

Threats of deportation and agitation against Syrian refugees in Germany and across Europe

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No sooner had the Islamist militias reached Damascus and overthrown the Assad regime earlier this month than the propaganda barrage against Syrian refugees began. Politicians and journalists are calling for their swift deportation to war-torn Syria and glorifying the Islamists of the HTS militia who have now taken power.

Authorities in Germany and numerous other European countries have suspended the asylum procedures of Syrian refugees until further notice—including Austria, Britain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Croatia, Greece, Finland, Poland, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, which was instigated with the support of the NATO powers, hundreds of thousands of people have fled to seek protection in Europe. But only those who survived the dangerous escape routes and were not deported in illegal “pushbacks” made it to the European Union (EU) at all.

Today, almost 1 million Syrian refugees live in Germany, the largest Syrian diaspora in the EU. Over 47,000 asylum applications have now been suspended. This means that their protected status could be cancelled, and they are in acute danger of being deported or forced to “voluntarily” return.

Many Syrians have been living here for years, starting families, learning the language and working in all areas of society, from manufacturing to healthcare and hospitality.

According to a recent press release from the Federal Statistical Office on December 12, Syrian refugees made up the second largest group of all people seeking protection in 2023, after Ukrainians. On average, Syrian migrants have been living in Germany for eight years; most came with the wave of refugees in 2015.

If Syrian people were to be deported on a large scale or driven out of Germany by right-wing extremism, it would be a major blow for many areas of society, especially for the healthcare system. Almost 6,000 of them are doctors, making them the largest group of medical professionals among migrants, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Rural hospitals in particular depend on immigrant doctors and nursing staff. Gerald Gass, director of the German Hospital Federation (DKG), has already warned of noticeable consequences for staffing levels.

Even children born in Germany would not be safe from

deportation. While in the United States, birthright to citizenship applies to all people born in the country regardless of their parents’ origin, a right that Donald Trump now wants to abolish, Germany only has a limited birthright principle. According to the official requirements, “at least one parent must have had their usual place of residence in Germany for five years and have a permanent right of residence at the time of the birth.”

A large proportion of Syrian immigrants do not meet these criteria. Around 624,000 have been granted recognised protected status in Germany, but in 90 percent of cases this is only temporary. According to the Federal Statistical Office, 12 percent of Syrian asylum seekers were born in Germany. As “asylum seekers,” however, they are still foreigners, even though many of them have probably never set foot on Syrian soil.

Austria has not only put asylum procedures on hold but has also announced a “repatriation and deportation programme to Syria.” In an interview with broadcaster ARD, Chancellor Karl Nehammer claimed that the real reason for fleeing had now been ended. Around 7,300 asylum seekers are now at risk of deportation; family reunification has also been stopped for the time being. A total of around 100,000 Syrians live in Austria.

In France, where 45,000 Syrian refugees live, the interior ministry has so far stated that it is working on a suspension of asylum procedures. For many refugees, France is also a transit country to the UK. According to a report by the Tagesschau news programme, almost 2,900 Syrians fled across the English Channel in small boats between January and September this year. More than 30,000 people from Syria were granted asylum there between 2011 and 2021.

Britain has already stopped processing asylum applications. Speaking to the BBC, asylum seekers who have been waiting for a decision for more than a year said they were “depressed” and “horrified” that their procedures had been suspended. One of them is 36-year-old Hussam Kassas, who lives in Greater Manchester. He fled from Syria to Jordan in 2016 due to political persecution and from there to Turkey, where he obtained a study visa for the UK in 2023. But that expires next month, after which he will not be able to work or rent an apartment. His family’s situation is uncertain.

Many Syrians in Germany also do not want to return to Syria because they fear insecurity and violence there. “Nobody knows

who will come to power next. Nobody knows what will happen now,” Jihad Omar, a Syrian Kurd, told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. He fled to Germany with his wife Zahida and two small children in 2015, travelling by foot, bus and train via Turkey. They spent six months in refugee camps. Now both are employed, have learned German, and the children go to school and attend local sports clubs. Nevertheless, the family is not yet among the 143,000 Syrians who were naturalised in Germany in the years 2021 to 2023.

