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# Empowering Refugees!

Prevention of Religious Extremism  
Through Social and Educational Work  
With Refugees

REFUGEES –  
DIVERSE  
BIOGRAPHIES

WHAT MAKES  
SALAFISM  
ATTRACTIVE?

PREVENTION  
WORK

RESOURCES



# Introduction

The possible radicalisation of refugees is a concern, which plays a key role in public debate. This disquiet has been exacerbated following the attacks perpetrated by refugees in Ansbach, Würzburg, Berlin and Hamburg. Yet, at the same time, recent figures from security authorities in Germany show that refugees only play a marginal role in the spectrum of Salafism. Out of 850 individuals in Berlin identified by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution as being associated with this scene, only 27 of those people had come to Germany as refugees in recent years.

Despite this, there has of late been a sharp increase in requests for training to prevent radicalisation from both voluntary and paid staff who work with refugees – often, without a concrete ‘case’ that has given cause for concern. As a rule, the enquiries are concerned with support for pedagogical work, which aims to raise awareness in young people and preemptively sensitise them against possible radicalisation from religious extremist narratives. These measures also aim to strengthen the self-efficacy of youngsters and, by doing so, help them to adopt a position against extremist religious offers.

This handbook addresses this request. However, it also aims to counter the alarmism and overemphasis on the idea of prevention in work with refugees: Prevention from radicalisation is not the most urgent topic in terms of advice and assistance for refugees. They often face problems of a completely different nature (for example concerning legal uncertainty, living conditions or their lack of prospects) and these issues warrant increased attention in pedagogical work, independent of security concerns.

Nevertheless, refugees are a target group for radical narratives. Refugees can feel disorientated and pessimistic about their prospects and Salafists can exploit these notions and the often-difficult living situations in order to promote religious extremist worldviews. Their offers help to fill the gaps felt by refugees in areas of care, support and mentoring. Retreating into closed communities and rigid belief structures may seem attractive when there are no opportunities for participation, social contact, security or educational and career perspectives. Prevention is, therefore, not limited to recognising and reducing the ‘risks’ presented by certain individuals but rather, above all, it means making better provisions so that extremist promises do not seem attractive.

This booklet makes suggestions for primary prevention work, which should be in place prior to the emergence of possible radicalisation processes. Targeted support through counselling centres is usually required to offer individuals and their relatives a route away from, and out of, radicalised environments.

Sufficient offerings for refugees in social and youth work, and in civic education, are of particular importance for universal prevention. These support structures are a prerequisite in order to enable refugees to settle into society, to encourage self-efficacy and to allow real participation and they should be provided regardless of security interests.

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# Refugees: Diverse Biographies and Experiences

Our images and assumptions about the countries of origin and the religion of refugees influence our educational practice. It is important to constantly question these assumptions and to orient one's own practice around what we know, not around what we think we know.

Refugees do not make up some sort of holistic group. Refugees are people with many varied and individual biographies and experiences. Differences include countries of origin, age, marital status, legal status, social background, religious affiliation and reasons for fleeing – to name but a few. All of these aspects influence the needs, self-image, interests, orientation and goals of refugees. Personal details like whether someone has a family, whether their legal status is resolved or whether they have a degree or have finished school are often more important for pedagogical work than being exhaustively informed about society in Afghanistan or Eritrea.

Legal status in particular is of critical importance for the everyday life of refugees. The wish to gain a foothold in society is also dependent on the likelihood of that perspective. Uncertainty about the right to stay, obstacles relating to education and work due to issues with residency rights, and the threat of deportation of friends or relatives pose existential challenges for people. These shape the orientation and action of a person more than their place of origin.

The importance of religion for refugees, in regards to self-image and everyday life, is often overestimated. In public discussions refugees are often equated with being Muslim, as most refugees come from predominantly Muslim countries. Consequently, educators often express an interest to learn more about 'Islam' in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. This is understandable. However, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that Islam is very differently understood and lived in these countries and has different meanings for different people.

Another important issue in this context: not to view people through the prism of religion alone. Religion does not motivate all behaviour or every statement and this applies to societal roles and everyday habits, as much as it does to derogatory attitudes towards others. Even when someone declares that he/she acted in a certain way because of his/her faith, it is important to search for other motives that might 'explain' his/her behaviour and which can provide starting points for educational work.

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## REFUGEES FROM AFGHANISTAN: RELIGION DURING THE REIGN OF THE TALIBAN

Many refugees in Germany are from Afghanistan. This is hardly surprising in light of the security situation there, which has deteriorated significantly in recent years. In 2016 alone, almost 11,500 people were injured or killed through fighting or in attacks. Between January and October 2017, the figures reached over 8,000. A great deal of refugees from Afghanistan suffered from serious acts of violence. However, in many areas the influence of the Taliban not only manifests itself as direct violence, but also in the form of control over everyday life (for example in mosques, schools and educational institutions). The effects of this tyranny can be reflected in remarks refugees make about religion and beliefs: compromises, criticism or personal opinions were practically unimaginable under the rule of the Taliban and were suppressed with the threat of violence. Discussions and independent analysis about religious values and norms are still barely conceivable. These sorts of experiences in the country of origin must be taken into account in prevention work with young people, in order to allow for alternative approaches to topics and to develop different ways of dealing with issues. Open discussions should not be taken for granted. For this reason, safe spaces are all the more important in order to give young people the chance to formulate their own thoughts and interests without feeling pressurised or that sanctions are imposed on them.

Nonetheless, religion occupies a great place in the everyday lives of many refugees and can be used as a resource for pedagogical work. Religion provides community, identity and offers meaning and guidance. When dealing with flight experiences or learning how to cope in new and insecure environments, faith and religious practices can become important. It is not uncommon for people to 'discover their faith' as they flee – an aspect of life, which had not been important for them previously.

