



Migration and Participation in Berlin



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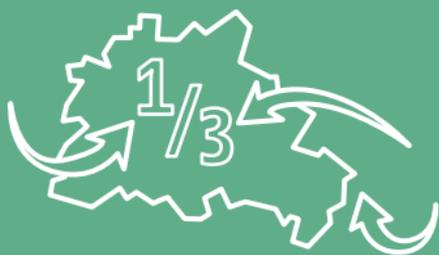
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Where do Berliners come from?

Berlin has approx. 3.7 million citizens. About 650,000 of the citizens of Berlin do not hold German citizenship, 230,000 of them from EU countries and 100,000 from Turkey. Turks and Poles form the largest national communities. 465,000 people in Berlin with so-called migration background have a German passport. This means that almost a third of the people of Berlin have migration history and their political participation is a central political task.

Concerning faith, Berlin is very diverse, too. The majority of people in Berlin are not followers of a religion. In Berlin, however, there are also several denominations: Protestants (17%), Catholics (10%), Muslims (7%), Jews (0,3%) and other denominations (3%).





In which elections may people with migration background vote?

EU citizens may vote in the elections for the Council of Representatives and EU Parliament, if registered residents of Berlin for at least three months. People without German citizenship, however, are not allowed to vote in Federal Elections and elections for the House of Representatives. A tenth of Berliners above the age of 18 (significantly more in some districts) are excluded from political participation via elections.

This also applies to participation in direct democracy, such as referenda or plebiscite, as they are bound to German nationality, too.

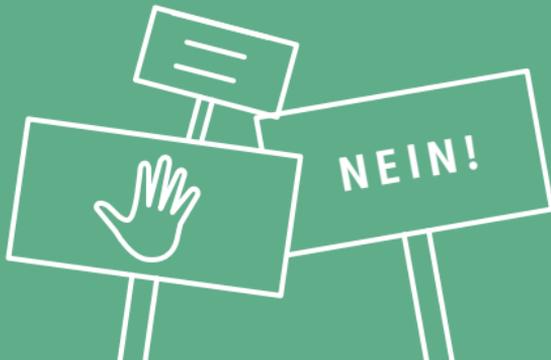
From the age of 16, however, citizens of Berlin may make the House of Representatives debate a topic or proposal. This requires 20,000 signatures.



How can I actively politically participate without German nationality?

In general, people not holding German citizenship are not eligible to participate in elections and referenda. Politics, however, do not begin in the House of Representatives or Council of Representatives. All citizens have civil rights and the right of information, irrespective whether or not they have German nationality. These include freedom of speech, liberty of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of information.

These rights can be used to exchange views, to find fellow campaigners, to make enquiries together to parliamentary representatives, district representatives or citizen deputies, or to table proposals. And numerous forums for participation are available to citizens, for instance:



- peaceful demonstrations,
- banners in front of windows,
- discussions,
- involvement at schools, for instance in the school council or in parent representations and associations,
- in parties,
- in trade unions,
- in the house community or neighborhood and
- involvement in societies and associations.

In general, opportunities are very diverse and experience tells that much is possible without depending on the passport. In order to get involved, however, it is important to be familiar with political structures – so that you know which topic belongs to where.



What is the administrative structure in Berlin?

Being one of 16 constituent states, Berlin is bound to the German constitution. All constituent states are therefore obliged to be structured in a republic, democratic and constitutional way, as well as welfare state. Furthermore, the state constitution defines



the constitutional order of the political community in Berlin. All political decisions are to be in accordance with the principals defined in the constitution. Berlin may decide alone for requests in education, culture, urban planning, economic promotion, public safety & order, organization of state administration, state budget and integration and employment. Decisions are essentially made by the Senate and the House of Representatives.

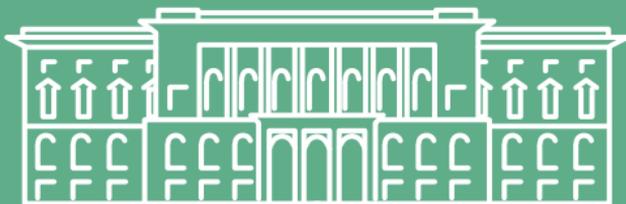
The State of Berlin is divided into 12 districts, in which the district office and the mayor as well as the Council of Representatives make decisions.



What is the Abgeordnetenhaus, the Berlin House of Representatives?

