
AUSTRIA MOVES TO BLOCK ASYLUM SEEKERS WITH TOUGH NEW RULES

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Austria on Wednesday (30 March) moved to further tighten refugees access to the country by placing tough new restrictions on asylum eligibility and making it easier to reject asylum seekers at the border.

As of mid-May, the government will only accept cases of refugees facing threats to their safety in a neighbouring transit country or whose relatives are already in Austria.

We will not consider any asylum requests unless we have to because of certain criteria * like under the (European) Convention on Human Rights, Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner told a press conference in Vienna.

She said the decision was in accordance with European Union law which allowed member states to take national measures in emergency situations.

Austria □ which last year received one of the highest asylum claims per capita in the EU □ was no longer obliged to accept all requests because the migrant crisis posed a threat to public order and national security, Mikl-Leitner said.

The new rules will also force refugees to request asylum directly at the border in purpose-built registration centres, where they may be held for up to 120 hours while their application is being checked.

Illegal migrants caught inside the country will be taken to the border, Mikl-Leitner warned, while rejected asylum-seekers will be returned to the nation from where they crossed into Austria.

The government also reaffirmed its intention to step up controls at existing checkpoints along its southern frontiers, including at the Brenner Pass, a key European transit route on the Italian border.

Some 14,000 people have already applied for asylum in Austria so far this year, according to the interior ministry □ reaching nearly half of the annual quota of 37,500 claims imposed by the government in January.

But the flow has slowed to a trickle since Austria and Balkan countries along the main migrant trail leading up from Greece shut their borders at the end of February.

BACKGROUND

Austria's tough asylum and migration policy has come under fire from the European Commission and human rights groups for capping its intake of refugees.

Austria is the last stop before Germany, the top destination for migrants fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and beyond.

Last month Austria took the lead in coordinating a slew of border restrictions spanning the Balkans that have caused a worsening logjam of migrants stuck in Greece.

Vienna believes migrants will find new paths into central Europe following the closure of the Balkan route and therefore plans to strengthen controls on the Brenner border crossing between Austria and Italy.

Kaynak/Source: