



Federal Criminal Police Office, Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism

Analysis of the background and process of radicalization among persons who left Germany to travel to Syria or Iraq based on Islamist motivations

2016 update

Version of 4 October 2016

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Joint analysis by

Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA)

Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)

Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism (HKE)

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1 Introduction

The present document is the second update of the analysis of the background and process of radicalization among persons who left Germany to travel to Syria or Iraq based on Islamist motivations. Since the first report in 2014, highly dynamic, geopolitical developments have occurred, leading to major changes in travel movements to the conflict region in Syria and Iraq during the four and a half years under observation (January 2012 to June 2016). A high-water mark in 2014 around the time the “caliphate” was declared in Syria/Iraq was immediately followed by a significant decline in the number of departures; this decline was likely related to the increasing military pressure on the so-called Islamic State (IS).

As a result, the conflicts in and around Syria, the founding and attempted expansion of the IS and the fight against this terrorist organization are issues which continue to dominate international and national policy. While the U.S.-led alliance, including Turkey, is focused above all on fighting the IS, the forces of the Syrian regime, with massive support from Russia and Iran, are fighting all actual or alleged Islamist opponents of the regime: both “moderate” Islamists such as the Free Syrian Army and clearly jihadist groupings such as the IS and the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (“Front for the Conquest of the Levant”), formerly known as Jabhat al Nusra, or the al-Nusra Front.

These efforts have increased in terms of quantity and quality since autumn 2015, with two immediate effects: First, they succeeded in pushing back the IS – the most obviously jihadist opponent of the Assad regime, also perceived internationally as the greatest threat – in both Syria and Iraq, which strengthened the Syrian government. Second, they set off an unprecedented wave of refugees fleeing the conflict region for Europe.

The developments in the region have had an impact on Germany and Europe, as well as “the West” in general and the Islamist and/or jihadist elements there in particular. Two points are especially important in this regard:

- The IS has recently been calling on its followers in the West to stop travelling to the “caliphate” and instead carry out attacks in their home countries.¹
- The number of Islamist-motivated departures from Germany to Syria/Iraq has fallen dramatically since July 2015.

The question whether and to what extent this dramatic drop is due to IS military defeats and loss of territory in Syria and Iraq and the resulting greater threat to life and health in the “caliphate”, and/or to the IS leadership’s call to stay home and carry out attacks there cannot be answered within the framework of the present analysis.

When the IS declared its caliphate in June 2014, it mobilized Islamists, primarily Salafists, worldwide to an unprecedented degree. In Germany, it is above all Salafist institutions and actors that are using the conflict in Syria and Iraq to spread their extremist ideology and recruit new followers. Even though the pull of the “caliphate” as destination has subsided, IS ideology has not lost its attraction. Only the focus of the threat from the IS and its supporters has changed: It is no longer primarily abroad, but increasingly also at home in the countries of the West.

This threat may emanate from three groups of persons, who may also work together: 1) persons sent with a mission to plan and carry out an attack (persons returning to Germany after engaging in jihad; foreign jihadists disguised as refugees or other persons smuggled into Europe); 2) local supporters of the IS or other jihadist groups (individuals or small groups); and 3) refugees recruited in Germany taking orders from abroad.

Of these three groups, this study can deal only with those persons returning to Germany from jihad. One-third of those who left Germany have returned. Identifying and possibly monitoring their activities poses major challenges for the security authorities in terms of human and material resources. Such persons may engage in propaganda activities and concrete attempts to recruit new followers as well as plan and carry out serious terrorist

¹ For example, in a video published on 21 March 2016, Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesman for the IS who was killed in a U.S. airstrike in August, outlined the focus of attacks in the West: “the smallest act you [IS supporters] carry out in [the unbelievers’] home countries is better and more effective for the state [i.e., the IS] and more painful for them.”

crimes. Well-founded suspicions indicate that this applies in particular to persons with combat experience or terrorist training.

The present report provides information on the backgrounds and processes of radicalization for the 784 persons nationwide known to the German domestic security authorities as having left Germany for Syria or Iraq by the end of June 2016 based on Islamist motivations, or who actively tried to do so.

Like the two previous analyses, the present analysis concentrates on four crucial aspects:

- Who left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq?
- What factors influence(d) their radicalization up to their departure, and what motivated their departure and return (if applicable)?
- Who did what in Syria/Iraq?
- Where do the returnees stand?

Like the study of 2015, the present report points out changes in departures over the past year (early July 2015 to late June 2016) and discusses possible reasons for them. Another key interest of this study is to define more precisely the group of persons at risk for departure, also in the hope of finding new approaches for effective prevention and deradicalization.

The present report was produced at the request of the Standing Conference of federal and state interior ministers (IMK, 204th session, 15–17 June 2016, Working Group IV with participation from Working Group II) as an update to the 2015 report and coordinated with the police and domestic intelligence agencies represented in the Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (GTAZ) working group on deradicalization.

Although again in 2016 the amount and quality of information varies significantly from case to case, it has improved overall compared to the previous two studies, thanks to the high level of awareness and improved intelligence of the German domestic security authorities. For example, enough information is available on a sufficient number of persons to allow greater insight into the circumstances and factors involved in their radicalization.

Like the 2015 report, the present report was drawn up jointly by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) and the Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism (HKE).² This report is based entirely on information from the federal and state police and domestic intelligence agencies. The first part of the present analysis (Chapter 3) is limited to describing the absolute and relative frequency of the individual characteristics, providing a picture of the individual aspects. Chapter 4 then provides an analysis of relevant issues, for example by comparing various groups, starting with those persons who left Germany before and after the study's cut-off date of 30 June 2015. The report closes with conclusions and a look ahead.

² The reports from 2014 and 2015 can be found using the following links:
2014: http://www.innenministerkonferenz.de/IMK/DE/termine/to-beschluesse/14-12-11_12/anlage-analyse.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2
2015: http://www.innenministerkonferenz.de/IMK/DE/termine/to-beschluesse/2015-12-03_04/anlage_analyse.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2

2 Methodology

The methodological approach is essentially based on the collection of information in 2014 and 2015. In view of the ongoing development of the phenomenon of radicalization (see Chapter 3.2.1) and the many operational challenges for the federal and state security authorities associated with this, it was necessary to develop methodology that promised to yield as much information for the least amount of effort possible on the part of the police and domestic intelligence agencies. A deeper analysis of the complex psychosocial conditions influencing radicalization in each case would have required time-consuming social science studies of individual careers, which would not have provided reliable results within a reasonable amount of time. For pragmatic reasons, therefore, it was decided to conduct a coordinated survey of the police and intelligence agencies represented in the Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre working group on deradicalization to ask them about relevant factors for radicalization based on their current information.

The police and intelligence agencies of all the federal states and the Federal Criminal Police Office collected the data for this analysis in anonymous form using a coordinated data collection instrument. The cut-off date for the present analysis is 30 June 2016, i.e. all relevant cases on which the federal and state security authorities had information by that date were taken into account, amounting to a total of 784 cases.

As in 2014 and 2015, the amount and quality of information varies significantly from case to case, although it has improved overall compared to the two previous studies, thanks to improved intelligence of the German domestic security authorities. In order to assess this in further detail, an index was created to indicate the amount of information available in each case. This index covered 22 questions and aspects (from standard biographical data to probable motivation for travel to Syria/Iraq) and ranged from a value of 0 (no further information available) to a maximum value of 22 (comprehensive case information available). In 2014 the mean value for this index was 11.7 (378 cases) and 15.5 in 2015 (677 cases); for the present analysis, it rose slightly to 15.7 for 784 cases. This density of information enables deeper insight into the circumstances and factors involved in radicalization. It will not be surprising that the amount of information correlates to the

length of the individual process of radicalization: In those cases where the radicalization process took longer (defined here as the period between the probable start of radicalization and the first departure for Syria/Iraq), there tends to be a much broader base of information.

However, despite the improved information, wide variations in the amount of information mean that no elaborated multivariate analysis was advisable. For this reason, descriptive statistical (frequency distributions, calculations of mean values) and simple inferential statistical methods were used to analyse possible differences between groups (very important: comparisons of mean values, crosstabulation using the chi-square test (for example, comparing men and women using the variable of whether they were known to the police before leaving for Syria/Iraq)).

All of the results presented here, especially in Chapter 4, are statistically significant and not simply the result of coincidence. Whenever differences or similarities that are noticeable but not statistically significant are described in the following text, this is explicitly noted. In order to improve the readability of the report, the extent of the difference or similarity will be described only with a reference to the mean value or percentage. These statistical analyses were carried out to avoid the risk of over-interpreting conspicuous differences in percentage or absolute numbers, leading to the wrong conclusions for practical action.

As already indicated, information on certain questions or variables is not available in every case. This means that, when comparing two variables, the groups may be rather small. And the reference figures may differ depending on the variable. For example, the question as to the length of the radicalization process can be analysed only based on those cases for which the relevant information is available: Both the date when the radicalization process first started and the date of (first) departure are known only in 364 cases, rather than in all 784, so the sub-groups of persons who became radicalized quickly and those who took longer to become radicalized can only be drawn from the 364 cases in which the relevant dates are known. Further, it should be noted that certain analytical methods were only applied if the number of cases in the various sub-groups under consideration were sufficient.

It should also be noted that the information on (likely) factors influencing the radicalization process or on the (likely) development of the radicalization process over time (very important: age at the start of the process, length of the process (so far)) is very imprecise. Various studies have shown that radicalization processes usually start before the authorities become aware of them; even friends, family members and others in the immediate social environment often fail to notice until the radicalization process is well advanced. With regard to other observations documented here concerning possible influences on the radicalization process, such as the Internet, friends or family, it should always be noted that only those factors known to the security authorities can be considered here. For example, when it says that in a certain percentage of the cases observed, the Internet apparently played a relevant role in the radicalization process, this does not rule out the possibility that the Internet also played a role in some cases in the other group being compared. Although this may be assumed, one should also be aware that this role was apparently not great enough to be noticed by the security authorities.

Given the circumstances of data collection and data quality, this analysis can make the claim to provide a relatively reliable picture of the extent of the phenomenon with attention to central socio-demographic data. Although the information base has improved, the analyses of specific social-environmental factors in radicalization processes can only offer orientation and help point out connections and influences that would be worth addressing with appropriate preventive measures.

Finally, this analysis does not draw any comparisons with the studies from 2014 and 2015, for two reasons: First, the latest questionnaire was revised on the basis of past experience in order to improve the quality (validity and reliability) of the information collected. Second, as already indicated, information on the group of travellers to Syria and Iraq improved further even apart from the data collection instrument. So a simple comparison between the figures in the earlier reports might reflect differences in the information available rather than differences in the actual situation. In order to draw reliable conclusions in this regard, a more detailed analysis was carried out based on this year's total sample of 784 cases. This sample includes the cases collected in 2014 and 2015 which are still current. The revised questionnaire asked the authorities in the federal states to provide updated information on these cases.

3 Descriptive data analysis (n=784)

This first part of the analysis describes the absolute and relative frequency distributions for the central variables of the total group (n=784). In particular, the socio-economic background of the persons who left Germany, their radicalization, how they travelled, what they did in the conflict region and their supposed return to Germany are examined in further detail. Based on these results, Chapter 4 presents comparative analyses of different sub-groups.

3.1 Sex, age and marital status

Of persons who left Germany, 79% were male and 21% were female. At the time of (first) departure, they were between 13 and 62 years old, with a mean age of 25.8 years. The majority (322 persons) were between 22 and 25 years old. The next-largest group was that of 18-to-21-year olds (164 persons), followed by 26-to-29-year olds (143 persons).

On the cut-off date of 30 June 2016, the age distribution was as follows: Ages ranged from 14 to 65; the mean age was 28.3 years. The relatively high percentage of very young persons is striking, as is the high percentage of older persons associated with the phenomenon of Salafism. Figure 3.1 compares the age distribution at the time of first departure and at the cut-off date.

