





ACTION PLAN Polnischer Sozialrat e.V. Berlin





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MISSION



Freedom of movement and residence, as established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, remains the very cornerstone of the European Union. For many of its citizens it has also become a crucial aspect of their personal identities.

As the geopolitical situation unfolded in - more often than not - unexpected directions, the debate surrounding asylum seekers and migration from outside of the EU in general quickly became the most heated item in the public debate of the 27 European states. As goodwill and idealism collide with internal security concerns it appears now that the future European policies concerning migration will be fuelled by very different principles than they have been so far.

Nonetheless: immigration from outside of the Union will not and cannot stop for a variety of reasons, and the migration-flows inside of the Union will also continue. Not only because of the established right to move freely but also because by now, and especially for the younger Europeans, it would be difficult to imagine a world without it.

Most of the people living in the EU today have profited from this freedom of movement in one way or another: through touristic excursions to other member states or the Erasmus exchange programmes. Still, the most vital right resulting from it is the possibility to freely choose where in Europe one wishes to work and live.

In spite of this, a closer look at the current situation reveals a range of shortcomings between the ambitious EU-legislation and the mundane and complex reality of the various receiving states. A person from Italy can easily come to Sweden at any time - but will they have the same chance of finding a job there as Swedish natives? People from Greece can come to France and perhaps won't have any problems finding work, but will they also easily find an apartment they would actually like to live in? There are already 142,5 thousands of people from Eastern-EU living and working in Berlin, the capital of Germany. But will they ever become full members of the local society?

The answer to all three of those questions should be obvious even to those who never dealt with migration or the migration-laws themselves: no, they will not. Despite great advances in this regard the ideal of the freedom of movement remains just a theory. People moving from one European state to another still face (micro)discriminations on the job- and property-market, are largely excluded from state-funded support networks, and take generations to fully integrate into them. All this should not be the case and pinpoints the amount of work still needing to be done before the unconditional free movement ideal becomes an actual reality.

This isn't meant to say that (Eastern-)Europeans are the most discriminated against migrants in Germany - far from it. Yet, many problems facing intra-European migrants are the same as the ones faced by various migrants from outside of the Union. By making sure that the EU-laws concerning the freedom of movement of its citizens are actually functioning and by pulling down the structural obstacles faced by the comparatively successful migrant communities we will be creating a better reality for everyone else as well.

The way in which the subject of migration will be handled in the years to come is perhaps the greatest challenge the European Union has to face. Yet somehow, people migrating from one EU-State to another have been missing from the conversation surrounding this issue almost completely. This comes from the right and commendable attitude of taking care of those most in need first; people born with European citizenship are perhaps already privileged enough. Yet, with this paper we suggest turning this attitude around. Free movement of persons is one of the pillars of the European Union and there are still laws and directives surrounding it on European, as well as national and municipal levels, which are yet to be implemented fully.



INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 01

As part of the Erasmus+ funded project "Includate - Education for Inclusion", we -Polnischer Sozialrat (the Polish Social Council, PSR) - joined forces with another two Berlin-based associations of Eastern-Europeans: Freie Ungarische Botschaft (Free Hungarian Embassy) and Diaspora Civica Berlin (Romanian Civic Diaspora). We could quickly find common denominators in our personal and professional histories. Although seemingly "well integrated" we all often had the feeling of hitting invisible walls and ceilings while trying to get by in Germany.

For the sake of clarity we divided the obstacles faced by the East-EU Communities into two main categories: structural and societal.

1. STRUCTURAL

Nothing is easy when it comes to German bureaucracy: things that only require a telephone number or a mobile app in Poland or Romania are often major undertakings in the richest country of Europe, requiring a provision of several documents and a number of long phone calls with the responsible governing body. Examples include scheduling a meeting at a Bürgeramt (City Council) or using the services of Deutsche Post and Deutsche Bahn (German Mail- and Rail Service). The need to accelerate the digitalisation progress and a major overhaul of outdated administration processes is common knowledge amongst the immigrants and native population alike and yet things are hardly moving forward. Germany has always been proud of its organisational skills and nowadays doesn't see the need of rethinking processes that, after all, do work. At the same time it is observable how the same processes become less adequate by the year and while the causes of the current crisis of National Rail, or of the debacle of Berlin's municipal elections in 2021 are more complex, an inadequate administration is surely one of them.

