

There is another way! Together for protection and solidarity

MEMORANDUM FOR STRONG REFUGEE PROTECTION

Human rights are the foundation of our coexistence. They begin where we all find common ground: in the desire for safety and a life of dignity. Peaceful coexistence is therefore only possible where everyone can truly exercise their own rights.

With the adoption of the Geneva Convention on Refugees 75 years ago, this very principle was enshrined in international law: persecuted people find protection. National borders do not stand in the way of an individual's right to a life of safety and dignity. Especially in times like these, fulfilling this promise is a major challenge that we, as the undersigned organizations, face every day. And we are convinced that refugee protection that lives up to this standard is possible.

What must be strengthened to achieve this is what sustains us as a society: solidarity, mutual respect, and the willingness to prioritize what unites us over what divides us. This is the foundation for refugee protection that works for everyone and improves our shared life as a whole.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND REALITIES

Currently, however, a different path is being taken. Flight and migration are being deliberately exploited for electoral purposes; refugees are being portrayed as enemies and as a threat to the security or prosperity of one's own country. As a result, they are denied fundamental rights in the name of supposed security and control. Yet this not only fuels dangerous nationalism but also elevates a divisive "us versus them" mentality to a political principle.

In concrete terms, this leads to three developments that we are observing with great concern. First, legislation that is highly problematic from a human rights perspective is emerging: The new European asylum legislation allows states to impose far-reaching restrictions on rights, including the detention of families with children and other vulnerable individuals, such as people with disabilities, as well as deportations to allegedly "safe third countries." Similarly, refugees may in some cases be deprived of the minimum standard of living required for a dignified existence. Second, people seeking protection and their supporters are being criminalized and pressured across Europe, court rulings are being ignored, and funding for refugee protection is being cut. Third, traumatic deportations and violence at the borders are on the rise: At the EU's external borders, people seeking protection are being pushed back, threatened, beaten, and prevented from entering the EU by border police or special forces. In Germany, too, deportations are taking place from protected spaces such as schools and hospitals. In the U.S., government officials are dragging people from their homes or detaining them on their way to school or work.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICAL TERMS FOR REFUGEES

In our counseling services, we encounter people who have often endured a dangerous journey lasting years. They appear exhausted to us and are facing an asylum process that is complex and difficult for them to understand. Many have experienced violence at Europe's external borders; visible signs include bruises or frostbite, while the psychological trauma they carry is often less visible.

The shelters where we work are home to people who have been forced into inactivity for months or years - without a purpose, without prospects, and without the chance to take control of their own lives. This forced inactivity can be demoralizing.

Based on our observations, deportations represent profound disruptions to the lives of those affected, especially when children are involved. In Germany, pickups usually take place without warning and often at night. This places a strain not only on those directly affected, but also on other residents of the shelters and the staff working there. The strain is particularly severe when people are deported directly from their workplace, from hospitals, or from psychiatric facilities.

THERE IS ANOTHER WAY!

What gives us courage: Many people in Germany and around the world share our conviction that refugee protection must be grounded in fundamental and human rights, and they advocate every day for policies that will implement exactly that in the future.

Around the world, people are standing up for their own rights and asserting them. In Europe and Germany, many actors from civil society, politics, and government continue to passionately advocate for a values-driven Europe of human rights. Maritime rescue organizations save lives in the Mediterranean. Counselors, social workers, volunteers, teachers, entrepreneurs, friends, and neighbors ensure, through their work and dedication day after day, that refugees find protection and opportunities here. In the U.S., entire communities are standing up to protect their neighbors.

Where restrictions on those seeking protection and migrants create untenable situations, those affected and their supporters come together in solidarity. They develop initiatives such as tandem programs, language cafés, communal cooking evenings, and volunteer counseling services. They strengthen neighborhood ties and contribute daily to a vibrant and resilient civil society.

FROM PROTECTION TO PARTICIPATION

Many stories show that protection and participation are interdependent. We want people to be able to enter the country safely and without danger, to feel well supported and guided through the asylum process, and to be able to develop their potential and abilities from the very beginning. This makes us, as a society, more diverse and stronger.

"I lost a lot while fleeing, but never my will. Today I stand strong because people believed in me. Now I believe in myself." **Weam** is 19 years old and lives in Saarbrücken. She fled Syria with her family as a child. Her mother drowned during the crossing of the Mediterranean. To this day, this remains an unimaginably painful loss for the entire family. At a counseling center, she was encouraged to do an internship at a preschool. Today, she's training to become a preschool teacher and supports children in their development.