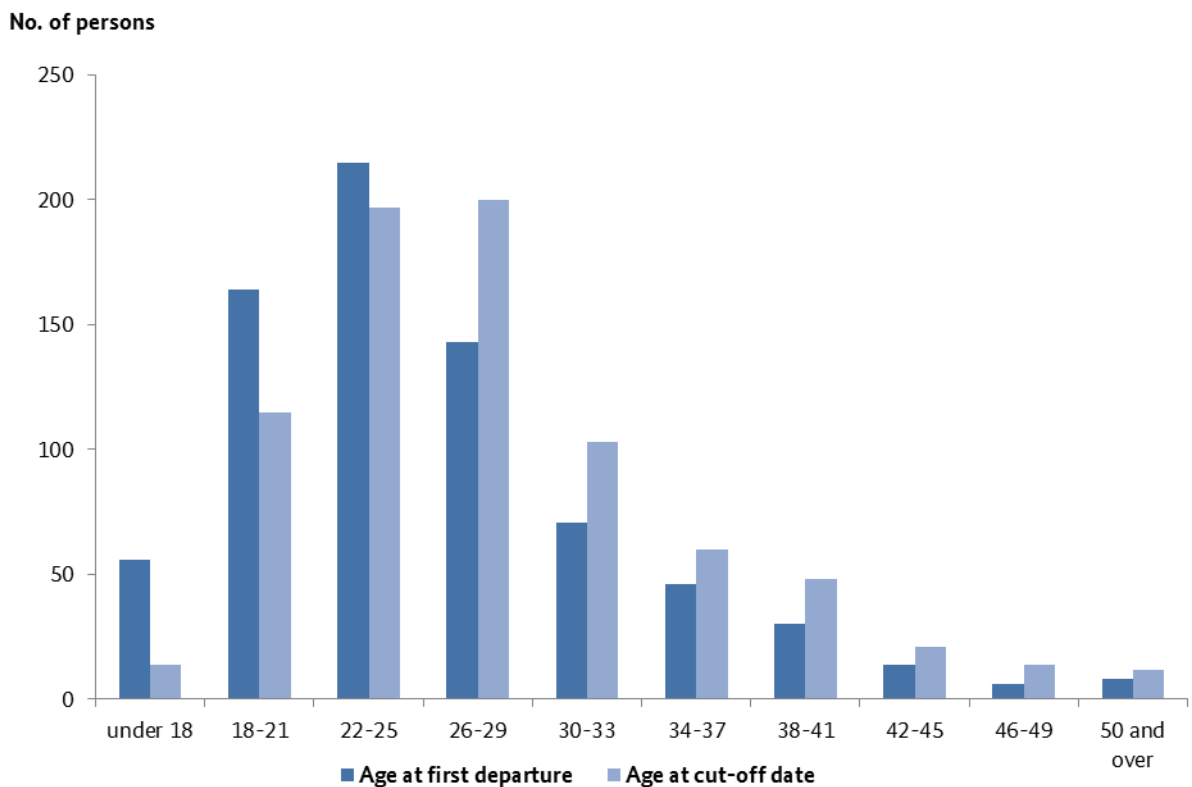


Figure 3.1 Age distribution at the time of first departure and at the cut-off date of 30 June 2016

Information on marital status at the time of (first) departure was available for 688 persons: 44% were single, 28% were married according to German law, and 22% were married according to Islamic rites; 16 persons were in a permanent relationship. Two hundred ninety persons are known to have had own children at the time of their (first) departure; 385 persons are known to have had their own household.

Of those married according to German law, two-thirds were married to a spouse born to Muslim parents; 29% to Muslim converts and 4% to spouses of non-Muslim origin. Of those married according to Islamic rites, 62% were married to spouses born to Muslim parents, 37% to Muslim converts and 1% to spouses of non-Muslim origin.

3.2 Place of residence prior to departure

The group of those who left Germany came from a total of 162 German cities and towns ranging in size from major and large cities to small towns and villages. They came from

cities and towns all across Germany, although there were some regional concentrations. Only 13 cities were home to more than 10 people who left Germany (minimum: 11; maximum: 107). It is worth noting that a total of 394 people left from these 13 cities, accounting for nearly half of the cases described here.

So the phenomenon examined here is largely an urban one, as nearly 89% of those who left Germany had resided in a larger city before their departure. About one in 10 had resided in a rural environment.

3.3 Country of birth and nationality

Of those who left, 61% were born in Germany. Other countries of birth are as follows: Turkey (6%), Syria (5%), Russian Federation (5%) and Lebanon (3%). The countries of birth are shown in Figure 3.2. The persons who left Germany were born in a total of 38 countries.

For 193 of those born abroad, information is available on when they immigrated to Germany: 39% immigrated to Germany as children (younger than age 14); 23% immigrated from 14 to 20; and 38% immigrated at age 21 or older. Thus the largest group, those who immigrated by age 13, was (politically) socialized primarily in Germany.

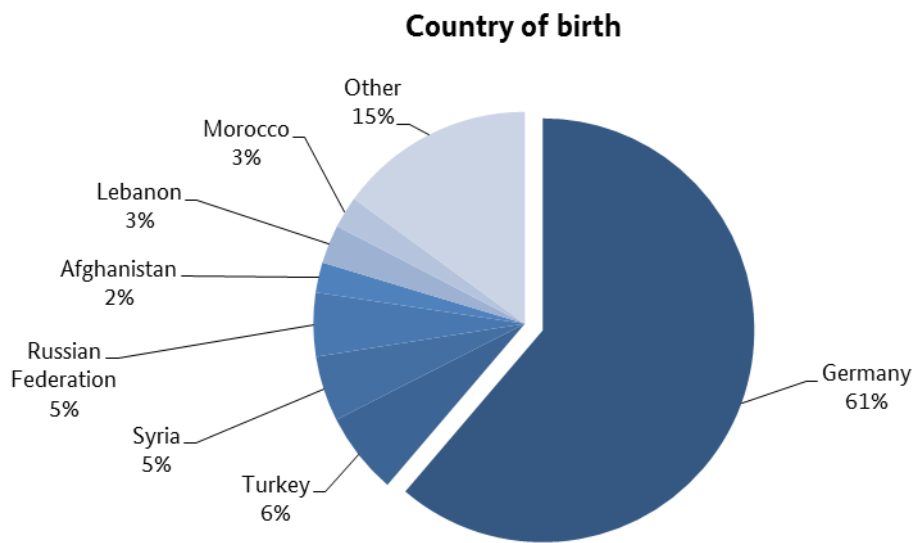


Figure 3.2 Country of birth

Information on country of first nationality is available for 769 persons who left Germany: 62% of these persons (also) have German nationality – 96% of them as their country of first nationality. This is followed by persons having (also) the following nationalities: Turkish (19%), Moroccan (7%), Russian (5%), Syrian (5%), Tunisian (5%) and Afghan (4%). Another 39 nationalities are represented, most in single cases.

More than one-third (35%) have only German nationality, while 27% have both German and another nationality. The largest groups with dual nationality are German-Turkish (21%), German-Moroccan (17%), German-Tunisian (13%), German-Afghan (11%) and German-Syrian (7%). The largest group of persons who left the country without a German passport are Turkish nationals (14%), followed by Russian (4%), Syrian (3%), Moroccan (2%) and Afghan (2%) nationals (Figure 3.3).

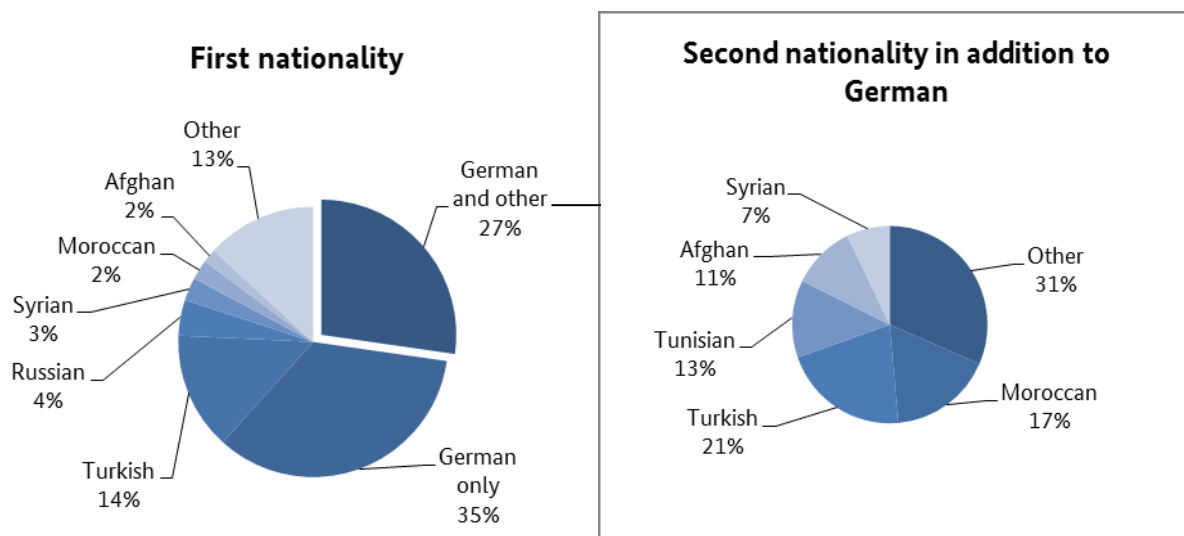


Figure 3.3 (First) nationality and second nationality in addition to German

Persons with an immigrant background are officially defined as “all persons who have immigrated since 1949 to the territory that today constitutes the Federal Republic of Germany, all foreigners born in Germany and all German nationals born in Germany who have at least one parent who immigrated to Germany or who was born as a foreigner in Germany”.³ This definition applies to 633 persons (81%) in this sample of those who left the country.

3.4 Schooling, training, university studies and occupation

A total of 72 persons are known to have been school pupils before leaving the country. One-quarter attended *Gymnasium* (academic secondary school) and one-quarter attended a trade or vocational school. About one-tenth attended *Hauptschule* (lower-level secondary school). Information on the highest level of schooling completed is available for 289 of those who left Germany: 36% had completed secondary school and qualified to enter university (*Abitur*, (*Fach-*) *Hochschulreife*); 27% had completed *Hauptschule* or *Volksschule* (lower secondary school); 23% had completed *Realschule* or *Mittlere Reife*

³ Federal Statistical Office, Wiesbaden 2009. Persons with an immigrant background. Accessed 22 September 2015, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/Migrationshintergrund/Aktuell.html>

(lower secondary school); 7% had another kind of school-leaving certificate; and 7% did not complete school.

Information on vocational training is available for 116 persons before their (first) departure: 42% completed vocational training; 32% left without completing their training and 26% had started training shortly before they left. Of the 94 persons known to have started university studies before leaving Germany, 10% completed their studies, 28% left without completing their studies and 63% had started university shortly before they left. For 111 persons, there is information that they were employed before/until their departure, and 166 persons are known to have been unemployed before their (first) departure.

3.5 Religion and ideological orientation

Of those who left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq, 624, or nearly 96% of those on whom this information is available, are considered part of the Salafist spectrum; only 29 persons are explicitly not part of this spectrum. According to information of the security authorities, 268 persons were active in a mosque congregation or mosque organization before their (first) departure.

There is information on 134 persons indicating that they converted to Islam. For nearly 77% of these converts, it is possible to determine their age at the time of their conversion: Nearly two-thirds of them were younger than 22 when they converted.

There is information on 515 persons indicating that they were associated with known Islamists/Salafists or similar groups before they left Germany; this was explicitly not the case for only 57 persons. There are indications of probably smaller local structures and of interregional contacts. For a large number of those who left Germany, real-world connections to known Salafists and places dominated by them played a key or at least relevant role in their radicalization. Identifying persons and/or places having such influence and taking preventive or punitive action to counter them can thus significantly help stop people from becoming radicalized and travelling to Syria/Iraq.

