

## Refugees in Berlin 2015/16

### Perceptions of basic public service delivery

#### Results from a joint survey of students and asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> at the Hertie School of Governance

Under the academic direction of Anca Oprisor  
and Gerhard Hammerschmid

### Key findings

“The chaos has a name: Lageso.”<sup>2</sup> This headline, a sharp critique of the Berlin agency responsible for asylum seekers in 2015, sums up the public consensus that Berlin failed miserably in its handling of refugees. But what do we know of the asylum seekers’ own experiences, and what issues still plague the system? One year after the historic influx of refugees into Germany, the numbers

<sup>1</sup> In this report we use the terms asylum seekers and refugees as follows: we refer to asylum seekers as persons who are currently undergoing the asylum process (only respondents in this situation have been included in the survey); we use “refugees” to describe users of public services more generally (regardless of their asylum status).

<sup>2</sup> “Das Chaos hat einen Namen: Lageso.” Malene Gürgen. *Chaos am Lageso nimmt nicht ab. O du Fröhliche*. Die Tageszeitung. [www.taz.de/!5259895/](http://www.taz.de/!5259895/)

have abated, along with the censorious headlines. But public administration in Berlin must still resolve some pressing challenges to providing basic services for refugees. And government officials must better understand their needs to face future challenges. While anecdotal evidence abounds, there is still insufficient systematic data on these needs and the effectiveness of measures taken so far. This original quantitative survey with 351 asylum seekers in Berlin from Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Kosovo and Syria addresses this evidence gap. The survey about their perception of public services was carried out in spring 2016 by students and staff at the Hertie School of Governance and refugee students participating in Hertie School courses. It was conducted under the academic direction of Prof. Dr. Gerhard Hammerschmid.

## High level of trust in citizens and institutions

A key result of the survey reflects the **positive attitudes of asylum seekers towards various actors in German society**: the great majority of survey participants are very trusting of and very satisfied with German citizens (85.0% and 64.8% respectively). The same can be said in relation to NGOs, which are trusted by 71.6% of respondents, and well-appreciated by another 40.2%. Findings also show a high level of trust in institutions such as the courts and justice system (81.0%) and the police (86.9%). However, a majority of refugees (69.2%) indicate distrust in other asylum seekers.

**Attitudes towards government and government services** are somewhat less positive, although a more nuanced assessment emerges. Overall, refugees showed a low level of satisfaction with their interaction with government institutions (19.8%), especially when compared to NGOs (40.2%) and citizens (64.8%). There is a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with government services, in particular with those related to preparation for the labour market, where 74.5% of respondents said they were dissatisfied. They were also unhappy with, finding accommodation (74.5%), quality of living conditions (64.6%), and the asylum process itself (60.0%). Nevertheless, 58,6% said they were not worried about their personal safety, and 49,4% were satisfied with their access to medical treatment.

On a personal level, however, survey participants assess their treatment by government officials as surprisingly positive. Many say they find government officials to be competent (42.7%), friendly (41.6%) and helpful (33.7%). Nonetheless, respondents also say that officials are frequently overwhelmed by their tasks (52.3%) and repeatedly turn people away (51.0%) – aspects that may be connected to resource limitations within the administrative system.

## A lack of access to information

Furthermore, the majority of asylum seekers say they lack information about government services in most areas. Government and NGOs are rarely their sources for information (neither online nor in person), with most people (70.3%) relying on information from other refugees, and to a lesser extent on the use of social media/phone apps (32.4%).

Additionally, asylum seeker groups perceive differences in treatment based on their country of origin in various service areas, with Afghans feeling particularly disenfranchised.

Results point to a surprisingly low visibility for NGOs in service provision, with around half of respondents assessing NGOs as unimportant across all service areas, and a third altogether unable to describe their interaction with them, although those that could were positive. Additionally, 43.9% of asylum seekers perceive a lack of collaboration between the government and NGOs.

## Where action is needed

In conclusion, the survey findings indicate that asylum seekers currently show a high trust capital and a positive appreciation of German institutions, citizens and volunteers: this is an important asset and a chance for initiating a smooth integration process, together with asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Attitudes towards government officials and services reveal a more nuanced picture than previously portrayed in the media. Personal interaction with government staff is generally assessed in a surprisingly positive manner; but it would seem that systemic resource limitations take their toll on government officials' capacity to provide timely, efficient services and to adequately assess asylum seekers' needs.

Such limitations should be adequately addressed in order to improve the capacity of the public administration to deliver on its tasks. The high level of dissatisfaction with certain areas (in particular accommodations, the asylum process, and labour market preparation) point to a clear need for prioritizing these services, especially as this is evidence that asylum seekers are eager to integrate into communities and the job market.

Given perceptions of inequality, standard services to all asylum seeker groups, regardless of country of origin, should be ensured in order to preserve a fair and tension-free settlement process.

From the perspective of asylum seekers, NGOs have a very low profile in service provision. Because local community groups and NGOs have played a major role in assisting the government where capacity was lacking, it is important that NGOs find more effective ways to reach out and clarify their role and activities to asylum seekers and refugees.

# I. Giving a voice to asylum seekers in Berlin: a quantitative survey of their experiences with public services in the city

## Refugee - or administration crisis?

The sharp increase in the numbers of asylum seekers over the past year has clearly placed the issue of asylum at the top of the German public agenda. In Berlin, around 11.800 asylum seekers have arrived between January and end of June 2016, adding to the approximately 55.000 who had come the previous year.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the autumn and winter of 2015, media abounded in images of long queues with thousands of asylum seekers waiting for days in the bitter Berlin cold to receive an appointment at LaGeSo.<sup>4</sup> Critique was also targeted at the insufficient housing and inadequate living conditions, especially in emergency shelters, where lack of space, hygiene and bad quality food were deemed particularly problematic; or the administrative difficulties and delays in the asylum process, often lasting for months on end. These images came to define what was repeatedly described as a chaotic,<sup>5</sup> catastrophic,<sup>6</sup> if not altogether farcical<sup>7</sup> reception of the incoming asylum seekers in Berlin, and an overall failure of public administration in the city. In the words of one volunteer supporting the newcomers: “This is not a refugee crisis, this is an administrative crisis.”<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, apart from the visible backlog in processing new arrivals at LaGeSo, and rich anecdotal evidence, there is to this date little systematic data to inform us more rigorously about the services and treatment provided to refugees by the administration, and of their respective relevance. The goal of this survey was to tap directly into the perspectives of asylum seekers in the city, as primary service users, in order to gain a systematic, evidence-based understanding of how services and solutions offered have worked so far work. More precisely, the study assesses the type and quality of basic services that asylum seekers are provided

