

## Social Work with Refugees in Germany – Already Established or in Tatters?

### The Survey of Professionals in Saxony 2017, 2020, 2023<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Jerzak<sup>2</sup> and Bernard Wagner<sup>3</sup>

#### Abstract

*Social work with refugees is not an entirely new field of activity. However, it has experienced an enormous expansion since 2015/2016 due to culminating refugee dynamics, and it has developed from a marginal, largely unnoticed niche existence to a visible and indispensable field of work in immigration societies, such as Germany. In Saxony, a German federal state, the field has become increasingly professionalized due to corresponding governmental guidelines and funding, lobbying by welfare organisations, and scientific monitoring. Through three standardized Saxony-wide online surveys of professionals (2017, 2020 and 2023), the project “Scientific Monitoring of Social Work with Refugees in Saxony”, based at the University of Applied Sciences for Social Work, Education and Nursing Dresden between 2016-2023, has attempted to empirically measure and describe the field of action. Central topics were the tasks of social work with refugees, the working conditions, and cooperations. Of nearly 250 professionals across Saxony, around 60% commented on the respective topics of employment relationship, target groups, working and general conditions (including staffing ratios, racism, accommodation situation, language mediation), tasks, networking and cooperation, standards and standardization.*

*This article presents and discusses results of the three surveys conducted in Saxony. In the 2023 survey “General social assistance and advice”, “Cooperation and networking”, and “Support with visits to authorities” are the most frequent regular tasks and can be described as the core of social work with refugees. 42% of social workers work on the basis of professional standards. Regarding subsidiarity, a slight increase in those employed by public providers and a significant increase in those employed by private providers since 2020 is to be noted. The proportion of permanent employment rose from 31% (2017) to 38% (2020) and again to 56% (2023). The frequently demanded staffing ratios of 1:50 or 1:80 are only achieved in exceptional cases. We recommend regular funding, the definition of qualitative professional standards, minimum staffing ratio of 1:60, as well as fixed staff. Furthermore, we recommend establishing modular in-service training programmes to ensure the quality of counselling, strengthen multi-professional*

---

<sup>1</sup> This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License and was accepted for publication on 17/02/2025.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Jerzak had been a research assistant in the Scientific Monitoring and Competence Centre for Social Work with Refugees and Migrants in Saxony (<https://lafast-sachsen.net/>) at the University of Applied Sciences for Social Work, Education and Nursing, Dresden, Germany, from 2016-2024.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Wagner had been Project Manager of Scientific Monitoring in the Scientific Monitoring and Competence Centre for Social Work with Refugees and Migrants in Saxony (<https://lafast-sachsen.net/>) at the University of Applied Sciences for Social Work, Education and Nursing Dresden, Germany, from 2016-2024.

*teams and recognise the long-standing commitment of career changers. Beyond that, the principle of subsidiarity for refugee and migration social work has to be established legally.*

### **Key Words:**

*Social work; refugees; tasks; standards; subsidiarity; staffing ratio; Germany*

## **1 Introduction to the Field of Social Work with Refugees**

Since the 1990s, social work with refugees has developed into an important field of work, as is the case with migration social work in general. Migrant social work includes various fields of social work, such as counselling services for special target groups including children, young people, families, women, mothers, senior citizens, LGBTQI+. Further, it branches into projects for education, work, language support, sponsorship and mentoring, culture, sport, anti-discrimination, etc. In Germany, the counselling services include the migration counselling centres for adult immigrants (Migrationsberatung für erwachsene Zuwanderer – MBE) and youth migration services (Jugendmigrationsdienste – JMD), both of which have been funded by the federal government since 2005. Social work with refugees, on the other hand, has been legally regulated and funded at state level in some federal states as a third specialised migration service since 2015. As a result of the inconsistent funding, social work with refugees often goes unnoticed in professional discourse (e.g. Müller, 2023). Survey works that deal with current practical and theoretical issues of refugee social work in their entirety are an exception (e.g. Gemende et al., 2022), and even overview works on refugee research only grant social work a marginal position (e.g. Scharrer et al., 2023). Nevertheless, scientific research and theorising did not develop before the increase in numbers of refugees arriving in Germany in the mid-2010s, and the associated change in the political addressing of flight (cf. Hammerschmidt et al., 2021; Scherr & Breit, 2023). The topic was also neglected in the older standard works on social work (e.g. Otto & Thiersch, 2011; Thole, 2010), treated too descriptively for further academic discussion, or only dealt with subgroups mentioned above, especially with unaccompanied minors or since 2022 with Ukrainian refugees (e.g. Boll et al., 2023), or with specific fields such as culture or sports. The professional discourse therefore hardly ever addresses the profile of social work with refugees itself, but instead is dominated by topics such as working relationships, habitus and the role of professionals between advocacy, othering and stigmatisation (e.g. Schmitt, 2023; Vogler, 2022), interculturality (e.g. Spetsmann-Kunkel & Frieters-Reermann, 2013), psychosocial counselling (e.g. Brandmaier et al., 2023), or more generally by asylum politics as a framing condition for social work (e.g. Scherr & Breit 2023). The questions in the surveys of professionals in Saxony, led by the Scientific Monitoring at EHS Dresden, resulted precisely from this vacancy in the professional discourse, from the new establishment and attempt to describe and sharpen the profile of this specialised migration service (see in particular Chapter 3, “Tasks of Social Work with Refugees”). Social work theory has foreseen these problems as structural. The perpetual search for standards of practice reflects social work theory by the definition, that standardization of social work is a process of negotiations, standards have no claim to be unambiguous and definitive, and ambivalence and uncertainty are professionally legitimised (see Hansen, 2010; Herriger & Kähler, 2003) (see Chapter 6, “Standards of Social Work with Refugees”).

Social work with refugees is defined here as a counselling service for people who have experienced flight and applied for asylum in Germany, and who have generally only been staying in a municipality for a relatively short time after being allocated to a federal state according to the so-called Königstein Key. The number of applications has remained on a high level since 2014. In 2024, a total of 229,751 people applied for asylum in Germany. Compared to 2023, this represents a decrease of 30.2%. In the same period, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) decided on 301,350 initial and subsequent applications, with an overall protection rate of 44.4% (BAMF, 2024). According to BAMF (2024), just under 11,300 people applied for asylum in Saxony in 2024. This was more than 5,000 less than in 2023, meaning that Saxony accounted for 4.9% of all asylum applications in Germany. Most asylum seekers came from Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey, in line with the national average (BAMF, 2024) (see Chapter 4, “Target Groups of Social Work with Refugees”). Over the past 10 years, new strategies have been developed in Saxony for refugees and a wider range of migrants, both as a target group for migration social work and with regard to integration policy measures:

“More than 40 per cent of people with a migration background in Saxony have only moved to Germany in the last ten years; around 21 per cent have only lived here for less than five years. The proportion of people who have immigrated in the last five years is therefore almost twice as high in Saxony as in the rest of Germany (10.7 %)” (Wohlfarth & Wittlif 2024, p. 9; translation by the authors).

While social work responsibilities are generally based on social legislation, social work with refugees is primarily defined in terms of integration policy, depending on the federal state. Social work with refugees is carried out by the local authorities themselves or by independent welfare organisations. It is offered to refugees living both in accommodation centres and in flats. Refugee social work is aimed at refugees who are asylum seekers in an ongoing application process, rejected asylum seekers, or those with a residence permit who receive municipal support. A switch to migration counselling for adults (MBE) is only envisaged if refugees have a high probability of obtaining a residence permit.

Considering the most important goals of refugee social work, the breadth of the tasks to be accomplished is obvious (see Chapter 3, “Tasks of Social Work with Refugees”). These goals can generally be summarised as:

- strengthening the local integration, especially social inclusion and social participation of newly arrived refugees;
- stimulating dialogue between refugees and citizens in the social space in order to promote diversity and tolerance and to help maintain social peace in the community;
- helping to shape the political, legal and social framework, especially in the context of refugees and asylum, by highlighting grievances and inequality.

In social work, the discussion about its universal competence is primarily linked to its orientation towards everyday life, subjective needs and perspectives (see Galuske & Müller, 2002; Thiersch, 1993). Therefore, social work is forced to cooperate with other authorities, particularly with regard to education, labour and the personal economic situation (cf. Müller, 2012), but also to the necessary limitation of the fundamentally delimited field of work. Overall responsibility, differentiation from and cooperation with regular services play a major role in the development of specialised migration services (cf. Schirilla, 2016). For this reason, the Scientific Monitoring Project asked the social workers

in Saxony about the quality and frequency of cooperation with institutional stakeholders and their satisfaction (see Chapter 3, “Tasks of Social Work with Refugees”).

Social work with refugees has experienced an enormous expansion since 2015/2016 due to culminating refugee dynamics, and it has developed from a marginal, largely unnoticed niche existence to a visible and indispensable field of work in an immigration society. The federal system of the Federal Republic of Germany results in different regional regulations for refugee social work (Flüchtlingssozialarbeit – FSA) or migration social work (Migrationssozialarbeit – MSA). The federal states have created various laws and/or guidelines regulating social work with refugees as well as various integration services (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021; Starke, 2022). In the federal state of Saxony, the corresponding tasks were long conceived as a voluntary structure. Since 2015, the “Social Care for Refugees” and “Integrative Measures” guidelines issued by the Saxon state government have enabled the field to become increasingly professionalized (see Directive Social Care for Refugees, 2018; Directive Integrative Measures, 2023)

The long-established refugee admission laws of the federal states usually only deal with the organization of accommodation for refugees. There are hardly any in-depth regulations on social work services for refugees or psychosocial support and counselling in these laws. Since 2014, Baden-Württemberg has been the first federal state to lay down guidelines in its Refugee Reception Act (Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz – FlÜAG) for the implementation of qualified social and procedural counselling during the initial reception as well as the identification of particularly vulnerable persons (cf. Landesrecht BW, 2013). Furthermore, this law requires the lower reception authorities to guarantee appropriate social work with refugees, as well as school attendance for children and “that basic German language skills can be acquired free of charge” (see above §§ 12, 13 FlÜAG). In 2016, the federal state of Brandenburg created a similarly detailed state reception law (Landesaufnahmegesetz – LAufnG) with regard to the implementation of social work with migrants. A Thuringian Refugee Reception Act (Thüringisches Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz – ThürFlÜAG) came into force in 1998, but has only laid down standards for accommodation and social work since 2010 with the Thuringian Community Accommodation and Social Care Ordinance (cf. Freistaat Thüringen, 2018). In North Rhine-Westphalia, a counselling structure has been in place since 1996, which has been continuously revised and developed over the last 25 years.

According to Article 28 para. 2 of the Basic Law, the 294 administrative districts in Germany as well as the independent cities and municipalities, are regional authorities with local self-government (cf. Ritgen, 2018). Therefore, they have to develop their own integration concepts regarding refugees and must decide whether to outsource social work to independent welfare organisations (see Frank & Vandamme, 2017; Gesemann, 2020).

In recent years, there have been repeated calls from independent providers, welfare organizations and social work interest groups to transfer the social work with refugees to free and independent providers in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity (cf. Evangelische Hochschule Dresden, 2020). The reason given is that this is the only way to provide fundamentally independent advice:

“The trust of many refugees in state institutions has been permanently damaged due to their previous experiences. For this reason, this task should be transferred to non-profit, independent providers or non-governmental organizations within the framework of subsidiarity. It is

independent of state agencies and local authority services, voluntary and open-ended. Due to the state's obligation to create reception conditions with a qualified counseling and support structure, refugee social work must be financed by the state" (Diakonie Deutschland 2014, p. 6; translated by the authors).

Employing refugee social workers directly at the district offices or even directly at the immigration authorities harbours a high risk of role conflicts, as the logics of action of administration and social work are fundamentally different, and thus, the required activities can fundamentally contradict the professional ethos and professional self-image of social work. For social work with refugees, this is particularly evident when expectations contrary to the mandate are placed on the professionals, for example that they provide 'administrative assistance' for the police, provide information on suspected countries of origin, report absences from accommodation, pass on addresses of residents who have gone into hiding or participate in age assessments or deportations (see also Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin, 2016).

