

Introduction

Dear City Councillor,

Dear Chairman of the City Assembly,

Dear Mayor,

we are pleased to bring the report of the Migrants Advisory Board to the meeting of the City Councillors. With this report, we would like to introduce a new tradition and provide you with a more detailed written version of the report in addition to the usual speech at the meeting so far. This is to enable you to gain a deeper insight into certain issues surrounding the work of the Migrants Advisory Board over the past period of time that can only be briefly outlined in an oral report.

Similar to the election period of our predecessors, our term of office has so far been marked by an unforeseeable crisis that has had a strong impact on our work in recent years. In 2015, the newly elected Advisory Board faced the challenges of the sharp rise in refugee numbers; in 2020, it was the pandemic that determined the focus of our work. A pandemic that, among many dramatic consequences, had an enormous impact on the literally collapsed processes of integration and made the socio-economic gap between the German majority society and the inhabitants with a refugee or migration background painfully visible and tangible. It is no secret that the impact of the virus on public life hit particularly hard those who were already in distress or socially disadvantaged before the pandemic - including migrants and refugees. These are two "sore spots" in our society that have been brought to the surface and exacerbated by the Corona crisis, both in Potsdam and across Germany.

On the one hand, the long outdated concept of mass accommodation in shared accommodation for refugees became a disaster for those affected as well as for the majority society from more than just a medical point of view, against the backdrop of the infectious events. What took on the dimensions of a humanitarian catastrophe worldwide - keyword Moria - also left its mark on Potsdam. There were important resolutions on this - and there is still a need for action.

On the other hand, under pandemic conditions, the educational disadvantages of children and young people with a migrant background became clear. This is a problem that is unfortunately not new in Potsdam, as we will explain in the following. Where a sad trend was already apparent, pandemic-related homeschooling - closely linked to inadequate access to digital participation - caused a hard break and for a time left socially disadvantaged children downright on the track of schooling.

On the other hand, under pandemic conditions, the educational disadvantages of children and young people with a migrant background became clear. This is a problem that is unfortunately not new in Potsdam, as we will explain in the following. In places where a sad trend was already emerging, pandemic-related homeschooling - closely linked to inadequate access to digital participation - caused a hard break and for a time left socially disadvantaged children downright stranded on the school educational path.

Due to their high relevance, both topics are dealt with in particular detail in the report. In addition, we focus on further results of our work to date, which even during pandemic and times of crisis serves one goal: To help shape Potsdam in the spirit of One City for All.

After the election is before the election

Eleven members from eleven countries: that was the result of the election of the Migrants Advisory Council of the State Capital Potsdam, which was reconstituted for the 7th time on May 26, 2019. While the local elections were held in Potsdam, around 15,000 Potsdamer*innen with foreign passports (9.1% of Potsdam's total population) had the opportunity to cast their vote via postal ballot for their candidate for the Migrant Advisory Council. Around 11% of them made use of this right and entrusted us with representing their interests in Potsdam's local politics over the next 5 years. The fact that only just under a tenth of all eligible voters took part in the election is sometimes a sad record - the previous low was 12.1% in the 2014 election. Turnout was marginally better (13%) in 2009.

This negative trend has re-emphasized for us the need to increase the visibility of the Migrant Advisory Council to your constituents* and made it one of the important strategic goals of the Council for the upcoming election period. We are working intensively to raise awareness of the activities of the Migrant Advisory Council through targeted networking with migrant self-organizations, associations and communities as well as institutions in the field of integration work. We strive to maintain existing cooperations and establish new ones. And we are personally "on site" as much as possible in order to increase the presence and low-threshold accessibility of the advisory board by participating in district discussions, regulars tables, city festivals and in many other meeting formats. In the best case scenario, this will also help to recruit other active members to work on the migrants' advisory council.

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In addition, we are striving to conduct targeted public relations work and, among other things, to expand the digital visibility of the Migrants Advisory Board. An important goal that we are currently working on and for which we still need support from the city would be the official appearance of the advisory board in social networks such as Facebook or Twitter. This would be particularly important in view of the average age of our target group. Our voters are young: The average age of Potsdam residents with a migration background was 30.4 years in 2019, and the group of 24 to under 27 year-olds has the largest share of the Potsdam population. (cf. Integration Monitoring of the State Capital Potsdam 2019, 14ff.).