The mounting shortcomings of the German administration are not only more visible to the migrant communities, but are also hitting them the hardest. A sense of being lost amongst the local rules and administration entities to the point of giving up trying completely is an often-quoted element of the migrant experience anywhere in the world. Many of the issues mentioned during the Includate and Interkulturelle Anlaufstelle workshops cannot be solved without some overdue reforms on the federal level, which go beyond the scope of this paper.

Migrant self-organisations in Berlin specifically note how overwhelmed the municipal administration is. The entire system is highly inflexible and the responsibilities fragmented between various entities. As a result, even if a problem is noted or a suggestion put forward by the civic society, it is usually met with a sense of helplessness on the side of the local politicians and other, theoretically responsible, parties.

A major problem is the lack of translations: obviously, German is the only official language of Berlin, yet to align with the EU-laws concerning free movement of persons and equal access to the job market translations of all the documents regarding labour laws, pensions or work-insurance should be provided, in at least some of the locally most commonly spoken EU-languages.

In Berlin it is explicitly allowed, and sometimes expected, for migrants to come to appointments in the city council or work agency with a translating friend. Facebook and Telegram-groups of migrants in Berlin are full of posts of people asking for assistance: they just arrived, do not speak German, don't have any bilingual friends yet, and have to attend an appointment to fully legalise their stay. Without fail someone will always offer to help. It has to be stressed that, at least in the case of the EU-migrants, those volunteers are doing work that is an explicit duty of the state, and are doing so for free. By now it seems that the municipal administration has learned to rely too much on those informal networks and solidarity amongst migrants, and too often expects them to do unpaid labour for each other. Migrant organisations and leaders too are often asked for their expertise or participation with an underlying assumption that they will consider that activity a reward in itself.

Low- and medium-level state functionaries are largely unaware of the specific laws surrounding EU-citizens living and working in Germany. This results in many requests being dismissed or not processed in a satisfying manner. Workers of various social counselling points for migrants in Berlin report on the uncooperativeness of various levels of the local administration even, or especially, when they make a mistake.

People of Eastern Europe generally have the opinion of "invisible" or even "ideal" migrants: they do not stand out from the crowd and tend to integrate quickly. On a structural level this results in them being often forgotten in social-awareness campaigns and other governmental measures aimed at reducing discrimination and facilitating integration. They are too foreign to be treated equally to the native population and yet not foreign enough to be helped. There appears to also be an underlying assumption, that they will move back to their countries of origin sooner or later - which, clearly, isn't always the case.

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Another major issue is lack of proper representation. As a result of some of the issues mentioned above, leaders of the communities, even if they emerge, have no way of knowing to whom and how they could raise their concerns. At the same time representatives of the municipal structures struggle to find contact persons in the East-EU-Communities when they need them. As a part of the German system big organisations like trade unions, welfare associations or churches are supposed to also represent the migrant communities in front of the state or the market. In reality, those organisations are too large and too set in stone to react properly to the changing structures of the labour force and not always prepared to accept non-German members with their differing points of view. Currently, those large organisations more often than not act as "gatekeepers", blocking the emergence of migrant leaders and organisations by occupying spaces that would be more appropriately filled by them.

For some of the Eastern European communities, there's a lack of physical spaces where they can gather for social, communal or even cultural purposes. The migration experience can be further exacerbated by a lack of support from an already established community, as the migrant is navigating the unfamiliar.

Last but not least, not all problems of the EU-Communities inside the EU can be solved by single member states; some (like health insurance or pensions of people who worked in more than one member state during their lifetimes) require the cooperation of the entire Union. At the moment there don't seem to be any entities lobbying for the interests of this group at the higher levels of the European administration. Furthermore no effective communication channels in this regard exist between the states alone, nor between them and the EUstructures.

2 SOCIETAL

Germany has a major racism problem: one resulting not so much from any sort of structural or personal malice, but from unwillingness to acknowledge its very existence. There seems to be a consensus in the German society, that only nazis can be racist - and nobody is a nazi in Germany anymore (See: Moshtari Hilal, Sinthujan Varatharajan, English in Berlin, 2022). This results in a range of often hidden and casual discriminations also against the people of the same skin colour but is already changing: since 2022 the Federal Officer for Integration has been conducting research into the discrimination of people from Eastern Europe on the German Job-market (See: Erica Zingher, *Täter, Opfer, Twitterer*, TAZ, 2021).

It's common knowledge that employers and landlords are less likely to invite people with foreign-sounding surnames to interviews or flat-viewings. People with Eastern-European surnames are no exception. The causes of this are surely complex, but it is clear some action is necessary to reduce this prejudice (See: Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, *Ethnie Testing Wohnungsvermietung*).

