



**Address:** Babol, Ayatollah Saeedi St., International Foundation Witnesses Ashoora

**Phone:** +989300074986

**Fax:** +981132203658

**Email:** info@ashoora.org

**Website:** www.ashoora.org

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**Submitted by:** International Foundation Witnesses Ashoora

**For further information, please contact:** +989300074986

**Executive Director:** Seyed ghasem MirnabiBaboli, mirnabi.ir@gmail.com

**Advisor:** Pezhman Rostami, info@ashoora.org

The international foundation “Witnesses of Ashoora” was established in 2013 as a religious and cultural organization and was granted a consultative status in 2021. The goals of this institution are as follows:

- Protecting Muslim rights
- Condemning crimes against Muslims around the world
- Preventing the desecration and destruction of historical and religious monument
- Recommendations on the implementation of the rights of immigrants and refugees
- Recommendations on the elimination of racial discrimination
- Recommendations on ensuring respect for distinctive identities
- Recommendations on respect for the rights of minorities and persons belonging to them

### **Migrants and asylum seekers**

The issue of immigrants and asylum seekers in Germany is of great concern to the Witnesses of Ashura International Foundation. In the middle of 2021, Germany reported almost 1.24 million refugees and 233.000 asylum seekers, making it the biggest host country for refugees in Europe<sup>1</sup>. The recent rise of xenophobic attacks against refugees in Germany has sparked many debates on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of right-wing violence. In the face of violent responses to the recent surge in refugee numbers within Europe and particularly in Germany, debates about the prosecution of right-wing extremist violence have resurfaced among politicians and civil society.<sup>2</sup>

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of early 2016, a majority of asylum applicants in Europe were Syrian citizens fleeing military advances by both their government as well as the Islamic State (48 per cent of arrivals), closely followed by refugees from Afghanistan (21 percent), where a withdrawal of foreign troops has led to a resurgence of Taliban control (UNHCR, 2016). Most refugees have sought asylum in Germany and Sweden; the German government’s reaction towards incoming refugees, in particular, has sparked international attention.

Neo-Nazis rioted against a planned refugee shelter in the northeastern German town of Grevesmuehlen, public broadcaster NDR reported Friday. According to police, around 700 mostly far-right people demonstrated at a local district council building where politicians were

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/germany.html>

<sup>2</sup> Refugees welcome? A dataset on anti-refugee violence in Germany

scheduled to discuss the case. They wanted to prevent the construction of refugee accommodation in the town of Upahl - but without success.

A recent report published by Funke Media Group revealed that in 2019, refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany were victims of violent attacks on 1,620 occasions. In 118 incidents, the perpetrators were found to be right-wing extremists. Explosives, fire or other weapons that can lead to dangerous bodily harm were used in 260 of the incidents, after overcoming major obstacles to reach. A total of 229 refugees were injured during the attacks<sup>3</sup>.

In 2021, the number of criminal offenses on asylum seekers and their places of accommodation in Germany exceeded 1,250. By comparison, authorities registered 1,690 criminal offenses against asylum seekers and places of accommodation in 2020, while 2019 saw 1,749 attacks. Almost all of the assaults were directed at asylum seekers outside of their accommodation: 153 people were injured as a result, according to the ministry. Moreover, authorities registered 20 assaults on aid organizations and their volunteers last year.<sup>4</sup>

The number of attacks targeting shelters for asylum seekers and refugees is on the rise in Germany, after having been in decline for years. In the first nine months of 2022, the Federal Ministry of the Interior counted 65 such attacks, almost as many as in the whole of 2021 (70 in total).<sup>5</sup>

The recent spread of anti-refugee sentiments in German politics and society has become a matter of concern, but investigations have thus far overwhelmingly concentrated on explaining the rise of the right-wing anti-immigration movement Pegida. Meanwhile, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement (forcible return), 167 men were deported to Afghanistan before deportations were temporarily suspended on 11 August.<sup>6</sup>

### **Syrian refugees**

More than 10 million Syrians have left their homes and sought refuge in neighbouring countries, including Europe, since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, and immigration continues to this day. This cross-sectional study included Syrian refugees residing in Germany and between 2015 and 2019 alone more than 1,622,954 people registered as asylum seekers with Syrians being the largest single nationality<sup>7</sup>. Delays in family reunification procedures raised concerns regarding the right to family life. Applicants from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria waited for more than a year to receive their first appointment at German

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.themigrantproject.org/different-attitudes-with-refugees/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/38708/germany-less-violence-against-asylum-seekers-in-2021-but-attacks-continue>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/11/16/attacks-against-asylum-seekers-on-the-rise-again-in-germany\\_6004524\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/11/16/attacks-against-asylum-seekers-on-the-rise-again-in-germany_6004524_4.html)

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, GERMANY 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/germany/report-germany/>

<sup>7</sup> Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Aktuelle Zahlen; 2019

embassies to start the procedure to reunite with their family members in Germany<sup>8</sup>.

