

BETROFFENEN RAT

Beratendes Gremium beim
Unabhängigen Beauftragten für Fragen
des sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs

Survivors' Council at the office of the Independent Commissioner for childhood sexual violence issues

Call to action: Secure children's rights now!

More than 2.5 million people have fled their homes since the war of aggression against Ukraine started. The UN refugee agency expects around 4 million or even more refugees within Europe, highlighting that we are currently facing the largest number of refugees within Europe since the Second World War. Currently, more than 10,000 people arrive at Berlin Central Station every day, most of whom have fled Ukraine via Poland. From there, refugees have been allocated to other federal states in Germany since March 7, 2022: but without a mandatory registration.

Fast, unbureaucratic help and support is important, and the political unity of EU foreign ministers on the admission of refugees is unprecedented. International as well as German solidarity on welcoming refugees is lived humanity. However, this solidarity must be given to all refugees, regardless of their origin, nationality, or color – and also for those who were able to find shelter in Germany in previous refugee crises.

Men between the ages of 18 and 60 with Ukrainian citizenship remain in Ukraine because they are not allowed to leave the country. Among the many refugees who are now fleeing to Germany, there are particularly vulnerable groups. These are children and adolescents as well as elderly people and people with special needs and disabilities.

In addition to corporations such as Deutsche Bahn, many private initiatives are also very actively involved in providing quick help for refugees. They drive to the borders in private cars and buses, picking up refugees with the intention of bringing them to local central contact points for refugees. All of this is based on trust and good faith. For the most part this is motivated by a genuine willingness to help, and this empathy is important. But not every offer to help is trustworthy and reliable. There is a real risk that particularly women and children could be exposed to danger instead of finding safety by becoming victims of sexual violence or forced prostitution.

Without comprehensive registration of refugees from the moment on they cross the border, there is substantial risk that children and women fleeing war could „simply disappear“ and likely experience (severe) violence in Germany. We cannot allow that to happen! Children suffer in particular from war, fleeing, and displacement. Children deserve all our special awareness, attention, and our protection right now.

It is also important to provide information for all refugees directly when crossing the border into all neighboring countries of Ukraine. Using sensitive and simple language, both verbally as well as in written texts, information about refugees' rights should also help raising awareness towards potential risks for those seeking protection, and pointing out to further and professional contact points.

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We urgently call to action all municipalities and cities, responsible authorities, churches, and all additional reception facilities to fully meet their responsibilities. Also, in preparation of the expected number of refugees to come authorities must ensure nationwide that child safety standards are implemented in all facilities, and rights are secured in reception, accommodation, and allocation of refugees, especially when they are children or adolescents.

In particular, all youth welfare offices have to fulfil their task to ensuring protection and care for unaccompanied under-age refugees. They have the duty to provide child-friendly and safe accommodation and care for all unaccompanied children and adolescents and for those who have been separated from caregivers, including having information on their respective whereabouts.

We demand:

- ➔ Child protection standards must be ensured in all forms of reception, allocation, and accommodation of refugees and protection standards must be mandatory in all actions. Protection against violence and guaranteeing human rights must be top principles of all state action.
- ➔ The federal government and the federal states must provide responsible municipalities and cities with all resources necessary, ensuring that they can fulfil their duty to protect and are enabled to proceed in a planned and coordinated approach when tackling upcoming tasks on site.
- ➔ Municipalities and cities must pool and coordinate all responses of all actors involved – including civil society actors – to ensuring basic care and psychosocial care for refugees.
- ➔ We call on the media to pay close attention to what happens to children in war and fleeing, and where there is need, to remind the State of its duty to protect all children.

We welcome your support for our call to action, endorsing and spreading it as far as possible.

The Survivors' Council at the office of the Independent Commissioner for childhood sexual violence issues

March 18, 2022

Media requests to the Survivors' Council:

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This call contains demands and views of the members of the Survivors' Council and does not necessarily represent views of the Independent Commissioner.