



BEI
Bündnis Eine Welt
Schleswig-Holstein

Less FOREIGN.

Parents find their voice.



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Prologue

After so many years of homesickness, I have found a little piece of home in Germany.

Veró S.

Foreword

The multilingual online handbook “Less FOREIGN. Parents find their voice.” is the result of the joint work of parents, educational stakeholders and civil-society organisations. It aims at encouraging people to get involved and to exercise their own rights. Put simply, it points out that every opinion counts, every commitment makes a difference.

Experiences, questions and ideas were collected in workshops and group discussions with parents, especially mothers from the Kiel districts of Gaarden and Mettenhof. This has resulted in a practical, everyday offering for learning and participation that combines political education with the realities of life of those participating.

Political participation is more than just voting. It means being heard and seen, taking responsibility and initiating change together, in school, in the neighbourhood and in society. This handbook aims to show ways in which this can be achieved: easy to understand, encouraging and open to all.

It is a contribution to a vibrant democracy in which diversity is understood as a strength and in which all people can have a say, participate in decision-making and help shape the future. Special thanks go to the women of the Mother-Child Breakfast in the Haus der Familie’s “Gaarden vernetzt” project, as well as to the local staff for their great commitment. Without their openness, energy and ideas, this handbook would not exist.

We would also like to thank the input providers of the accompanying initiatives, especially from the Afghan Stammtisch Meet-Up, the Schleswig-Holstein Migrant Parents’ Network and the individual women who participated as input providers in the workshop discussions. Thank you for your commitment, your experience and your trust.

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Kiel, 2025

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What does participation mean?

Politics is everywhere – not just in parliament.

Politics is also where you live: in your street, in your daycare centre, at school or in the local sports club. Politics happens when people talk together and decide what they want to change.



Mini-explanation: Political participation means ...

- Getting information
- Expressing your opinion
- Playing a part in decision-making
- Getting involved

💡 Political participation means: You are allowed to have your say and change things in everyday life. Every vote counts – including yours.

Example: Amandla wants more buses

Amandla lives in a district where the buses rarely run.

She writes to the city administration and says that many people have to wait a long time in the morning.

A few weeks later, there is a meeting in the town hall. Amandla goes there and speaks about her idea.

Soon, new bus times will be planned.

Amandla has made a difference because she participated.



What can you do?

Talk to others about your ideas.

Write to your city or municipality.

Take part in a campaign in your district.

Ask, when you want to change something.

Small steps are the beginning of big changes.

Encouragement quote

“When I have a say, I understand more. When I participate, I can change something.”

Continue to the next chapter - Participating in my district

Find out here how you can make a difference locally – at meetings, campaigns and with other people in your neighbourhood.

Chapter 2

Participating in my district

You can make a big difference / change a lot in your town or village.

You can say what is important to you.

You can join forces with others and make a difference.



Mini-explanation: What is local politics?

💡 Local politics means:

People from your town or village decide on local things –
for example on roads, playgrounds, daycare centres or parks.
You can have your say and make suggestions.

Knowledge box: What is a municipal council?

- The municipal council is the elected representation of the citizens in a town or village.
- It decides on important issues – for example on schools, transport or new construction projects.
- The members of the municipal council **are called councillors**.
- You can listen or ask a question at public meetings.

Knowledge box: What is a local advisory council?

- Larger cities have a **local advisory council** in addition to the municipal council.
- These are responsible for individual districts or boroughs.
- A local advisory council talks about things that directly affect people in this district – for example, playgrounds, street lighting or neighbourhood festivals.
- You can contact the local advisory council if you have a concern.

Ways to participate

Have your say

Go to a citizens' meeting or to a district council.
There you can ask questions or talk about your idea.

You can also participate in writing

You don't always have to speak in a group. Many people prefer to express their opinion in writing. That's just as important!

Questionnaire or survey

Sometimes the city or municipality asks about what the citizens want. You can fill out a paper survey or an online form.
Example: "What would you like to have in the new playground?"

Letter or email

You can write to the town hall, the local advisory council or the school. Say what is going well or what should be improved.

📱 Participate online

Many cities have websites where you can write in ideas.

Example: “Participation page for your city” or Schleswig-Holstein participation portal.

📝 Statement or comment

When new projects are being planned, you can write down what you think about them, e.g. about a new cycle path or housing area.