Only a few federal states stipulate the principle of subsidiarity in the implementation of FSA/MSA (e.g. Brandenburg's LAufnG). The presented surveys have asked about subsidiarity (see Chapter 7, "Subsidiarity at Municipal Level") at all survey dates and can describe developments on this basis. In Saxony, the prerequisites for the necessary expansion and conversion of independent providers were quickly provided in 2015/2016 through the Directives "Social Care for Refugees" and "Integrative Measures" of the Saxon state government, but only through project funding that had to be applied each year. However, implementation took place in the ten administrative districts and three independent cities. The decision as to whether refugee social work was awarded to independent or private providers was made by the local authorities. The public providers at least had to restructure the responsible departments in the district and city administrations. However, it was predominantly the welfare associations and other independent providers that had to implement new concepts and teams for refugee social work on an ad hoc basis. These included a number of actors who had not previously been involved in migration-related social work. In many cases, the situation was inevitably characterized by improvisation and actionism. The providers lacked an overarching networking and exchange platform.

To support them, the project "Scientific Monitoring of Social Work with Refugees in Saxony" was established at the University of Applied Sciences for Social Work, Education and Nursing Dresden in 2016. Since 2021, the project has been further developed into the Competence Centre Social Work with Refugees and Migrants (Landesfachstelle FSA/MSA – LaFaSt). The Competence Centre has contributed to the further professionalization of social work with refugees and migrants in Saxony as an interface between science and practice. It addressed professionals as well as organizations, (supra) regional associations and networks with interface functions or in cooperation with the social work with refugees, decision-makers for the design of refugee social work, civil society and the addressees of refugee social work in the context of their concerns.

The tasks of the Competence Centre were divided into four areas of work (LaFaSt, n.d.):

- (1) platform for (institutionalized) communication and cooperation between professionals and providers of refugee and migrant social work in Saxony;
- (2) further development of professional standards and contribution to the professionalization of practice;

- (3) empirical analyses and scientific monitoring;
- (4) public relations and committee work.

In order to help intensify communication and cooperation between all stakeholders involved in working with refugees, the Competence Centre created spaces for discourse and contributed to the institutionalization of communication and cooperation structures by organizing regular workshops and specialist exchange formats. The further development of professional standards was one of the main tasks of the Competence Centre. This could only be done in cooperation with the refugee and migrant social work stakeholders in Saxony and by incorporating impulses from outside and from current scientific findings. The Competence Centre was active by providing conceptual advice, organizational support and the publication and dissemination of the concepts developed. Scientific research and empirical surveys within and outside of Saxony remain the task of the Competence Centre. The findings were incorporated as input into the exchange with practitioners and thus contributed to their qualification. The Competence Centre used methods of action research as a link between researching practice and changing the field of practice. For the purposes of connecting the stakeholders, ensuring transparency and facilitating the transportation of needs and solutions in the subject area, the Competence Centre designed active public relations work.

This utilisation of social work as a means of welfare state refugee policy resulted in an increase in staff positions and funding for social work providers. It was a process in which institutional structures and professional practices initially had to take place in many cases without a specific scientific foundation and without the possibility of recourse to specific specialised practical experience (cf. Scherr & Breit, 2023). In the following years, accompanying research made it possible to publish handbooks on racism-critical and human rights-oriented social work with refugees (e.g. Hartwig et al., 2018; Kunz & Ottersbach, 2017; Prasad, 2018; Scherr & Yüksel, 2016; Staub-Bernasconi, 2019), which emphasise the ethical foundations of the profession, but only touch on the problems faced by practitioners: the profile of social work with refugees itself, as well as tasks, networking and cooperation, standards, staffing ratios, racism, accommodation situation, and language mediation. While Scherr and Breit (2023) merely focused on the basic problem of uncertain residence, which leads to problems of target setting and places the help process on a precarious basis, on which the working alliance between refugee clients and social workers is in constant danger of failing, a key determinant from the view of practitioners is the staffing ratio (cf. Sand, 2022), complemented by alternating financing, subsidiarity and training programmes (cf. Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Flüchtlings- & Migrationssozialarbeit in Sachsen, 2020; Liga Sachsen, 2017). The professional and theoretical foundation of the practice has reached the limits of the politically set framework conditions. Representatives of the practitioners, such as welfare associations and FSA's self-organisation LAG FSA/MSA, therefore demanded that the standards mentioned be enshrined in law – and failed during the adoption of the Saxon Integration and Participation Act in the last session of the State Parliament before the end of the legislative period in 2024 (Sächsische Staatskanzlei, 2024). The Saxon Integration and Participation Act contains only two sentences on refugee social work, despite vehement demands from welfare organizations and other interest groups in the participation process of the Ministry of Social Affairs: “The integration authorities can provide social advice and support to refugees assigned to them and advice on voluntary return. Refugee social work provides refugees with orientation in their new life situation and supports them in coping

with everyday life” (Sächsische Staatskanzlei, 2024). The interest groups therefore continue to rely on scientific findings to justify their demands.

Through three standardized but exploratory state-wide online surveys of professionals (2017, 2020 and 2023), the project "Scientific Monitoring of Social Work with Refugees in Saxony" has attempted to empirically measure and describe the field of action – and to give answers to these discussions in the field. The central questions were:

- What tasks arise (see Chapter 3, “Tasks of Social Work with Refugees”)?)
- What are the working conditions like (see Chapter 8, “Key Working Conditions”)?)
- How does social work with refugees cope with the (professional, political and social) framework conditions?

Of nearly 250 professionals across Saxony, around 60% each commented on the respective topics of employment relationship, target groups, working and general conditions, tasks, networking and cooperation, standards and standardization. This article presents and discusses the results of the three surveys in Saxony.

## 2 Methodology

The first survey was conducted in June 2017. At that time, the field of refugee social work in Saxony was still rather vague. The aim of the state-wide standardized survey was to generate the first reliable data on the practice and situation of refugee social work in the state of Saxony. This provided an initial snapshot of the working and general conditions, as well as tasks and experiences in an unexplored field of action, even though the Competence Centre has conducted numerous guided interviews with refugees, social workers and political and administrative representatives, workshops and symposia since 2016 (Gemende et al., 2017, 2018, 2020, 2022).

We were able to repeat this survey largely identically in 2020 and 2023. In terms of overall design, we are therefore dealing with a repeat survey (trend study) (cf. Scherer & Naab, 2013). These are “repeated cross-sections” (Schnell, 2019, p. 58), not a panel study that would make it possible to identify changes in individuals. Only “changes between the total number of respondents, i.e. changes in the aggregate statistics” (Schnell, 2019, p. 59) can be determined. In this respect, it cannot be ultimately clarified whether changes in the results between the three surveys really mean changes in the objective circumstances or, for example, a change in the composition of the population of skilled workers in the meantime, which changed significantly between 2017 and 2020 and then again until 2023, in particular due to high mobility in the workforce.

The empirical approach to the field of action is confronted with considerable hurdles. These result from the diffuse population due to the field of action, which on the one hand is still in the process of being created, and on the other hand is already subject to permanent changes, including partial shrinking processes, the fact that it is not always possible to reach the target group, the resulting “coverage error” (Groves et al., 2009, p. 87), as a result of which the sample population is likely to deviate slightly from the population as a whole, and the high non-response rate.

We are dealing with a diffuse population. There is not always a clear demarcation between the tasks performed and the qualifications of the employees: Those who are categorised as social workers with refugees by one provider may not be by another.

All three surveys were conducted online. We were familiar with the providers due to our project work. We wrote to them asking them to forward the questionnaire with closed and open questions to their employees. With a response of 154 usable questionnaires almost exactly the same number of people were reached in 2023 as in 2020 (155) and slightly more in each of the two repeat surveys than in 2017, when 130 respondents answered. Although we are likely to have potentially reached almost 100% of the population via the organisations, only just under half of the potential respondents replied. According to our calculations based on the available data from the administrative districts and independent cities, we are likely to have achieved a response rate of around 50% of the population - a very good rate.

### 3 Tasks of Social Work with Refugees

Based on practical experience and service descriptions, the LaFaSt has distilled and summarized around 25 task clusters in the social work with refugees and repeatedly asked the professionals about the scope of their work in these clusters. This task profile is intended to allow statements to be made about which tasks and activities can be counted as core tasks in working with refugees – and thus support a definition and self-conception. In the 2023 survey “General social assistance and counselling”, “Cooperation and networking” and “Support with visits to authorities” are the most common regular tasks.

There is no consensus on the tasks and responsibilities between the independent “contractor” and public “client” providers of refugee social work. State-wide guidelines, namely the Saxonian Refugee Reception Act (Sächsisches Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz - SächsFlüAG, 2018), Directive Social Care for Refugees (2018), and the Saxonian Integration and Participation Act (Sächsisches Integrations- und Teilhabegesetz – SITG, 2024) only set the framework. It is up to the districts and independent cities as the “lower accommodation authorities” to define the tasks of social work with refugees, record them in service descriptions and then commission independent providers with the implementation or carry out social work with refugees themselves (see Lehr & Gemende, 2022). These municipal service descriptions vary. The decisive factors in each case are the basic local understanding of migration policy, political guidelines, regional circumstances and the division of labour among the various providers in the field. In some cases, welfare organizations were able to help shape these service descriptions. In recent years, professional associations of independent organizations, among others, have attempted to implement a certain basic understanding or “standards” for this field of action through corresponding recommendations (see AWO Bundesverband 2018; Deutscher Caritasverband e.V., 2016; Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin 2016; Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Flüchtlings- & Migrationssozialarbeit in Sachsen, 2020; Liga Sachsen, 2017). However, a consensual canon for a description of tasks for refugee social work is not in sight.

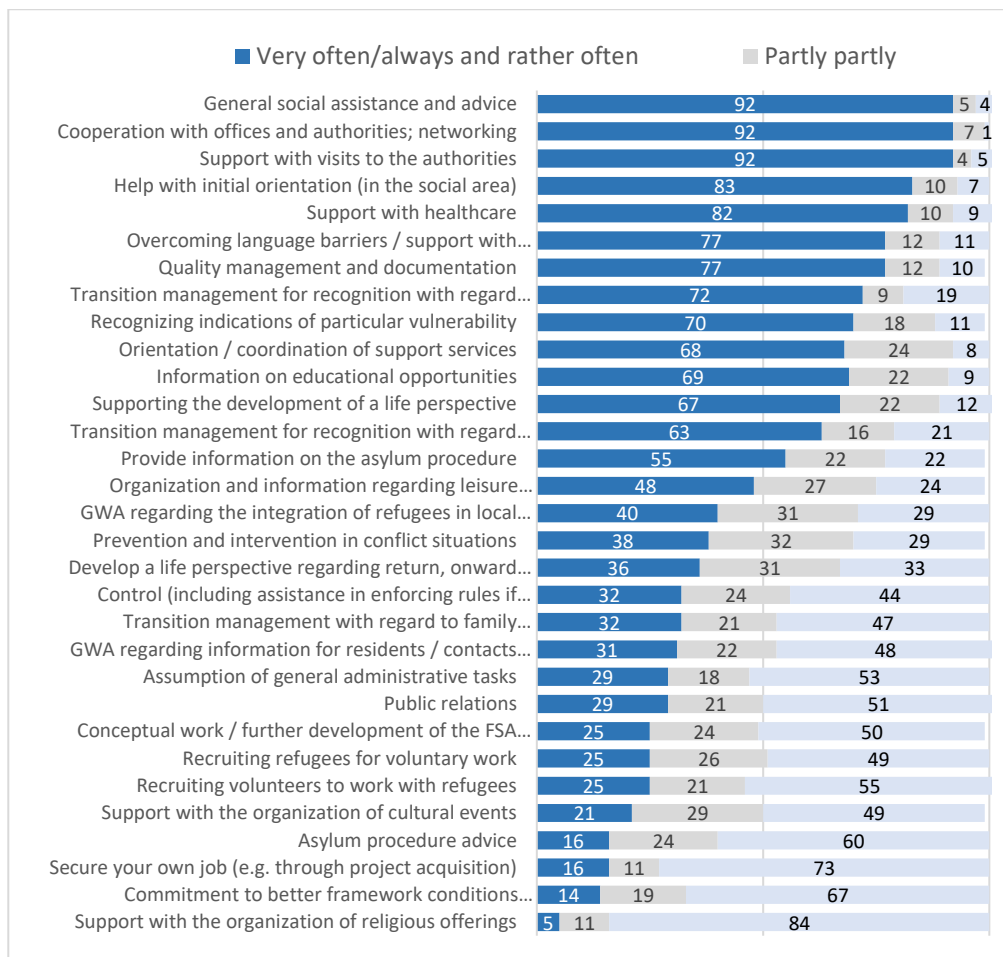
We analysed and summarised tasks from practical experience and service descriptions. In order to determine the relevance of the various possible tasks in the day-to-day practice of social work with refugees, we presented the respondents with a list of numerous items and asked them to use a five-point scale to assess “to what extent you personally deal with the following content in your work”. This is intended to create a rough task profile that at least allows statements to be made about which tasks or activities can be counted



among the core tasks in working with refugees in terms of the frequency with which they actually occur.

