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Religious affiliation and everyday religious practice among refugees

by Amrei Maddox

At a glance

- 69.7 % of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 are Muslim, the majority of whom are Sunni (81.1 %). 16.0 % are Christian and around 7 % each belong to another religion or to no religion.
- 89.3 % of refugees retain their faith over time. Changes in in religious affiliation since arrival in Germany usually relate to adoption of an affiliation or disaffiliation.
- Refugees with a religious affiliation show a high level of religiosity in 2021 in terms of self-rated religiosity as well as the importance of religion for their well-being. This is reflected in a high frequency of prayer among Christian and Muslim refugees.
- The high individual importance of faith also appears to be due to the COVID-19 pandemic: Especially between 2019 and 2021, religion has become more meaningful for many.
- In 2021, 26.5 % of refugees, predominantly Christians (56.4 %), participate in religious events at least once a month. The primary motivations for attendance include religion-related factors, such as the perceived religious duty, and individual reasons, including gaining strength and confidence from it. Among those who never attend such events, sometimes scheduling conflicts and a lack of suitable offers are preventing their participation.
- 20.9 % of refugees use digital religious services at least once a month. Yet, the types of use are very diverse. This digital use represents another aspect of everyday religious practice. In that regard, digital religious contents seem to be more of a supplement than a substitute for non-digital religious activities.

Introduction

The religious landscape in Germany has changed significantly in recent decades. The share of people who do not belong to any religious community has risen to over a third of Germany's population in 2023 (Müke et al., 2023). At the same time, the picture is becoming more and more heterogeneous due to increasingly individualised religious practice and alternative meditative and spiritual practices. This heterogeneity is amplified by the immigration of people who belong to other religious communities than those established in Germany (Müke et al., 2023; SVR, 2016). The predominantly Muslim refugees who came to Germany in 2015 and 2016, for example, often differ in terms of origin and language from the Muslim communities that were predominantly present in Germany until then (Türkmen, 2024).

A particular focus on refugees is merited, given the significance of their religious life is twofold: firstly, it provides a source of support in coping with challenging circumstances, and secondly, it influences the religious fabric of German society. Religion plays an important role in the lives of refugees, for example, as a means for coping with traumatic or difficult events. In addition, integration into existing religious communities provides opportunities for social contacts with people from the host society and for the exchange of information about life in Germany, among other things. Last but not least, the new environment in Germany can lead to changes in refugees' religious orientations.

Against this background, this brief analysis examines the religious affiliation and everyday religious practices of refugees[1] who came to Germany between 2013 and 2019 – so before the war in Ukraine. It also focuses on the use of digital religious contents and services. Furthermore, individual developments in religious affiliation, religiosity, and religious practice over time are studied as well. The analyses are based on data from the IAB-BAMF SOEP survey of refugees, particularly from the year 2021 (see info box).

This brief analysis thus updates the previous study, which examined religious affiliations and practices on the basis of data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees from 2017 (Siegert, 2020).[2] At the same time it adds further aspects: the use of digital religious services, which has not yet been investigated for refugees as well as individual developments over time. Furthermore, the analyses consider the potential influences of the experiences, worries, and uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic occurring in the period prior to and during the survey.

Info box: Data basis

The present analyses are primarily based on data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees from the year 2021. For this nationwide survey, people who have come to Germany and applied for asylum here have been interviewed annually since 2016, regardless of the course and outcome of the asylum procedure. The samples were drawn from the Central Register of Foreigners (AZR) and include people who entered the country between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2019 (Brücker et al., 2018). By using statistical weighting techniques, the results are representative of the households in this population group (for a detailed description of the sampling, see Kroh et al., 2016; Kühne et al., 2019; Jacobsen et al., 2019).

In two excursions, additionally changes over time are analysed. This is made possible by the longitudinal nature of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees and the repeated inclusion of religion-specific questions: Participants were asked about their religious affiliation, religiosity, and everyday religious practices in detail in 2017, 2019, and 2021. For the longitudinal analyses, only cases with valid information for at least two points in time can be considered. The investigation of change over time relates only to refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2016. Respondents in a refreshment sample, which also includes refugees who came to Germany at a later point in time, were interviewed for the first time in 2020, meaning that only one measurement point is available with regard to their religious characteristics under study.

1 The term "refugee" is used here as a collective term for persons who have filed an application for international protection in Germany, regardless of whether or how the application was decided.

2 While the previous study refers to the sample of refugees who immigrated to Germany between 2013 and 2016, the data on which this brief analysis is based also includes refugees who arrived between 2016 and 2019. Due to these different sample compositions, the results of the two studies are only comparable to a limited extent.

Refugees are predominantly Sunni Muslims

In 2021, 69.7 % of refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2019 are Muslim, 16.0 % Christians (Figure 1). Members of other religions (e. g., Yazidis) and people who do not belong to any religion constitute minorities of around 7 % each. The vast majority of Muslim refugees are Sunni (81.1 %; in relation to the total number of refugees: 56.5 %). 7.1 % of Muslims are Shia, 11.8 % belong to another or no specific Islamic denomination. With this, Muslim refugees are slightly more likely to be Sunni compared to the overall Muslim population in Germany (Müke et al., 2023; Pfündel et al., 2021).[3] The majority of Christian refugees belong to Orthodox churches (45.4 %), followed by Protestant churches (27.5 %), the Catholic Church (16.8 %) and other churches (10.2 %) (Figure 1).

3 The available numbers on the Muslim population differ slightly – presumably due to different survey methods and time frames. Based on the study "Muslim Life in Germany (MLD 2020)", the share of people of Sunni faith within the Muslim population is 73.6% (Pfündel et al., 2021), while the Religion Monitor 2023 indicates a slightly lower share of 66.5% (Müke et al., 2023).

