

# Germany and Austria discriminate against Kosovo refugees

Markus Salzmann  
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In the course of the past six months, according to media reports, 50,000 people have left Kosovo, some 35,000 in the last month-and-a-half alone. Their main destinations are Germany, Austria and Scandinavia.

The exodus is the result of the catastrophic economic and social situation in Kosovo, which is making life unbearable for the majority of the population. “Kosovo is the poorest country in southeast Europe,” migration researcher Besa Shahini, from the European Stability Initiative think tank, told *Der Spiegel*. “The numbers of refugees have been increasing continuously for several years, so in that respect it is not a new phenomenon.”

Average wages in Kosovo are €220 per month. Without remittances from Kosovars who have found work abroad, many families would be unable to survive. The official unemployment rate is 27 percent, but the real rate is estimated at more than double that. Youth unemployment is thought to be around 70 percent. According to figures from the World Bank, around a third of residents are living below the poverty line, on less than €1.50 per day.

The annual income per head in 2013 was somewhat more than €2,500. This is not even half the figure of the European Union’s (EU) poorest state, Bulgaria, and roughly one-tenth of the EU average.

*Deutsche Welle* reported on an unemployed father, Fitim S., who travelled with his family to Germany. He said he did not even receive social welfare in Kosovo of €80 per month, because, according to the justification, he has a house and did not have to pay rent. “We were told that we could get asylum in Germany,” said the desperate father.

The British *Daily Telegraph* quoted a woman in Kosovo, who stated, “It is sad for Kosovo, but there is no hope here for the people. They are leaving the country because they are desperate.”

There is no organised medical care. Health care from a doctor or at a hospital can only be obtained in exchange

for cash. The country, with a population of 1.8 million, is dominated by criminal clans that are closely connected to the major political figures in the country and enrich themselves through prostitution, people trafficking, and the drugs and arms trade. Corruption is rampant.

“Those with no connections or associations with the clans in the political parties have no career prospects,” states *Der Spiegel*. “Many people in Kosovo are just fed up with the situation and simply want to escape,” said Iliriana Kaçaniku, who works as an expert on EU integration at the Kosovo Foundation for an Open Society (KFOS). Kosovo is one of Europe’s most corrupt countries. On Transparency International’s index, the country is in 111th place.

Since Kosovo’s independence in 2008, the European powers have not improved the situation at all, but are themselves deeply implicated in the network of corruption and the black market. The Eulex mission, aimed at establishing an independent judiciary, is discredited.

The daily *Koha Ditore* uncovered that a number of corrupt state prosecutors and judges involved with Eulex had called a halt to prosecutions or handed down milder punishments in exchange for money. German news magazine *Die Zeit* named the Italian judge Francesco Florit, who allegedly received €300,000 in exchange for clearing a man charged with murder.

The catastrophe in Kosovo is the direct result of the intervention by the major western powers. They deliberately provoked the ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia for their own interests.

In 1991, Germany’s foreign policy backed the breakup of the Yugoslav state by rushing to recognise Slovenia and Croatia as independent states. The United States followed suit and forced the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The result was the extremely bloody four-year Bosnian war, in which the western powers intervened with their own troops.

The NATO states subsequently used the separatist strivings in Kosovo they had promoted in order to move against Serbia. In 1999, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright presented the Serbian government with an unacceptable ultimatum at the Rambouillet meetings. When it was rejected, NATO went to war with Serbia.

Even then, Albright and German foreign minister Joschka Fischer relied on the support of dubious elements like Hashim Thaci, currently deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo. Thaci, as head of the Kosovo Liberation Army militia, was wanted by Serbian authorities for terrorist attacks against security forces, and had also been accused of liquidating rivals within his own ranks. He also had ties to the drug mafia.

After the war, Kosovo was under United Nations administration, practically under the military and political control of the countries who led the war. The country's declaration of independence in 2008, which was only recognised by the western powers, further intensified ethnic tensions in the region.

The governments of the countries that pressed for Kosovo's separation and independence are now responding with an inhumane policy of deporting refugees fleeing the catastrophe they have produced. Almost none of the asylum seekers from Kosovo are permitted to stay in Germany or other European countries. The human rights organisation ProAsyl estimates that only 40 Kosovars were given the right to reside in Germany in 2014. Almost 9,000 applications were lodged.

"There is no asylum for Kosovars," Manfred Schmidt, President of the federal office for refugees and immigration, bluntly stated. Almost all asylum applications from Kosovar nationals are rejected because they cannot prove any political persecution. Many of the refugees have used all of their savings for the journey and face an even more hopeless situation after their return.

In Germany, the interior ministers at the federal and state levels enacted several measures two weeks ago to restrict the flood of refugees from Kosovo. The German police will provide support to the Serbian border police. This could mean that Kosovars who possess a Serbian passport will be prevented from crossing the Hungarian border.

In contrast to past practices, asylum seekers from Kosovo are not to be distributed among the municipalities after they have been registered. Instead, their asylum proceedings are to be completed at arrival centres within two weeks. European spokesman for ProAsyl, Karl Kopp, criticised the plan, commenting, "There will certainly not

be impartial proceedings." It was merely about "declaring the people to be ready for deportation as quickly as possible."

Discussions are also ongoing about classifying Kosovo as a secure third country. The most recent states to be classified were Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia. Since November of last year, applications for asylum from nationals of these countries have been rejected in sped-up proceedings as "obviously unjustified." Subsequently, deportations must take place within a week. The interior minister in Saxony, Markus Ulbig (Christian Democratic Party), has already demanded such a classification for Kosovo.

The state president in Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann (Green Party), spoke out cynically in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in favour of denying asylum to Kosovars. "We have a right to asylum which is meant for people who are politically persecuted. Currently, the mass migration of people from Kosovo is beyond that—but this can't go on, they are not politically persecuted. It is overwhelming and endangering the right to asylum."

In Austria, interior minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner (Austrian People's Party) has provoked a campaign against the refugees on behalf of the Social Democratic-Conservative government. She described it as her mission to restrict the storm of refugees from Kosovo. In the name of this goal, she arranged for statements to be distributed in Kosovo making it absolutely clear that refugees are not desired in Austria and could be punished with prosecution.

The text states, "Smugglers lie. There is no asylum in Austria on economic grounds." For breaching the EU's travel ban, a fine of up to €7,500 is threatened.



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