This interest in religion is picked up by many Muslim organisations in Europe and can be a reason for targeted cooperation. The support and counselling work of these communities and associations often goes beyond religious issues. Many Muslim associations and initiatives are making an important contribution through the social support of refugees. They provide clothing and food donations, accommodation, leisure activities or translation assistance and all of this, often, regardless of religion or origin.

For pedagogical work with refugees, it can be helpful to establish contact with Muslim organisations and specifically point out their offers. However, many refugees are accommodated in rural areas and connecting with the Muslim community is difficult. Even in the cities, it can be difficult for refugees to join mosques due to language difficulties or because of the content conveyed in the mosque. For example, it may well be that the mosque in the neighbourhood is too traditional for some refugees to feel comfortable there.

Even refugees for whom religion plays an important role in everyday life must not be reduced to their faith: People in Afghanistan also play football or are interested in art and culture, and young refugees are, first and foremost, young people. Religion is always just one facet that makes up a person. Other aspects, such as age, education or hobbies are no less important when it comes to developing interests and perspectives. For example, at first glance one cannot be sure whether a young woman from Syria actually has a particular interest in getting in contact with other Muslims or if she wouldn't rather search for a handball team.

In educational work it therefore makes sense to provide as many opportunities as possible, serving different needs and interests and thereby opening up options: Mosques and communities can be focal points but sports clubs, youth facilities, the voluntary fire brigade, theatre or music schools are equally important in providing refugees with leisure opportunities and counselling services. Preventive work faces particular difficulties in environments lacking these services.

## IN SHORT

- Knowledge of the countries of origin helps when comprehending people's reasons for fleeing, as well as when supporting refugees with legal matters. Nevertheless, this detail says little about the individual's self-image and their reality of life. For pedagogical work, it is important to repeatedly question one's own assumptions: Is a refugee from Iraq really religious? Just because a person is from Afghanistan, does it really mean that he/she came from a rural region and never went to school? Am I really offering things in line with what 'my' teenagers and young people are interested in - or are they more of a reflection of what I think appeals to them?
- Religion is a resource. It helps in difficult situations, creates bonds, identity and a feeling of community and solidarity. Although religious beliefs and practices may raise questions and conflicts in everyday pedagogical life, religion should also be seen as a tool to cope with difficult situations.
- Not every behaviour or statement can be explained by faith. It is important to stop viewing people through the prism of religion and instead question why someone speaks or behaves in certain ways. In doing so social, familial or personal motives are revealed, which can be addressed in educational work independent of religion.
- Religion may be a central aspect in the lives of many but it is not all-important, and religious offerings should not replace those from other institutions. Rather services should complement one another and people should be able to pick and choose from a range of different offers and organisations.

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## **ARE ALL PEOPLE FROM IRAN MUSLIMS?**

Our images and assumptions about countries of origin can deceive and create complications in educational work. There are currently around 150,000 people in Germany who either personally fled from Iran, or have parents who fled the country in previous decades. Given the current situation in Iran and the rule of the Islamic Republic, it is not surprising that the European public perception of those with Iranian backgrounds is often associated with images that we know from reports on Iran: a conservative society in which the state enforces rigid ideas about beliefs and one in which alternative readings of Islam are suppressed. These images, however, have very little to do with the present reality of life and the self-image of many that have come to Germany and other European countries from Iran since the end of the 1970s. Ultimately, people were fleeing the repression and persecution of the Islamic Revolution and therefore, had completely different alignments and convictions as those represented by the Iranian regime. That is still true today for many refugees who have fled Iran in recent years. For many people with Iranian backgrounds, religion often plays no role in their everyday life in Europe. Many remain sceptical about religion. It is therefore also important to regard the individual when discussing refugees who have fled Iran in recent years. Knowledge about countries of origin can be helpful, yet this must not shift the focus away from individual experiences and interests.

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## **ARE ALL REFUGEES FROM SYRIA VICTIMS OF THE 'ISLAMIC STATE'?**

Reports from Syria often deal with the violence of the 'Islamic State' or other jihadist groups, shaping our image of refugees from Syria. 'Syrians flee the violence of the Islamic State!' This widespread assumption implies that refugees from Syria suffered directly from acts of violence committed by jihadist groups and are, as victims, therefore, 'immune' to radical worldviews. In fact, most Syrians do not flee for fear of the 'Islamic State' but rather the civil war, in which the 'Islamic State' is just one actor amongst many. A survey of Syrian refugees in Germany found that around 70% of people blamed the regime for the war and thus for their flight. Fewer than 30% held the 'Islamic State' responsible. In terms of preventive work this means that for refugees from Syria, in contrast to perceptions of the German, British or French public, Salafism is not necessarily associated with rigid religious beliefs and violence. In European societies, many extremist religious groups in Syria evoke immediate associations with violence and terror. However, from the perspective of the local population in Syria, these groups might appear as, above all, fighters against the regime.

# What Makes Salafism Attractive?

Salafism is not an imported phenomenon. One must look at local conditions in order to understand why religious extremist offers appear attractive. Despite influences from Arab and Islamic countries and the references to Islamic history and tradition, experiences in host societies play a key role. The offer of community and a feeling of self-efficacy in radical scenes can be especially inviting for unaccompanied refugee minors.

The reasons for the appeal of Salafist narratives and offers are as diverse as the biographies of those who join the scenes and groups. Personal, social and political factors play a role here, as does religion. Often, not only the causes and motives of the Salafists differ but their mission statements and ways of doing things are also at odds.