However, in addition to networking, local presence, and public relations, our primary goal is to secure higher voter turnout through concrete results of our involvement in the urban development during our election period. Because only when the migrants in Potsdam benefit from the decision-making processes shaped by the advisory council do they see in the body a real chance to have their interests represented in local politics and thus to be able to actively participate in shaping the city. We are convinced that the more effective our cooperation with city councilors and the

administration is in these years, the more letters with the names of our successors ticked off will arrive at the polling station in 2023.

Work priorities and initial assessment

The most important focus of our work during this election period will be our active consultative in municipal bodies and committees, as well as active participation in the decision-making processes relevant for Potsdam's migrants and refugees. In this way, we want to fulfill our mission as the political representation of a large population group and to use our voluntary capacities in cooperation with the and the administration for the benefit of Potsdam's migrants and refugees in the most effective and sustainable way possible.

In order to fulfill our advisory role within city politics, we always strive to, support city councils and the city administration in their decision-making processes with well-founded opinions and expert contributions. To this end, we obtain specialist expertise from several areas of integration and refugee work on the respective topics within the framework of internal working groups convened by us. Currently there are five internal working groups (WGs) of the Migrants Advisory Board are active on given occasions:

- WG Housing (support for the implementation of resolutions on the dissolution of GU's).
- WG Homeschooling (promotion of digital participation of educationally disadvantaged children)
- WG Integration Budget (review of funding applications for the integration budget of the LHP)
- Africa WG (organization of events in the context of the UN Decade for People with African roots and anti-racism work)
- Jewish Museum WG (securing the Jewish Museum of the Jewish Community of Potsdam)

Furthermore, the Migrants Advisory Council works in depth with the city councilors and with different areas of the city administration on current integration policy issues within the framework of several alliances and public working groups:

- WG Asylum at the GSWI Committee of the SVV
- WG Foreigners Authority of the alliance "Potsdam! shows its colors".
- Cooperation in the implementation of resolution 20/SVV/0518 (internal to the administration).
- Potsdam Welcome Region Science Network / in short: AG Internationals
- WG Integration Award
- Alliance "Potsdam! shows its colors"
- Action alliance "Different than you think..."

In addition, the Migrants Advisory Council is active in the district councils Waldstadt/Schlaatz as well as in Stern/Drewitz/Kirchsteigfeld. In the future, the Migrant Advisory Board will cooperate with other Potsdam advisory boards within the framework of two working groups: the Inclusion Steering

Group for the implementation of the Local Participation Plan 2.0, as well as the Inclusion Working Group of the Daycare Parents Advisory Board.

At the same time, we would like to mention the successful cooperation in many areas with the city administration. Above all, we would like to emphasize the close cooperation with the Integration Officer of the LHP Magdolna Grasnack and the Office for Equal Opportunities and Diversity headed by Martina Trauth, who continuously supported our work actively. We would like to express our sincere thanks for this. In addition, we would like to express our thanks to Department 39 "Housing, Employment and Integration" and the entire Business Unit 2. We experienced our collaboration as open and cooperative, which, in view of the Corona crisis, involved many short-term operational and often unconventional decisions and working methods. In the following, we focus on the most important work priorities and the results of this cooperation to date.

Living in the Safe Haven Potsdam

One of the drastic "findings" from the pandemic period - or rather one of the long-known known problems that exacerbated the infectious event to the point that it became impossible to ignore, was the fact that the concept of mass housing for refugees is largely contrary to the humane asylum policy to a large extent. Living in cramped quarters, often with inadequate access to shared sanitary facilities and kitchens in the midst of rapidly spreading disease ultimately resulted in unacceptable life-threatening conditions. In the overcrowded refugee camps at Europe's borders, under unimaginable living conditions and without access to adequate medical care, the virus exacerbated a humanitarian catastrophe of a format that can hardly be grasped - the heartbreaking images of burning camps in Moria will be forgotten by none of us so quickly. In September 2020, the Migrant Advisory Council voted in favor of the city council's "Safe Haven II" motion, which instructed the mayor to lobby the Brandenburg state government for a state reception program for refugees. We thank the city councilors for the corresponding resolution, wish the mayor much success in its implementation and hope that soon not only Potsdam, but the whole of Brandenburg will become a safe haven.

