

# Attacks stoke fears of refugees in Germany

Some fear backlash as violent acts increase, opposition to open-door policies mounts

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+2 mehr By Anton Troianovski, Ruth Bender and Drew Hinshaw

BERLIN—When the news came in that a Syrian asylum applicant had carried out a suicide bombing in Ansbach on Sunday night, the director of a refugee shelter 300 miles to the north wondered if any of his residents would be capable of doing the same.

“When something like this happens, it’s a personal blow,” said Thilo Rau, who runs the shelter on an old military base in Basepohl, Germany. “You ask yourself whether you’re doing the right thing and whether you’re doing everything you can.”

The recent string of attacks by migrants in this country has rattled many refugees and the Germans who work with them. Some fear a backlash or longer screening times as they wait in packed shelters for asylum requests to be processed. Others say that given the hundreds of thousands who entered this country in the past year with few or no controls, more at-



A Syrian refugee in Ansbach, Germany, the site of Sunday’s suicide bombing, holds a sign reading, ‘We are Muslims and not terrorists.’

tacks may be inevitable.

“I was thinking such things might happen,” said Niaz Ahmad Azizi, a 37-year-old audio technician from Afghanistan who arrived in October. “People just came

without any checking up, without any control of who you were or where you were from.”

The concerns underscore the stakes behind Germany’s decision to welcome one million

refugees onto its soil, many of whom could eventually strengthen this powerhouse economy’s aging workforce. But a small number of them, some politicians say, could import the kind of vio-

lent fundamentalism that so far has had a weaker hold here than in neighboring Belgium and France. Some of those people may have brought a radical ideology with them; others may be adopting it after arriving.

“Islamist terrorism has arrived in Germany,” Bavarian State Premier Horst Seehofer said on Tuesday.

In the city of Bremen, a non-profit youth organization has seen an increase in phone calls from asylum-shelter workers concerned about refugees radicalizing.

“There are many unaccompanied minors here, some of whom have imported their conservative views of their religion that can lead people to interpret them as a radicalization,” said David Aufsess, a counselor specializing in Islamic radicalism for the nonprofit group VAJA. “There is a lot of insecurity among some of the refugee helpers who don’t know how to deal with that.”

He said none of those calls led to anyone the group found to actually have radicalized.

German authorities say they are currently investigating some 60 cases in which recently arrived refugees are suspected of being connected to terrorism. The federal criminal-investigation agency BKA has received more than 400 tips about possible members of terrorist organizations or radical Islamists among the record num-

ber of asylum seekers that have arrived.

The difficulties European authorities face in monitoring radicals’ communications and movements were further illustrated when Islamic State published an obituary claiming the Ansbach bomber had fought with the group in Iraq and Syria before being wounded on the battlefield, traveling abroad for medical treatment and seeking asylum in Germany, where he launched Sunday’s attack with help from a second operative.

Security officials have also been concerned about refugees adopting radical views after arriving—for instance, after attending mosques that follow the conservative Salafī branch of Islam, many of which hold services in Arabic and offer assistance to refugees.

In Bavaria, for example, underage refugees have been spotted going to known radical mosques, the state’s domestic intelligence agency said.

To be sure, the two Islamist attacks here recently were committed by asylum applicants who had arrived before last fall’s influx. Nevertheless, they have made fears of terrorists arriving in the migrant stream more palpable.

Refugees and people who work with them already see signs of rising tensions between Germans and the new arrivals. When Peter Hermanns hosted a Syrian pianist on Sunday night for a concert at the

refugee shelter he runs in eastern Berlin, he got angry phone calls from neighbors. They told Mr. Hermanns that the traditional Syrian music was a provocation and didn’t belong to Germany, he said.

“If the forces of integration are lacking, if the discussion is always led in a polarizing way, then one can fear that we will get into a kind of civil war at some point,” Mr. Hermanns said. “Society is dividing.”