When trying to explain the attractiveness of Salafism, it is important to take note of the differences between various currents. This particularly concerns those willing to use violence. In Germany, about 1,600 of a total of 11,000 persons associated with the Salafist scene in a strict sense, are considered violent. Yet even in this spectrum, various currents offer different aspects to their followers. Theological questions, for example, play a more prominent role in publications of al-Qaeda than in videos of the 'Islamic State'. Al-Qaeda has been typically characterised by its rather elitist approach. In contrast, the 'Islamic State' targets a wider audience, which is less concerned with theological arguments. They use more accessible content that is often youth culture-oriented ('pop-jihad'). The 'Islamic State', therefore, often reaches out to 'religious illiterates' who are less concerned with religious knowledge than with community, self-efficacy and rebellion.

Common to all currents of Salafism is the offer of simple answers (good/bad, black/white, haram/halal). These answers can ease daily life in a society, which may be new or difficult to understand. Issues surrounding values, norms, gender roles or social conflicts generally do not have simple solutions. The offer of a clearly allocated (gender) role and status is also a reason why women without migration backgrounds turn to these scenes. The clarity of Salafist worldviews liberates its followers from the responsibility of making decisions about lifestyle or societal roles – and gives them the framework to represent and justify themselves to parents, friends or teachers according to supposedly divine norms.

Another attractive aspect is the promise of community and solidarity, which is experienced through social bonds and concrete support. As a community of 'brothers' and 'sisters,' Salafist groups provide a substitute family promoting self-efficacy and empowerment: As a member of a Salafist group, I am someone and I can trigger reactions in my environment that I couldn't achieve with other provocation. Passport, origin or social status are irrelevant. What counts is the confession of faith, as it is understood by Salafists. This supposedly worldwide community of Muslims offers a possible alternative, especially for young people marginalised by or excluded from society.

Entry into the Salafist scene offers a new beginning and this can be attractive for both personal and religious reasons. Flight experiences, dropping out of school, family conflicts or experiences of crime and violence can lead to broken biographies and for these young people the turn to Salafism represents the possibility of starting a 'new life' and leaving behind old 'sins' or personal failure.

These Salafist inducements can also be attractive to refugees. Lack of social contact, experiences with racism in everyday life, uncertainties and a lack of prospects due to legal status are possible reasons that may promote a shift towards Salafist scenes. Expectations may have also been disappointed due to an economically insecure life in host countries.

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## WHAT FORMS OF RADICALISATION ARE THERE?

Radicalisation processes take on different forms. In the context of possible radicalisation of refugees, there are two main differences: people who were already radicalised in their country of origin and possibly entered Europe with terrorist intentions, and those who were first radicalised in Europe. Causes and motives differ considerably as do the possible ways of reacting to these phenomena. In Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees runs a network of counselling centres, which support the evaluation of individuals and provide possible measures for intervention and exit assistance (see appendix, similar advice centres and support hotlines exist in most European countries). These advice centres are often directed by civil society organisations, which means that information will be treated confidentially and only forwarded to police in the case of a security risk.



When one is seeking guidance, the promise of simple and clear answers can be very attractive.

Source: Facebook

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## WHAT IS SALAFISM?

Salafism is characterised by a literal understanding of religious sources according to the wording of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the stories from the life of the Prophet Muhammad), which are perceived by Salafists as binding regardless of time and social context. The term *Salafist* derives from the term *salaf* (Arabic for ancestors), which refers to the first three generations of Islam beginning with Prophet Muhammad and his companions in the early days of Islam. The ancestors are regarded as role models whose teachings and actions faithfully reflect the original doctrine of Islam and Salafists believe that these practices should be directly applied in modern everyday life.

Salafists differ significantly from other Islamic schools of thought that have, over the centuries, shaped the everyday life and thinking of Muslims. The history of Islamic theology is characterised by the emergence of different schools of Islamic law, which sometimes differ considerably in their approaches and in their treatment of religious sources. Internal Islamic discussions about interpretations have been indispensable to the history of Islam – as in Christianity and Judaism – and have long been regarded as a natural expression of diversity within a religion. From a Salafist point of view, these approaches to Islam are a distortion of the original doctrine. Claiming sole truth goes hand-in-hand with the rejection of other forms of reading and ways of behaving, which are condemned as a departure from supposedly true Islam.

It is important to remember that Salafism is understood differently in Europe as it is in many Arab and/or predominantly Muslim countries. In the latter, it is often associated with a special piety and does not have negative connotations. In many of these countries, people who are described as Salafist in European contexts are not necessarily considered 'problematic' or 'extremist'. This can lead to misunderstandings when discussing Salafism.

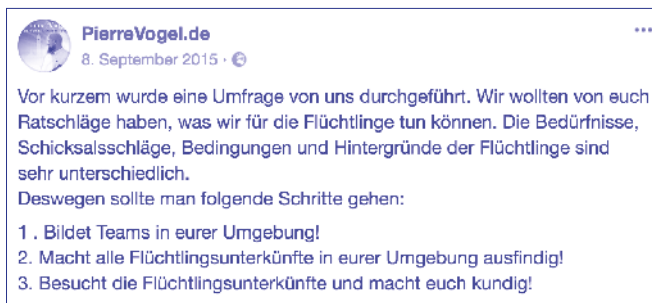
Terms more commonly used in Arab countries to refer to (violent) strains of Salafism are 'Wahhabism' (relating to the prevailing doctrine in Saudi Arabia), 'takfirism' (those who declare other Muslims infidels) or simply 'jihadism'. It is therefore all the more important to make it clear exactly what is meant when, for example, there is a warning about visiting a 'Salafist' mosque.



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## LEGITIMATE QUESTIONS, FALSE ANSWERS

'When will you finally wake up and support your brothers and sisters suffering in Syria?' This probing question can be found in various guises in Salafist content. Other messages deal with global inequality and poverty, racism and discrimination, the history of colonialism, actual or perceived double standards of Western policy in the Middle East or simply the crisis of capitalism. The focus is, therefore, not on religious issues but rather on quite real societal ills that many people – regardless of their country of origin or their religion – perceive as unfair and appalling. Many questions posed by Salafist media raise legitimate concerns. The problem resides in the answers that are given, for Salafists are not concerned with promoting an equal society or a human rights-oriented foreign policy. Nor do they want to help young men and women deal with the freedoms and responsibilities of a pluralistic society, so that they can live self-confident lives following their own path. The Salafist aim is to enforce a supposedly true Islamic social order in which human rights, equality and justice have no place. The problem, therefore, lies less in the questions Salafists ask but in the solutions they promote.



