



Central Committee Meeting on 8 September 2015
Frankfurt am Main

Declaration by IG Metall:

**Towards a sustainable refugee policy
based on solidarity**

Towards a sustainable refugee policy based on solidarity

In view of surging numbers of refugees, Germany faces a gargantuan task that will require nothing less than an “unprecedented national feat” (Merkel) to cope with. Policy-makers and civil society are currently mustering to meet these challenges and taking the initial steps in this direction.

IG Metall is calling upon its members and staffs at companies within its organisation to show solidarity with refugees and mobilise all elements of society working for the rights of refugees and their integration in our society. IG Metall condemns any and all acts of violence towards refugees in the strongest possible terms. A state based on rule of law must prosecute and punish perpetrators of such acts.

1. Crises in the world – major challenges for Europe

Almost 60 million people are fleeing from poverty, hunger and war throughout the world at present. The causes of this are in particular international crises and failed states. In view of the severity of the various crises, no speedy solution is apparent in the territories affected. Nevertheless, it must be the aim and objective to directly combat these causes. Only a fraction of the waves of refugees in the world come to Europe. Nevertheless, the number of refugees seeking protection, refuge and prospects for the future in Germany is mounting continuously. Current forecasts by the Federal German Government are projecting up to 800,000 refugees for the Germany this year. That would be the greatest number since 1990.

Problems faced by local communities are coming to a head. They have to come up with lodging, food and assistance in an incredibly short span of time. In spite of the serious problems associated with this, they are approaching the task with tremendous commitment in order to make it possible to take refugees in quickly and efficiently. But the difficulties involved in this can be witnessed in the image of tents, sports arenas and emergency lodging that are increasingly coming to dominate the media. By the same token, many new problems are also cropping up for which prudent, pragmatic solutions need to be found.

The issue is polarising society. The vast majority of people in Germany are in favour of taking in the refugees, as is reflected in their tremendous willingness to lend a hand. The political debate is emotional, with the media reporting in primarily empathetic and sympathetic terms. At the same time, with almost every passing day there are attacks on refugee lodgings and refugees. Right-wing radicals and right-wing populists are taking advantage of the dire situation of refugees and the weak points of European policy for their own aims.

2. Cornerstones of a refugee policy based on solidarity

The debate over the “right way of dealing” with the refugees is in full swing in Europe and Germany at present, even if it is much too late in view of the burgeoning flows of refugees perceivable for years. IG Metall has been working for a refugee policy steeped in solidarity based on the following cornerstones for years:

European solutions: We need a fair European migration and immigration policy based on solidarity. In addition to a just and fair distribution of the burden among the European states, uniform

humane standards in taking in refugees need to be applied in practice throughout the EU. We need a uniform, effective immigration procedure throughout Europe. This above all includes improved registration and assistance for refugees at those points where they first step on European soil. The attempt to reach Europe or the countries of their choice within Europe must not cost the lives of anyone. This is a humanitarian obligation on the part of the EU. The existing Dublin arrangement, which has in part already been lifted and provides for the countries of “first contact” to be responsible for the asylum procedure, needs to be subjected to fundamental review. The very long period of time they sometimes have to wait must be shortened, while standards of due process of law have to be guaranteed in asylum procedures. The statement of countries as a secure country of origin must not jeopardise the basic right to claim asylum or undermine legal security for the persons involved. The EU has to prove its meddle as a community of values and insist that the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights be upheld and respected.

Strengthening local communities: Local communities are being confronted with the challenge of setting up humane lodging very swiftly. The upcoming winter dictates that this be done as rapidly and with as little red tape as possible. In particular, planning-law and building-law requirements applying to the construction of lodgings need to be implemented as pragmatically as possible. Temporary lodging should be reduced over the long term, while stays in collective centres and camps should be as brief as possible. The financial resources available to local communities need to be further developed on the basis of the decision issued by

the Coalition Committee on 6 September in order to make it possible for the Federal Government to assume a key share of the costs of lodging and integrating refugees on a long-term basis. Sins of omission in the area of social residential construction are making their impact painfully felt at present. The need for liveable residential space for everyone requiring such must be met in the guise of a crash programme. This is the order of the day! Many schools are facing the major challenge of instructing and assisting refugee children without sufficient human resources and material. Suspending the obligation to attend elementary school is not a solution! Instead, schools quickly need to be furnished additional resources in order to be able to cope with this task.

