Deportation of the Rouf family in Germany: Green Party minister backs immigration authorities

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On the morning of October 16, officers from the Coesfeld Central Immigration Office and the Leverkusen Immigration Office forcibly broke down the door to the apartment of the Rouf family in Leverkusen-Opladen. They took away the parents and four of their children, who were just about to head to school. The fifth child, 15-year-old Ruhaim, was on a school trip in Berlin and briefly sought refuge in a church in Duisburg on his way back.

Father Mohamed Rouf and his 19-year-old daughter Ramla, who was about to take her high school graduation exams, were immediately deported to Sri Lanka. Mother Chamsul Rouf and their four minor children, including Ruhaim, also face deportation; they are considered subject to mandatory departure. The brutal police operation immediately sparked protests in the city. Several petitions are calling for the family to be granted the right to stay; the petition by Ruhaim's classmates against his deportation has already been signed by over 6,000 people.

The deportation was carried out even though the Hardship Commission of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia had previously recommended that the family be allowed to remain.

The family, which arrived in Germany in 2018, belongs to the Tamil-Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. The circumstances of the case highlight the brutality with which the authorities are acting. Mohamed Rouf had a job paying social security contributions, and his wife, Chamsul, worked part-time. Their eldest daughter, Ramla, was due to take her high school graduation exams this year; the other children are of school age, some of whom were born and raised in Germany. They do not speak Tamil and would be unable to continue attending school or pursuing higher education in Sri Lanka.

Mohamed Rouf suffers from diabetes and has severe heart disease. He has had nine stents implanted. If his symptoms recur, open heart surgery would be necessary. The medical records are on file with the immigration authorities. The medications he needs are either unavailable in Sri Lanka or unaffordable for the family—Medical care there is not comparable to that in Germany.

North Rhine-Westphalia's Hardship Commission had recommended that the family be granted permission to stay. Under the state's rules, however, the recommendation is not binding; the local immigration authority decides whether to grant a residence permit. Before rejecting a recommendation, it must inform the ministry and the commission's secretariat of its reasons.

However, NRW Integration Minister Verena Schäffer (Greens) sided with the Leverkusen Immigration Office. The Immigration Office states that the family's asylum applications were rejected, appeals have been unsuccessful and the courts have ruled against a right to remain. The Cologne Administrative Court also rejected an urgent motion against the deportation on October 16, and Green Party Minister Schäffer reaffirmed that the Foreigners' Registration Office has no discretion once the temporary stay is no longer valid. She emphasized in a letter to State Parliament President André Kuper that the Higher Administrative Court of North Rhine-Westphalia had upheld the decision of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

This account is incorrect. According to the official rationale, the hardship case procedure under Section 23a of the Residence Act exists precisely because there is a gap between formal law and humanitarian reality. The Hardship Commission can identify humanitarian circumstances and propose a prospect for remaining in the country.

The fact that the Foreigners' Registration Office ignored the recommendation is therefore not the result of an unavoidable practical constraint but rather a political decision made at several levels. First, at the ministerial level, Schäffer of the Green Party is responsible. Second, however, there were and still are legal avenues available to the Immigration Office to secure residency. The residence

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permit under Section 25a of the Residence Act for well-integrated adolescents and young adults who have been granted temporary tolerance for at least 12 months, have lived here for three years, and are successfully attending school—a path that would have been directly relevant for the daughter prior to her high school graduation. Or Section 25b of the Residence Act for well-integrated adults who have been residing here for an extended period. The fact that these avenues were not pursued is not a matter of law but of political will.

Now the family has been torn apart. The father and daughter have been deported, while the mother and their other children remain in Germany and must expect to be deported at any time.

The deportation machine requires the seamless cooperation of all parties involved. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-Green state government headed by Minister President Hendrik Wüst (CDU) and his Green Minister of Integration, together with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), the city of Leverkusen under Mayor Stefan Hebbel (CDU), its immigration office, and the courts have all ensured that the deportations are carried out.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, a total of 4,784 people were deported in 2025. In the first half of 2026, the figure was 1,931. North Rhine-Westphalia ranks first in Germany in terms of absolute deportation numbers, followed by Bavaria (2025: 3,649) and Baden-Württemberg (2025: 3,368).

On November 2, the Leverkusen City Council held a seven-hour special session to discuss the Rouf case, during which the immigration office defended its actions. In the end, the council voted by a narrow majority of 33 to 26 in favor of an official review of the case and a fundamental change to the Leverkusen immigration office's previous restrictive practices regarding ongoing residency proceedings.

While the Greens in Leverkusen expressed outrage, their ministerial party colleague Schäffer is enforcing the brutal deportation policy.

Just as hypocritical is the outrage expressed by the opposition parties, including the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party. SPD state parliamentary group leader Jochen Ott accused the Wüst state government of lacking a "consistent approach to immigration policy." In the case of families who have been integrated for years, he argued, existing leeway must be used with "humanity, moderation, and balance." The Left Party in Leverkusen called for a right-to-stay program similar to the one in Cologne. This demonstrates how a city "can support people on their way to securing residency," explained Keneth Dietrich, chair of the Left Party parliamentary group.

All of this is a smokescreen. The deportation of the Rouf family is the result of an asylum policy that was not invented by the Merz or Wüst administrations. It is the result of an asylum and refugee policy that has become increasingly restrictive over decades, one that was established by all previous federal governments—from the SPD-Green coalition to the Grand Coalition of the CDU and SPD.

Under former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the SPD eroded asylum rights; under the Grand Coalition, it accelerated deportations; and in 2018, it backed the policies of Interior Minister Horst Seehofer. In the states where they govern, the Greens have organized deportations themselves and approved stricter asylum laws. Wherever the Left Party is part of a government, it also actively implements the federal government's inhumane refugee policy.

When the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party now plead for "humanity," it is only to divert attention from their own responsibility. They created the legal instruments that authorities use today to tear families apart. They designed the Hardship Commission as a toothless body whose recommendations local authorities can ignore. And they now portray themselves as defenders of the family, while at the same time leaving the foundations of deportation policy untouched.

The Merz government is implementing the right-wing asylum policy demanded by the far-right Alternative for Germany, which is the culmination—for now—of a trend that all the established parties have jointly supported. The ruling class blames people fleeing war and misery for the social upheavals that capitalism itself creates. Deportations do not serve to solve any problem; they serve to divide the working class, pit local workers against refugees, and divert attention from the real causes of the crisis: the destruction of social infrastructure, skyrocketing living costs and the arms race.

There is enormous opposition to these policies and broad support for the people fleeing war and misery. But this opposition finds no representation in any of the established parties. The working class must build its own organs of struggle—independent of the SPD, the Greens, the Left Party, and all other parties that support the deportation policy. Defending the Rouf family and all those threatened with deportation is part of the struggle against capitalism itself, which creates the causes of flight—war, poverty and exploitation.



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