

German federal and state governments agree on hardline approach to refugees

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At a refugee conference held in the Chancellor's Office in Berlin, representatives of the federal government and the premiers of Germany's 16 states agreed on a further restriction of the right to asylum. The federal government made available more resources to the states and municipalities for refugees. At the same time, however, additional countries were declared to be safe countries of origin and welfare benefits were sharply reduced for refugees.

This year, the federal government will allocate to the states an additional €2 billion, followed by approximately €4.1 billion next year. These sums have been calculated at a rate of €670 per month for each refugee—a contribution that falls well short of providing sufficient funds to oft traumatised refugees from war zones and ultimately runs out after providing a minimal level of care well under the basic level of existence.

However, the state premiers agreed to the financial plan from finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble because they are in full agreement with the federal government's policy of deterring and harassing refugees. They have therefore also accepted the federal government's wide-ranging restriction of the right to asylum.

According to this, refugees will be first confined to hopelessly overflowing reception centres for six months, instead of the current upper limit of three months. During their time in reception centres, refugees are strictly banned from working, and children cannot attend school. Refugees who have no prospect of staying in Germany due to their nationality are also not given access to language courses. Families, small children and pregnant women have to simply sit and wait in halls with hundreds of camp beds, as if they were in prison.

In addition the government is planning to build waiting centres, where asylum seekers will be locked up immediately upon their arrival. Officially, this is supposed to deal with the chaos of distributing people requiring

protection to the states. In reality, the plan is the expansion of the camp system and forced internment.

In the waiting centres, refugees will not be able to apply for asylum, but are only given a certificate confirming their status as an asylum seeker. They are the equivalent, on the national level, of the so-called "hot spots" on the European Union's external borders where refugees will be held in concentration camps, searched, registered and subjected to pre-screening. For refugees, this means the lengthening of waiting time and virtual internment in camps until the conclusion of the asylum hearing.

In the reception centres, so-called pocket money welfare benefits of €143 per month will no longer be paid out. This sum was already seen as an absolute minimum totally inadequate for travel tickets, telephone charges and similar expenses. In future they will be only be provided with vouchers, and that at a tremendous bureaucratic cost.

The cuts are particularly drastic for those seeking protection whose applications have been rejected by the authorities. So-called "enforceable deportees" will only be provided with benefits until a determined departure date. If they ignore this time scale, they would only have "a right to the bare minimum."

Since refugees currently receive only money and benefits in kind amounting to an absolute minimum for survival, rejected asylum seekers will thus be receiving, in violation of a ruling of the German Constitutional Court, assistance well below the absolute minimum. Entire families will be driven into extreme poverty and a desperate struggle to survive.

After the conference, Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that they had "overcome incorrect incentives," thereby regurgitating the myth that refugees only come to Germany to claim welfare benefits.

Their lack of desire to go to Bulgaria, Greece or Hungary is because they are likely to be subjected to severe mistreatment, often have to live like animals in the

open, and face the brunt of police abuse. An expert assessment authored by the federal agency for migrants and refugees came to the conclusion that financial incentives play an extremely subordinate role in the choice of a target country. The cutting of benefits for refugees serves only to bully those in need of protection, while playing into the hands of the right-wing neo-Nazis.

The Balkan states of Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro were subsequently declared to be safe countries of origin. Refugees from these countries will now face a shortened procedure with virtually no hope of obtaining asylum.

These countries are not only extremely poor, but minorities like Roma confront severe discrimination and lack legal rights. In Montenegro and Kosovo, the government is closely tied to mafia clans, and journalists are persecuted. In addition, 5,000 soldiers—including 700 from the German army—of the KFOR mission are stationed in Kosovo, allegedly to guarantee the “safety of the country.” To speak here of “safe countries of origin” is entirely at odds with reality.

In addition, the stream of refugees from the Balkan countries has dropped significantly over recent months. Kosovo and Montenegro do not appear in the federal agency for migration and refugees’ list of top 10 countries of origin for refugees arriving in August.

Because the designation of a country as a “safe country of origin” also has to be agreed by the upper house of Germany’s parliament, the government, which does not have a majority in the house, was reliant on the support of the Green-Social Democratic Party (SPD) government in Baden-Württemberg and the Christian Democratic Union-SPD government in Hesse.

Baden-Württemberg’s state premier Winfried Kretschmann (Greens) welcomed the agreement at the refugee conference in the Chancellor’s Office, stating, “I am very satisfied that this compromise has been reached. Everyone had to make tough choices on difficult issues for them. But this did not change the constructive atmosphere, which was actually very, very constructive with all involved.”

The Greens once raised the defence of refugees on their party banner, but now their despicable role is only outdone by the hypocritical role of the Left Party. Although the Left Party officially opposes restrictions on the right to asylum, Left Party state premier of Thuringia Bodo Ramelow acceded to almost all decisions at the Chancellor’s Office, describing them as “steps in the right direction.” The only exceptions were the expansion of “safe countries of origin” and the lengthening of the

period refugees have to remain in reception centres.

Among the measures supported by Ramelow were the cutting of welfare benefits and for the states to rapidly carry out deportations. Thuringia, governed by the Left Party and SPD, will participate in the mass deportation of refugees.

The repressive measures against refugees have gone hand in hand with a deliberate campaign against Muslim refugees, who are constantly being accused of an unwillingness to integrate. To begin with, refugees from Syria were welcomed due to their high levels of training. But now they are also being labelled illiterate and accused of competing for resources with the poorest sections of the population.

On the ZDF television talk show hosted by Maybrit Illner, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière painted a picture of a horde of uncivilised Muslim barbarians storming Germany. He said that refugees should be expect that, “after it has been explained to them, they accept our role of the woman, our understanding of human dignity, that they live out their male testosterone issues in another way.”

He found support on this from the Greens. Tübingen Mayor Boris Palmer said in an interview with the *Tageszeitung* that he not only supported deportations and cuts to social support for refugees, but also agitated against Muslims and refugees. “Currently, over 70 percent of refugees are young men who have totally different ideas about the role of women, religion, freedom of speech, homosexuals or environmental protection in society as we Greens,” he said. “Let’s not lie to ourselves: the task is massive. There is an objective limit to integration and the burden we can bear.”



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