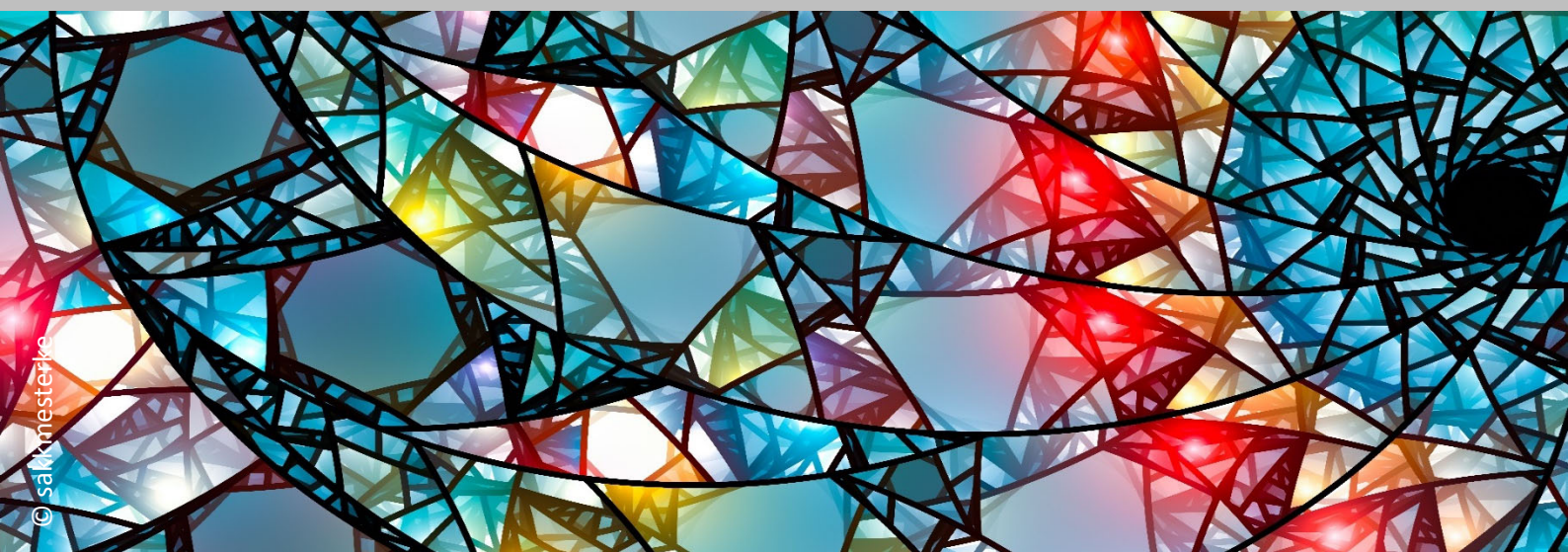




**NOVAMIGRA**

NORMS AND VALUES IN THE  
EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

September 2020 BRIEFING PAPER



# The 'Refugee Crisis' and Religious Tolerance in Europe: Plurality of Perspectives

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## Acknowledgments

This report is based on empirical field research in five countries: Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden. The research team was warmly received in each country. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to all the representatives of governments and civil society groups, including faith-based organizations, for spending time with us discussing issues of religious tolerance and religious plurality. We are especially grateful to the refugees and migrants who opened their communities to us. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

We also want to thank the European Union's taxpayers for funding this project. We hope we spent their hard-earned money wisely and efficiently.

And finally, we would like to thank each other. Writing this report was a team effort and despite being quarantined for many weeks in far-flung countries, we still enjoyed exchanging ideas, research findings, and numerous drafts to produce the final product.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program under grant agreement No 770330.

## Key recommendations

Religious pluralism has existed in Europe for centuries. Comprehensive legal frameworks at the European and national levels have been created and put in place to prevent any form of discrimination on the basis of one's beliefs. Yet, the increasing religious and ethnic diversity resulting from the 2015 'refugee crisis' became a source of challenges to religious freedom and tolerance. In the context of the recent 'refugee crisis,' religion has gained even more significance and become the subject of many public debates. On the one hand, politicians, religious leaders, and other public figures openly expressed their opposition to refugee reception by framing Islam as a threat to the identity of the European continent, reducing refugees' complex identities to their religious affiliation. These debates antagonized many people against those seeking safe haven in Europe. On the other hand, our research has identified a plethora of voices and activities undertaken to 'welcome the stranger.' Many civil society representatives interviewed in Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden explained their motivation to assist and solidarize with asylum seekers by referring to religious values. Their engagement in aid of refugees was an implicit practice of religious tolerance. Other actors and communities had a very explicit mission to foster and promote the value of religious tolerance through ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Considering the implications of the EU's own commitments to religious tolerance and religious plurality and our ethnographic research as well as existing writings about religious tolerance, we recommend to:

- ◆ Strengthen the powers of the European Commission in arenas relevant to religious pluralism, including forced migration and refugee integration;
- ◆ Expand the competences of the EU Court of Justice to review the relationship between EU law and religion and the legally binding nature of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- ◆ Ensure that religious freedom guaranteed by EU and national laws allows everyone to choose/change their beliefs, freely practice their faith, access and establish communities and places of worship;
- ◆ Provide legal mechanisms to report acts of religious discrimination;
- ◆ Establish support for victims of religiously motivated crimes;
- ◆ Maintain the universalistic principle of freedom of religion, understood both as freedom *of* belief and freedom *from* belief;
- ◆ Ensure that refugees, immigrants, religious minorities, and refugee leaders have a voice in policy dialogues at all levels of governance;
- ◆ Ensure adequate financial and institutional support for faith-based and non-confessional civil society organizations at the EU, regional, national, and local levels;
- ◆ Support adult educational programs and campaigns promoting religious pluralism and tolerance;
- ◆ Include topics related to religious tolerance and religious pluralism in school curricula at all levels;
- ◆ Train community leaders, educators, civil society, and government representatives in facilitating inter-religious dialogue; and
- ◆ Use social media platforms to enable innovative and interactive ways to discuss religious tolerance and religious pluralism.

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## Introduction

### Religion and forced migration

Religion and forced migration have always been inextricably connected. Religious persecution figures prominently in the UN definition of a refugee. Persecution based on religious beliefs constitutes one of the grounds that allows asylum seekers to apply for refugee status.<sup>2</sup> Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices sustain many refugees in their process of displacement, migration, and settlement.<sup>3</sup> Religion and spirituality are sources of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and political expression and mobilization, and a vehicle of community building and group identity. Of course, not everybody finds solace in religion in the time of extreme suffering.<sup>4</sup> After seeing innocent children burnt alive during the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel wrote that 'the flames consumed my faith forever' and that the experience 'murdered my God and my soul.'<sup>5</sup> Many refugees fleeing wars and violent conflict also asked why God has forsaken them, while others found refuge in God, referred to Him as a shepherd and a rock, and found religious beliefs and rituals essential in trauma healing.<sup>6</sup>

### Religion and the 'refugee crisis'

Religion also took center stage in the recent 'refugee crisis' in Europe. In the increasingly secularized Europe, religion, paradoxically, has gained or regained significance in many policy and public debates. Religious pluralism existed in Europe for centuries; in many countries quite unproblematically. However, the increasing religious (and ethnic) pluralism stemming from more recent migration resulted in challenges to religious freedom and religious tolerance, despite existing anti-discrimination laws.<sup>7</sup> Even prior to the recent 'refugee crisis' debates about building mosques, wearing different forms of hijab, and providing religious education in schools abounded. This situation has changed even more dramatically in 2015. With the arrival of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, governments and the general public started to link the refugees' identity to their religion.<sup>8</sup> Thus, refugees began to be equated with Muslims and Muslims with refugees. In extreme cases, refugees have been linked to Muslim fundamentalists.

Ethnocentric perspectives identified Islam as an alien and anti-democratic religion, an incubator of political conflict.<sup>9</sup> Several recent surveys bore out this widespread negative view of Islam and Muslim refugees.<sup>10</sup> As a result of a growing Islamophobia, many policy-makers and quite a few members of the general public called for the fortification of Europe.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the emerging pro-refugee advocacy and solidarity movements, even in countries such as Poland or Hungary that refused to

<sup>2</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Goździak and D. J. Shandy. 2002. Editorial Introduction: Religion and Spirituality in Forced Migration. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15(2): 129–135.

<sup>4</sup> E. M. Goździak. 2002. Spiritual Emergency Room: The Role of Spirituality and Religion in the Resettlement of Kosovar Albanians. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15(2): 136–152.

<sup>5</sup> E. Wiesel. 1960. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang.

<sup>6</sup> E. M. Goździak. Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> G. Pickel. 2018. Perceptions of Plurality: The Impact of the Refugee Crisis on the Interpretation of Religious Pluralization in Europe. In U. Schmiedel and G. Smith (eds). *Religion in the European Refugee crisis*. Palgrave. Pp. 15–38.

<sup>8</sup> G. Pickel, ibidem. See also M. Koenig. 2005. Incorporating Muslim Migrants in Western Nation States: A Comparison of the United Kingdom, France and Germany. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 6(2): 219–234.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Fox. 2004. *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 Through the New Millennium*. Lanham: Lexington Books; S. P. Huntington. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Pickel. 2013. *Religionsmonitor 2013: Religiosity in International comparison*. Gutersloh: Bertelsmann; Ch. Welzel. 2013. *Freedom Rising, Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; R. Wike, B. Stokes, and K. Simmons. 2016. *European Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, fewer Jobs: Sharp Ideological Divided Across EU about Minorities, Diversity and National Identity*. PEW Research Center.

<sup>11</sup> U. Schmiedel and G. Smith. 2018. Introduction: Charting the Crisis. In U. Schmiedel and G. Smith (eds). *Religion in the European Refugee crisis*. Palgrave. Pp. 1–14.



participate in the refugee relocation program, have called for openness to refugees regardless of their religion.

## Presence of Muslims in Europe

The fear of Muslim refugees and Islam was somewhat surprising since Muslims have lived in Europe for many centuries. Table 1 shows the different Muslim populations residing in Europe over several centuries. For the most part, Muslims coexisted peacefully with Europeans of other faiths. Historically, the encounters with Muslims in Hungary and Poland, two countries with the strongest objections to admitting Muslim refugees, took different forms. Some were violent, while others were characterized as peaceful coexistence. The Ottoman occupation of Hungary (1541–1699) is still present in the Hungarian psyche. However, according to some writers, the Ottoman era is not remembered as a Christian–Muslim conflict but, rather, as a foreign occupation in the same way that the Catholic Austrians, who conquered Hungary after the Turks left, or the atheist Soviets, who controlled the country until 1989, were regarded.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1. Who are the Muslims in Europe?**

Who are the Muslims in Europe?	
◆	Indigenous Muslims who have lived in Europe for centuries, mainly in Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo, where Islam is a foundational element of their history
◆	Native minorities in Romania and Bulgaria
◆	Tartar Muslims in Poland and Crimea
◆	Students and business people from Muslim countries. In France alone, there are some 70, 000 North African students, and London is a capital of Arab and Muslim business men and women
◆	Muslims who entered without restrictions (British Commonwealth citizens, Algerians in France, and Surinamese and Indonesians in the Netherlands)
◆	Muslim labor migrants from Turkey and northern Africa who came to Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s
◆	Muslim refugees from Somalia and the Balkans who came in the 1980s and 1990s
◆	European Muslims who were born in Europe to migrant parents
◆	Muslim converts
◆	Asylum seekers and refugees who arrived since the 2010s

Source: Bichara Khader, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium (see footnote 14).

Europe's Muslim population is diverse. It encompasses Muslims born in Europe and in a wide variety of non-European countries. It includes Sunnis, Shiites, and Sufis. Levels of religious commitment and belief vary among Europe's Muslims. Some of the Muslims surveyed by the Pew Research Center would not describe Muslim identity as salient in their daily lives. For others, Muslim identity profoundly shapes their daily lives.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Z. Pall and O. Sayfo. 2016. Why an Anti-Islam Campaign Has Taken Root in Hungary, a Country with Few Muslims. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311557615\\_Why\\_an\\_anti-Islam\\_campaign\\_has\\_taken\\_root\\_in\\_Hungary\\_a\\_country\\_with\\_few\\_Muslims](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311557615_Why_an_anti-Islam_campaign_has_taken_root_in_Hungary_a_country_with_few_Muslims) [accessed 20 May 2020].

<sup>13</sup> Europe's Growing Muslim Population. 2017. *Pew Research Center Demographic study* November 29, 2017.

## Fear of small numbers

*In 2016, Europeans greatly overestimated the share of Muslims in the total population. The gap between perceptions and reality was even greater in 2020.*

Prior to the recent arrival of refugees in Europe in 2015, there were roughly 23 million Muslims living in the 28 European states. Three-quarters are European citizens either by birth or by naturalization. If we add to these numbers the two million Muslims who recently sought refuge in Europe and have not yet been legalized, the number reaches 25 million Muslims. This accounts for about 5% of the total population of the continent.<sup>14</sup>

The perceptions, however, put the proportion of Muslims in Europe at a much higher level. According to international surveys conducted in 2016 and 2020, Europeans overestimated their country's Muslim population and the rate at which it is growing. Among the countries in our study, German respondents guessed that more than one-fifth of the country's resident population was Muslim, while in reality it was less than 5%.<sup>15</sup> According to the 2011 Hungarian Census, there were 5,500 Muslims, mostly Sunni, living in Hungary. While large numbers of Muslim refugees transitioned through Hungary in 2015, very few received permission to stay, therefore the number of Muslims in Hungary continues to be negligible.<sup>16</sup> Konrad Pędziwiatr<sup>17</sup> estimates the number of Muslims in Poland to be between 25,000 and 40,000 people, while Grodź<sup>18</sup> places the number within the range 15,000 to 30,000. According to the Pew Research center, in 2017, in Germany Muslims constituted approximately 6.1% and in Sweden 8.1% of the population.<sup>19</sup> In Greece, in addition to 140,000 members of the historical minority of Muslims of Thrace, there are an estimated 500,000 Muslim immigrants.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> B. Khader. 2016. Muslims in Europe: The Construction of a 'Problem.' In F. González (ed.) *The Search for Europe: Contrasting Approaches*. BBVA: Open Mind Project. Pp. 303-324.