However, not only at European borders, but also in Germany, the mass accommodation during the pandemic had serious consequences both for refugees themselves and for the host communities. In Potsdam alone, four facilities with shared rooms and bathrooms were quarantined for weeks during the first wave of infection. The GUs and initial reception facilities became hotspots nationwide in the spring of 2020, causing the virus to spread by leaps and bounds. Potsdam was no exception. The decentralized apartment-like accommodation of refugees in Potsdam turned from a sometimes theoretical goal of the city's integration concept into an urgent necessity from a scientific, medical, legal and, not least, humanitarian perspective. The Migrants Advisory Council pointed out the evidence in this regard several times at the beginning of the pandemic. And we are proud that our municipality was the first in Brandenburg to react to this dramatic situation in accordance with its pioneering role in the field of asylum policy.

In June 2020, you, dear city councilors, passed a resolution, which we also supported, on the dissolution of shared housing in Potsdam (resolution 20/SVV/0518). In this resolution, you commissioned the Migrants Advisory Board to accompany the process of implementation together with the city's integration officer and to support it in an advisory capacity. We have fulfilled this task. In order to fulfill our mandate, we convened an internal housing working group to obtain additional expertise from the areas relevant to the implementation of the resolution. We incorporated this expertise into our statements and recommendations to the administration. Within the framework of the internal administrative working group under the leadership of Department 39, we accompanied

the implementation process in an advisory and monitoring capacity. After 9 months, we can state: it will be a "difficult birth".

First of all, we would like to express our appreciation for the qualified and motivated work of all employees of the department of "Housing, Employment and Integration", especially the head of the department Mrs. Fisch and the head of the department Mr. Jekel, and thank them for their work. But Unfortunately, we would also like to note that despite the efforts of department 39, the goal formulated in the resolution - the housing of all refugees in Potsdam - unfortunately lies in the distant future. The path to implementation harbors many hurdles. Some of them are difficult to handle and require detours. Others, however, are surmountable in our view.

For example, we cannot change the difficult real estate situation in Potsdam overnight, which makes the practical implementation of the resolution much more difficult - there is much need here for creative solutions and alternative implementation concepts that still need to be discussed. But we can already provide the legal framework for implementation today. After all, the first and necessary prerequisite for the dissolution of the shared accommodations is that the refugees are allowed to move out of these accommodations. What sounds logical, almost tautological, is in reality a difficult obstacle on the way to implementation. In order to be able to move out of the GU in Potsdam, every refugee without a residence permit requires a formal permit. This is not a statewide obligation, but a free decision of the municipality based on the discretionary powers provided for in the German Asylum Act. Berlin for example, does not have a residence requirement for shared accommodations. The permit requirement in Potsdam has been implemented in a confusing case-by-case procedure since 2019, which on the one hand is not subject to any objective criteria and on the other on the one hand involves an enormous amount of administrative capacity. To illustrate this with figures: Since December 2019, 8 applications for departure from the GU have been positively decided by the Potsdam Foreigners Authority (cf. Kleine Anfrage 20/SVV/1214). By way of comparison, around 800 out of 1000 refugees in Potsdam currently require this permission to move out of a GU in the future.

In accordance with our mandate as an advisory monitoring body, we appeal today to the decision-makers of the city to create the formal conditions for the implementation of the decision and, taking into account the interest of the municipality as well as the health protection of those affected, to change the procedure for the issuance of exit permits. We request that, taking into account the discretionary leeway according to § 53 para. 1 sentence 2 AsylG (humanitarian reasons) as well as § 49 para. 2 AsylG (public health care), all refugees to move out of a shared accommodation after a maximum duration of stay of two years as provided for in the integration concept of the LHP and to refer the residence requirement in the future not to a shared accommodation but to the municipality of Potsdam.

Potsdam shows its colors and Potsdam is a safe harbor - it is now a matter of implementing together what has already been decided. and to have the courage to rethink the sense of existing regulations. Order must not and cannot contradict integration. And in in this case, they even go hand in hand: An objective, repeatedly justified uniform procedure with clear guidelines that correspond to the current recommendation of the state integration advisory board and at the same time promotes the implementation of a historic resolution of the city councillors, would be preferable to a subjective case-by-case procedure with unwarranted administrative burdens.

