

German government plans to strip Syrian refugees of their protected status

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6 October 2026

The German Interior Ministry plans to revoke the protected status of Syrian refugees on a large scale. Yet under the new ruler, former Al Qaeda leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, the Islamisation of the country is being driven forward. Government troops and allied militias have taken part in massacres and extrajudicial killings of members of religious minorities, in particular Alawites and Druze. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Syria as a whole is catastrophic.

About 1 million people of Syrian origin currently live in Germany. More than half of them have protected status, and their safe residence in Germany and Europe would thus be endangered by such a move by the German government. Many of them came during the great refugee movements of 2014 to 2017 and have lived in Germany for around a decade. They have built a new life there, completed training, found work, had children, opened businesses and made friends.

At the time, they fled not only from the authoritarian Assad regime but in many cases also the Islamist militias that already controlled various parts of the country and terrorised the population. One of these “Islamist terrorist” militia leaders is today’s head of state, al-Sharaa. Under his former name, Mohammad al-Jolani, he was emir of the al-Nusra Front, which was initially closely linked to the “Islamic State” (IS) and later directly to Al Qaeda. The al-Nusra Front carried out numerous bloody attacks in which countless civilians lost their lives. The United Nations classified the organisation as terrorist as early as 2013.

Al-Sharaa and his militia, meanwhile renamed Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), rose to become the ruling force in Damascus at the end of 2024 with the support of the Western powers. Ever since, they have continued to use violence against religious minorities and political opponents. Thousands of Alawites, Druze and Christians have already fallen victim to Islamist terror under al-Sharaa.

The humanitarian situation is catastrophic overall. In 2025, 49 percent of the Syrian population said they lacked food, shelter, electricity and protection. In the same survey, a further 39 percent of Syrians said they did have the basic prerequisites of life but that these were inadequate. The official minimum income covers only about 10 percent of the cost of living at the most basic level, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The “Minimum Expenditure Basket” for a family of five was calculated at around €220 in 2025.

In around three-quarters of the country, there are only two to six hours of electricity a day, which is insufficient for either domestic needs or industrial production. Since the start of the US-Israeli war against Iran, the energy crisis has worsened further. Likewise, 75 percent of all communities in Syria reported that there was not enough food available to supply the population.

Humanitarian aid does not reach 86 percent of communities, even though they have reported a “severe need.” Russia and Iran had supported the Assad government with aid funds, but after the fall of their proxy, these resources are no longer available. The aid coordinated by the United Nations is no longer financially supported by the US, as a result of which various aid programmes had to be discontinued. AP reported in February 2025, for example, that 10 clinics run by Doctors of the World in northern Syria had to close because of the US aid freeze. Germany and the EU each contribute around 12 percent of this wholly inadequate UN aid.

In the autumn of 2025, after a visit to Harasta, a suburb of Damascus heavily devastated in the war, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) stated, “Hardly anyone can really live in dignity here.” The foreign minister was immediately sharply criticised by his own party for this “spontaneous” remark. In response, the Chancellery announced the invitation of al-Sharaa to Berlin to discuss the return of refugees.

In March 2026, al-Sharaa was then courted by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and Chancellor Friedrich Merz (CDU). At the subsequent press conference, Merz said that in the next three years “around 80 percent of the Syrians currently staying in Germany should return to their home country.” Even people who are “well integrated” and work, for example, as doctors or nursing staff in hospitals would be “needed at home,” the chancellor said, and one must therefore “also talk about these people.”

Now this is being put into practice. At the behest of Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (Christian Social Union, CSU), the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is to revoke the protected status of Syrian refugees “on a broad front,” reports the Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland media network. The martial vocabulary used here is an accommodation to far-right forces that imagine themselves to be at war with refugees.

At the same time, the severity of the measure is to be disguised by claiming that the step is directed against people who “exploit our hospitality.” Alexander Throm, the domestic policy spokesman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, stated, “The revocation review should begin with young men travelling alone who receive welfare benefits, who are therefore not working and are living off the state. People such as doctors or nurses who work have the option of switching to a work-residence permit.”

This is a deliberate deception intended to prevent solidarity with the people who are threatened with deportation. In fact, the government has long since embarked on a far-right course in immigration policy itself. In reality, conditions in Syria make a life of dignity and freedom

impossible. A government that revokes the protected status of refugees from Syria and urges or forces them to return is itself guilty of grave human rights violations.