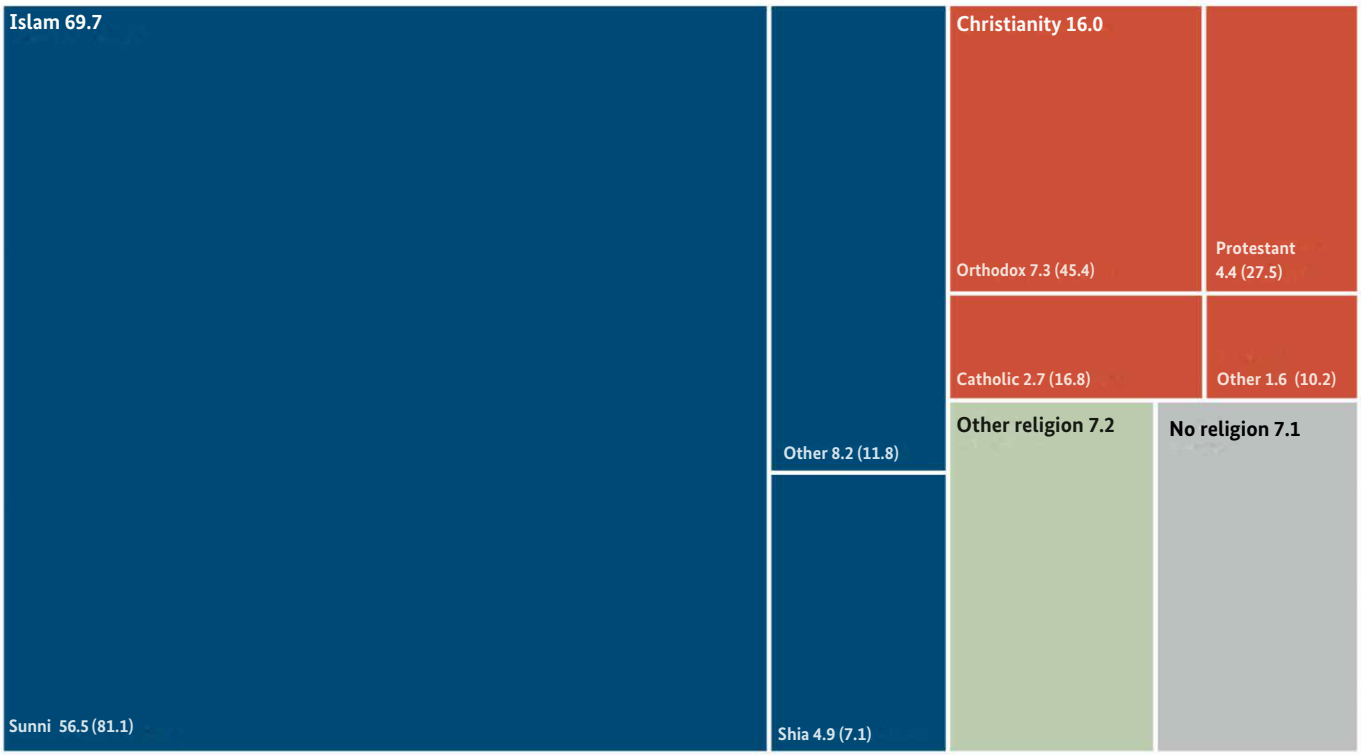
Excursion 1: Consistency and changes in religious affiliation after immigration

According to the findings of qualitative studies, refugees often appreciate the freedom of religion in Germany. This encompasses both the freedom to live their faith according to their own convictions and the possibility of not practising it or giving it up (Brücker et al., 2016; Nagel, 2022). The longitudinal analysis for the period between 2016 and 2021 based on the present data set (cf. info box) reveals changes in religious affiliation for 10.7 % of refugees:

- 3.9 % have given up their religion.
- 2.9 % did previously not belong to any religion, but have since become affiliated with one.
- Conversions, i.e., transitions from one religious community to another, account for 1.5 % of cases in the time period under review.
- In 2.4 % of cases multiple changes occur, which may include the adoption, renunciation, or changing of religious affiliations.

At 89.3 %, the clear majority of refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2016 still belong to the same religion or continue to affiliate with no religion in 2021. Overall, refugees' religious affiliations are thus very stable.

Figure 1: Religious affiliation and denominations (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; data weighted; unweighted number of cases: 2,085

Note: In relation to the denominations, the numbers in brackets represent the shares within the respective religion, whereas the shares without brackets refer to the total number of refugees.

Refugees with a religious affiliation are mostly devout and their faith is very important to them

In addition to formal religious affiliation, individual religiosity is an important aspect of religion. At over 88.5%, the clear majority of refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2019 describe themselves as somewhat or strongly **religious** in 2021 (Figure 2). This share increases to 92.5 % if only those with religious affiliation are considered (50.4 % strongly and 42.2 % somewhat religious; not shown). Slight differences in religiosity exist by religious affiliation, but are not statistically significant at the conventional level. As part of the study "Muslim Life in Germany 2020", individuals with a migration background from Muslim-majority countries of origin were asked about their faith: In this group, 29.3 % of those affiliated with a religion described themselves as strongly religious, 52.3 % as somewhat religious (Pfündel et al., 2021). In comparison, refugees who belong to a religion have a more pronounced faith.

As expected, refugees with no religious affiliation are significantly less religious than those who are affiliated to a religion (Figure 2). Nevertheless, around one in three people (32.6 %) in this group describe themselves as somewhat or strongly religious. This finding that people who do not feel they belong to a religious community can also be devout is also consistent with the findings from other studies (e.g. Müke et al., 2023; Pickel, 2013). These may be people who have turned away from their religious community, but not (yet) from religion itself, or those who live their faith individualistically (Pickel, 2013).

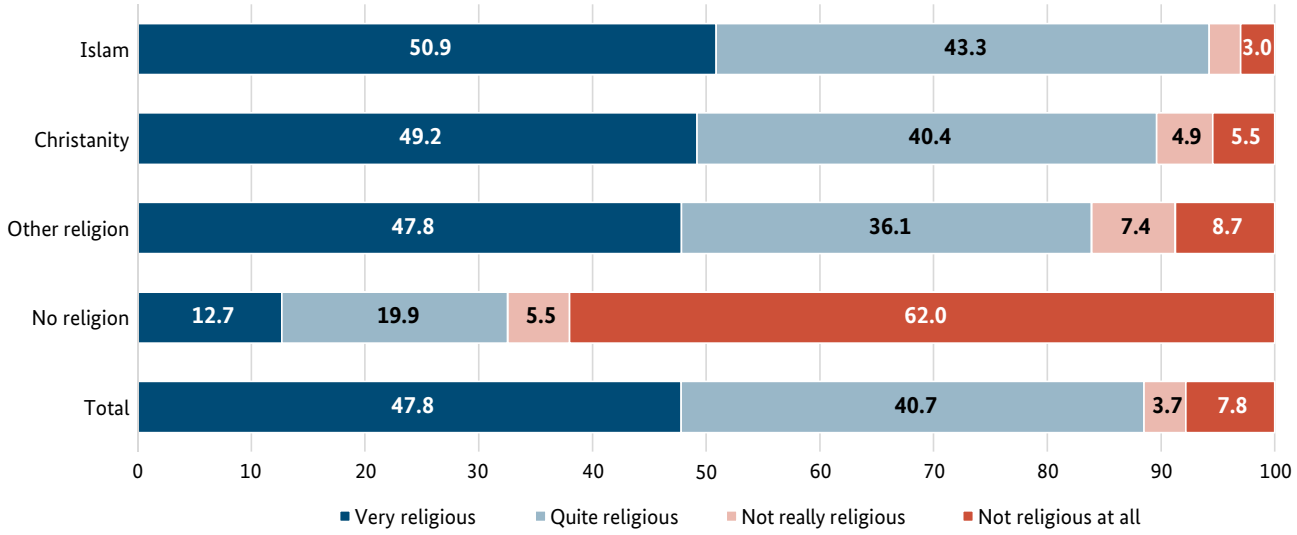
When looking at the question of **how important religion is for the well-being and life satisfaction** of refugees, a similar picture emerges (Figure 3). Accordingly, three quarters (75.1 %) of refugees in 2021 rate their faith as important or very important. This share is even higher among Muslims (78.7 %) and Christians (87.5 %) than among members of other religious communities (68.9 %). Conversely, just under one in five (18.3 %) people with no religious affiliation consider their faith to be (very) important.

Christian refugees practise their faith particularly frequently

Religious rules and practices often differ between religions and do not have the same meaning for members of different religions. For example, piety among Muslims is less strongly linked to mosque attendance than to church attendance among Christians (El-Menouar, 2014). In the following, we will therefore take a look at **the everyday religious practices** of refugees by their religious affiliation in 2021.