In the 2023 survey “general social assistance and advice”, “cooperation with offices and authorities; networking” and “support with visits to authorities” were identified as the most frequent regular tasks. These results correspond with the challenges that accompany the development of specialised migration services, i.e. the differentiation from and cooperation with regular services (Schirilla, 2016). 92% of respondents are “very often/always” or “fairly often” involved in these tasks. Measured by the frequency of mentions, these three tasks can rightly be described as the core of social work with refugees. These were already the most frequently mentioned tasks in the two previous surveys (fig. 1).

**Figure 1: Frequency of tasks to be completed in social work with refugees (in %)**



Surveillance is a controversial area of responsibility in practice. According to the self-image of social work, monitoring clients/addressees is not justifiable. In 2023, 32% of the

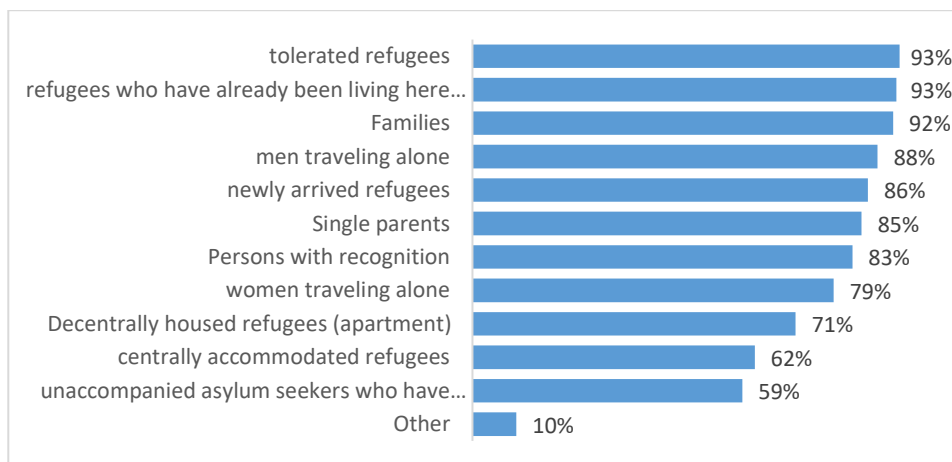
practitioners surveyed still described monitoring as “frequent/very frequent”. At the same time, however, 44% rarely or never carried out checks. In 2017, as in 2020, 41% of the professionals surveyed stated that this task was one of their (very) frequent tasks. This may reflect a professionalization of the understanding of the role of refugee social work. As this survey includes practitioners with very different qualifications or functions, the response behaviour is also analysed in terms of professional qualifications; for example, only 9% of professionals with a degree in social work perform monitoring tasks “very frequently”, while 23% of their colleagues without a relevant degree do so.

The tension between help and monitoring is reproduced in refugee social work in the often conflicting tasks assigned to public and private organizations. Going beyond human rights-focussed publications (e.g. Hartwig et al., 2018; Kunz & Ottersbach, 2017; Prasad, 2017; Scherr & Yüksel, 2016; Staub-Bernasconi, 2019), our results show that this general tension characterises refugee social work in particular. Social work as a “human rights profession” is challenged here in the context of refugees and asylum. This potentially applies in particular to social work with refugees staff who are employed directly by public agencies, as conflicts between the roles of social work are exacerbated here for structural reasons. On the other hand, it may detract from the image of the socially committed social worker that “campaigning for better framework conditions” is almost at the bottom of the list of perceived tasks. For only 14% of respondents, this commitment in the sense of a “political mandate” of social work is still one of the (rather) frequently performed tasks; in 2020, it was still significantly higher at 24% (also in 2017 at 20%).

#### 4 Target Groups of Social Work with Refugees

The question on the characterization of the target groups in the current work with refugees revealed an almost universal responsibility of the respondents. Almost all of them work with tolerated refugees, and also with refugees who have been living here for some time (93% in each case). More than half of our interviewees even work with unaccompanied minors who have reached the age of majority (fig. 2).

Figure 2: "Do you currently (June 2023) work with ..." (multiple answers)



Where do the refugees come from? In response to the questionnaire's request "Please indicate the (predominant) nationalities of the target groups of your work", we received a total of 875 responses. Of course, the following table should not be confused with a statistically valid indication of the actual countries of origin of the refugees arriving in Saxony. The information – which is certainly by no means complete – merely shows which nationalities or origins the practitioners were dealing with in the social work with refugees' field of action in June 2023. It is striking that people from Ukraine were "only" the fifth most frequently mentioned in spring 2023, but that Georgia and Russia were mentioned almost as frequently. Palestine was only mentioned six times as a region of origin – this is likely to change in future surveys due to the recent Middle East war since 2023 (fig. 3).

Figure 3: "Please indicate which nationalities the target groups of your work (predominantly) have!"

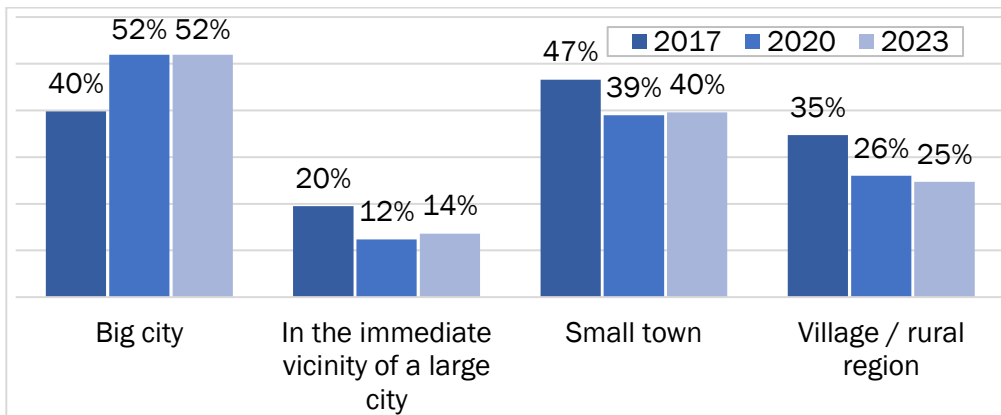
(Predominant) nationalities or regions of origin of the refugees	Number of respondents (n=154) who provided this information
Syria	122
Afghanistan	104
Venezuela	84
Iraq	78
Ukraine (including "third-country nationals from Ukraine")	52
Georgia	44
Iran	40
Russia/Russian Federation (5 times with the addition "Chechnya")	39
Pakistan	34
Turkey	33
Lebanon	30
Libya	24
India	21
Somalia	17
Cameroon	16
Eritrea	15
Nigeria	13
Tunisia	12
Chechnya (partly as "Russian Federation/Chechnya")	10
Morocco	7
<b>Each was stated six times:</b> Algeria, Albania, Vietnam, Palestine/Palestinian Territories	(24)
<b>Each was stated four times:</b> Ethiopia, Kosovo, <i>African region/African countries</i>	(12)
<b>Each was stated three times:</b> "Maghreb states" (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia), Myanmar, North Macedonia	(9)
<b>Each was stated twice:</b> Bulgaria, Romania, Kurdistan, <i>North Africa, Arab region, Stateless</i>	(12)
<b>Each was stated once:</b> Armenia, Bosnia, Brazil, Cuba, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Macedonia, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, South Sudan, Czech Republic, Hungary, Belarus, Western Balkans, Unknown, Stateless, Eastern Europe, Other Asian Countries, "Mixed"	(23)

## 5 Social Work with Refugees in Rural and Urban Areas

If we assign the 2023 sample to different location classes (from large city to village/rural region) it is noticeable that the shift from rural areas and small towns towards large cities, which was still evident in 2017, has not continued in our data (with regard to the environment in which they work) (fig. 4). In 2023, almost 55% of respondents work exclusively in large cities or their immediate surroundings, 38% exclusively in small towns or rural regions and 8% in both types of regions. In our opinion, the urbanization trend of recent years has resulted from the fact that after initial accommodation in villages or small towns, refugees predominantly try to move to larger cities (Gemende et al., 2020). The extent to which this trend has now come to an end remains to be seen.

Both in terms of the working conditions of the professionals surveyed and with regard to the structural contextual conditions in the field of action, there are certainly differences between the metropolitan and the small-town/rural environment. Some of these are already mentioned here:

**Figure 4: Respondents by location class 2017, 2020 and 2023 (multiple answers\*)**



\* Since many respondents assigned themselves to several location classes, the sum of the answers is over 100%.

Of the eight indicators relating to the employment relationships and working conditions of social work with refugees staff (see section 5), at least three items point to advantages for employees in rural areas: for example, the remuneration, material resources and the amount of available workspace were rated as significantly more favourable by respondents in small towns and rural areas than by their colleagues from the metropolitan working environment. Only when it comes to the question of sufficient time for documentation and reports do the conditions in the metropolitan area appear to be slightly better.

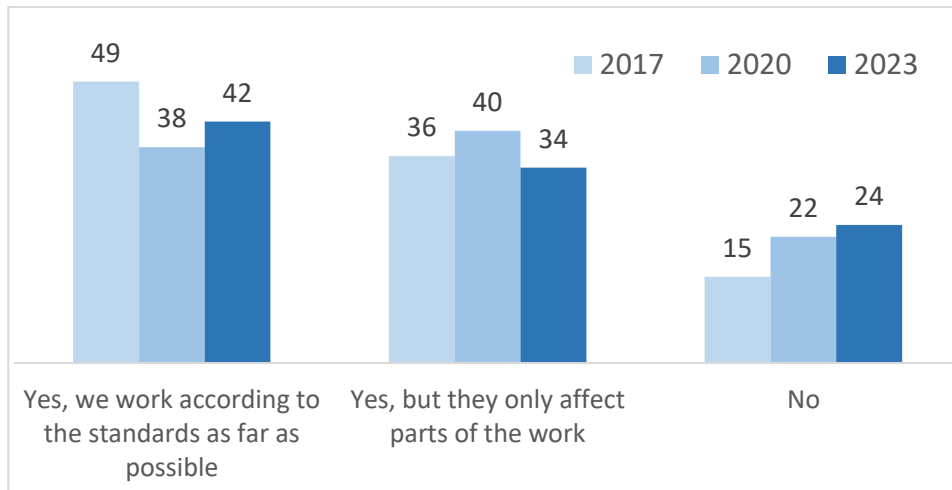
Furthermore, overall, rather minor differences between the settlement types also tend to arise with regard to questions of appreciation and hostility towards social work with refugees and its clientele (see section 6). It goes without saying that some infrastructural conditions, such as the availability of affordable housing (rural areas have a clear

advantage) or accessibility by public transport (urban areas have a clear advantage), vary considerably.

## 6 Standards of Social Work with Refugees

Although standardization efforts in the context of social work are otherwise predominantly viewed critically, as they are often pursued in the context of neoliberal efforts to economize social work, in the field of social work with refugees we frequently encounter the hope that many things would improve if certain standards were developed. Aware of the vagueness of the concept of standards and the very different interpretations of the topic, we asked professionals in the field of social work with refugees in Saxony in 2017, 2020 and 2023 whether their organizations have standards for working with refugees. In 2020, this figure was 38%, while three years earlier, just under half of respondents were still oriented towards standards (see fig. 5). The proportion of respondents who answered in the affirmative rose again to around 42% in 2023.

