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Presidents of leading German business organisations on shared responsibility in the face of high refugee numbers

BDA President Ingo Kramer, BDI President Ulrich Grillo, DIHK President Dr Eric Schweitzer and ZDH President Hans Peter Wollseifer issue the following statement:

In recent days and weeks ever more people have been applying for asylum in Germany. Hundreds of thousands of people to whom we rightly offer humanitarian protection against war, displacement and political prosecution will stay with us for a long period or for ever. In addition, many people are coming who have no prospect of asylum despite difficult living conditions in their home country. Refugees have the right to a fair, rapid asylum procedure and treatment in Germany which is decent in every respect. German business is firmly opposed to all forms of hate, insult or violence against asylum seekers.

Germany can only shoulder the challenge jointly with its neighbours. The temporary reintroduction of border controls is right to prevent an excessive demand being placed even on a country as well organised as Germany and to highlight the urgent need to find a European solution. Our European values oblige us to take on and solve the task of growing refugee numbers as a community. We therefore rapidly need a coordinated European asylum policy rooted in solidarity between all EU Member States. All must make a meaningful contribution in accordance with their capacities. Thus, within the European Union, the burdens of accepting and integrating asylum seekers must quickly be shared more fairly. At the same time, it is important that not only Germany but the entire European Union strengthens its commitment to tackling the causes of flight – including support for assistance efforts in countries neighbouring crisis states.

Even if we manage to come to grips with the acute inflow, we must still adjust to the fact that Germany continues to face immense challenges in the years ahead. But cooperation between state decision-makers, good administration, robust businesses and voluntary commitment in its thousands of forms is also an opportunity to emphasise the strengths of a free society and the Social Market Economy. However, the asylum system in Germany must not be overwhelmed. It is important that those responsible at federal and sub-federal level have the will to accelerate decisions on asylum applications generally and for persons from safe countries of origin specifically. It is also sensible and necessary that the government Coalition has agreed to add Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro to the list of safe countries of origin. Rejected asylum seekers must be returned to their countries of origin as rapidly as possible and economic migration via the asylum system prevented. Focusing on asylum seekers and refugees who genuinely need protection is a condition for maintenance of the population's remarkable willingness to offer assistance.

BDA | DIE ARBEITGEBER  
Bundesvereinigung der  
Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände

BDI - Bundesverband der  
Deutschen Industrie e.V.

DIHK | Deutscher Industrie-  
und Handelskammertag e.V.

Breite Str. 29 | 10178 Berlin

Zentralverband des  
Deutschen Handwerks

Mohrenstr. 20 / 21 | 10117 Berlin

Recognised victims of persecution who remain in Germany must gain access to school education, training and employment in short order. That is the best route into durable integration and out of eligibility for social benefits. The alpha and the omega for this is learning the German language as early as possible. For this reason, support first and foremost for language learning must now be promptly and massively expanded. Children and young people need to be integrated in schools at an early stage. Childcare facilities, schools, vocational schools and education centres must be provided with the necessary resources, childcare professionals and teachers. Policy-makers are responsible for sharing out fairly above all the burdens of accommodation and integration between municipalities, the Länder and the federal level. We therefore support the stated will of these three levels to support inter alia the building of new residential units and extending the existing stock of social housing. In the interest of more rapid construction or conversion of this accommodation, it would be desirable for the competent authorities to proceed with flexibility and a sense of proportion.

Companies, chambers of commerce and business organisations are engaged in numerous projects for the integration of refugees in training and employment. These come with enormous challenges and are anything but a sure-fire success. Many refugees are largely or completely unqualified, some have not even had the chance of a school education. As a rule, even those who are well or very well qualified have no knowledge of the German language. At the same time, it is often difficult to classify the diplomas and skills of refugees. Hence, small companies in particular should not feel abandoned and need comprehensive support service offers if deployment in the business is to be successful and durable. Chamber organisations input their experience, in particular with recognition of foreign vocational diplomas. It is important to have clarity rapidly on what skills and abilities refugees are bringing to the table so that the required complementary qualifications can be offered.

The support instruments of employment agencies and job centres must be made accessible to all asylum seekers with the prospect of staying and tolerated residents. This applies in particular for support services to vocational training, for instance assisted training and grants to flank training, in order to give targeted support for successful completion of vocational training. In addition, we should agree smart facilitations for the transition into training and work. It is of central importance that businesses which train refugees are finally given planning certainty applicable across the country for the entire duration of training and the prospect of subsequent employment. The still excessively strict rules surrounding the Federal Employment Agency's so-called priority test also need to be reviewed. It is a very happy development that the Coalition wants to scrap the outdated ban on temporary employment. Moreover, we have observed a marked entrepreneurial spirit among people with foreign roots. Accordingly, the potential of self-employment should be taken into account.

For well qualified refugees who meet the narrow conditions for a permit to take up skilled employment in Germany, direct access to a skilled migration residence permit should be enabled. At the same time, the regular immigration possibilities for qualified workers should be made better known abroad and developed further in a targeted way. The latter can also open up a prospect in Germany for skilled workers from safe countries of origin, on a case-by-case basis. To combat the causes of flight locally, framework conditions in refugees' countries of origin have to be improved. We support the decision by heads of the Coalition parties to concentrate financial resources for development cooperation on important home countries of refugees and to develop crisis management and prevention. German business already contributes to creating prospects for people in their home countries through numerous initiatives, in particular through development of vocational training structures.

We are convinced that a high degree of willingness to help in the population and in businesses can be maintained and expanded. Together, we can and want to manage the enormous integration effort that is necessary in the interest of us all. German business will continue to be engaged – also jointly with other partners in society.

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