✍️ Collection of signatures or petition

Many people sign a text together to bring about change.

Example: “We want more benches in the park”.

💡 Ideas campaign or suggestion box

Write down your idea and hand it in at the district centre or online.

Maybe it will be implemented!

👏 Get involved

Help with a campaign in your neighbourhood. For example, a litter-picking event, a planting campaign or a neighbourhood festival.

Example: The new playground

Parents in a particular district wanted the old playground to be made safer.

They took photos, collected signatures and spoke with the city.

A year later, the playground was renovated.

Today, lots of children play there – and they all say: “That was a good idea!”



What can you do?

Ask when and where the next district meeting is.

Write to your city or municipality if you have ideas.

Talk to your neighbourhood about problems and solutions.

Take part in campaigns in your neighbourhood.

Political participation begins where you live.



Encouragement quote

“When we talk together, the others hear us.”

Continue to the next chapter - Participating in daycare

Here you can find out how you as a parent can have a say in your children’s everyday lives – in conversations, in a parents’ café or in the parents’ council.

Participating in daycare

Parents are important. You know your child best.

You can have a say and participate in the daycare centre – every day.



Mini-explanation: Who make decisions in the daycare centre?

There are many people working together in a daycare centre:

- **The management:** they organise the everyday schedule and plan offers.
- **The daycare team:** they look after and support the children.
- **The parents:** they contribute ideas and wishes.
- **The sponsor:** for example, a city, church or association.

💡 Everyone works together to ensure that the children are well.

Knowledge box: What is a “Träger” (sponsor)?

- The sponsor is the organisation that owns the daycare centre.
- This can be the city, a church or an association.
- The sponsor pays the employees and decides on rules and equipment.
- If you have any questions, you can also contact the sponsor.

Ways to participate

Conversations

Talk to the daycare team.

Tell them what is good for your child or what you want.

These short conversations are called **“Tür-und-Angel-Gespräche”** in German or “drop-off/pick-up chats”.

Parents' café

Many daycare centres have a parents' café.

You can meet other parents there, ask questions and exchange ideas.

Parents' council

Every daycare centre has a parents' council.

It talks to the management about important topics: opening hours, food, excursions or events. You can have yourself elected – or simply give your opinion.

Knowledge box: What is a parents' council?

- The parents' council is a group of elected parents.
- They represent the opinion of all parents of the daycare centre.
- They regularly talk to the management and contribute ideas.
- Anyone can be elected – no matter how good their German is.

Example: Lunch

Parents wanted more fresh vegetables in a daycare centre.

The parents' council talked to the management.

A few weeks later, there was a new meal plan – with more vegetables and fruit.

Everyone was satisfied.



What can you do?

Attend the parents' evening or parents' café.

Ask, if you don't understand something.

Speak your mind in a friendly and clear way.

Help out with a party or excursion.

Together you can change a lot.



Encouragement quote

"The children will do well when parents and educators work together."

Continue to the next chapter - Participating in the school

Learn here how parents can ask questions and contribute to decision-making in the school.

Participating in the school

Parents can also have a say in the school.

You are allowed to ask questions and make suggestions.

That way you can help shape your children's everyday school life.



Mini-explanation: Who makes decisions in the school?

Many people work together in a school:

- *Teachers:* they teach and know the children well.
- *School management:* it organises the school.
- *Parents:* they contribute experience and ideas.
- *Students:* they say what is important to them.

💡 **Everyone should decide together and listen to each other.**

Knowledge box: What is an “Elternsprecher” (parent spokesperson)?

- In each class, the parents elect a parent spokesperson.
- This person talks to teachers about class questions, such as homework or events.
- They bring the opinion of the parents into the parents’ representation.
- Anyone and everyone can be elected – even with simple language.

Knowledge box: What is a school conference?

- Parents, teachers and students sit together in the school conference.
- They discuss important things: e.g. school rules, projects or holiday dates.
- Everyone is allowed to express their opinion – and the majority decides.
- In this way, children also learn that co-determination is part of democracy.

Ways to participate

Parent spokesperson

Talk to teachers about class topics – e.g. excursions, events or lessons.

Parent representation

Several parent spokespersons form the overall parent representation.

They speak for all parents of the school and consult with the school management.

School conference

Parents, teachers and students come together here.

They vote on important issues, such as school rules or new projects.

Example: The school festival

Parents and teachers wanted more music at the school festival.