PierreVogel.de  
(popular Salafist preacher in Germany)

'In order to gather some suggestions about what we can do to assist refugees, we recently conducted a survey. The needs, ordeals, requirements and backgrounds of the refugees are very different. That's why one should take the following steps:  
1. Form teams in your area.  
2. Locate all refugee shelters in your area.  
3. Visit the shelters and get informed.'

Source: Facebook



Young refugees at a Quran distribution stand in Hamburg.

Source: Youtube

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## NARRATIVES TARGETING REFUGEES

Salafist narratives can be found on social media but they are largely conveyed in person, for example through encounters at Qur'an distribution stands or in cafés. Donation events for Syria, Yemen or other countries and so-called Islam seminars also serve to promote Salafist ideas. Refugees often come into contact with Salafist content through specific support services, such as clothing or food aid or whilst receiving translation assistance during visits to the authorities or doctor.

A particularly striking example for such content is shown in a video taken at a Qur'an distribution stand in Hamburg. This video shows how Salafists succeed in warning young refugees of the supposed dangers of a non-Islamic life in Germany by positively reaching out to them. The young men are held in high regard for their religious knowledge. Their stories of flight are recognised and acknowledged and they receive empathy for the suffering they experienced in their country of origin. The young refugees also gain concrete support in coping with questions of everyday life in their new environment. This video, which is well suited for raising awareness amongst educators, can be found on ufuq.de's website ([www.ufuq.de/Dawa-mit-Geflüchteten.mp4](http://www.ufuq.de/Dawa-mit-Geflüchteten.mp4)).

# Prevention Work With Refugees

Many experiences from primary prevention work with young people who have grown up in Germany or Europe can be taken up in preventive work with refugees. However, there are particularities related to experiences of flight and exile.

## Promoting Identity and Community

Many refugees find coexistence in European societies impersonal and distant, especially unaccompanied refugee minors who had to leave their family and social surroundings behind. Salafist groups often use these fractures to address refugees, regardless of religious issues. The open ear, security and warmth (which appear as a family substitute) and free time activities are possible motives for people to turn to Salafist groups. In many cases, people often do this without any background knowledge of these circles. Turning towards them often happens by chance: for example when someone is given a Qur'an as a present or because the only Mosque preaching in Arabic is Salafist. Most refugees are not aware of the various associations and societies in Europe and it is therefore difficult for them to classify them. Open conversation is important to find out why someone is interested in a certain mosque or group and to discuss possible alternatives.

In youth work, there are various ways to strengthen social bonds and a sense of belonging. In addition to sport and free time activities – offered, for instance, through youth centres – social contacts can be established through theatre or cultural projects, as well as associations and initiatives like the voluntary fire brigade and morning running groups. When working with young refugees, it is particularly important to actively approach youngsters and to encourage them to join the activities of the local youth club. Unlike young people that have grown up in the vicinity, many refugees are unaware of which facilities and opportunities exist in their local area. Refugees with uncertain residency statuses face the extra hurdle of not knowing whether they will be granted the right to stay. The effort needed to take the first step into a youth centre seems all the greater when it is unclear as to whether one will still be living in one's current country of residence in two months time. In this respect, targeted addresses to young people and outreach work by institutions are of particular importance. This also applies to staff and voluntary workers, who are in contact with refugees. They too play an important role in alerting young people to relevant offers and reducing reservations and barriers to services.

Fundamentally, this is not about creating new proposals for refugees but about using existing activities and promoting contact and connections with other young people from different backgrounds and with different biographies. Multi-lingual offers or support from translators can be helpful here but primarily in terms of facilitating access to existing services.

## Strengthening Participation and Self-Efficacy

Refugees face the challenge of finding a space in a new environment. Flight experiences mean a break with many certainties: the social and familial setting changes, career perspectives are uncertain, routines alter but also values and norms are no longer identical to those which may have previously been taken for granted in the country of origin. All the more important then, is the experience of involvement and participation in daily things. Here too social and youth work, as well as informal education, offer many opportunities to strengthen the involvement of refugees. Film or online projects, future workshops, neighbourhood projects or targeted engagement in associations and initiatives are examples of this. Diverse offers mean that young people can be directly involved in initiatives with the interests and skills that they bring with them.

Ultimately, promoting self-efficacy is key. Everyday life for refugees is often combined with a clear restriction of one's own autonomy and self-responsibility, especially for young people who left their home-countries without friends or family: Before, I was alone in an existential situation and suddenly now, I am subject to countless constraints? This concerns not only bureaucratic questions but already begins with the rules of the communal kitchen or the morning wake-up in a refugee centre. Here, participation in everyday life but also in sports and free time activities provide opportunities to experience self-efficacy.

Promoting participation and self-efficacy includes assuring young people that they are acknowledged and that their interests and perceptions are taken seriously: for example when it comes to developing common rules or guidelines for an institution. It is not about fulfilling all wishes and interests – that would not be possible in many cases. Nevertheless, the feeling of being taken seriously makes it easier to accept outcomes and live with compromises (for example, rules on how to deal with religious practices in a youth centre).

Despite all the problems associated with stories of flight and exile, these experiences can also be understood as resources. Every flight out of Afghanistan or Syria is made with great individual accomplishment. This is especially true for unaccompanied refugee minors and these experiences can be used in educational work to strengthen self-confidence and to encourage people to take pride in their own biography.

"Brothers Evening  
With fun, games and Islam.