<sup>3</sup> Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Gesundheit und Soziales. Flüchtlingszahlen im Fokus: Weniger Zugänge, mehr Rückkehrer in Heimatländer. Pressemitteilung, 06.07.2016. <https://www.berlin.de/sen/gessoz/presse/pressemitteilungen/2016/pressemitteilung.495199.php>

<sup>4</sup> LaGeSo, or “Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales”, the Berlin State Office for Health and Social Affairs, which until July 2016 handled the registration and administrative aspects for asylum seekers in Berlin. Starting 1st August it has been replaced with the Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten (LAF) or the State Office for Refugee Affairs, which has taken over, integrating attributions related to both registration and asylum. See Andreas Abel. Nach Chaos: Neues Berliner Flüchtlingsamt löst Lageso ab. Morgenpost, 20.07.2016. <http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article207914985/Nach-Chaos-Neues-Berliner-Fluechtlingsamt-loest-Lageso-ab.html>

<sup>5</sup> Melissa Eddy and Katarina Johannsen. Migrants Arriving in Germany Face a Chaotic Reception in Berlin. The New York Times, 26.11.2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/europe/germany-berlin-migrants-refugees.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/europe/germany-berlin-migrants-refugees.html?_r=0)

<sup>6</sup> Hannes Leitlein. Ein zivilgesellschaftlicher Gänsehautmoment. Die Zeit, 07.08.2015. <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2015-08/berlin-moabit-lageso-asyl>

<sup>7</sup> Margarete Stokowski. Ist das dieses „Wir schaffen es nicht“? Der SPIEGEL, 26.11.2015 <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/fluechtlinge-in-berlin-ist-das-dieses-wir-schaffen-es-nicht-kolumne-a-1064661.html>

<sup>8</sup> “Das ist keine Flüchtlingskrise, das ist eine Verwaltungskrise”. See Margarete Stokowski, cited article.

with in the first phase after coming to Berlin, while waiting for a decision on their asylum request; as well as the interaction between asylum seekers and the key stakeholders assisting them: government officials and non-governmental organizations/ volunteers.

The study has been conducted by the Hertie School of Governance Berlin, under the coordination of Prof. Gerhard Hammerschmid and Anca Oprisor. A team of twelve volunteers, among whom students of the Hertie School and asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan and Albania participating in a **course for refugees** offered by the Hertie School have been closely involved in all phases of the research. This makes the study one of the very few directly offering a voice to asylum seekers, and benefitting from the experience of asylum seekers in the design, data collection and results analysis.<sup>9</sup>

## Reaching out to asylum seekers in Berlin

The study was conducted as a survey with 25 questions focusing on key public services offered to asylum seekers in the city, and translated into Arabic, Farsi, Pashto and Albanian. Most were closed questions, some offered respondents the possibility to expand on their experiences.

The survey was implemented in person by trained volunteers, across varied locations in the city (different types of shelters, in front of LaGeSo and in a few non-governmental organizations). The survey team consisted of 12 persons: 6 students in the Hertie School Master of Public Policy and 6 refugees and asylum seekers in Berlin; among them were 3 Farsi speakers, 1 Albanian speaker and 8 Arabic natives. The refugees in the team were involved from the early stages of planning, in order to ensure that the design and implementation of the study would reflect the most relevant aspects of the daily lives of asylum seekers and refugees in the city. All interviewers were trained to follow common guidelines, and in particular to ensure the anonymity of responses.

The respondents were extremely open and interested in getting their story across, as a means of contributing to improving the situation of fellow refugees. Despite the time length of the survey (filling it in took around 20 minutes), our estimated response rate reached a high 80%.

### **Several factors have been identified as important for an optimal outreach to refugees:**

- Approaching refugees in their native language (rather than in English or German, which many may not yet master so well) is a key prerequisite to ensuring a clear and precise communication process.
- A personal outreach is preferable to an online one, to ensure a wider coverage of all socio-demographic categories (regardless of age, education etc). The personal approach, particularly when also intermediated by a peer (in our case, the refugees volunteering in our team) also helped to build trust: the experience of the survey team showed that the asylum seekers approached

<sup>9</sup> We thank our volunteers for their excellent, dedicated work and for their articulated comments to this study throughout its implementation: Dana Abdel Fatah, Golnaz Aghazadeh Tabrizi, Anas Attal, Hossam Koblaoui, Faisal Maandgaar, Nada Mahdy, Abdalraouf Nasri, Olimpia Parje, Mariam Sanjush, Naueel Semaan, Hamza Sweid, Jon Vrushi, Asmaa Yousuf.

responded in greater numbers and to a larger number of survey items when a volunteer from the team was present to respond to their queries and guide them through the survey questions.

- A quiet, comfortable setting, where respondents felt at ease also contributed to a high number of quality responses (for instance respondents completed all questions, as opposed to dropping out after only partial completion). This was the case in shelters, at quiet times, as opposed to public places or during ongoing activities in the shelter.

## Target group

The survey focused on five main groups, with mixed, high and low stay perspectives in order to be able to compare between the services offered, and representing two thirds of the asylum seekers in Germany in 2015<sup>10</sup>: Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Kosovo, Syria. In this study, we did not consider the second, longer-term aspects of integration: we have intentionally limited our focus on asylum seekers who have not yet received a definitive positive decision to their asylum request, in the first phase of their arrival, in order to explore their reception in Germany and Berlin, and respectively the way in which key assistance is provided at the local level. At this phase asylum seekers are provided for instance with housing, education opportunities and other basic services, but cannot take regular employment.

Our sample is made of 351 respondents, the majority of whom are Syrian (40%) and Afghanis (37%), with 83% males, 76% under 35 year-olds. Men are slightly overrepresented in our sample (around 75% in the asylum seeker population), despite the mix of men and women interviewers, perhaps due to a higher readiness of men to participate. A quarter of respondents (24.5%) have completed university or a higher educational level. With only about 18% of asylum seekers in Germany<sup>11</sup> having a graduate education, our sample has a higher number of asylum seekers in this educational category. This might be explained by the relative length and complexity of the survey, more easily available to respondents with a higher education, but also by the fact that the survey team was composed of students themselves, which might have created an added appeal for this group. Since we also see higher educated respondents as more critical, we hope that this has contributed overall to a sharper exploration of the realities of asylum seekers in Berlin. More than half of respondents (52%) had arrived in between 6 and 12 months, and the majority of respondents (76%) had been in Germany for at least two months at the time of the survey, leaving ample time for them to have gone through the various reception steps and to have had the chance to interact with the key actors mentioned in the survey.