The data for 2021 was collected between September 2021 and February 2022. In this time, the COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on religious practice to a certain extent (Hillenbrand & Pollack, 2023). Religious communities were subject to similar restrictions as other public events

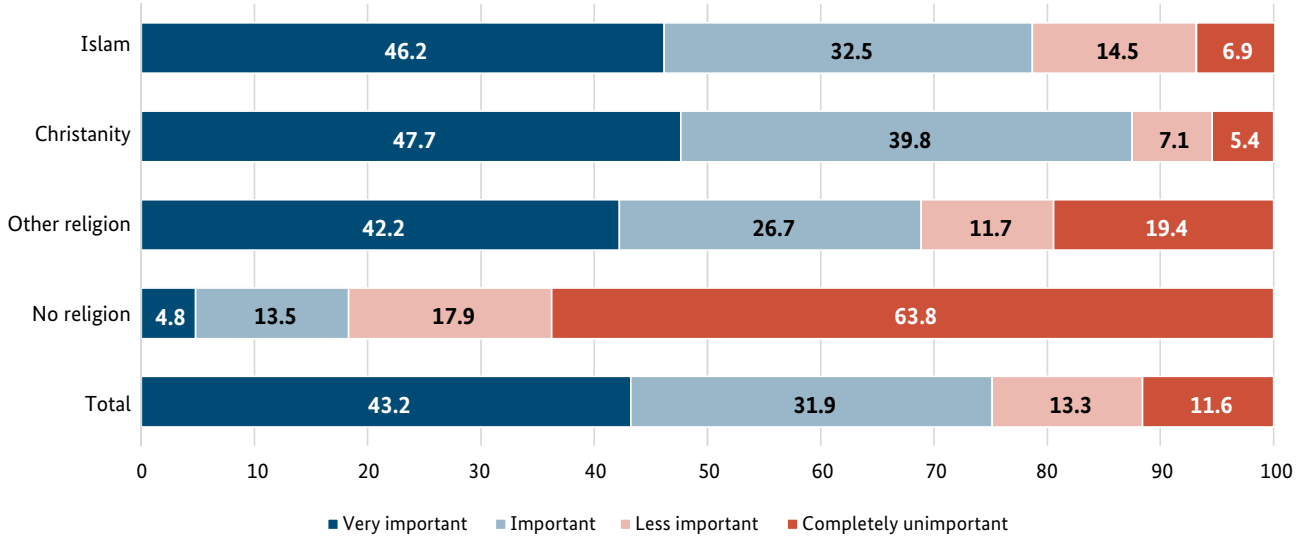
Figure 2: Religiosity in 2021, by religious affiliation (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; data weighted; unweighted number of cases: 2,004

Note: Shares below 3 % are not labelled in the figure.

Figure 3: Individual importance of religion in 2021, by religious affiliation (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; weighted data; unweighted number of cases: 2,036

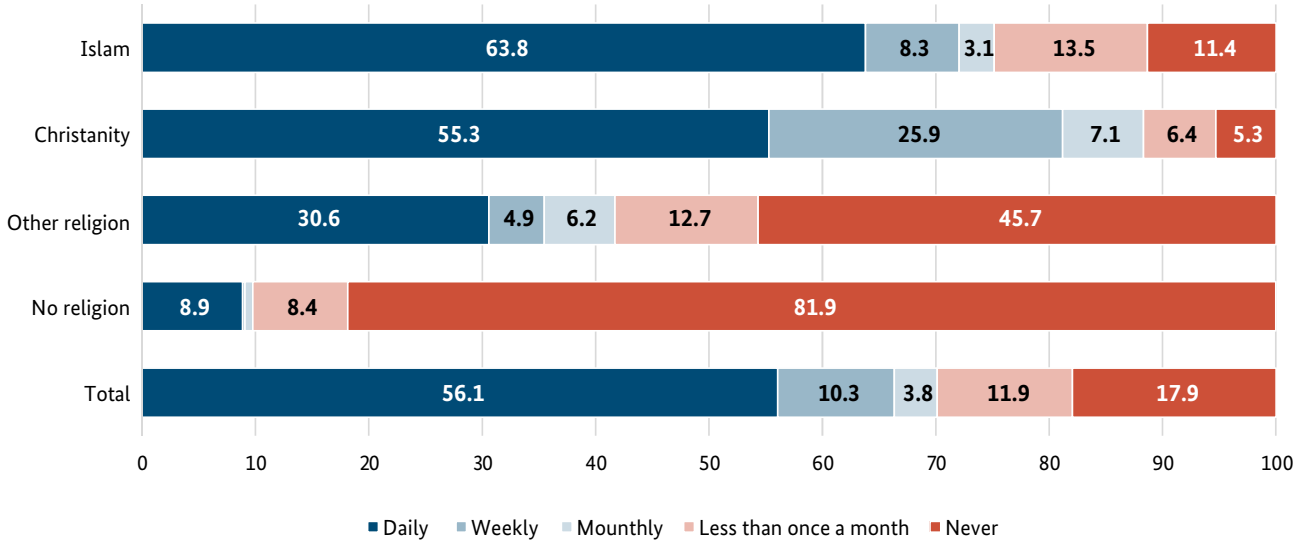
during the pandemic, e.g., limited numbers of participants, compliance with social distancing and hygiene rules, or absolute bans on public meetings. The rules varied depending on the time, federal state, and local circumstances. Religious communities often experienced a decline in visitor numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic and had to restrict religious and non-religious offers (e.g. Sauer et al., 2023). During the survey period, in addition to the social distancing and mask regulations, in particular the "3G rule" applied, which only allowed access to events and certain facilities to people who had been vaccinated against the coronavirus, recovered from an infection with this virus, or had tested negative in advance. The effects of the pandemic on individual religious practice will be examined in more detail in the analysis of individual changes in religiosity and everyday practice (see excursion 2).

In 2021, 70.2 % of all refugees **pray** at least once a month (Figure 4). Only a relatively small share of Christians (5.3 %) and Muslims (11.4 %) never pray, compared to almost half of members of other faith communities (45.7 %). Among Christians in particular, less frequent prayer is also common, i.e., weekly, monthly, or less often. At 63.8 %, Muslims pray particularly frequently on a daily basis. Daily prayer, which should be performed five times a day, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Prayer is therefore of central importance for devout Muslims (Esposito, 2002). According to the results of the study "Muslim Life in Germany 2020", 38.6 % of Muslims with a migration background from Muslim-majority countries of origin in Germany pray daily, 24.6 % never (Pfündel et al., 2021). According to figures from the Religion Monitor 2023, the frequency of prayer among the Muslim population in Germany as a whole is even lower. A comparison of these results with the present data shows that Muslim refugees pray particularly frequently. The higher frequency of prayer also applies to Christians (Müke et al., 2023). Refugees who do not belong to any religion mostly never pray (81.8 %). However, 9.3 % of them pray at least occasionally, i.e., weekly, monthly, or less frequently. Around the same number of them (8.9 %) even pray daily (Figure 4).