We offer:  
Food and drinks  
Islamic lectures  
Fun and games  
(In separate rooms)

PARTICIPATION IS FREE OF CHARGE"

Invitation to an event by a Salafist  
organisation in Berlin.

Source: [berliner-muslim.de](http://berliner-muslim.de)

## FLIGHT, TRAUMATISATION AND RADICALISATION

Flight experiences are associated with great mental stress. The causes of flight from the countries of origin play a role here, as do experiences whilst fleeing or experiences after arriving in Europe. As a risk factor, mental stress is also important for prevention work. The 27-year-old Mohammed Daleel had received psychiatric treatment following a suicide attempt before committing an explosive attack in Ansbach in July 2016. The Berlin-based Diagnostisch-Therapeutisches Netzwerk Extremismus (Diagnostic-Therapeutic Network Extremism) advises on mental health problems for people at risk of radicalisation (see appendix). What is important here is the combination of pedagogical and psychological services that counteract the possible causes of radicalisation at various levels. It is also imperative to counteract the possible stigmatisation of the mentally ill. For example, Iris Hauth, President of the German Society for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Psychosomatics and Neurology, says that it would be wrong to 'psychologically justify every attack or serious act of violence as this view contributes to the stigmatisation of mentally ill people. The development of serious acts of violence is a rare event amongst this part of the population and can only be observed in the minority. Mentally ill people are not responsible for the vast majority of acts of violence.' (Expert conference, 'Radikalismus – wenn Menschen extrem werden, [www.dgppn.de](http://www.dgppn.de))

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## SPECIAL SITUATION OF UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

In 2016 alone, more than 35,000 children and adolescents came to Germany as unaccompanied refugees. They find themselves in a particularly difficult situation. Refugee minors share youth-related questions and conflicts with youngsters who have grown up in Germany: uncertainties regarding educational or professional paths, the search for belonging, questions about role models etc. However, the situation for unaccompanied refugees is particularly difficult due to the lack of direct familial connections and all the other existential resources that these attachments provides: unconditional emotional support, solid social identity, binding social ties, orientation in questions of values and norms. Experiences of flight and violence in the countries of origin provide additional difficulties. Studies concluded that about half of the child refugees in Germany suffer from psychological stress. One in five children has been diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, often accompanied by suicidal thoughts. At the same time, there is a lack of therapeutic offers for flight and war trauma. Making it all the more important to provide care, counselling and support in one's native language in order to respond to these particular difficulties and needs.

Additionally, unaccompanied minors often experience a lack of self-efficacy and a feeling of being at the mercy of external circumstances. Especially for adolescents and young adults who were left on their own during their flight to Europe, the legal insecurities of everyday life and constricting rules experienced in supervised shelters signify a clear limitation of previously experienced autonomy and personal responsibility.

## Religion as Both Opportunity and Challenge

Religion can play an important role in the daily lives of refugees. It is a resource that, especially in youth, can be meaningful and help build resilience and identity. Religion also offers orientation, a basis for community and a sense of belonging. Discussing religious issues is, therefore, also important in educational and prevention work with refugees. It is usually less about *teaching* religion, as it is about *giving a space* to the questions and interests of young people. This allows different approaches to religious beliefs and practices to be demonstrated, as well as views and experiences to be shared, encouraging young people to enter into a dialogue. Naturally, non-religious perspectives also have their place in this: religion is just a way to open conversation but it is not necessarily the most important topic for all refugees. Nevertheless, it may make sense to make religious offers to young people, or to give them opportunities to practice their faith, for example within a mosque. Again, however, a religious offer alone is not enough. Other youth-specific propositions are equally important in strengthening social bonds and addressing non-religious interests.

Yet religion is not just a positive resource; it may also fuel conflicts. Religious symbols and behaviours can serve to provoke others and to attract attention, which may have been otherwise lacking. For instance, roommates of the Hamburg assassin, Ahmad A., reported that A. often called *Allahu Akbar* through the shelter. It would have hardly been possible to garner more attention.

Religion offers support and direction but can also lead to the claim of absolute truth, accompanied by notions of religious mission and the desire to impose standards and norms. It offers the feeling of community and identity and gives a sense of belonging, especially when one feels disconnected and excluded in a new environment. Religion can, however, promote withdrawal and the devaluation of others: 'I have experienced rejection repeatedly but Salafists offer me a community in which my commitment to the "true religion" makes me a "brother" or a "sister."' Salafist communities are easily accessible and there it is secondary where someone comes from or which social status they have.

In pedagogical work there are three aspects, which identify the moments when religiosity 'tilts' and can no longer be justified by religious freedom: anti-pluralism and related social pressure, the claim to absolute truth and the devaluation of other people and other lifestyles. These are statements and behaviours that can provoke conflicts and restrict the freedoms of others. Yet, religion itself plays only a marginal role here. All educators know these three points from their daily work with youngsters. No matter whether they are seen in instances of bullying, racism or peer pressure, they are unfortunately by no means new. The experiences in dealing with such attitudes and behaviours can, therefore, be transferred when dealing with expressions of religious-extremist ideologies.

## Civic Education

Civic education is not about imposing values and norms but rather about reflecting on attitudes and orientations, strengthening recognition of social diversity and promoting ambiguity tolerance. Flight experiences offer numerous starting points for discussions where questions of identity, basic values or role models can be raised - not only amongst refugees but also with young people who have grown up in Europe. Thereby the different experiences and heterogeneity of the group can be used to dismantle generalised notions of 'the' refugees or 'the' Germans/British etc. After all, social differences or different educational backgrounds also characterise attitudes and orientations amongst refugees. There may be more in common between a student from Damascus and one from Amsterdam or Berlin than between the student from Damascus and a craftsman from Daraa.