In order to further support the implementation of the resolution, we, the Potsdam Migrants Advisory Council, in cooperation with the city's integration officer, are organizing a series of events in digital format, which will start under the title Potsdamer Fachgespräche für integrative Wohnpolitik with

the kick-off event on April 15, 2021, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on the topic of "Legal framework conditions for housing refugees in the state of Brandenburg."

The aim of the series of events is to bring a wide-range of professional expertise into a solution-oriented discussion with the decision-makers (city councillors and mayors) and the responsible departments in the city administration and to formulate recommendations for action for the implementation of the resolution. These recommendations will be prepared and published by us, the Migrants Advisory Council and the Integration Officer, as a follow-up to the discussions. We invite you, dear members of the city council, and you, dear Lord Mayor, to participate in the kick-off event and the subsequent discussions.

Homeschooling and digital participation

The educational disadvantage of children with a migrant background is unfortunately not a new or temporary problem linked to the pandemic for Potsdam, but rather a sad trend - and therefore also an important future field of action for city policy and city administration. Thus according to the 2019 integration monitoring, 58.5% of German and only 15.6% of non-German students have attained a higher education degree; 17,2% of non-German students in Potsdam have completed their schooling in 2020 without a high school diploma. (cf. Integration Monitoring of the LHP 2019: 59ff.).

The pandemic exacerbated the problem immensely. Although the whole of Germany had to realize that in matters of digitization, especially in schools, we are nowhere near as far along as we would like to be. But children and young people with a refugee or migration background in particular, including those living in shared accommodations, have been hit particularly hard and unprepared by the abrupt switch to digital learning. The need for action quickly became clear: To cope with the emergency and to help the affected students in the digitally advancing education system, explicit support measures tailored to this target group had to be taken.

The challenges here were and are immense.

In addition to autodidactic and organizational skills at the level of a student, homeschooling also required digital media skills, both on the part of the students themselves and on the part of their parents, who largely had to take on the task of providing educational support. This is particularly problematic for refugees, who do not have sufficient knowledge of the German language skills and also do not have the necessary experience in dealing with the media. The frequent lack of technical equipment (PCs, printers, WLAN) further complicated the situation and made homeschooling an almost impossible challenge for these students.

In March 2021, the Migrants Advisory Board, in close cooperation with the Integration Officer of the LHP, the RAA Brandenburg and the responsible administrative department (division 2) convened a working group "Homeschooling", which explicitly deals with the challenges of digital learning for educationally disadvantaged students, including children with a refugee or migration background. Through a rapid and far-reaching networking of the relevant actors in Potsdam, including school social work, teaching staff, migration social work, and relevant administrative departments, it was possible to identify specific problem areas, formulate both acute solutions and long-term approaches.

I am pleased to report to you today that the first important steps have already been taken on the path to feasible homeschooling for educationally disadvantaged children in Potsdam. For example, the inadequate technical equipment for digital instruction for refugees, which the Migrants Advisory Council pointed out on behalf of the Homeschooling Working Group in the respective committees,

has been significantly improved through the support of the city administration. Technically equipped homeschooling rooms were set up in Potsdam's shared accommodations, financed by the state funds from the 2020 integration lump sum. In addition, the laptops and/or tablets made available by Business Unit 2 for disadvantaged students also made a significant contribution outside of the shared accommodations.

In addition to the technology, initial measures were also taken in the area of media-pedagogical supervision and support. An initial ad hoc solution was provided by cooperative arrangements between youth welfare organizations and schools/school social work, which were initiated and coordinated by Business Unit 2. A more long-term and sustainable solution is to be provided by a multi-stage project "Integration through Education - Strengthening the Participation of Children and Youth with a Migration Background in Education in Potsdam", which has also been developed under the leadership of Business Unit 2 with the participation of the Homeschooling Working Group. The project is to be implemented with the financial support of the state as part of the 2021 integration budget, and the first support measures should start as early as this month.

The measures described above are only the first steps on the long road toward fair educational participation for all children and youth in Potsdam. Over a year of unprepared homeschooling has widened the educational gap and the consequences will continue to concern us long after the pandemic is over. This field of action therefore remains of central importance for our collaboration with the administration and city politics.

Culture in Potsdam: Art in spite of the pandemic

Cultural life has suffered greatly as a result of the pandemic. It was therefore all the more important for us not to ignore this area despite the many challenges posed by the corona crisis, and to make it one of the focal points of the Advisory Board's work. We would like to briefly discuss two important results of this work.