"Germany has become my home. (...) The way I think fits in with Germany. That's why I feel so at home here. I can say exactly what I think and just be myself." **Nasrin's** family is from Afghanistan, but she grew up in Iran. She came to Germany at 18, now lives in Stuttgart, is studying math and physics to become a teacher, and volunteers to help children and teens from disadvantaged families.

"I'm proud of myself and of what I've accomplished. Ten years ago, I had nothing; now I'm a father of two, I'm responsible for my family and my career... I feel German, no matter what others say. (...) But I'm very grateful that Germany took me in, that I'm allowed to live here. I've been given so much; now I want to give something back. I do that by working and paying taxes." **Abdisamed** fled Somalia 10 years ago: Settling into life in Germany was a slow process for him. In addition to the language course, a special training program for refugees offered by the city of Frankfurt was crucial for him. He has now been working at the industrial group Samson for nine years and is pursuing further training to become a mechanical engineering technician.

"It was a Friday in late May, and I really celebrated. That was the day I found out I'd passed my training - and on the very same day, I finally held my German ID card and passport in my hands. (...) But I still find it hard to call Germany home. Simply because of the political climate and the racism I experience, especially online. (...) The experiences I've had motivate me to fight against things like this. (...) As part of a team with others, I also do awareness-raising work on the side as a freelancer, raising awareness about racist patterns and structures." **Othman** was 15 when he fled from Iraq to Germany. He had never left his hometown of Baghdad before, so his journey was correspondingly difficult. Being placed with a foster family made his arrival in Germany much easier.

This kind of refugee protection is possible. We want to discuss how to implement it, what it requires, and what we need to do to achieve it. The following five areas of action are not about minimum legal standards; rather, we are developing an ambitious social vision and providing concrete impetus for the political discussion.

1. [Establishing Global Protection](#)
2. [Enabling Safe Flight Routes](#)
3. [Offering Fair Asylum Procedures and Prospects for Residency](#)
4. [Ensuring a Good Start Through Social Rights](#)
5. [Participation and Co-determination - Shaping Society Together](#)

I. ESTABLISHING GLOBAL PROTECTION

There are already numerous foundations for rights-based and solidarity-driven refugee protection - now it is a matter of implementing them. The key lies in strengthening international agreements, establishing a global fund for refugee protection, and ensuring a fair, binding sharing of responsibility. This will create reliable protection worldwide while simultaneously strengthening a rules-based coexistence grounded in human rights and international law, from which everyone benefits.

One thing is fundamental here: Refugees play an active role in shaping refugee protection. Their experiences and knowledge make refugee protection better for everyone.

This is achieved through:

1. Global implementation of the Geneva Convention on Refugees

The Geneva Convention on Refugees is ratified and consistently applied worldwide. This means adhering to standards by creating equal reception conditions, prospects, and access worldwide. States jointly pursue the goal of guaranteeing protection worldwide without this coming at the expense of other areas of development cooperation. In addition, regional exchange and regional solutions are strengthened. States actively assume responsibility and do not attempt to impose it on other countries.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Abolishing the concept of “safe third countries.”

2. A Global Fund for Refugee Protection

A global fund ensures the financing of reception, support, and prospects for refugees worldwide. In the event of large-scale refugee movements, emergency aid can be mobilized quickly. This enables all countries to create good reception conditions. Clear criteria for the use of funds and effective monitoring guarantee the sensible allocation of resources.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Implementation and expansion of the Global Compact on Refugees, particularly with regard to funding the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and supporting countries of first reception.

3. Binding and Fair Sharing of Responsibility

All countries contribute to the successful protection of refugees. Binding agreements specify the contribution each country makes toward receiving those seeking protection, for example through resettlement slots or financial support for countries of first reception via the Global Fund. These agreements are verifiable and based on clear deadlines. Each state's contribution is determined by its economic capacity,

population size, and historical and structural shared responsibility for global causes of displacement.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Strengthening and expanding the European solidarity mechanism as a first example of such a mechanism.

II. ENABLING NON-VIOLENT BORDERS AND SAFE FLIGHT ROUTES

Fleeing persecution or war is always dangerous - but routes of refuge and borders do not have to be. The goal is clear: No one should die while fleeing. At our borders, people should be treated with dignity and respect, and their rights should be upheld.