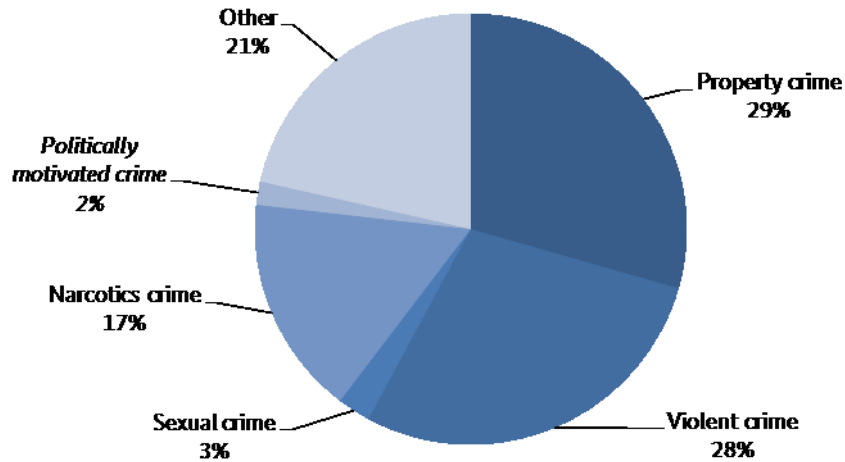
3.6 Criminal offences

Two-thirds of those who left Germany on whom such information is available (778 persons) were already known to the police: 26% for violent offences; 24% for property crime; 18% for politically motivated crime and 10% for narcotics crime. Before becoming radicalized, these persons were most often noted for property (62%) and violent (60%) crime, followed by narcotics crime (35%). Only about 4% were associated with politically motivated offences before becoming radicalized. During the radicalization process, however, the largest category of criminal offences was politically motivated crime (55%), while violent crime (47%), property crime (41%) and narcotics crime (14%) continued to represent a large share.

In order to draw conclusions about the development of criminal delinquency, only those persons were considered who were associated with criminal offences before and during radicalization. This information is available for 189 persons.⁴ Comparing the offences before and during the radicalization process (Figure 3.4), it is apparent that more politically motivated offences were recorded during radicalization, which then constituted the largest share of offences (27%). The share of all other offences decreased significantly during the radicalization process.

⁴ See Chapter 2 on the problem of imprecise dates with regard to the radicalization process of individuals.. Individuals may have been associated with crimes in more than one category.

Types of offences before radicalization (189 persons)



Types of offences during radicalization (189 persons)

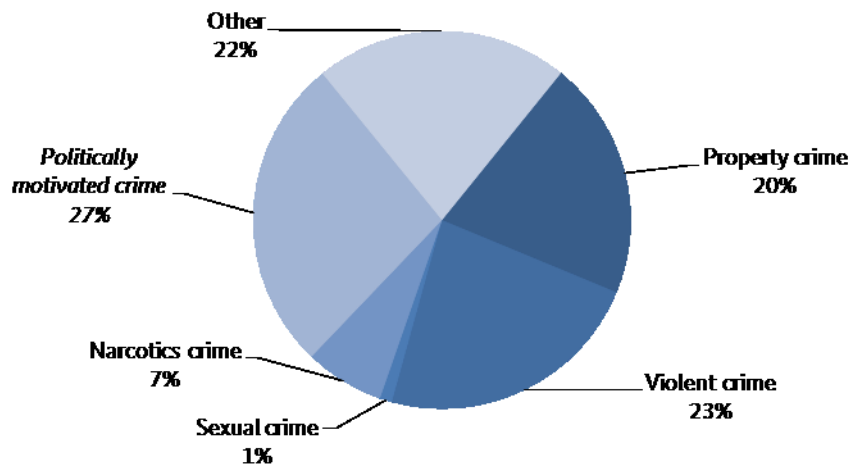


Figure 3.4 Types of offences before/during radicalization

Information on the number of offences was available for almost all persons known to the police (504 persons).⁵ More than half of them (53%) had been associated with three or more offences, and nearly one-third (32%) had been associated with six or more. This confirms the previous trend in which most of the persons having a criminal record who left Germany were multiple offenders.

⁵ It should be noted that the number of offences is based on the information available in police systems at the cut-off date for collecting this information. Owing to data protection law (e.g. deadlines for deleting data), these systems may no longer have information on older offences, so a person's "criminal career" can no longer be fully reconstructed at a later date. As a result, the average number of offences given here may actually be higher in some cases.

With regard to the 770 persons for whom information on current criminal proceedings is available, at the cut-off date for collecting this information more than half (53%) were the subject of pending proceedings, most of them investigations in accordance with sections 89a, 89b, 129a and 129b of the Criminal Code (StGB).⁶ With regard to this group, two proceedings were pending in accordance with Section 89c, which was added to the Criminal Code in 2015. Some persons in this group were also the subject of proceedings concerning violent crimes (mainly bodily injury/dangerous bodily injury).

3.7 Radicalization factors

The survey collected information on several factors considered relevant for the start and process of radicalization. Here it was possible to list multiple factors. The security authorities have information on 572 of the persons who left Germany indicating which factors were likely to have been relevant at the start of their radicalization: for 311 of these persons, friends represented a relevant factor at the start of their radicalization (54%). Other relevant factors were contacts at (relevant) mosques (48%), the Internet (44%), so-called Islam seminars (27%), Koran distribution activities such as the “Read!” campaign (24%), family members (21%), so-called fund-raising activities (6%), contacts at school (3%) and contacts in penal institutions (2%).

The different factors obviously vary in relevance over the years with regard to their influence – whether they set the radicalization process in motion or accompanied it. This is indicated by the increasing volume of Internet propaganda put out by Islamist organizations and individuals as well as the rise of new recruiting strategies. For about half of the 784 persons who left Germany, it is possible to determine the period in which radicalization probably began as well as the factors which were relevant at the start of radicalization.

⁶ At the cut-off date, 95 persons were the subject of at least one proceeding pursuant to sections 129a and 129b of the Criminal Code. One proceeding pursuant to sections 89a and 89b of the Criminal Code involving 226 persons and one proceeding pursuant to sections 89a and 89b in conjunction with sections 129a and 129b of the Criminal Code involving 22 persons were also conducted.

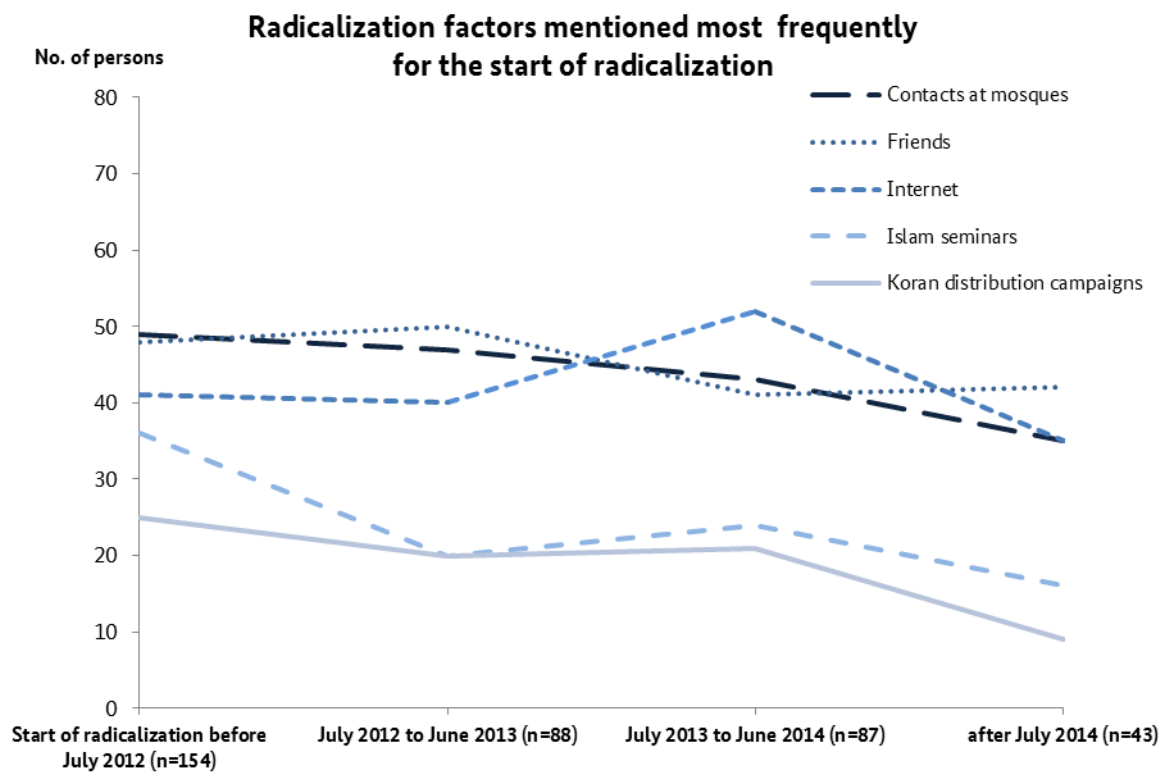


Figure 3.5 Radicalization factors over time

As Figure 3.5 makes clear, the five most frequently mentioned factors for radicalization are the same for all the periods examined. However, there are noticeable differences over time for the three most frequently mentioned factors: For example, contacts at (relevant) mosques steadily decreased in importance at the start of radicalization. Whereas this factor played a role for about half of those who started becoming radicalized before July 2012, this was true of only about one-third of those who became radicalized after July 2014. During the period from July 2013 to June 2014, the Internet played a key role for more than 50% of those who started becoming radicalized; for those who became radicalized starting in summer 2014, however, the Internet was apparently less relevant: It played a role at the start of radicalization for only one person in three in this group. The importance of so-called Islam seminars and Koran distribution activities as a factor at the start of radicalization also tended to decrease.

There is now sufficient evidence that, in many cases, Internet propaganda was a relevant factor in radicalization. Nonetheless, the question arises as to whether Internet propaganda can initiate radicalization, or whether the Internet simply accompanies other radi-

calization factors. The available data indicate that, for 249 persons, the Internet seems to have been a relevant influence at the start of their radicalization. The Internet is the only known deciding factor at the start of radicalization for 17% of these persons; for the remaining persons, there are indications that other factors also had an influence. Friends, contacts at (relevant) mosques and so-called Islam seminars also played a decisive role. However, it should be remembered that it is impossible to know how much information is still lacking, especially when it comes to the Internet as a factor in individual radicalization.

Information on factors influencing radicalization at later stages is available for 615 persons. Friends (63%) are the most frequently mentioned factor in later stages of radicalization, as already at the start of radicalization. This is followed by contacts at (relevant) mosques (57%), the Internet (38%), so-called Islam seminars (31%), Koran distribution activities such as the “Read!” campaign (28%), family members (21%), so-called fundraising activities (11%), contacts at school (2%) and contacts in penal institutions (2%).

In comparison to the relevance of these factors at the start of radicalization, the importance of friends (from the Salafist scene), contacts at (relevant) mosques, participation in so-called Islam seminars and Salafists’ Koran distribution activities tended to increase for later stages of radicalization, while the Internet appeared to decrease in importance. Direct personal contact with like-minded persons appears more important in most cases for later stages of radicalization than the consumption of extremist Internet propaganda or digital communication. Overall, despite some slight shifts, Salafist institutions, personalities and propaganda played an important role for a large share of persons who left Germany, both at the start of radicalization and later on in the process. Radicalization largely takes place in the real social environment. Salafism thus continues to be one of the decisive factors for Islamist radicalization of persons who travel from Germany to Syria and Iraq.

3.8 Timing, length and outward signs of radicalization

Information on the timing of the probable start of radicalization⁷ is available for 370 (48%) of the 784 persons who left Germany. By far the largest share of these persons (55%) started becoming radicalized between the start of the Syrian conflict in spring 2012 and the Islamic State's declaration of the caliphate in late June 2014. One-third (32%) started becoming radicalized between the attacks in the U.S. on 11 September 2001 and the start of the Syrian conflict. The security authorities know that 12% started becoming radicalized between the declaration of the caliphate in late June 2014 and the cut-off date for this study (30 June 2016). Only 1% of those who travelled from Germany to Syria/Iraq started becoming radicalized before 11 September 2001.