In 2021, 26.6 % of refugees **attend religious events** at least once a month (Figure 5). Christians take part in religious events much more frequently than members of non-Christian religions – presumably also due to the larger number of events on offer. In Islam, communal Friday congregational prayers are required for men, but not for women (Akca, 2019). As a result of this gendered religious obligation, men are significantly more likely to participate in religious events than women among Muslim refugees: 21.8 % of Muslim men, but only 7.0 % of Muslim women attend religious events every week. In contrast, 58.9 % of Muslim women never do so (men: 43.4 %, not shown). By comparison, members of other religions practise their faith in community less regularly than Christians and Muslims. 44.8 % of them never attend religious events and a further 43.8 % do so less than once a month.

Only 9.2 % of individuals with no religious affiliation visit religious events, and they do so rather infrequently (Figure 5). It can be assumed that people with no religious affiliation either take part in religious events during major occasions or holidays that are usually celebrated with relatives and friends (e.g., weddings, Eid, or Christmas), or that they have separated from their religious community, but not completely.

Figure 4: Frequency of prayer in 2021 according to religious affiliation (in per cent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; data weighted; unweighted number of cases: 2,008

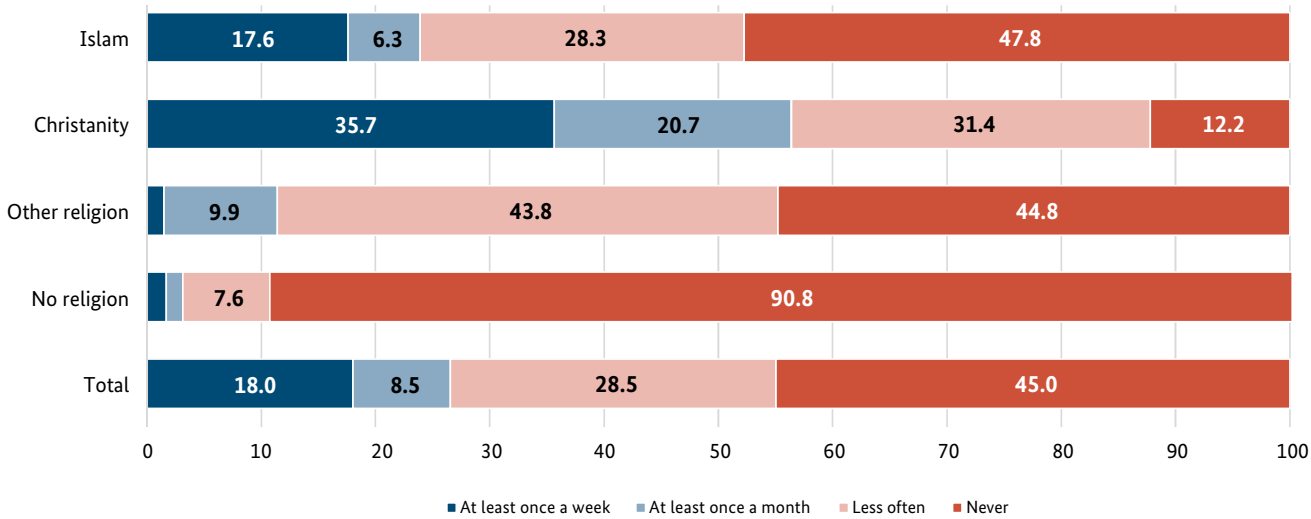
Note: Shares below 3 % are not labelled in the figure.

Attendance at religious events mainly for faith-related and for personal reasons

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in 2021 asked in detail about the reasons for attending and for not attending religious events, where any number of reasons could be given. The role of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious communities and believers was not asked. However, an analysis of individual changes in the later course of the pandemic gives some indication of this (see excursion 2).

The **reasons for attending** religious events were surveyed among all individuals who are affiliated with a religion and participate in them at least occasionally. Overall, just under half (49.0 %) of respondents gave one reason, 18.4 % two, 12.1 % three and 15.9 % more than three motives. Around 5% did not specify any (not shown). Those belonging to a religion attend religious events primarily for faith-related and for personal purposes (Figure 6). In terms of faith-re-

Figure 5: Frequency of attending religious events in 2021, by religious affiliation (in percent)



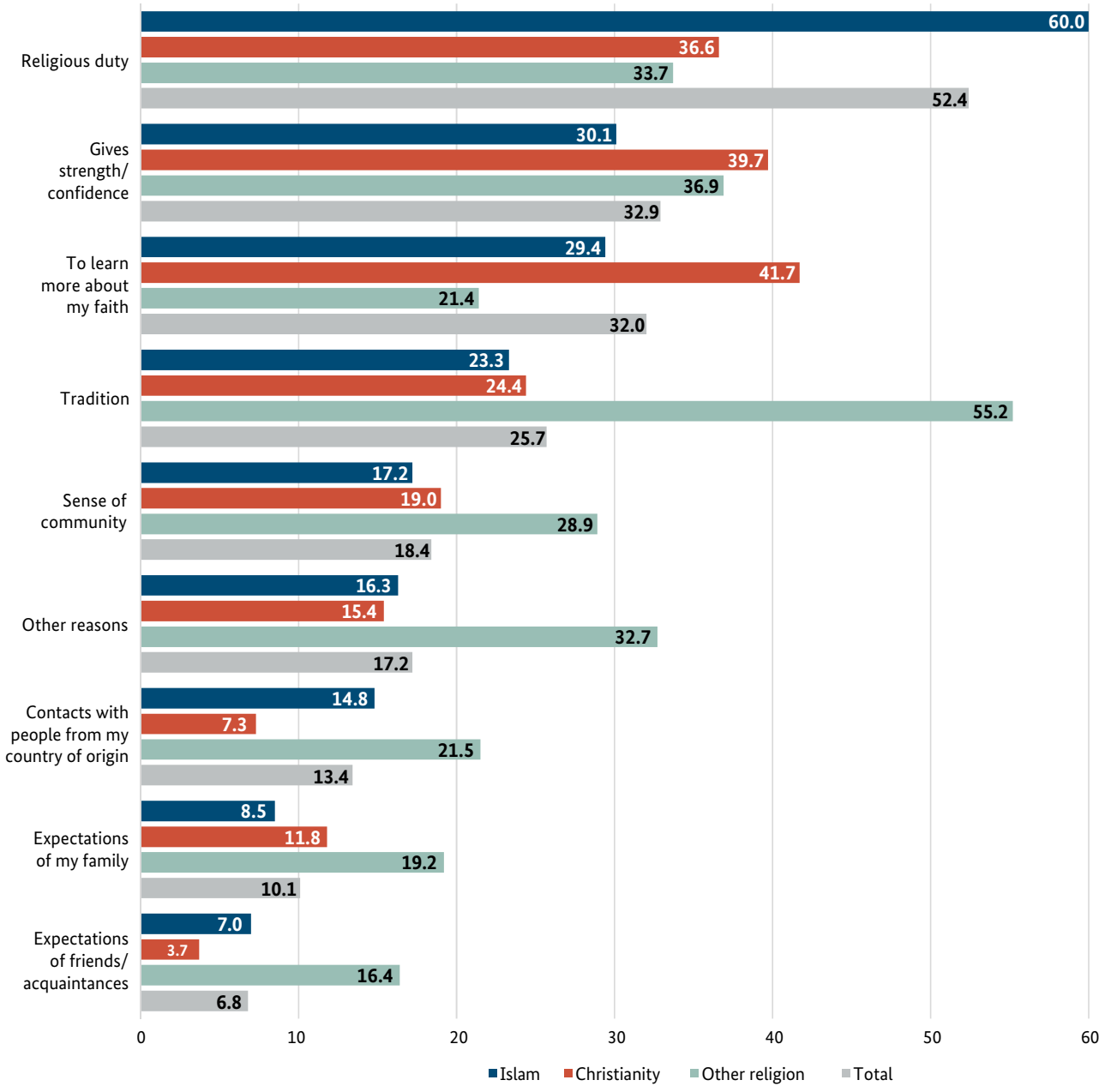
Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; data weighted; unweighted number of cases: 2,041