Figure 5: "Does your organization have uniform standards for working with refugees?" (2017, 2020 and 2023, in %)

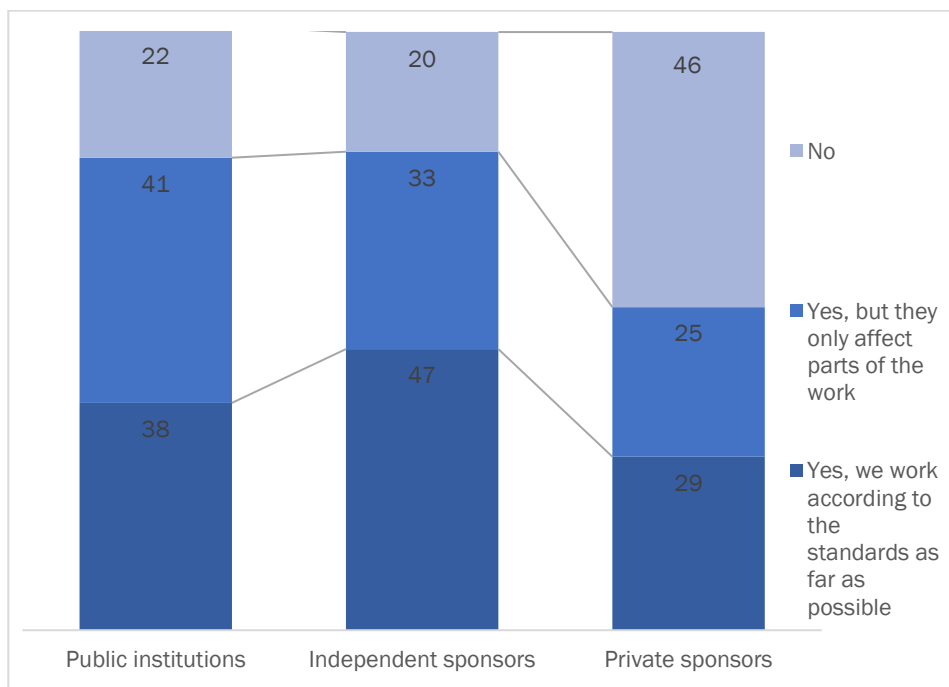


During the constitutive phase of refugee social work from 2015/2016 onwards, the call for "standards" was clearly audible from the onset (cf. Liga Sachsen, 2017). A lot was and is expected of standards: they are seen as a necessary basis for assessing state funding, as an orientation aid for professionals in a still unknown field of work, as an important vehicle for professionalizing the work, but also as an instrument for comparability and "accountability" of the tasks performed – the latter, of course, mainly on the part of the public providers or administrations at the responsible municipalities.

Standardization is generally viewed critically in social work. They are often promoted in the context of neoliberal efforts to economize social work. However, they are no substitute for interaction-sensitive or person-centred individual case work (Schilling, 2017). Even the "wild", difficult to "tame" problems of social work (Gaitanides, 2000, p. 129) cannot be overcome with standards. In its monitoring of refugee social work since 2016, the Competence Centre for Social Work with Refugees has observed ongoing standardization efforts on the part of providers and professionals.

While there are no significant differences between the employees of independent, non-profit and public providers when it comes to the question of attitudes towards standards or the desire for them in the social work with refugees, the answers of the two groups differ in that the independent providers (47%) now tend to work “as far as possible” according to standards, more often than the public providers (38%). In 2020, this difference was still converse. The employees surveyed at private, commercial providers stand out here, with just under half stating that they do not work according to standards at all (fig. 6).

**Figure 6: "Does your organization (employer) have uniform standards for working with refugees?" by type of organization (2023; in%)**



In view of the heterogeneity of the target group for social work with refugees and its “universal responsibility” in its tasks, the discussion of professional standards continues. This is a must, as the development of standards is an ongoing process. In addition, successful social work with refugees must always be case-dependent and can vary greatly depending on the concept of the provider and other (e.g. regional) characteristics.

With the open question “In which areas of your work with refugees do you think standards would be helpful?”, we asked professionals in Saxony to name relevant work content. From the practitioners’ perspective, key areas of work that can be standardized are the counselling setting (confidential, independent) and the content of counselling (areas of responsibility, delimitation), the qualification of staff (training and further education) and instruments/methods of social work in general (supervision, collegial case counselling, anamnesis, empowerment, documentation, etc.). Standards are also required with regard to the guarantee of language mediation, the accommodation (equipment standards), the initial interviews, transition management, the securing financing.

The following aspects are considered standardizable:

- Types of assistance or advisory service (office and/or outreach)
- Facilities such as regular office hours, own workplace
- Staff qualifications, general objectives and areas of responsibility
- Appropriate supervision ratio
- Provision of translation services
- Time for collegial case consultation
- Training and further education, networking, professional exchange

On the other hand, the professionals named areas in which their work cannot be regulated or standardized: the requirements with regard to complex, individual life situations and the various needs and thus counselling and support mandates of the target group, as well as the type of counselling, specific counselling content and the counselling time required. Specific advice content required individual scope for action. In addition, individual case decisions are named that require individual assessments and evaluations. This also includes relational work with the recipients, as well as dealing with psychosocial challenges. However, regional differences in the implementation of social work with refugees also defy standardization.

The following aspects are considered non-standardizable:

- The professional positioning of the social work with refugees with its respective theoretical and methodological concepts
- Processes, consulting procedures
- Type and duration of consultations
- Extent of support (e.g. how long after arrival people need support from FSA/MSA)
- Concrete target action and methodical target achievement in individual cases, especially by means of advice, cooperation and division of labour with other systems
- Flexibility in dealing with individual problems and abilities of the target group

Here is an insight into the qualitative reasons given by the interviewees as to why standardization is not so easy - and thus into everyday working life:

“Organization of advice - How many clients do we advise per day? What topics do we cover and where do we refer to other agencies/experts? How do we encourage clients to become independent and when do clients have to be able to do something themselves? At what point do we hand clients over or, if necessary, refuse further advice in special cases? Standardized individual procedures/processes - dealing with clients in mental crises/suicidal thoughts, working with victims of domestic violence and child endangerment; would offer security, especially for newcomers to the profession, and reassurance for those involved that they have considered everything important (legal certainty)”

“Especially with regard to one's own attitude towards the client value-based (orientation towards human dignity, transparency, eye level, empowerment, resource orientation); standardization of the counselling process insofar as the need is formulated in a kind of anamnesis process (problem assessment); this can be used to measure again and again how the counselling is going and when the process is completed; regular case presentations in the context of collegial case discussions in order to be open to impulses from outside”

When asked in which areas of social work with refugees' standards are not useful or where standardization is not possible, some basic characteristics of working with refugees are addressed and some misunderstandings regarding the possibility of defining clear standards are focused on:

"We can't give support to all clients in the same way. Everyone has to be seen as a person with their own ideas and needs in order to do justice to the advisory mandate."

"The course of a counselling session and the course of a help process. These are too different. The way in which interventions are used can also hardly be predetermined."

"The type of accommodation must be taken into account. Standards cannot apply equally to tents and houses everywhere."

"Very standardized statistics (we only have a limited number of assistance needs that we are supposed to record statistically, but the clients' problems are often very individual)."

"In the determination of times that a consultation on topic X, an accompaniment to appointment Y, a conversation about Z should take. If, for example, a period of 10 minutes is set for the handover and explanation of a benefit notification in accordance with the AsylBLG [Asylum Seeker Benefit Act], this may or may not be sufficient. The integration of a person into the first labour market can be successful within 3 months or 3 years - here too, time limits are not very useful."

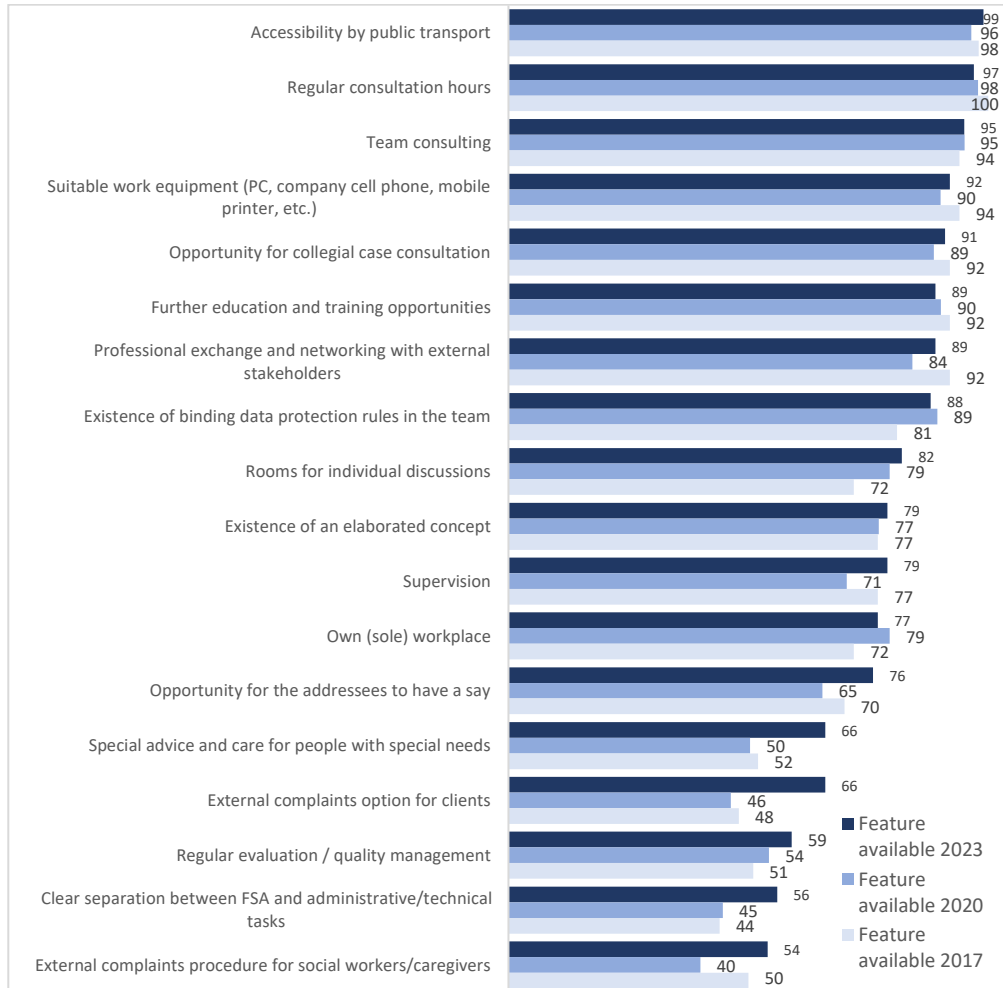
"I have the forms from the authorities in front of me every day, which I can't fill out with the residents' information. I often finagle and press the residents' concerns and information into these papers and we keep our fingers crossed that they are understood at the other end."

Some structural guidelines for ensuring the ability to work and the quality in social work with refugees can therefore be determined. Standardization of social work is a process of negotiations. Standards have no claim to be unambiguous and definitive, and ambivalence and uncertainty are professionally legitimised (see Hansen, 2010; Herriger & Kähler, 2003; Schilling, 2017). These should also be reflected in legal regulations or administrative provisions. However, they should be geared towards not hindering action that is appropriate to the situation and flexible.

In order to gain an impression of the "standards" or requirements and characteristics of work with refugees at the local organizations, respondents were presented with a longer list of selected items (fig. 7). The practice described by our interviewees in 2023 offers almost Saxony-wide coverage with some social work "self-evident features" (such as regular availability, office hours, team consultation). However, it also lacks a great deal that can be described as prerequisites – and in this sense as "standards" – of professional social work with refugees. To put it negatively, around 10% of respondents are lacking suitable work tools, the opportunity for collegial case consultation, further education and training opportunities or professional exchange/networking. Around 20% are lacking rooms for one-to-one meetings, a concept, supervision and a workplace that can be used alone.



**Figure 7: "Please indicate whether the conditions listed below are present in your current daily work or whether you have them!" (2017, 2020 and 2023; in %)**

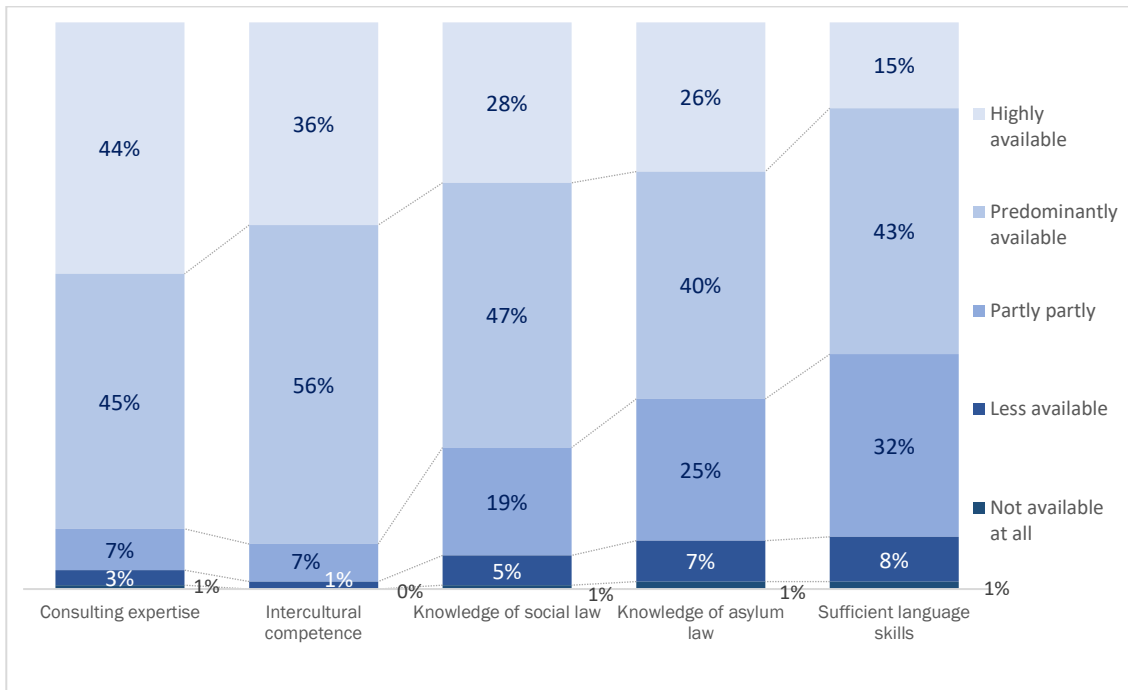


In 2023, we also asked about the extent to which five key skills are considered to be present in refugee social work. In each case, 90% or more of the respondents were convinced that they have "to a high degree" or "predominantly" counselling skills and intercultural skills; at the same time, these two skills were seen as the most important characteristics in their current daily work (mean values 1.2 and 1.3 on a scale of 5 from 1 = very important to 5 = completely unimportant). Knowledge of social and asylum law and, in particular, sufficient language skills were rated much less frequently, but still predominantly as being present (fig. 8).