<sup>15</sup> P. Duncan. 2016. Europeans greatly overestimate Muslim population, poll shows. *The Guardian* December 13, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> R. Wike, B. Stokes, and K. Simmons. 2016. Negative Views of Minorities, Refugees Common in EU. In R. Wike, B. Stokes, and K. Simmons (eds), *Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs: Sharp Ideological Divides Across EU on Views About Minorities, Diversity and National Identity*, pp. 23–33. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

<sup>17</sup> K. Pędziwiatr. 2015. Islamophobia in Poland 2015 Report. In E. Bayraklı and F. Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report*, pp. 425–441. Istanbul: SETA.

<sup>18</sup> S. Grodź. 2010. Christian-Muslim Experiences in Poland. *Exchange* 39(3): 270–284.

<sup>19</sup> Europe's Growing Muslim Population. 2017. *Pew Research Center Demographic study* November 29, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> A. Hüseyinoğlu. 2016. Past and present of Islam in the Balkans: The case of Greece. *Avrasya Etüdləri* 50/2016-2, 25-48.



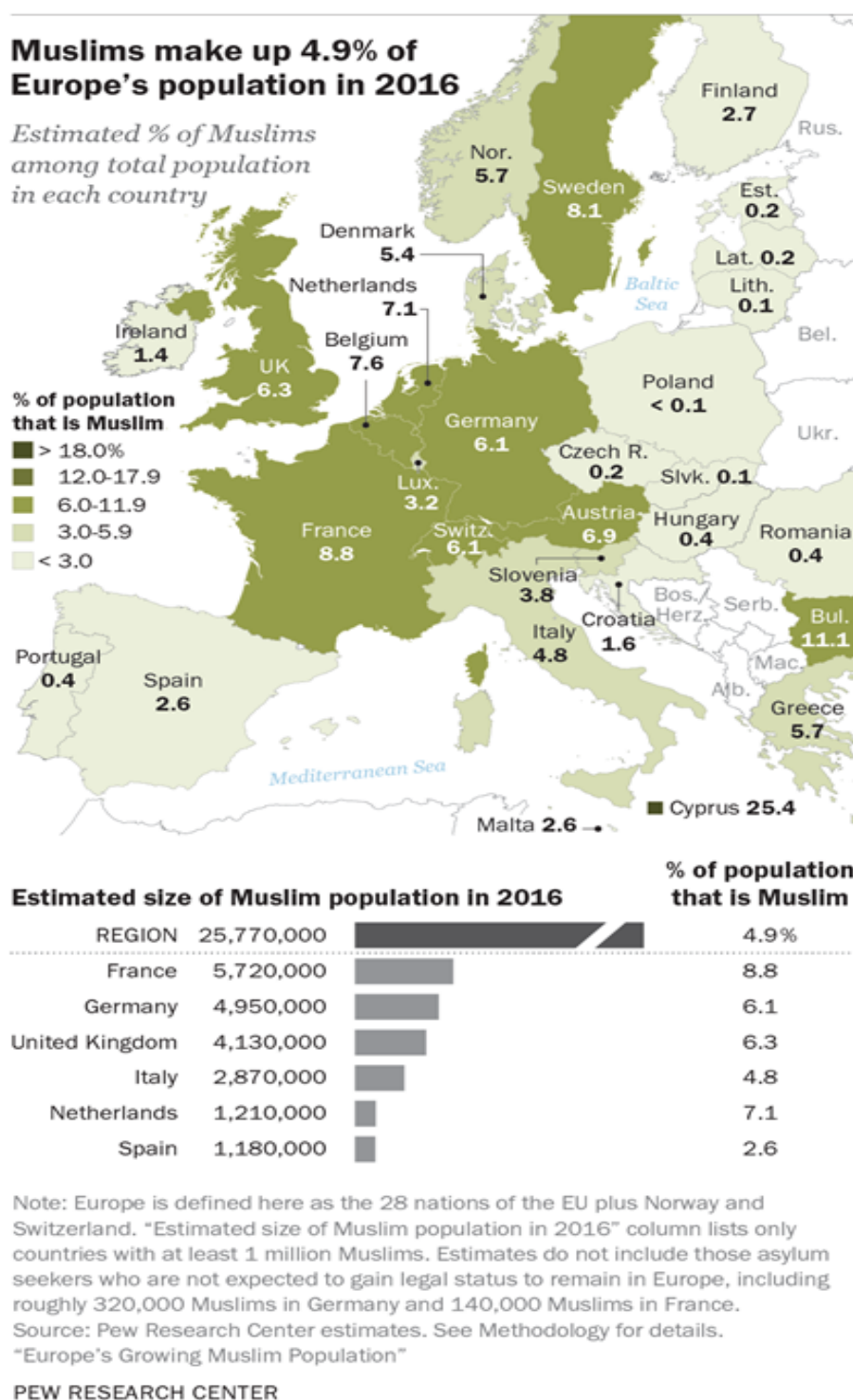


Figure 1. Source: Pew Hispanic Research Center.

## The report

The report focuses on religious tolerance and religious pluralism in selected European countries. These two phenomena, discussed in more detail below, contribute to the vision of cosmopolitan Europe.

The report is a continuation of our research on the complexities of value transmission in different member-states and in the European Union as a whole and the tensions and synergies arising between different societal groups promoting particular values related to religious tolerance. We also examined the relationship between policies aimed at promoting religious pluralism and how these policies are put into practice (or not).

We begin the report with a brief description of the methodologies used to collect the data that inform our analysis. A discussion of ethical considerations follows.

The findings stemming from our research are organized thematically. First, we look at how religious tolerance and religious pluralism are defined and operationalized by the different actors – policy-makers and representatives of civil societies, including faith-based organizations – on the ground. Second, we present the ways religious tolerance and religious pluralism are discussed and enacted at the European Union and member state levels. Recognizing that the 'refugee crisis' greatly politicized the issue of religion and religious tolerance we next turn our attention to how different politicians as well as religious and spiritual leaders debate religious tolerance and religious pluralism. Finally, being cognizant that even the best top-down policies to promote religious tolerance and prevent discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs do not go far enough without concerted bottom-up efforts to facilitate religious tolerance and foster religious pluralism, we discuss initiatives undertaken by different civil society actors, including faith-based and secular organizations. We end the report with a series of recommendations aimed at different levels of political and religious leadership in Europe as well as local community leaders and members.

The report is not meant to be a comprehensive compendium of programs aimed at facilitating religious tolerance and religious pluralism. Rather, it intends to provide an ethnographic snapshot of initiatives and strategies worth promoting at different levels of governments, religious institutions, and civil society. We believe that the anthropological approach will enhance the policy-making process and will provide policy-makers, who often design policies and fund programs in an ethnographic vacuum, relying solely on abstract notions of norms and values, with a window into the lived experiences of both refugees and those standing in solidarity with refugees and migrants.

## Data and methodology

This study is part of a large interdisciplinary research on norms and values in the context of the 'refugee crisis.' It is also a companion piece to two other reports on hospitality and gender equality in selected European countries.<sup>21</sup>

In this report we use several different sources of data to discuss religious tolerance and religious pluralism in five European countries—Germany (Saxony, Bavaria, Hesse, and North Rhine Westphalia); Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki); Hungary (Budapest, Debrecen, Vac), Poland (Poznań, Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Kraków), and Sweden (Malmö, Lund, Gothenburg, small towns in Southern Sweden)—as

<sup>21</sup> A. Dimitriadis and H. Malamidis. 2020. Hospitality and humanitarianism in civil society practices during the European refugee 'crisis' and B. Sutter, I. Jerve Ramsøy, and F. Böhm. 2020. Valuing Gender Equality: Experiences and Practices in Everyday Integration Work.

well as in Istanbul, Turkey; Beirut, Lebanon; and Bangkok, Thailand. The most important source of data includes **empirical field research** conducted between 2017 and 2020 by three different teams of researchers from the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity, and Welfare (MIM) at Malmö University, and the Center for Migration Studies (CeBaM) at the Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU).

**Table 2. Field research**

Country	Cities	Team
Greece	Athens, Thessaloniki	ELIAMEP AMU
Germany	Saxony, Bavaria, Hesse, and North Rhine-Westphalia	MAU
Hungary	Budapest, Debrecen, Vac	AMU
Poland	Poznań, Warszawa, Gdańsk, and Kraków	AMU
Sweden	Malmö, Lund, Gothenburg, Southern Sweden	MAU
Lebanon	Beirut	AMU
Turkey	Istanbul	AMU
Thailand	Bangkok	AMU

In the course of the field research we conducted in-depth ethnographic interviews with:

- ◆ Representatives, staff, and volunteers of faith-based organizations assisting refugees and immigrants,
- ◆ religious and spiritual leaders of different faiths,
- ◆ educators providing language and civic education training,
- ◆ curriculum developers of courses earmarked for the foreign-born
- ◆ representatives of municipal governments,
- ◆ solidarians advocating on behalf of refugees and immigrants,
- ◆ selected refugees and migrants

Depending on the local context, each team chose to interview the most appropriate experts. The Greek team focused exclusively on civil society representatives. In Germany and in Sweden, the research team interviewed language and civic orientation course teachers and cultural mediators. Additionally, the team conducted participant observation at a refugee reception center, clothes drives, and cafes where refugees congregate, and during practitioners' gatherings (conferences, workshops). In Poland, the team focused mainly on civil society actors, including religious and spiritual leaders, members of parishes and congregations, representatives of faith-based organizations, refugee activists, solidarians, and representatives of refugee- and migrant-led organizations. Additionally, the Polish team has also interviewed representatives of municipal governments. In Hungary, the researchers talked to a wide range of volunteers involved in facilitation refugees' journey from Hungary to Austria and Germany, representatives of legal aid programs, and several spiritual leaders representing the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim faith communities. Many of the interviewed leaders and representatives of faith-based and civil society organizations work on a much wider range of issues. In this report, we focus only on their activities related to religious tolerance.

The interviews were conducted in several different languages depending on the country where the research was conducted and the facility of interviewed stakeholders in the local language: English, German, Greek, Polish, Russian, and Swedish. We transcribed all interviews and analyzed the resulting texts to elicit themes related to religious tolerance and religious pluralism.

In addition to interviews and informal conversations, we conducted participant observation of awareness raising programs, educational activities, democracy training programs for refugees and immigrants, planning meetings for bridgebuilders working for the Church of Sweden, networking meetings, fundraising events, and artistic endeavors. In Poland, the research team also participated in theatre performances about and with migrants and refugees.



**Photo 1.** Meeting organized by project Salam in Poznań.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/projekt.salam/>

Most of the team members are migration scholars with many years of experience researching forced migration issues, including the international refugee regime and refugee policy as well as refugee and migrant integration, the role of religion and spirituality as coping mechanisms, and the role of religion in identity formation and community building.

Researchers conducting qualitative studies often reflect on their own positionality vis-à-vis study participants. After all, research is shaped by both researcher/s and study participant/s. Considering their own positionality, scholars acknowledge that because we have multiple overlapping identities, we make meaning from various aspects of these identities.

The Polish research team included three applied anthropologists, affiliated both with the Centre for Migration Research (CeBaM) and with the Migration Info Point (MIP), a program providing assistance to migrants in Poznań. In this capacity, they have organized many events and trainings aimed at informing different individuals and groups – students, teachers, employers, and community leaders – about migration and migrants. Participants of these gatherings often discussed religious intolerance,



othering of refugees on the basis of their faith, and the need to foster interfaith understanding. Blueprints and notes from these activities are part of the data informing this report. One member of the team is a refugee and also served as a policy-maker in the US Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). All these identities served us well in conducting this research: they facilitated access to many stakeholders and communities and fostered rapport with those whom we interviewed.

Additionally, many activists working with refugees, especially in Poland and in Hungary, are very visible in mass media, including social media. They have granted numerous interviews to journalists. Some blog about their activities and maintain a robust presence on Facebook. We have analyzed these interviews, blog posts, videos, and stories posted on Facebook and used them to inform this report.

Early in the project we also conducted **desk studies** designed to identify different 'value agents'<sup>22</sup> and the practices and strategies they use to transmit these values. Religious tolerance and religious pluralism were among the analyzed values.

**Table 3. 'Value agents'**

Public institutions	Civil society organizations	Others
<b>National and regional governments</b>	Humanitarian NGOs	Mainstream media outlets
<b>City councils</b>	Refugee-led organizations	Migrant media
<b>Schools</b>	Faith-based organizations	
<b>Language schools</b>	Youth organizations	
<b>Citizenship test providers</b>	Sports clubs	

The practices 'value agents' use for the purpose of value transmission were studied by surveying a wide range of documents, including national constitutions, laws and regulations, directives, mission statements, training manuals, and educational curricula. In some instances, the desk survey was augmented by interviews with selected value agents and other key informants. The number of documents needed to be analyzed to complete this task was quite large. As a result, country teams were able to survey only the most important documents.

Another source of information we used to prepare this report is a volume entitled *Europe and the Refugee Response: A Crisis of Values?* edited by Elżbieta M. Goździak, Izabella Main, and Brigitte Suter (Routledge 2020). This volume was produced as part of the NOVAMIGRA project.

## Ethical considerations

Finally, a few words about ethical challenges in conducting this research. Each team received an approval for this research from their respective ethics committees. However, only the Polish team obtained permission to interview refugees and immigrants. The remaining teams focused on mainstream stakeholders, some of whom came to Europe as immigrants and refugees or are children of immigrants and refugees.

Conducting research with human subjects, researchers have an obligation to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. It is difficult to maintain anonymity of some activists because their actions are easily recognizable. Moreover, some insisted on being named in our writings since they want their actions

<sup>22</sup> 'Value agents' is a term used by EU policy-makers to refer to a variety of individuals responsible for transmitting 'European values' to newly arrived refugees and immigrants. See E. M. Goździak and I. Main. 2020. Summary report on value agents in public and civil society institutions.

and ideals to be widely shared. Despite the fact that we often played multiple roles – researchers, participant observers, organizers, and supporters of pro-migration events – we adhere to the principle of anthropological research and analysis and distinguish the *emic* (or insiders') perspectives from the *etic* (or outsiders') interpretation of the gathered data.