Age at the start of radicalization ranged from 13 to 56, with an average age of 22. According to the available information, the youngest persons who later left Germany were 13 years old when they started becoming radicalized (five persons). Information is available on 69 persons (19%) who left Germany indicating that they were minors when they started becoming radicalized. Figure 3.6 shows the age distribution at the start of radicalization.

⁷ See footnote 4 in this context.

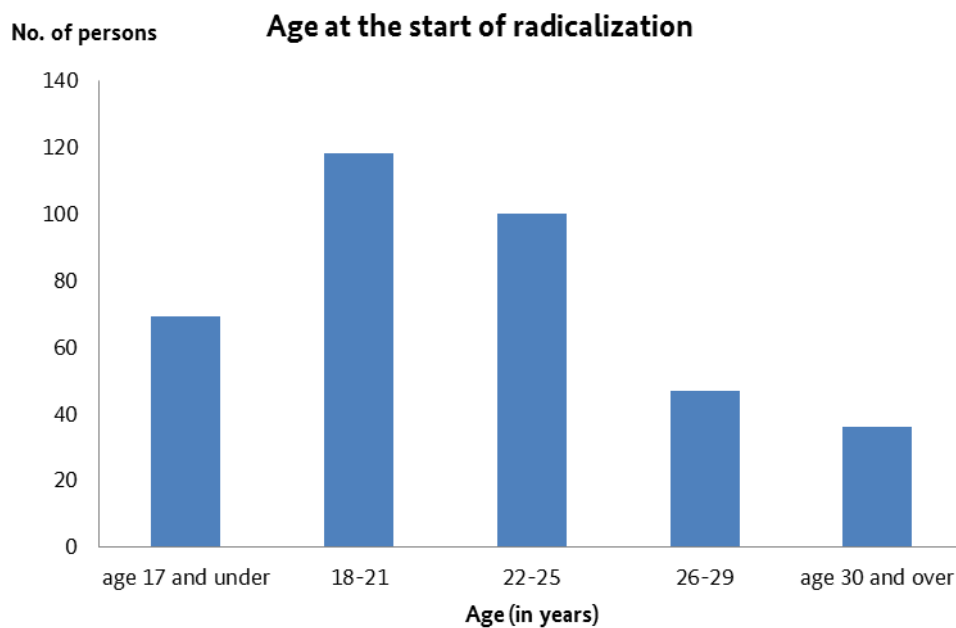


Figure 3.6 Age at the start of radicalization

For slightly less than half (46%) of all those who left Germany, it is possible to deduce the length of time from the start of radicalization until their departure. More than one-fifth (22%) were sufficiently radicalized within six months to leave Germany. Nearly half (46%) left within one year of first becoming radicalized. About two-thirds (68%) left within two years of first becoming radicalized. Figure 3.7 shows the length of radicalization.

Information on 48% of all those who left Germany indicates that their radicalization was accompanied by changes in their appearance. Changes in behaviour in the process of radicalization were noticed in the case of 36% of those who left Germany. More than one-quarter (27%) of those who left Germany were known to have agitated on behalf of Salafism and to have tried to influence those around them before they left. In the case of 13%, activities preparing for their departure indicated that they were in the process of becoming radicalized.

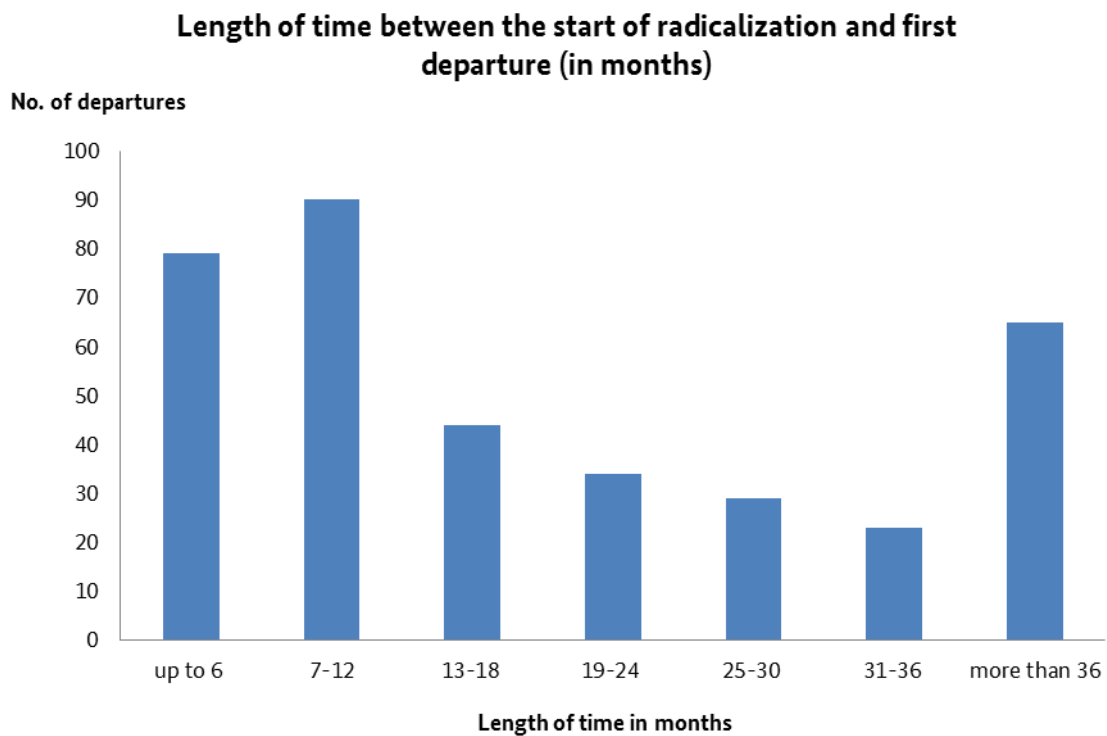


Figure 3.7 Length of time between the start of radicalization and first departure

3.9 Departure

As far as others were aware of the intention to leave the country, it was mostly friends (43%) followed at some distance by family members (29%) who knew about such plans.⁸ Fellow pupils were much less likely (less than 1%) to have known about someone’s plans to travel to Syria/Iraq based on Islamist motivations. According to the security authorities, 37% of the traveller’s friends or fellow pupils were also in the process of becoming radicalized, indicating that persons in the immediate social environment play a significant role (among other things in preventing people from leaving the country). In 9% of cases, the person leaving left behind a letter or will.

Information on the motivation for travel was available for four out of five persons (79%).⁹ Islamist-jihadist motivation can be assumed in 54% of the cases. According to the available information, 27% can be assumed to have travelled with the aim of immigrating to

⁸ Multiple selections were possible.

the caliphate or the “Islamic State”. The third most frequent motivation was “humanitarian” reasons (18%). Much less frequently mentioned as motivation for travel were “revolutionary intent” (8%), desire to marry (6%) and following or accompanying a spouse or family member (5%). In about three out of five cases, the motivation could be deduced from statements by the person planning to leave (60%) and based on information from friends and family members (63%). Of those who left, 18% explicitly expressed a desire to take part in combat (“armed jihad”) themselves.

In 86% of cases, the security authorities are aware with whom those who left travelled.¹⁰ In most cases, they travelled all or part of the way with friends (46%). In the remaining cases, they travelled with family members (33%) or alone (31%). These data confirm previous information indicating that the decision to leave is often made within a peer group or with others in the immediate social environment, and that the traveller then departs with others (e.g. group departures).

There is information on 117 persons (15%) indicating that they left the country more than once. Depending on the individual situation, they may have left the country between two and 25 times.

⁹ Multiple selections were possible.

¹⁰ Multiple selections were possible.

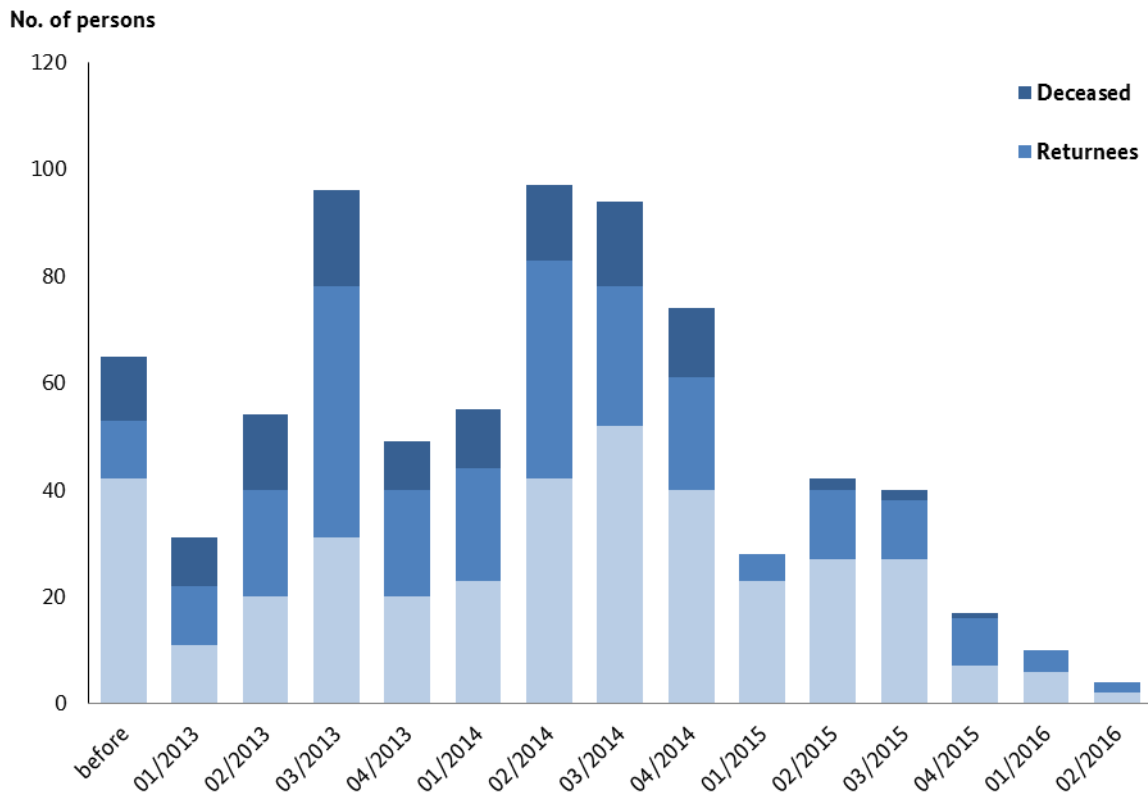


Figure 3.8 Latest/current departure (by quarter)

Figure 3.8 shows the number of persons leaving each quarter starting in 2013.¹¹ The graph also shows the number of persons who left during that quarter and are known to have returned to Germany by 30 June 2016 and the number of those known to have died (darker blue).¹²

These numbers indicate that the declaration of the caliphate in late June 2014 increased the willingness to travel to Syria/Iraq only temporarily. Overall, the number of departures dropped significantly after the fourth quarter of 2014. This trend continued through the end of the study: Whereas in the fourth quarter of 2014 74 people left Germany for the first or last time, only 28 persons did so in the first quarter of 2015. Although the number of departures rose slightly in the second and third quarters of 2015, the total number of Islamist-motivated departures for Syria and Iraq decreased from 17

¹¹ For persons who left the country multiple times, the most recent date of departure was chosen.

in the fourth quarter of 2015 to four in the second quarter of 2016. The quarter with the highest absolute number of departures (including returnees and deceased persons) is the second quarter of 2014, followed by the third quarter of 2013 and the third quarter of 2014.

The decline in the number of departures since early 2015 could be due above all to the increased controls and security measures taken by the Turkish authorities along the Turkish-Syrian border since July 2015 and to the recent events in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq. Jihadist groups, in particular the IS, are facing significant military pressure in both regions and have suffered major losses of territory and personnel as a result. The IS suffered its first significant setback in the battle for the city of Kobane, on the border between Syria and Turkey, when it was forced back after military intervention by the U.S. and other countries in late January 2015. Since August 2015, the Russian Federation has increased its military presence in Syria and conducted airstrikes against IS positions. In Iraq, after a long phase of weakness the armed forces of the central government in Baghdad were able to take back territory from the IS. Between October 2015 and June 2016, the Iraqi Army drove the IS out of Baiji, Ramadi and Fallujah. In Syria, the IS lost the city of Palmyra in fighting with the Assad regime forces in 2016; the Syrian government devoted extensive media coverage to portraying its victory as rescuing ancient sites.