Khaled Homsi, 31, who fled to Germany in 2013 and is a member of the German-Arab cultural centre Daruna, is concerned about right-wing extremism. He says he has received a lot of support from the German population, but that the political situation in Germany is going in the “wrong direction.”

All the parties in the Bundestag (parliament) are now campaigning against refugees. Syrians and other migrants are being used as scapegoats for social problems that are actually caused by the social cuts and increased military spending which the coalition government has pursued.

The cynical and inhumane campaign for the deportation of Syrian refugees goes hand in hand with militarisation and rearment. The propaganda for warmongering policies and the agitation against their victims are two sides of the same coin.

Most recently, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democrat, SPD) announced in the tabloid *Bild am Sonntag* that they would have “Assad supporters” fleeing Syria prosecuted. This is a clear threat: anyone who flees from the Islamist rulers and the ongoing violence of the war in Syria in the future will be branded as an “Assad supporter,” put on trial and deported.

All European governments are joining in the anti-immigrant chorus and have implemented similar attacks on Syrian refugees as Germany. Italy and Greece, the two Mediterranean countries through which most people flee to Europe, have also put asylum procedures for Syrians on hold.

In Greece, this affects almost 10,000 applications. Pavlos Marinakis, the spokesman for the government under the right-wing Nea Dimokratia (ND), said the change of power in Syria must lead to “an end to the flow of refugees from that country.”

In fact, the violence of the Islamists and the war offensive of the Israeli regime, with the help of the NATO powers, will drive even more people in the Middle East to flee. When Marinakis speaks of “ending the flow of refugees,” his government and the other EU states are concerned with preventing these people from fleeing to Europe by any means necessary.

That is why they are pushing ahead with the expansion of Fortress Europe, locking up refugees in isolated concentration camps and criminalising sea rescues and other activities of aid organisations. The Italian government under fascist Giorgia Meloni has drastically tightened legislation against sea rescuers, forcing Doctors Without Borders to withdraw its large rescue ship Geo Barents from Italy.

The Mediterranean has been transformed into a gigantic cemetery over the last 10 years. In the summer of 2023, more than 600 people drowned in the Pylos shipwreck, caused by a pushback attempt by the Greek coast guard. This year, according

to UN figures, 1,536 people have already died or gone missing in the Mediterranean.

In the last three weeks alone, five boats have been in distress off the coast of Greek islands and dozens of refugees have drowned. Just on Saturday, three boat accidents occurred off the small island of Gavdos, south of Crete. Five dead were recovered and 39 people, mostly Pakistani men, were rescued from the largest shipwreck of an overcrowded wooden boat. According to reports cited by *Euronews*, there could have been 80 refugees on board, which would put the death toll at over 40.

Like the first one, the other two boats came from Libya. 47 people were rescued from one of them and 88 from the other. Among the survivors were refugees from Egypt, Syria, Sudan and Bangladesh.

On November 20, six minors and two women died in a shipwreck off the island of Samos, while 39 were rescued. A few days later, on November 28, another boat capsized off Samos. Two children were among the four dead; 16 people were rescued.

Equally tragic scenes are also playing out off the Italian coast. On Wednesday last week, an 11-year-old girl from Sierra Leone was found drifting in the Mediterranean. For three days, she had clung to two truck tyres on the high seas until she was spotted and rescued by chance 10 nautical miles off Lampedusa. She is the only survivor of the capsized refugee boat; her brother did not make it.

“We set off from Sfax in Tunisia three days ago. There were 45 of us on the iron boat, and my brother was among them. In the middle of the sea, we were caught in a storm with high waves. The boat filled with water and sank,” she told the volunteers of the non-governmental organisation CompassCollective. The old truck tyres that were on board served as makeshift life rings.

“For a while there were three of us. We were floating in the sea close together, clinging to the inflated tyres. We prayed and tried to keep each other’s spirits up, but suddenly I couldn’t see them anymore. From that point on, I was alone,” the girl continued. Her father, who stayed behind in the Tunisian coastal city of Sfax, had paid for her and her brother to make the crossing so that they could have a better future.

More than 30,000 dead and missing in the Mediterranean in the last 10 years—that is the official number of victims according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The escalation of war and genocide in the Middle East and the sealing off of Fortress Europe will further increase the number of refugees who embark on the deadly journey to Europe.



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