<sup>10</sup> According to BAMF statistics, throughout 2015, the total number of asylum applications received, 36% came from Syrians, 7% from Iraqis and Afghanis, and a combined 20% from Albania and Kosovo. See Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (2016). Aktuelle Zahlen zu Asyl, Ausgabe Dezember 2015. <http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/aktuelle-zahlen-zu-asyl-dezember-2015.html?nn=7952222>

<sup>11</sup> Anna-Katharina Rich (2016). Asylerstantragsteller in Deutschland im Jahr 2015. Sozialstruktur, Qualifikationsniveau und Berufstätigkeit. Ausgabe 3|2016 der Kurzanalysen des Forschungszentrums Migration, Integration und Asyl des Bundesamtes für Migration und Flüchtlinge. [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Kurzanalysen/kurzanalyse3\\_sozial-komponenten.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Kurzanalysen/kurzanalyse3_sozial-komponenten.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)

The survey does not claim representativeness, as drawing such a sample was not possible based on available information in Berlin; we do believe however that the careful selection and data collection process ensures a coverage of relevant and sincere responses from our sample.

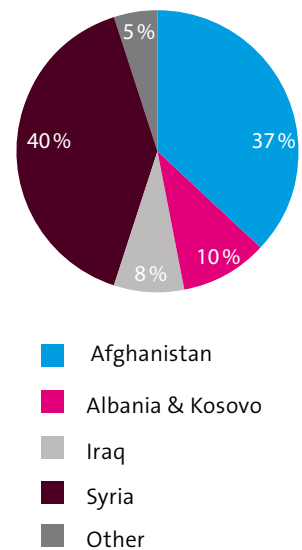
## II. Attitudes towards key German actors

### Welcome culture: high appreciation for German citizens, but low satisfaction with government officials and other refugees (see figure 2)

- The warm welcome offered by German citizens and volunteers has not gone unnoticed by asylum seekers in Berlin. The majority of our respondents (64.8%) mark a high level of satisfaction in their interaction with German citizens.
- Respondents are considerably less satisfied however with their interaction with government officials (only 19.8% are satisfied) – a result most likely of the perceived difficulties encountered by asylum seekers in their interaction with public officials.
- Results also reveal a comparatively satisfying interaction of asylum seekers with NGOs and volunteers (40.2%) of respondents evaluate this interaction positively, double the share of those satisfied in their relation with the government). However, in relation to NGOs, there is also a grey area, with 44.2%

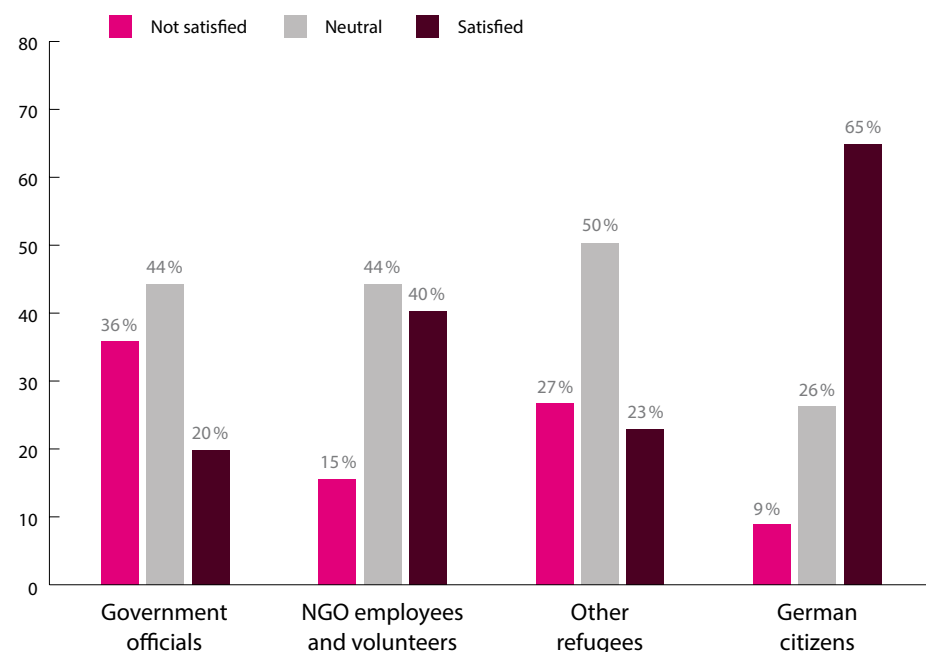
Figure 1

Survey sample: respondents' countries of origin



### “Overall, how satisfied are you with the way you personally interact with the following actors?”

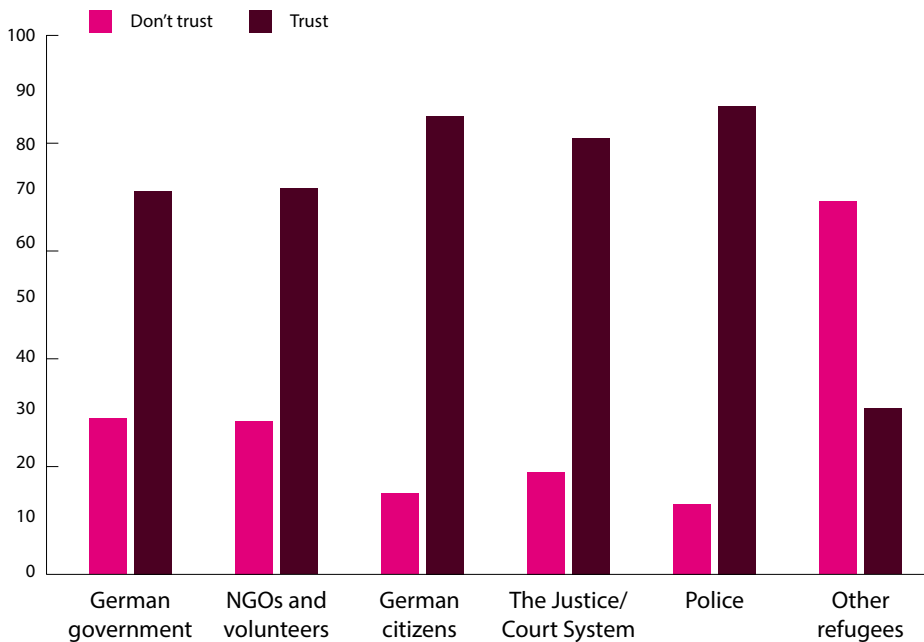
Figure 2



(3 point scale, where 1 = not at all satisfied and 3 = very satisfied)

## “Based on your experience in Germany, do you generally trust or don’t trust the following institutions?”

Figure 3



(2 point scale, where 1 = don't trust and 2 = trust)

of respondents showing neither a positive nor a negative attitude. This perception suggests that for many asylum seekers, the role of non-governmental organizations is relatively unclear.

