

New developments „Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.V.“ 2019/2020

To combine remembrance of the past with hands-on efforts to promote democracy – this was the vision shared by the founding members of Gegen Vergessen - Für Demokratie e.V. in 1993, when they got together against a backdrop of racist and xenophobic rioting. From this initial vision, a politically independent national association emerged. Today, over 2,000 members in 40 regional teams work to keep memories of National Socialist crimes and of the injustices of the SED dictatorship alive, while promoting participation in politics, civil society and the critical analysis of political extremism.

The association organizes more than 500 civic education projects and events a year, at local, regional and supra-regional levels. Its wide range of activities invites audiences to reflect on the past, present and future through lectures, panel discussions, eyewitness encounters, screenings, exhibitions, concerts, visits to memorials and student projects.

Gegen Vergessen - Für Demokratie e.V. sees itself as a platform for people from different social and political extractions to meet and debate, establishing common ground and shared demands. Like an open marketplace, the association thrives on the diversity and engagement of the people within it.

Project against hate speech online: „BeInterNett“

In 2019, GVFD started a new project called “BeInterNett”. Here, the aim is to strengthen young adults between 18 and 30 in their commitment against hate speech. GVFD started the project as a participatory process with about 50 young adults from all over Germany. Together, they built a cross-cultural team with a variety of skills and expertise. Our cooperation partners are RAMSA (council of Muslim students and academics) and jugendschutz.net. The main goals of the project are to establish counter-narratives against islamophobia as well as religious extremist hate and propaganda by groups such as ISIS. In 2020 the project team (GVFD, RAMSA and volunteer students) will develop educational programs for young adults in non-formal education. Due to Corona crisis we organized a digital workshop course over three weeks in May 2020. The main purpose was to sensitize the participants to (disturbed) dynamics of online communication and to support them in putting democratic principles into practice online. At the same time, the team could acquire more expertise in confidently standing up to hate speech through further trainings. Finally, the volunteer team may make use of safe spaces and counselling in cases of discrimination and hate speech. The project is funded by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung).

Online counselling against right-wing extremism

The online counselling seeks to inform and advise people who encounter right-wing extremism in their private or professional environment. Online counselling is particularly suitable for those who are looking for help but wish to remain anonymous.

Offering quick and competent support since its inception 12 years ago, the service has reached people who otherwise would not have sought advice in a more conventional way, due to geographical distance, shame or fear.

In 2019 and 2020, the number of cases was consistently high. Particularly after the anti-Semitic attack against the synagogue in Halle 2019 and the far-right and racist attack in Hanau near Frankfurt, many people wrote to us looking for information and support in dealing with right-wing friends and family members.

The financial support by the federal program *Demokratie Leben!* (“Live Democracy!”) of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth ran out by the end of 2019. Therefore, the counselling is currently founded by Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.V.