

URGENT ACTION

ASYLUM LAW CHANGES SIGNED BY FEDERAL PRESIDENT

Amendments to Austria's asylum law were signed into law by the outgoing federal president and entered into force. The emergency measures that would allow people fleeing violence and conflict to be turned away at the border are yet to be enforced.

On 20 May the outgoing federal president Heinz Fischer signed the amendments to Austria's asylum law introducing, among other changes, "special measures for the maintenance of public order and the safeguarding of internal security". If enforced, these special measures would allow the government to treat asylum seekers as a threat to national security and to reject the claims of asylum-seekers at the border.

Some parts of the newly adopted legislation entered into force on the date of publication in the official gazette, 20 May. Some other amendments entered into force on 1 June. However, a separate decree is needed to introduce the "special measures" in practice, as part of a state of emergency, and this has not been submitted by the government to date. If submitted, it will need further approval by the relevant parliamentary committee.

A recent reshuffle in Austria's government resulted in the appointment of a new chancellor and a new minister of interior. On 2 June, incoming chancellor Christian Kern told Parliament that a state emergency will not be declared unless the number of new asylum seekers in the country reaches a level that the authorities deem to justify the introduction of a state of emergency. Late last year, Austria was criticised for introducing an arbitrary cap on the number of asylum seekers admitted into the country. The real number of new asylum seekers is still well below this controversial cap of 37,500 applications "allowed" for 2016.

Amnesty International will continue monitoring the implementation of the new legislation and taking action as appropriate.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the UA network.

This is the first update of UA 103/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR13/3941/2016/en/>

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