Note: Shares below 3 % are not labelled in the figure.

lated reasons, participation out of religious duty dominates (52.4 %), followed by the motive of wanting to learn more about one's faith (32.0 %) and/or out of tradition (25.7 %). Personal reasons are especially the gain in strength and confidence through the visit (32.9 %) and the sense of community (18.4 %). The expectations of others only play a minor role.

Muslims are significantly more likely to cite a perceived religious duty as the reason for their visit than members of Christianity or other religions (60.0 to 36.6 and 33.7 %). Despite the gendered Islamic duties, this reason is cited almost equally often by Muslim men and women. Christians, on the other hand, more frequently want to learn more about their own faith (41.7 to 29.4 and 21.4 %) or gain strength and confidence from the visit (39.7 to 30.1 and 36.9 %). Members of other religions more frequently cite tradition, the sense of community, contact with people from their country of origin, expectations of others, as well as other reasons (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Reasons for attending religious events among individuals who are affiliated with a religion and who attend at least occasionally (in percent, multiple answers possible)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; weighted data; unweighted number of cases: 890

Time constraints and a lack of suitable offers are often reasons for not attending religious events

According to the above analyses, the majority of refugees belonging to a non-Christian religion never or only occasionally attend religious events in 2021. Thus, their communal religious practice is significantly lower than that of Christian refugees. The research literature on this subject offers various explanations for these observed differences: Qualitative research points to everyday challenges, such as scheduling conflicts, which can stand in the way of religious practice (Nagel, 2022). While Christians typically attend church on Sundays, Friday is the most important day for communal religious practice among Muslims, which can for example conflict with work or school schedules. Additionally, members of religious or denominational minorities frequently seem to encounter a lack of congregations and venues that meet their expectations and needs (Nagel, 2022; Türkmen, 2024). In the Eastern German federal states and in rural areas, for instance, the density of mosques is lower or only just beginning to emerge due to the historically evolved population structures and the previously low share of Muslim residents (Noack, 2016; Perabo, 2018). In many cases, mosques are also difficult to reach due to their location, e.g., in industrial areas. In addition to the gender-specific obligation to attend a mosque, some mosques also do not have separate areas for women (Akca, 2019).

In addition, the historically grown reference to the origin countries of many Islamic communities in Germany may prevent refugees from attending them, for example due to linguistic or cultural differences. Also, theological aspects may be at odds with the needs of refugees (Türkmen, 2024). For example, most mosques are Sunni and often have a Turkish orientation (Sauer et al., 2023). As a consequence, there are differences in the frequency with which Muslims attend religious events between refugees and the general population in Germany. According to findings from the study "Muslim Life in Germany 2020", 23.6 % of Muslims with a migrant background from Muslim-majority countries of origin attend religious events at least weekly and 14.6 % monthly (Pfündel et al., 2021), while the shares for refugees are 17.6 % and 6.3 % respectively (see Figure 5).[4] The discrepancy becomes even more striking when taking the more pronounced religiosity and more frequent prayer practice of refugees compared to immigrants from Muslim-majority countries of origin and their descendants into consideration (see above).

However, a lack of fit can also prevent Christian refugees from attending church services: Churches in Germany are usually Catholic or Protestant and events are held in German language. Last but not least, it is also conceivable that the refugees are not (yet) aware of the relevant existing offers and events and therefore do not attend them.

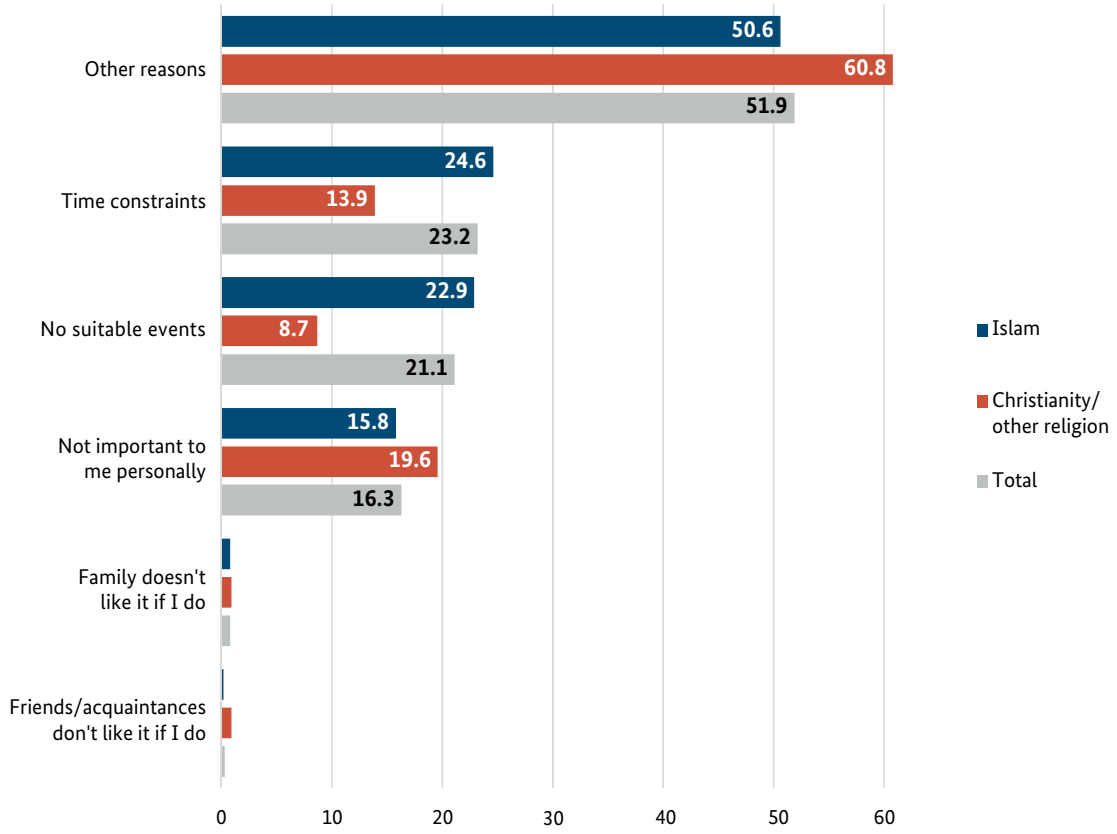
In the subsequent analysis on the **reasons for non-participation in religious events** among individuals who are affiliated with a religion but who never partake in such events, Christians are grouped together with members of other religions due to the limited size of this group. Taken together, the vast majority (88.5 %) provided a single reason, while a further 10.3 % gave two and 1.2 % more than two reasons (not shown). Beyond other reasons, time constraints (23.2 %) and/or a lack of suitable opportunities (21.1 %) were named most frequently, along with the perception that attendance is not a prerequisite for living one's faith (16.3 %) (Figure 7).

