

24. November 2025

Integration Council

Bocholt awards integration prize

German-Syrian association and Kurdish children's choir honoured // Five applicants // 30 years of the Foreigners' Advisory Council - founding members honoured

The city of Bocholt, together with the city's Integration Council, has awarded the Integration Prize for the second time (after 2023). This prize recognises individuals and groups who are particularly committed to the city community. The prize is endowed with a total of 2,000 euros.

"I am thrilled to see how committed you are here and I look forward to hearing much more from you in the future," said Deputy Mayor Michael Wiesmann, who welcomed the attendees to the Lernwerk. "The presentation of the Integration Award 2025 is a very special evening - and the Integration Award gives people who build bridges between cultures with commitment, creativity and courage and thus enrich our coexistence in Bocholt the recognition they deserve," emphasised Wiesmann.

30 years of the Foreigners' Advisory Council

Before the actual award ceremony, Wiesmann talked about an anniversary: when the first discussions about the establishment of a foreigners' advisory council in Bocholt took place in 1993, this was by no means a matter of course. It needed people who not only believed in co-determination, but also actively demanded it. One of these people was Abdulkadir Kis. Together with Taskin Sevgi Oymaci and Süllü Bayar, he collected signatures back then to push through the democratic election of the advisory board - and thus laid the foundation for a whole three decades of active participation and dialogue to this day", Wiesmann praises the initiators, who subsequently also became founding members of the Foreigners' Advisory Board.

"Mr Kis, I would like to extend a special welcome to you and Mr Süllü Bayar today. With a great deal of foresight and even more perseverance, you have contributed to giving people with an international family history a strong voice in Bocholt. You deserve our recognition for this. You have, in the truest sense of the word, written a piece of Bocholt's history."

Talking to each other instead of about each other

A lot has changed since the first election in 1995: "The Foreigners' Advisory Council became the Integration Council in 2010, and from November this year the body will be called "Committee for Equal Opportunities and Integration" (following the latest amendment to the municipal code by the NRW state parliament). This name alone shows where the journey is heading: it is no longer just about origin, but about justice and equal opportunities for all people in our city and about the potential that these people with an international family history harbour", Wiesmann continued.

He thanked Chairman Juan Lopez Casanova and Integration Officer Bruno Wansing, who had been instrumental in organising the evening. "30 years of the Foreigners' Advisory Council - that is 30 years of commitment to mutual understanding. It is 30 years that show what is possible when people - and this has become the motto of the current Integration Council - talk to each other instead of about each **other**", Wiesmann concluded. In addition to Kis and Bayar, Gülay van Dijk was also present from the founding members, all of whom were subsequently honoured with a bouquet of flowers.

Those who get involved are part of it

Juan Lopez Casanova, Chairman of the Integration Council, explained the background and history of the award. "We want to praise all those involved tonight", said Lopez Casanova. The second Integration Award ceremony is taking place today - and with good reason: "Because there are so many people and initiatives in Bocholt that put integration into practice every day. The prize is endowed with 2,000 euros - but let's be honest: The real value is not in the money. The real value lies in the recognition, in the visible thanks and in the strong signal that we send out as an urban society: Anyone who gets involved here, who builds bridges, who helps others to arrive here and join in - they belong", said Lopez Casanova.

He emphasised that those being honoured today are people who have rendered outstanding services in recent years, who have invested time, heart and soul and, often enough, nerves. "You have overcome language barriers, broken down prejudices and opened doors - doors into flats, jobs, friendships and our society, for which I say on behalf of the Integration Council of the city of Bocholt, but also personally and sincerely: Thank you! Thank you for showing how integration really works: with open arms, with respect and with a great deal of humanity."

Fabian Bohland presented the five applicants to the jury, which was made up of Fabian Bohland, Dr Samer Ladkany, Loredana Morotti, Lutfieh "Latifa" Rezk Almasri and the First City Councillor, Björn Volmering. In addition to the German-Syrian Association, the Kurdish Children's Choir of the International Mesopotamian Cultural Association, Yilmaz Balci and the International Choir of the Mariengymnasium, the Bocholt bleibt bunt e.V. association had also applied for the integration prize. "I would like to thank you for the voluntary work you do on a daily basis, you are all doing a great service to Bocholt and integration", praised Bohland.

Two award winners

"We met on 9 July and even though the decision was not easy, we all agreed on the result", reported Fabian Bohland. As was the case two years ago, there were once again two award winners this year. The German-Syrian Association received the integration prize of 1,500 euros for its outstanding voluntary and integrative commitment to supporting the Syrian community in the city of Bocholt, but in particular for the large number of events that bring people together and build real bridges between cultures, as well as for the great support provided at community events in the city of Bocholt.