- Attitudes towards other refugees are somewhat ambivalent. The satisfaction balance tilts neither way: half of respondents mark a neutral opinion in this regard, while the rest of respondents reveal a comparable share of positive and negative assessments, which points to a mixed type of experience with fellow refugees.

### A high level of trust in German institutions, citizens and volunteers, but low trust in other refugees (see figure 3)

- Findings show that asylum seekers see all German institutions, whether governmental, non-governmental or citizens, as very trustworthy: over 80% of respondents indicate that they trust the German Police, the Justice and Court System and German citizens. By comparison, trust in the German government and NGOs/volunteers is slightly lower, but still very high in absolute terms: over 70% of respondents show high levels of trust towards these two groups
- The results reveal one interesting finding in relation to respondents' attitudes towards government: even though levels of satisfaction from the interaction with government officials are low (see figure 2), asylum seekers still retain a high level of trust in the German government.
- A sharp contrast can be seen in relation to other refugees, where the great majority of respondents (69.2%) indicate distrust.
- The findings revealing the high level of trust towards German institutions hold when compared to respondents' levels of trust towards all groups of people in general: even while most respondents (56.1%) indicate that they generally distrust other people, the trust shown towards German institutions is very high (see figure 3).



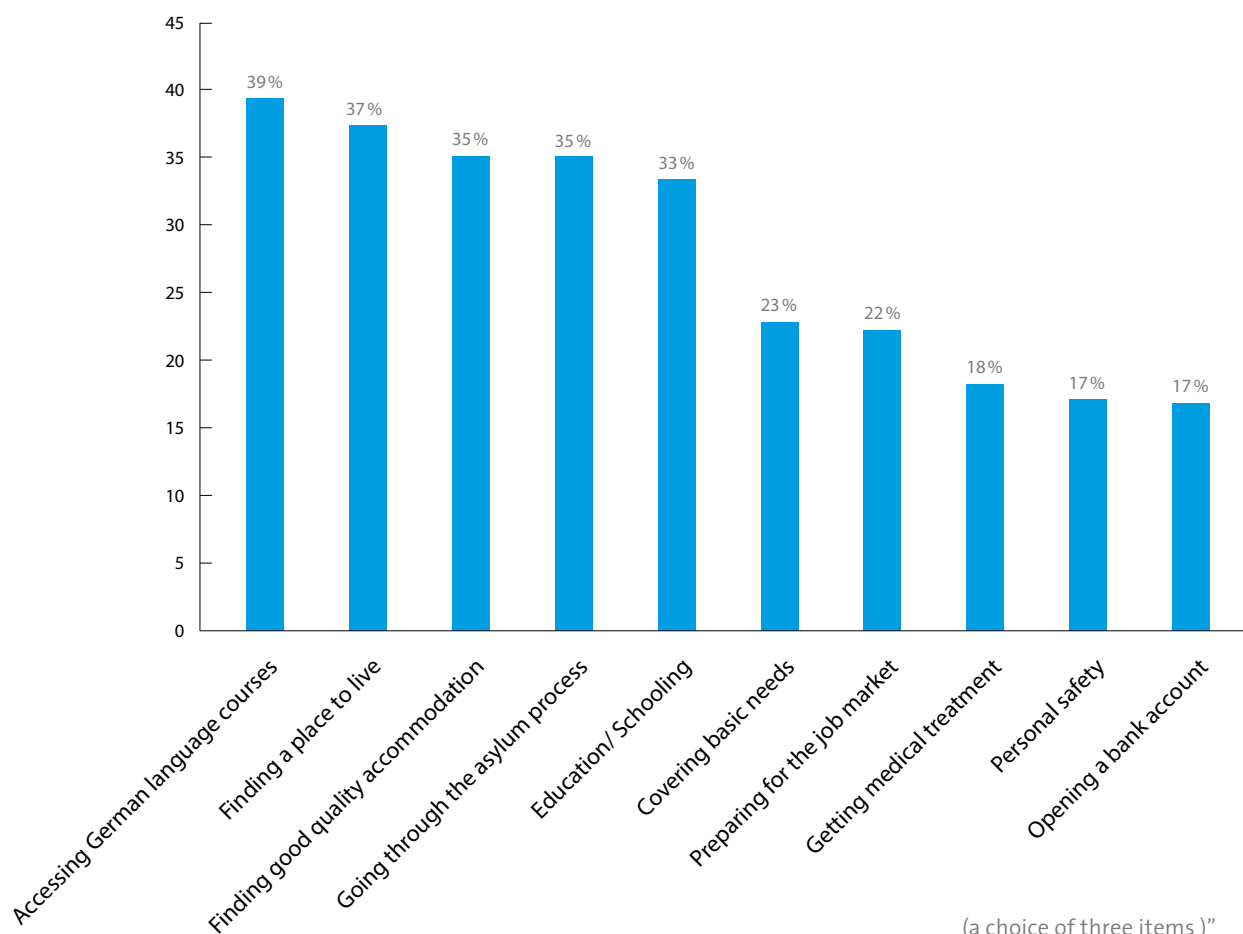
# III. Asylum seekers' perceptions of public services and public administration in Berlin

## The most important challenges for asylum seekers: finding adequate housing and preparing for the long term integration (see figure 4)

- Survey respondents indicated that, upon arrival in Berlin, their greatest challenges were related to fulfilling urgent, basic needs: finding accommodation (37.3%) and quality housing (35.0%), as well as going through the asylum process (35.0%).
- Furthermore, two other challenges marked by respondents are the access to German language classes (in fact the item picked by the greatest share of respondents – 39.3%) and to education and schooling (33.3%). As opposed to the items above, linked to basic needs, these latter choices reveal a preoccupation of asylum seekers with issues related to longer term integration in Germany.