By bringing similarities and differences into the open and through experiencing acceptance and recognition independent of individual orientation, one can be made aware of Salafist narratives and of community offerings that are rigid and pejorative. Similarly, political and social conflicts (for example on the role of human rights in European foreign policy or about same-sex marriage) can be addressed in order to raise awareness of contradictions and conflicts in a pluralistic society and to show that this is normal. Experiences gained from projects, like the Berlin-based 'Kreuzberg Initiative Against Anti-Semitism,' show that even difficult topics such as the Israel-Palestine conflict can be discussed and different perspectives and experiences can be shown. Peer education approaches, where young people with flight experiences have been moderators in the talks of others, have proven to be particularly helpful.

# The Right to be Religious and the Problem of Recognising Radicalisation Processes

Nobody is going to become radicalised overnight. The shift to extremist ideologies and groups is a process that happens in phases and often manifests itself in visible changes. Therefore, it is important to know certain features that may indicate radicalisation. *May!* Symbols, behaviour and statements can rarely be interpreted unambiguously.

Many religious symbols that play an important role for Salafists have great significance for other Muslims too. Moreover, an outwardly worn and confidently practiced religiosity is a basic human right. This is ensured by freedom of religion.

This makes it more difficult to recognise and in turn to deal with problematic changes. Hence the appeal to follow these suggestions: *inquire rather than dramatise, seek conversation rather than condemning, show interest rather than scandalising*. Only in this way can the motives of young people be understood and ways of dealing with them can be developed that neither stigmatise, nor provoke. Finally, religious symbols and outward appearance, whether consciously displayed or not, always offer opportunities to initiate conversation.

## I. Outward Appearance

### Religious Symbols/Religious Clothing

About 23 % of Muslim women in Germany between the age of 16 and 25 wear a headscarf. For many refugees the headscarf is an important and normal aspect of their faith – or is simply regarded as fashionable and chic. The same applies for beards and traditional clothes. Nevertheless, radicalisation processes can also be expressed in the adoption of religious symbols and looks. For many Salafists, these aspects simultaneously signal belonging to the community of true believers and mark a clear distinction with the ‘unbelieving’ world. However, there have also been cases where violent Salafists tried to disguise their convictions through an inconspicuous appearance. Ultimately, outward changes alone are not an indication of a possible shift to extremist scenes. Radicalisation is always reflected in attitudes and behaviours too.

..... Outward change – such as the decision to wear traditional clothing – can be a starting point for a conversation. This is not because such changes indicate radicalisation but rather because it always makes sense to show interest in, and ask about personal change, when working with adolescents and young adults.

## Excessive and Rigid Adherence to Rituals

Rituals play an important role in most religions and this also applies to Islam. Salafism uses rituals as it uses religious clothing and symbols: to highlight special aspects of their faith and differentiate themselves from others. Rituals are excessively and relentlessly demanded. Strict adherence proves that one lives the 'true faith.'

## II. Attitudes

### Rejection of Pluralism and Rejection of Others

The rejection of diversity – religious, cultural, political – is an important feature of all religious extremist currents. Young people from those scenes also vehemently advocate such standpoints. For them, pluralism and different attitudes and ways of life are not the norm, but rather a deviation from the true faith and a danger to unity. For radical movements, there is only one true faith – all others are not only different but also wrong. This manifests itself in the categorical rejection of other views that are deprecated and denounced as immoral and sinful.

Many people have reservations about pluralism and diversity. Coming into contact with different people and their various lifestyles, biographical experiences and understandings of religion and roles is important in order to experience the self-evident nature of such differences and to be able to deal with them. This also applies to the team or staff in an institution: diversity can be exemplified by representing and thus recognising differences. When people are taken seriously and feel respected by others it becomes easier to deal with differences.

All people follow rituals, whether consciously or not. Pedagogical work is not about criticising rituals but about stimulating reflection on them and their backgrounds, as well as their potential impact on others. Rituals should not be criticised as irrational or incomprehensible. The emphasis is rather on understanding why someone acts in a certain way and what that person wants to express. In a conversation, it becomes clear whether the ritual is important to that person because it 'belongs to religion' and gives something to them (for example support or a structured daily routine) or if it is intended as a means of differentiation and provocation.

## New Beginning/Return/Conversion

Young people who radicalise often describe this development as a new beginning or as a conversion to the true faith. Their new worldview and new orientation grant them an absolute break with the past and a radical new beginning. This is accompanied with a decisive depreciation of ideas, interests and orientations that were important to them before.

## Conspiracy Theories

Similar to other extremist ideologies, conspiracy theories also play an important role in Salafist thinking. The idea of a timeless conspiracy of 'everyone's against us' is a means to reduce social complexities and to absolve one's own community of responsibility.

## Thinking in Terms of 'Us' and 'Them'

Islamist worldviews are characterised by ideas of homogenous groups that are incompatible: such as 'us' and 'them.' This is expressed, for example, in the idea that 'the' West is materialistic, individualist and against 'the' Muslims, but also in the assertion that there is just one Islam that it is lived equally by all Muslims.

Withdrawing to notions of 'us' ('us Muslims,' 'us Afghans') is often a reaction to experiences of exclusion and to a sense of not belonging ('you are different,' 'you are strangers'). It is, therefore, all the more important to highlight similarities and strengthen bonds and notions of identity within the social setting.

## Rejection of Democracy and Man-Made Rules and Laws

Scepticism about democracy and the political order is widespread amongst young people, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In radical movements, this is not intended as a critique of injustices and political structures but a general rejection of the idea that 'all power comes from the people.' Here, God alone is sovereign. This idea is combined with the desire for clarity and explicit rules that absolve one of responsibility.

The experience of participation makes democratic values and principles more attractive. This already applies on a small-scale, for example when co-determining rules in institutions or having the possibility to bring one's own experiences and interests into the discussion. It is also important to bring contradictions and conflicts out into the open. Everyday life in a pluralistic society is full of conflicts, to which there are often no easy answers. This includes considering and talking about one's own inconsistencies and encounters with ambiguities. Recognising mistakes or abuses within society is also important, in order to credibly promote democratic values and convictions as an educator.



### III. Behaviour

#### Social Withdrawal

Religious beliefs can also affect modes of behaviour, for example, when it comes to relationships between members of the opposite sex. Shaking hands between men and women is unusual in some traditional Islamic settings. Also in Europe, some Muslims feel that inter-gender handshaking is improper. This often has something to do with traditional gender roles but it can also signal a distancing from the non-Muslim environment. Such an aversion is characteristic of Salafism. Contact to non-Muslims and even to Muslims who live Islam differently, is considered potentially dangerous. In the most extreme cases, this means a complete retreat into one's 'own' community.

#### Social Pressure and Proselytising

An important feature of radical movements is the aspiration to convince others of the correctness of their faith. The da'wah, which means to invite or summon someone, is considered an individual duty to every Muslim in the Salafist movement. This can be expressed, for example, in vehement attempts to urge others into wearing a headscarf, to pray or to fast. Social pressure and bullying is typical behaviour of Salafist followers against peers who refuse to behave in the supposedly correct way.

The refusal to shake hands leads to conflict time and again. Many non-Muslims consider this as showing a lack of respect. For Muslims who decide not to shake hands, the refusal can have a very different background, namely the wish to avoid direct physical contact with the opposite sex. It is not meant to represent devaluation. Often those who do not wish to shake hands put their hands on their hearts in greeting and understand this as an expression of recognition. Of course, supposedly common gestures are not always clear. Only by asking questions and engaging in dialogue can one clarify what is meant by a gesture and understand the motives behind it. Mutual recognition, which can be gained through these sorts of conversations, is of much more value than a strong handshake.

Most Salafists see it as their duty to proselytise others. In doing so, they often resort to forms of social pressure to urge others to follow certain rules. There are many parallels to other forms of harassment and bullying, familiar to many in everyday pedagogical life. Here it is helpful to state the problem specifically, which is the social pressure itself and not the religious justification possibly cited for it. Clear lines can be drawn without religiosity becoming a problem. It should be made apparent that it is his/her personal behaviour or attitude that is being challenged and not his/her faith that is being attacked.

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## IS EVERYTHING 'IS'?

The image of fighters with Kalashnikovs on a Facebook profile rarely bodes well and yet it is important to explore this more carefully, as an example from our work illustrates. A school asked us for help after a student posted a picture of armed fighters on his Facebook page. The teacher feared that the student expressed sympathy for the 'Islamic State.' Only in conversation did it emerge that the fighters were members of the Lebanese Hezbollah, who are fighting in the Syrian civil war on the side of the regime and Iran against Sunni jihadists. Expressions of sympathy for Hezbollah are also problematic but they are motivated by reasons other than those sympathetic to the 'Islamic State.' The same applies for statements of support for the Syrian regime, which are by no means rare. Similar to Hezbollah, the Syrian regime is also seen by many Syrians and Lebanese as the protector of the Alawi, Shia and Christian minorities in Syria and Lebanon. The experience of minorities and the concern about jihadist violence are possible motives for supporting militant organisations, which must also be considered in educational work.

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## WHAT IS ACTUALLY FORBIDDEN?

In recent years, the Federal Minister of the Interior has banned several Salafist organisations in Germany. Similar bans were imposed in other European countries. In Germany, the use and distribution of certain symbols is forbidden. In practical terms, identifying these symbols is difficult for many educators. This is especially problematic with the symbol of the 'Islamic State,' as it takes up a passage from the Islamic creed.

### Note:

The creed itself is, of course, not forbidden but the graphical form used by the 'Islamic State' and Millatu Ibrahim (another banned organisation) must not be used or distributed.





## UFUQ.DE – JUGENDKULTUREN, ISLAM & POLITISCHE BILDUNG

ufuq.de is a recognised organisation providing youth welfare services, civic education and is active in prevention work relating to the themes of Islam, racism and Islamism. We strive to develop alternatives to the heated debates surrounding 'parallel societies', religious-based radicalisation and a supposed 'Islamisation' of Germany.

ufuq.de acts as a nationwide point of contact for educators, teachers and staff employed by public authorities. Working at the intersection between civic education, pedagogy, scholarly research and political debate, we aim to inform, advise and support in the challenges that educational work can face in a culturally diverse society. That is why our association is named 'ufuq,' which is Arabic for 'horizon.'

Many questions and conflicts regarding the 'naturalisation of Islam' arise in everyday life, at school, at work or in politics. The focus, however, is not whether this process of naturalisation has or will happen, but rather how it is constructed.

Our key question is: 'How do we want to live?' We are interested in the *lebenswelt* of young people: Which interests and hopes do young Muslims have? How do they view themselves and others? What has been their personal experience and how do they live their faith – if, indeed, their faith is an important part of their lives. We share this knowledge with professionals in the field, to develop methods for dealing with societal and religious diversity. At the same time, our work aims to train experts in strategies to prevent racism and religious-based ideologies of demarcation and devaluation.