Guaranteeing health care and proper assistance and support:

Many refugees have suffered physical and psychological harm. In addition to medical treatment, they also need good individual assistance. One useful instrument for improving access to medical care is the health card. Refugees need active support and positive employment possibilities. Here there is also space for civil society to make a commitment, for everyday encounters in normal places, common activities such as sports, playing together or music. Enabling such contacts makes an important contribution to integration.

Improving language skills, promoting language practice:

Language is at the nexus of integration in society. Refugees have to take part in language courses right from the outset. We do not want people who do not speak German to be offered up as cheap labour and to be employed at low wages. That is why the language

courses on offer have to be expanded significantly. On top of language courses, above all social contacts play a crucial role.

Access to the labour market: Refugees need access to the labour market. That is why among other things pragmatic approaches to dealing with the priority review are needed to this end – and this is already happening in part. In addition, there is a need for access to promotional tools and instruments in the area of labour market policy as well as language instruction tailored to certain professions. Refugees have to be supported in the recognition of their vocational and educational degrees. When refugees undergo training, a secure stay for the entire training period should be guaranteed from the very beginning. A secure stay should furthermore be extended to the period after completion of training in order to provide people the possibility to find a job if they are not taken on directly by the company at which they have undergone training. The maximum age for young people who receive approval to stay in Germany as a result of their training status, currently 21 years of age, should be raised. Independently of this, we need solid immigration possibilities above and beyond the right to asylum in the labour market. Measures are already being contemplated here (immigration law, immigration contingents).

Special responsibility of employers: Employers also bear responsibility in the current situation. This includes a resolute response to any and all forms of racism and xenophobia at companies. It is especially important to make training positions available and to encourage refugees whose vocational degrees

have not been afforded recognition in attaining a recognised vocational degree.

Refugees must not be instrumentalised to undermine existing social protection and other arrangements in our labour and social system. The Federal Labour Office must also act to ensure that applicable collective bargaining agreements are abided by in the future. The planned lifting of the prohibition against agency work for asylum seekers and persons whose stay is tolerated after three months sends out the wrong signal because it could give rise to new possibilities for abuse.

The guiding principle must be to create positive prospects and security in the labour market for everyone. Scaling down and eliminating existing standards is unacceptable! This is where effective controls by the institutions in charge in the labour market come in. The Federal Labour Office must be involved in the admissions procedure early on in order to identify existing qualifications of asylum-seekers. This is why the Federal Labour Office has to be involved at the initial admission point. This could create a solid basis for enterprises to train people or initiate qualification measures. At any rate, the task is to improve the required personal prerequisites of individuals who want to work. Significantly more financial resources as well as more human resources are needed at the Federal Labour Office for this purpose. On top of this, early integration in the labour market eases the burden on the social system considerably over the medium and long term.

3. IG Metall is acting now

The manner of dealing with refugees is putting the cohesion of our society and our democracy to the test. The political arena has in the meantime reacted to this huge challenge with several packages of measures. Whether these are sufficient will above all be measured in terms of whether there is successful implementation on the ground and society accepts this. We shall do our part in consolidating these efforts and fostering a refugee policy based on solidarity. This is because the number of people coming to us in search of a better life will probably not decline in coming years in view of current wars and crises, but rather remain the same – if not even continuing to rise.

We must therefore work together to establish the emotional, cultural, statutory and institutional preconditions to take in these people and integrate them as quickly and effectively as possible. Above all this means proper lodging and assistance. Above and beyond this, (initial) health care, training and qualification measures as well as integration in the labour market have top priority.

IG Metall will do its part in all this to the utmost of its abilities. It is to this end that we are taking the following steps immediately:

- IG Metall will leverage its influence in society and work for and advocate a refugee policy based on solidarity. Wide-ranging preliminary work has already been performed in this direction and material is available to be used by the administrative offices.
- IG Metall is providing its local units with a total of EUR 500,000. It expects that chairpersons at these offices will use these resources to promote and initiate local activities for the benefit of refugees.

- IG Metall is calling upon its members, works councils, trade union officers and youth training representatives to work for an integration in the labour market based on solidarity.

- IG Metall will promote the integration of refugees through patrons or mentoring programmes based on solidarity at the local level.

In the view of IG Metall it is all very clear: we shall do everything in our power to offer people positive future prospects – people who are seeking protection with us out of fear for life and limb. We shall not allow refugees to be instrumentalised to scale back the existing level of social protection in our labour and social system. Freedom, solidarity and justice! These have been our values for more than 125 years now. It is these values that translate into an attitude of respect, recognition and dignity towards foreigners, who will perhaps tomorrow be fellow citizens and colleagues! Steeped in this tradition, we shall make a contribution of our own and work for a sustainable refugee and integration policy based on solidarity.