More than 40% of respondents do not even have a regular evaluation or quality management system. Finally, there is also a clear lack of external complaints mechanisms for clients and, in particular, for professionals themselves.

Compared to the 2020 survey, the frequencies in 2023 have increased significantly for four items: supervision, the clear separation between social work with refugees and administrative or technical tasks, the external complaints option for clients and special advice and care for people with special needs. Only the presence of binding data protection rules in the team is significantly lower than in 2020, at 5%. Beyond that, only slight or no changes can be observed compared to 2020. We can therefore speak of a certain consolidation here, even though many things that were taken for granted are not yet a matter of course in many places (fig. 6).

**Figure 8: To what extent are the competencies listed below present in your current daily work?**



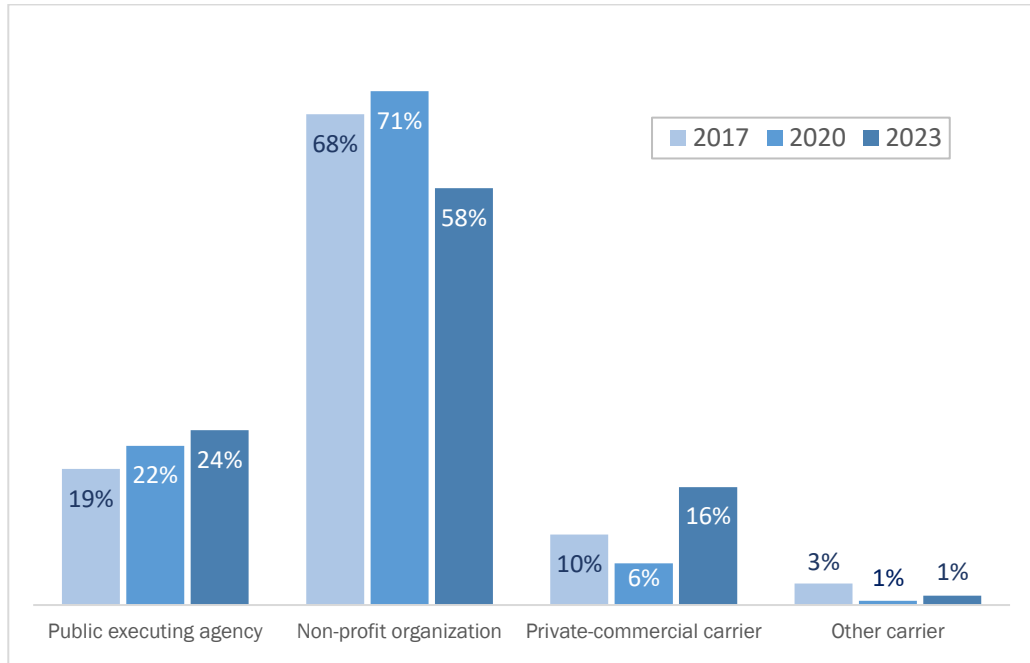
## 7 Subsidiarity at Municipal Level

The vast majority of our respondents are still employed by non-profit organizations, with 58% working there in 2023. However, this quota was still 71% in 2020 (and 68% in 2017). In addition to a slight increase in those employed directly by public executing agencies, we note a significant increase in those employed by private-commercial providers since 2020 (fig. 9).

Against the backdrop of the debate about the subsidiarity principle (see Evangelische Hochschule Dresden, 2020) in refugee social work that has repeatedly flared up in Saxony in recent years, it can at least be noted here that, measured in terms of the number of employees, the non-profit providers actually seem to be on the retreat, at least in our sample, although they naturally still make up the majority of employees. In the meantime, a considerable proportion of tasks are apparently being carried out by private-commercial providers.

Whether this is a survey effect or whether the trend that emerges here reflects real shifts in the field of action cannot be decided on the basis of our data. However, it remains a question to be pursued further, especially as this is about the basic structures of the provider landscape.

Figure 9: Respondents by type of institution in 2017, 2020 and 2023 (in %)



## 8 Key Working Conditions

In our first repeat survey in 2020, we found that the results for the two survey periods of 2017 and 2020 were surprisingly consistent in terms of the assessment of working conditions. This has now changed. The assessment has deteriorated noticeably for five of the eight items. This applies to the appropriateness of staffing ratios, remuneration, time for documentation and reports, equipment at the workplace and personal freedom at work. The assessments with regard to training and further education opportunities and the available premises have remained roughly the same, only the support from management is now rated slightly better than in 2020.

Respondents were asked to rate the consistency of the – positively formulated – statements on the key aspects of their employment relationship on a rating scale from 1 (= "agree") to 4 (= "disagree"). Figure 11 first illustrates the changes in the mean values between 2017 and 2020. The higher the mean value, the worse the assessment. Most of the curves show an unmistakable negative trend, most clearly in the case of staffing ratios, remuneration and time for documentation and reports.

**Figure 10: Assessment of working conditions in 2017, 2020 and 2023 (mean values on a scale of 1 - 4)**

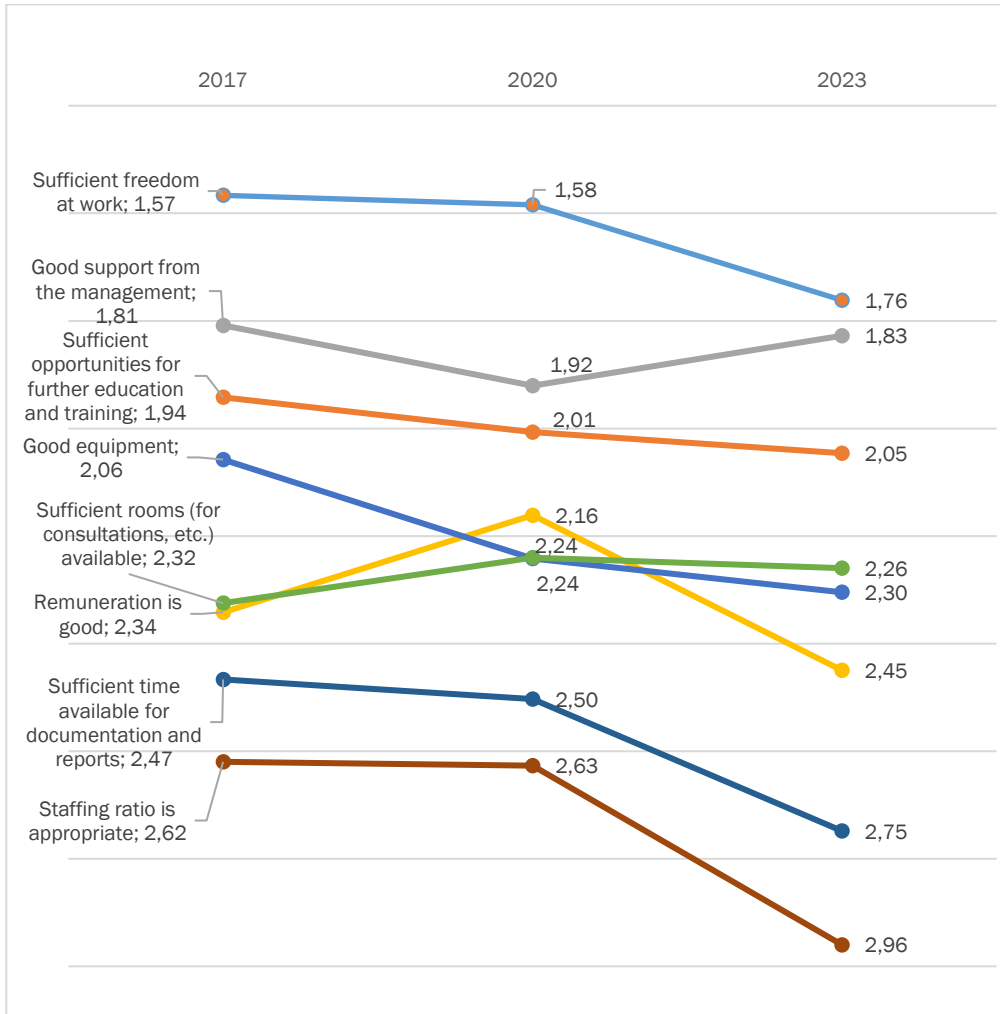
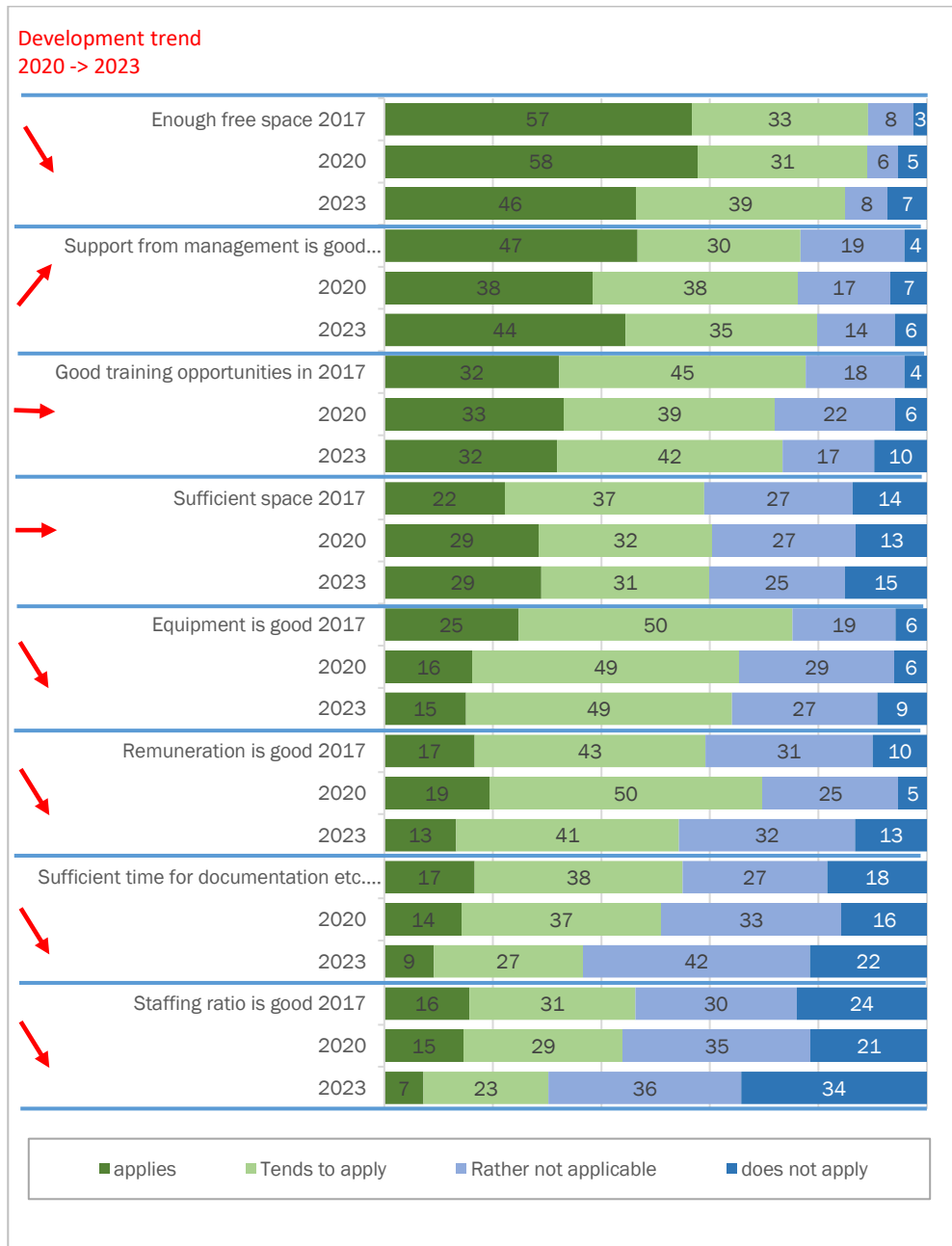


Fig. 11 shows the frequencies of all assessments on the four-point scale mentioned above. First of all, it can be seen that the freedom to work and the support from the management receive the best assessment of all aspects. 46% and 44% respectively agree unconditionally with the positively formulated statement – although agreement with the statement “I have enough freedom in my work” has fallen by 12% since 2020. At the other end of the scale, it can be seen that only seven percent now unconditionally agree with the statement “The staffing ratio (or staffing situation) is completely appropriate”. While the assessment of remuneration had initially improved significantly between 2017 and 2020, agreement with the statement “Remuneration is very good” has now fallen significantly again, even below the 2017 figure. It can also be seen that the values for the aspects “material resources”, “time for documentation/reports” and “staffing ratio” have deteriorated continuously since 2017.