To justify their hard line against refugees, Chancellor Merz and Interior Minister Dobrindt cite Denmark as a model. The Social Democratic government under Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has pursued an asylum policy since 2019 so restrictive that refugees practically no longer receive protection, and what is granted is in any case only temporary. The aim is maximum control over immigrants and “zero asylum applications,” as the government itself has put it.

As early as 2021, Syrian refugees in Denmark were stripped of their protected status and parts of the country around Damascus were declared safe. The refugees affected, who can neither return to Syria voluntarily nor be deported, are locked up in so-called “centres for foreigners.” Ellebæk is one such deportation prison run by the Danish state, the conditions of which have been amply documented by Danish media: structural defects, untenable hygienic conditions, a lack of medical care and restricted access for inmates to fresh air.

Council of Europe inspectors noted during a visit to the Ellebæk centre that living conditions there were worse than in Russian prisons. Ellebæk, they said, was one of the worst institutions in Europe.

A report on Germany’s *Tagesschau* news programme describes life in Kærshovedgård, another Danish “departure centre,” using the example of 36-year-old rejected asylum seeker Yasin.

He lives here in what is effectively an open prison regime, behind bars every night. It has been like this for seven years, day in, day out. “We aren’t allowed to do anything here,” he says. “It’s really hard. Denmark is a land of opportunity—but not if you live here in Kærshovedgård. Here you’re on your own.”

Everyday life in the camp, which holds more than 200 inmates, is depressing, Yasin says. A mattress, three meals and strict rules. The message here is easy to understand. Refugees are meant to leave Denmark again.

Yasin cannot return to his homeland, Iran, even if he wanted to. There is no repatriation agreement, life in an endless loop. He speaks good Danish, wants to work, to see his Danish girlfriend. Once he stayed overnight at her place. But then the police came, he says. “At seven in the morning, three officers came into the room. They said, ‘Pack your toothbrush and clothes, you’re under arrest.’ I asked, ‘Why?’ They said, ‘You stayed somewhere else overnight without registering.’”

An electronic system had registered the violation. The result was three months in prison.

The restrictive asylum policy has created a climate of general insecurity among refugees, so that they often do not claim even the assistance they are entitled to—for fear that this could adversely affect their ongoing proceedings.

Even the few refugees who eventually obtain a permanent residence permit or are naturalised remain subject to a discriminatory special status. For example, they are compulsorily assigned a place of residence. Neighbourhoods with more than 50 percent “non-Western immigrants and their descendants” are subject to a “ghetto law” under which crimes are punished more severely, and residents can even be forcibly resettled.

This is the model for the German government. The CSU, which provides the interior minister, invited the then Danish minister for immigration and integration, Kaare Dybvad Bek, to its January 2024 retreat at Seon Abbey, where he declared, “The most successful approach we are pursuing in Denmark, and that many countries,

including Germany, could adopt, is a more effective return of people without a right of residence.”

Germany and Denmark are now jointly pushing efforts within the European Union to outsource asylum procedures to non-EU states and to intern rejected asylum seekers in deportation centres in other countries. The European Commission has since presented a draft that is intended to make precisely that possible and is supported by a majority of the other EU states.

Syria is not a safe country. The country’s infrastructure has been devastated for years to come by 14 years of war, and in al-Sharaa, a jihadist leader has replaced Assad in power. There continue to be many reasons to flee Syria. No one must be forced to return to the shattered country.

Deportations and threats of deportation are a crime against refugees and immigrants. The shift to the right in immigration policy is no coincidence in Germany, Denmark and elsewhere. It is the ideological accompaniment to rearmament, the drive to war and social cutbacks. The ruling class needs scapegoats to distract from the real causes of social misery—rampant profiteering, war and austerity measures.

The defence of Syrian and other refugees is not simply a humanitarian principle. The working class is an international class. Almost a million people of Syrian origin live and work in Germany in all sectors of the economy—in industry, healthcare, construction, catering and the post office. They are not “guests” but part of the working class. To defend them means to defend the unity of the working class against nationalist attempts to divide it.

Legal certainty for all Syrians living in Germany and full right to remain for all who have lived, worked and started families in Germany for years, regardless of employment or passport status—these must be the demands of the working class. Furthermore, it must campaign for equal wages and working conditions for all workers regardless of origin and citizenship, so that refugees are not exploited as a cheap labour reserve and wage levels are not driven down as a result.



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