¹² The number of returnees does not include those who had returned to Germany but left again and were outside the country on the cut-off date.

The loss of territory by the IS and other jihadist groups to their enemies likely made the idea of travelling to the areas under its control in Syria and Iraq less attractive. Another factor could certainly be that the IS is no longer easily able to include positive messages to mobilize foreign fighters (such as expansion of its territory or establishing and consolidating a state) in its propaganda addressed abroad. This report cannot provide a conclusive answer as to whether or to what extent this factor and the developments described above in fact influenced Islamist-motivated travel to Syria/Iraq. Further analysis is recommended to answer this question.

3.10 Activity in Syria and/or Iraq

For more than half of those who travelled from Germany to Syria/Iraq (409 persons), information is available indicating that they joined an Islamist-jihadist group in Syria and/or Iraq after leaving Germany (Figure 3.9). Most of these persons (80%) joined the IS, while much smaller shares joined Jabhat al Nusra (JaN) (8%) or Junud al Sham (JaS) (6%). The fact that the IS continued to attract the most new members indicates that it was still more attractive than other organizations to those travelling to Syria/Iraq and those wanting to take part in jihad, despite coming under greater pressure. IS propaganda may play a decisive role here, along with the constant attention the group receives in the media and public discourse.

Islamist-jihadist groups joined by travellers

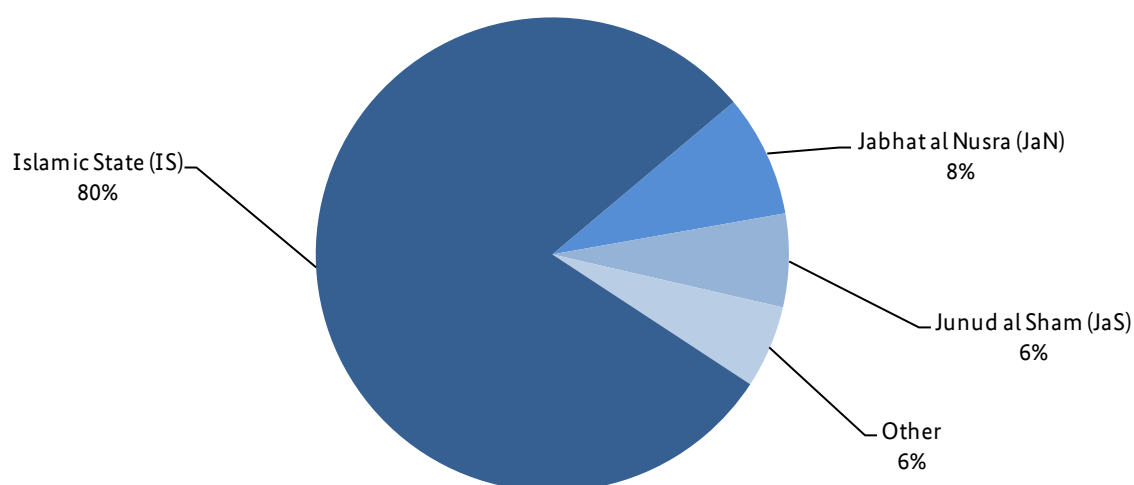


Figure 3.9 Islamist-jihadist groups joined by travellers from Germany

For 527 persons (67%) who left Germany, there is information on their activity in the conflict regions. It should be noted that the same persons may take part in different activities in parallel or in succession (multiple selections were possible). For 46% of those who left Germany, there are indications that they took part in fighting in the conflict regions; 53% are known to have taken part in combat training, such as weapons training; 12% participated in the propaganda efforts of one or more Islamist-jihadist groups; 11% were involved in humanitarian aid; 3% were identified as working in logistics.

3.11 Return and current residence status

On the cut-off date for this survey (30 June 2016), 37% of the persons for whom information on their current residence status was available (775 persons) were still in Syria or Iraq. Another 35% were back in Germany, of whom nearly 12% were in prison.¹³ According to information of the security authorities, 16% were registered as (probably) de-

¹³ Further comparative analyses concerning returnees are found in Chapter 4.3; Chapter 4.1 contains more information on return journeys.

ceased. Another 11% were either abroad (but not in Syria or Iraq), or their place of current residence was unknown.

Most of the current 274 returnees had originally left Germany with friends (53%); about 28% of them travelled alone and 22% travelled with family members.¹⁴ For their return to Germany, the picture was somewhat different: Only 18% returned with friends, 24% returned with family members and nearly one-third (29%) returned alone. The rest were brought back to Germany using government measures, for example by the police in countries of transit (19%), or no reliable information was available by the survey cut-off date.

The reasons for returning are known for only slightly more than half of the current 274 returnees: 10% returned due to disillusionment and/or frustration, and another 10% returned due to pressure from family members or others close to them. The authorities believe that 8% returned for tactical reasons, for example to recuperate or to gather money or supplies for the fighting in Syria or Iraq. The authorities believe that 6% returned due to illness or health problems.

One-quarter (25%) of returnees and 22% of parents of returnees were cooperating with the security authorities. However, the security authorities have information on only a few cases in which returnees left the Salafist/extremist milieu (9% of returnees); instead, about half (48%) returned to that milieu. For the rest, there was no clear or reliable information on their position with regard to the radical Islamist/Salafist scene.

¹⁴ Multiple selections were possible for modalities of departure. This also covered those cases in which persons travelled part of the way to Syria/Iraq with others and part of the way alone. The same applies to (current) return travel.

4 Comparative data analysis

Like last year, again this year the comparative analyses turned up more noticeable findings on certain sub-groups. These findings will be considered in greater detail below, as they make special characteristics of the overall phenomenon clearer. These group profiles should be seen as an overall summary of the diverse findings of the analysis, in order to make them more useful as the basis for practical action. Each group profile is introduced with a brief explanation of how the various sub-groups were identified and what variables were used. The sequence of group comparisons is oriented on the extent of obvious differences identified, starting with the reference groups showing the most relevant differences or striking features with the greatest significance for practical action.

4.1 Departures after the declaration of the “caliphate”: The attraction of the IS for German Salafists

The cut-off date of 30 June 2014 for the survey that year nearly overlapped with Abu Bakr al Baghdadi’s declaration of the “caliphate” on 29 June 2014. Last year’s analysis showed that those who left Germany after that media and propaganda event differed in many respects from those who had left earlier. However, it also became clear that the caliphate’s attraction did not last as long as had been feared. Although a larger number of German Salafists travelled to Syria/Iraq around the time the caliphate was declared (third and fourth quarters of 2014), the number of persons leaving fell dramatically after late 2014/early 2015 (see Figure 4.1). Two years later, hardly anyone was travelling. This can be attributed to a wide variety of geopolitical developments, national preventive and punitive measures, as well as developments within the IS and the resulting effect on the organization’s appeal: The IS has faced increasing military pressure at least since it lost the battle for Kobane in January 2015. Other milestones in the decline of the IS are Russia’s military intervention since September 2015 and the Iraqi army’s retaking of Fallujah in June 2016. In July 2016, the presidents of Turkey and the U.S. agreed that their countries – and military forces – would cooperate more closely to stop the flow of mercenar-

ies from joining the IS. Also at national level, the security authorities are increasing their efforts to prevent people from leaving to travel to Syria and Iraq. These punitive efforts are flanked by preventive measures, as socio-pedagogical intervention by civil-society organizations is increasingly having an effect on the relevant target group of those most interested in leaving. IS propaganda activities, other than those focused on its military operations, also seem to have decreased noticeably since the third quarter of 2015. Thus the IS has apparently lost some appeal,¹⁵ or the pool of Salafists willing to leave Germany has largely been exhausted. The IS is obviously no longer able to generate a large pool of sympathizers from which further supporters or mercenaries for its caliphate in Syria/Iraq can be recruited.

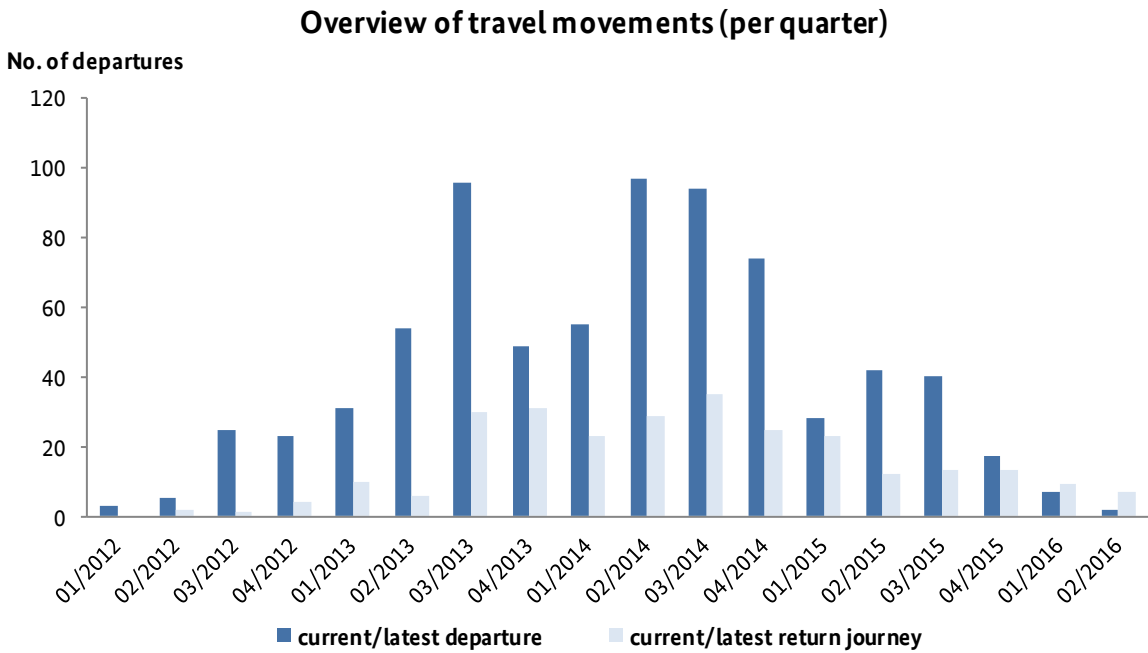


Figure 4.1 Number of current/latest departures and returns per quarter

Firstly, it should be noted that of the 784 persons considered in the present analysis who left Germany based on Salafist motivations during the period under examination (January 2012 to June 2016), only 260 persons left Germany after the caliphate was declared and before the cut-off date of 30 June 2016 for the present study. This supports the ar-

¹⁵ See Zelin, A.Y. [2015] The Decline in Islamic State Media Output. <http://icsr.info/2015/12/icsr-insight-decline-islamic-state-media-output/> (22 September 2016)

gument that the IS has significantly lost appeal. Only one-third of all Islamist-motivated departures since January 2012 took place during these two years, which make up nearly half of the total period under examination. And in the second year of the caliphate's existence, which corresponded exactly to the period under examination in last year's study (1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016), only 49 persons left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq, or only 6% of the total of 784 persons who left since January 2012. This shows that the caliphate did not exert as strong an attraction, at least on the Salafist scene in Germany, as originally anticipated. Following more than four and a half years of observation, it is clear that the declaration of the caliphate instead marked the start of a reversal in the trend of Salafist-motivated travel, as travel to the IS has nearly stopped.

In order to better assess the effects of these connections and developments, we will look in the following at how the caliphate affected Salafist-motivated travel in the first two years of its existence. Oriented on the cut-off dates for the collection of data for last year's and this year's analyses, we will compare the group of those who left Germany for Syria/Iraq during the first year of the caliphate's existence (departure between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015, 211 cases) with the group of those who left in the caliphate's second year (departure between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016, 49 cases): Did it appeal to other groups of persons from the Salafist milieu?