In comparison, scheduling issues and a lack of congruence between personal conviction and the available events are particularly salient factors among Muslims. Expectations from family and friends or acquaintances only in very few exceptional cases prevent participation (less than 1 % each). Just over half (51.9 %) (additionally) cited "other reasons" for non-participation in religious events (Figure 7). It is plausible that the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the attendance of such events could be a salient factor, though this was not a surveyed aspect.

Members of religious communities who cite an unsuitable programme as a reason most frequently mention a lack of language fit (25.3 %) and/or the fact that they do not know or trust the clergy (17.7 %). Furthermore, events are rated as unsuitable due to the absence of individuals from the country of origin (14.3 %), events being organised by other religious communities (13.0 %), feelings of discomfort and a lack of belonging (12.0 %) and other reasons relating to the suitability (60.8 %) (not shown).

4 This difference in the frequency of attendance is also evident when the comparison is made for men only, i.e., against the background of gender-specific patterns of religious practice in Islam. 32.9 % of Muslim men with a migration background from Muslim-majority countries of origin attend religious events at least once a week (Pfündel et al., 2021), compared to 21.8 % of the refugees in the present study.

Figure 7: Reasons for non-participation in religious events among religious people who never attend (in percent, multiple answers possible)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; weighted data; unweighted number of cases: 887

Note: Due to low case numbers, Christian and other religions are analysed together. Shares below 3 % are not labelled in the figure.

Around a fifth use religious offers online

Digitalisation has now reached almost all areas of everyday life, including religion. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous Christian (CONTOC, 2021; Sievert, 2023) and Muslim communities (Sauer et al., 2023; Tabti, 2020) in Germany have expanded existing digital services and/or launched new ones. These include online broadcasts of religious services, virtual religious instruction and other online courses, office hours and pastoral care, or counselling via video or live chat (CONTOC, 2022; Sauer et al., 2023; Tabti, 2020). In addition to religious institutions, individual religious figures are also present on the internet, for example on social media and platforms such as YouTube. The internet as well offers a wide range of information and counselling services on the respective faith and religious practice from a wide variety of sources.

Mobile phones have been shown to play an important role in the lives of many refugees, not only during their flight, but also in everyday life after arriving in their destination country. For instance, they can facilitate contacts with relatives in their country of origin or establishing new contacts in the host country (Alencar, 2020; Mancini et al., 2019). In light of this, the question arises as to the extent to which refugees search for and use religious content, information, and contacts in the digital space. As part of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees in 2021, a further aspect of everyday religious practice was therefore introduced into the questionnaire asking for the first time about a) the frequency and b) the type of use of religious content and services on the internet and in social media.

The results indicate that 20.9 % of refugees use the internet or social media for these purposes at least once a month, with 14.9 % doing so weekly and 6.0 % monthly (Figure 9). There are no significant differences in this aspect according to religious affiliation. Individuals who do not belong to any religion, on the other hand, predominantly do not (85.1%) or rarely (9.9%) use religious content or services online.

Excursion 2: Consistency and changes in religiosity and religious practice after immigration

Previous research has produced mixed results on the development of religiosity among immigrants, with Muslims in particular in particular showing a high degree of consistency (Fleischmann, 2022). A qualitative study points to different developments among refugees. On the one hand, there are indications of a religious privatisation or relativization, i.e. a tendency towards a decreasing importance of religion and religious practice, for example in the sense of a cultural-religious attitude. On the other hand, some refugees in Germany intensify their religious practice, for example as a coping strategy for negative experiences or in the sense of a catch-up intensification, the latter especially for people who were unable to live their religion freely in their country of origin (Nagel, 2022).

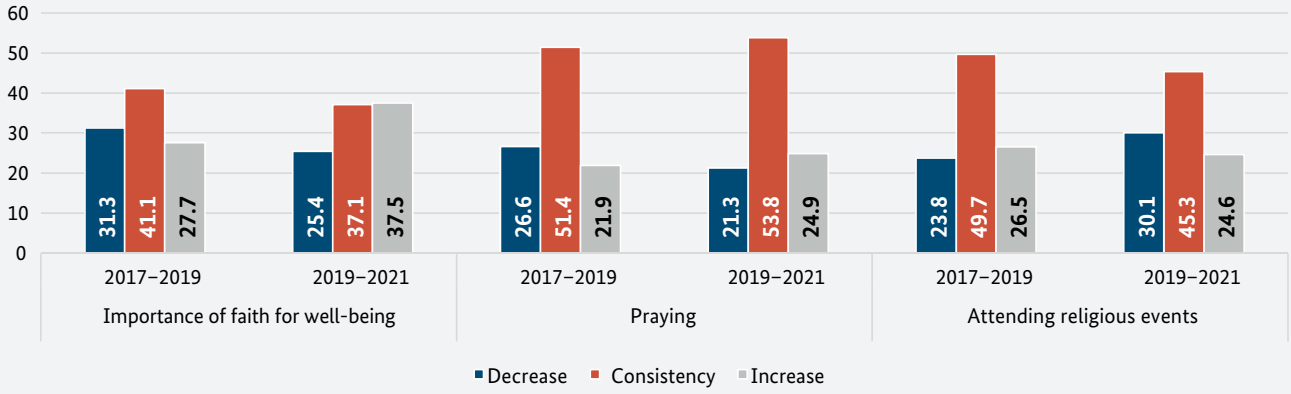
The analysis of individual changes based on the present data (see info box on the data basis) for refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2016 and who belong to a religion is carried out for two periods: 2017 to 2019 and 2019 to 2021. The developments between 2017 and 2019 initially reveal that the largest group is each time comprised of individuals for whom there have been no changes in their religiosity and religious practice (Figure 8). For 41.1 %, their faith was just as important in 2019 as it was in 2017, around half prayed just as often (51.4 %) and attended religious events just as regularly (49.7 %). Furthermore, the share of individuals for whom their faith has become less important slightly outweighs the share of those for whom it has become more important during this period. Similarly, the proportion of individuals with a decreasing prayer frequency over time slightly exceeds the share of those with an increased frequency of prayer.

There are discernible differences between religious groups in terms of the frequency of their visits at religious events. Specifically, while a greater proportion of Christian refugees exhibit a reduced frequency of attendance, constituting 28.2 % compared to 16.6 % of those with increased frequency, a contrary pattern is observed among non-Christian religious groups (Islam: 23.2 to 28.8 %, other religion: 17.9 to 26.2 %; not shown). One potential explanation for this disparity could be that the latter group has established connections with existing communities and found suitable events over time, or alternatively, that new organisations have been established by the refugee population itself.