Because of the character of the migration from Eastern Europe to Germany in the past decades members of these communities tend to be seen as less qualified or less intelligent or less capable. This creates a vicious cycle when those people are stuck doing jobs significantly below their qualifications even now, when a large proportion (39,1%) of Eastern-Europeans arriving in Berlin are skilled and highly skilled professionals (Minor-Kontor, Prakär in Berlin, 2019). Connecting to this is a general reluctance towards "poverty-migration" with the view that most Poles, Hungarian, Bulgarians etc. are only coming to Germany to profit from the robust social support system. Research shows that although members of these groups do tend to rely on governmental support somewhat above the native-German average (8,4%), they are nowhere near in the majority. (Minor-Kontor, Prakär in Berlin)

It has to be noted, at this point, the much larger prejudice and negative or downright hostile attitudes towards the Roma population: many, if not most, of the members of this community also hold Eastern-European citizenship and are therefore also subjects of this paper. There is significant disparity between the "Willkommenskultur" ("welcoming culture") as proclaimed by the government and the actual attitudes of the population, and things look very different in the multicultural "migrant districts" in the inner city than in the suburbs. Generally, the people from Eastern Europe suffer from a sort of "bad PR". There seems to be a lack of awareness or suitable political marketing, as many regular Germans as well as politicians seem to be thinking of Eastern-EU as much more foreign than it actually is. It is a bewildering state of affairs given the geographical proximity and the amount of shared history.

Another major issue are cultural differences, even if they're not nearly as big as many of the German natives appear to think, and results mostly from contemporary history. Germany is a mature democracy in which the public overwhelmingly trusts politicians and public institutions. This is not at all the case in Eastern Europe. Until the early 1990's this region was still in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union which carried with itself a corrupted and ineffective administration, totalitarian state-apparatus and politicians serving the best interests of a foreign oppressor rather than those of their own countries. The transformation towards a more egalitarian and democratic system has been long, often tumultuous and always draining on the civil population. In some post-soviet countries the process has not been quite completed to this day; in some others it suffered some major drawbacks in the last decade: many of the young migrants that came to Berlin over the last few years, especially from Poland or Hungary, can almost be seen as political refugees.

Those younger generations are still used to thinking of state institutions as oppressive and, by default, as trying to harm the common people rather than support them. As a result of being socialised with these sorts of attitudes people from Eastern Europe tend to be suspicious of governmental structures and initiatives - even the ones put in place specifically to support them. They are more likely to rely on themselves or on informal support from inside of their own communities. The ones who dare to give the local support and participation networks a chance will usually experience a sense of confusion since those structures are rather complex and, at a first glance, seem impenetrable even to people better versed with German democracy. Furthermore, they will not know with whom and how to speak, nor what kind of results they can feasibly expect since they lack that kind of political education that is common practice in Germany, and in the "New-EU" states is only emerging now.





INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 02

According to the Court of Justice of the European Union, "the principle of nondiscrimination prohibits not only direct discrimination on grounds of nationality but also all indirect forms of discrimination which, by the application of other criteria of differentiation, lead in fact to the same result" (C-73/08, Bressol, ECLI:EU:C:2010:181, paragraph 40). With this paper we argue that as long as the municipal administration will not fully integrate EU-Nationals into the existing mechanisms of civic society it will be contributing to their indirect discrimination. Also, we suggest a number of actions that can and should be undertaken in order to avoid such a situation. At the end of 2023 the three aforementioned groups (Polish, Hungarian and Romanian migrant organisations in Berlin) formed an informal "East-Alliance" (Ostallianz). We met for a workshop organised by the Berlin-funded project "Interkulturelle Anlauf- und Beratungsstelle für Migrant*innen" (Intercultural Contact- and Advice-Center). The analysis above and the recommendations below are the result of synergic cooperation of this, and the Includate project, and were developed in a democratic, participative and inclusive manner.

During our workshop we focused specifically on the Eastern-European communities in Berlin and used the Problem-Tree Method to identify the structural and societal instances of bias against our communities. We then tried to establish what would need to happen in order for them to be able to effectively articulate their interests as well as having them taken into account by politics and administration in Berlin.

For the sake of this paper we grouped the resulting grassrootsrecommendations into three main objectives, for which, in turn, we identify a number of necessary actions:

- 2.1: Individual Empowerment
- 2.2: Removal of structural hurdles
- 2.3: Establishing a Space for Dialogue



1.First Objective: Establishing a space for dialogue with the East-EU communities

For the time being there is just one well-positioned organisation of Eastern-Europeans in Berlin: the Polish Social Council. This single association, by already having some resources and enough know- how, managed to assemble a group of specialists and prepare this document to represent a larger scope of migrants from our region.