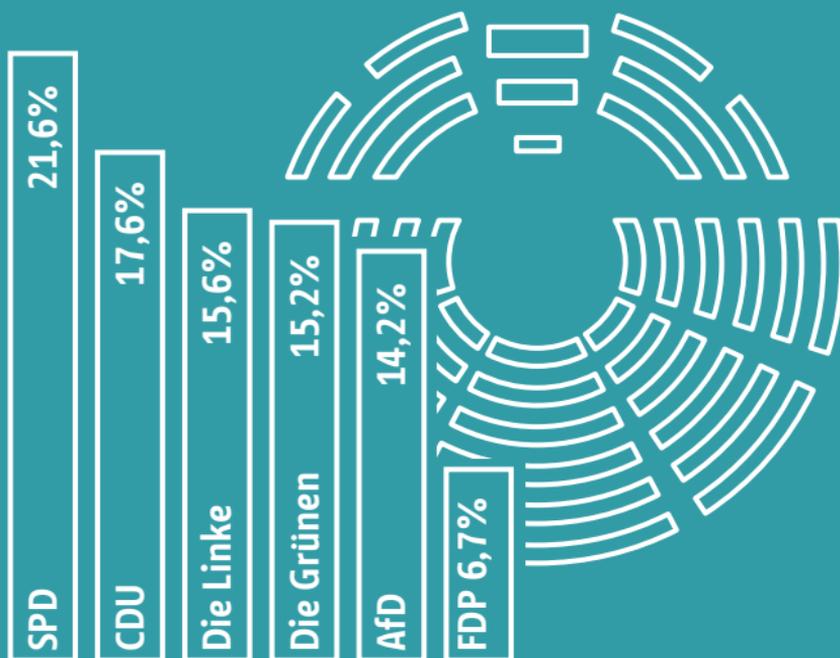
The House of Representatives elects the Governing Mayor. It includes at least 130 members, who are the candidates from the various parties. Everyone who holds the right to vote can also be elected, meaning every holder of German citizenship, age 18+, having lived in Berlin for minimum three months.

The House of Representatives is the legislative assembly in Berlin. It considers, discusses or issues laws and approves or disapproves of them. As part-time parliament, it assembles on Thursday every other week. In addition, Representatives participate in committee meetings and political assemblies, where political decisions are being prepared. Among the current 15 committees, there is the Committee for Civic Engagement and Participation as well as the Committee for Integration, Employment and Social Services.



Which parties are represented in the House of Representatives?

The House of Representatives is currently listing following parties with factions (as of 2017): SPD 21,6%, CDU 17,6%, Die Linke 15,6%, Die Grünen 15,2%, AfD 14,2% and FDP 6,7%.





What are the spokespersons for integration of the parties doing?

Spokespersons of the parties responsible for integration are appointed by their parties. Information about their political emphases, you can find on their individual web sites. Currently, spokespersons for integration are: Karin Korte (SPD), Cornelia Seibeld (CDU), Hakan Tas and Katina Schubert (Die Linke), Canan Bayram (Die Grünen), N.N. (AfD) and Paul Fresdorf (FDP).





How can I contact the Berlin House of Representatives?

You can exert influence on the House of Representatives via petitions (www.parlament-berlin.de/de/Das-Parlament/Petitionen/Online-Petition-Formular) – all Berliners age 16 or above may file one – and via people initiatives, referenda and plebiscites. Most representatives, in addition, offer office hours in citizen centers. Public meetings of the House of Representatives take place at the former Preußischen Landtag (Representative Assembly of Prussia) in Niederkirchnerstr. 5, Berlin Mitte ([Anmeldung über: www.parlament-berlin.de/de/Service/Besucherdienst](http://www.parlament-berlin.de/de/Service/Besucherdienst)). The meetings can be followed via livestream (www.parlament-berlin-de/de/Mediathek/Parlament-live).



What are citizen center office hours?

Office hours at citizen centers are great opportunities to get in touch with politicians at federal, state and district level and utter one's request. Everyone is welcome there. Politicians use these office hours to discuss matters with people interested or concerned and to receive proposals and suggestions. Most members of parliament and Berlin representatives and many district representatives offer such office hours. Mayors and district councilors also offer such office hours.



What is the Senate of Berlin?

