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BAKU: German community integration project wins UN intercultural innovation award

Published By [Foreign Affairs Publisher](#) / April 27, 2016 / Comments Off on BAKU: German community integration project wins UN intercultural innovation award

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Source: United Nations 3 – Press Release/Statement:

Headline: BAKU: German community integration project wins UN intercultural innovation award

26 April 2016 A project platform and network that makes social engagement and neighbourhood work accessible to Berlin's large non-German speaking population – winner of an intercultural innovation award at a United Nations forum in Baku today – was sparked by one woman's own migrant experience and the rise of xenophobia in Europe.

Three years after its inception, Give Something Back to Berlin – or GSBTB – is now well-known in Europe. It was declared the winner during an award ceremony as part of the Global Forum Baku 2016, held in the Azerbaijani capital and convened by the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

The Forum, which officially opened earlier today, is bringing together nearly 3,000 participants, including Heads of State and Government, political officials, civil society representatives, religious and youth leaders, who will share their perspectives and solutions under the main theme on 'Living Together in Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and A Goal.'

"The refugee crisis we have been seeing lately actually created a unique opportunity to build a new culture of living together," Annamaria Olsson, founder of GSBTB, said upon receiving the Intercultural Innovation Award, which was created in 2011 under the partnership between the BMW group and the UNAOC.

Faced with an estimated influx of 160,000 newcomers to Berlin in recent years, including 71,000 from outside the country, GSBTB's role as a facilitator of social integration is growing fast as many migrants and refugees face stigmatism, exclusion and discrimination.

"We are bringing different kind of migrants together and make them learn and share," she told the *UN News Centre*, noting that volunteers of 60 nationalities work with them.

GSBTB runs an accessible online platform to inspire and mobilize Berlin's migrant community to create social impact and foster integration, organize events for newcomers to meet actors in their neighbourhoods, and establish networks for intercultural understanding, solidarity and participation.

Once a symbol of division between East and West, Berlin may have a conscience to look for better ways to live together, not stay isolated or segregated, she said. Now, 16 per cent of Berliners are foreign citizens. Ms. Olsson moved from Sweden to Berlin in 2008 to pursue her career as a journalist.

As a recipient of the award, which comes with a funding support, she feels greater responsibility to help stabilize the refugee situation in Germany. "We have more than 1 million refugees and have a lot to do," she said, adding that other cities in and outside Germany are looking to GSBTB's model and expertise.

The finalists were selected from nearly 1,000 applicants from 120 countries. Other prize winners today included:

- Unistream (Israel), which creates social change by empowering teens from underprivileged communities to build and run their own startups;
- Red Dot Foundation – Safecity (India), which crowdsources personal stories of sexual harassment to make public spaces safer for all;
- The Coexist Initiative (Kenya), which engages men, boys and communities to address the socio-cultural stereotypes and conditions that impedes girls' education; and
- Shine a Light (Brazil/USA), which teaches indigenous children to share their stories through digital arts.

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