In addition, the Kurdish Children's Choir of the International Mesopotamian Cultural Association was honoured with the integration prize of 500 euros for its outstanding voluntary and inclusive commitment to strengthening cultural identity, promoting language skills and developing a sense of community, combined with the use of music as a bridge builder between cultures and as an element that unites people.

Three pillars of the German-Syrian Association

Since the association was founded in 2022, it has been actively promoting the integration of the Syrian community in Bocholt. The aim is to reduce misunderstandings, promote cultural exchange and overcome the challenges of the integration process. There are three pillars to this,

- Supporting the Syrian community by helping them with official matters, organising free language courses and helping them to find a job,
- the promotion of intercultural dialogue through participation in municipal events, organisation of own events, such as the Ramadan Bazaar, which only exists in Bocholt in the entire Borken district, or "10 years of Syrians in Bocholt" a milestone that recognised the successful integration, cultural exchange and close ties between the people of the city.
- social commitment and humanitarian aid by supporting refugees as soon as they arrive in Bocholt, through aid campaigns such as the donation campaign after the earthquake in Syria in 2023 and also by promoting social cohesion through joint activities.

The work of the German-Syrian Association has brought about many positive changes in the 10 years of its existence and is appreciated by the Syrian community, but above all by the entire Bocholt community. Bocholt is also a city of diversity and togetherness thanks to the German-Syrian Association.

Kurdish children's choir - voluntary, inclusive, integration through music

The children's choir is a voluntary, inclusive project that promotes integration through music. It strengthens the children's sense of belonging, opens up opportunities for education and participation and brings families together. A place is created where children can find their voices and their place. There are weekly rehearsals, performances are planned and organised and the choir is in close contact with the families. The work is done on a voluntary basis - with great dedication, heart and personal commitment.

Creative days are regularly integrated into the programme in order to offer children - especially those who are socially disadvantaged or from a refugee background - additional opportunities for self-development. On these days, the association works with the children to organise music, arts and crafts or movement units that encourage their creativity, make their strengths visible and boost their self-confidence. These special activities create space for individual forms of expression and strengthen the sense of community.

The programme is primarily aimed at children with a Kurdish background, but children from other backgrounds are also very welcome. The choir stands for respectful coexistence. Children from different backgrounds sing, learn and grow together. Parents are also actively involved - this creates integration in everyday life. Mutual understanding, multilingualism and genuine encounters are an essential contribution to integration.

Muaiad Abl Alrahman for the German-Syrian Association and Selda Koldamca for the Kurdish Children's Choir accepted the prizes from Michael Wiesmann, Juan Lopez Casanova and Fabian Bohland.

From "Random German" and "State-certified German"

Cabaret artist Muhsin Omurca then had the laughs on his side with his political cabaret when he described Mayor Michael Wiesmann as a bio-German and then himself as a "fake German". "You became a German by chance, but I knew what I wanted, I was a conscious and even a state-certified German", said Omurca.

The cello quartet from the Bocholt-Isselburg music school with Isabel Feldberg, Selin Özdemir, Wiebke Seggewiß and Katharina Theling under the direction of Christiane Schröder provided the musical accompaniment. The Kurdish children's choir also performed three songs.

Afterwards, the guests enjoyed delicious food prepared by Ataf Chaudhry from the Ahmadiyya community and Mustafa Abu Dieb from "Bocholt's Chicken" and drinks, and took the opportunity to chat and, of course, take lots and lots of photos. "I am super satisfied, everything went - almost - as I had imagined", concluded Bruno Wansing, Integration Officer of the City of Bocholt.

You can find more photos here: <https://share.mediaflow.com/de/?73IBTLESMW>



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Delighted with the Integration Award: Muaiad Abd Alrahman (2nd from right), Chairman of the German-Syrian Association Bocholt, received the Integration

Award 2025 from (from left to right) Fabian Bohland, Michael Wiesmann and Juan Lopez Casanova



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Integration Award Winner 2025, the Kurdish Children's Choir under the direction of Selda Koldamca (with certificate) received the award from Juan Lopez Casanova (left), Michael Wiesmann and Fabian Bohland (from right)



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Standing for 30 years of the Foreigners' Advisory Council: Abdulkadir Kis, Süllü Bayar and Gülay van Dijk (from left to right with bouquets of flowers). The founding members were honoured by Deputy Mayor Michael Wiesmann (left) and Juan Lopez Casanava for their many years of commitment