The Senate of Berlin is responsible for matters regarding the constituent state of Berlin. It consists of the Governing Mayor and up to ten senators appointed by him, who are assigned to different subject groups. Since 2014, Michael Müller is Governing Mayor of Berlin. The areas of responsibility of the individual senators focus on specific subjects and co-operate in many topics. The individual departments inform about their fields of work on their respective Internet sites. Information regarding the individual senate administrations can be found under: www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/regierender-buergermeister/senat.





Which senate administration is responsible for integration?

Responsible is the Department for Integration, Employment and Social Services. Current senator is Ms. Elke Breitenbach. Mr. Daniel Tietze is the State Secretary responsible for questions regarding integration politics. For more than 30 years, there has been a specialist administration for the intertwined political topic of integration: the Commissioner of the Senate for Integration and Migration. At the moment, this is Mr. Andreas Germershausen. The Commissioner is contact person for people with migration background and supports them exercising their rights (PartIntG §5).

Since 2004, there is the Advisory Committee for Integrations and Migration. This committee directly connects Berliners with migration background to integration-political debates on senate level.

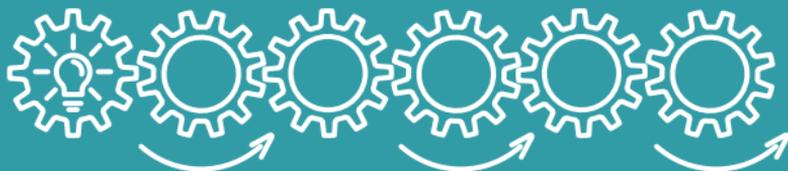
Integration-political topics are important to many fields, hence the reason other departments of senate administration also list them on their agendas.



Functions of Commissioner for Integration?

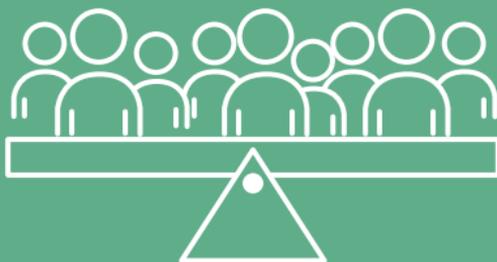
According to §5, 2nd clause, PartIntG, the Commissioner for Integration will work towards “that people with migration background are given the opportunity of equal participation in all areas of social life. The Commissioner will advocate for reducing obstacles towards integration and structural disadvantages of people with migration background, and for protecting respect, acceptance and peaceful co-existence between all citizens of Berlin.

For implementing these aims, he or she will develop suitable concepts, strategies and measures and can recommend measures to other departments of senate administration“. The website of the Commissioner, via which you may also contact the Commissioner, informs about remit, programs, information events and current issues (www.berlin.de/lb/intmig).



Which role does the Regional Advisory Committee have?

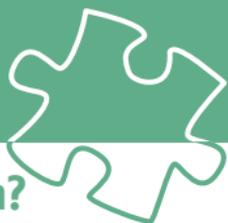
The Advisory Committee for Integration and Migration supports and advises the Senate of Berlin in all matters of integration policies. Members are representatives of various migration groups and associations. The Advisory Committee develops recommendations for further development of integration policy in Berlin. Key phrase of its work is: “integration requires participation”. The Committee places equal rights for migrants, and active involvement and self-initiative of them at the center of integration politics in Berlin. Being able to take part in the opportunities our society offers is the pre-requisite for successful integration. All information under: www.berlin.de/lb/intmig/integrationsbeirat.



Which law governs participation and integration in Berlin?

In December 2010, the “Act to Regulate Participation and Integration in Berlin“ (Gesetz zur Regelung von Partizipation und Integration in Berlin, short: PartIntG) came into force. It defines structures and responsibilities of all institutions and fields of activities in the factual scope of integration and participation. Intentions to issue laws and decrees must be in accordance with the principal policy of this law. It regulates the act of appointing the Commissioner of the Senate of Berlin for Integration and Migration, and of allocating fields of work to him or her, the Advisory Committee for Integration and Migration as well as the District Commissioner for Integration and Migration and much more. The legal text can be found under: www.berlin.de/lb/intmig/_assets/integrationsbeirat/partintg_bf.pdf.