**Figure 11: Assessment of key features of working conditions in 2017, 2020 and 2023 (in %)**

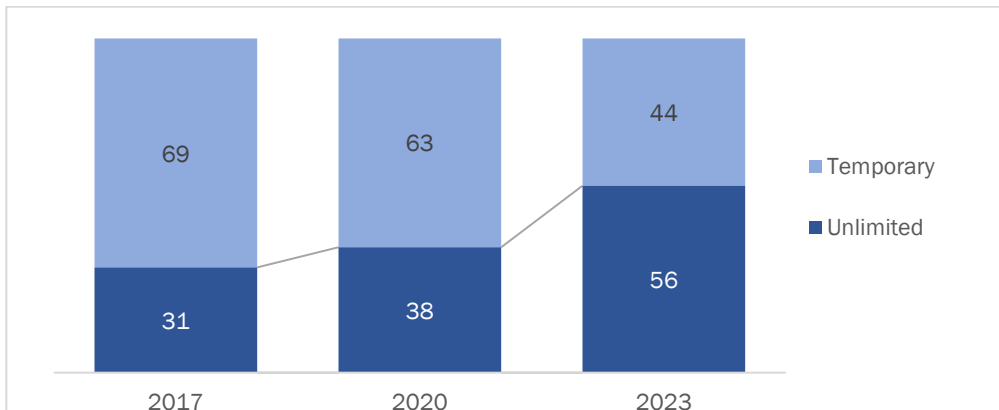


Let's take a more detailed look at three important determinants of working conditions in refugee social work in Saxony: fixed-term contracts, pay and staffing ratios.

### 8.1 Fixed-Term Contracts: For the First Time, the Majority are Open-ended

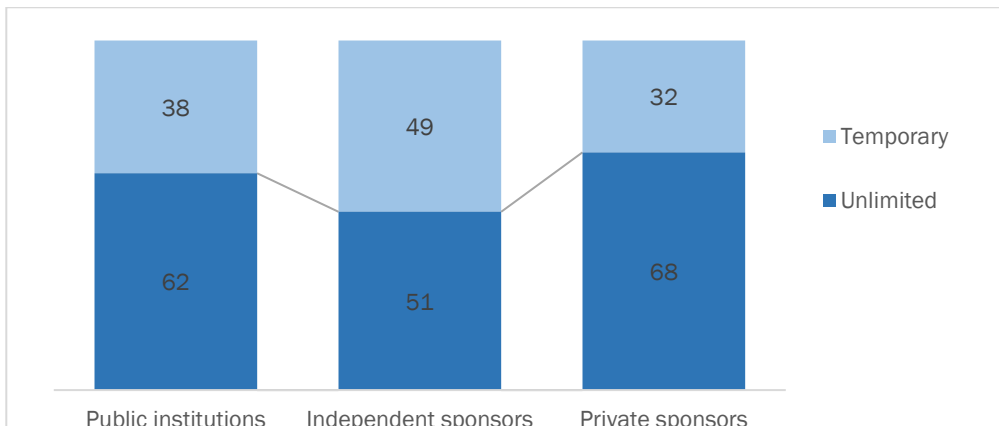
A rather encouraging trend can initially be assumed with regard to the significant decline in the proportion of fixed-term employment contracts: the proportion of permanent employment within our sample rose from 31% (2017) to 38% (2020) and now stands at 56% (Fig. 12).

Figure 12: Fixed-term employment contracts 2017, 2020 and 2023 (in %)



Incidentally, public providers are still well ahead of independent providers here: 62% of employment contracts with public providers are already permanent in 2023 (47% in 2020; 36% in 2017); this proportion is now 51% for independent providers (30% in 2020; 26% in 2017).<sup>4</sup> Among private providers, 68% of respondents are employed on permanent contracts (fig. 13).

Figure 13: Fixed-term employment contracts by type of provider (2023) (in %)



<sup>4</sup> Among the private organizations, only 11% of those surveyed are employed on a temporary basis. However, this figure is based on only nine respondents who are employed by private organizations, so it is therefore only of very limited use.

However, the differences to established fields of social work are of course still enormous: According to Lochner & Möller (2017), only around 10% of employment relationships in the field of educational support are temporary. This once again indicates that the field of social work with refugees is still far from being an established and secure field of work. Beyond the uncertainty caused by the residence status of the clients (cf. Scherr & Breit, 2023), these unstable frame conditions burden the working alliance between refugee clients and social workers.

## **8.2. Payment: Average, No More and No Less than Elsewhere**

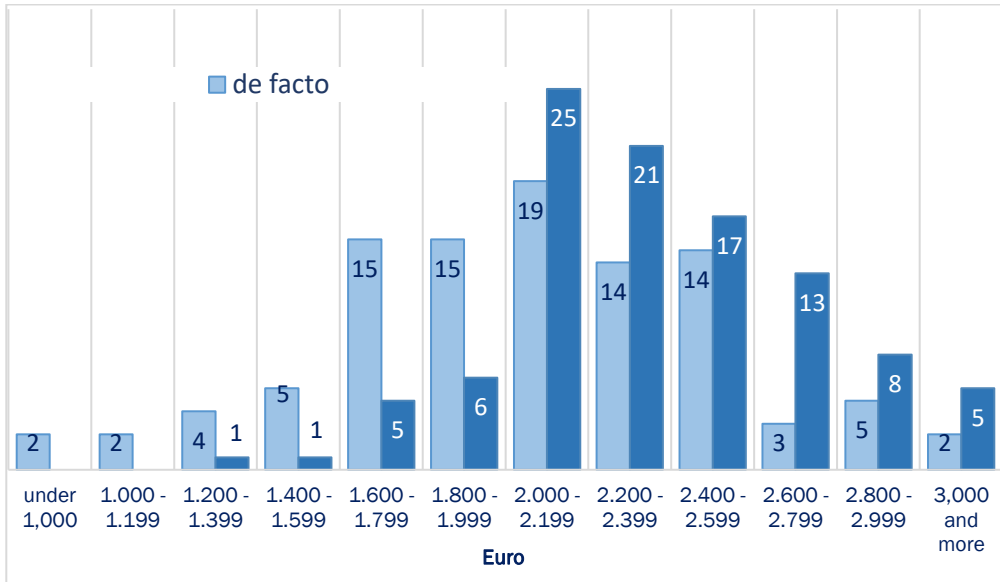
The aforementioned significant decline in satisfaction with pay between 2020 and 2023 may primarily be a subjective perception in light of the enormous inflation since 2022. The data on income does not look so bad for the situation in social work. The employment field of refugee social work therefore appears to be able to keep up with the more established fields of social work, at least in terms of the income to be earned.

In this context, we asked about net monthly incomes, as these reflect the reality of life better than gross salaries, despite being difficult to compare. According to our respondents, the arithmetic mean of monthly de facto net incomes in 2023 was EUR 2,040 (median: EUR 2,000), compared to EUR 1,797 (median: EUR 1,800) in 2020. In 2017, the arithmetic mean net income was still EUR 1,569 (median: EUR 1,585).

However, since a considerable proportion of employees do not work full-time, i.e. 40 hours, we have extrapolated the stated de facto incomes to full-time incomes, taking into account the actual hours worked. This gives us fictitious full-time incomes, which are subject to a certain degree of uncertainty and allow us to compare incomes on the basis of an assumed 40-hour position. This fictitious net full-time income in the Saxon Social Work with Refugees amounts to an average of EUR 2,357 in 2023, compared to an average of EUR 2,178 in 2020. The median is €2,300 in 2023 and €2,160 in 2020.

This probably corresponds fairly well to the average income for a full-time position in the field of social work in Saxony, and may even be slightly higher (which in turn is probably related to the high average age of those employed in the field of social work with refugees). We estimate the average monthly net income in the social work sector in the federal state of Saxony on the basis of data from the "Entgeltatlas" of the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2023), with a median gross income of EUR 3,400 to a net income of around EUR 2,200 for a single person without a child of the age of our sample average (41 years), legally insured and not subject to church tax. Figure 15 compares the two values of the de facto income and the fictitious full-time income.

**Figure 14: Net monthly income 2020 de facto and calculated on a fictitious full-time position (in %)**



### 8.3 Staffing Ratio: Only 14 Minutes Per Client Per Week

A key determinant of the working conditions of our interviewees is, of course, the respective staffing ratio (Sand, 2022) under which they have to perform their work. Of all the work characteristics considered, the staffing ratio is rated most critically: 70% of respondents consider the existing staffing ratios to be (rather) inadequate.

However, it should first be noted that in 2023, only 61 (40%) of our 154 respondents stated that they work with a staffing ratio. Only 51 respondents were able to provide precise details. 16 respondents (10%) work according to the specialist-service-hours-principle, a special Dresden regulation. The remaining 77 people (50%) stated “I don't know” or “Does not apply”. The following statements therefore relate to the information provided by the 51 respondents who explicitly work with staffing ratios and were able to state this.

According to our interviewees, the arithmetic mean of the staffing ratios stated (actual status) is 1:114 in 2023, which is significantly worse than in 2017 and 2020, when it was still 1:108 and 1:105. The highest ratio reported in 2023 (by an individual case) is 1:400 (in 2020, the highest individual value was still 1:200). The median – i.e. the value from which one half of the sample is below and the other half is above – is 1:110 in 2023. The most common value (mode) in 2023 (see fig. 15) – as in the two previous surveys – is 1:150.

Finally, the mean value of the desired, “ideal” staffing ratio remains unchanged at around 1:60 in all three surveys to date, and at 1:59 in 2023 to be precise. This leads to the conclusion that the ideal value of around 1:60 is well-founded and is viewed as a target value by employees with clear continuity.

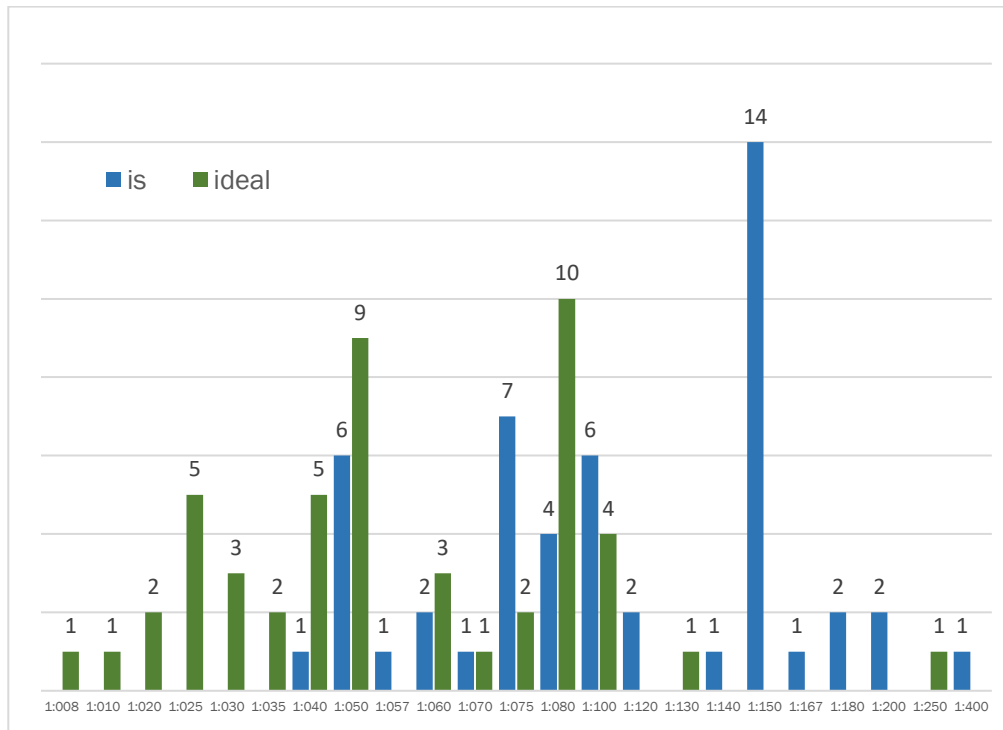


Figure 15: Staffing ratio - current status and ideal (mean values 2017, 2020 and 2023)

	What staffing ratio do you currently work with?			What staffing ratio would be ideal in your opinion?		
	2017	2020	2023	2017	2020	2023
Mean value	1:108	1:105	1:114	1:60	1:60	1:59
Median	1:100	1:120	1:100	1:55	1:50	1:50
Mode	1:150	1:150	1:150	1:80	1:50	1:80

Figure 16 below shows all individual responses to the question of the de facto and "ideal" childcare ratio. The wide range of answers is particularly striking.