Humanitarian admission programs and resettlement already enable many people to arrive safely, and lives are saved every day through sea rescues. But that is not enough. What we need are more safe and regular pathways for refugees - within the EU and beyond. National borders are not legal vacuums; fundamental and human rights must be consistently upheld there as well - especially the right to seek asylum.

From our work in reception and resettlement programs, we know that people get off to a better start in a new life when they can arrive unharmed, in safety and peace, together with their families and with a clear outlook for their immediate future. For everyone involved, this means greater predictability. Reception is more successful at the local level, and society's willingness to welcome refugees also increases again.

This can be achieved by:

1. State-operated maritime rescue services fulfilling their obligations

The overarching goal is prevention - that is, preventing those seeking protection from ending up in distress at sea in the first place. This is achieved through the consistent expansion of legal, safe, and accessible routes to refuge. Anyone who nevertheless finds themselves in distress at sea will be rescued by government-run maritime rescue services. In the long run, civilian maritime rescue will no longer be necessary - because life-threatening routes will lose their significance, not because aid is being withheld.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* A state-operated maritime rescue system focused on rescuing everyone.

2. Ensuring the Rule of Law at the Borders

The protection of fundamental and human rights and the accountability of state actions form the foundation of European policy, and they are guaranteed without exception at the external borders as well. Access to individual asylum proceedings is guaranteed at all border crossings. Trained border personnel provide the necessary information.

▶ *What we want to talk about now:* The consistent enforcement of the ban on forcibly pushing back refugees by border police, coast guards, or through state cooperation with third countries.

3. Safe and Legal Entry for All Those Seeking Protection

Those seeking protection can enter the EU and Germany safely and without being criminalized. The previous practice, under which entry was often considered unauthorized and subject to criminal prosecution, will be abolished. Irregular entry will no longer result from restrictive entry and visa policies but will be effectively prevented through lawful and humanitarian access routes.

▶ *What we want to discuss now:* The decriminalization of irregular entry for asylum seekers under the German Residence Act.

4. A Diverse Infrastructure for Legal Entry Routes

The pathways to refugee protection require diversity rather than narrow channels. This calls for a diverse infrastructure of legal entry routes: asylum through spontaneous entry, embassy and consulate asylum, resettlement procedures through the UNHCR, humanitarian admission programs, nomination procedures with guarantees from municipalities, civil society, or families, as well as the granting of temporary protection during acute crises. Effective family reunification, including reunification with siblings, is also part of this. These pathways complement one another and should not be pitted against one another.

▶ *What we want to discuss now:* The resumption of Germany's resettlement quota and currently suspended family reunification procedures.

5. Enabling Free Choice of Place of Protection

Integration is most successful where people have prospects. Asylum seekers should be able to choose for themselves where in the European Union their asylum proceedings should take place. Family ties, language, education, and work are thus automatically taken into account. Forced assignments are abolished, as they generate secondary migration and waste valuable integration time. This is made possible by an effective - and above all financial - sharing of responsibility among member states. Arrivals are managed in a spirit of solidarity, and good reception conditions are mandated.

▶ *What we want to discuss now:* A fundamental reform of the criteria for determining responsibility within the EU.

6. Expansion of circular migration

Refugee protection and migration are not the same thing - but they deserve the same approach. Expanding circular migration for work, education, or project-based stays creates legal mobility and reduces the pressure on asylum procedures. Visa-free

entry or comprehensive visa facilitation measures make mobility the norm. Those already in Germany do not need to go through a visa procedure retroactively if all requirements are met.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Facilitated mobility for workers from third countries, including through the increased issuance of multiple-entry visas.

III. ENSURING FAIR AND EFFICIENT ASYLUM AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES AND LONG-TERM RESIDENCE PROSPECTS

Fair procedures are important for everyone; in asylum law, they are the cornerstone. When these procedures are of high quality, it is possible to reliably identify those who are fleeing war, persecution, or other distress and who need protection. From our work, we know how important fair procedures are - for asylum seekers as well as for society. When those seeking protection have the space to recount their experiences as fully as possible, when they are supported in compiling their account of persecution and flight of flight, and when their applications are reviewed impartially, they feel taken seriously and seen. This also makes procedures more efficient, fosters acceptance of decisions, strengthens the rule of law, and reduces the burden on authorities and courts.

It is important to note that even if an asylum application is denied, it makes sense to open up further opportunities for people who are already here. This allows refugees to contribute their experiences and skills to society and shape their own futures independently. Coercive measures such as detention or deportation are then rarely necessary. Practice shows what is needed to achieve this: quality support and counseling that enable individuals to identify pathways and develop plans together.