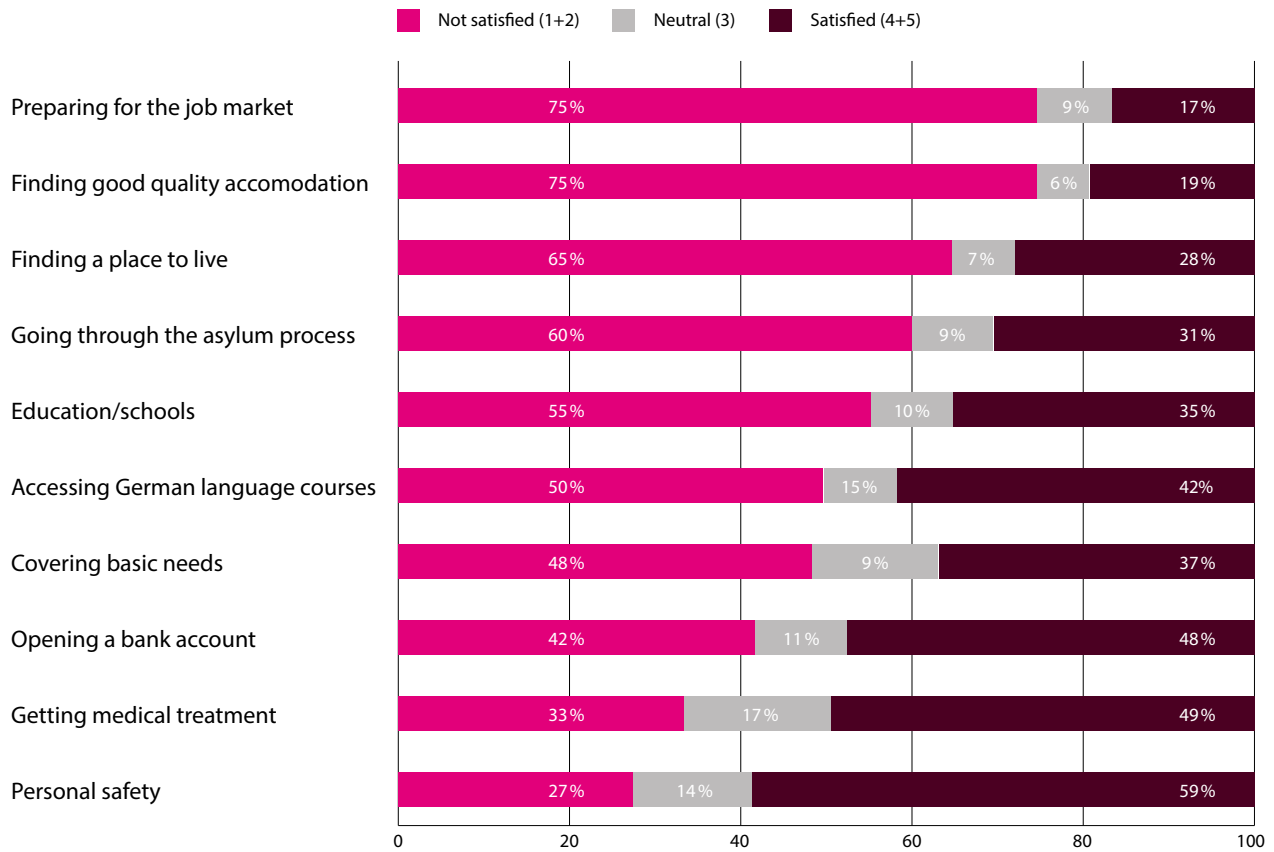
### “When you first arrived in Berlin, what were the greatest challenges you faced?”

Figure 4



(a choice of three items)”

## “How satisfied are you with the services you are currently receiving?”



(5 point scale, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied)

Figure 5

### Accommodation and preparation for the job market are areas with lowest satisfaction; but public services assessed more positively than expected (see figure 5)

- After inquiring about the areas posing obstacles to asylum seekers, the survey went on to include items regarding the satisfaction with the services that respondents were offered in these areas. Results show that by far the most problematic are support services preparing respondents for the job market and housing conditions (74.5% of respondents are dissatisfied in each case). The asylum process is also assessed negatively (by 64.6% of respondents).
- We note that areas deemed by respondents as challenging (housing, asylum process – see figure 4) generally tend to be assessed in a more critical manner.
- Surprisingly however, the levels of dissatisfaction drop sharply in certain areas and respondents assess quite positively personal safety (58.6%), medical treatment (48.4%) and bank account services (47.6%), as well as access to German courses (41.7%).
- Satisfaction with personal safety in particular is very high. This finding could be explained (based on the open comments made by participants at the end of the survey) through the perception of security that respondents have inside Germany, compared to their experiences before arrival.
- In most service areas we notice quite polarized perceptions and hardly any neutral positions: respondents either overwhelmingly mark a service as satisfactory, or quite on the contrary. This aspect indicates that rather than finding generalized cross-policy challenges, we see sharp but localized needs in a certain key sectors.

