

Massive increase in attacks on refugees in Germany

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There were 3,533 attacks on refugee shelters and individual refugees in 2016 in Germany, indicating a massive increase in right-wing violence directed against a vulnerable group of people who have experienced war, persecution and poverty.

The growth of such deliberate violence can only be understood against the background of the refugee baiting conducted by the establishment parties, the media and sections of the academic milieu. In 2015, when many refugees from Syria and other war zones came to Germany, there was an outpouring of solidarity in the population. But since then, the most right-wing sections of society have been mobilized against them with various threatening scenarios.

Of the 3,533 registered attacks, those on refugee shelters (inhabited and uninhabited) account for 988. These included attacks (66 arson attacks and four involving explosives), propaganda offences (211 cases), property damage (371 cases) and other assaults. While compared to the previous year—the highpoint of the refugee influx, when 1,031 attacks on refugee homes took place—this number has decreased, violence in every other category is on a sharp rise.

There were 2,545 registered cases of violence involving direct attacks on refugees outside their accommodations (due to lack of data there are no comparative figures for 2015). In total, 560 people were injured, including 43 children. Added to this are 217 attacks on aid organizations and their volunteers.

The figures are derived from a response by the Interior Ministry to a parliamentary question quoted by the Funke Media Group at the beginning of the week. Since no official statistics have been released, the figures are only preliminary and may rise.

Violence against refugees had risen to around 200 offences from 2014 to 2015. In May 2016, the Federal

Criminal Police then reported an increase of 44 percent over the same period the previous year. Thus it could already be foreseen that politically motivated crime and violence by right-wing groups and individual perpetrators against refugees would take on a massive scale. The number of attacks rose yet again, while the number of refugee shelters and refugees has decreased. The figures for 2016 mean that 10 attacks took place every day last year.

In autumn 2016, *Der Tagesspiegel* reported an increase in the brutality of the violence by far-right groups and neo-Nazis. The number of attempted homicides has risen from one (2014), to four (2015), and 11 in 2016.

Attacks occurred throughout the country, and the number of successful prosecutions is generally low. The media only report particularly brutal cases, such as those in Clausnitz and Bautzen.

In Bautzen at the end September 2016, after an aggressive provocation, around 80 right-wing extremists chased 20 young asylum seekers through the city because they had refused to leave a public square. One refugee was injured with a knife. The far-right hooligans threw stones at an ambulance, which could only continue to take the youth to hospital under police protection. In another incident in the same city, an asylum seeker's residence was set on fire, while right-wing onlookers stood by and applauded.

In Clausnitz in the state of Saxony in February 2016, an angry group of right-wing demonstrators surrounded an incoming bus of refugees and abused the terrified occupants with xenophobic slogans. The police responded by violently forcing the refugees from the bus into their hostel.

Most assaults are only reported in the regional press or not at all. For example, the Berlin police only issued

a press release about 15 of the 57 attacks on refugees in 2015. In 2016, there were just seven press releases on some 60 attacks on refugee homes. The situation is similar in Bavaria. Police issued press releases on just two of the 30 attacks on refugee accommodation or individual refugees in Munich.

Assaults by refugees, however, whether fictitious (as the recently alleged “sex mob” in Frankfurt) or grossly exaggerated (as in New Year's Eve 2015 in Cologne), are exploited politically and by the media to stamp refugees in general as being potential perpetrators of violence. There is a systematic effort to stigmatize refugees as sex offenders, social parasites or potential terrorists.

The statistical data of the Federal Police tells an entirely different story, however. As of June 2016, crimes “against sexual self-determination” as well as the general crime rate have not grown proportionately.

In November 2016, criminal psychologist Ulrich Wagner told broadcaster SWR, “The fact is that in 2015, more than a million people came to Germany, and this did not lead to a corresponding increase in crime.” He pointed out that the “sense of security” in the general population is influenced greatly by the detailed media coverage.

The massive violence against refugees takes place against a background of a political turn to the right internationally. In the US, Donald Trump and his fascist adviser Stephen Bannon have made nationalist and racist action against migrants the official state doctrine.

In Europe as well, nationalist and xenophobic views have gained ground in the political establishment with the rise of the National Front in France, UKIP in Britain, and the far-right Alternative for Germany. Official social discourse has moved clearly to the right.

Germany's Left Party also bangs the drum for a strong state and the arming of the police. Its parliamentary leader Sahra Wagenknecht, the supposedly “left” figurehead of the party, stirs up particularly offensive sentiments against refugees. At times, she calls for upper ceilings on the number of refugees; at others, she criticizes Merkel's “chaotic policy” of “uncontrolled border openings” or demands that refugees who abuse German “hospitality” be deported.

Jörg Baberowski, professor of Eastern European

history at Humboldt University in Berlin, has denounced refugees in numerous interviews and newspaper columns as a burden on the welfare state and as potential perpetrators of violence.

Against the backdrop of this intellectual incitement, right-wing forces feel encouraged to move from public expressions of anti-refugee hatred to carrying out actual deeds. While refugees are criticised for their supposed readiness to commit violence, in actual fact there is a massive rise in right-wing violence against the refugees themselves.



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