## A European culture of religious tolerance

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*Tolerance, as we well know, is neither built into our behavior, the way that psychological needs like hunger and thirst are, nor a universal value practiced by everyone. As the basis of democratic culture, in which truth is relative and differences are legitimate, tolerance is incompatible with totalitarian regimes, which advocate a single belief system. And yet, in a world that aspires to peace and where democracy is on the rise, it is still not a universal fact. On the contrary, we are witnessing a strong resurgence of racism, xenophobia, extreme forms of nationalism, religious fanaticism, and all kinds of social exclusion and discrimination.*

Federico Mayor  
Director-General of UNESCO (1997)

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In the European integration process, the European Union continues to search for an identity that can generate widespread support among its residents. Some have suggested that the EU should embrace the Christian values that underpin its national traditions and cultures. Others argued that instead of relying on a communitarian vision of a 'Christian Europe,' a European identity should build on a culture of religious tolerance and religious diversity commensurate with a cosmopolitan vision for the continent.<sup>23</sup>

Articles 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) do not define religious tolerance, rather they speak about freedom of and from religion.<sup>24</sup> Jan Dobbernack and Tariq Modood<sup>25</sup> use two terms: tolerance and toleration. Although they use these terms interchangeably, they posit that tolerance usually signifies an articulated normative principle whereas toleration refers to attitudes, virtues, practices, and institutional regimes. Conducting field research, we have not defined religious tolerance *a priori*, but rather focused on how our interlocutors operationalized the term. We were more interested in what religious tolerance means in practical terms than whether our interlocutors agreed or disagreed with any definition we might have put forth.

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<sup>23</sup> D. Augenstein. 2008. A European Culture of Religious Tolerance. EUI Working Papers. LAW 2008/04.

<sup>24</sup> EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief  
[https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Jan Dobbernack and Tariq Modood. 2011. Concepts and Theories on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity. Available at:  
<https://www.eui.eu/Documents/RSCAS/Research/MWG/201011/05-11-Triandafyllidou.pdf> [accessed 11 July 2020]



Based on our field research, we found that religious tolerance means many different things to different people, including the following:

- ◆ Allows to freely hold different religious beliefs
- ◆ Grants everyone freedom of personal beliefs, including atheist and agnostic beliefs
- ◆ Provides freedom of religious speech
- ◆ Allows to freely change their religion, or denomination or beliefs
- ◆ Allows children to hold religious beliefs that are different from their parents to a degree that depends on their age
- ◆ Allows people to practice their religious faith
- ◆ Refuses to discriminate in employment, accommodation etc. on religious grounds
- ◆ Accepts that followers of various religions consider their own beliefs to be true
- ◆ Makes a reasonable effort to accommodate other people's religious needs by, for example, allowing employees to work overtime in order to take off a religious festival or holy day that is significant to them, scheduling meetings so that they do not conflict with common holy days.

We recognize that different faith communities and different individuals define religious tolerance in many other ways. Some spiritual leaders thought that religious tolerance goes hand-in-hand with interfaith issues. The spiritual leader of the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood in Budapest talked about religious tolerance in very practical terms. One of the stories he shared with us related to marriages of interfaith couples. He said:

A Lutheran pastor, a friend of mine, and I are the only ones willing to bless mixed marriages. One day, a couple came to me to get a blessing to be married. The groom was a Dutch convert to Islam and the bride was a practicing Jew. They sought blessing from the imam, from a Calvinist priest, and from a rabbi. The rabbi was a very progressive person, but he said that if he blessed the union, he would be killed by his own congregation, which did not tolerate mixed marriages. Finally, they came to me. I thought that the marriage is approved by God and it is not my place to ask them what they believe and how they pray.

He thought that religious tolerance should be expressed in everyday gestures and should recognize the humanity of the Other in every circumstance. When hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees descended on the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest in the summer of 2015, he was there to provide whatever assistance his congregation could deliver. He quickly realized that there were no bathroom facilities for the refugees because the government wanted the refugees to cross the border to Austria. When he asked a policeman about bathroom access for the refugees, he was told: 'They can go to the bathroom on the other side of the border. The quicker we get them across to Austria, the better.' He got on the phone and ordered a couple dozen of porta-potties. In our conversation, he dwelled on this story for a bit and insisted that religious tolerance includes providing for physiological as much as for spiritual needs of all human beings.

These stories indicate that religious tolerance is not always related to tolerating other people's religious beliefs *per se*, but includes appreciating views on other issues, views that stem from religious beliefs.

## Religious tolerance in the European Union

The European Union has no explicit legal competence in the sphere of religion and the management of relations with faith communities. Member states retain sovereignty over the status of churches, religious associations, and religious communities. However, religious concerns have taken on

increasing importance within the legal and institutional framework and policy discourses of the European Union in the last few years. Since the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty in May 1999 and the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009, the relationship between 'religion' and European law, and the multifaceted linkages of the latter with several EU policies, have been profoundly transformed. These transformations challenge preliminary assumptions about the limited role that the EU is presumed to have over religion.<sup>26</sup> It is not our intention to present a legal analysis of the EU policy frameworks related to religious tolerance. We are neither professionally equipped to do so nor is such an analysis within the remit of this report. We do, however, present the reader with a table that maps the relationship between religion and EU policy and law. It includes pertinent treaties and approaches that have a bearing on how religious minorities are treated, religious tolerance is upheld, and religious pluralism is fostered. All EU member states must sign off on these policies and directives to maintain their EU membership.

**Table 4. Mapping relations between religion and EU policy and law**

Year	EU policy and law
1957	<b>Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). Article 17:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.</li> <li>◆ The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organizations.</li> <li>◆ Recognizing their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organizations.</li> </ul>
1999	<b>Amsterdam Treaty. Declaration 11:</b> The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2000	<b>Racial Equality Directive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Combats racial and ethnic discrimination in a variety of societal domains</li> </ul>
2000	<b>Employment Equality Directive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Addresses various forms of discrimination in employment, including on the basis of religion or belief</li> </ul>
2002	<b>EU Framework on Integration and Intercultural Dialogue.</b> Includes the following basic principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States</li> <li>◆ Integration implies the respect of the basic values of the EU</li> <li>◆ Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration</li> <li>◆ Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, intercultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens</li> <li>◆ The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law</li> </ul>

<sup>26</sup> S. Carrera and J. Parkin. 2010. The Place of Religion in European Union Law and Policy: Competing Approaches and Actors Inside the European Commission. RELIGARE Working Paper 1.

2004	<b>Citizens Rights Directive (CRD).</b> Paragraph 31 calls on member states to implement this Directive without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic characteristics, language, religion or beliefs.
2005	<b>Commission Communication “Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for All”</b>
2007	<b>EU Framework for a “European Agenda for Culture”</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue</li> </ul>
2008	<b>Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Framework</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Combat racism and xenophobia</li> <li>◆ Criminalize all intentional behavior (including speech) aimed at inciting violence or hatred on the grounds of race, color, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin.</li> </ul>
2009	<b>Treaty of Lisbon.</b> The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, part of the Lisbon Treaty, is legally binding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Freedom of religion as a fundamental human right to be enjoyed by all individuals</li> <li>◆ Articles on non-discrimination and cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity</li> </ul>
2010	<b>Directorate General of the European Commission for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ensure fundamental freedoms – including freedom of religion and freedom from religion - are taken into account at an early stage of policy formation.</li> <li>◆ Implement EU policy against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other related intolerance, including Islamophobia.</li> </ul>

Table devised by authors using a working paper by S. Carrera and J. Parkin (2010). See footnote 26.

The information in the table above shows the ways religion is being framed in EU law and policy and other guiding principles, which are largely determined by the perspectives and activities of the different Directorates General (DGs) and services of the European Commission. The resulting scenario is a complex and highly heterogeneous patchwork of normative approaches delineating the relationship between religion and the EU.

### Religious tolerance in the nation-state: National traditions and Christianity

Policies and directives regarding religious tolerance put forth by the European Union serve as an excellent point of reference. However, national laws and policies need to harmonize with these directives, but they also need to be codified in national fundamental legal documents (e.g., constitutions).

In this section we briefly compare and contrast how religious tolerance is promulgated and upheld in the five countries under study. This discussion is not meant as a definitive legal analysis, but rather to provide the reader with some background information.

In all five countries, fundamental legal documents address the issue of religion, religious rights, and the relationship between the state and religious institutions. As members of the European Union, the countries under study stress both freedom of religion and, in some cases, freedom from religion. However, how this principle plays out in reality differs from country to country, especially when it comes to the relationship between the State and the Church.

Greece is the only country in this sample that has an **official state religion**. The Greek Constitution stipulates that the ‘prevailing’ religion of the population is Eastern Orthodoxy under the authority of the autocephalous Church. In Greece, the state and the Church are not separate but carry out distinct functions. The constitution, however, still guarantees freedom of religion stating that freedom of

conscience is inviolable, freedom of worship (which does not disturb public order) should be guaranteed, and ministers of all religions are subject to the same state supervision and obligations. At the same time, the constitution prohibits proselytizing.<sup>27</sup> As the result of the Lausanne Treaty, which recognizes the Muslim minority of Thrace, Greece is the only member of the EU which integrated Sharia Law into its national legal system and recognizes it in cases regulating family and civic matters for Muslims. In 2018, the Hellenic Parliament voted to allow Muslims to choose whether Sharia law or the secular court system will be used to resolve family disputes.<sup>28</sup> Still, one wonders whether having a recognized state religion does not result in discrimination and remains an obstacle to religious tolerance and religious pluralism.

The Polish constitution, on the other hand, says nothing about state religion, **but Catholicism is a privileged denomination** in the country. The constitution stresses that 'freedom of conscience and religion shall be ensured for everyone' and 'churches and other religious organizations shall have equal rights.'<sup>29</sup> It grants national and ethnic minorities the right to establish educational and cultural organizations as well as institutions designed to protect religious identity. At the same time, the constitution specifies that the relations between the Catholic Church and the state should be determined by a concordat. Poland signed a treaty with the Holy See in 1993. The concordat privileges the position of the Catholic Church in Poland, though it also stresses the 'autonomy and independence' of the State and the Church.

The 2012 Hungarian constitution refers to the country's **Christian heritage** and emphasizes the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood while omitting entirely the country's secular heritage. The 2012 Constitution was a subject of great controversies. Among many objections it raised was the issue of forcing a Christian ideology upon the whole society. Even though the Constitution acknowledges Hungary's diverse religious traditions and their role in the country's history, it stresses 'the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood.'

Unlike in Greece and in Poland, there is **no single religion that dominates the spiritual landscape of Hungary**. The most common denomination in Hungary is Catholicism. More than 54% of the total population are Roman Catholic and about 3% Greek Catholic. Additional 20% are Protestant (mostly Calvinist). Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews constitute less than 1% of the Hungarian population.

The Hungarian Constitution prohibits religious discrimination and speech violating the dignity of any religious community and stipulates the autonomy of religious communities. However, in December 2018, the Hungarian Parliament amended the constitution and stripped hundreds of religious entities of their legal status. The amendment entered into force in April 2019. It established a four-tier system of churches to make them eligible for tax-deductible donations and state funding.<sup>30</sup> The amended constitution is viewed by many as a serious restriction on religious freedom as people cannot exercise their rights unless they belong to a church recognized by the state.

Furthermore, several incidents in recent years highlighted the complexity and ambiguity of the situation. For example, in the May 2018 ruling, the Hungarian Supreme Court deemed the 2017 government raid on the Church of Scientology headquarters to be lawful. Jewish groups expressed concern that the *House of Fates* museum would obscure the country's role in the Holocaust. Jewish

<sup>27</sup> Constitution of Greece, available at: <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/gr/gr220en.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2020].

<sup>28</sup> A. Cuddy. 2018 Greece no longer requires Muslims to use Sharia law. *Euronews* January 10, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, available at: <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm> [accessed 22 May 2020].

<sup>30</sup> Fundamental Law of Hungary, 25 April 2011, Article VII. available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53df98964.html> [accessed 22 May 2020].

community leaders, including those interviewed as part of this study, also voiced concerns about Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and other government officials' praise for World War II-era anti-Semites and Hitler allies.<sup>31</sup>

The German and Swedish Constitutions also espouse freedom of religion. The German Basic Law ensures that 'freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed shall be inviolable.'<sup>32</sup> It states that no one should be favored or discriminated on the ground of their faith or religion. The constitution prohibits an official state church but guarantees the freedom to establish religious societies which should be regulated and administered within the limits of the law, but independently from the state. German law distinguishes between positive and negative individual freedom. The latter guarantees the right not to confess any faith and not to be exposed to religion. The Swedish Constitution guarantees Swedes the right 'to practice one's religion alone or in the company of others.'<sup>33</sup> It also demands actions from public institutions against any form of discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation. The relationship between the main religious institution, the Church of Sweden, and the state was not regulated until the 2000 constitutional amendment that separated the Church from the State. Despite the amendments, there is still a strong relationship between the Church of Sweden and the State. For example, much public funding goes to the Church, including for programs for refugees and immigrants.

In many European countries, refugees and immigrants receive information about laws and norms governing religious tolerance. In Sweden, for example, freedom of religion is mentioned in all civic education classes for refugees and immigrants. The topic is not necessarily covered in-depth. However, the trainers present the appropriate law and discuss what the law means in reality. One of the civic education trainers said:

We inform refugees about their rights and obligations, including freedom of religion. We tell them that they have the right to practice their own religion, but at the same time we emphasize that practicing some aspects of certain religions might be difficult in some settings such as at work, in school, and in health care settings where prayer might not be possible or halal meat might not be available.

In the Lund diocese, the Church of Sweden is very proactive in terms of facilitating refugees' involvement in discussions about the role of religion (and other issues) in migrants' lives. It has organized a reference group composed of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, including undocumented migrants, and holds regular meetings to discuss topics that refugees think should be addressed by policy-makers and politicians. The refugees write 'motions' that they present to both local and national policy-makers. They travel to Stockholm biannually to present their motions to members of parliament and to members of municipal and regional governments.