## “How would you describe your interaction with German government officials?”

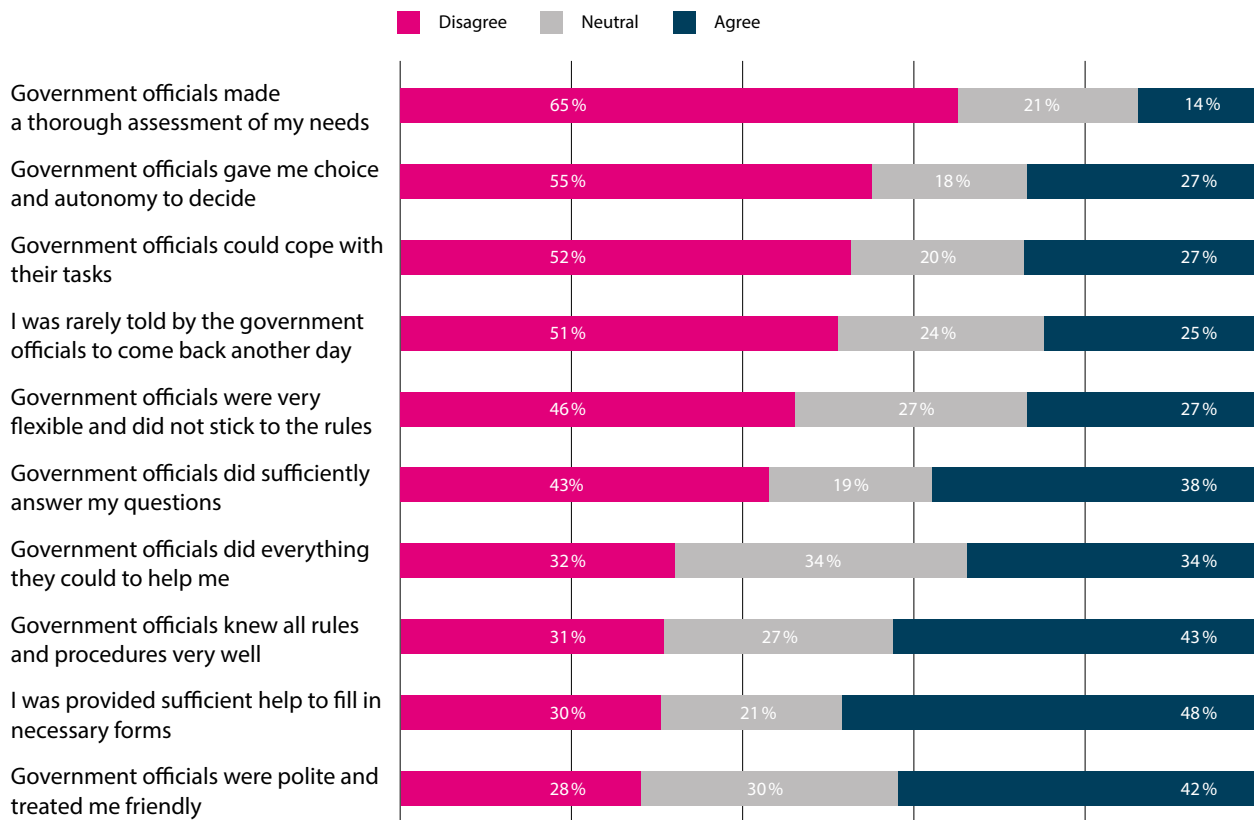


Figure 6

- Last but not least, many participants (44%) have noted that they feel uncomfortable receiving services from special programs exclusively for refugees. This would point to the interest of many asylum seekers in having a more independent, self-sustained role to play in their stay in Germany, rather than simply receiving assistance.

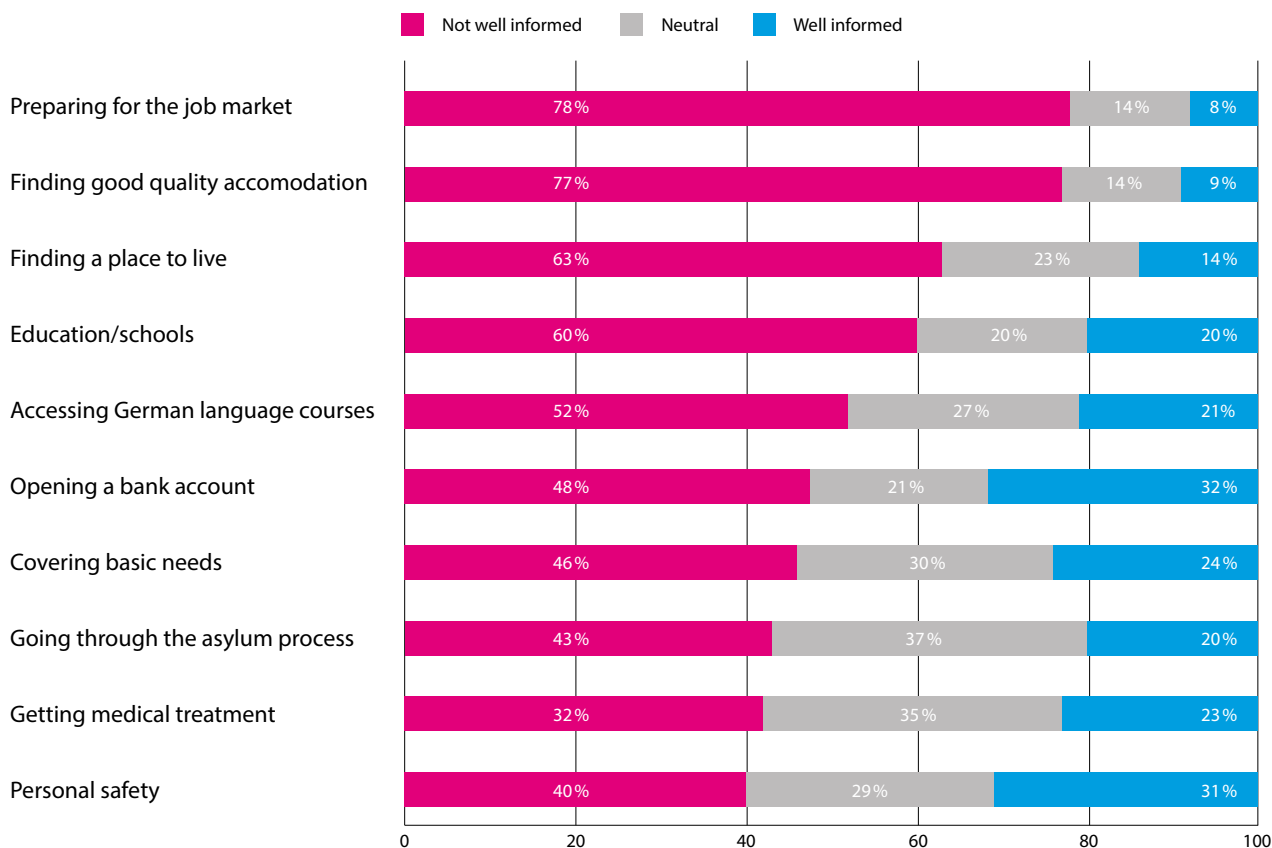
### Personal interaction with government officials assessed positively; but resource limitations are affecting the administration’s capacity to respond to asylum seekers’ needs (see figure 6).

- The next item in the survey went beyond the assessment of overall public service areas, to explore aspects of the personal interaction between asylum seekers and government officials. Here too the respondents’ assessment is more positive than expected. In particular, we find a good share of positive experiences related to the friendly treatment (41.6%), helpfulness (33.7%) and competence of public officials (42.7%).
- Resource limitations in the administration are however clearly taking their toll on officials’ capacity to respond to asylum seekers. An important share of respondents indicate for instance that their needs and qualifications have not been sufficiently well assessed (64.8%) and that government officials did not provide them with sufficient choice and autonomy to decide (55.0%). A majority of respondents have also pointed out that government officials are being clearly overwhelmed by their tasks (52.3% of responses), turning people away (51.0% of our respondents indicated regular delays), and having to im-

provide to cope with the situation (46% of respondents showed that officials are rather flexible and do not stick to the rules).

