in new research. Such longitudinal and mixed-method studies could lead to an overview of existing validation mechanisms in Germany, with special attention to those that come close to formal recognition of NFIVOS and might allow a comparison.

Moreover, such an analytical approach could pave the way for an international comparison between Germany and similarly highly regulated labour market contexts in other countries (e.g. Austria, Switzerland or France) as well as less regulated countries (e.g. the UK or Ireland) in which there may be less need for formal skills recognition because of fewer labour market barriers for people without formal vocational or professional qualifications. Knowledge gained from such studies could support the development of new, or preferably the adjustment of existing validation mechanisms that are more suitable for migrant and refugee users. This could imply overcoming the obstacles and encouraging the facilitators identified in Baden-Württemberg. It would thereby contribute to efforts to reduce the devaluation of individuals' foreign cultural capital so wasteful for individuals and their recipient countries alike.

7.5. Closing remarks

The urgency of making mechanisms that grant formal recognition to NFIVOS more suitable for refugee users might have dissipated. However, the topic of skills recognition will not disappear and will continue to occupy the governments and social scientists of Germany and many other countries in the future. In Germany, there is a long-term need for arrangements that formally recognise informal and non-formal learning because of the country's particular labour market focus on formal qualifications, especially regarding the target group of low-

qualified but skilled Germans, estimated to amount to more than two million, and the rising number of foreign workers (BMBF, 2015b). The roll-out of the ValiKom pilot project attests to this policy concern.

8. References

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1. Information sheet for study participants (translated from German)

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44 18 6527 4024
www.education.ox.ac.uk

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of doctoral research project: Recognising refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills for use in Germany's labour market

Introduction
I am a doctoral researcher at the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). My doctoral research explores the enabling and impeding factors for refugees to make use of their non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills in Germany's labour market.
In the context of the considerable influx of asylum seekers since late 2015, this research seems pertinent, as many refugees possess vocational skills for which they cannot provide formal certification or documentation. In the absence of specific mechanisms for the formal recognition of such vocational skills, I will analyse the established procedures for the recognition of foreign vocational or professional qualifications (under Germany's Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act) and diagnostic assessments of informal and non-formal learning to infer facilitating and impeding factors that also apply to the formal recognition of refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills. My aim is to contribute to a better understanding of how refugees' skills could be more advantageously used for labour market integration.

The data collection for this research will include interviews with stakeholders of skills recognition mechanisms and observations of guidance sessions and skills assessments to detect impeding factors that these stakeholders face and to identify facilitating parameters that have helped overcome some of these obstacles.

Ultimately, collected data will inform a doctoral thesis written in English in the field of educational sciences. Parts of this thesis may be published, and if this is the case, participants will be notified and provided with access to the publication. This project has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance from the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee.

What does participation involve?
Participation in this research project involves an interview / observation:
- The interview would be a one-to-one meeting lasting up to an hour and would be arranged flexibly around your schedule. It would take place in your office, or if you prefer elsewhere.
- The observation would imply my presence during a guidance session or a skills assessment and would also be arranged according to your availability.

If need be, I might allow myself to follow up with you on certain points of the interview and/or the observation at a later point in time.

Your rights

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
- If you agree to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time.
- You are free to ask questions at any time. You can ask questions about the study before you decide whether or not to participate.
- You are free to decide that you prefer not to answer certain interview questions.
- You are free to end the interview/observation at any time.

Anonymity, confidentiality and security

If you prefer not to be referred to under your proper name, we will choose a pseudonym for you and all of your data collected throughout the research process will be kept anonymous.
I would like to have your permission to digitally record the interview. If you agree to this, you may ask me to turn off the recorder at any time during the interview.
Only a few selected persons will have access to data gathered. Data will be stored securely and will be password protected. According to the regulations of the University of Oxford, all research data and records need to be stored for a minimum retention period of 3 years after publication

Risks and benefits

There are no risks involved in participating in this study. I hope that our conversations will also be of interest to you.
During an observation, my presence may affect the observed situation. However, as the observer I will try to impact as little as possible on the situation.
If you decide to participate in this study and are interested in the findings, I will send you a copy of the completed thesis.

