

A Berlin administrative court has compelled Chancellor Friedrich Merz's government to admit an Afghan family languishing in Pakistan, ruling that Germany cannot walk away from its own resettlement promises.

The decision, handed down Tuesday, rebukes the conservative-led coalition for freezing a program that once offered a lifeline to Afghans deemed most at risk after the Taliban seized Kabul in August 2021. Roughly 2,400 approved applicants—journalists, women's-rights defenders, LGBTQ+ activists and former officials—have been left in limbo in Pakistan since the suspension took effect early last year.

In its 28-page judgment, the court found that Berlin's commitments were "final and irrevocable," adding that the plaintiffs—a former law lecturer and deputy election-commission chief, her spouse and two children—face "serious danger to life and limb" if forced back into Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

"The Federal Republic of Germany is bound by its own word," the presiding judge wrote, noting that the family had already undergone security vetting and received formal admission letters before the program was halted.

Political setback for Merz

The ruling dents Chancellor Merz's flagship pledge to curb irregular migration. Since taking office in late 2023, the Christian Democratic leader has tightened border checks and championed swift expulsions, arguing that Germany's social systems are overstretched. His government froze the Afghan humanitarian corridor just weeks after he was sworn in, citing "security reviews" and "capacity constraints."

Opposition parties and refugee advocates welcomed Tuesday's verdict, calling it a "victory for the rule of law." Green MP Luisa Neubauer said the judgment "proves human rights are

not optional.” The Interior Ministry and Foreign Office—jointly responsible for resettlement logistics—declined to comment on whether they would appeal.

Wider implications uncertain

While the court stressed that its order applies only to the single family, lawyers say the reasoning could influence dozens of similar lawsuits now pending across Germany. “The legal principles are identical,” said Daniel Müller, counsel for several stranded applicants. “If the government has made a written promise, it must deliver.”

The government has argued that each case must be litigated individually. Last month Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt adopted a comparable stance after another court ruled that turning away asylum-seekers at the German-Austrian border was unlawful. Berlin continues those checks, insisting the judgment covered only three plaintiffs.

Pressure mounts

Human-rights groups warn that delays expose Afghans in Pakistan to arrest or deportation. Islamabad has tightened its own visa rules and begun repatriating undocumented Afghans. “Every extra week raises the risk,” said Teresa Kühl of the Refugee Council.

For the family at the center of Tuesday’s ruling, the decision could mean a flight to Germany within weeks—unless the federal government seeks a higher-court injunction. For the thousands still waiting, it is another sliver of hope that Germany may yet honor its pledge.