It is noticeable, first of all, that the share of women who left Germany fell from 36% in the caliphate's first year to 27% in the second year. The IS was apparently projecting a negative image that seemed to scare off more women than in the group's early phase.

It is also noticeable that the share of single persons increased significantly in the second year (60% compared to 47% in the first year), while the share of those with own children fell (from 36% in the first year to 22% in the second), as did the share of those with an own household (52% in the first year, 32% in the second). The IS obviously lost attraction not only for women but also for those in the Salafist milieu who had become socially established in Germany, at least to a certain degree: Of those who left Germany in the second year of the caliphate's existence, a much larger share (65% compared to 44%) were neither employed nor married, nor did they have own children or their own household.

Although the share of those who left Germany and who were known to the police fell noticeably, from 72% before the declaration of the caliphate to 54% in its first year and 46% in its second year, it should be noted that those with criminal records who left Germany in the caliphate's second year had a much higher average number of offences than those who left the year before: 7.2 registered offences in the period prior to radicalization, compared to 4.2, even though those who left in recent years were noticeably younger. Before the caliphate was declared, the average age at the time of first departure was 26.7 years; in the first year of the caliphate's existence, the average age was 24.2, and in the second year 23.5. The share of minors also grew in recent years: Before the caliphate was declared, minors made up 5% of those who left; in the first year of the caliphate's existence, this share increased to 11%, and in the second year to 16%.

Summing up these observations, IS propaganda and what the IS offers in the real world tended to attract – if any – younger persons, those who were less socially established and those more intensively involved in criminal activity.

It is worth noting that the share of persons who became radicalized within a short time (less than 12 months to departure) dropped significantly in the last year (37%, compared to 61% during the first year of the caliphate) and was even somewhat lower than the figure of 40% from before the caliphate was declared. The IS appears to have motivated less spontaneous immigration. The initial euphoria occasionally observed immediately after the caliphate was declared seems to have subsided. In view of the changed situation, those considering leaving for Syria/Iraq are apparently thinking twice before taking that step. This finding matches another interesting observation:

In order to examine whether, as expected, more of those who left Germany last year were radicalized in the immediate environment of Salafist groups, a corresponding index was produced.¹⁶ In the process, it became obvious that the radicalization of those who left

¹⁶ The index is intended to show proximity to the Salafist scene during the radicalization process. For each case, a point was assigned for each of the following conditions present at the start or during the process of radicalization: activity in mosque congregations, activity in Islamist organizations/parties, activity in the context of the Koran distribution ("Read!") campaign, participation in Salafist-oriented Islam seminars/public sermons, participation in Salafist fundraising events, exposure to Salafist influences in the immediate social environment and/or from friends. The highest possible score was 14 points. The highest score actually achieved was 13 points. Only about one in ten cases scored higher than ten; two-thirds of the sample did not score higher than four. In view of this distribution, two indicators were created for the index: little proximity to the Salafist scene during the radicalization process (all persons with a score of four or less), and close proximity to the Salafist scene (all persons with a score of five or more).

Germany last year did indeed take place more often in a Salafist environment. Here, the share with a strong affinity for the Salafist scene was much larger than in the first year of the caliphate's existence (37% compared to 21%). IS propaganda is apparently reaching not only a smaller group of persons, but one that already has strong ties to a Salafist environment. If the IS still has any appeal, then only to like-minded persons and committed activists. It is obviously less successful at addressing a larger group of IS sympathizers from which to recruit immigrants or supporters for Syria and/or Iraq. This indirectly indicates that the Internet seems to be losing significance for IS recruitment: Among those who left Germany during the first year of the caliphate's existence, 44% are assumed to have been strongly influenced by the Internet at the start of radicalization, whereas this was true for only 33% of those who left during the caliphate's second year. To attract persons willing to immigrate to Syria/Iraq and join the IS, therefore, direct social influences in real life are needed – Internet-based IS propaganda seems to have become less effective.

It is noticeable, though not surprising, that the social environment has become more aware when someone is undergoing a process of radicalization. Parents, friends, teachers and/or social workers were increasingly aware when someone in their social environment was becoming radicalized: 35% during the period before the caliphate was declared, 48% in the caliphate's first year and 53% in its second.

Further, the security authorities were increasingly successful at recognizing when someone was about to leave Germany or return and at taking targeted action. Whereas state return operations were successful for only 3% of those who left Germany before the caliphate was declared, this figure increased significantly in the past two years: to 5% in 2014/2015 and to 14% in 2015/2016.

The share of persons returning from Syria/Iraq also increased: Of those who left Germany during the caliphate's first year, 24% are now in Germany; of those who left during the caliphate's second year, 36% have returned to Germany. These returnees have also shown greater willingness to cooperate with the security authorities: Whereas only 8% of those returnees who left before the caliphate was declared and during its first year were willing to cooperate more closely, 20% of returnees who left in the caliphate's second

year were willing to cooperate. The share of those who provided information about their motives for returning also grew noticeably, from 9% to 18%. The share of those who resumed contact with the Salafist milieu also shrank, from 44% to 35%. Taken together, all these observations indicate that the IS has become less attractive and less able to retain its followers. Whether this signals a greater willingness to reintegrate is not possible to assess in greater detail based on the available data and the fact that information on willingness to participate in a rehabilitation and disengagement programme is available only for a few cases.

In sum, Salafist-motivated travel from Germany to the IS should be interpreted as an indicator for the apparent decline of the “caliphate” declared in 2014: Like a failed state, the caliphate is experiencing less immigration and more emigration. If in view of the small number of departures for Syria/Iraq one can still describe the IS as an attractive destination, then it has a certain attraction at most for younger men who are less socially integrated and are in general characterized by a higher level of criminal energy. Flanked by punitive and preventive measures, the difficult living conditions in the IS, marked by violence and brutality, appear to have resulted in a certain disillusionment accompanied by a significant drop in travel to the region and an increase in the number of returnees.

4.2 Women and men: The influence of gender

As already described in detail in Chapter 3.1, 21% of those who left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq were women. Looking only at the group of those who left Germany after the caliphate was declared, 34% of them were women. So radicalization in the context of the conflict in Syria and Iraq also affects women. This is sufficient reason to undertake once again in this follow-up study a closer comparison of women and men, which largely confirms the findings of the previous study.

To look first at some of the standard socio-demographic data: As also described in media reports of very young women travelling to Syria and Iraq, the difference in the average age of women and men is noticeable. At the time of their latest departure, the women were on average three years younger than the men, a significant difference (23.5 years

old compared to 26.5 years old for men). A larger share of women were minors (13% compared to 6% of men).

Fewer women were employed or in training shortly before their departure (54% compared to 70% of men). This is also due to the fact that more of the women already had children (55%, compared to 41% of men). Thus the hypothesis that women with children would be less likely to travel to Syria and/or Iraq was not confirmed; on the contrary, precisely women with children travelled to the territory of the Islamic State.

Also noticeable is the larger share of converts among women: Whereas only 17% of men were converts, 33% of women were, probably as the result of marriage to Muslims.

Another obvious difference is that the share of women having only German citizenship was significantly higher than that of men (42% compared to 33%).

Independent of women's much lower average age at (latest) departure (see above), men and women entered the radicalization process at about the same age (women: 21.4 years old, men: 22.8 years old). However, looking at all the data on the timing of the radicalization process from start to the first departure, a significant difference is apparent which may be relevant for preventive interventions: More women became radicalized within a short period of time, i.e. less than 12 months between the recognized start of radicalization and first departure: 56% compared to 43% of men.

There are also significant differences with regard to probable influences on the radicalization process. Women have a much different relationship to the Salafist scene. The share of men active in the Salafist scene was much larger than that of women (75% as compared to 45%). And men who left Germany more often appeared in public, in line with the Salafist role models for men and women: 22% of men were associated with Koran distribution campaigns in the early phase of their radicalization (compared to 4% of women), while 23% participated in so-called Islam seminars (compared to 8% of women).

Women thus apparently were more likely to become radicalized in the private sphere. This matches the observation that, for the women who left Germany, influence from their immediate social environment was much more important for the start of radicalization (75% compared to 61% for men). These findings imply that some women did not

travel to Syria or Iraq following their own individual decision, but at least in close consultation with those close to them. Overall, 54% of women but only 22% of men travelled with family members.

The familiar criminological research finding that crime is generally a “masculine” phenomenon also applies to the group considered here: A much larger share of men were known to the police than women (73% compared to 36%). And the criminal activity of the men known to the police was much more intensive than that of the comparable group of women: The men had an average of 7.9 registered offences, while the women had 3.0. Despite the obvious and expected higher level of criminal activity among men, there is little evidence for the hypothesis that women had no interaction with the police: More than one-third of the women who later left Germany were known to the police. Criminal proceedings were pending for 57% of the men and 39% of the women who left Germany.

The much higher incidence of violence among men is also significant for the phenomenon of radicalization. In many cases, however, the affinity for violence pre-dated radicalization: 31% of men and 8% of women had come to the attention of the authorities for their involvement in violent offences already before their radicalization. This affinity for violence is also expressed in the motives for departure and concrete activity in Syria/Iraq: For more than half (56%) of men who left for Syria/Iraq, information indicated a motive of participating in combat; this applied to only 18% of women. According to information of the security authorities, 39% of the men who left did in fact take part in combat; there are only isolated indications that women did so (3%).

The motives for departure and the specific circumstances indicate that the women’s motives for leaving tended to be more socially and family oriented. The desire to live in a different/new Islamic society was found much more often among women (40% compared to 22% of men), as was the desire to marry. By contrast, Islamist-jihadist motivation was found much more often among men (61% compared to 26% of women).

As in past years, there is a much larger share of returnees among men (39%) than among the comparable group of women (21%). It can be assumed that it may be easier for men to return to Germany than for women; this is addressed in more detail in the next chap-

ter. Or it may be that men have a greater motivation to return, for example due to traumatic experiences in combat regions, while fewer women return due to family ties such as marriage.

4.3 Returnees: A conspicuous group?

The security authorities and the media repeatedly point out the special threat associated with returnees from Syria and Iraq. The data gathered in the context of this study are not detailed enough to provide a thorough assessment of the potential threat posed by this group. However, the data may provide orientation which makes it possible to assess whether this is a different conspicuous group which should be handled differently – in terms of prevention and punishment – as appropriate.

A total of 274 persons, or 35% of the 784 men and women who left Germany, had returned to Germany by the cut-off date for this study. These persons make up the group of returnees described in the following comparison.¹⁷

Two things are noticeable with regard to the process of radicalization: Although the average age of both groups is about the same at the start of radicalization (returnees: 22.8 years, others: 22.3 years), the two groups differ significantly in terms of average age on the cut-off date of 30 June 2016. The higher average age of returnees (29.8 years compared to 27.4 years for those in Syria/Iraq on the cut-off date) can be regarded as an indication that older persons are more likely to reject the IS and/or return to Germany. This can also be interpreted as a sign of a gradual process of withdrawal; criminological research has shown that entering and withdrawing from extremist milieus is closely linked to age.

A look at other standard socio-demographic data reveals that the share of women returnees (13%) is much smaller than that of women still in Syria/Iraq (26%). The reasons

¹⁷ As already mentioned in Chapter 3, it should be noted that a number of persons travelled to Syria/Iraq more than once. The definition of reference groups is therefore based on their current whereabouts. This means that persons in Syria/Iraq on the cut-off date are defined here as persons who left, even though they may have spent time in Germany in the meantime. To clearly distinguish between groups and above all to be able to make current comparisons between those who left and returnees, we refer here to the location on the cut-off date.

for this can only be speculated, including the hypothesis that women in the “Islamic State” have less freedom to choose whether to stay in Syria/Iraq or return to Germany. There are no significant differences between the groups of returnees and those still in Syria/Iraq with regard to nationality or employment status before their departure.

As already noted, we can address the assessment of the threat posed by the two groups only indirectly, for example by considering the motives relevant for the latest departure and return and comparing the information available on the person’s specific actions. The available data on concrete police information do not indicate that returnees were more likely to distance themselves from (violent) activities. The average number of offences both before and during radicalization was about the same for returnees and others (returnees: 4.9 offences before radicalization, compared to 4.2 for others; returnees: 2.5 offences during radicalization, compared to 2.7 for others). The same is true of the share of persons known to the police in connection with violent offences (returnees: 26%, others: 27%).