Will the research be published?

On successful submission, the thesis will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives and will be accessible via open access.

Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to me [+44 (0)78 4985 4979] or my supervisor [+44 (0)1865 274024]. We will do our best to answer your query. I should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how I intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter:
Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee
Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk
Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research beforehand or if you have questions afterwards, please contact me:
Hendrickje Catriona Windisch
DPhil candidate at the Department of Education of the University of Oxford
Hendrickje.Windisch@education.ox.ac.uk
T: +44 (0)78 4985 4979
T: +49 (0)16 3747 9190

Appendix 2. Consent form for study participants (translated from German)

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44 18 6527 4024
www.education.ox.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM

Title of doctoral research project: Recognising refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills for use in Germany's labour market

Research purpose
This doctoral research explores the enabling and impeding factors for refugees to make use of their non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills in Germany's labour market.
In the context of the considerable influx of asylum seekers since late 2015, this research seems pertinent, as many refugees possess vocational skills for which they cannot provide formal certification or documentation. In the absence of specific mechanisms for the formal recognition of such vocational skills, it analyses the established procedures for the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications (under the Federal Recognition Act and Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act) and assessments of informal and non-formal learning to infer facilitating and impeding factors that also apply to the recognition of refugees' non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills. In doing so, this research project aims to contribute to a better understanding of how refugees' skills could be more advantageously used for labour market integration.

	Statement	***Please initial each box as appropriate***
1	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	
2	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	
3	I understand that the collected data will inform a doctoral thesis that will be published.	
4	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	
5	I consent to being audio recorded. Otherwise, please see option 6 below!	
6	I prefer not to be audio recorded. However, I give permission for the researcher to take notes.	
7	I give permission to be referred to in the research by my proper name. Otherwise, please see option 8 below!	
8	I prefer to be referred to under a pseudonym in the research.	
9	I agree to take part in this study as a study participant.	
10	I agree for my personal data to be kept in a secure database for the purpose of contacting me.	
11	I would like to receive the completed thesis as a pdf.	

________________________ ____________ ________________________

Name of Participant Date Signature

________________________ ____________ ________________________

Name of person taking consent Date Signature

Appendix 3. Overview of documents

Table 24. Overview of documents (ordered in alphabetical order of document topics)

#	Document topic	Reference
1	AiKomPass	AgenturQ. (2018). Projekt AiKo. Retrieved August 15, 2018, from https://www.agenturq.de/projekte/aiko/
2	Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act	Land Baden-Württemberg. (2013). Gesetz über die Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen in Baden-Württemberg (Landesanerkennungsgesetz Baden-Württemberg - LAnGBW) [Recognition Act Baden-Württemberg]. Stuttgart: Land Baden-Württemberg.
3	Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act	IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg. (2019). What is the legal basis of the recognition procedure? Retrieved October 2, 2019, from https://www.netzwerk-iq-bw.de/en/what-is-the-legal-basis-of-the-recognition-procedure.html
4	Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act	Statistisches Landesamt. (2019). Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen (BQFG). Retrieved October 5, 2019, from https://www.statistik-bw.de/BildungKultur/AusWeiterb/BQFG.jsp
5	Baden-Württemberg's Recognition Act	Statistisches Landesamt, & Ministerium für Soziales und Integration. (2019). Beratung zur Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen in Baden-Württemberg. *GesellschaftsReport BW*. Stuttgart: Land Baden-Württemberg.
6	Candidates' training	IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg. (2017). Perspektiven schaffen. Mannheim: Interkulturelles Bildungszentrum Mannheim gGmbH – Ikubiz Koordinierungsstelle des IQ Netzwerkes Baden-Württemberg.
7	Companies employing refugees	Deutsche Wirtschaft. (2018). Wirtschaft zusammen. Retrieved March 8, 2018, from https://www.wir-zusammen.de/das-netzwerk/ueber-uns/
8	Companies employing refugees	Rolls-Royce Power Systems. (2016). Rolls-Royce Power Systems ermöglicht jungen Flüchtlingen berufliche Einstiegsqualifizierung.
9	Companies employing refugees	Thieme, T. (2018, 23 February). Unternehmer Initiative: Firmen fordern Bleiberecht für beschäftigte Flüchtlinge. *Stuttgarter Zeitung*.
10	IQ guidance session	Bohn, L., Cichon, W., Döring, O., et al (2016). *Asylsuchende und Flüchtlinge in Deutschland: Erfassung und Entwicklung von Qualifikationen für die Arbeitsmarktintegration*. (G. Goth & E. Severing, Eds.). Bielefeld: Bertelsmann Verlag. doi:10.3278/6004517w
11	IQ guidance session	IQ Netzwerk. (2018). Das Förderprogramm IQ in Zahlen. Nuremberg: IQ Netzwerk.
12	IQ guidance session	IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg. (2018). Arbeitsmarktintegration von Geflüchteten: Erfolge, Herausforderungen, Perspektiven. Dokumentation zum Fachtag des IQ Netzwerkes Baden-Württemberg 18.09.2017. Mannheim: IQ Netzwerk Baden-Württemberg.
13	Migrant welcoming culture (*Willkommenskultur*)	Alzaher, H. (2018). Gibt es noch eine Willkommenskultur in Deutschland? *Flüchtling - Magazin Für Multikulturellen Austausch*. Hamburg.
14	Migrant welcoming culture (*Willkommenskultur)*	Kösemen, O. (2017). Willkommenskultur in Deutschland - Mehr als nur ein Modeword? [Willkommenskultur in Germany - more than just a buzzword?]. *Policy Brief Migration*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