### “How informed do you feel about your rights/possibilities in the following areas?”

Figure 7



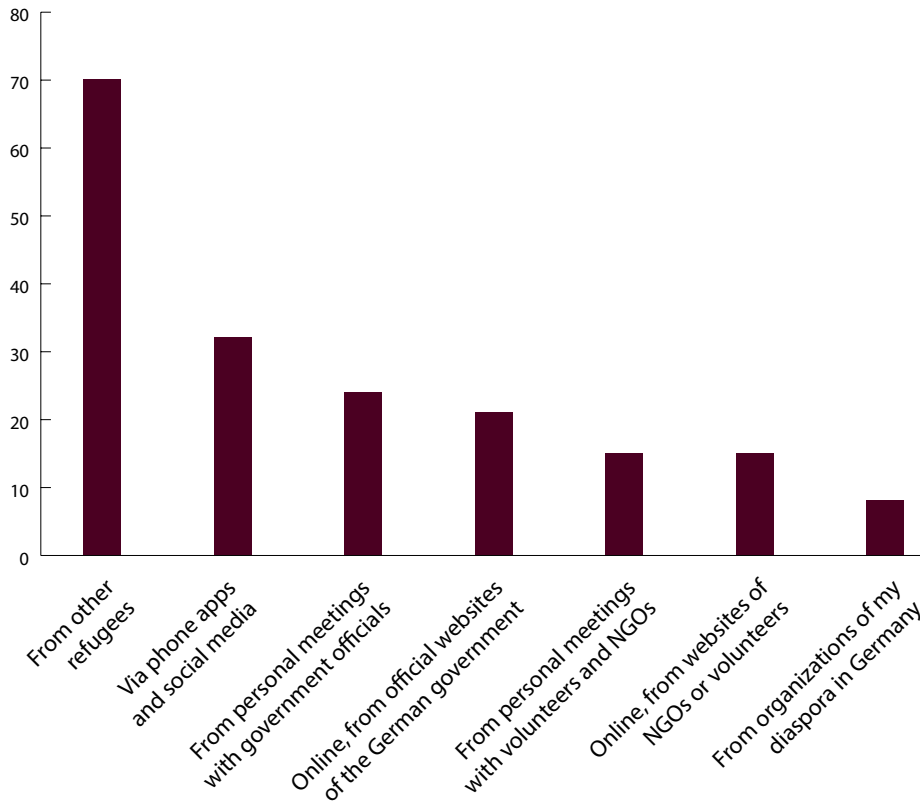
(3 point scale, where 1 = not at all satisfied and 3 = very satisfied)

### Lack of information as source of dissatisfaction (see figure 7)

- Respondents feel the least informed with regards to preparing for the job market (78.0% of respondents indicate this), finding quality accommodation (77.1%), as well as education (60.0%) and accessing German classes (51.9%).
- We notice similarities between these responses and those related to the lack of satisfaction with public services (see figure 5), which could indicate that a substantial lack of information in a certain area is likely to trigger dissatisfaction.
- Areas where more respondents are well informed are related to opening a bank account (31.7%) and (ensuring) personal safety (30.6%).

## “Where do you mostly get your information about government services (for example finding housing, asylum procedure etc)?”

Figure 8

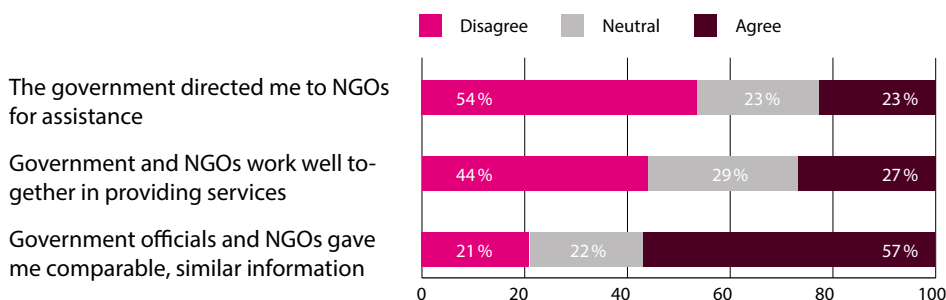


### The most important source of information: other refugees (see figure 8)

- Asked where they get their information regarding public services, the great majority of respondents (70.4%) pointed to other refugees as core source. These results underline the relevance of word-of-mouth and personal approaches in reaching out to refugees.
- While other refugees are the primary source of information, they are not necessarily seen as a trustworthy group (see figure 3), a result which points to potentially contradictory perceptions and experiences with fellow refugees and asylum seekers.
- Another somewhat relevant information source indicated was apps/ social media (32.5%). Other sources (websites of and personal meetings at government institutions and NGOs) are mostly considered irrelevant.

**“Based on your own experience, which of the following sentences would you would you agree/ disagree with?”**

Figure 9



(3 point scale, where 1= disagree and 3= agree)

## IV. The role of NGOs in service provision

### A surprisingly low perceived relevance of NGOs

- The involvement of NGOs in supporting asylum seekers has received intense attention in the media. Nonetheless, our findings suggest that, from the perspective of asylum seekers in Berlin, NGOs have a low profile in service provision and that generally, asylum seekers in Berlin are not aware of the role and activities of NGOs. The majority of respondents indicate consistently across service areas that NGOs have not been important to service delivery (responses vary between 41.1% in the case of personal safety and 55.2% for finding quality accommodation).
- There is also a substantial share of respondents in all areas who have a neutral position towards NGOs. Further survey results show that around 30% of respondents cannot describe their interaction with NGOs at all when asked to do so.
- The only areas where NGOs are seen as somewhat more relevant are personal safety (33.2%), job market preparation (where NGOs are relevant for 31.7% of respondents), and education/ schooling (31.0%).

### A substantial lack of collaboration between government and NGOs (see figure 9)

- Furthermore, from asylum seekers’ perspective, there seems to be a clear lack of collaboration between government and NGOs: 43.9% of respondents indicate that the two institutions do not work well together. In addition, most respondents mention that the government has not directed them to NGOs for assistance (53.6%).
- A more positive note is that both institutions are on the same page regarding the type of information offered to asylum seekers (rather than creating contradictory situations).

- The findings are also mirrored by a recent government survey conducted by the Hertie School, which confirms that collaboration with NGOs/volunteers is regarded as key challenge by government officials (Zukunftspanel Staat & Verwaltung 2016).