A larger share of returnees is thought to have been motivated by humanitarian concerns for their latest departure (33% compared to 9% of non-returnees). This is reflected in the fact that much more concrete information on participation in humanitarian activities is available for returnees (22% compared to 5% of non-returnees) and much less information on their participation in combat (14% compared to 40% of non-returnees). There is also less information indicating that returnees joined jihadist groups in Syria/Iraq (30% compared to 64% for non-returnees) or took part in related propaganda activities (4% compared to 10% of non-returnees).

4.4 Salafist influence

Of the 784 persons studied in this report, 537 can be considered more closely linked to Salafist circles based on their activities. These persons were in contact with known Islamists or mosque congregations, visited (Salafist) fund-raising events or Islam seminars, were involved in Islamist organizations and/or participated in Koran distribution campaigns. Comparing these persons to the remaining 247 without known direct contacts to

Salafists reveals some differences with regard to socio-demographic data, radicalization processes, travel movements and participation in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq.

The socio-economic data show that of those who were more actively involved in Salafist circles before leaving for Syria/Iraq, a larger share were men (86% compared to 62%), and more of them had lower levels of education (77% compared to 67%). Put another way: Fewer of them attended *Gymnasium* (academic secondary school), fewer qualified to enter university or technical university, and fewer entered university.

Only 41% of those more closely linked to Salafist circles became radicalized in less than a year (counting from the start of radicalization known to the security authorities to the date of departure), compared to 63% of others. It is also noticeable that more of those closely linked to Salafists were converts (23% compared to 16%).

Both contacts in the real world and activities in the virtual world had more influence on those more closely linked to Salafist circles at the start and during the process of radicalization: Friends were listed as an important factor in radicalization for 46% of these persons at the start of radicalization and for 57% during the radicalization process, compared to 26% and 34% for those less closely linked to Salafist circles. The Internet played a major role for 35% of these persons at the start of radicalization and for 33% during the radicalization process, compared to 25% and 25% for those less closely linked to Salafist circles.

Salafists usually base their ideology on the model of the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Muslims, known as the “pious predecessors” (in Arabic: *al-salaf al-salih*). Salafists try to emulate this model as closely as possible, not only in their extremist activities but also in private life. So it is not surprising that, for those more closely linked to Salafists, their radicalization was apparent from changes in their appearance (56%) and behaviour (40%) more often than for others (31% and 26%, respectively). The former also focused their activities on the central Salafist tenet of Dawah, or proselytizing and preaching, more often than did others (35% compared to 11%).

Practising and promoting Islamist ideology in this way explains how the security authorities and those in the social environment were more often aware when persons with closer links to Salafist circles became radicalized. Friends were aware of radicalization in

34% of cases and family members in 18% of cases, compared to 25% and 12% for those less closely linked to Salafist circles. Domestic intelligence agencies were aware of persons more closely linked to Salafist circles turning to Islamism in almost half the cases (46%), and police were aware in 40% of cases, compared to 26% and 25% for those less closely linked to Salafist circles.

Those more closely linked to Salafist circles were more often known to the police (73% compared to 49%). After the start of radicalization, these persons were more often involved in violent (26%), property (20%) or politically motivated offences (32%) than others (7%, 8% and 11%, respectively).

Those more closely linked to Salafists more often told a friend about their intention to travel to Syria/Iraq (48%) and more often travelled with a friend (45%) than those less closely linked to this milieu (32% and 29%, respectively). Islamist-jihadist motivations to travel to Syria/Iraq were more important for the former (61% compared to 37%), while for the latter, marriage (8% compared to 4%) and other motivations (18% compared to 13%) were more important. Those more closely linked to Salafist circles also more often expressed the desire to take part in combat in Syria or Iraq (21% compared to 12%), which also helps explain the larger share of such persons thought to have been killed in fighting (19% compared to 11% of others). Thus these persons seem to have a greater affinity for violence than those who were not active in the inner circle of Salafists before leaving Germany. This finding is reinforced by a look at the data on activities after arrival in Syria or Iraq: 56% of those more closely linked to Salafist circles before their departure joined Islamist-jihadist groups, and 37% of them took part in combat, compared to 44% and 19% of others.

The former were not only more often directly involved in fighting in Syria or Iraq; more of them also took part in “humanitarian” activities (12% compared to 7% of others) and in propaganda on behalf of Islamist-jihadist groups (10% compared to 4% of others). Given these figures, it is possible to conclude that those persons who were closely involved in Salafist activities and networks before leaving Germany were usually more involved in jihadist groups after leaving.

It is also worth noting that most of these persons belonged to the group of those who left Germany before the caliphate was declared (71% compared to 54%). By contrast, persons

without explicit contacts to the Salafist scene made up a larger share of those who left Germany after the caliphate was declared (46% compared to 29%). The founding of the caliphate apparently had less impact on those more involved in Salafist activities and networks and was more attractive to those on the fringes of the Salafist scene who were thus possibly less ideological.

After returning to Germany, a larger share of those more closely involved in the Salafist scene remained true to their extremist attitudes. A smaller share cooperated with the security authorities (7% compared to 13%), more returned to the Islamist milieu (50% compared to 22%) and travelled again to Syria and Iraq (17% compared to 10%). So de-radicalization measures are less likely to reach these persons than those who were less involved in the Salafist scene.

4.5 Urban centres: Different paths to radicalization?

As described in Chapter 3.2, about half of those who left Germany to travel to Syria and Iraq (394 persons) came from 13 cities, and at least 10 persons left Germany from each of these 13 cities. These cities are therefore described as “hot spots” in this analysis. There were significant differences between the radicalization of persons who travelled from these cities and those who travelled from other places in Germany. More of those from the hot spots seemed to have become radicalized in a Salafist environment, under the influence of friends and/or family members, while the rest more often became radicalized through the Internet or from public recruiting attempts, for example in the context of Koran distribution campaigns.

The following differences are noticeable:

- On the cut-off date, persons from the hot spots were an average of 28.9 years old. The others were an average of only 27.3 years old.
- For 25% of those who left from hot spots, the Internet is thought to have been a relevant factor for the start of radicalization; this figure is much higher for the others (42%).

- Contact with friends was much more important for persons from hot spots even at the start of radicalization (43% compared to 36%), and their friends were more likely to be aware of their desire to leave (51% compared to 35%). A larger share of their family members were also in the process of radicalizing (89% compared to 74%).
- However, those persons not from hot spots also were able to connect with relevant groups and friends: In the process of radicalization, friends played an important role for 43% of those not from hot spots. But (Salafist) friends became even more important for persons from hot spots, increasing from 43% at the start of radicalization to 56% later on. And more of them had contacts to known Salafists during their radicalization (94% compared to 85%).
- Among those from hot spots, the share of converts is higher: 24% compared to 17% among those not from hot spots.
- More of those from hot spots were known to the police (70% compared to 59%). The average number of registered offences before radicalization was 5.6 for persons from hot spots and 3.4 for others.
- Of those not from hot spots, 22% were involved in Koran distribution campaigns at an early stage of radicalization (compared to 14% of those from hot spots); many of them came to the attention of the authorities as participants in these campaigns.
- Many persons from hot spots left Germany with family members (31%) or friends (46%), as could be assumed from the fact that multiple family members were in the process of becoming radicalized at the same time. These figures are much lower for persons not from hot spots (left Germany with family members: 24%; with friends: 34%).
- There are no significant differences between the two groups with regard to the desire to take part in fighting in Syria or Iraq, joining Islamist-jihadist groups there, or the share of returnees.

4.6 Minors: An increasingly conspicuous group

The security authorities have more information on minors than on older persons who left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq, mainly because those in the person's social environment (primarily family members, but also friends and school contacts) are more willing to cooperate with the security authorities.

- The security authorities were aware of 56 minors who had left Germany by the cut-off date of 30 June 2016, accounting for about 7% of the total.
- More than half (57%) of these minors are German nationals. Two-thirds of them (66%) also have a second nationality.
- Women make up a much larger share of this group (39% compared to 20% of the group of older persons).
- Slightly less than half (42%) of minors became radicalized in less than a year. Fewer minors were associated with known Salafists (80% compared to 91% of older persons).
- Fewer minors were converts to Islam (17% compared to 21% of older persons)
- As could be expected for this age group, two factors which overlapped and reinforced each other played a much larger role in the radicalization of minors: friends and the Internet. Friends were an important influence for 57% of minors at the start of radicalization and remained important for 55% of minors during the radicalization process. This clearly indicates the significance of personal contacts in the process of radicalization. For minors, the Internet is nearly as important as friends, although it becomes less important during the radicalization process, falling from 55% to 45%. The Internet was an important influence at the start of radicalization for only 30% of older persons who left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq but remained important for 29% of these persons during their radicalization process.

- The radicalization process is visible for those in the social environment due to relevant changes in behaviour for more minors than for those over age 18 (49% compared to 35%): Family members noticed that minors were becoming radicalized in 61% of cases, as compared to 29% of cases of persons over age 18; for 36% of minors, friends noticed their radicalization, compared to 15% of those over age 18; and for 21% of minors, teachers noticed their radicalization, compared to only 3% of those over age 18.
- More minors left behind a message for friends and/or family before leaving Germany (25% compared to 18% of those over 18).
- There are some major differences in motivation for leaving between minors and those over 18: marriage was a motivation for nearly one-third of minors (29%) but only for 4% of older persons; emigration (*hijra*) was a motivation for half of minors but only for 24% of older persons. Islamist-jihadist motivation was about the same for both groups (55% and 53%), and nearly one-third of minors (16 persons) are known to have wanted to take part in fighting. For 23 minors, there is information that they did in fact join Islamist-jihadist groups in Syria or Iraq, and 11 are thought to have taken part in fighting.
- A much larger share of minors travelled alone (38% compared to 26% of older persons); only 5% returned alone, compared to 11% of older persons.
- Nearly half (46%) of the minors who left have returned to Germany; this figure is much smaller for those over age 18 (35%). There are also significant differences between minors and those over 18 in the motivation for returning: disillusionment and/or frustration was a motivation for 13% of minors but only for 3% of older persons; pressure from persons in the immediate social environment was a motivation for 16% of minors but only 3% of older persons.

4.7 Immigrant background

The information base on persons with an immigrant background (see the definition in Chapter 3.3) is as good as that for persons without an immigrant background, and there are no statistically significant differences with regard to the amount of information (see index in Chapter 2). So the comparisons here between the two groups are reliable, and any differences are not the result of differences in the information of the security authorities concerning persons with and without an immigrant background.

- Many more persons with an immigrant background who left Germany to travel to Syria/Iraq than without an immigrant background came from the “hot spots” (see Chapter 4.5), the 13 German cities that were each home to more than 10 persons who left for Syria or Iraq (60% compared to 46%).
- A much larger share of those with an immigrant background who left Germany were men (81%) than women (19%). Among those without an immigrant background, the share of men was 68% and of women 32%. Nearly half (46%) of converts who left Germany (a total of 62 persons) had an immigrant background .
- There are no differences between the two groups with regard to their motivation for departure or the groups they joined in Syria or Iraq, and the same share of both groups expressed the desire to take an active part in fighting (18%).
- Those with an immigrant background were noticeably older than the others at the time of first departure: 26.2 years old compared to 24.3 years old. About the same share of both groups returned to Germany: 42% of those with an immigrant background and 39% of those without.
- Fewer of those with an immigrant background were known to the police (64% compared to 71% of those without an immigrant background), and fewer of them had a record of property crime (24% compared to 31% of those without) or violent crime (25% compared to 28%) before becoming radicalized. And fewer of those with an immigrant background were the subject of pending criminal proceedings (52% compared to 58%).

4.8 Persons radicalized in less than a year

For 364 persons, information is available on their age at the start of radicalization and on the date of their first departure to Syria/Iraq. In order to detect notable features in connection with the length of radicalization processes, this group was divided into those who became radicalized in less than one year and those whose radicalization took longer. Overall, reliable information is available on 169 of the former and 195 of the latter. Using this information and following on the 2015 update of the present analysis, it is apparent that radicalization in less than one year is still no exception.