15	MySkills	BA. (2017). Weisung 201709018 vom 25.09.2017 - Einführung des neuen Testverfahrens MySkills – Berufliche Kompetenzen erkennen. Nuremberg: Bundesagentur für Arbeit [Federal Employment Agency].
16	MySkills	BA. (2018). Zusammenfassung MySkills - Stand 14.03.2018. Nuremberg: Bundesagentur für Arbeit.
17	Partial qualifications	Dpa. (2017). Wann eine Teilqualifizierung sinnvoll ist. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.
18	PerF	BA. (2017). Perspektive für Flüchtlinge - PerF. Nuremberg: Bundesagentur für Arbeit.
19	PerF	Ministerium für Wirtschaft Arbeit und Wohnungsbau Baden-Württemberg. (2018). Ausbildung - Perspektive für junge Flüchtlinge. Retrieved January 18, 2018, from https://wm.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/arbeit/berufliche-ausbildung/fluechtlinge-in-ausbildung/
20	Political statements on refugees' labour market integration	BAMF. (2018). "Integration gelingt nur gemeinsam." Retrieved September 8, 2018, from https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Meldungen/DE/2018/20180706-am-va-integration-aus-einem-guss.html
21	Political statements on refugees' labour market integration	BIBB. (2018). Empfehlung des Hauptausschusses des Bundesinstituts für Berufsbildung vom 15. März 2018 zu „Abschlussorientierte Qualifizierung Erwachsener: Gelingensbedingungen und Erfolgsfaktoren". Bonn: Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB).
22	Political statements on refugees' labour market integration	ZDH. (2017). Strategiepapier Entwicklung von Erwachsenen ohne Berufsabschluss zu Fachkräften für das Handwerk. Berlin: Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks.
23	Refugees interviewed about their labour market experience	Oberhuber, N. (2018). Flüchtlinge und Arbeitsmarkt: "Viele sind Fachkräfte, können das aber nicht nachweisen." *Die Zeit*.
24	Refugees interviewed about their labour market experience	Thieme, T. (2018). Ohne Abschluss im Arbeitsmarkt. Anerkennung für ungelernte Arbeitskräfte. *Stuttgarter Zeitung*.
25	Refugees interviewed about their labour market experience	Wiedemann, C. (2018). Integration von Migranten: Gekommen, um zu bleiben. Fünf Geschichten von Geflüchteten, die sich trotz widrigster Umstände und dank engagierter Helfer eine Perspektive in Deutschland geschaffen haben. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.
26	Federal Recognition Act	Ekert, S., Larsen, C., Valtin, A., Schröder, R., & Ornig, N. (2017). Endbericht Evaluation des Anerkennungsgesetzes. Berlin/ Frankfurt: INTERVAL GmbH and IWAK (Institut for Economics, Employment and Culture).
27	Federal Recognition Act	BIBB and IQ Netzwerk. (2018). Statistik zum Bundesgesetz. Auswertung der amtlichen Statistik zum Anerkennungsgesetz des Bundes für 2017. Retrieved September 10, 2018, from https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/de/statistik_zum_bundesgesetz.php
28	Federal Recognition Act	BMBF. (2012). Erläuterungen zum Anerkennungsgesetz des Bundes. Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Feststellung und Anerkennung im Ausland erworbener Berufsqualifikationen. Bonn: BMBF [Federal Ministry of Education and Research].
29	Federal Recognition Act	BMBF. (2017). Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2017. Bonn: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung [Federal Ministry of Education and Research].
30	Federal Recognition Act	BMBF. (2019). Recognition in Germany. Retrieved October 2, 2019, from https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/index.php

