

German states try to offload refugees on each other

Elisabeth Zimmermann
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A year after the unveiling of the so-called welcoming culture, refugees are not only being rejected and deported en masse in Germany; German states are also offloading refugees on each other.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is frequently falsely portrayed as the initiator of the “welcoming culture,” has placed herself at the head of the offensive against refugees. At a meeting of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union parliamentary group executive in Berlin last Thursday, she declared that the priority now was to deport asylum seekers whose applications are rejected. “In the coming months, the most important thing is repatriation, repatriation and again repatriation,” Merkel declared.

In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), cities including Essen, Bochum, Dortmund and Gelsenkirchen have demanded that thousands of recognised refugees who have been living there for months return to Bavaria or states in eastern Germany, where their asylum applications were initially filed.

Municipal officials, most of whom are social democrats, are implementing the reactionary integration law passed in August, with dire consequences for refugees, their friends and families.

Previously, residence requirements only applied to refugees whose asylum applications had not yet been fully processed. In a violation of fundamental democratic rights, the state could order them to live in a certain area. As soon as their asylum application was approved, however, they could freely choose their place of residence.

According to the new law, authorities can retroactively impose a residence condition on refugees for three years. Generally, this will be in the city or region where the refugee lived while applying for asylum. Anyone who does not “voluntarily” accept the

forced move will no longer receive welfare support from NRW job centres.

Gelsenkirchen, in the Ruhr region, has written to all the nearly 2,000 recognised refugees who have moved to the city since the beginning of the year, calling upon them to leave NRW. Since several states where they are being sent refused to accept them, authorities sent many back to NRW. Most of those affected came from Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Bavaria.

The Gelsenkirchen job centre permitted a temporary reprieve for those affected until October, to avoid homelessness. After that, however, all those newly residing in the city must return to their original place of residence in Germany.

States and municipalities are also trying to agree on regulations by the end of the year on the deportation of refugees.

In Essen, 1,662 asylum seekers accepted in other states have registered, according to the city’s statistics. They moved into their own homes and registered their children with kindergartens and schools. Many have begun taking language courses, to be able to reestablish an independent and self-sufficient life after months of flight and accommodation in inhumane refugee camps.

The city of Essen intends to send anyone who arrived after 6 August back to their original place of residence. The city administration estimates that this will affect around 2,500 people, including those who have not registered yet. They were briefly informed that they must return to their original place of residence.

The city of Bochum intends to send back some of the 1,000 asylum claimants who have moved to the city since the beginning of the year.

The city of Dortmund plans first to send back all refugees who arrived after 6 August, because they do not yet have data on those refugees who arrived prior to

this date.

State and municipal politicians defend these ruthless measures, claiming that only in this way can costs be fairly distributed. The human costs of such inhumane policies are irrelevant to them.

Many refugees came to NRW because they had friends or relatives there and hoped to secure better opportunities for work than in rural areas or eastern Germany. In addition, they must fear for their lives in some regions: in 2015 alone, there were over 1,000 attacks on refugee centres in Germany, according to Federal Criminal Agency statistics.

In Bochum, many refugees and migrants impacted have begun protests against forced resettlements. In Essen, some are trying to legally challenge their removal.

The refugee organisation ProAsyl condemned the practice of moving refugees between states as “absolutely crazy,” and a “disaster for integration.”

The Refugee Council of NRW declared, “These people waited for a long time for recognition and were delighted to be able to move close to friends or relatives. If they are now sent away, the period of recovery they have long fought for will be taken from them.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* described the new integration law of 20 April as an attack on basic democratic rights. Imposing stringent residency conditions for recognised asylum seekers, based on an initiative of Baden-Württemberg state premier Winfried Kretschmann (Greens), was “simply a violation of the law,” it stated. It is a breach of the UN Convention on Refugees and the European asylum law, which guarantees recognised asylum claimants 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 article continued.

The removal of recognised refugees from NRW underscores the reactionary and brutal character of German asylum policy. It is bound up with attacks being waged on the democratic and social rights of the working class as a whole and the growth of militarism.

It exposes the right-wing policies of the SPD/Green state government in NRW. Interior minister Ralf Jäger (SPD) boasts that his state has deported the most rejected asylum seekers.

NRW immigration authorities had deported 2,652 refugees by the end of June, 32 percent more than last year. The numbers of those “voluntarily” leaving the state also rose significantly. According to the interior ministry, 13,633 people have left NRW since the beginning of the year.

Jäger has also complained of “extreme problems” with repatriating refugees to North Africa. He was supported by state premier Hannelore Kraft (SPD), who criticised the federal government from the right on this issue. She recently told *Der Spiegel*, “It cannot go on like this,” and demanded more support from Berlin to deport refugees more quickly and in greater numbers.

The NRW government is also crowding refugees into mass accommodation centres. Although about 14,000 places are available in normal accommodation facilities, approximately 9,000 people are forced to live in halls or tents. According to Jäger, this period in forced emergency accommodation is intended to ensure that refugees without a realistic chance of asylum never reach a municipality. This is based on an agreement with the federal agency for migrants and refugees (BAMF).



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