Laws regarding religious freedom do not necessarily mean that rights of all religious minorities are always upheld. The accommodation of religion and religious pluralism in contemporary societies remains a subject of intense public debates, especially those ignited in the context of the 'refugee crisis' of 2015. In the next section of this report we discuss the intertwined relationship between religion, religious tolerance, and politics.

<sup>31</sup> US State Department. 2018. Hungary: 2018 International Religious Freedom Report.

<sup>32</sup> Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, available at: <https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/pdf/80201000.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2020].

<sup>33</sup> Constitution of Sweden. The Fundamental Laws and the Riksdag Act, available at: <https://www.riksdagen.se/globalassets/07.-dokument-lagar/the-constitution-of-sweden-160628.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2020].

## Religion in politics, politics in religion

The 'refugee crisis' has resulted in a range of ideological responses to the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe in the summer of 2015. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, famously declared 'Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das' (We have managed so many things – we can do this) and opened the doors to a million asylum seekers<sup>34</sup> regardless of their religion.

Other politicians and religious leaders saw the predominantly Muslim refugees as a threat to the Christian identity of the continent. The anti-refugee debates have been especially fervent in the new accession countries in Central Europe. Hungarian and Polish political actors vehemently rejected the idea of accepting non-Christian refugees. The Islamophobia without Muslims<sup>35</sup> was palpable in both countries and reminiscent of anti-Semitism without Jews.<sup>36</sup>

The attitudes towards cultural diversity varied between countries. In 2016, the Pew Research Center identified the percentage of people who think that an increased number of people of different race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion makes their country a better place to live. Sweden came the highest with 36%, followed by Germany with 26.4%, Hungary 17.4%, Poland 15.8% and Greece 10.4%.

Table 5 shows the number of refugees living in each country (estimated by the UNHCR) and the proportion of newcomers to the total population in each country in 2015 and 2019. The differences between countries in the increase of the number of registered refugees and in relation to the total population are very clear.

**Table 5. Number of refugees in the studied countries**

Year		Germany	Greece	Hungary	Poland	Sweden
2019	Registered refugees	1,100,000	61,400	6,000	12,500	248,200
2019	% of the population	1.3%	0.6%	0.1%	Less than 0.1%	2.4%
2015	Arrivals	890 000	856 723	391 384		162 877
2015	% of the population	0.3%	0.1%	0%	Less than 0.1%	1.5%

Source: UNHCR. Available at [https://migrationdataportal.org/data?t=2018&i=refug\\_host](https://migrationdataportal.org/data?t=2018&i=refug_host). Table compiled by the authors.

We begin this section of the report with a discussion of attitudes and responses to the 'refugee crisis,' with a particular emphasis on religious tolerance and religious pluralism, by different religious leaders and political actors.

## Welcome the Stranger

The majority of Europeans declare an attachment – spiritual or cultural – to Christianity. As a result, churches and their adherents have some influence over European affairs. People expect them to react when the continent is faced with great moral challenges such as the recent arrival of refugees and

<sup>34</sup> A. Merkel cited in J. Delcker. 2016. The phrase that haunts Angela Merkel. A year on and the German leader hasn't recovered from 'we can do it.' *Politico* August 19, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> K. Górak-Sosnowska. 2016. Islamophobia Without Muslims? The Case of Poland. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 5(2): 190–204.

<sup>36</sup> See J. Darnton. 1981. Anti-Semitism Without Jews? A Polish Riddle. *The New York Times*, 15 March; D. Snyder. 2017. Anti-Semitism Spikes in Poland – Stoked by Populist Surge against Refugees.



asylum seekers by sea and land. Many religious and spiritual leaders have spoken about the religious and moral obligations Europe has towards forced migrants.

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*Every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine in Europe [should] welcome one [refugee] family.*

Pope Francis

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**Pope Francis**, the Pontiff of the Catholic Church, appealed to the faithful several times to welcome the Stranger. Shortly after his election in March 2013, the Pope travelled to Lampedusa, one of the main reception centers for asylum seekers reaching Europe by boats. During his visit he condemned the 'globalization of indifference' and criticized lack of empathy for, and solidarity with refugees and migrants. In his encyclicals and homilies, he repeatedly stressed the importance to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate refugees and migrants. He denounced acts of hostility and encouraged people to remain open towards foreigners of different faiths. He called for 'every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine in Europe [to] welcome one [refugee] family.'<sup>37</sup> He led by example to demonstrate his commitment to refugees. Visiting Lesbos in 2016, he brought three Muslim refugee families and offered them safe haven at the Vatican. In the same year, during the Holy Week, Pope Francis visited a refugee shelter in Castelnuovo di Porto, outside Rome, to wash and kiss the feet of Muslim, Orthodox, Hindu, and Catholic refugees. It was an important symbolic gesture of welcome at a time when anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment had risen after the Brussels and Paris terrorist attacks. Such symbols were powerful. In 2016, Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki celebrated mass at the famed Cologne Cathedral standing at a refugee boat recovered from Malta. The symbolism carried a potent message: Cardinal Woelki criticized Europeans for turning a blind eye to suffering.

Some religious leaders answered the Pope's call, but others did not. In September 2015, when a large number of refugees were allowed to leave Hungary to enter Germany, **Cardinal Reinhard Marx**, a Catholic, and **Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm**, a Protestant, went to Munich to personally welcome the arriving refugees.<sup>38</sup> In response to Pope Francis' statement about the 'globalization of indifference,' the German Catholic Bishops' Conference stressed the need to follow the call 'to love thy neighbor' (*Nächstenliebe*). The Bishops suggested that Christians should face new challenges not with fear or resignation, but with true confidence and active engagement.<sup>39</sup> **Archbishop Hesse**, the chairman of the Migration Commission of the Bishops' Conference, further indicated that Christians are called to give hope to those in need and not placate them with empty words.<sup>40</sup> A similar message was issued by the German Evangelical Church, which reminded the faithful of the importance of empathy that should not disappear in the face of challenges. Abandoning empathy would mean losing humanity. Sealing off Europe would mean betraying our own values.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> J. J. McElwee. 2015. Francis calls on every parish across Europe to house refugee families. *National Catholic Reporter* September 6, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> J. Hien. 2019. Faith-Based Organizations Under Double-Pressure: The Impact of Market Liberalization and Secularization on Caritas and Diakonie in Germany. In P. Manuel and M. Glatzer (eds) *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare. Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

<sup>39</sup> Flüchtlingshilfe der katholischen Kirche, <https://www.dbk.de/themen/fluechtlingshilfe/> [accessed 28 May 2020].

<sup>40</sup> Die Fürsorge für Flüchtlinge ist Teil unserer christlichen Identität. 2015. *Katholisch.de* November 12, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Stellungnahme des Rates der EKD zur Situation von Flüchtlingen, [https://www.ekd.de/20160122\\_stellungnahme\\_fluechtlinge.htm](https://www.ekd.de/20160122_stellungnahme_fluechtlinge.htm) [accessed 28 May 2020].

Despite the mostly hostile political climate in Poland and in Hungary,<sup>42</sup> where Catholics constitute the majority of the population, some Catholic clergy voiced their support for refugees. In Hungary, **Miklós Beer, the Catholic Bishop of Vác**, attempted to set an example by housing refugees in his rectory. Referring to Pope Francis, he told us: 'Pope Francis said that refugees are our brothers. (...) In the Bible, Jesus said: when I was a refugee myself, you took me in. You cannot understand this message in any other way.'<sup>43</sup> He was disappointed over the apathy of other clergy and members of his congregation and their reluctance to follow in his footsteps. They chose to believe the hateful and intimidating messages broadcasted by state media. He commented on people's irresponsiveness and hostility saying: 'What makes me sad is that they want to protect Christianity and yet they reject refugees. So, what is it that makes us Christians then?' he asked. While most of the Hungarian Catholic clergy ignored Bishop Beer, his friend, **Lutheran Bishop, Tamas Fabiny**, joined him to record a video message about the importance of welcoming the Stranger.

There were also several other members of the Hungarian clergy that responded positively to Pope Francis' call. **Péter Mustó**, a Jesuit priest, and **Csaba Bőjte**, a Franciscan monk, responded positively to the message of humanitarian responsibility towards refugees. **István Bogárdi Szabó, the Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church's Synod**, called for the expansion of the Refugee Mission. **Péter Ganec, a Lutheran Bishop**, visited one of the refugee camps and called for compassion and assistance to refugees. Others, however, thought it was not their responsibility. The Hungarian Baptists believed that it was more important to invest in helping refugees in their countries of origin than providing assistance in Hungary. Leaders of several Hungarian Jewish communities publicly empathized with the persecution faced by Muslim refugees, but called on governments of rich Arab countries to step up and help. They also emphasized the need for strict control of immigration but maintained that the decision should be in the hands of the Hungarian government.<sup>44</sup>

In Poland, **Bishop Krzysztof Zadarko** advocated for the introduction of humanitarian corridors, emphasized that meeting with refugees reveals our humanity or immaturity,<sup>45</sup> and stressed that 'today Jesus has a face of a refugee'.<sup>46</sup> Addressing the 'refugee crisis,' **Archbishop Wojciech Polak** stressed that the Catholic Church should strive for openness and solidarize with people who need help.<sup>47</sup> **Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek** strongly criticized lack of any actions by comparing it to a sin of omission. He argued that supporting refugees is a moral matter which should be a priority for the Church.<sup>48</sup>

Christian Orthodox bishops also expressed support for refugees. **Patriarch Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople**, and **Ieronymus II, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece**, accompanied Pope Francis on his trip to Lesbos. Bartholomew I, an ecumenical patriarch, used this opportunity to address refugees directly: 'We have traveled here to tell you that we care. We have traveled here because the world has not forgotten you. (...) And we assure you that we will do everything to open the eyes and hearts of the world.'<sup>49</sup> During the same trip, Ieronymus II stressed their joint goal to 'bring forward before the whole world, Christian and beyond, the current tragedy of the refugee crisis.'<sup>50</sup> Other

<sup>42</sup> For detailed analysis of the situation in Poland and Hungary see E. M. Goździak and P. Márton. 2018. Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 7(2): 125-151.

<sup>43</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotes come from our interviews.

<sup>44</sup> K. Barcsand A. Máté-Tóth. 2016. The Hungarian Religious Leaders' Statements from the Beginning of the Migration. *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 36(3): Article 2.

<sup>45</sup> Bp Zadarko: Spotkanie z uchodźcami odsłania człowieczeństwo lub niedojrzałość. 2019. *Więź* September 29, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> K. Zadarko. 2016. Dziś Chrystus ma twarz uchodźcy. *Deon* September 12, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> W. Polak and B. Strzelczyk. 2016. Gnieszno: Odwaga patrzenia w oczy. *Tygodnik Powszechny* March 15, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> J. Gądek. 2017. "Grzech zaniechania" – bp Tadeusz Pieronek ostro o kościelnym milczeniu nad uchodźcami. *Gazeta.pl* June 16, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Speeches of Bartholomew I and Ieronymus II, Moria Refugee Camp, Lesvos, April 16, 2016, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160416\\_lesvos-rifugiati.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/april/documents/papa-francesco_20160416_lesvos-rifugiati.html) [accessed 24 May 2020].

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

bishops answered their calls. In Greece, **Apostolos Nikolaidis** talked about the country facing a humanitarian crisis that deserves immediate attention in the face of which the Church has no other choice but to help with love and solidarity.<sup>51</sup> **Ignatius, Archbishop of Dimitriadis**, openly denounced the idea that Islam was a security threat. He emphasized that fanaticism can be found in any religion, therefore extremism cannot be equated with Islam as it is a marginal element within a whole spectrum of Islamic thought.<sup>52</sup>

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*The duty to protect refugees is not only a moral obligation.*

Rev. Dr Martin Junge  
LWF General Secretary

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In a letter dated September 4, 2015 and addressed to the European member churches of the Lutheran World Federation, **Rev. Dr Martin Junge**, the General Secretary of the Federation, wrote that the current refugee crisis in Europe is a pivotal moment, in which churches can demonstrate values of solidarity and human dignity.<sup>53</sup> The Lutheran **Archbishop Antje Jackelén**, head of the Church of Sweden (*Svenska kyrkan*), was especially vocal in her support of refugees. She asserted that aiding refugees was an obvious thing to do. 'This kind of work is actually natural for any Christian congregation,' she said. '(...) to extend a hand to a fellow human who needs help; to show hospitality to a stranger is a Christian value.'<sup>54</sup> The Swedish Christian Council, an umbrella organization of all Christian denominations in the country, made it clear in their common statement that refuge and exile have played pivotal roles in the Christian faith, and committed itself to support 'the poor, the powerless, and the discriminated'.<sup>55</sup>

Calls to support refugees came also from various political actors and parties on different levels. For instance, in 2014, Fredrik Reinfeldt, Swedish prime minister, called upon Swedes to 'open their hearts' as well as to 'show their tolerance and patience'<sup>56</sup> and Stefan Löfven, who took over the office that year declared: 'We need to decide right now what kind of Europe we are going to be. My Europe takes in refugees. My Europe doesn't build walls.'<sup>57</sup> Alexis Tsipras, leader of Syriza and Prime Minister of Greece, expressed similar sentiments. In one of his most famous speeches he strongly criticized the EU stating he felt ashamed as a member of its leadership for the 'inability of Europe in dealing with this human trauma' further stressing that 'the waves of the Aegean are not just washing up dead refugees, dead children, but (also) the very civilization of Europe'.<sup>58</sup>

In Poland amid the overwhelmingly negative reactions on the national level, some municipal leaders took a very positive stand. Particularly vocal with regard to refugee support were presidents of two major cities Gdańsk and Poznań – Paweł Adamowicz and Jacek Jaśkowiak. The Mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz supported migrants and refugees verbally, during meetings and by organizing The

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<sup>51</sup> Apostolos Nikolaidis: "Refugees have the support of the Christian Church". 2016. DW April 14, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> M. Chatzipanagiotou and I. Zarikos. 2019. Countering Islamophobia in Greece. In I. Law, A. Easat-Daas Arzu Merali and S. Sayyid (eds) *Countering Islamophobia in Europe*. Palgrave. Pp. 110.

