



NOVAMIGRA

NORMS AND VALUES IN THE
EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

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

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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.² Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices sustain many refugees in their process of displacement, migration, and settlement.³ 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.⁴ 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.’⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ Several recent surveys bore out this widespread negative view of Islam and Muslim refugees.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ On the other hand, the emerging pro-refugee advocacy and solidarity movements, even in countries such as Poland or Hungary that refused to participate in the refugee relocation program, have called for openness to refugees regardless of their religion.

The policy research alert

This policy research alert is a companion piece to a briefing paper entitled “The ‘refugee crisis’ and religious tolerance in Europe: Plurality of perspectives”¹² (DOI [10.17185/duerpublico/72833](https://doi.org/10.17185/duerpublico/72833)) on 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 well as in Turkey (Istanbul), Lebanon (Beirut), and Thailand (Bangkok).

Below we present a series of policy recommendations to strengthen the vision of cosmopolitan Europe where religious tolerance and religious pluralism can flourish.

Policy recommendations

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.

- ◆ **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;

- ◆ **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; and
- ◆ **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.

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

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ E. Wiesel. 1960. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang.

⁶ E. M. Goździak. *Ibidem*.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² E. Gozdzia, I. Main, and I. Kujawa. The 'refugee crisis' and religious tolerance in Europe: Plurality of perspectives. NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D3.3b, 2020. [10.17185/duerpublico/72833](https://doi.org/10.17185/duerpublico/72833)

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ A. Portaru. 2019. The EU needs to show real commitment to religious freedom. *Euroactiv* June 25, 2019.

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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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