Figure 16: Staffing ratio - current status and ideal (2023; abs., n = 51)



In any case, it should be noted that with the staffing ratios of between 1:100 and 1:150 that are common in practice, qualified social work with refugees seems difficult to achieve, as the majority of professionals concerned emphasize in a wide variety of contexts.

To illustrate the time available when working with certain staffing ratios (which are frequently used in practice), we would like to refer you once again to our rough model calculation (excluding the category "Not applicable") which shows how much time is available per client with three common ratios:

Time per client:

- At a ratio of 1:100, an average of 21 min/week/client
- With a ratio of 1:120, an average of 18 min/week/client
- With a ratio of 1:150, an average of 14 min/week/client

This already includes general time for team consultations, documentation, further training/supervision/exchange of expertise. However, travel times, waiting times at public offices and authorities and time for language mediation (which sometimes doubles the counselling time) must also be deducted.

The frequently demanded ratios of 1:50 (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Flüchtlings- & Migrationssozialarbeit in Sachsen, 2020) or 1:80 (Liga Sachsen, 2017) are in fact only achieved in exceptional cases. It seems crucial to differentiate the ratios according to the special needs of the clients and local or municipal circumstances, as demanded by professional associations, but only partially implemented in practice in Saxony to date. Since social work is relational work, staffing ratios of up to 1:10 should also apply for particularly vulnerable groups (Sand, 2022). Finally, the question of the extent to which the staffing ratio implies co-financing of management, assistance and further training as well as financial requirements for material costs should also be clarified.

## 9 Conclusion

When refugee social work was urgently needed in 2014/2015 due to the massive increase in refugee numbers, the Saxon state government immediately enabled refugee social work and, building on this, its professionalization, with a great deal of creative will. Since these acute challenges, the field of action has become more stable. As an overarching field of action with its own professional self-image, this field has had to and must continue to consolidate and develop.

The dynamics and changes in migration policy (see SVR, 2024) will lead to cuts in refugee social work over the next few years. After negotiating the new Saxon state government coalition at the end of 2024, the motto of migration policy is deterrence – this is reinforced by the tightening of asylum laws currently being prioritised at federal level. The Ministry of Social Affairs announced to continue the Social Care Directive and the Integrative Measures Directive, but with major restrictions. At the local political level, the tightening of the migration policy course corresponds with the AFD's majorities, especially in the districts. As described above, the municipalities are the executive institutions.

They have already shown the effects of this tightening of policy in the past year, such as the reintroduction of payment cards for asylum seekers, which will now be implemented throughout Germany from the start of 2025. In Saxony, several districts took action in the Spring of 2024 and introduced the payment card months earlier despite the additional costs.

Refugee social work is the third specialist migration service alongside the youth migration service and migration counselling for adults. It is a supporting pillar for refugees in Germany, for guidance, advice, support and integration, and should remain the third pillar. If this pillar is dropped, this would have to be compensated for by other advisory services and civil society volunteering.

The same picture applies to all measures to promote integration that were paid for from state funds. Here, too, there are already huge cuts. The question arises: is there a “return to volunteering”? Can the welcome alliances that were formed in 2014/2015 get back to work? And above all, can they fill the void left by the discontinuation of refugee social work?

There is a clear answer to the last question: Volunteering cannot replace any area of social work, because professional social work has knowledge of social and administrative law, for example, as well as skills in counselling work. Social work can also represent clients in dealings with the administration, for example. In rural areas of Saxony, a restrictive approach by the administration towards voluntary work has already become apparent in recent years: voluntary work has been excluded and accompanying clients to official appointments has not been accepted. Social work, on the other hand, has a firmer footing and a legal basis on which it can act much more extensively as a representative of interests.

Instead of toppling this pillar, we recommend the following improvements: Regular funding, the definition of qualitative professional standards and minimum staffing ratio of 1:60, as well as fixed staff, regardless of the current number of people requiring support or counselling. Furthermore, we recommend to establish modular in-service training programmes for social work with refugees at universities or educational institutions. This will ensure the quality of counselling, strengthen multi-professional teams and recognise the long-standing commitment of career changers to social work with refugees. Beyond that, the principle of subsidiarity for refugee and migration social work has to be established legally. The Saxon Participation and Integration Act must guarantee the target group of refugees the right to support and counselling by professionals from an independent organisation. Due to possible conflicts of interest, it can be assumed that this cannot be provided by employees of district offices resp. immigration authorities. An important element in sharpening the self-image as a new specialised migration service is the task description. Social work with refugees must examine the requirements of the immigration and social authorities on a professional basis and reject them if necessary. In particular, the relationship between public and private providers is polarised by the tension between help and monitoring, in which social work sees its mandate called into question. In addition, to further relieve the burden on professionals, providers must continue to develop in tasks that tend to be overloaded, such as for clients with disabilities, addicts, debts, domestic violence, child endangerment, as well as counselling for traumatised and mentally ill people, letters to authorities, job applications and finding accommodation.

Standards should provide certainty of action. The call for them is Janus-faced. On the one hand, standards may enable quality management, rationalise internal organisational structures, increase performance transparency, identify the need for further training among professionals, and increase public legitimacy. However, on the other hand they may also undermine national welfare state models through global competition, economise social work through cost-cutting, simulate measurability through compulsory documentation. Instead, the aim should be for independent and public organisations to negotiate standards together, so that the practical perspective is given high priority.

Part of the standards should be: Objectives and tasks and responsibilities of refugee social work, basic working methods and ethical principles, accessibility for clients, low staffing ratios and socio-educational or social work qualifications of staff.

In Saxony, anti-immigration parties have almost reached a majority in district councils, municipal councils and the state parliament for the local elections in spring 2024 and the state elections in fall 2024. As a result, measures to promote integration are likely to be massively hindered or restricted at municipal and state level in the future. This became apparent in 2023 with the amendment of the Integrative Measures Directive, which now covers fewer areas of funding, for which LaFaSt had to cease its work at the end of January 2024 (see Netzwerk Tolerantes Sachsen, 2024). This was also evident in the Bautzen district council, which decided before the summer break to cut the position of foreigners' representative. Although the Saxon Integration and Participation Act describes integration measures as refugee social work very generally and in a few words ("providing refugees with orientation in their new life situation and supporting them in coping with everyday life"), the first-time application of this new SITG may soon refer the district of Bautzen back to the legal basis. In Saxony, however, these are thin on the ground as a result of the decades-long anti-immigration climate.

This makes it all the more important to set standards based on the experience of practitioners, detailed above. Social work theory has foreseen this necessity to define them and depicted it as a process of negotiations. Nonetheless, from the practitioners' point of view, ambivalence and uncertainty have limits, and the demand is for at least to guarantee equipment standards, to regulate initial interviews and transition management, to secure financing and to support language mediation.

## References

- Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin (2016). *Positionspapier: Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten in Gemeinschaftsunterkünften: Professionelle Standards und sozialpolitische Basis*. [http://www.fluechtlingssozialarbeit.de/Positionspapier Soziale Arbeit mit Gefl%C3%BChteten.pdf](http://www.fluechtlingssozialarbeit.de/Positionspapier%20Soziale%20Arbeit%20mit%20Gefluechteten.pdf)
- AWO Bundesverband (2018). *Soziale Arbeit mit geflüchteten Menschen: Ein Leitfaden für die AWO Beratungspraxis*. [https://awo.org/wp-content/uploads/Projekte-Programme/2018-11 Soziale-Arbeit-mit-gefluechteten-Menschen.pdf](https://awo.org/wp-content/uploads/Projekte-Programme/2018-11_Soziale-Arbeit-mit-gefluechteten-Menschen.pdf)
- BAMF (2024). *Aktuelle Zahlen*. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. [https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/AsylinZahlen/aktuelle-zahlen-dezember-2024.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/AsylinZahlen/aktuelle-zahlen-dezember-2024.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2)
- Boll, C., Birkeneder, A., Castiglioni, L., Chabursky, S., Gutt, J., Gandlgruber, M., Kanamüller, A., Langmeyer, A., Langner, R., Liel, C., Mairhofer, A., Peucker, C., Pluto, L., Reinhardt, M., Schlimbach, T., van Santen, E., & Walper, S. (2023). *Ukrainische Geflüchtete in Deutschland: Erhebungen zur Zielgruppe und zu kommunalen Betreuungs- und Unterstützungsstrukturen*. Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V. <https://doi.org/10.36189/DJI202314>
- Brandmaier, M., Bräutigam, B., Gahleitner, S. B., & Zimmermann, D. (2023). *Geflüchtete Menschen psychosozial unterstützen und begleiten: Ein Handbuch*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Bundesagentur für Arbeit (2021). *Die Arbeitsmarktsituation von Frauen und Männern 2020*. Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit.

- Bundesagentur für Arbeit (2023). *Entgeltatlas: Verdienstmöglichkeiten prüfen und Gehalt realistisch einschätzen*. <https://web.arbeitsagentur.de/entgeltatlas/tabelle?dkz=58775&geschlecht=1&alter=1&branche=1>
- Deutscher Caritasverband e.V. (2016). Von der Unterbringung zum Wohnen: Standards und Empfehlungen. *Fluchtpunkte*, 4, 1-46.
- Diakonie Deutschland (2014). Positionen zur Aufnahme, Wohnraumversorgung und Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen, p. 6. [https://www.evangelisch-in-westfalen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Kirche/Was\\_uns\\_bewegt/Flucht\\_und\\_Asyl/Texte-07\\_2014\\_Positionen\\_Fluechtlingen.pdf](https://www.evangelisch-in-westfalen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Kirche/Was_uns_bewegt/Flucht_und_Asyl/Texte-07_2014_Positionen_Fluechtlingen.pdf)
- Evangelische Hochschule Dresden (2020). *Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit in Sachsen: Das Subsidiaritätsprinzip – oder weshalb Flüchtlingssozialarbeit von freien und öffentlichen Trägern kooperativ und ‘auf Augenhöhe’ geleistet werden muss*. [www.ehs-dresden.de/fileadmin/FORSCHUNG/ehs-forschung/FSA/Das\\_Subsidiaritaetsprinzip\\_und\\_Fluechtlingssozialarbeit.pdf](http://www.ehs-dresden.de/fileadmin/FORSCHUNG/ehs-forschung/FSA/Das_Subsidiaritaetsprinzip_und_Fluechtlingssozialarbeit.pdf)
- Liga Sachsen (2017). *Standards der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit: Empfehlungen der Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege Sachsens*. [https://liga-sachsen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/news/2017/fluechtlingssozialarbeit.pdf](https://liga-sachsen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/news/2017/fluechtlingssozialarbeit.pdf)
- Frank, E., & Vandamme, R. (2017, October 19). Was ist eine Kommune? Zur Bedeutung von Kommunalpolitik heute. BpB. <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/izpb/257291/was-ist-eine-kommune-zur-bedeutung-von-kommunalpolitik-heute>
- Gaitanides, S. (2000). Soziale Arbeit: Im Spagat zwischen Ökonomisierung und Menschenrechtsprofession. In S. Elsen, D. Lange, & I. Wallimann (Eds.), *Soziale Arbeit und Ökonomie* (pp. 125-135). Hermann Luchterhand Verlag.
- Galuske, M., & Müller, C. W. (2002). Handlungsformen in der Sozialen Arbeit: Geschichte und Entwicklung. In W. Thole (Eds.), *Grundriss Soziale Arbeit: Ein einführendes Handbuch* (pp. 485-508). Leske+Budrich.
- Gemeinde, M., Jerzak, C., Lehr, M., Sand, M., & Wagner, B. (2017). *Abschlussbericht 2016 zum Projekt Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit (FSA) in Sachsen: Strukturen, Kooperationen, Handlungsansätze*. University of Applied Sciences Dresden.
- Gemeinde, M., Jerzak, C., Lehr, M., Sand, M., & Wagner, B. (2018). *Abschlussbericht 2017 zum Projekt Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit (FSA) in Sachsen: Die Weiterentwicklung von professionellem Selbstverständnis und fachlichen Standards der Sozialen Arbeit mit Geflüchteten*. University of Applied Sciences Dresden.
- Gemeinde, M., Jerzak, C., Lehr, M., Sand, M., & Wagner, B. (2020). *Abschlussbericht 2018/2019 zum Projekt Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit in Sachsen: Zusammenarbeit in Integrationsnetzwerken im ländlichen Raum*. University of Applied Sciences Dresden.
- Gemeinde, M., Jerzak, C., Lehr, M., Sand, M., Starke, D., & Wagner, B. (2022). *Flüchtlingssozialarbeit in Bewegung: Ein Handlungsfeld der Sozialen Arbeit am Beispiel der FSA in Sachsen*. Beltz Juventa.
- Gesemann, F. (2020, December 16). *Kommunale Integrationspolitik in Deutschland: Teilhabe vor Ort ermöglichen*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/kurzdossiers/kommunale-migrations-und-fluechtlingsspolitik/322672/kommunale-integrationspolitik-in-deutschland-teilhabe-vor-ort-ermoeglichen/#footnote-target-4>