31	Federal Recognition Act	BMWi; BMAS; BA. (2018). Anerkennung in Deutschland. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales und Bundesagentur für Arbeit.
32	Federal Recognition Act	Bundesrepublik Deutschland. (2011). Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Feststellung und Anerkennung im Ausland erworbener Berufsqualifikationen (Anerkennungsgesetz) [Federal Recognition Act]. Berlin: Bundesregierung [Federal Government].
33	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Baranik, L. E., Hurst, C. S., & Eby, L. T. (2018). The stigma of being a refugee: A mixed-method study of refugees' experiences of vocational stress. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *105*(March 2017), 116–130. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2017.09.006
34	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Brücker, H. (2018). Arbeitsmarktintegration von Geflüchteten beschleunigt sich. Nuremberg: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB).
35	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Eggenhofer-Rehart, P. M., Latzke, M., Pernkopf, K., Zellhofer, D., Mayrhofer, W., & Steyrer, J. (2018). Refugees' career capital welcome? Afghan and Syrian refugee job seekers in Austria. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *105*(February), 31–45. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2018.01.004
36	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Gericke, D., Burmeister, A., Löwe, J., Deller, J., & Pundt, L. (2018). How do refugees use their social capital for successful labor market integration? An exploratory analysis in Germany. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *105*(December 2017), 46–61. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2017.12.002
37	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Newman, A., Bimrose, J., Nielsen, I., & Zacher, H. (2018). Vocational Behavior of Refugees: How do Refugees Seek Employment, Overcome Work-related Challenges, and Navigate Their Careers? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *105*, 1–5. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2018.01.007
38	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Obschonka, M., Hahn, E., & Bajwa, N. ul H. (2018). Personal agency in newly arrived refugees: The role of personality, entrepreneurial cognitions and intentions, and career adaptability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *105*(January), 173–184. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2018.01.003
39	Research on refugees' labour market integration	Wehrle, K., Klehe, U. C., Kira, M., & Zikic, J. (2018). Can I come as I am? Refugees' vocational identity threats, coping, and growth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *105*(October 2017), 83–101. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2017.10.010
40	Skills analysis	BMBF. (2016). Validation of non-formal and informal learning – The German approach The German approach to validation - Premise. Brussels: EQF Advisory Group.
41	Skills analysis	BMBF. (2017). Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2017. Bonn: BMBF.
42	Skills analysis	BMBF. (2018). Infografik Qualifikationsanalyse. Retrieved September 8, 2018, from https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/media/infografik-qualifikationsanalyse.pdf
43	ValiKom	IHK Region Stuttgart. (2018). Projekt ValiKom. Retrieved January 8, 2018, from https://www.stuttgart.ihk24.de/standortpolitik/bildungspolitik/bildungsprojekte/Projekt-ValiKom/3010860
44	ValiKom	Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag. (2014). *Die Qualifikationsanalyse – Das Verfahren zur Analyse und Feststellung von Berufsqualifikationen im Rahmen von Anerkennungsverfahren. Ergebnisse aus dem Projekt Prototyping – Zusammenfassende Darstellung*. Düsseldorf: Deutscher Handwerkskammertag.

