

# Open door to migrants makes Germany terror hub of Europe



German police watch as Yamen Alahmad appears in courtULI DECK/AFP

On the surface, at least, Yamen Alahmad was a model refugee, a Syrian teenager apparently motivated only by the hope of starting a new life far from the hell of his homeland.

Last week, however, Germany's anti-terrorism police kicked in the door to the flat the state had granted him in the northern city of Schwerin. The officers had evidence that Alahmad was building a bomb.

As if more evidence were needed of the terrorist threat facing Europe, the 19-year-old had arrived in Germany as an unaccompanied minor at the peak of the migrant crisis in 2015, becoming one of the country's 1.6m registered asylum seekers.

He was charged with terrorism. Over the internet he had ordered electronic and chemical materials used in bomb making and he had been in contact with a self-styled "soldier of the caliphate" or Isis.

Intelligence sources have revealed to The Sunday Times that more than 9,000

suspected terrorist plots against European countries have been discovered in recent years. Many were foiled before the attackers reached Europe. But most of the recent cases are linked to the migration of late 2015, when Germany opened its borders to Syrian and other refugees to avoid a humanitarian emergency.

Since then police have received more than 1,900 reliable tip-offs about terrorists among the refugee population. More than 70 investigations are under way, with authorities carrying out an average of three to four house searches a week.

Many of America's considerable intelligence resources in Germany are focusing on terrorist threats, a majority of them emanating from migrant communities. Germany, say intelligence sources, has become Europe's prime "terror hub".

This newspaper was the first to reveal how most of the Paris attackers in 2015 had hidden among the wave of refugees to penetrate Europe.

With Isis facing defeat in Syria, many more are likely to travel by boat from Libya or Egypt to Europe, according to the intelligence sources whose electronic surveillance tools are trained on the route.

America's National Security Agency is monitoring mobile phones and social media to alert its European counterparts to potential attackers. Such intelligence led to the arrest of Alahmad, who was placing orders on Amazon for materials to make triacetone triperoxide, the explosive of choice for Isis terrorists. Amazon helpfully added that customers who bought detonators also bought acetone.

America's FBI reportedly helped German authorities to secure Alahmad's "chat protocols" from Facebook, allowing them to eavesdrop on his preparations.

Although the German authorities have evidence that about 25 Isis terrorists have infiltrated the stream of refugees to attack Europe, the majority of those arrested recently — including Alahmad — are young men who became radicalised in Germany after communicating with Isis handlers over social media.

Alahmad, like tens of thousands of other migrants, was granted asylum in 2016 without even being interviewed by authorities — he just had to fill out a form.

More than two-thirds of the 1.6m refugees in Germany are male and more than half arrived without any form of identification, according to official estimates. About 230,000 rejected asylum seekers have been marked for deportation, but the

lack of documents makes it difficult for the authorities to remove them from the country.

This poses a security threat for the rest of Europe, as migrants who reach Germany can move freely across the borderless Schengen zone. Thousands have disappeared without trace.

Peter Altmaier, Germany's refugee co-ordinator and acting finance minister, said the lack of information about people entering and leaving the European Union was part of the problem.

He also admitted, however, that Germany had no oversight of its own migrant population. "No one knows exactly how many asylum seekers have left Germany and Europe without being registered," Altmaier told the Bild newspaper.

The authorities are overwhelmed. Monitoring a terrorist suspect requires about 30 officers. Officials say they do not have enough manpower.

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