<sup>53</sup> Appeal by Rev. Dr M. Junge retrieved from <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/refugee-crisis-gs-letter-churches> [accessed 18 July 2020].

<sup>54</sup> Report: Eight out of ten Swedish churches helped refugees. 2017. *Sveriges Radio* March 16, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> R. Scaramuzzino and B. Suter. 2020. Holding course: Civil society organizations' value expressions in the Swedish legislative consultation system before and after 2015. In *Europe and the Refugee Response: A Crisis of Values?* London: Routledge.

<sup>56</sup> Reinfeldt calls for tolerance to refugees. 2014. *The local* August 16, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> O. Gee. 2015. Swedish PM: 'My Europe takes in refugees'. *The Local* September 6, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> N. Squires. 2015. Migrant crisis makes me ashamed to be in EU, says Greek PM. *The Telegraph* October 30, 2015.

Immigrant Advisory Council in 2016, with 12 migrant representatives, including two refugees, to keep the municipal government abreast of refugee concerns.<sup>59</sup> On July 18, 2015 the Mayor of Poznań, Jacek Jaśkowiak, joined a pro-refugee manifestation 'In Solidarity with migrants' organized by a group of Poznań activists, including artists, academics, and anarchists. This gesture of support from the city mayor showed his understanding of what it means to be an open city.<sup>60</sup> The City Council in Poznań also granted a few scholarships to young Syrians who were invited to Poznań on student visas (when the governmental administration prevented inviting them as refugees).

These examples illustrate positive attitudes of the European religious and political leadership towards refugees and asylum seekers amid otherwise fervent anti-refugee debates opposed to religious pluralism in Europe and fearful of the Other, the non-Christian.

## Fear of the Other

Blatantly disregarding the call issued by Pope Francis to welcome the strangers, many Hungarian and Polish clergy launched anti-Muslim refugee campaigns. **Gyula Marfi, the Archbishop of Veszprem**, called the refugees 'invaders' and 'Islamists'<sup>61</sup> and asserted that the main reason for the migration of Muslim refugees is jihad.<sup>62</sup> **Bishop Laszlo Kiss-Riggo** joined the choir and declared that the Pope was wrong to call for compassion and ignorant of the Muslim threat to Hungary's Christian character.<sup>63</sup> **Bela Balas, Bishop of Koposvar**, published an apocalyptic letter in the *Heti Válasz* magazine entitled 'Evening news from the European caliphate in the first century after Christianity,' where he evoked destruction of churches, persecution of Christian believers and priests, banning of pork and wine, censorship, and emigration of European citizens. According to him, refugees 'present a grave threat to the continent's Christian universal values.'<sup>64</sup> These attitudes resonate with the legacy of **Ottokár Prohászka, Bishop of Székesfehérvár** between 1905 and 1927 and prominent Anti-Semite ideologue, calling for the extermination of Jews whom he characterized as a festering disease on the body of Christian Hungary. The Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference admitted the seriousness of the situation and assured the public that Caritas Hungarica looked for effective ways to help refugees. At the same time, however, the Conference stressed that countries have both a right and a duty to protect their citizens. The bishops also indicated their serious concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East.<sup>65</sup>

In Poland, the Pope's request to welcome refugees was met with skepticism and diplomatic reluctance. In an official response, the **Polish Episcopate** failed to indicate whether the Pontiff's call to action would be implemented or not. Instead, the Polish Episcopate pushed the responsibility to help asylum seekers onto the Polish government. 'When it comes to a specific assistance to refugees in Poland, there is no doubt that the major initiative rests on the shoulders of secular power,' stated the bishops' communique, issued in September 2015.

Some clergy were more direct in their opposition to refugee admissions. **Archbishop Henryk Hoser**, for example, stressed that Muslim refugees would face insurmountable challenges in understanding

<sup>59</sup> Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej, Gmina Miasta Gdańska, Urząd Miejski w Gdańsku, <https://bip.gdansk.pl/prezydent-miasta/gdanskie-rady/rada-imigrantow-i-imigrantek,a,2747> [accessed 18 July 2020].

<sup>60</sup> T. Nyczka and P. Żytnicki. 2015. "Wyp... z uchodźcami!" Demonstracja na placu Wolności. *Gazeta Wyborcza* September 17, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> B. F. Németh. 2015. Isten Helyét Elfoglalták a Bálványok-Márfi Gyula Veszprémi Érdek az Iszlám Térhódításáról és a Kereszténységről. *Veol.hu*, October 25, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> K. Barcsa and A. Máté-Tóth. 2016. The Hungarian Religious Leaders' Statements from the Beginning of the Migration, Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe: Vol. 36: Iss. 3, Article 2.

<sup>63</sup> G. Witte. 2015. Hungarian Bishop Says Pope Is Wrong About Refugees. *The Washington Post* September 7, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem

<sup>65</sup> K. Barcsa and A. Máté-Tóth. 2016. The Hungarian Religious Leaders' Statements from the Beginning of the Migration, Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe: Vol. 36: Iss. 3, Article 2.

and accepting Christian values and therefore would not be able to integrate into Polish society. Archbishop Hoser clearly represented a conservative stance and thought that isolating both religions was a preferred alternative to finding creative solutions to ensure the peaceful co-existence of Islam and Catholicism. **Deacon Jacek Jan Pawłowicz** went even further. On his Facebook page he posted hostile, often vulgar, sentiments insulting Islam and Arab refugees. He claimed that Syrians would turn aggressive as soon as they were granted refugee status. While some Polish media outlets criticized Deacon Pawłowicz, the Episcopate did not initiate any investigation into his hate speech.<sup>66</sup>

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*They [non-Christian refugees] can be a threat to Poland. I think it is a great way for ISIS to locate their troops... all around Europe.*

Miriam Shaded  
Eстера Foundation

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While very few Muslim refugees coming from the Middle East reached the Polish borders in 2015, the migration that was occurring elsewhere in Europe has been greatly politicized, especially by the populist national-conservative parties: Law and Justice, KORWiN, and Kukiz'15. Political candidates expressed openly xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic views; produced anti-immigration posters; and participated in demonstrations 'against the Islamization of Poland and Europe.'<sup>67</sup> Kamil Kupiec, representing the KORWiN party in Kraków, used an electoral poster that read 'Instead of immigrants we want repatriates.' Ewa Damaszek, also from KORWiN, proclaimed '[This] is our home. Islam has its own.' Ms. Damaszek was referring here to people of Polish origin whose ancestors have been forcefully relocated to Kazakhstan, Siberia, Azerbaijan or other countries ('repatriates') and whom the conservative Polish government encourages to move to Poland.

In a YouTube chat, **Jarosław Kaczyński**, the president of the Law and Justice party, said: 'After recent events connected with acts of terror, [Poland] will not accept refugees because there is no mechanism that would ensure security.'<sup>68</sup> Many Poles agreed with the party leadership. The anti-refugee rally in November 2015 in the city of Wrocław captured the populism that has been on display in Poland in the last few years. Thousands of protesters marched, denouncing the EU proposal to relocate refugees. The rally members chanted anti-Islam and anti-migrant slogans declaring their loyalty to 'God, Honor, and Fatherland.' They finished the gathering by burning an effigy – ironically, not of a Muslim or a refugee, but a Hassidic Jew – wrapped in the EU flag.<sup>69</sup>

More than half of the Poles surveyed by CBOS in 2017 were adamant that Poland should not admit any refugees; 40 percent of the respondents agreed the country should provide temporary refuge until it is safe for the refugees to go back home. Only four percent of the survey participants favored permanent resettlement of refugees in Poland.<sup>70</sup> Debates observed in the public sphere – on Polish TV, in churches, and cafes – centered on rejecting Muslim refugees and allowing Christians from the Middle East to settle in Poland. The Warsaw-based Eстера Foundation, set up to provide support to Christians in Syria, proclaimed that they would support their resettlement. Miriam Shaded, the head

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<sup>66</sup> M. Kruczek. 2018. Pisze o muzułmańskiej dzicz i arabusach. Ośrodek ostrzega: „Nie tylko Międlar – kolejny rasista w sutannie”. *Gazeta Wyborcza* March 16, 2018.

<sup>67</sup> K. Pędziwiatr. 2015. Islamophobia in Poland 2015 Report. In E. Bayrakli and F. Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report*, pp. 425–441. Istanbul: SETA.

<sup>68</sup> Silna Polska w Europie. Czat z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim. 2016. *Blogpressportal* May 7, 2016.

<sup>69</sup> I. Taroon. 2016. The So-Called 'Islamic Rape of Europe' is Part of a Long and Racist History. *The Washington Post* February 18, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> CBOS (2017). Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców. Warsaw: Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.



of Estera, said that Muslim refugees pose a threat to Poland.<sup>71</sup> Ms. Shaded was born to a Polish mother and a Syrian father, a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Warsaw.

By the end of 2015, 391,384, mainly Muslim, refugees and asylum-seekers crossed the Serbian-Hungarian border and descended on the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest. Yet, for **Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary** and his government, the arrival of refugees was not a humanitarian challenge but a 'Muslim invasion' that required an appropriate response: closing the Balkan land route to the European Union. A 100-mile-long, four-meter-high, razor-wire-topped fence on Hungary's southern borders with Serbia and Croatia was erected to keep refugees out. Hungarian border police, guns in holsters, swaggered in pairs alongside the fence in a scene reminiscent of the Cold War.

In the following weeks and months, the Hungarian government used the arrival of refugees as an opportunity to strengthen their Christian discourse and simultaneously stigmatize refugees as terrorists. The conservative media likened the migration to the Ottoman era when Hungary was a bastion, 'defending Christianity from 'Muslim hordes.'<sup>72</sup> **Antal Rogán**, at the time leader of the Hungarian Fidesz' parliamentary group, warned of a future 'United European Caliphate,' while former Secretary of State **László L. Simon** urged Hungarians to make more babies in order to counter the negative cultural effects of mass migration such as the envisioned 'impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture.'<sup>73</sup>

Calls to protect religion and national culture also emerged in Greece despite the fact that amid the 2015 'crisis,' the head of the Orthodox Church of Greece, **Ieronymos II**, promoted a rather tolerant and open stance. He claimed that every refugee who needs assistance ought to be helped without discrimination. As we demonstrate later in this report, many Greek organizations and individuals offered support to the arriving refugees, nevertheless, xenophobic attitudes were not uncommon. Some clergy, including popular priests, actively participated in the organization of anti-refugee protests. **Bishop Anthimos of Thessaloniki**, who was repeatedly invited to appear on TV talk shows and news programs, did not refrain from expressing hostilities towards refugees, calling on them to go back,<sup>74</sup> and claiming that Muslims constitute a threat to Greeks' religious beliefs.<sup>75</sup> In order to support his convictions, he relied on his own interpretation of the Gospel. For example, stated that even the Good Samaritan did not invite the wounded stranger he helped to his home.<sup>76</sup>

In Germany and in Sweden, anti-refugee attitudes resulted in a significant rise of the right-wing parties, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Sweden Democrats (SD), respectively. Both parties incorporated religion into their political agendas. These populist attitudes were surprising in countries that have had an illustrious history of accepting refugees. In 2015 alone, nearly 163,000 asylum seekers, mainly from Syria entered Sweden and more than 800,000 asylum seekers entered Germany. Both countries already hosted refugees and immigrants of different faiths. However, the 'refugee crisis' resulted in stricter approaches to refugee admissions after November 2015. The perception that refugees and migrants 'overburden' the welfare system emerged and was used to justify border closing and tightening of admission policies. The public debates became more polarized as religion became clearly visible in the public sphere. In 2016, a Muslim representative of the Green Party refused to shake hands with a female journalist citing religious precepts. The incident sparked a debate about

<sup>71</sup> Z. Wasik and H. Foy. 2015. Poland Favors Christian Refugees from Syria. *Financial Times* August 21, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Z. Pall and O. Sayfo. 2016. Why an Anti-Islam Campaign Has Taken Root in Hungary, a Country with Few Muslims. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311557615\\_Why\\_an\\_anti-Islam\\_campaign\\_has\\_taken\\_root\\_in\\_Hungary\\_a\\_country\\_with\\_few\\_Muslims](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311557615_Why_an_anti-Islam_campaign_has_taken_root_in_Hungary_a_country_with_few_Muslims) [accessed 20 May 2020].

<sup>73</sup> L. Simon. 2015. Szaporodjunk! Népszabadság Online, September 5, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> The Thessaloniki metropolis bishop gives hate speeches against migrants. 2010. *RED Early Warning System* July 6, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> K. Koukoumakas. 2015. 'Love has no religion': pires and pastors reach out to refugees. *The Guardian* December 15, 2015.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem



religious pluralism and gender equality. The debate was framed as a conflict between secular values and religious freedom. A number of municipalities issued a ban on headscarves in public offices. In fact, the headscarf debates focus on the tension between freedom of religion and gender equality. Additionally, some members of the public questioned whether people socialized in different religious and cultural contexts were able to function in a secular society.

The discussions following the 2015 New Year's Eve's sexual assaults in Cologne expressed concerns about both violence against women and Islam. A critical view of Angela Merkel's asylum policy paved the way for the populist AfD party to achieve record popularity in regional elections.<sup>77</sup>

## Religious tolerance: Lived experiences of refugees settled in Europe

Lived experiences of refugees and migrants must inform all policy debates. Policy-makers often form advisory bodies composed of refugees and immigrants but equally often disregard the advice they receive. In this section, we present a snapshot of impressions and narratives we collected over the course of this study to provide insight into the refugees' lived experiences with religious tolerance and religious pluralism.

Social support, economic condition, and existing networks of fellow migrants are important for many refugees. These are often the decisive factors refugees consider when choosing a place to apply for refugee status. Yet, for some, the fact that religion plays a significant role in a society was also an important consideration. As one of the staff members at the Association for Legal Intervention in Poland said 'when I asked one of the Chechen women if she plans to move to Germany as many Chechen refugees did, she replied that she feels better in Poland. She said that people believed in God here, and she believes in God, so it is better for her here (...) Also, the family is really important in Poland, just like in the Chechen culture.' It seems that for this particular refugee woman, the importance of religion and family was crucial as she envisioned her integration into Polish society.