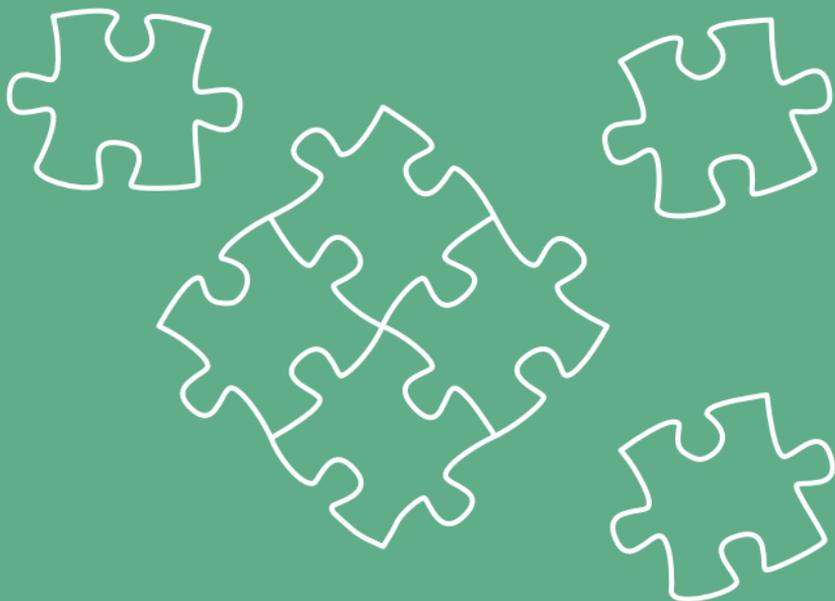
What does integration mean?

“Integration is a process in society as a whole, with the success depending on participation of all citizens. Successful integration requires the offer made to people with migration background to participate, as well as the will and commitment of people with migration background to integrate.”

This is what the Act to Regulate Participation and Integration in Berlin says. People with so-called migration background are therefore people not holding German nationality or with at least one parent born abroad and immigrated to Germany after 1949, respectively.



Integration means to feel as part of a country, town or district and to be recognized by society as such. Factors such as ensured stay, access to housing and labor market, to education and culture, as well as to social systems hereby contribute as much as the opportunity to express and have an own opinion.



What is participation?

The term participation or co-determination describes integrating people and organizations in decision-making processes. On the one hand, this means there have to be opportunities for co-determination, which are organized by the government. On the other hand, participation is impossible without members of the particular society, who are interested in and committed to this cause. Successful participation strengthens social trust in institutions and agents of government and constituent states, respectively.



There are different constitutional or institutional forms of participation in society (e.g. co-determination at work, elections, membership in parties, trade unions). Furthermore, there are non-institutionalized forms of participation (political consumerism, involvement in citizen initiatives, new movements in society, petitions, public discourse, demonstrations or strikes).

Participation is yet to be defined as term. What it means to get involve in political decision-making processes depends on the form of participation. There are ample opportunities.



Why is participation important?

Participation is a decisive factor for an open society that is capable of integrating people and reacting to problems. Via participation alone, one can adequately represent one's own interests. If opportunities to participate are lacking, people feel excluded or perceive decisions in politics as well as society as something foreign not concerning them.



The question how we wish to live together and how we want to shape our environment therefore will be determined by the opportunities available to people to co-determine and shape society. This includes the way in which citizens, who are excluded from common political co-determination processes such as elections and votes, can be involved in particular.



How are the districts organized?

Every five years, mayors are elected for the twelve districts of Berlin, and every four years city councilors by the Council of Representatives. The districts of Berlin vary significantly in size, number of inhabitants, number of people with migration background and opportunities to participate, and they act quite differently, also depending on the political landscape of the elected district representatives.

Politicians within a district deal with applications and requests, public petitions and referenda. All eligible voters for the Council of Representatives can submit requests to the Council of Representatives, which has to reply to these at the next meeting. Specific requests can be proposed here via applications by residents or public petitions. Residents of the district may contribute to matters of district budget, regulation of development and landscape plans and environmental protection via public petitions. The districts are obliged to inform their residents

about extensive plans well in advance and to include opinions and rejections in discussions. Information hereto are displayed and are available in the respective district offices. Here you find the online representation of the district offices: www.service.berlin.de/bezirksaemter.



What is the Council of Representatives?

The Council of Representatives (Bezirksverordnetenversammlung or BVV) is the board elected in the district, which elects the mayor and decides about matters of the district. In every district, there are 55 representatives in the Council of Representatives. Areas of responsibility comprise arrangement of developing and landscape plans, inventory and budget of the general school system, assignment of tasks to private agencies (e.g. youth institutions), acquisition and sale of participating interests or estates of the district, the district economic promotion, local cultural and educational programs such as adult education centers, music schools and district libraries, and organization of citizens and public order offices, youth welfare office, youth welfare and social welfare offices.