The percentage of wage-employed refugees among the Syrian refugees is low when compared to the local community, and their sources of income differ from the general population. Only 13% indicate that wage from work is their main source of income, and the main sources of income for more than 55% of refugees are unemployment benefits and other government support<sup>9</sup>.

It has been generally noted that a higher perceived ethnic discrimination is associated with lower mental and physical health, but not for Syrian refugees, who have derived a sense of control, distinctiveness and meaningfulness from their Syrian identity. Ethnic pride is a protective factor that mitigates the effects of discrimination on the symptoms of depression and social bonding.<sup>10</sup>

In November 2020 a paramedic punched a restrained and defenseless Syrian refugee in the face at a Kassel refugee shelter; the incident did not become public until police released video surveillance of it in March. The video showed two police officers at the scene not interfering or trying to stop the assault.

#### Recommendations

- ❖ Supporting the the principle of non-refoulement of refugees by acting responsibly based on international obligations
- ❖ Protecting and assisting refugees and immigrants to live decent lives
- ❖ Providing suitable social and economic status for refugees through creating quality job opportunities
- ❖ Removing legal and social restrictions on the presence of refugees in the society that leads to forcible return
- ❖ Fighting migrant smuggling, especially women, girls, and children
- ❖ Protecting refugees against racism
- ❖ Ensuring that all asylum seekers enjoy their basic human rights and protecting them against arbitrary arrest and detention, humiliation, and deportation

#### **Racial discrimination and violation of minority rights**

German authorities recorded at least 662 Islamophobic crimes in 2021. Over 46 mosques were attacked between January and December last year and at least 17 people were injured due to violence against Muslims<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/germany/report-germany/>

<sup>9</sup> Ragab NJ, Rahmeier L, Siegel M, editors. Mapping the Syrian diaspora in Germany: Contributions to peace, reconstruction and potentials for collaboration with German Development Cooperation; 2017.

<sup>10</sup> <https://archpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13690-021-00745-7>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/anti-muslim-attitudes-widespread-in-germany-study/2703573>

The German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle has been systematically targeting Muslim staff over political issues and sacked many Muslim journalists for alleged anti-semitism. In February, two Palestinian journalists, Zahi Alawi and Yasser Abu Muailek, were sacked over alleged anti-Semitic comments made from their social media accounts some seven years ago<sup>12</sup>.

In 2019, 871 anti-Muslim hate crimes were reported in Germany. However, it is estimated that these statistics solely represent a fraction of experiences as many go unreported<sup>13</sup>. Along with the staggering number of hate crimes, cases of discrimination against Muslims in jobs, education, health and everyday life are on the rise, as recent studies show that around half of the German population holds Islamophobic views. Muslim women experience inequality not only because of their gender, but also because of their ethnicity, religion, and nationality. Discrimination against Muslim women is especially common in the labor market and occurs in access to professional training and employment, as well as in the workplace<sup>14</sup>.

In May 2021, the Federal Ministry of Interior reported that hate crimes increased by 19 percent compared to the previous year<sup>15</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- ❖ Protecting minorities' rights and strengthening legal actions
- ❖ supporting the rights of Muslims and other minorities and promoting inter-religious dialogue in Germany;
- ❖ Supporting ethnic and religious minorities and ensuring their equal and full participation in social and personal life
- ❖ Strengthening norms and policies for ethnic and religious minorities to ensure that they can fully enjoy their Human Rights
- ❖ Preventing and eradicating discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities
- ❖ Addressing potential discrimination and restrictions against the rights of ethnic and religious minorities
- ❖ Ensuring freedom of religion and belief and putting an end to religious and ethnic discrimination

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/anti-muslim-racism-in-german-media-organisations-explained-56566>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/871-attacks-reported-against-muslims-in-germany-in-2019/news>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/Islamophobia-AntiMuslim/Civil%20Society%20or%20Individuals/CMGJ.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, GERMANY 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/germany/report-germany/>