A vote was taken in the school conference.

Now a school band plays every year, and everyone dances along.



What can you do?

Attend the parents' evening or the school festival.

Ask, if you don't understand something.

Help with a campaign or translate for other parents.

Share information in the class group.

You can also participate in writing

You can also write to the school or the teachers. For example:

- a short letter or email with an idea
- fill out a school survey,
- write a message in the parent app.

Even small steps are important. They show that you belong.

Encouragement quote

"When parents have a say, children learn democracy."

Continue to the next chapter - Active together

Here you can find out how you can make a difference together with other people – in a club, in a project or in your neighbourhood.

Active together

Together we can do more than alone.

When people get together, they can make a big difference.

This is how an idea becomes a project – and words become change.



Knowledge box: What is a club/association or an initiative?

- A **club** or **association** is a group of people who work together on a regular basis – for example, for sports, culture, education or environmental protection.
- An **initiative** is often smaller.
- An initiative is when people work together for a short-term goal, e.g. against racist exclusion in the community centre or for a playground.
- Both groups show: Together you can achieve something.

Ways to participate

Neighbourhood group

People from the neighbourhood meet to make things better – e.g. plant trees, keep streets clean or plan festivals.

Parents' association

Parents help each other and are committed to better education. They support families, organise tutoring or parent cafés.

Initiative for equality

Many groups fight against discrimination or injustice. They show that every vote counts – including yours. .

Example: The parents' meeting

Some mothers wanted to get to know each other better.

They founded a parents' meeting in the district centre.

Now they meet once a week, drink tea and plan joint activities.

They help new families get started at school.



What can you do?

Ask what groups or clubs/associations there are in your city.

Go to a meeting and get to know the people.

Take part in a project or start a small campaign yourself.

Talk about your topic – maybe there will be others who want to join in.

Tip:

- You can also write down your ideas – for example on a pin board in the district centre or in an idea box.
- Some groups or associations organise little idea campaigns.
- Participation is possible in many ways – not only in conversation.

It is easier to change something together.

**Encouragement quote**

“Alone I am loud – together we are strong.”

Continue to the next chapter - Courage to participate

Here you can find out why it is important to speak your mind and that it is safe to do so in Germany.

Courage to participate

Sometimes it is not easy to express your own opinion.

You might be afraid of saying the wrong thing.

Or you have had bad experiences in your country of origin.

But in Germany, you are allowed to express your opinion freely – and no one is allowed to punish you for it.

Knowledge box: What does freedom of expression mean?

💡 Freedom of expression means:

You are allowed to say what you think – even if other people have other opinions.

You are allowed to protest peacefully, write, speak or paint signs.

The only important thing is that your opinion must not hurt or insult others.



Mini-explanation: Your rights in Germany

In Germany, all people are equal.

- No one may be disadvantaged because of language, origin, religion or opinion.
- You are allowed to meet with others, found clubs and demonstrate.
- Political engagement is safe – that's what the law says.

Knowledge box: What does the Basic Law say?

- The **Basic Law** is the most important law in Germany.
- It contains the rights and duties of all people.
- For example: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion.
- No one should be treated worse because of their origin or religion.
- All people are equal before the law.

Example: The parents' group

In a school, many parents did not dare to speak at first.

One mother said: "I can't do it in German."

But she spoke about her idea anyway and everyone listened.

Since then, the parents have been meeting regularly.

They plan events and help each other.



What can you do?

Speak together with someone. This gives you more confidence.

Ask a question at a meeting.

Write down your idea if you don't want to say it out loud.

Take small steps, every step counts.

Courage begins with a word.

Encouragement quote

"When I speak my mind, change begins."

Continue to the next chapter - Where can I get help?

Here you can find out who to contact if you need support – in your language and in your area.

Where can I get help?

Sometimes you need support.

Maybe you have a question or a problem.

There are many places you can contact – in your language, too.

No one has to do everything alone.



Knowledge box: What is a “Beratungsstelle” (counselling centre)?

- A **counselling centre** is a place where you can get help.
- The people working there will listen and look for solutions.
- The consultation is free of charge and confidential, which means
- that your information will not be passed on.
- You can call, visit or write to the centre.

Ways to participate

Help in daycare or school

Talk to the **management** or the **parents' council**.

Ask who is responsible for parents.

There are often parent assistants or translators who can help.