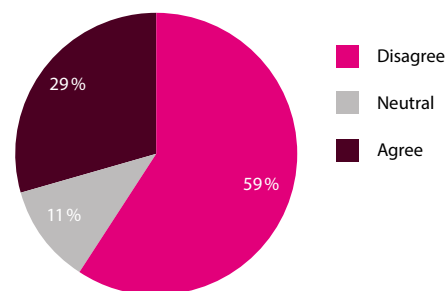
## V. Very different perceptions of services, depending on asylum seekers' countries of origin

### Evident perceptions of inequality among asylum seekers, with Afghan respondents reporting the sharpest differences in treatment (see figure 10)

- Our findings suggest that there is a growing feeling of inequality among the different asylum seeker groups, with Afghans in Berlin being particularly affected. Most respondents (59%), regardless of their country of origin, believe that refugees are not treated equally (and 73% of respondents from Afghanistan respectively). In addition, more than half of the Syrian and Afghani respondents state that the public procedures and services provided are inequitable and unfair, and that they are not applied in the same way for everyone.
- An important share of respondents from Afghanistan perceive an unequal treatment in relation to specific service area: 57% of respondents in the group indicated that finding housing was a challenge, compared to only 37% on average; this was also the case for around half the Iraqi respondents. A large share of Afghani respondents also indicate that accessing German courses is problematic (78% compared to the 39% sample average).
- Respondents from Albania and Kosovo report having the least exposure to NGOs of all respondent groups: 68.7% of all Albanian respondents have never interacted with NGO representatives (close to the double the total average).

#### “All refugees – no matter what nationality – are treated equally”

Figure 10



(3 point scale, where 1 = disagree and 3 = agree)

# VI. Concluding remarks: matching asylum seekers' needs with improved public services, a joint effort of refugees, government and civil society

Through this original quantitative survey jointly developed by the Hertie School and refugees, we aimed at offering a first-hand account of asylum seekers in Berlin regarding reception services in the city.

Some of our results confirm general perceptions regarding the challenges of the local government in managing the refugee intake to the city. Our findings show for instance that asylum seekers are most dissatisfied with the services related to accommodation and the asylum process (the handling of which has been heavily criticized by public opinion), as well as with labor market entry services and education. Survey results paint however a more nuanced picture of the situation of services for asylum seekers in Berlin.

Personal security and medical services are assessed in a largely positive manner. Personal interaction with government officials is also viewed in a surprisingly positive light, with officials being seen as competent, friendly and generally helpful. Asylum seekers also perceive them however as visibly overwhelmed, having to improvise to cope with tasks and frequently turning people away. These aspects point to larger systemic failures, beyond individuals' personal efforts of interacting with asylum seekers. NGOs, generally very visible in the public space, are not perceived as important to service delivery by asylum seekers.

Perhaps the most positive finding of the survey is that asylum seekers are extremely trusting and open to towards German citizens, NGOs and institutions in general. This has an important potential for long-term integration of refugees and should be used to facilitate cooperation between the state, non-governmental organizations and refugees themselves. Concluding this report, we would like to point out some implications for both government and NGOs based on the survey findings.

## Implications for government

German society and institutions benefit at present from a very high trust and openness capital from asylum seekers. This potential should be acknowledged as an important basis for cooperation for the medium and long term integration and encouraged through policies which build further institutional trust.

Results also show that systemic (and particularly resource) limitations in the administration rather than welcome culture failures weigh heavy in the process of managing the asylum seeker intake. Despite the visible personal efforts of the engaged government staff and their overall positive assessment by asylum seekers, further organizational effort and resources are required at the system level



in Berlin to limit delays and inefficiency and support civil servants in continuing their work in a manner that is efficient and beneficial to asylum seekers.

Survey findings point in particular to a number of basic service areas in Berlin (accommodation, the asylum process and labour market preparation in particular) where considerable improvements are still required.

Of course, covering urgent needs, such as accommodation, food, medical treatment should be a priority. Nonetheless, access to quality **services related to longer term integration**, such as language courses, education and labour market support should also be supported as early as possible after arrival, in order to facilitate a smoother integration process.

Information deficits are very high, across most service areas. In addition, credible and well informed sources, such as state institutions and NGOs are only to a small extent used by asylum seekers. Other refugees remain the main information sources, even despite generally low levels of trusts for each other among refugees. Building adequate communication channels and **ensuring access to correct and complete information is essential**, as inability to access information about existing services or use of incorrect information is likely to delay and complicate administrative processes and increase dissatisfaction with services.

**Providing equal and standard basic treatment to all asylum seekers**, irrespective of their country of origin, in the first stages after arrival and while their asylum request is being processed, should be a high priority. Not only would this ensure fairness and transparency in the way government handles asylum seekers, but doing so will likely aide the overall management of service provision, by defusing the increasing tension and competition between asylum seeker groups, as well as by maintaining their trust and capacity to actively collaborate with public institutions.

Furthermore, as survey results show, there is **considerable room for improvement in the cooperation between government and NGOs** in many areas, including in exchange of information and experience, and cooperating for a more effective promotion of existing services. A first step could be intermediating more actively between NGOs and asylum seekers by informing about and directly guiding the latter towards the services provided by NGOs.

## Implications for non-governmental organizations

One of the most surprising results of the survey was the relative low profile of NGOs to asylum seekers – particularly when otherwise considering the high levels of trust towards NGOs and volunteers. While this reduced prominence could be the result of the lack of experience of refugees with civil society, it points out the great **need of NGOs to better engage asylum seekers and refugees and clarify their roles and services**. NGOs should focus on exploring strategies of outreach and communications which would help them to better relay their functions and their existing services to asylum seekers and refugees.

Furthermore, in view of the major information deficits of asylum seekers, NGOs, just like in the case of government institutions, should also prioritize activities providing adequate and timely information in various areas.

In this regard, the experience of the survey has shown that personal (rather than online) contact, in the asylum seekers' native language, and where possible using the intermediation/ multiplication effects of other refugees and asylum seekers are the more effective ways of reaching out to refugees.

A positive finding of the survey is the visible openness of asylum seekers. German NGOs and volunteers are seen as by asylum seekers in Berlin as highly trustworthy. Asylum seekers are open to, accepting of NGO representatives and satisfied with the interaction with them when this takes place. Additionally, as results revealed, many asylum seekers feel uncomfortable taking especially-designed services; they might be more at ease playing a more independent role in their stay and integration. Overall, these aspects reveal an important **potential for co-involving interested asylum seekers** as partners in designing and delivering services.

*Anca Oprisor* is a Research Associate at the Hertie School of Governance, focusing on public sector reform and social policy. She has previously worked for the European Commission and the Open Society European Policy Institute. She is currently completing her PhD at the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

*Prof. Dr. Gerhard Hammerschmid* is Professor of Public and Financial Management at the Hertie School of Governance. He received his PhD from Vienna University of Economics and Business and served as assistant professor at the University's Institute for Public Management. His recent research includes the EU-wide project Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future (COCOPS), which he co-lead.

Hertie School of Governance  
Friedrichstraße 180  
10117 Berlin

[www.hertie-school.org](http://www.hertie-school.org)

For further information please contact:

Hertie School Communications  
+49 30 25 92 19 113  
[pressoffice@hertie-school.org](mailto:pressoffice@hertie-school.org)