

Letter from the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to the German Federal Government (10 February 1953)

Caption: On 10 February 1953, the Dutch UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart, forwards to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) an initial report on the persistent mass influx of refugees from East Germany into the FRG and outlines the measures taken to house them.

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Sir,

I have the honour to refer to the cable which I addressed to you on 30 January, a copy of which is attached.

After a first-hand report from one of my staff members who has returned from a visit to Berlin and Western Germany, I am now in a position to give you the further details which I promised in my telegram.

The influx of refugees from Eastern Germany into Berlin has created a most serious problem of accommodation, not only in Berlin but in Western Germany, which, if immediate action is not taken, will have the most far-reaching effects on the integration of the existing refugee population.

As I have on several occasions reported to the organs of the United Nations there are still in camps in Germany approximately 45,000 non-German refugees and some 300,000 German refugees. In Western Germany every possible action must be taken to ensure that the camp population should not be unnecessarily increased.

According to the information I have received from the Allied Authorities in Berlin, during 1952 118,727 refugees entered Western Berlin. The monthly statistics for 1952 are as follows:

January	4262
February	4179
March	4583
April	4221
May	5109
June	8219
July	13182
August	15396
September	14145
October	15595
November	14049
December	15787

The total for January 1953 was 28,276, and the weekly figures were as follows:

week ending January	4	4952
“ “ “	11	3806
“ “ “	18	4762
“ “ “	25	6188
“ “ “	31	8568

Emergency action to cope with this influx is being taken in Berlin by the German Authorities and a number of Voluntary Agencies. The Berlin Authorities agreed that support for the West German Authorities in dealing with the accommodation bottle-neck in Western Germany would be the most effective help for Berlin at the present time.

Accordingly, my Office has discussed with the West German Authorities the possibility of starting immediately housing schemes in West Germany. It has been agreed that housing schemes should be started in the following areas where there are guaranteed opportunities of employment for the refugees:

- (i) Emmerich - Munster - Ludenscheid - Aachen
- (ii) Hannover - Wiesbaden - Mannheim
- (iii) Heilbronn - Ulm
- (iv) Munich - Augsburg
- (v) Hannover - Brunswick - Göttingen

The Federal Government has agreed that if these housing schemes can be realized, a proportion of refugees, including non-German refugees still living in camps, will be moved into the houses which are built. Furthermore, the Federal Government has agreed that any contribution from outside will be doubled by the German Authorities and an amount equivalent to the German contribution will be raised internally on mortgage by the German Authorities from the German banks. This considerable contribution by the Federal Government would mean that any contribution from outside would represent 20%, of a total which will be backed by 80% from German sources.

I am prepared on my side to authorize in agreement with the International Voluntary Agencies an initial contribution from the Ford Foundation Grant, with the administration of which I have been charged. I have further been assured of a contribution of housing units by the Swiss Government. Furthermore, the Norwegian and Swiss Aid to Europe have promised to give support to this housing scheme.

The execution of the plan will be undertaken in close coordination between the Federal Ministry for Refugees, the International Voluntary Agencies the German counterpart agencies and my Office.

As stated in my telegram, the realization of this plan would be a most effective demonstration of international sympathy with the Berlin and West German Authorities in the urgent crisis with which they are faced. Moreover, it would ensure not only that the integration of the refugees already in camps in Germany will not be retarded for several more years, but that many of them would be given immediate opportunities to find housing in areas where employment is guaranteed.

I express the hope that your Government will see its way to participating in this scheme either through a financial contribution or by providing prefabricated housing units or furniture, and that you will let me know in the very near future what action it can take.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

G.J. van Heuven Goedhart
High Commissioner for Refugees