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*People believe in God here.*

Chechen woman living in Poland

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Indeed, for some Muslim refugees and immigrants, integration into a new society is relatively unproblematic, but others encounter significant challenges and discrimination. Bashir,<sup>78</sup> originally from Yemen, is married to a Polish woman. When asked about how his wife's family received them, he rolled his eyes and uttered one Polish word *masakra* (disaster) to describe the first three years of his relationship with the in-laws. He attributed their negative attitudes to lack of education and familiarity with people who are not Polish. Bashir hopes that the baby he and his wife were expecting at the time of our interview would change the family dynamics for the better. He said that Polish grandparents dote on their grandchildren and hoped that this would prove the case in their circumstances.

Bashir's family was much more supportive and sent gifts when he announced his engagement to his bride-to-be. His mother and brother came to Poznań to see if they could settle there, but after about

<sup>77</sup> Inquiry committee hears first testimony of Cologne New Year's Eve attacks. 2016. DW March 7, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> All names in this section are pseudonyms.

six weeks they went back to Germany. Bashir's middle-aged mother did not see a place for herself in the very small, estimated at 100 people, Muslim community in Poznań.

Bashir also commented on how foreign-born Muslims are received in the wider community. The Islamic Community Center that houses a mosque, a small library, and training facilities is located in the middle of a very nice residential area with lots of single-family homes surrounded by gardens. When asked how neighbors reacted to the mosque and the center, Bashir indicated there were never any problems, but hastened to add that the Imam makes sure that there is outreach to the neighbors. Bashir said that the Imam is a peace-builder, good at educating people about Islam and Muslims.

During our interview with the Imam, he emphasized how he goes out of his way to build a more positive image of Islam, facilitate dialogue, and foster peaceful coexistence. He said: 'I just want people to respect us, this is my goal here in Poland, that people respect our children, that people respect our presence, dignity.' While various initiatives initiated and carried out by the Center – often in cooperation with other institutions or the Municipality – evoked a lot of interest, he admitted that the situation is far from perfect: various forms of intolerance and abuse are still experienced by many Muslims in Poland. Xenophobic attitudes, exacerbated by statements made by various political and religious actors in the last couple years, contributed to the growing sense of insecurity and instability among the community. This makes the role the center plays even more important. Bashir also emphasized how important it is to engage with the wider Polish community through art, theatre, music, dance, and food. Bashir and his wife hold cooking workshops during various festivals.



**Photo 2.** Intercultural culinary workshop in Poznan, source:

<https://empikbilety.pl/wydarzenie/kuchnia-z-widokiem-na-pokoj-warsztaty-kulinarne-z-albaraa-alanesi-i-paulina-kuntze/czerwec-2019>.

Several Muslim refugees we spoke with in different countries wondered about the outcome of their integration in Europe. Close cultural and religious similarities between Turkey and Syria motivated Muslim Syrian refugees interviewed in Istanbul to remain in Turkey. Several wondered whether they would be as free to practice Islam in Europe as they were in Turkey. Even those eligible for resettlement programs had similar doubts. Questions about religious tolerance were frequently asked during pre-

departure cultural orientation programs. An older Syrian couple living in Istanbul while awaiting resettlement in Western Europe worried about how their deeply religious family would fit into the secular society of Switzerland or the Netherlands, the two countries that offered to accept them.

In fact, debates and concerns like this also recur during integration or language courses in the countries of arrival, including during the classes carried out by interviewed instructors in Germany and Sweden. In both countries a lot of emphasis is put on the fact that religion ought to belong to the private sphere and not intersect with other people's right to not be religious. One of the teachers recalled the difficulty:

Problems or topics that lead to discussions within the lessons... (...) other religions are not a problem, many of them know quite a lot about other religions as well, what leads to a lack of understanding is the mention of a majority not being religious at all.

In search for ways to talk about religious pluralism and position of religion, some courses focus on the historical, social, and philosophical changes in Sweden and Europe in general that gradually led to the current legal and social norms. One of the instructors found this approach particularly important as, from his experience, some refugees assumed these were direct defensive responses to immigration. A representative of one Muslim organization in Germany, on the other hand, chose to stress the fact that many important values or cultural norms such as respect or helping your neighbors, even if they are not framed within the religious framework in the arrival country, are values recognized and promoted in Islam.

Many things are important to integration of refugees in their new countries. Many refugees we spoke with talked about the significance of places of worship. The presence and visibility of mosques became central to many discussions in several European countries. In some, the issue of Muslim places of worship predated the 'refugee crisis' by several years, but it gained momentum during the 'crisis.' For instance, in Greece, supported by conservative and right-wing actors, Christian Orthodox religious leaders mobilized the general public against the construction of a mosque in Athens. In 2016, Archbishop Ieronymos II openly opposed the idea of building a mosque. He pointed to sectarian conflicts in the Middle East and advised to halt the construction.<sup>79</sup> In public debates, Islamic centers and mosques have been framed as supposedly incompatible with Greek national identity and dangerous to 'Hellenism.' These debates could be perceived as a clear sign of a growing fear of Islamisation. It was not until 2019 that the first mosque in the history of the modern Greek state was finally opened. It is important to note that this particular mosque was not built to welcome refugees, rather it was built because the mayor of Athens valued diversity and pluralism. The ensuing debate concerned the need to renegotiate the public space which at times was utilized for worship. These historical complexities very much affect the relationship between Islam and the state of Greece.<sup>80</sup>

The prospect of mosques being built by refugees is also threatening to many Poles. In the spring of 2010, when news of the first mosque to be built in Warsaw was announced, posters portraying a female figure in a niqab standing in front of missile-shaped minarets appeared in the city center. The posters that read 'Stop the Radical Mosque in Warsaw' were part of a campaign spearheaded by Europa Przyszłości (Europe of the Future).<sup>81</sup> In 2011, an artistic installation including an LED-light Minaret designed by a Polish artist, Joanna Rejkowska, was banned in Poznań. The Minaret's architectural form was to be based on the design of the minaret of the Great Mosque of Jenin on the West Bank of the Jordan River, one of the earliest masterpieces of the Ottoman architecture in

<sup>79</sup> Greek archbishop calls for halt in Athens mosque construction. 2016. *Daily Sabah* November 3, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> P. Hatziprokopiou and V. Evergeti. 2014. Negotiating Muslim identity and diversity in Greek urban spaces. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 15:6, 603-626.

<sup>81</sup> K. Narkowicz, K. Pędziwiatr. 2017. Why Are Polish People so Wrong About Muslims in Their Country? *Open democracy* January 13, 2017.

Palestine. A high school educational program on multiculturalism was to accompany the artistic installation. Joanna Rejkowska summed up the decision of the city fathers as follows:

It would seem that the decision was made in the name of the image of Poznań and its inhabitants' collective 'self' – as shaped by the city authorities, based on national and religious unity. What the city hall seems not to notice, however, is that this monolithic collective identity has been losing currency and is no longer obvious or shared by everyone in the city. In Poznań's current social situation, stabilizing or reinforcing it may result in violent exclusions of some of its residents. This is a real and significant danger.<sup>82</sup>

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*Islamophobic views become even more mainstream not only in politics, but also in the media, education, and other spheres of life.*

### European Islamophobia Report 2016

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While the current Mayor of Poznań, Jacek Jaśkowiak, is quite favorably disposed towards refugees and immigrants, the 'refugee crisis' resulted in strong Islamophobia in Poland. As highlighted in the 2016 European Islamophobia report, 'Islamophobic views become even more mainstream not only in politics, but also in the media, education, and other spheres of life.'<sup>83</sup> The state-owned media, transformed after the elections to promote the government's positions on migration, reinforced Islamophobic views by inviting critics of Islam to present Muslims as terrorists.<sup>84</sup> This in turn led to an increase in racist and anti-immigrant attacks in recent years in Poland. The Never Again Association, monitoring such violence in its magazine, points out a continuously growing number of assaults on foreigners, taking place both in larger cities and smaller towns in Poland. Verbal abuses and physical attacks were directed against people who looked or behaved differently: individuals with darker complexion, speaking foreign languages, wearing different clothes, and perceived to be Muslim.<sup>85</sup> The activists of civil service organizations mentioned examples of migrant and refugee women who were attacked verbally and physically because of wearing hijab. There was a clear change around 2015-2016 when religion became a visible divide in Poland.

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<sup>82</sup> J. Rajkowska. This is a Story of a Minaret that Never Happened, <http://www.rajkowska.com/en/this-is-a-story-of-a-minaret-that-never-happened> [accessed 10 July 2020].

<sup>83</sup> K. Pędziwiatr. 2017. Islamophobia in Poland: National Report 2016. In E. Bayraktar and F. Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, Istanbul. SETA. 411-443.

<sup>84</sup> E. M. Goździak and P. Márton. 2018. Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 7(2): 125-151; I. Main (2020). Proclaiming and practicing pro-immigration values in Poland. A case study of Poznań. In E.M. Goździak, I. Main, and B. Sutter (eds.) *Europe and the Refugee Response: A Crisis of Values?* London: Routledge, 269-285.

<sup>85</sup> O agresji wobec muzułmanów – raport na Dzień Islamu w kościele, <https://www.nigdywiecej.org/komunikaty/komunikaty/175-rok-2019/4109-o-agresji-wobec-muzułmanow-raport-na-dzien-islamu-w-kościele> [accessed 18 July 2020].

## Facilitating religious tolerance in local communities

*UNHCR embarked on a 'journey of mutual discovery' with faith-based organizations by exploring the role of faith in humanitarian responses. In December 2012, the fifth High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges was held on the theme of Faith and Protection. The Dialogue assembled over 400 representatives of faith-based organizations, faith leaders and other partners for a two-day discussion in Geneva on partnership with faith-based actors. This was the first formal multi-faith dialogue UNHCR ever engaged in and explored the common values underpinning the notion of refugee protection in all of the world's major religions. It also fostered deeper appreciation for and understanding of the role religion and spirituality plays in the lives of those UNHCR serves.*

*The areas of support and cooperation with faith-based organization on local level include: physical protection and humanitarian access, deterrence of violence through presence and accompaniment, reception of asylum-seekers and accompaniment of the detained, community outreach and advocacy benefiting refugee populations, prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, prevention of and response to harmful traditional practices, and legal counseling, asylum-case management and membership in protection networks.*

UNHCR. 2014. Partnership Note on Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders

The 'refugee crisis' resulted in many responses on global, European, national, and local levels. In this part of the report we focus on initiatives undertaken by civil society actors, including faith-based organizations, secular programs, and refugee-led initiatives to facilitate religious tolerance and enhance religious pluralism. We conceptualize community very broadly and include faith (parishes, congregations, al-ummah) and secular communities, host society and refugee communities. Many of the actors we mention here have been motivated by religious convictions, but equally many actions stemmed from secular values. Some actors have a very explicit mission of fostering religious tolerance, but the vast majority practice religious tolerance implicitly.

Our interlocutors interpreted activities facilitating religious tolerance and religious pluralism quite broadly and engaged in a wide range of activities. Generally speaking, those with a more explicit goal to promote religious tolerance focused on inter-faith dialogue or education about religious diversity. On the other hand, those who practice religious tolerance more implicitly considered providing food and shelter, offering language courses, and cultural orientation training to refugees of different faith an important step in appreciating religious diversity and respecting other religions, but did not explicitly invoke religious tolerance.

Some of the actors had considerable **financial resources** at their disposal, others relied heavily on **volunteers**. National churches with significant resources at their disposal were able to finance large-scale initiatives. In 2018 alone, the German Catholic Church spent around 125.5 million Euros to provide short- and long-term assistance to refugees. The Church used the money to support both domestic and overseas projects. In 2015, the Church Assembly of the Church of Sweden earmarked 60



million SEK for work with refugees to be used during the following three years in various dioceses and congregations. In the beginning the focus was on humanitarian aid and reception, including psycho-social support, but this has changed over time. Currently, the Council supports integration programs. While the Swedish government has been assisting refugees and asylum seekers for a long time, the 'refugee crisis' has definitely contributed to increased engagement with migrant integration efforts by different actors affiliated with the Church.

Well-funded national faith-based organizations and their local affiliates became quite active during the 'refugee crisis' displaying a range of positions towards refugees and religious pluralism. Many faith-based organizations are international, and have a long tradition of supporting people in need. Caritas is one such organization. Caritas has been active in almost all studied contexts, yet its activity was often defined nationally or locally. In Greece, Caritas Athens is a member of Caritas Hellas, the Greek brand of the Caritas Europa and Caritas Internationalis, member of the Philanthropic Organization of the Catholic Church. Caritas Athens launched the refugee program of daily help: organizing soup kitchens, providing shower facilities, distributing clothing, household items, toys, and school supplies as well as primary healthcare, and mental health counseling, and art activities for children. The organization follows Catholic social teachings, including values of charity, solidarity, social responsibility, human dignity, and human rights.<sup>86</sup> In Hungary, Caritas joined support groups at the Keleti train station when refugees arrived in 2015, responding to the current needs of arriving refugees. In Germany many local Caritas organizations also offered diverse support for refugees: housing, language courses, integration activities, etc.

Financial resources were important, but **volunteer efforts** were equally vital. The large-scale assistance to refugees in Hungary in the summer and fall of 2015 relied almost exclusively on volunteers as the Hungarian government did not provide any support to asylum seekers. One of the volunteers recalled the atmosphere of the first days:

First, we paid for water, for something to eat, small things. And then we posted on Facebook that we need help so some people just came to the train station. We started making and posting lists of what is needed. And these were more and more diverse things, baby things, diapers for example, underwear. Because they needed everything, everything. And some people here were very sympathetic... Some of them.

The vast majority of the volunteers self-organized using Facebook to communicate and assign tasks and GPS navigation and tracking to monitor train routes to Austria. In the chaotic or even hostile circumstances, they organized help in a form of basic reception: they offered food, clothes, medical support, as well as translation services providing refugees with reliable information. Our interviewees indicated that the leadership was exclusively female.

Several community activists we interviewed in Hungary indicated that, while volunteerism continues to be strong, most volunteer efforts focus now on the Roma and the homeless. This shift occurred after the Orbán administration criminalized assistance to refugees and undocumented migrants.