This is achieved by:

1. Ensuring high-quality asylum proceedings and effective judicial protection

Fair asylum proceedings are thorough and unbiased. This means that the hearing takes place in a trusting atmosphere, with sufficient time and qualified language mediation. Those who need special support - for example, due to trauma or a disability - are provided with trained interviewers and clear information. Interviewers ask targeted and empathetic questions to understand why someone needs protection. Asylum decisions take into account international human rights law and current case law. These standards must be upheld nationwide and in the best interests of all parties involved. The state covers the costs of medical evaluations and certificates, and those who need other documents to substantiate their claim for protection receive support in obtaining them. Civil society, committees involving refugees, and government agencies regularly exchange information to jointly improve procedures. Asylum seekers have access to due process at every stage of the procedure.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Instead of expedited procedures - such as border procedures and procedures for people from countries of origin classified as safe - every asylum application is thoroughly examined.

2. A protection-oriented European Asylum System

The same high standards for asylum procedures apply throughout the EU, and member states support one another in ensuring these standards are met. This requires a protection-oriented design of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Where CEAS regulations conflict with the rights of those seeking protection or the quality of the asylum procedure, they are amended. Once recognized, refugees can move freely and settle within the EU. The basis for this is a refugee status valid throughout the Union, which is already enshrined in the EU Treaties.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* consistent enforcement of EU law by the European Commission through infringement proceedings against Member States - particularly in cases of pushbacks at borders and the suspension of the right to seek asylum.

3. Ensuring continuous individual case management

Every person seeking protection is provided with individual case management. This requires trained case managers who inform asylum seekers about their rights and obligations, communicate with the authorities on their behalf, and ensure access to medical and psychological care where needed. They provide trusted advice and support that extends beyond the asylum procedure itself. Case management should be delivered by independent organisations with adequate and sustainable funding, including organisations rooted in migrant communities that bring lived experience and relevant language skills.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Needs-based funding for civil society support and counseling services, including asylum procedure counseling independent of government agencies.

4. Prospects after the asylum process

A residence permit granted following the recognition of protection does not need to be renewed and is issued without residence restrictions. Following a revocation or rejection in the asylum process, there is the possibility of securing alternative residency, for example through education, work, or other needs-based pathways to regular residence that are also open to people with disabilities, family caregivers, or single parents. Once all options have been explored, return may be the preferred solution - voluntary, dignified, and based on a jointly developed plan. Voluntary departure always takes precedence over forced deportation.

► *What we want to discuss now:* Asylum seekers are given a fair opportunity to switch different residence tracks during the asylum process or within a reasonable period after a rejection.

IV. A GOOD START THROUGH SOCIAL RIGHTS

Everyone knows this: Arriving in a new environment is challenging - you have to make new connections, often learn a new language, and on top of that, find housing, a job, or a spot in daycare. It's nearly impossible to do this alone. What is needed are supportive structures and strong social rights that carry people through even the most challenging times.

For refugees, this means, in concrete terms: arriving in safety and peace, quickly finding their bearings, the opportunity to contribute their existing potential and skills - and pathways to social integration.

A high-quality reception for refugees is important for all of us. Peace and stability prevent conflicts. Strengthening social cohesion improves the quality of life for all of us. When refugees can put their talents and skills to use from the very beginning, everyone benefits - both socially and economically. This requires investment in essential public services, social infrastructure, and schools that are open to all. Equal access to social benefits, health care, and participation also saves costs in the long run.

This is achieved through:

1. Access to social benefits that ensure a livelihood

Those who are financially secure and do not have to fear for their basic survival can focus on settling in. Therefore, equal access to social benefits that ensure a livelihood, health insurance, and participation services - such as school support or personal assistance - is needed so that those seeking protection can be effectively supported according to their individual needs and participate on an equal footing. Safe escape routes complement this: Those who do not have to pay exorbitant sums to flee start out with more of their own resources. This makes settling in easier, faster, and more efficient for everyone. Studies show that providing adequate support pays off financially in the long term.

► *What we want to discuss now:* A dignified minimum standard of living is granted to everyone effectively and without discrimination from the very beginning.