45	ValiKom	Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag, DIHK, DHKT, & BMBF. (2018). Berufsrelevante Kompetenzen bewerten und zertifizieren. Retrieved May 17, 2018, from https://www.validierungsverfahren.de/startseite/
46	Various skills assessments	AWO. (2019). Netzwerk Bleiben mit Arbeit. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://www.awo-konstanz.de/bleiben-mit-arbeit.html
47	Various skills assessments	Baethge, M., & Severing, E. (2015). Sicherung des Fachkräftepotenzials durch Nachqualifizierung. In M. Baethge & E. Severing (Eds.), *Sicherung des Fachkräftepotenzials durch Nachqualifizierung. Befunde - Konzepte - Forschungsbedarf* (pp. 7–16). Bielefeld: BIBB (Federal Institute for VET).
48	Various skills assessments	BruderhausDiakonie. (2019). BruderhausDiakonie. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://www.bruderhausdiakonie.de
49	Various skills assessments	Projektverbund Baden. (2019). Arbeit und Ausbildung für Flüchtlinge. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://www.projektverbund-baden.de/?Standorte-Freiburg

Source: Author.

Appendix 4. Interview guide sample (translated from German)

Please find below an interview guide divided into four section, which could serve as a guide for our conversation.

Interview guide

The main focus of my doctoral thesis is on skills assessment procedures for persons with a refugee background which aim to make their occupational skills visible for swift labour market integration. That is why I am interested in your experience in evaluating applications for the formal recognition of foreign qualifications in the academic health professions of doctor, dentist and pharmacist, especially from those with a refugee background, i.e. from the five countries with good prospects to be granted refugee status (Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Somalia).

A. About us

Let's start by introducing each other. I would like to know about you:
1. what brought you to assume your current position,
2. what you have mainly been working on over the past three years,
3. and what are you preoccupied with this working week.

B. First of all, some general questions about the recognition procedure for foreign qualifications in the academic health professions doctor, dentist and pharmacist:

1. What does a typical recognition procedure look like?
Prerequisites and application stages (proof of language, application for a work permit, application for a doctor's license, dentist or pharmacist)?
2. What are the differences between an application for approval of physicians, dentists and pharmacists from other EU countries and applicants with academic training from a third country?
3. Numbers:
3.1. How many applications for recognition do you receive on average per year for doctors, dentists and pharmacists?
3.2. Over the last five years, what percentage of overall applications in the three occupations have been made on average by third-country nationals?
3.3. On an annual average, what percentage of all applications in the three occupations are successful, i.e. obtain confirmation of full equivalency?
3.4. Are you more likely to notice knowledge and skills deficiencies among third-country applicants than among EU foreigners?
4. What advice is given to people who have been identified with knowledge and skills deficiencies?
4.1. What are the differences between proficiency and knowledge examinations?
5. What have been past and current challenges in the recognition procedures for degrees in these three academic health care professions and how have you met or are you meeting these challenges?

C. Since refugees with foreign vocational qualifications are one of my target groups in my research project, I am interested in the following aspects of your work:

1. To what extent did the large refugee influx in 2015-2016 impact on your work?
2. Have the conditions for a recognition procedure for third-country qualifications (for example from Syria) changed in recent years?

3. Applicants from Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Somalia:
3.1. Since 2015, have you had more applicants for recognition of foreign qualifications with a refugee background, i.e. from the 5 countries with good prospect to be granted refugee status (Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Somalia)?
3.2. If so, what percentage did this group represent from Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Somalia in 2016, 2017, 2018? How many are these in numbers?
4. Knowledge exam:
4.1. What is the procedure for a knowledge exam?
4.2. Where / with what material can a candidate prepare for it?
5. What have been past and current challenges regarding applicants with a refugee background, and how have you addressed these challenges, or would you like to address them?

D. Let us turn now to some more general questions:

1) In your opinion, what works well in the assessment of applications for recognition of foreign qualifications for the medical professions doctor, dentist and pharmacist? What could be improved?
2) In your opinion, what are the biggest obstacles to the licensing of doctors, dentists and pharmacists from third countries?
3) Regarding my ongoing data collection, could you recommend any literature on skills recognition practices and other interviewees?
4) Do you have any other thoughts about the recognition of refugees' vocational skills that you would like to share with me?

Many thanks for your time!