In the period between 2019 and 2021, which was characterised by the COVID-19 pandemic, the largest group were again individuals who did not experience any change in religiosity or religious practice. With regard to the importance of faith, the proportions of individuals who considered their faith to be equally important and those who considered it to be more important were roughly equal at around 37 % (Figure 8). Concurrently, the share of individuals for whom faith has become more important is around 12 percentage points higher than the share of people for whom it has become less important. A comparable, albeit less pronounced, trend can be observed concerning the frequency of prayer. Among Muslims, the difference between the groups exhibiting increased and decreased prayer frequencies is greater than in the other groups (not shown), at 26.3 % to 19.9 %. This finding aligns with the results of the Religion Monitor, according to which 24 % of Muslims engaged in a more intensive prayer practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 11 % with a less intensive one. This pattern was not evident among most other religious groups, particularly Christian ones. Furthermore, Muslims were more likely than average to perceive religion as a source of support in coping with the pandemic (Hillenbrand & Pollack, 2023). As expected, the effects of the coronavirus restrictions can be seen in the development of the frequency of attendance at religious events, with the share of people who attend less frequently over time outweighing those who attend more frequently over time (difference: 5.5 percentage points).

To summarise, the majority of refugees display consistency in the importance of faith and everyday religious practice over time. Between 2017 and 2019, there was a slight overall decrease in the importance and frequency of prayer, while there was a slight overall increase in the frequency of attendance during this period. This phenomenon can be attributed to individuals who adhere to religions other than Christianity, for whom there appears to be a kind of catch-up effect. Conversely, the data from 2019 to 2021 paints a contrasting picture with regards to all three aspects. This is likely to be a consequence of the impact of the pandemic. Religion still appears to be a coping mechanism for believers and especially for Muslim religious believers and can provide support, particularly in times of crisis (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on communal practice.

Figure 8: Individual changes in religiosity and everyday religious practice (in percent)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2017, 2019 and 2021, v38.1; weighted data; unweighted case numbers: 2,623 (importance 2017–2019); 1,328 (importance 2019–2021); 2,619 (praying 2017–2019); 1,306 (praying 2019–2021); 2,666 (attendance 2017–2019); 1,339 (attendance 2019–2021)

Heterogeneous use of digital religious content

The use of diverse digital contents is a multifaceted phenomenon. Individuals who engage with digital religious content at least occasionally were invited to specify up to seven distinct utilisation categories. This analysis focuses exclusively on refugees who are affiliated with a religion as those who do not belong to any religion tend to utilise such contents rarely, if at all (see Figure 9).

The data revealed that just over half (50.5 %) reported only a single type of use, 14.7 % two, 8.8 % three, and 6.8 % more than three categories. 19.3% did not provide any information. The internet and social media are most frequently used for the following purposes: a) finding out about the latest news from the congregation (34.9 %), b) searching for specific information to learn more about one's own faith (33.8 %), and c) reading, watching, or listening to sermons, prayers, or church services (33.5 %). In each case, approximately 16 % of respondents reported using the internet to exchange ideas with other believers and/or to follow religious people, institutions, or clergy on social media. Only relatively few respondents sought advice or counselling from religious institutions or clergy online, e.g. by email, chat, or in forums (5.4 %). 30.1 % of respondents reported other types of use. It is noteworthy that there are no significant differences in the religion-related use of the internet and social media between the various religious groups (not shown).

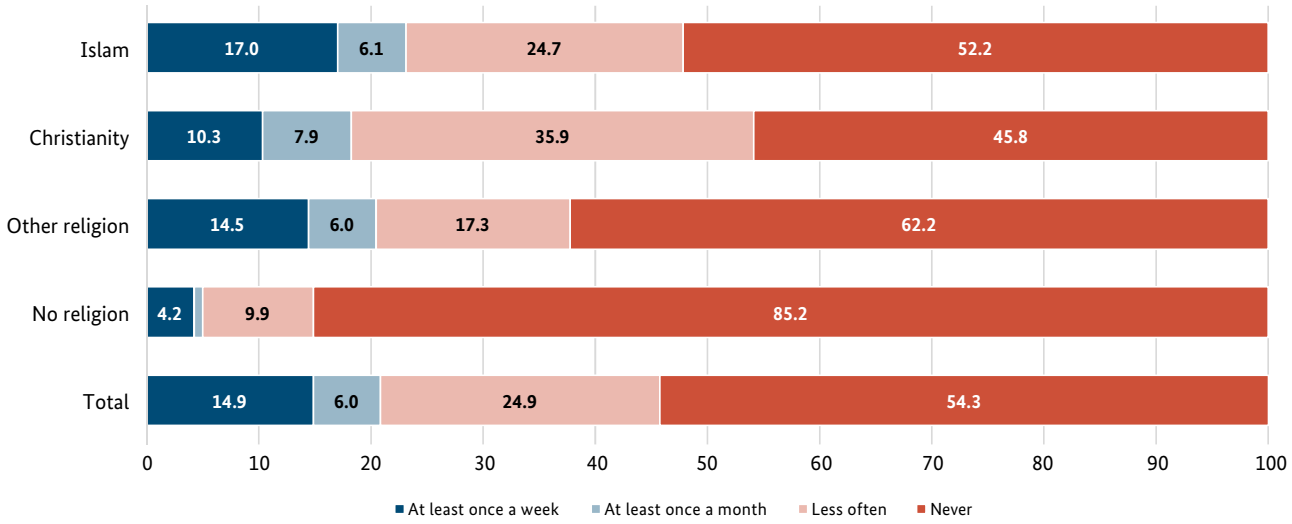
Multivariate analysis: Religion online

It can be assumed that the use of digital religious content functions as a supplement to other forms of everyday religious practice. It can be assumed that the more intensively refugees practise their faith in other ways, i. e. the more often they pray or the more regularly they attend religious events, the more inclined they will also be to turn to religious content on the internet or on social media. However, it is also imaginable that people who do not attend religious events due to scheduling conflicts or a paucity of suitable offers may use digital religious content and services a substitute for such events. In order to examine these interrelations, a logistic regression with robust standard errors is employed, analysing the interrelations between the use of digital religious content and various religious characteristics (religiosity, frequency of prayer, frequency of attending religious events). The dependent variable differentiates whether digital religious contents and services are used (1) regularly (weekly or monthly) vs. (0) less frequently or never.[5]

The results of the regression analysis show a positive correlation between the use of digital religious content and services and everyday religious practice, both in terms of prayer frequency and the participation in religious events. When all other characteristics are taken into account, individuals who pray on a daily basis are, on average, 25.4 percentage points more likely to use digital religious content

5 As a robustness check, the same analyses were calculated as an ordinal logistic regression. The results differ only slightly.

Figure 9: Frequency of the use of digital religious content and services, by religious affiliation (in percent)



Source: Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; data weighted; unweighted number of cases: 2,037

Note: Shares below 3 % are not labelled in the figure.

than those who never pray. Under control, no significant correlation is found between self-rated religiosity and the use of religious content and services online.

A comparison of the predicted probabilities of individuals who never attend religious events for scheduling reasons or due to a perceived lack of suitable opportunities with those of refugees who never do so for other reasons reveals the following: Although a correlation in the expected direction is observed s, at 7.6 percentage points this difference is not very large and only weakly statistically significant. This finding suggests that digital religious content may serve to a limited extent as a substitute for individuals who do not have time to participate in-person or for whom there are no suitable events (Figure 10).