2. Decentralized, needs-based and accessible housing

Refugees should be able to settle where they can find resources and contacts, through the free choice of place of residence and type of housing. Where temporary housing is initially needed, it is provided in a decentralized, needs-based, and accessible manner, preferably in private apartments. This enables them to build

connections from day one, offers security and stability, and increases the chance of leading an independent life. Standards for protection against violence are in place; the rights of women, children, people with disabilities, and queer individuals are protected. The infrastructure for refugee protection is versatile and enhances social participation for everyone in the community or region, not just refugees.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Government-provided housing is structured not as an obligation, but as an option.

3. Good starting conditions through supportive structures

Language skills are the basic prerequisite for a successful arrival, peaceful coexistence, and participation in the labor market. Immediate access to free, needs-based, and accessible language courses allows people to start learning the language right away. Thanks to well-developed, inclusive childcare that includes appropriate services, these structures are accessible to everyone.

- ▶ *What we want to talk about now:* Access to integration courses for everyone from the very beginning.

4. Opportunities through education and employment

Immediately upon arrival, all children are given opportunities through inclusive access to equal education in mainstream schools and daycare centers. Everyone keeps a close eye on supporting refugee children - whether in terms of educational content, how it is taught, or daily life at school. A work permit from the very beginning enables a faster entry into the labor market. Intensive support, training programs, and an efficient and pragmatic recognition of professional experience help individuals realize their full potential. Well-developed support services enable single parents, in particular, to find a faster path to a self-determined life. Needs-based services provide them - as well as people with disabilities, family caregivers, and older adults - with access to gainful employment.

Any form of gainful employment can secure long-term residency.

- ▶ *What we want to talk about now:* Immediate and unrestricted access to the labor market and education for all.

V. PARTICIPATION AND CO-DETERMINATION - SHAPING SOCIETY TOGETHER

Everyone wants to be seen, to feel a sense of belonging, and to have a say in matters that affect them. This is precisely what makes a society strong: that diverse experiences, perspectives, and skills are visible and can be contributed. For those seeking protection, access to these opportunities is often difficult or even blocked. However, we know how important participation and co-determination are for feeling like part of society - a crucial aspect of successful refugee protection.

At the same time, this makes society a better place to live. Exchange and shifting perspectives transform it into something shared and sustainable. Community life in local communities or neighborhoods becomes stronger and more diverse. Trust in democratic processes grows. Rigid structures begin to shift because different cultures, languages, and life paths bring new solutions to light.

Participation and co-determination succeed in this way:

1. Strengthening the political voice

The voices of refugees are part of societal normality. Asylum seekers are granted the right to vote in local elections as early as possible so that their voice becomes visible and their positions, priorities, and living conditions are reflected. Everyone who experiences and helps shape society strengthens democracy, including through their political voice.

- ▶ *What we want to discuss now:* Introducing at least the right to vote in local elections for everyone who has been legally residing in Germany for at least five years.

2. Opening institutions to everyone

All population groups are represented and visible in society - in government, in schools, in public agencies, and in businesses. Everyone recognizes power dynamics and exclusion; they can identify and change them because racism and discrimination based on origin, gender, disability, religion, social status, or other attributes are continuously addressed, allowing everyone to learn and grow on an ongoing basis. All institutions have reliable and confidential monitoring and complaint mechanisms, as well as regular external reviews. Everyone learns early on to be heard and to listen to others, to act in solidarity, and to take responsibility.

- ▶ *What we want to talk about now:* Human rights education is standard practice in schools as well as in training sessions and educational programs for adults.

3. Promoting community and interaction

Political decision-makers at the municipal and state levels promote coexistence. They create spaces for interaction in everyday life and support public social infrastructure. Through decentralized housing, open neighborhoods, community centers, clubs, schools, and cultural venues, there are opportunities to get to know one another, find common ground, share responsibility, and grow.

- ▶ *What we want to talk about now:* Meeting places and space for interaction are being created for everyone and prioritized in municipal urban planning.

4. Enabling self-determination and personal initiative

Civil society structures, local initiatives, and migrant-led organizations develop diverse and vibrant projects on the ground as a meaningful investment in democracy,

peaceful coexistence, and a shared future. Those who can help shape their own living environment can speak for themselves and strengthen local cohesion. Those who help shape their community belong to it.

- ▶ *What we want to talk about:* Needs-based and sustainable funding for federal programs such as “Demokratie leben” and “Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt.”

The [Memorandum “There Is Another Way! Together for Protection and Cohesion”](#), published on June 19, 2026, is issued by Amnesty International, AWO Bundesverband, Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, Diakonie Deutschland, Handicap International, and PRO ASYL, and is supported by over 300 organizations, including 75 national organizations such as the Evangelical Church in Germany.

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