- Groves, R. M., Fowler, F. J. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2009). *Survey Methodology: Second Edition*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Hammerschmidt, P., Pötter, N., & Stecklina, G. (2021). *Der lange Sommer der Migration: Die Teilhabechancen der Geflüchteten und die Praxis der Sozialen Arbeit*. Beltz Juventa.
- Hansen, F. (2010). *Standards in der sozialen Arbeit*. Eigenverlag des Deutschen Vereins für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.
- Hartwig, L., Mennen, G., Schrapper, C. (2018). *Handbuch Soziale Arbeit mit geflüchteten Kindern und Familien*. Beltz Juventa.
- Herriger, N., & Kähler, H. D. (2003). *Erfolg in der Sozialen Arbeit. Gelingendes berufliches Handeln im Spiegel der Praxis*. Socialnet Verlag.
- Jerzak, C., Lehr, M., Sand, M., Starke, D., & Wagner, B. (2020). *Flüchtlingssozialarbeit auf dem Weg der Integration von Menschen mit Flucht- und Migrationshintergrund: Entwicklungen, Positionierungen, (Heraus)Forderungen*. University of Applied Sciences Dresden.
- Kunz, T., Ottersbach, M. (2017): *Flucht und Asyl als Herausforderung und Chance der Sozialen Arbeit*. Beltz Juventa.
- Landesfachstelle FSA/MSA - LaFaSt (n.d.). *Konzept der LaFaSt: Die Landesfachstelle Flüchtlingssozialarbeit/Migrationssozialarbeit in Sachsen*. <https://lafast-sachsen.net/ueber-uns/konzept-der-lafast/>.
- Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Flüchtlings- & Migrationssozialarbeit in Sachsen (2020). *Positionspapier zu Standards in der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit*. [https://www.lag-migration-sachsen.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/LAG-FSA\\_MSA\\_Positionspapier\\_zu-Fachstandards-FSA.pdf](https://www.lag-migration-sachsen.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/LAG-FSA_MSA_Positionspapier_zu-Fachstandards-FSA.pdf)
- Lehr, M., & Gemeinde, M. (2022). Warum Flüchtlingssozialarbeit in freier Trägerschaft agieren sollte und öffentliche Träger dennoch Verantwortung tragen. In M. Gemeinde, C. Jerzak, M. Lehr, M. Sand, D. Starke & B. Wagner (Eds.), *Flüchtlingssozialarbeit in Bewegung: Ein Handlungsfeld der Sozialen Arbeit am Beispiel der FSA in Sachsen* (pp.71-79). Beltz Juventa.
- Lochner, B., & Möller, D. (2017). Professionelle Hilfen zur Erziehung unter prekären Arbeitsbedingungen? Workshop-Bericht des Thüringer Bündnisses für Gute Arbeit in der Sozialen Arbeit. *Sozial Extra*, 41(4), 48-50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12054-017-0051-6>
- Müller, M. (2023). Stärkenorientiertes Migrationsfachdienst-Case-Management. In M. Brandmaier, B. Bräutigam, S. B. Gahleitner, & D. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Geflüchtete Menschen psychosozial unterstützen und begleiten: Ein Handbuch* (pp. 84-97). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Müller, B. (2012): Professionalität. In W. Thole (Ed.), *Grundriss Soziale Arbeit: Ein einführendes Handbuch* (pp. 955-974). Springer.
- Netzwerk Tolerantes Sachsen (2024, October 23). *Solidarität statt Kahlschlag: Für eine faire Förderung der Zivilgesellschaft in Sachsen*. <https://www.tolerantes-sachsen.de/solidaritaet-statt-kahlschlag/>
- Otto, H. U., & Thiersch, H. (2011). *Handbuch Sozialarbeit/Sozialpädagogik*. Luchterhand.
- Prasad, N. (2018): *Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten: Rassismuskritisch, professionell, menschenrechtsorientiert*. Barbara Budrich.
- Remer, U. (2020). *Partizipative und deliberative Demokratie auf lokaler Ebene: Eine Vermessung der Beteiligungslandschaft Baden-Württembergs*. Springer.

- Ritgen, K. (2018). Integration in ländlichen Räumen: Die Rolle der Landkreise. In F. Gesemann, & R. Roth (Eds.), *Handbuch lokaler Integrationspolitik* (pp. 407-431). Springer.
- Sand, M. (2022). Handlungspraxis konkret in der sächsischen Flüchtlingssozialarbeit. In M. Gemende, C. Jerzak, M. Lehr, M. Sand, D. Starke & B. Wagner (Eds.), *Flüchtlingssozialarbeit in Bewegung: Ein Handlungsfeld der Sozialen Arbeit am Beispiel der FSA in Sachsen* (pp. 80-97). Beltz Juventa.
- Scharrer, T., Glorius, B., Kleist, J. O., & Berlinghoff, M. (2023). *Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*. Nomos.
- Scherer, H., & Naab, T. K. (2013). Messen im Zeitverlauf. In W. Möhring, & D. Schlütz, (Eds.), *Handbuch standardisierte Erhebungsverfahren in der Kommunikationswissenschaft* (pp. 103-123). Springer.
- Scherr, A., & Breit, H. (2023). Soziale Arbeit. In T. Scharrer, B. Glorius, Kleist, J. O., & M. Berlinghoff (Eds.), *Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium* (pp. 127-136). Nomos.
- Scherr, A., Yüksel, G. (2016): *Flucht, Sozialstaat und Soziale Arbeit*. Lahnstein.
- Schilling, R. (2017). *Welche Standards benötigt und wie viel Standardisierung verträgt Flüchtlingssozialarbeit? Eine dialektische Erörterung der Standardisierungsanforderungen der Flüchtlingssozialarbeit* [Master's thesis, Evangelische Hochschule].
- Schirilla, Nausikaa (2016): *Migration und Flucht: Orientierungswissen für die Soziale Arbeit*. Kohlhammer.
- Schmitt, C. (2023). *Inklusion und Fluchtmigration: Neue Narrative für die Soziale Arbeit*. Beltz Juventa.
- Schnell, R. (2019). *Survey-Interviews: Methoden standardisierter Befragungen*. Springer.
- Spetsmann-Kunkel, M., & Frieters-Reermann, N. (2013). *Soziale Arbeit in der Migrationsgesellschaft*. Barbara Budrich.
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2019): *Menschenwürde – Menschenrechte – Soziale Arbeit: Die Menschenrechte vom Kopf auf die Füße stellen*. Barbara Budrich.
- Starke, D. (2022). *Über den Tellerrand geschaut: Flüchtlings- und/oder Migrationssozialarbeit in anderen Bundesländern*. LaFaSt. <https://lafast-sachsen.net/forschung/uber-den-tellerrand-geschaut-fluechtlings-und-oder-migrationssozialarbeit-in-anderen-bundeslaendern/>
- SVR (2024). *Integrationsklima 2024: Leichte Abschwächung des positiven Trends: SVR-Integrationsbarometer 2024*. Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration. [https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/SVR\\_Integrationsbarometer\\_2024\\_barrierefrei.pdf](https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/SVR_Integrationsbarometer_2024_barrierefrei.pdf)
- Thole, W. (2010). *Grundriss Soziale Arbeit*. Springer.
- Thiersch, H. (1993). Strukturierte Offenheit. In T. Rauschenbach, F. Ortman, M.-E. Karten (Eds.), *Der sozialpädagogische Blick: Lebensweltorientierte Methoden in der Sozialen Arbeit* (pp. 11-28). Juventa.
- Vogler, J. (2022). *Arbeitsbeziehungen im Handlungsfeld Migration. Eine empirische Untersuchung zum vielschichtigen Handeln von Sozialarbeiter\*innen und freiwillig Engagierten*. Springer.
- Wohlfarth, C., & Wittlif, A. (2024). *Integration in Sachsen: Sonderauswertung des SVR-Integrationsbarometers 2022*. Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration.

[https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/SVR-Sonderauswertung\\_Integrationsbarometer-Sachsen-2022\\_barrierefrei.pdf](https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/SVR-Sonderauswertung_Integrationsbarometer-Sachsen-2022_barrierefrei.pdf)

## Legal Materials

### Baden-Württemberg

*Gesetz über die Aufnahme von Flüchtlingen (Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz-FlüAG) vom 19. Dezember 2013.* <https://www.landesrecht-bw.de/bsbw/document/jlr-Fl%C3%BCAGBW2014rahmen>

### Brandenburg:

*Gesetz über die Aufnahme von Flüchtlingen, spätausgesiedelten und weiteren aus dem Ausland zugewanderten Personen im Land Brandenburg sowie zur Durchführung des Asylbewerberleistungsgesetzes (Landesaufnahmegesetz - LAufnG).* <https://bravors.brandenburg.de/gesetze/laufng>

### Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania:

*Directive for the operation of shared accommodation and the social care of residents.* [www.landesrecht-mv.de/jportal/portal/page/bsmvprod.psml?showdoccase=1&st=vv&doc.id=VVMV-VVMV000006780&doc.part=X&doc.origin=bs](http://www.landesrecht-mv.de/jportal/portal/page/bsmvprod.psml?showdoccase=1&st=vv&doc.id=VVMV-VVMV000006780&doc.part=X&doc.origin=bs)

### Saxonia:

*Directive Integrative Measures* of November 14, 2023 (SächsABl. p. 1498), included in the administrative regulation of August 6, 2024 (SächsABl. SDr. p. 966).

*Directive Social Care for Refugees* of June 5, 2018 (SächsABl. p. 783), included in the administrative regulation of November 30, 2023 (SächsABl. SDr. p. 306).

Sächsisches Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz. <https://www.revosax.sachsen.de/vorschrift/9524-Saechsisches-Fluechtlingaufnahmegesetz#ef>.

Sächsisches Integrations- und Teilhabegesetz. <https://www.revosax.sachsen.de/vorschrift/20855-Saechsisches-Integrations-und-Teilhabegesetz>

Sächsische Kommunalpauschalenverordnung. [www.revosax.sachsen.de/vorschrift/](http://www.revosax.sachsen.de/vorschrift/)

### Thuringia:

Thüringisches *Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz - ThürFlüAG.* <https://www.landesrecht.thueringen.de/bsth/document/jlr-FIAufGTHrahmen>

*Thüringer Verordnung über Mindestbedingungen für den Betrieb von Gemeinschaftsunterkünften und die soziale Betreuung und Beratung von Flüchtlingen und Asylsuchenden (Thüringer Gemeinschaftsunterkunfts- und Sozialbetreuungsverordnung – ThürG USVO -).* [www.landesrecht.thueringen.de/bsth/document/jlr-GemUnterkerSozBVTH2018pAnlage2](http://www.landesrecht.thueringen.de/bsth/document/jlr-GemUnterkerSozBVTH2018pAnlage2)