

Joint statement of Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), Federation of German Industries (BDI) and German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH) on asylum and refugee policy

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Durable solution possible only with a pan-European effort

Germany is currently performing a spectacular humanitarian task. Central government, regional authorities and municipalities are stretched to the limit. Last year alone we in Germany welcomed more than one million refugees. Those fleeing war, displacement or political persecution must also be given humanitarian protection in the European Union. Our shared values oblige us to accept the growing numbers of refugees as a European challenge. The concentration of massive flight movements in just a few EU States must inevitably overwhelm the latter in the longer term. Only through EU-wide solidarity efforts in which no Member State can decline to participate can the problems be mastered. We support the German Federal Government in its commitment to a coordinated process and a fair sharing of burdens across Europe. Damage to or a complete breakdown of the Schengen area would be a severe setback for the European Union and its citizens, for freedom of travel and for unimpeded cross-border business activity which are of primordial importance.

Consistent return of rejected asylum seekers

BDA, BDI and ZDH are in favour of Germany continuing to make its contribution to managing the refugee crisis. But genuine victims of persecution can only be effectively protected if at the same time forces are being dissipated because the inflow comprises people who have no chance of being recognised as victims of persecution. For that reason, it is right that the German Federal Government has taken measures to greatly accelerate the asylum procure and to create the conditions for a rapid return of rejected asylum seekers. Countries of origin which refuse to take back their nationals and to issue corresponding replacement papers must be persuaded to change their practice in the framework of bilateral and European cooperation through diplomatic and, where necessary massive political pressure.

It is the task of Germany's regional authorities, the *Länder*, to carry through consistently the possible and necessary returns for which they have competence without exception but also without delay. This is still not always being done everywhere.

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Reduce the inflow of refugees

But the ongoing inflow of refugees into Europe also needs to decrease significantly. An excessive burden on our society runs the risk of strengthening political forces which could endanger our freedom-based society over the longer term. We therefore support the efforts for effective control of the EU's external borders, the fight against the causes of flight, bilateral agreements with the most important transit countries, in particular Turkey, and financial support for States in the regions from which a very large majority of refugees are fleeing – above all Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. It is more humane for people to receive material support in the form of accommodation and protection close to the refugees' home countries than for them to be forced to turn to unscrupulous gangs of traffickers and embark on perilous journeys via the Mediterranean and the Balkan route.

Rapid and consistent integration in training and work

We must integrate people who rightly stay with us for a long period or for ever as well as possible in training, employment and society more generally. Business organisations, chambers of commerce and industry as well as companies have already set a large number of initiatives in motion. From early experience we know that many refugees are particularly motivated to make the leap into a job, training or study in Germany. But we now also know that this will be a major and difficult challenge for many refugees. As a rule, deficient language skills, a frequent shortage of skills and qualifications which are of value for our labour market as well as the absence of familiarity with our education and training system are significant hurdles.

The German Federal Government has already initiated many important improvements to enable successful integration in the labour market of refugees with good prospects of being allowed to stay in Germany, not least at the urging of business. However, further important adjustments are needed. To this end, BDA, BDI and ZDH have submitted comprehensive proposals. In particular, the following elements should now be addressed:

- Integration courses – fully open up compulsory inclusive communication of the hierarchy of values and democratic legal order to all refugees and tolerated residents with good prospects of being allowed to stay in Germany,
- Sufficient language skills promotion offers should also be made available to schools and vocational colleges. Also necessary is compulsory school education country-wide after three months, demand-led development of welcome and language learning classes and language skills promotion for children and young people in the initial reception centres. The prospect of a school diploma can be improved by extending compulsory school education beyond 18 years of age in individual cases.

- For asylum seekers and tolerated residents with good prospects of being allowed to stay in Germany – including those beyond the age of 21 – it is important to secure a national training residence permit which is uniform and dependable from the outset, and to improve the prospects of a guaranteed stay once training is successfully completed,
- For asylum seekers with good prospects of being allowed to stay in Germany, it is necessary to enable access to all grants for vocational training following termination of a training contract and not only after 15 months of residence,
- The deployment of orientation traineeships and entry-level qualifications as well as entry into employment should be facilitated.
- The ban on part-time work – independent of the relevant qualification – should essentially be scrapped from the beginning.

Recognise our rules on living together in society

Integration is not a one-way street. Refugees must recognise the values and rules of our democracy and open society. Nobody must be allowed to justify bringing into question i.e. equality between men and women or the State's monopoly on the use of force by a reference to their own culture or religion. Robbery or sexual harassment, threatening behaviour and force have no place in our society. Such acts must be investigated and punished consistently without fear or favour and regardless of the origin of the suspect. The obstacles to returning convicted criminals must be lowered.