The wish for more visibility and better access to decision-makers were both recurring themes during our workshop and meetings. Based on this experience we would like to put forward an idea that empowering the Eastern-European organisations in Berlin as well as establishing spaces for exchange with them, would be the fastest way to fully integrate EU-Nationals into the existing mechanisms of civic society in Berlin.

Working in jobs significantly below one's qualifications is a common malaise among most migrant communities anywhere. Yet, because of the cultural proximity and a favourable European framework, it would be especially easy to tap into this latent potential of Eastern-Europeans in Berlin. In order for this to happen there need to be established spaces and formats allowing their expertise to be expressed and heard. This will be of benefit also to the other migrant communities and the German society as a whole: as already stressed most of the problems faced by the East-EU communities in Berlin are not unique to them.



As a next step academics and researchers working in fields broadly connected to Eastern Europe, or coming from the region themselves, should be included in the works of the network.

Suggested Actions:

1. Establishing lasting exchange channels between the communities, organisations, administration and politics: a Jour Fixe with the representation of East-EU communities, Berlin Senate, district councils and relevant federal actors. An annual round table-event led rotationally by the migrant organisations could also be implemented. In particular, the inclusion of existing Roma organisations (e.g. RomaniPhen) or the support of newly established ones is of relevance here.

2. **Giving the EU-migrant communities access and a right to have a say in political and administrational committees** like the Berlin Senate or the Federal Work Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit). Introducing a (symbolic, i.e. small) quota for EU communities in the existing migrant committees (e.g. Migrationsbeirat).

3. Establishing spaces for EU-migrant organisations to meet, exchargemmendations robgetbet. Joistatemergies and tions al-media accounts.

4. **Inclusion of partial academics and researchers** into the newly established spaces and networks

2. Second Objective: Removal of Structural Hurdles

This objective is, perhaps, the most straight-forward of the three suggested in this paper, as the only thing required to make the suggested actions a reality would be a decision on an adequate municipal (or federal) administration level. While the authors are aware that the reality is much more complex than that, they would also like to stress that the following actions merely represent an actual and full implementation of the existing European legislations concerning free movement of EU-citizens.

Suggested Actions:

1.A requirement for all relevant government agencies to provide their forms, documents and online services in the most spoken languages of the city: a measure that is already in operation e.g. in the city of New York. The four most commonly spoken EU-Languages in Berlin are, in this order: Polish, Italian, Bulgarian and Romanian (Gizem Ünsal, Europäische Zugewanderte in Berlin, Minor-Kontor, 2023) We would also recommend the inclusion of the fifth most common EU-language in Berlin: French, as this would be of significant benefit to many of the African communities. We would also strongly advise to include Turkish, as not only the first most spoken foreign language in the German capital, but also as the national language of an important EU-Accession candidate.



2. Establishing training programmes for the employees of the public administration in order to prepare them to adequately handle the cases of EU-Foreigners. Evidence shows, that many problems EU-Citizens have with the local administration (notably with the Agentur für Arbeit, Work Agency) stem from the clerks being unaware of applicable legislation. Examples include two problems edgesettle compaloyamentagetatbarriter ther seeffleesing loyed (Mazurek, Szymańska, Socha, Ochrona i bezpieczeństwo socjalne obywateli Unii Europejskiej..., 2023).

3. Necessary, but impossible without appropriate actions on the federal level: **digitising all public services and administration processes** in order to make them as easy and accessible for everyone. Dismantling instances of archaic bureaucracy, focusing on apps and mobile services, finally forcing a leap into the digital era. At this point migrants arriving in Berlin from any western country are bewildered by the aged standards reigning in the German administration.

3. Third Objective: Individual Empowerment

Most migrants from Eastern Europe come to Germany for economical reasons: to find well paid jobs and to better their financial standing. Initially, every other need will be subordinate to the need of earning money: be it suitable housing, finding time to learn the local language or striving for societal and political it **closizy**ister to the method success state ides to earns that migrants even from privileged, European backgrounds will be trapped in a cycle of precarious jobs and conditions sometimes for many generations. The efforts of the government or the municipal council to offer opportunities or organise free language classes will all be in vain, if the people to whom those offers are addressed will be unaware of them or even - utterly uninterested. If one does not see any means of changing their situation, they will quickly give up trying.

