
DISCRIMINATION A 'WIDELY UNDERESTIMATED PROBLEM' IN GERMAN HOUSING MARKET

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A right-wing politician's remarks about a soccer player have focused attention on discrimination in housing. DW found that Germany's antidiscrimination law allows property owners to discriminate against renters.

The question of racial discrimination in Germany's housing market surfaced following controversial comments made on Sunday by Alexander Gauland, deputy chairman of the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

The right-wing politician told German newspaper "Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung" (FAS) that Germans may appreciate soccer player Jerome Boateng's performance on the field, but they wouldn't want him as a neighbor.

"People find him good as a footballer," Gauland said. "But they do not want a Boateng as their neighbor."

While his comments were met with an outpouring of support for Boateng on and off the field, the reality of racial profiling for Germans with migrant backgrounds is widespread in the housing market.

Christine Lüders, head of Germany's Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS), told DW that Gauland's comments are "quite clearly racist thinking."

"These statements are typical of a right-wing party like the AfD," Lüders said. Gauland's remarks highlight the thought process behind "people who discriminate against others because of their background," she added.

'Blatant segregation'

The German federal government in 2015 submitted a report to a UN committee on discrimination, stipulating housing and education as the "two areas of blatant segregation" in Germany.

The report showed that Germany's General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) offered few protections for victims of discrimination.

It added that many people are reluctant to bring about a legal case in light of blatant discrimination, which was best exemplified in a case where a couple was "denied the right to visit an apartment on the grounds that it could not be rented to black people."

"In our experience, discrimination in the housing market, particularly for people with a migrant background, is a large and widely underestimated problem," Lüders told DW.

"People with a migrant background have a difficult time being invited to a house tour. In a recent study, we were also able to prove that women who wear a headscarf have significantly more difficulties securing an apartment - even if their financial circumstances are quite good," she added.

ADS chief Christine Lüders tells DW that migrants are typically targeted with discrimination when it comes to renting

Avoiding 'ghetto-formation'?

According to the European Commission, the AGG contributes to the propagation of discriminatory practices when it comes to renting.

In the third subsection of AGG's section 19, property owners may discriminate against potential renters "with a view to creating and maintaining socially stable residential structures and balanced housing estates and also balanced economic, social and cultural conditions."

A report by the German Institute for Human Rights added that "unequal treatment, which the provision permits in strictly-defined cases, is justified in order to avoid ghetto-formation."

"The fact that a law specifically targeted at discrimination contains a directly discriminatory provision is most disturbing," said Germany's Forum Menschenrechte, a network of over 50 non-governmental human rights groups.

[Rights organizations have criticized the AGG for allowing land owners to discriminate against potential renters with a migrant background]

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Discrimination takes many forms

However, racial profiling is not the sole form of discrimination found on the housing market.

"There is discrimination based on religious affiliation, and the number of children potentially living in the rental [*] People experience discrimination on the grounds of a disability, even structurally, such as with the limited amount of accessible housing, and also based on specific allocations to certain types of disabilities, such as mental impairment," Daniel Bartel, managing director of Germany's Antidiscrimination Association, told DW.

"People can be discriminated against due to income and social status, which is not protected in the General Equal Treatment Act," Bartel added.

The government's 2015 report also found that discrimination in the housing market "particularly

applied to people, who property owners perceive as being members of the Muslim community."

Last year, the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination issued adamning report on the subject, saying "racism is not only found in extreme right-wing circles, but in all parts of society."

Kaynak/Source: