

Press Release



Fostering Participation in Society, Enjoying Communal Experiences - Initiatives for Refugees During the 66th Berlin International Film Festival

When the Berlin International Film Festival was launched 66 years ago, there were millions of German refugees and traumatised displaced persons in Europe. The festival made a point of fostering understanding, tolerance and acceptance. Since then, it has always been responsive to current events in society - not only with the film programme, but also with many complementary activities.

Last year 79,034 people sought refuge in the German capital (source: Berlin Senate department of health and social services). They came from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea and many other crisis regions around the world. As a public festival and one of the city's biggest annual events, the Berlinale feels a responsibility to do its part for Berlin's culture of welcome.

For many years the Berlinale has promoted participation in cultural life for the socially disadvantaged by offering them tickets at a 50 percent discount, as well as making a quota of free tickets available to low-income people, an initiative run jointly with the non-profit [KulturLeben Berlin - Schlüssel zur Kultur e.V.](#) This year the festival is adding several projects aimed specifically at helping refugees.

The Berlinale urges its guests and audiences to make a donation to the non-profit [Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer e.V.](#) (Berlin Center for Torture Victims, <http://www.bzfo.de/homeen.html>), which provides support for people traumatised by torture, war, migration and persecution. Each year, the bzfo helps more than 500 people. Money collected from the donation boxes placed around the festival venues and in a special [betterplace.org donation drive](#) will be used primarily for initiatives aimed at helping them integrate into society, such as a film camp or German courses, as well as providing interpreters for therapy and counselling sessions.

In addition, the "sponsored cinema visit" initiative has asked Berlin's non-profit refugee aid programmes to nominate volunteers who would like to accompany a refugee to a screening. The aim of the project is to

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help boost existing acquaintanceships and foster cultural exchange. The Berlinale has also joined with the BBZ Beratungs- und Betreuungszentrum für junge Flüchtlinge und Migranten (support centre for young refugees and migrants) to offer a chance for ten or twenty refugees to spend time in various areas behind the scenes in the festival offices.

Also this year, some of the Welcome Classes (school classes for refugees) will participate in the school project that the festival's *Generation* section has mounted for the last ten years in cooperation with Vision Kino. The project's objective is to involve children and young people in the media dialogue.

As part of the *Culinary Cinema's* street food initiative, top Sardinian chef Roberto Petza will work with the refugee initiative "Über den Tellerrand kochen" to serve Mediterranean cuisine from a food truck.

The Berlinale also asks its guests and audiences to donate, wherever possible, to organisations helping refugees with their everyday needs, for instance with finding short or long-term housing (see place4refugees.de, fluechtlinge-willkommen.de, fluechtlingwillkommen.de, among others).

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