

German government backs draconian refugee “integration” law

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The leaders of the grand coalition government in Berlin agreed on the key features of an integration law for refugees last week.

The planned legislation does nothing to help integrate refugees into German society. Instead, it is an attack on basic democratic rights. For years, the “war on terror” has served as a pretext for strengthening the security apparatus both inside Germany and abroad. Now the alleged “integration of refugees” is being used to expand the country’s low wage sector and the use of forced labour, and as a pretext to abolish fundamental rights such as the freedom to choose where one lives and what one does for a living.

Beginning with the heading “fostering and requiring,” every line of the 15-point paper reeks with the stench of authoritarianism. The “fostering” means in practice that refugees will be restricted, controlled and threatened with the loss of their residence permits. The legislation exposes the fraudulent character of the official “welcoming culture” in Germany, because the planned measures will systematically marginalize refugees.

The so-called integration courses are presented as an important way of teaching refugees the German language, and about the history and legal system in Germany. However, these courses are only offered selectively and they serve, at the same time, as a cudgel for pressuring refugees and putting pressure on them.

Refugees from Syria, Iran, Iraq and Eritrea will have privileged access to integration courses. Asylum seekers from Afghanistan, for example, will be excluded, although 77 percent of their applications for asylum were accepted last year, according to the human rights organization ProAsyl. However, they are not viewed as having “good prospects of remaining” because the German government is working intently with the puppet regime in Kabul on a deportation agreement.

Access to integration courses is so important because permanent residence documents are only issued when refugees can demonstrate that they have “integration achievements.” In the past, recognized refugees normally received a permanent residence permit automatically after three years. Now, recognized asylum seekers must be able to provide evidence of linguistic competence, vocational training or a secure job, and

pass a background check that shows whether they represent a “danger to public safety.”

Moreover, asylum seekers will be threatened with the loss of social services if they violate their “duty to cooperate with integration measures.” However, the “integration measures” have neither been specified—since they do not yet exist—nor have the refugees been eligible for them up until now.

In reality, the demand for integration courses far exceeds what federal and state governments have made available. While the Federal Interior Ministry wants to offer 300,000 places in integration courses each year, the need is twice as high as this. According to the German government, the integration courses are already at 120 percent of capacity.

However, not only the number, but also the quality of courses lags far behind what is needed.

The number of hours of instruction provided to reach a B1 linguistic competence, which is adequate for a simple understanding, is capped at 600. The same amount of instruction is provided to all refugees, regardless of whether they are academics accustomed to lifelong learning or illiterate individuals who have next to no schooling. As a rule, the teaching staff works for a meagre fee, which has to cover all social security contributions and, at the end of the month, amounts to scarcely more than a starvation wage.

However, instead of expanding and improving the course offerings, the maximum number of students per class will be increased from 20 to 25. This will lower the quality of instruction and make it even more difficult for refugees to achieve the required level of linguistic ability.

The orientation course, which covers German history and the German legal system, will now have 100 instead of 60 lessons. In the future, the orientation course will “contain content appropriate to the emphasis on teaching values.” Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière spelled out what this means, demanding that everyone who wants to live in Germany must “know German culture and accept our basic values. I expect respect, politeness and readiness to help from everyone.”

He implies that refugees lack “respect” and “readiness to help.” At the same time, the deterrence policy of the German government is responsible for the mass death of refugees in the Mediterranean, and this same government is seeing to it that

people who are fleeing from war and persecution are held in deportation prisons and deported back to their countries of origin.

The federal government also wants to exploit the refugees in order to expand the low wage sector. It is planning to create 100,000 jobs for asylum seekers that will pay around €1 per hour. The example of the German €1 jobs shows that such forced labour measures almost never lead to a transition to the normal job market. In fact, this is not at all what the coalition government intends.

The remarks of Bavarian Social Minister Emilia Müller (CSU) underscored its real purpose when she tried to explain the “customs of the German working world” to refugees. In a racist tone, she explained that in this way asylum seekers would learn “important values like punctuality, responsibility and conscientiousness, on which our working world is based.”

In Bavaria, where the forced employment of refugees is already being practiced, asylum seekers who reject the work assigned to them are punished with cuts to social services. The human rights organization ProAsyl called the job market program “authoritarian integration pedagogy for refugees.”

Only a section of the refugees will benefit from the promised access to vocational training support. Moreover, the supposed legal guarantees of residence during the training period are a sham. No actual residence permit will be provided, only a certificate for the temporary deferment of deportation. And even this will be taken away if the refugee breaks off training because of a shift in job aspirations. Career guidance and preparations measures are not part of the plan.

The planned “integration law” and its actual effects are most sharply expressed in the planned residence condition. According to the paper, a more equal distribution of refugees is required in order “to ensure integration and to prevent social flashpoints.” A violation of this residence condition “leads to noticeable consequences for those who are affected.”

This tightened residence condition on recognized asylum seekers was initiated by the Green Party Minister President of Baden Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann. This condition is not simply counterproductive. It is illegal. Both Article 26 of the Geneva Refugee Convention and the European asylum right, spelled out in Article 33 of the qualification guidelines of the EU, guarantee recognized refugees the right to freedom of movement.

The forced resettlement of refugees into structurally weak regions, which will tear apart families and social networks that provide assistance in job searches, vocational training and continuing education and visits to the authorities, will drive recognized asylum seekers into isolation and exclusion and increase their dependence on social services.

The government claims that migrants in large cities create “ghettos” and “parallel societies” and French banlieues are consistently brought up as an example. The social flashpoints in the cities are, however, not a consequence of ethnic

concentration, but of the impoverishment of broad layers of the population and the polarization of society into rich and poor.

The French banlieues are not distinguished by their ethnic homogeneity, but by their “miserable infrastructure,” as migration researcher Oltmer put it. There is “no access to transportation, no opportunity for consumption, no work,” which leads to the isolation of the residents of these satellite cities.

“There are no ‘ghettos’ in Germany,” stated Oltmer. On the other hand, poverty is rapidly growing in the large cities. In Berlin, the Parity Association counted more than 727,000 people under the poverty line in 2013, more than 21 percent of the entire population. In Cologne, almost every fifth person lives under the poverty line. In both cities, the section of the population living in poverty has grown dramatically since 2006, in Berlin by 25 percent, in Cologne by more than 30 percent.

It is not refugees or migrants who are responsible for this, but the massive low wage sector, the expansion of casual work and the drastic decrease in social services as a consequence of the Hartz laws. Social flashpoints are a direct consequence of the antisocial policies of the German government, which now wants to hold the refugees responsible and make them a scapegoat.

Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union) said the fact that the federal government is viewing integration as a legal task was “qualitative progress.” Social Democratic Party head and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel called the paper a “historic step,” since “for the first time in the history of the republic, Germany has an integration law.” However, the legislative plans of the grand coalition have nothing to do with “integration.” Instead, the law serves to attack and divide the entire working class.



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