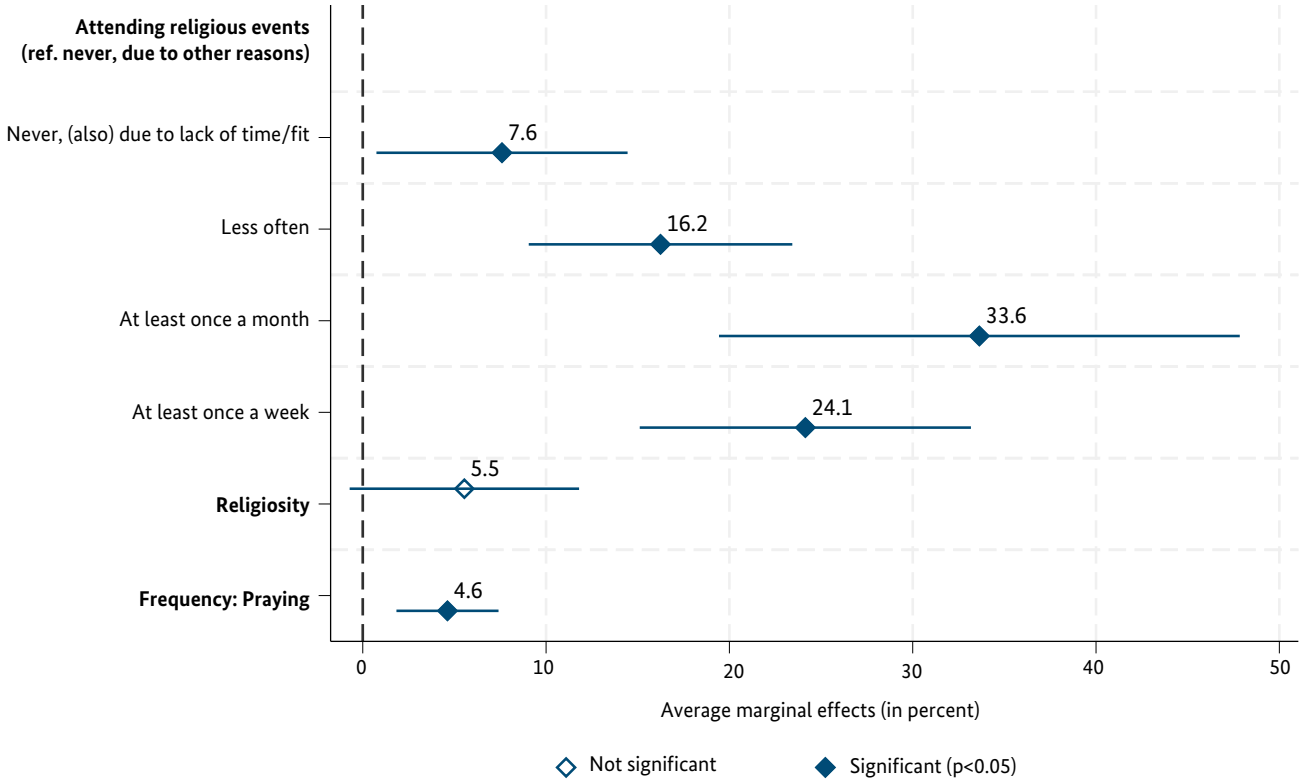
In summary, the results indicate that the use of digital religious content represents an additional aspect of everyday religious practice. Specifically, it appears to function in particular as a supplement to other religious practices, though less as a substitute.

Conclusion

This brief analysis examines the religious affiliation, religiosity, and everyday religious practices of refugees in 2021 based on data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees. The analyses reveal that refugees who are affiliated with a religion display a high level of religiosity, characterised by a high self-perceived religiosity and an important role attributed to their faith for their own well-being.

The refugees' high level of religiosity is also often reflected in their everyday religious practices. Compared to Christian refugees, however, Muslim refugees exhibit a lower propensity to attend religious events, and when prompted for reasons for not attending, more frequently cite scheduling conflicts and a lack (awareness of) available opportunities as key factors. Examining changes over time between 2017 and 2019 indicates a potential catch-up effect among non-Christian refugees, possibly due to them gradually finding suitable events or establishing their own. However, a slight downward trend is observed in terms of the

Figure 10: Association between the use of digital religious content and selected characteristics (average marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals)



Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees 2021, v38.1; weighted data; unweighted number of cases: 1,818

Note: The figure is based on a multivariate logistic regression with robust standard errors and the use of religious online services as a dependent variable. Religious affiliation, religious minority in Germany, age, gender, country of origin, and highest level of educational attainment are controlled for.

Reading example: Taking all other variables into account, refugees who attend religious events on a weekly basis are on average 24.1 percentage points more likely to use digital religious content regularly compared to people who never do so and for whom this is not the case due to scheduling conflicts or a lack of suitable opportunities.

importance of religion and the frequency of prayer over this period.

Conversely, for a considerable number of refugees, their faith assumed a heightened relevance between 2019 and 2021, a development that is presumably attributable to the challenges posed by the pandemic. This period also witnessed an increase in the frequency of prayer among many individuals. One plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that prayer served as a coping mechanism, enabling refugees to navigate the uncertainties and restrictions imposed by the pandemic. On the other hand, the tendency towards a decrease in the frequency of attending religious events during this period reflects the restrictions imposed on leaving home and social gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As is the case in many other domains, the digital sphere is also assuming an increasingly significant role in religious life. Approximately one in five refugees access digital religious content and services at least once a month, with many doing so less frequently. However, this happens in very different ways. The most prevalent practices include seeking current news from one's community, searching for specific religious information, and following sermons, prayers, and church services online. A multivariate analysis reveals that the utilisation of digital religious content is more indicative of being an additional form of practice rather than a substitute for the established, conventional practices. These analyses, thus, offer a valuable insight into the religious life of refugees in the digital space. However, the frequency and type of use provide no indication of the quality and content of religious online contents and services. Research in the form of studies that explicitly shed light on this topic and/or analyse web data are useful here, as they can provide in-depth insights and a deeper exploration of this topic.

In order to make a conclusive assessment of the extent to which the developments observed between 2019 and 2021 are temporary effects of the pandemic, it is essential that future developments remain subject to ongoing monitoring. In the long term, trends of alignment, in the sense of declining levels of religiosity and religious practice, may emerge, given the potential impact of the religious context in which immigrants reside on their own religiosity (e.g., van der Bracht et al., 2013).The current data also demonstrate that there are differences between religions when it comes to motives for attending religious events with Muslims who attend such events particularly frequently citing religious duty as the reason for doing so. While this is also often important for members of religions other than Islam or Christians, personal reasons (e.g., gaining strength and confidence) for example play a dominant role for Christian refugees, while tradition takes precedence among members of other religions. These differences have the potential to result in divergent developments between religious groups. Previous research has demonstrated in the context of immigrants and their descendants that Muslims exhibit a comparatively high stability in their religiosity when compared to other groups (Fleischmann, 2022). It remains to be seen to what extent analogous developments will also occur among refugees over time. The future development of digital religious content as well as the religiosity and religious practice of refugees may also have a lasting impact on the religious landscape in Germany.

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