Inventory and operation of youth centers, sport fields and playgrounds, public swimming pools, and infrastructure fall into the competence of the district. The duties of the Council of Representatives are decision-making of regulations, budgeting, electing members of the district office and supervising the district office.

Council of Representative meetings are mostly public and can sometimes even be followed via livestream. Specific political topics are discussed by the district representatives in respective committees. So-called citizen deputies also participate in committees. They are politically engaged citizens. You may find the online-performance of the individual Councils of Representatives under: www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/politikportal/politik-in-berlin/hauptverwaltung-und-bezirksverwaltung/bezirksverordnetenversammlungen.



How do districts organize integration policy?

According to the participation and integration law, all districts in Berlin have commissioners for integration and migration. Furthermore, committees for integration und migration shall be established in all districts (currently ten districts have such committee).

The district commissioners for integration and migration have the following particular tasks in close cooperation with local migrant organizations: “(1) They make suggestions and offer proposals for drafts of decrees and proposals as well as measures of the districts, as long as these aid reduction of obstacles to integration as well as promote support and participation of people with migration background. (2) They endeavor that the needs of people with migration background are being considered in every important project which the district is planning or undertaking.” (PartIntG

§7,2). Committees for integration and migration can be used in particular to involve oneself in political decision-making processes. Often these committees have public sessions.



What are citizen deputies?

Citizen deputies are nominated by factions for certain district committees and elected by the Council of Representatives. They hold the right to speak, the right of petition and the right to vote in the committee as well as in the Council of Representatives. People of no German nationality may also become citizen deputies.

According to PartIntG, specialist committees for integration are to be set up in all districts. Elections of citizen deputies in those integration committees are supposed to consider citizens with migration background in the definition of §2 of the PartIntG in particular.



What are the functions of advisory boards for integration?

Ten Berlin districts have advisory boards or similar structures regularly meeting in connection to the District Commissioner for Integration and Migration. Individual advisory board meetings are mostly public and offer specific opportunities for residents of the particular district to get involved. Especially people not holding German nationality may participate in these advisory boards and find an opportunity here to actively contribute to political topics. You will mostly find information about individual advisory boards in the district office and on their Internet presence on the site of the Commissioner for Integration.



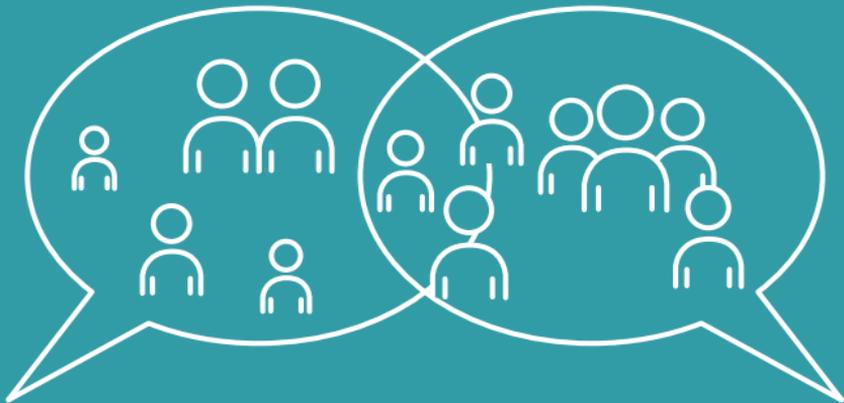
How to become member of a district advisory board for integration?

Almost all districts of Berlin have advisory boards for integration, and migration respectively. Usually, meetings are public and may be witnessed by interested Berliners. Here, one can inform him- or herself and actively participate in debates. The bylaws of the individual districts decide who can be elected into the advisory board. It is recommended to simply attend an advisory board meeting and to get to know the members of one's own district first hand.



Is it possible to actively participate in political parties without German citizenship?

It is possible, indeed, and important as parties greatly influence political decisions on district, constituent state and federal level. Often, meetings may be attended to, political topics discussed and decision-makers met without membership. SPD, Die Linke and Die Grünen offer party-specific working groups for migration.



What are the functions of party-affiliated political foundations?