In Hungary, many volunteers were lay people not affiliated with any religion or religious organization. However, in other countries many of the volunteers we spoke with were members of **local parishes and congregations**. In the aftermath of the mass arrival of refugees at the Malmö Central Station in the fall of 2015, members of a Lutheran congregation started spontaneously organizing clothing donations. These efforts continued in the spring of 2016 when the clothing drive expanded, the

<sup>86</sup> Caritas Athens, <http://caritasathens.gr/en/> [accessed 18 July 2020].



number of volunteers increased, and the parish hall turned into a café and meeting place where refugees could practice Swedish with the volunteers. A local deacon commented:

We treat people of different faith with respect. If someone is interested and curious about what the Christian faith is about, then we tell them. Tell them, but just as fellow humans, not for the purpose of proselytizing. We are here as fellow humans [in compassion], the same way, I hope, Christian people in Muslim countries meet fellow humans who give a helping hand. It is the same God. The same God. [...] The purpose [of our work] is humanity and compassion.

Between the fall of 2015 and the fall of 2016, according to surveys, eight out of ten parishes had pastoral activities for and with asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants. More than 20,000 asylum seekers are estimated to have participated in the social gatherings of the parishes per month, and 8,000 volunteers have contributed to the implementation of wide-ranging activities.<sup>87</sup> Such high level of parish refugee support is a sure sign of not merely tolerating the Other, but a sign of respect for refugees regardless of their religion.

Given the small number of refugees and asylum seekers in Poland, parishes were mainly involved in organizing events such as the World Migrant and Refugee Day, which is celebrated in mid-January every year. In 2018, the materials prepared by the organizers of this event encouraged people to offer masses in the intention of migrants and refugees, learn about activities undertaken by Caritas Poland, make donations to support refugees residing in the Middle East, get to know immigrants from the Ukraine, offer sympathy, and open hearts to those staying in the reception centers for foreigners. These activities took on a more symbolic character; civil society organizations, including those connected to the Catholic Church such as Caritas or Jesuit Social Center, were providing material and spiritual assistance.

Catholic parishes and organizations were not the only ones active in Poland. The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, for example, also organized **prayers** and help for people fleeing war and violence: 'with understanding, awareness of the complexity of the issue and guided by a sense of responsibility and love for people in every life situation.' The Head of the Evangelical Church stressed that it is not always "a matter of spectacular and effort-intensive help," sometimes it is enough just to help someone to deal with administrative matters or simply spend time together. Together with the Ocalenie Foundation and an Evangelical Church of Westphalia, the Augsburg Confession Church organized an educational project 'Crossing Borders, Understanding Refugees' (action Hoffnung für Osteuropa), with workshops across Poland.<sup>88</sup> It is interesting that some of these initiatives collaborated with each other not only in the same location, but also across locations within the same country and across international borders.

In Hungary, there was a particular moment when refugees could cross the border. At the height of the refugee arrivals, there were both Catholic and Protestant clergy helping refugees, although the interviewed volunteers at the Keleti and Nyugati stations did not necessarily attest to this claim made by the clergy we interviewed. A Lutheran pastor we spoke with stressed:

<sup>87</sup> Hellqvist and Sandberg, 2017 cited in S. Linde and R. Scaramuzzino. 2018. 'Is the Church of Sweden an 'Ordinary' Civil Society Organization? The advocacy activities of the Church in comparison to other civil society organizations in Sweden', *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 118-138.

<sup>88</sup> *Przekraczając granice – zrozumieć uchodźców. Projekt warsztatów dotyczących sytuacji uchodźców w Polsce*. 2018. *Luteranie.pl* April 25, 2018.

(...) the Church, on the theological basis, has a very clear message about loving the neighbor and about how to behave with the strangers and also with immigrants (...) We are all created in the image of God and we should love our neighbors as God loves us. (...) If you are a Christian you see God's image in people.

At the same time, she emphasized that in the face of the current political climate and omnipresent propaganda the only actions that can be undertaken are those at **the community level**. According to her this was clearly visible during the crisis when members of the congregation gathered to discuss the refugees' needs and proposed concrete ways to meet them. These activities continue to this day. In the neighborhood where the congregation is based, members organize informal events, discussions, and film screenings about migrants and refugees and how to support them.

Actors who were religiously-motivated to engage in helping refugees invoked various passages from the Gospel, which inspired them to take action. Others stressed that, while religion remains an important incentive for them or constituted the environment in which they grew up, secular sources of values such as human dignity are equally significant. Religion plays a very different role in the analyzed societies and people working in NGOs supporting refugees and migrants also have very diverse political opinions. In Greece, most of the NGOs occupy either **the liberal center or the left of the political spectrum**. This means that religion and religious values are kept separate from their activities or are not publicly acknowledged. Many interlocutors stated that they try to inform both the NGO staff and the volunteers about their organizational values without a particular reference to religion. Some organizations mentioned religion mostly in relation to non-discrimination. They also stressed that they try to prevent religion-based conflicts and promote peaceful co-existence of different religions in everyday interactions. An interviewee from a women's NGO stated:

Every time we have new participants, we organize orientation programs. We try to talk to them; we try to give them an overview of what they will experience here and at the same time we also discuss mutual expectations. For us, the main expectation is mutual respect, co-existence, meaning that we have to respect one another, regardless of religion, nationality, and ethnicity. [...] We always emphasize that we use discussions to solve conflicts and do not use violence or hate speech. But rather we talk, we discuss, and we listen to one another. That is always our main concern and expectation from refugees. They have responded positively. Sometimes they dance here together, they sing, some join different religions...It is not an issue for us. It has never become a hindrance for us to continue our work, that of empowerment activities we are doing here. [...] I think mutual respect is respect for all things.

Similarly, in Poland, members of civil service organizations supporting migrants and refugees often come from liberal and left-wing positions. They stress human rights and humanitarianism as the basis for their activities, but some are also motivated by religion. One of the leaders of the Polish Migration Forum spoke about her staff being motivated by humanitarianism, a deep belief in the universality of human rights, desire to provide assistance to the needy, respect for all human beings, and the necessity to protect the dignity of all refugees and migrants. She said:

Personally, I am motivated by my religion. I believe that refugees and migrants deserve respect. I am convinced that every human being no matter where they come from has inborn dignity. My team includes young women who are atheists, but they share my convictions although mine are born out of my religious beliefs and theirs are rooted in

their secular ideology. I also have a lawyer on my team and he believes that under the law everybody is equal, migrants as well.<sup>89</sup>

Sweden is often portrayed as a **highly secular society**. This characterization is reflected in the World Value Survey.<sup>90</sup> Representatives of community-based organizations interviewed in this study indicated a certain level of reluctance to talk about religion or even avoidance of religious debates. This was best illustrated by the interviewee of the Red Cross. While the organization bases its mission and self-image on impartiality and neutrality, our interlocutor stressed that they aim solely to reduce human suffering and to help the neediest and do not express their own political opinions and religious beliefs.<sup>91</sup> The respective sections of the organization identify areas where support is needed and arrange their activities accordingly. For instance, during summer and fall of 2015, the Malmö Red Cross was involved in many emergency actions and outreach work at the Malmö train station. Activities undertaken after 2015 mainly focused on creating meeting places and providing civil orientation and language training depending on participants' needs.

In Germany the image of the 'crisis' not only mobilized an unprecedented number of citizens but also brought **new non-religious motivations**. Before 2015, committed community members were a relatively small minority in the society, usually in faith-based circles or networks of left-wing activists. For a large number of the new volunteers, neither religious nor political motivations played a major role. Many volunteers framed their activities as a 'sign of humanity'<sup>92</sup> or 'care relations.'<sup>93</sup> According to our interlocutors, the 'refugee crisis' which sparked the 'welcome culture' motivated many more people to volunteer and support refugees, at least at the beginning of the 'crisis.'

This involvement fell into several kinds: some of the initiatives were directly related to the religious mission of the organization, others were undertaken in a secular space. There were several initiatives led by refugee and immigrants, but refugees also worked for mainstream organizations as paid staff or volunteers.

The Muslim Cultural and Educational Center in Poznań is an example of a faith-based organization established and led by immigrants. Established in 2005, the center is both a house of worship and an integration center. It offers Arab language and culture lessons and workshops, organizes annual Days of Islamic Culture program, and thematic exhibitions. Its message is religious tolerance and openness. It provides spiritual support to Muslims living in the Wielkopolska region, both foreign-born residents and native-born converts. The Imam's mission is to facilitate intercultural dialogue with members of the Polish community. The Imam wants the residents of Poznań and other visitors to learn about the true values of Islam.<sup>94</sup> During an interview, the Imam assured us:

The Center is open to everyone who wants to learn about Islam and our culture. The door is always open, even during our prayer. In fact, next Friday there will be some university students here, because they want to see how we pray. We have nothing against it. Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Atheist, it doesn't matter to us. Anyone is invited.

<sup>89</sup> Polskie Forum Migracyjne, <http://www.forummigracyjne.org/en/aktualnosci.php?news=201&wid=36> [accessed 19 July 2020].

<sup>90</sup> World Values Survey, Findings and Insights, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=Findings> [accessed 19 July 2020].

<sup>91</sup> R. Scaramuzzino and B. Suter. 2020. Holding course: civil society organizations' value expressions in the Swedish legislative consultation system before and after 2015. In E. M. Goździak, I. Main, and B. Suter (eds) *Europe and the Refugee Response*, Routledge, 172.

<sup>92</sup> L. Fleischmann and E. Steinhilper. 2017. "The Myth of Apolitical Volunteering for Refugees: German Welcome Culture and a New Dispositif of Helping. (Report). *Social Inclusion* 5(3): 17, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> T. Herrmann. 2020. Crisis and Willkommenskultur: civil society volunteering for refugees in Germany. In E. M. Goździak, I. Main, and B. Suter (eds) *Europe and the Refugee Response*, Routledge, p 209.

<sup>94</sup> Muzułmańskie Centrum Kulturalno-Oświatowe w Poznaniu, <http://www.islam.poznan.pl/o-nas/> [accessed 19 July 2020].

The Imam also joined public gatherings in support of refugees and migrants organized by Poznań activists in the summer of 2015.<sup>95</sup> He continuously advocates for religious tolerance in Poland. Together with representatives of other denominations, he participated in discussions about religious holidays and celebrations, and took part in demonstrations condemning xenophobia and promoting openness and dialogue.

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*Each of us contributes her own skills and professional resources, we complement each other and we jointly develop activities tailored to the needs of a specific group of women.*

### Kobiety Wędrownie

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In Gdańsk, refugee women and their Polish allies established a foundation called *Kobiety Wędrownie* (literally Wandering Women or Women on the Move) that comprises women hailing from different countries, and includes refugees, immigrants, and women from Poland. The women work on a broad array of issues, including domestic violence, women's empowerment, and microenterprise activities, but their message is a message of inclusion. During the current COVID-19 epidemic they have been sewing masks for nursing personnel. During Equality Marches, as Pride Parades are called in Poland, they accompanied members of the LGBTQI community.

In Sweden, we have seen refugee newcomers and refugees who arrived years ago getting involved in initiatives supporting other refugees in need, serving as language interpreters and cultural brokers. The Bridgebuilders in the Lutheran Lund diocese is an important initiative within the Church of Sweden. The Bridgebuilders were started by one former refugee in the aftermath of the 'refugee crisis,' when interpreters and cultural brokers were in high demand. Currently, there are 10 former refugees, mostly Muslim, who work part-time to facilitate communication between refugees attending church-sponsored assistance programs and the parish volunteers and program staff. The bridge builders are recruited from among refugees who have reached a relatively high level of fluency in Swedish.

## Interfaith dialogue

The ultimate expression of religious tolerance and religious pluralism includes ecumenical initiatives and interfaith dialogue – framed here as an exchange among religious communities on issues of mutual concern and collaboration on questions of human rights, human dignity, and social cohesion – that bring about mutual respect and understanding as well as joint endeavors. In this study we have identified several initiatives aimed at interfaith dialogue.

Some initiatives were rooted in ecumenical movements, but their activities undertaken on behalf of refugees were less focused on inter-faith dialogue or ecumenical liturgy and prayer that might bring together refugees and people of different faiths and more on providing material support to refugees on a daily basis. In Germany, the ecumenical movement has had a long history and is tied to Kirchentag (Church Day), a biennial forum bringing together politicians, academics, theologians, and activists to discuss issues of concern.<sup>96</sup> The German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum (Ökumenische

<sup>95</sup> A. Włoszczyńska. 2015. Poznański spór o los uchodźców. *Codzienny Poznań* July 17, 2015.

<sup>96</sup> Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag, <https://www.kirchentag.de/english/start> [accessed 19 July 2020].

Bundesarbeits-gemeinschaft Asyl in der Kirche) is an example of the ecumenical movement's involvement in supporting refugees, but the support focuses on providing temporary protection. The ecumenical debates that characterize Church Days do not seem to involve refugees.<sup>97</sup>

Two of Sweden's largest Muslim and Christian congregations – the Katarina Church and the Stockholm Mosque – also started with material support to refugees. Since September 2015, they have been working together to provide beds for a third of all refugees who come through Stockholm on their way to other countries. The mosque feeds the refugees and provides bathing facilities, while the church houses them. Mohammed, a 27-year-old Muslim who fled sectarian violence in Baghdad, described his encounter with this ecumenical effort as follows:

In Stockholm, at the station, I was met by volunteers with food and water. They asked where I would prefer to go, the mosque or the church? I said the church (...) It was a beautiful feeling. Back home, Muslims are not allowed to go to churches. Some refugees came to the church just because they wanted to find out what it was like. They found people respected them, even though they were Christians and we were Muslims. (...) Everyone was treated like a king at the church, I felt like a real human being for the first time in my life, I wasn't used to it. They were really good people.