The Western concept of representation has, so far, withstood the test of time: in order to achieve an optimally functioning society we need to make policies answering the needs of all of its component groups, and in order to make such policies we need to include representatives of the given communities in the policymaking process. Nonetheless, when targeting groups for whom representation is a foreign concept and which are only vaguely aware of the mechanisms of a mature democracy, only introducing migrant-quotas is nowhere near enough.

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The usual failing of the representation policies is expecting the representatives to emerge by themselves - we need to strengthen the mechanisms that would allow the municipal administration to also recruit them. This would set a positive cycle in motion: noticing successful and active countrymen proves to the members of their communities that this form of success abroad is not only possible, but also desired. And to make something desirable it only needs to be connected to some form of financial remuneration - or, at least, prestige.

When targeting the Eastern-European communities the issue of them being invisible and forgotten migrants also has to be addressed, along with a certain inferiority complex on their part. Germany is already in the avant-garde of representing migrant histories in its contemporary arts and media - but the principal target of these is the native population. From here only one more step needs to be taken to create formats addressing the migrant communities directly to make them aware that their voice and perspective is desired and sought after.

Suggested actions:

1. **Outreach "recruitment" of migrant community leaders:** new rights and duties for the Integration Officers (Integrationsbeauftragte): making them responsible for identification and promotion of motivated individuals from the target communities. Giving the Officers the right to issue small grants or scholarships for the migrant leaders and/or organisations that will require little to none bureaucratic effort on their part. Alternatively: establishing a new governing-body that will take over those responsibilities.

2. **Highlighting (activist) success stories of EU-migrants**; establishing role-models in order to show others the ways of successful engagement. Training- and scholarship-programmes.

3. **Dedicated funds** for projects, social campaigns, events or forms of artistic expression aimed at empowering Eastern-Europeans, improving the public image of Eastern Europe and strengthening the pan-European solidarity.

4. Focusing on paid representation rather than on volunteers; setting aside funds for spaces and projects.





INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 03

Experience shows that promoting civic society and maintaining a steady state- support for migrant organisations often yields positive yet unexpected results. During the 2015-2016 Refugee Crisis it was the Turkish associations in Germany that were first to offer their resources and practical help to the newly arrived from the Middle East. The same was true of the Polish associations and Ukrainian refugees in 2022. The principal goal of this plan as well as the first tangible result of the suggested Actions is:

To establish, within three years, a competent and reliable network of EU-Citizens in Berlin, capable of quick reaction and of providing in-depth analyses in its given field.

The implementation of this Action Plan is already underway and its first tangible result was the launching of Ostallianz Berlin (East-Alliance Berlin). For the time being the Ostallianz ist just an informal network of three Polish, Hungarian and Romanian organisations but given time, effort on our part, and wider support on the part of the municipal administration it will grow to become a wider and more versatile platform of EU-Citizens in Berlin. Everything as outlined in the "Actions and Objectives" section of this paper.

The results so far came into being in a thoroughly organic way, and yet were only made possible by the PSR using the resources accumulated over the 40 years of its existence. We met our future partners during the networking events organised as part of the Includate project, which we lead jointly with five different European organisations since 2020; it was also this project that provided a broader framework and allowed for the development of this paper in the first place. The funds provided by the municipal "Interkulturelle Anlauf- und Beratungstelle" project allowed for organising the workshop and brainstorming session, which provided this Action Plan with the necessary theoretical base and input. The meetings of the Ostallianz continue to take place in the office spaces of the PSR; the other two organisations are now using them for their individual meetings as well. We shared our resources by inviting the members of the Hungarian and Romanian associations to join us on the abroad conferences of the Includate project and helped them to some remunerated possibilities as well. We shared our know-how and connections to include them in planned meetings with members of the Berlin politics and administration. We stress it all not to boast about our merits, but to demonstrate that the resources made available even to a fraction of the migrant community can, with the right approach, quickly spread to its other parts and yield exceptional results.

All three organisations already started participating in their respective actions and events thus strengthening cooperation and building up mutual understanding of our respective communities. The PSR is already planning a workshop in political lobbying for the other two members of Ostallianz, and all three organisations are mounting efforts to find and recruit members of other East-EU Communities into our Alliance.

In the meantime the members are joining forces in order to organise common events and actions for the upcoming European Parliamentary elections in June 2024. The goal of this campaign will be mobilising their Eastern-European fellows in Berlin to take part in the voting - whether for candidates from Germany or from their (original) homeland.





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