Party-affiliated foundations offer information events, further training and discussion formats. Many events specifically aim at topics of integration policy and participation. Following foundations participate in the process of political education on federal level: the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (www.fes.de), the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (www.kas.de), the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (www.rosalux.de), the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (www.boell.de) and the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung for Freedom (www.freiheit.org).

Here are further party-affiliated foundations and communal-political educational organizations in Berlin: (www.august-bebel-institut.de), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Bildungsforum Berlin (www.kas.de/berlin), Helle Panke e.V. (www.helle-panke.de), Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (www.bildungswerk-boell.de/de), Bildungswerk für Alternative Kommunalpolitik (BiwAK) e.V. (www.biwak-ev.de), Kommunalpolitisches Forum e.V. (Berlin) (www.kommunalpolitik-berlin.de), Kommunalpolitisches Bildungswerk Berlin e.V. KBB (www.kbb-berlin.de).



Which role do societies and associations play in Germany?

There are around 600,000 societies and associations in Germany pursuing different goals: sports, culture, politics, education or religion. The Verband für Interkulturelle Arbeit (Association of Intercultural Work) is one example: an umbrella organization for societies, clubs and initiatives supporting migrants, emigrants and refugees and whose association in Berlin-Brandenburg has helped develop this pamphlet (www.via-bund.de).

As member of a society, you can pursue and realize your goals together with others and represent your interest. Representing interests together is important to make yourself be heard, because obstacles to participation exist for people with migration background without a doubt and have to be removed. Without such participation of people, who have been excluded in many areas of society so far, this will not happen.



What do refugee councils do?

Refugee councils are representations of self-organized refugee organizations, support groups and special initiatives active in the constituent states. They perceive it as governmental duty to provide to refugees generous acceptance, effective protection, integration with lasting results and self-determined future perspectives under professional consideration of their humanitarian needs and reasons to flee their home countries (*siehe: www.fluechtlingsrat.de*).

Refugee Council Berlin organizes further training events, informs refugees and volunteer helpers in all matters around this topic and supports refugees when dealing with authorities and applications as well as helps them integrate into their new living environment. The Council is looking for more volunteer helpers. Further information can be found under:

www.fluechtlingsrat-berlin.de



Where can I find information about how to participate?

First of all, how you can participate depends on the topic and to which extent you wish to contribute to. Beside the aforementioned possibilities, such as district advisory boards for integration and migration, citizen center office hours, role of citizen deputy, submission of petitions and proposals in the Councils of Representatives etc., there are many ways to involve oneself in the information and opinion-forming processes of society – from voluntary commitment in societies to discussions with people having the same



or different opinions and to visiting information events. A good start is walking through one's part of town with eyes open - not just walking by problems or things that are interesting or annoying, but to become active.

An important institution for political education in Berlin is the Berliner Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (Berlin Center for Civic Education). Here you can find good access to the topic of participation and integration (www.berlin.de/politische-bildung).



How to get German citizenship?

German citizenship can be applied for at the citizenship office. Pre-requisites for the application are the necessary residence permit, ability to make a living, minimum eight years of residence permit in Germany, proficiency of the German language, basic knowledge of the country, generally renouncing previous nationality (except for EU and Switzerland), no criminal record and commitment to the free democratic basic order of the constitution. Some of these requirements may vary in individual cases. This is why visiting the office during opening hours is recommended. All documents relevant for application will be received after a personal consultation.



The authorities responsible can be found in every district. You find them under: www.service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/318998 (key word: naturalization).



How can I deal with discrimination?

Unfortunately, discrimination takes place in various aspects of society on a daily basis. Whether at schools, working place, in authorities or public transport. EU guidelines as well as the constitution declare equal rights and demand fighting discrimination and the Senate of Berlin has vowed to follow this cause. Therefore, fighting discrimination itself can be considered a very important and effective form of active political participation.

The Landesstelle für Gleichbehandlung – gegen Diskriminierung: Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment and Against Discrimination (www.berlin.de/sen/lads) is responsible for informing about one's rights concerning cases of discrimination. For requesting consultation and reporting discrimination, one can contact the federal anti-discrimination office (www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de) under (030)18555 1865 or beratung@ads.bund.de.



Further Reading:

„Demokratie in Berlin. Mitmachen und Mitgestalten.“ Broschüre der Berliner Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (2017). Download under:

www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/publikationen/materialien

„Willkommen in Berlin! Welcome to Berlin!“ Broschüre der Berliner Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (2017). Download under:

www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/publikationen/materialien

Information of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) on the Internet:

www.bpb.de

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