The church and mosque are entering into a new stage of collaboration by starting a joint venture. They hope to compete with private companies that have been criticized for allegedly making profits providing refugees with shelters using public money. 'We are small, but we have a unique cooperation with an organization that has a lot of information [for refugees and migrants], and the big asylum companies don't have that,' said Olle Carlsson, the vicar of Katarina Church. The two congregations hope to 'export this idea to other countries,' said Abdallah Salah, secretary general of Islamic Relief in Sweden.<sup>98</sup>

In Sweden, there is also a long tradition of study associations aimed at promoting democratic values. The Muslim Study Association focuses on integration of Muslims into the Swedish democratic society. The activities of the Association center on **recognizing the value of religious pluralism**. One of the members of the association said:

There is a genuine desire in different Muslim communities in Malmö to work together to show that we can live together despite religious differences. We can do this, amongst other things, by having study circles, where we explore different religious texts. I think we call it 'scriptural reasoning' in English. But I also think the collaboration with the Church of Sweden is important. Our opinion is that Muslims should be a taken-for-granted part of Sweden. Our opinion is that you should be able to be religious, no matter the religion, and live in a society that is democratic and that builds on the values that are basic for Sweden.

In Greece, the ecumenical movement also got involved in supporting refugees. The Integration Centre for Migrant Workers – Ecumenical Refugee Program, was established in 2012 by the Church of Greece. The organization is a successor of the Integration Centre for Migrant Workers which had been operating as an office of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece since 1978. Initially, the program aimed to support the reintegration of Greek labor migrants returning from German-speaking countries. Ever since the 1990s, when migrants and refugees started flowing into Greece, the Integration Centre

<sup>97</sup> D. Gavlak. 2017. German churches act as buffer for refugees with sanctuary program. *National Catholic Reporter* December 19, 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Swedish communities unite to support Syrian refugees. 2016. *Islamic Relief. News* April 13, 2016.

for Migrant Workers extended its scope to serve asylum seekers and refugees by founding a new office, the Ecumenical Refugee Program.<sup>99</sup>

Although religious leaders of the Ecumenical Refugee Program hold the high-ranking positions in the organization, neither the staff nor the beneficiaries have to be religious. The staff member interviewed in the course of this study, emphasized that the organization respects the values of human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination, but decorates its offices with religious paintings in order to let the beneficiaries know about the Christian environment of the organization. The beneficiaries celebrate jointly various religious feasts— Christmas and Ramadan—with the staff. During the refugee crisis, the organization collaborated with other foreign and domestic religious (not Orthodox) organizations, such as Caritas and Diakonie in Germany.

Attempts to promote inter-faith dialogue also took place in countries such as Poland where few refugees settled. The Catholic Church has been involved in organizing the Day of Islam, held every year on January 26 in different parts of the country. The event includes conferences and seminars as well as interfaith services. The Polish Episcopate proposed the event in 2000 and the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims approved the initiative. The Day of Islam is an opportunity for Catholic clergy and Muslim imams to discuss similarities and differences between the two religions. These are usually small meetings with limited social impact. In 2014, the lack of preparation by the Polish state and society to welcome refugees, to make them 'feel at home,' was discussed at Oświęcim (Auschwitz) Forum of Human Rights. The Polish Muslim Religious Association joined other religious communities and civil service organizations. The Forum concluded that 'The point is to enable them to cultivate their own religion and traditions, often different from the commonly encountered, and thus incomprehensible, and found unacceptable.'<sup>100</sup>

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*I came to Taizé on 4 December, with two Afghans and three Sudanese. Here we found seven Sudanese. The other two Afghans wanted to leave after two days and I remained alone with ten Sudanese. I did not speak English or French; it was very difficult to communicate with others. But they welcomed me so warmly that, with the brothers and the villagers, they have become my family.*

*I am a Muslim and I feel very good here among Christians. We all pray to God. I feel at home in Taizé! But if one day peace and security return to my country, of course I would love to go back.*

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The ecumenical community of Taizé was founded in 1940 by Brother Roger. Today, the community is comprised of 100 brothers from more than 25 different countries. Through their life together, they try to be a sign of unity and peace. The brothers live and search together for the unity of Christians, and welcome youth every week of the year and during international meetings and conferences. One of the volunteers at Taizé, wrote a post to summarize her experiences:

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<sup>99</sup> Integration Centre for Migrant Workers-Ecumenical Refugee Program, <http://www.kspm-erp.com/history/?lang=en> [accessed 19 July 2020].

<sup>100</sup> Muzułmański Związek Religijny w RP, <http://mzr.pl/uchodzcy-wyzwanie-xxi-wieku/> [accessed 19 July 2020].



We see in the Gospel how Jesus went beyond the cultural, social and religious barriers of his time to enter into relationships with very different people. Following his steps, when I think of the solidarity and culture of encounter that is lived out each in day in Taizé, I think of the 4 verbs that Pope Francis outlines as the best response to serve migrants and refugees: to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate. I believe that Taizé puts these verbs into action in a very effective and far-reaching way.<sup>101</sup>

For the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Brother Alois has written a special prayer, which was posted on the community's Facebook page:

Christ Jesus, on this day when we pray for all the exiles, refugees, and migrants who have had to leave their countries, we entrust to you those who have lost their lives on the journey. Inspire political leaders to take courageous measures of justice and dignity. And inspire us all so that our hearts may be open to those who come from elsewhere. May the breath of your goodness lead us forward.

Many European youth attend gatherings in Taizé where they learn about the 'refugee crisis' and the needs of refugees within and beyond their countries. We have heard that some of the Taizé volunteers also decided to volunteer in refugee camps, including on Lesvos in Greece.

In Poland, some Catholics had difficulty accepting the lack of general support for refugees on the part of Polish clergy and decided to **educate and promote a more pluralistic perspective**. They decided to act, because they thought that the 'Catholic Church should provide a space for an honest discussion [about refugees], a debate to reject hysterical reactions and absurd commentaries.'

Members of the Sant'Egidio, the Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs, the NGOs – Refugee.pl, and the Polish Migration Forum established 'Communities of Refuge' (Wspólnoty Schronienia), educational programs for parishes, congregations, and faith groups to provide a forum to discuss the plight of refugees and to diminish the fear of refugees in the Polish society.<sup>102</sup> An open debate on migration took place during a prestigious religious congress in Gniezno; several workshops were organized in different parishes across Poland and in five Catholic seminaries. The Bishop of Koszalin asked the leaders of the initiative to print additional materials about refugees and ways to support them and distributed the information to all bishops in Poland. Interviewed members of the Sant'Egidio community explained:

For us it is important to acknowledge that history matters, that it must be remembered so we don't repeat its mistakes. We regularly travel and take young people with us to Auschwitz. We talk with them about violence around us, nowadays also about migrants and refugees. We discuss what can be done to reduce violence in our cities so that everyone feels welcome, well received. (...) We organize prayers for refugees, which are also attended by Protestants and Orthodox. It unites us, the feeling that if we want to be faithful to the Gospel, we should be open. It also means openness to followers of other religions. (...) There is a great need for tolerance, respect. We need to focus on the things that unite rather than on those that divide us. This is the only ground that can be used to build common things, common good.

They also expressed great disappointment about the lack of concrete actions to support refugees in Poland. At the same time, they stressed that there is another group which needs openness and

<sup>101</sup> Taizé: Doing dialogue amongst faiths. 2018. *Migrants and Refugees*, Blog News September 10, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Fundacja Refugee.pl, <http://refugee.pl/informacje/wspolnoty-schronienia-publikacja/> [accessed 18 July 2020].

hospitality: migrants from Ukraine, whom they invite to their meetings and for whom they organized Orthodox Christmas.

Another initiative **promoting religious pluralism and tolerance** in Poland is **Islamista**, established by a young Catholic couple, Anna and Karol Wilczyński. They decided to use their expertise in Arab studies and Islam to share their knowledge with the general public via a blog they named *Islamista* (i.e. an expert on Islam). They not only have advanced degrees in Arab philosophy (Karol) and Arab studies (Anna) from a prestigious university in Kraków, but they have travelled extensively in the Middle East since 2011 and have a first-hand knowledge about Arab cultures and Islam. They wrote the following about their rationale behind creating the blog:

The project was born out of our desire to share knowledge about and experience with Islam and Muslims. The more political scuffles around Islam, the more wars and tragic events, the more often religions are used for political purposes, the more questions arise about Islam, for which it is difficult to find a reliable answer in the media and the public discourse. The blog is a place to answer all these questions - ask specialists, recommend valuable sources, promote the culture of dialogue about another religion and culture without hostility or prejudice.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to the blog, they also have a highly active Facebook page. They often stream live discussions about Islam and Islamic law. Recently, they also organized a series of workshops and meetings under a theme of *Rethinking Refugees – Knowledge and Action*. In a press interview, Karol described this initiative as follows:

(...) we invited refugees from several countries: Chechnya, Syria, and Afghanistan. They delivered lectures, we ate breakfast together, you could talk to them, not necessarily about trauma, but about everyday life. Together with a group of people associated with the blog, we organize cyclical inter-religious meetings. The pretexts for these meetings vary: sometimes we screen a movie, sometimes we help the homeless together, and sometimes we organize a joint prayer.<sup>104</sup>

Islamista is one of the most innovative approaches to cross-cultural education and inter-faith dialogue. Its active presence in cyberspace attracts young people who need to learn about the wider world and religious pluralism as the Polish educational system focuses almost exclusively on Catholicism.

<sup>103</sup> Blog Islamista, <https://islamistablog.pl/o-blogu/> [accessed 18 July 2020].

<sup>104</sup> R. Radłowska. 2018. Anna i Karol Wilczyńscy: katolicy, którzy uczą szacunku do islamu. Słyszają: jesteście dziwni. *Gazeta Wyborcza* November 26, 2018.

## Policy recommendations

*While remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their former divisions and unite ever more closely, to forge a common destiny.*

Preamble of the Draft Treaty  
establishing a Constitution for Europe

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in January 2009 has renewed the **institutional and legal foundations upon which the relationship between religion and EU law and policy** might develop in the years to come.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, in 2013, the **EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief** have been issued. When first issued, the Guidelines were hailed as a landmark commitment. However, in subsequent years there has been much criticism of the lack of formal evaluation of the effects of the Guidelines.<sup>106</sup> These criticisms predate the 'refugee crisis,' but it seems that there is even more reason now to evaluate the Guidelines as religious diversity related to migration is growing.

Considering the implications of the EU's own commitments to religious tolerance and religious plurality and contextualizing them within our empirical research as well as existing writings on religious tolerance and religious pluralism, we recommend to:

- ◆ Strengthen the powers of the European Commission in arenas relevant to religious pluralism, including forced migration and refugee integration;
- ◆ Expand the competences of the EU Court of Justice to review the relationship between EU law and religion and the legally binding nature of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- ◆ Ensure that religious freedom guaranteed by European and national laws and regulations does in fact allow everyone to choose and change their beliefs, freely express and practice their faith, access and establish communities and places of worship;
- ◆ Provide legal, easily accessible mechanisms to report acts of religious discrimination and religion-based violence; and
- ◆ Establish legal and psychological support for victims of religiously motivated crimes.

There are already many good policies and practices trying to instill **religious tolerance**. However, these policies are not always enforced as rigorously as they should be. Furthermore, with the growing role religion plays in political debates as well as discussions about immigration, refugee support, and integration, there is a need for innovative approaches. Below are recommendations aimed at maintaining and enforcing the norms, policies, and laws that facilitate religious tolerance.

<sup>105</sup> S. Carrera and J. Parkin. 2010. The Place of Religion in European Union Law and Policy: Competing Approaches and Actors Inside the European Commission. RELIGARE Working Paper 1.

<sup>106</sup> A. Portaru. 2019. The EU needs to show real commitment to religious freedom. *Euroactiv* June 25, 2019.

- ◆ **Maintain the universalistic principle of freedom of religion**, understood both as freedom *of* belief and freedom *from* belief. These are important distinctions for many refugees and immigrants as some might have never been able to choose not to be religious or to be agnostic. In patriarchal societies, religious beliefs and associated behaviors, dress codes, and the ability to work outside the home are not available to women. These restrictions are often explained in terms of religious precepts. Children born to immigrants in Europe and attending secular schools might also need the freedom to abandon the religious beliefs of their parents. They should be accorded these rights;
- ◆ **Ensure that refugees, immigrants, religious minorities, and refugee leaders have a voice in policy dialogues** at all levels of governance. Islam is the second largest religion in Europe and Muslim populations of immigrant descent face disproportionate socio-economic exclusions, discrimination, and racism;<sup>107</sup>
- ◆ **Ensure adequate financial and institutional support** for faith-based and non-confessional civil society organizations at the EU, regional, national, and local levels. Resources provided at the EU and regional levels, in particular, would go a long way towards developing EU-wide and regional initiatives, including exchange of knowledge and best practices through meetings, conferences, and online platforms; support initiatives that directly address the issue of religious pluralism but also undertakings which focus on tackling common concerns and problems and are therefore actual examples of conviviality and cooperation;
- ◆ **Support adult educational programs and campaigns** promoting religious pluralism and tolerance;
- ◆ **Include topics related to religious tolerance and religious pluralism in school curricula at all levels**. In particular, include content on religious diversity, examples of historical conviviality, and stress the variety of interpretations, beliefs, cultural aspects in various religions;
- ◆ **Train community leaders, educators, civil society and government representatives** to become skilled in facilitating inter-religious dialogue;
- ◆ **Use social media platforms** to enable innovative and interactive ways to discuss religious tolerance and religious pluralism. Furthermore, ensure participation of refugees and migrants of different faiths.

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<sup>107</sup> Al-Hassani, 2005.

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## About NOVAMIGRA

Several, partly interconnected crises have profoundly challenged the European project in recent years. In particular, reactions to the arrival of 1.25 million refugees in 2015 called into question the idea(l) of a unified Europe. What is the impact of the so-called migration and refugee crisis on the normative foundations and values of the European Union? And what will the EU stand for in the future?

NOVAMIGRA studies these questions with a unique combination of social scientific analysis, legal and philosophical normative reconstruction and theory.

This project:

- Develops a precise descriptive and normative understanding of the current “value crisis”;
- Assesses possible evolutions of European values; and
- Considers Europe’s future in light of rights, norms and values that could contribute to overcoming the crises.

The project is funded with around 2.5 million Euros under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for a period of three years.

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