

# Berlin: Bureaucratic treatment of refugees leads to death of 4-year-old

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Four weeks ago, at around noon on October 1, 4-year-old Mohamed disappeared in the crowd in front of the State Office for Health and Social Affairs (LAGeSo), the central reception centre for refugees in Berlin-Moabit. On Wednesday the boy was found murdered in the trunk of a car. The alleged perpetrator was arrested after police released surveillance video from the scene. He was apparently identified by members of his own family, who informed the police.

The child was abused before being strangled. While the exact circumstances of the crime remain unclear, it is clear that the conditions leading to this terrible tragedy were the result of a chain of bureaucratic arbitrariness and harassment. This applies not only to the chaotic crowd of hundreds of refugees in front of the LAGeSo office, which made it relatively easy for the offender to kidnap the child. It also applies to the indifference and coldness of the authorities, which forced the mother to enter the centre in the first place and endure its hellish conditions together with her three small children.

On Thursday evening, many mourners gathered outside the central reception centre in Berlin-Moabit to express their condolences. “We just had to come here”, declared Denis M. and G. Dzevan, whose names have been changed to protect their identities. Their parents had fled to Germany in 1992 to escape the war in Bosnia, when the two were both small children.

“His mother just wanted a better future for her children, like our parents formerly”, Denis said. “We fled from the war; this woman came because of grinding poverty. And then this happens. It’s incredible. I have three children myself. It is hard to bear.” The young mother had come to Germany from Sarajevo.

Dzevan was angry because he had heard rumours in

the last few weeks blaming the mother for the child’s disappearance. It was implied that the mother had given the child away or hidden him in order to improve their chances of getting a residence permit. “This is sheer madness”, he said. “No mother would ever do such a thing. That was purely to whip up hatred against refugees.”

Denis M. accused the police of not investigating vigorously enough. A surveillance video at LAGeSo shows a man escorting Mohamed away from the premises, but it was only accepted as evidence on October 7. “After one week had gone by!” he declared angrily. “If a German child had disappeared, then they would have mobilized dogs and helicopters.”

This version of events was confirmed at a press conference October 29 by the public prosecutor, who declared: “We learned at a very late stage that there were photos from LAGeSo.”

On the fringe of the sea of candles erected for Mohamed on the street outside the LAGeSo we met Rusmira D., a young woman from Berlin who is originally from Bosnia. She came with her mother, who lives in the refugee camp on the grounds of the former Karl Bonhoeffer Nerve Clinic in Berlin-Reinickendorf. The camp houses a total of about 900 refugees, including the mother of the murdered child, Aldiana J., and her two other children, Melina, 9, and Kevin, 5 months.

Rusmira reported that her mother lives on the same floor and had often taken care of little Mohamed. She translated what her mother related to her about the family’s background.

She reported that on October 1, 28-year-old Aldiana had an appointment with the State Office for Health and Social Services to pick up her money for the next two months. It was planned that a social worker from

the Youth Welfare Office would take care of the children that day, but the social worker was ill and did not turn up. No replacement was available.

Aldiana then asked the mother of her partner to look after the children. The warden, however, who had already clashed repeatedly with Aldiana, had forbidden this and instructed security guards not to permit visitors. Bans on visits are quite normal in the home.

As a result, Aldiana set off with her three children at 3:00 in the morning in order to gain admission to the LAGeSo offices on the same day. At noon they were called in, but in the confusion in front of the offices she briefly lost sight of Mohamed.

“On the surveillance video you can see that the man gave Mohamed biscuits”, said Rusmira. “And the little one probably had not eaten anything all day.”

“He was such a dear, trustingly blessed child”, her mother added. “He was a very unsuspecting little boy.”

Rusmira reported that there had been repeated fierce conflicts between the camp management and Aldiana because Mohamed played outdoors. “But there is no playground and no play area for the children. ‘What does he want me to do? You cannot lock three children all day in a room’.”

On two occasions the 28-year-old mother had been threatened with expulsion from the camp. There had been constant trouble. Aldiana had repeatedly packed her bags and was only persuaded to stay by other residents.

The family, who had come from Sarajevo, lived in constant fear of deportation back to their supposedly “safe country of origin”, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Shortly before Mohamed’s disappearance, their stay in Germany was again extended by six months.

“No one took care of the mother”, Rusmira explained. “As a result, the little one is now dead and all are to blame—the authorities, the youth welfare office, the camp management. They are responsible.

“She was in Germany alone with the three children. Had they at least allowed the mother-in-law to take care of the little ones, then this would not have happened. If someone had helped her, the child would still be alive.”



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