When comparing those who became radicalized in less than a year and those who took longer, the following differences are noticeable:

- Women are still over-represented in the group of those radicalized in less than a year, with a share of 27% compared to 18% of those radicalized in more than a year.
- The social environment and participation in Islamist activities appear to have been involved less often in initiating radicalization in less than a year: Friends were an important influence at the start of radicalization in 37% and family in 12% of these cases. By comparison, 56% of those whose radicalization took more than a year listed friends and 19% listed family as an important influence. Islam seminars and public sermons (32%) and involvement in Koran distribution campaigns (26%) were important influences for this group at the start of their radicalization; for those whose radicalization took less than a year, these influences were less important (23% and 17%).
- During the process of radicalization, friends (43% compared to 64% of those whose radicalization took longer), involvement in Koran distribution campaigns (17% compared to 32%), and Islam seminars and public sermons (23% compared to 38%) were less important for those whose radicalization took less than a year. A smaller share of this group was also present in (Islamist) mosques during their radicalization process (47% compared to 59% of those whose radicalization took longer).

- And for fewer in this group, the radicalization process was signalled by changes in outward appearance (54% compared to 68% of those whose radicalization took longer). Those who became radicalized in less than a year were also less often involved in (Salafist) agitation (27% compared to 41%).
- Given their lower degree of involvement in Islamist activities, their less frequent appearance at places associated with the Islamist scene and the fact that their radicalization was less often signalled by changes in their outward appearance, it is not surprising that the police and domestic intelligence agencies often failed to notice when those who became radicalized in less than a year turned to Islamist ideology and goals. Their radicalization process was noticed by the domestic intelligence agencies in 28% of cases and by the police in 16% of cases, compared to 44% and 40%, respectively, of those whose radicalization took longer.
- The latter group more often told their friends of their plans to leave the country than the former (48% compared to 35%), while those who became radicalized in less than a year more often left behind a letter or will (29% compared to 16%).
- These detailed observations give the impression that the radicalization of those who become radicalized in less than a year still takes place largely, though not always, out of sight, and that it is more often a self-referential process.
- Part of this picture is that those who became radicalized in less than a year came to the attention of the police less often for politically motivated crimes (37% compared to 54% of those who took longer to become radicalized).
- Those radicalized in less than a year also appeared to have less to do with Islamist ideological content: There were indications that only 13% of these persons possessed relevant Islamist propaganda materials, compared to 30% of those whose radicalization took longer.
- Fewer in the former group left Germany for Islamist-jihadist reasons (49% compared to 61% of the latter group). And those radicalized in less than a year were less likely to become involved in propaganda activities of Islamist-jihadist organizations in Syria and Iraq (6% compared to 12% of those whose radicalization took

longer). So those in the former group appeared less likely to actively promote Islamist-jihadist goals abroad through political agitation or activities.

4.9 Jihadist activities and delinquency

Information on 352 persons indicates that they were concretely involved in jihadist activities. Here, “jihadist activities” includes participation in combat training, in actual combat, in propaganda activities and/or logistical activities on behalf of a terrorist organization. This group also includes those who left Germany and died in the conflict region, most of whom were killed in combat. Information on two-thirds of this group (69%) indicates that they took part in fighting in Syria and/or Iraq; 18% of the group can be assumed to have taken part in propaganda activities for Islamist-jihadist groups. Comparing the group of those involved in jihadist activities with those for whom there is no information indicating such involvement reveals the following differences:

- As can be expected, the share of men in the group of those involved in jihadist activities was much higher than in the other group (94% compared to 66%).
- At least with regard to jihadist activities, having children seems to act as a protective factor: 39% of those thought to have participated in jihadist activities had own children, while nearly half (49%) of those in the other group did.
- The parents of those in the first group more often noticed their radicalization (37% compared to 26% in the latter group).
- A clear majority (80%) of those involved in jihadist activities were associated with the Salafist scene before leaving Germany; this was true of only 59% of those in the other group. Further, those involved in jihadist activities were more often actively involved in Islamist organizations (65% compared to 43% of those in the other group), and their agitation and attempts to influence those around them were noticed (35% compared to 21%). Even early in their radicalization, those in the first group more often took part in Koran distribution campaigns (26% compared to 19%) and so-called Islam seminars (24% compared to 15%). Both at the

start of their radicalization and later, more of them had contacts in (relevant) mosques (at the start of radicalization: 39% compared to 32% of those not involved in jihadist activities; during the radicalization process: 51% compared to 40%).

- More of those in the first group were known to the police (77% compared to 57%). Even before becoming radicalized, more of those in this group had a record of property crime (33% compared to 19%), violent crime (34% compared to 19%) and narcotics crime (19% compared to 9%); the same was true for sexual offences as well, though the number of cases was much smaller: 3% compared to 2%. And those in the first group were known to the police also for other types of crime (23% compared to 14%). Those later involved in jihadist activities had an average of 7.8 registered offences, while the others had an average of 6.8 registered offences. As a result, it is not surprising that more persons in the first group were the subject of pending criminal proceedings (64% compared to 45%).
- For more of those involved in jihadist activities, there are concrete indications that their motivation for travelling to Syria/Iraq was to take part in fighting (28% compared to 10%). For more of those in this group, there is also information indicating that they joined Islamist-jihadist groups, above all the IS, in Syria or Iraq (80% compared to 33%).
- The share of those in this group who have returned to Germany is much smaller (18% compared to 50% of those not involved in jihadist activities), and a much larger share of these returnees are in prison (36% compared to 4%).
- Only 2% of the former group were willing to cooperate with the security authorities after returning to Germany, and only 5% of their parents cooperated. A larger share of returnees who had not been involved in jihadist activities and their parents were willing to cooperate with the security authorities (14% and 13%).

Overall, it appears that persons who travelled to Syria/Iraq and who were known to the police have a much stronger affinity for jihadist activity than those who had no police record. For the former, there are more often indications of a jihadist motivation for trav-

elling (61% compared to 38%). And those who travelled to Syria/Iraq and were known to the police more often joined a jihadist group than those who had no police record (55% compared to 47%). So it is not surprising that those who travelled to Syria/Iraq and were known to the police much more often explicitly indicated the desire to take part in fighting in Syria/Iraq (74% compared to 27%).

A latent propensity for violence, as persons known to the police can be assumed to have, when combined with Salafist ideology appears to lead quickly and directly to general approval of jihadist violence and to the desire to use such violence. When these persons return to Germany, there is reason to believe that they represent a special security risk which may be expressed in propaganda or in action, in prison or outside. However, persons known to the police who did not travel to Syria/Iraq but have been indoctrinated by Salafists and jihadists also represent a special security risk.

5 Conclusion and outlook

Although the fighting continues in Syria and Iraq, and various jihadist organizations are still active in the region, the number of people travelling to the region from Germany has dropped significantly. Whereas nearly a hundred people per month were travelling at the peak (most recently in February 2014), an average of fewer than five were known to leave each month between July 2015 and June 2016. The caliphate declared by the so-called Islamic State no longer has much attraction for those in Germany with an affinity for jihad. And there are currently no indications that large numbers will again travel to Syria, Iraq or any other “theatres” of jihad in the foreseeable future. A combination of preventive and punitive measures and geopolitical developments appear to be making it increasingly difficult for the IS to generate larger numbers of sympathizers from which to recruit additional supporters or mercenaries for its “caliphate” in Syria/Iraq. However, the decline in the number of those travelling for jihadist motivations does not mean we can let down our guard. There are two main reasons for this:

1. We can expect a large number of those who left Germany to return; one-third of them are already here. Dealing with these returnees remains a complex and challenging task.
2. Although the “caliphate” seems to have lost its effect, the ideology and propaganda of the IS have not lost any of their virulence and may have become even stronger, judging from the most recent attacks and attempted attacks in Germany and Europe. The IS has increasingly called on its followers to “stay home” and carry out attacks of all kinds there.

This means that, in addition to the possible threat of large numbers of persons with experience in Syria/Iraq, a difficult-to-estimate number of radicalized persons who did not leave the country also pose a potential threat. The latter are not the subject of the present study, however. What does link the two groups is their shared ideological foundation – Salafism – and the framework for action based on this foundation – jihadism. This study provides concrete results and information based on the 784 cases/persons analysed here who are known to the German domestic security authorities as having left Germany to

travel to Syria or Iraq by 30 June 2016 based on Islamist motivations. With the urgent purpose of this study – optimizing preventive approaches – in mind, the following results should be emphasized:

- Fewer travellers are leaving Germany, while more are returning: Following more than four and a half years of observation, it is clear that, contrary to fears at the time, the declaration of the “caliphate” marked the start of a reversal in the trend of Salafist-motivated travel, as travel to the IS has nearly stopped.
- Almost all those who left Germany (96%) can be considered part of the Salafist spectrum. For a large number of them, connections to known Salafists and places dominated by them apparently played a key role in their radicalization. Identifying persons and/or places having such influence and taking preventive or punitive action to counter them can thus significantly help stop people from becoming radicalized and travelling to Syria/Iraq.
- Four out of five persons who left Germany (81%) had an immigrant background (see Chapter 3.3 for a definition). No significant differences between persons with and without an immigrant background were found in terms of their motivation for leaving or direct influences on the radicalization process. What is noticeable is a much higher average age at first departure for Syria/Iraq (26.2 years compared to 24.3 years) and a smaller group of persons known to the police among those having an immigrant background (64% compared to 71%).
- Comparing the period before the caliphate was declared (up to June 2014) with the caliphate’s first (July 2014 to June 2015) and second (July 2015 to June 2016) year of existence reveals some noticeable differences: The share of women travelling to the caliphate rose in its first year of existence (from 15% to 36%) and then fell (from 36% to 27%). The average age fell, from 26.7 years to 24.2 and then 23.5 years, while the share of minors rose, from 5% to 11% and then 16%. The share of persons who are less socially integrated also rose. The share of persons who became radicalized in less than a year reached its highest point in the first year of the caliphate’s existence, after which it dropped to below the level before the caliphate was declared (40% to 61% to 37%). More of those who left Germany in the

last year were radicalized in a Salafist environment; the Internet seems to have had less significance for this group. Those in their social environment (parents, friends, teachers and/or social workers) were increasingly aware of their radicalization (35% – 48% – 53%), indirectly indicating a growing societal awareness of Salafist-motivated radicalization. These individual observations can be summarized as follows: The IS still has a certain attraction for younger men who are less socially integrated, are characterized by a higher level of criminal energy and are more likely to be found in the immediate Salafist environment.

- Although the Internet plays a key role in radicalization, direct personal contact with like-minded persons is more important in most cases for later stages of radicalization than the consumption of extremist Internet propaganda or digital communication. Radicalization largely takes place in a real social environment. This applies especially to cities and regions with active Salafists.
- There are noticeable differences between the way men and women become radicalized, calling for gender-specific prevention: Women tend to become radicalized more quickly and in social environments that are less publicly accessible (“going private”).
- Persons who were closely involved in Salafist activities and networks before leaving Germany are more involved in jihadist groups after leaving.

These findings make clear that the security authorities and other government and non-governmental institutions in Germany are facing a changed set of challenges: Salafist ideology meets with different responses depending on the person (for example, with regard to age, gender or criminal record) and place (whether rural, urban or metropolitan). Once again, no single strategy can be advised for the entire country. Punitive and preventive measures should therefore be tailored to fit the specific regional, socio-demographic and milieu-related characteristics identified.

This analysis, now carried out for the third year, has demonstrated the value of systematic monitoring of this phenomenon. For example, this year’s analysis confirms the downward trend in the number of people travelling from Germany to Syria/Iraq first identi-

fied in last year's analysis, and it is apparent that the IS currently has a certain influence only in particular environments with a different socio-demographic profile (younger men who are less socially integrated). Despite the decline in jihadist-motivated travel compared to the previous year, the security situation has become more critical, also in objective terms, in view of the recent attacks. This development occurred largely outside the analytical focus of this study and cannot be tracked using these data.