# Advice Centres and Projects

## Advice Centres

Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung –  
Bundesamt für Migration und Flücht-  
linge in Zusammenarbeit mit  
zivilgesellschaftlichen Trägern  
Tel. 0911/943 43 -43

DNE – Diagnostisch-Therapeutisches  
Netzwerk Extremismus (ZDK Zentrum  
Demokratische Kultur gGmbH)  
[www.dne-deutschland.de/dne](http://www.dne-deutschland.de/dne)

### Baden-Württemberg

Beratungsstelle Baden-Württemberg  
(Violence Prevention Network)  
Tel. 0711 / 21 95 62 63  
[bw@violence-prevention-network.de](mailto:bw@violence-prevention-network.de)

### Bavaria

Beratungsstelle Bayern  
(Violence Prevention Network)  
Tel. 089 / 416 11 77 10  
[bayern@violence-prevention-network.de](mailto:bayern@violence-prevention-network.de)

Fachstelle zur Prävention  
religiös begründeter Radikalisierung  
in Bayern ([ufuq.de](mailto:ufuq.de))  
Tel. 0821 / 65 07 85 60  
[bayern@ufuq.de](mailto:bayern@ufuq.de)

### Berlin

Beratungsstelle Hayat  
(ZDK Gesellschaft Demokratische  
Kultur gGmbH)  
Tel. 0157 / 71359963  
[info@hayat-deutschland.de](mailto:info@hayat-deutschland.de)

Beratungsstelle KOMPASS  
(Violence Prevention Network)  
Tel. 030 / 23 91 13 00  
[kompas@violence-prevention-network.de](mailto:kompas@violence-prevention-network.de)

### Bremen

Beratungsnetzwerk Kitab  
(VAJA – Verein zur Förderung  
akzeptierender Jugendarbeit e.V.)  
Tel. 0157 / 55 75 30 02  
[kitab@vaja-bremen.de](mailto:kitab@vaja-bremen.de)

### Hamburg

Fach- und Beratungsstelle für  
religiös begründete Radikalisierungen  
(Legato e.V.)  
Tel. 040 / 38 90 29 52  
[beratung@legato-hamburg.de](mailto:beratung@legato-hamburg.de)

### Hesse

Beratungsstelle Hessen  
(Violence Prevention Network)  
Tel. 069 / 13 82 26 86  
[hessen@violence-prevention-network.de](mailto:hessen@violence-prevention-network.de)

### Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Fachstelle für Prävention von  
religiös begründetem Extremismus –  
Bidaya (CJD Nord)  
Tel. 0160 / 8825607  
[kathrin.barkam@cjd-nord.de](mailto:kathrin.barkam@cjd-nord.de)

### Lower-Saxony

Beratungsstelle zur Prävention  
neo-salafistischer Radikalisierung  
(beRATen e.V., Hannover)  
Tel. 0511 / 92 09 21-0  
[info@beraten-niedersachsen.de](mailto:info@beraten-niedersachsen.de)

### North Rhine Westfalia

Beratungsnetzwerk Anschluss  
Beratung für Hilfesuchende zum  
Themenfeld Radikalisierung  
und Extremismus im Kontext der  
Flüchtlingsarbeit (IFAK e.V., Bochum)  
Tel. 0234 / 68 72 66 -64  
[beratungsnetzwerk@ifak-bochum.de](mailto:beratungsnetzwerk@ifak-bochum.de)

### Rhineland Palatinate

Beratungsstelle DIVAN  
Prävention gegen religiös begründete  
Radikalisierung (Landesamt für  
Soziales, Jugend und Versorgung)  
Tel. 06131 / 96 75 04  
[divan@lsjv.rlp.de](mailto:divan@lsjv.rlp.de)

### Saarland

Yallah! Fach- und Vernetzungsstelle  
Salafismus im Saarland  
Tel. 0681 / 5867 708  
[info@salafismuspraevention-saar.de](mailto:info@salafismuspraevention-saar.de)

### Saxony

Beratungsstelle Sachsen  
(Violence Prevention Network)  
Tel. 0351 / 26 44 04 99  
[sachsen@violence-prevention-network.de](mailto:sachsen@violence-prevention-network.de)

### Schleswig-Holstein

PROvention – Präventions-  
und Beratungsstelle gegen religiös  
begründeten Extremismus  
Tel. 0431 / 739 49 26  
[provention@tgsh.de](mailto:provention@tgsh.de)

### Thuringia

Beratungsstelle Thüringen  
(Violence Prevention Network)  
Tel. 03643 / 5448913  
[thueringen@violence-prevention-network.de](mailto:thueringen@violence-prevention-network.de)

## Projects

Willkommen bei Freunden  
(Deutsche Kinder- und  
Jugendstiftung)  
Welcome Friends (German  
Children and Youth Foundation)

'Six regional offices are helping cities and districts to welcome young refugees in kindergartens and schools, and to accompany them on their transition into the working environment. These service offices offer not only advice and qualifications to administrative staff and municipal institutions, but also support the establishment of alliances between authorities, associations and educational and refugee institutions at the local level.'

[www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de](http://www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de)

Discover Diversity.  
Between the past and present.  
(KIGa Berlin)

'Discover Diversity – Between the Present and the Past' is a pilot project involving young refugees in civic education, which takes their own experiences into account and searches for new approaches to historical and civic education. The focus is on living together within a diverse society in Germany. This topic is linked to the history of migration and how diversity has been dealt with in the past. The project will confront prejudices, in particular anti-Semitic patterns of thinking and interpretation, and combine this with reflection on the social position of young refugees and the identification of strategies of action in cases of discrimination.

[www.kiga-berlin.org](http://www.kiga-berlin.org)

movemen – empowering male  
refugees (Bundesforum Männer)

'Movemen opposes derogatory and threatening depictions of "the male refugee" by offering varied and inspiring perspectives. Movemen sharpens the awareness of the specific situations, strengths and challenges of refugee boys and men. Movemen enables encounters and conversations in order to look ahead and move forward together.'

[www.movemen.org](http://www.movemen.org)

For more projects in Germany see  
[www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/  
radikalisierungspraevention](http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/radikalisierungspraevention)





[ufuq.de](http://ufuq.de)

Civic education and prevention

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[info@ufuq.de](mailto:info@ufuq.de)

[www.twitter.com/ufuq\\_de](https://www.twitter.com/ufuq_de)

[www.facebook.com/ufuq.de](https://www.facebook.com/ufuq.de)

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und Jugend

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**Robert Bosch**  
Stiftung