

Germany: Increased suicide rates among refugees

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The brutal deportation policy of the central and state governments in Germany is driving more and more refugees to commit suicide.

In mid-March this year, WDR radio reported that, according to official figures, 433 refugees sought to commit suicide in the years 2014 to 2016, with 19 resulting deaths. In fact, the real figure for suicide deaths is undoubtedly many times higher. Only a few German states actually collect statistics on suicides and suicide attempts, and the data that is available is mostly based on individual case studies or on an evaluation of police statistics.

In the state of Bavaria alone, 162 refugees attempted suicide last year, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in early April. Christine Kamm, the spokeswoman for asylum issues of the Green Party, said that this figure has tripled compared to previous years. Among those attempting suicide were 43 people from Afghanistan.

Last December, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière imposed compulsory deportations for refugees from war-ravaged Afghanistan. The result has been growing despair and fear on the part of thousands of Afghans living in Germany, who in the past had been given protection due to the war raging in their homeland.

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is now sending out a succession of deportation orders, irrespective of the problems or backgrounds of those affected. The deportations affect many Afghans who have been living in Germany for some time.

Immediately after receiving notice that his application to stay in the country had been rejected, a 20-year-old Afghan threw himself in front of an ICE high-speed train travelling in Haar near Munich. He had fled to Germany from the Afghan province of Kandahar 19 months ago and was reported to be severely traumatised

and depressed.

Every day he had studied German for four to five hours, but had become increasingly reclusive in the past few weeks, a volunteer helper reported. “He had a huge fear of having to return,” she said. “The Afghans all receive negative decisions. Fear is spreading in the Afghans’ temporary collective accommodation.” The volunteer added angrily, “The rigid deportation policy of de Maizière killed him.”

Cologne-based lawyer Gunter Christ, a member of the Cologne Refugee Council, confirmed that the suicide risk had “dramatically increased” and condemned the refugee policy of the government. There were more and more people who would be hospitalised, he told Deutschlandfunk at the end of February. “To that extent, it is also a kind of suicide programme. Others do not kill themselves, but go completely insane and end up in psychiatry.”

The Bavarian refugee council also drew attention to two other cases: 24-year-old K. and 27-year-old S. had tried to take their own lives in a deportation prison.

K. had been living in Germany for six years. His planned marriage to a German woman was postponed due to a lack of confirmation of his status from the German Embassy in Kabul. K. then slit his wrists and swallowed a potion containing chlorine. After first aid at the deportation prison he was transferred to a psychiatric clinic in Wasserburg. His fiancée reported to the refugee council that the treating physician told the patient on the day of his arrival that he would be sent to a detention centre three days later (on March 27).

With the help of his lawyer, S. had been able to dispute the deportation detention order issued by Augsburg District Court. He was then, however, lured into the immigration office in Augsburg and arrested to

await deportation.

Stephan Dünnwald, the spokesman for the Bavarian Refugee Council, condemned the cooperation between the government, doctors and magistrates: “A psychiatrist declares someone prepared to take his own life as healthy so the authorities can quickly put the person in question on a flight to Kabul. A judge at the District Court issued a detention order, well aware that only a few days previously a different magistrate had stated that there was no sufficient reason for deportation—these are the servile accomplices of the Bavarian minister for deportation.”

Dr. Tom Nowotny from the medical organisation IPPNW also criticised the doctors involved in the mass deportations, saying, “Refugees are declared fit for deportations to Afghanistan, although they are not.”

Refugees from other states are also affected. At the end of October 2016, the state of Thuringia, led by Left Party Premier Bodo Ramelow, hit the headlines when a highly depressed 15-year-old Somalian leapt off the top floor of a tower block building in Schmölln reserved for unaccompanied refugees. He had only recently been released from a psychiatric clinic.

On March 30, 28-year-old Pakistani Faisal Imran leapt from the roof of a hotel near Leipzig’s main station, as terrified passers-by looked on.

In some states, suicides by refugees are not recorded. This includes Thuringia, headed by the Left Party, and Baden-Württemberg, which is governed by the Greens. The red-red-green (Social Democratic Party, Left Party, Green Party) coalition in Berlin also does not yet provide statistics. Other states, such as Christian Democratic Union-ruled Saxony, record such numbers, but then play down their significance. The Saxony Interior Ministry recently declared that such figures had no “statistically conspicuous order of magnitude” and that “beyond existing measures” there would be no need for action.

Psychologists and social pedagogues reject this. The danger of a suicide attempt arises clearly from refugees’ experiences of war and flight from their country, which is then compounded by the surly treatment and inadequate housing they receive in their host country, Germany.

One psychologist, Corinna Klinger, told WDR the reasons behind suicide attempts were often “extreme fear of deportation and renewed confrontations with

hostile forces back home. Lack of perspective, despair or the situation in an asylum shelter can be decisive.” Despite this crisis situation, adequate psychological care is lacking.

The Merkel government has long since turned its alleged “welcome culture” into a cold-blooded “deportation and isolation culture.” The opposition Green and Left parties are also involved in this policy at the local and state government level.

The tragic fate of Salah J. at the end of March exposed the cruel consequences of Germany’s refugee policies. The young Syrian father fled with his family to Turkey. He left his pregnant wife and little daughter back in Turkey because he wanted to secure their passage to Europe. In the meantime, the German government has suspended migration for the families of Syrian war refugees. His wife, no longer prepared to wait, drowned with their newborn child and daughter attempting the perilous passage across the Mediterranean.



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