Help in your city

You can get information about appointments, forms or applications at the **Bürgerbüro Citizens' Office**.

The **Integrationsbeirat** (Integration Advisory Board) helps people with a migration background.

In the **district centre** you can meet other families and find support.

Help with discrimination

The **Anti-Discrimination Agency** helps if you are treated unfairly.

You can call, write or make an appointment there.

There are also associations that help with racism, violence or unfair treatment.

Help for parents

Parent networks such as the *Bundeselternnetzwerk der Migrant*innenorganisationen für Bildung und Teilhabe (bbt)** support families throughout Germany.

The network will give you advice, materials and contacts..

www.bundeselternnetzwerk.de

Help on the Internet

You will find information in simple language on many websites.

Enter your topic in the search engine – for example: “Counselling family + your district”.

Look out for the webpages of cities, clubs or official bodies.

What can you do?

Ask for help, if you don't understand something.

Ask other parents or friends where they can get support.

Go to a counselling centre. This is a sign of strength.

Help others when you can.

Together, no one is alone.



Encouragement quote

"Asking for help is a sign of strength."

Continue to the next chapter - Courage to carry on – even if things don't work out immediately.

Here you will learn why it is important not to give up right away, even if things do not change immediately. You will learn that every voice counts and that democracy is created through perseverance, courage and many small steps.

Courage to carry on – even if things don't work out immediately

In a democracy, people can have a say and participate in decision-making. They can say what is important to them. They can get together and want to change something.

But: Even if people invest a lot of time, strength and emotion, things don't always work out immediately. Sometimes an initiative does not get what it wants.

For example: A group wants a new playground in the district. It collects signatures, talks to politicians and contributes good ideas. Nevertheless, no new playground will be built.

That feels hard. Many then ask themselves: "Was our work worth it at all?"

Democracy means:

Contributing ideas, discussing, finding compromises. And sometimes democracy also means: accepting the fact that others decide differently.

Defeats are part of it. They are not a sign of weakness – they are part of the process.

The important thing is:

People keep talking with each other.

People carry on.

People learn from each other.

Civil rights activist Maya Angelou¹ said:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said,
but people will never forget how you made them feel."

And Rosa Parks² said:

"I've learned that you're never too small to make a difference."

1 Maya Angelou (1928–2014) was a well-known black writer and civil rights activist from the United States. She wrote about her life, her experiences with racism and the power that people carry within themselves. Her books and poems encouraged many people. She also worked as a teacher and appeared at important events.

2 Rosa Parks (1913–2005) was a black civil rights activist in the USA. She became famous for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. Her courageous decision led to major protests against racial segregation. Rosa Parks fought for justice and equal rights throughout her life.

These sentences show:

Every voice counts. Even small steps make a difference.

Perhaps the new playground will not be built immediately.

But the group did something important:

It has shown that people care.

It has shown courage.

It has shown others: We have rights. We are allowed to have a say.

Courage often begins on a small scale – a conversation, an idea, a first step.

Courage grows when people stick together. Courage remains, even if something doesn't succeed the first time.

Therefore:

Don't give up. Try again. Continue to ask questions. Start anew.

This is how democracy is created – every day, through many small deeds.

Continue to the next chapter - Toolbox and outlook

Here you can find out what the Toolbox is, where to find it, and what it's for.

In the Toolbox, you'll find up-to-date addresses, links, and offers that help you get involved locally.



Now it's your turn!

Political participation begins in everyday life.

Ask questions, join in, get involved – in your daycare centre, in your school, in your city.

Every voice counts.

Yours too.

Toolbox and outlook

This handbook is about how to participate and have a say. We have not written any addresses or internet links directly into the handbook.

There are two reasons for this:

Addresses and websites change frequently. We want to make it possible for the handbook to be used by many groups and institutions – in different cities and towns. This is why we have made an extra toolbox.

The toolbox can be downloaded from the Internet. It contains important addresses and links. For example: information from the city, counselling centres and educational offers, parents' representations, district centres and associations, and projects in which you can participate.

The toolbox is regularly updated and expanded. This means you can always find up-to-date information there for your own place of residence.

So, the handbook explains how participation works. And the toolbox shows where you can get support. Together, the handbook and toolbox help to put ideas into practice – so that the desire for participation becomes real participation. .

Click here for your own ideas.



Pages for your own ideas:

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