

EXPANDING EUROPE'S BORDER REGIME:

Berlin-Brandenburg Airport to
become mass deportation
centre





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Expanding Europe's border regime: Berlin-Brandenburg Airport to become mass deportation centre

The German government plans to convert Berlin-Brandenburg (BER) Airport's Terminal 5 into a mass deportation centre, starting from 2025. People awaiting verdicts from asylum cases will be indefinitely detained, with limited access to legal recourse and wide constraints on fundamental rights. Expanding BER Airport's capacity to detain asylum seekers represents a coherent development within a wider European border regime - rooted in strategies of isolationism and deterrence. Furthermore, the policy aligns with the proposed fundamental reform to the EU's asylum system, which would see even stricter border regulations, a permanent integration of "third countries" in the processing of asylum seekers and a grim neglect of state responsibilities - set out under international law.



[Anti-deportation protest camp](#) - photo by Lisa Vierheilig

What is happening at BER Airport?

The national German government (Bundesregierung) has agreed with the regional ministry in Brandenburg to convert BER's Terminal 5 into a benign-sounding "integrated arrival and departure" centre. The centre will be used to detain up to 120 asylum seekers and would significantly increase the number of fast-track asylum procedures.

The stated aim of the policy, a project expected to cost over €300 million from 2026, is to make the asylum system in Germany more “efficient” and accelerate individual cases. In reality, the result will be the imprisonment of innocent people, asylum seekers undergoing cases without access to fundamental freedoms or adequate legal support and an exponential rise in the rate of deportations.

Over 60 organisations, made up of NGOs, human rights lawyers and refugee councils from throughout Germany, are actively petitioning against the mass deportation centre at Berlin’s main airport. Currently operating with a capacity of up to 32 people, the proposed plan to expand detention at BER Airport’s Terminal 5 make the centre joint largest location for fast-track airport asylum procedures in Germany- alongside Frankfurt am Main. The petition focuses on upholding human rights and is grounded in humanitarian principles.

“The same money could be used to receive and offer provisions to people seeking protection,” says Tareq Alaows from PRO ASYL. “Instead, investments and the political apparatus are focused on highly problematic fast-track procedures and the imprisonment of innocent people.”

EU border regime: pursuing a politics of isolationism and deterrence

A mass deportation centre at BER Airport represents a strategic development of the EU’s broader migration policy. Europe’s border regime is a project predicated on exclusion: the Schengen Agreement enables free movement internally while simultaneously prevents entry from outside of Europe’s borders and criminalises those who try. Yet at the same, even within Europe’s borders, freedom of movement is not universally enjoyed. Restrictions on movement, enacted through policies such as the Dublin Regulation, seek to constrain the freedom of people deemed irregular - meaning those who did not enter using the limited legal routes of arrival. Put into context, less than 1% of refugees are resettled each year, with the EU offering (but failing) to provide legal entry for 30,000 in 2020.

The EU border regime operates with the objective of fundamentally preventing migration, pursued through practices of isolationism and deterrence.

Systematically detaining asylum seekers, whether in camps or airports, means establishing inhumane conditions, which violate rights to liberty and self-determination, in order to erode the effect of so-called “pull factors” - despite a lack of any universal or applied evidence within the existing context supporting the logic of push-pull theory. Deterrence strategies pursued by the EU include placing people seeking protection in indefinite detention, violent pushbacks at the external borders and the criminalisation of civic actors operating search and rescue missions. Concerning detention centres, enforced confinement is in danger of violating both German and international law, with outcomes from detention often resulting in immediate as well as long-term psychological and physical harm.

Meanwhile, fast-track asylum procedures have been instrumentalised in recent years to deprive claimants of access to legal recourse and to fuel mass deportation. In Germany, the rate of rejection for fast-track asylum procedures has increased between 2013 and 2019 from one in twenty cases to more than one in two. At the same time, the EU is facing almost one million pending applications - leaving asylum seekers in a state of limbo. Expanding fast-track asylum procedures can only be seen as a conduit for deportation. Expectations for BER estimate a tenfold increase (compared to 2021) in fast-track procedures as of 2025. Moreover, carrying out these procedures behind closed doors, or within “integrated centres,” makes the harm of detention and deportation opaque, functioning effectively to disarm public opposition.

The future of the EU's asylum system

Comprehensive reform to the European asylum system has been discussed since 2020. Recent developments appear to be close to agreeing an overhaul which would introduce compulsory procedures at Europe's external borders, expand the relocation of asylum seekers to third countries during their application and consolidate the dysfunctional Dublin System. Policies to this effect endanger the safety of people on the move and threaten to deconstruct the foundations of legally binding treaties, such as the Geneva Refugee Convention, which strive to uphold the rights of those displaced.



Kein Asylkompromiss 2.0 Protest

In the context of the EU's deteriorating commitment to fair and just asylum procedures, the core issue of European interior ministers' meeting this month, the detention of refugees and migrants at BER Airport is an iterative abdication of duty in an apparatus void of humanity. The inhumanity of EU migration policy must be recognised and the normalisation of cruelty rejected - without compromise.



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