



ALEVIEW

Alevi Youth Project in UK and Germany



Ankommen
Teilhaben
Wertschätzen



DEUTSCHLAND
GESTALTEN



Herausgegeben vom
Bund der Alevitischen Jugendlichen in Deutschland e.V. (BDAJ)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Aleview: UK-Germany Youth Exchange for Alevi Youth	5
Our Organisations	8
BDAJ	8
BAYF	9
Aleview in 10 Sentences	10
Aleview – Professional Exchange	21
London Exchange	26
Gender Equality in Alevism	32
Advice to Young Self/Youth	40
Religion	40
Culture & Community	41
Identity	42
Youth	43
Final Exchange in Berlin	44
Afterword	52
Impressum/Imprint	54

ALEVIEW: UK-GERMANY YOUTH EXCHANGE FOR ALEVI YOUTH

Welcome to the exciting world of intercultural exchange! We are thrilled to introduce this pioneer project that aimed to create meaningful connections between the youth of Alevi background from the United Kingdom and Germany.

The "Aleview" exchange program was a collaborative initiative between the UK and Germany, funded by the Foreign Office of Germany (Auswärtiges Amt Deutschland) over a time period of two years. The project name "Aleview" is a combination of the Turkish word "Alevi" and the English word "view" reflecting its two main objectives. "Aleview" was the first project of its kind in a binational context, addressing the living conditions and challenges faced by young Alevi individuals born in Germany and UK. Within these contexts, the project engaged in substantive discussions on various political and social issues, such as the experiences of marginalization, (anti-Alevi) racism, and other ideologies of inequality.

The project was driven by the shared vision of fostering understanding, political education, and friendship among young individuals with Alevi heritage. With a focus on diversity, inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue, this project aimed to empower participants to become cross-cultural ambassadors and advocates for social cohesion. The long-term objective was to establish sustainable association structures on both sides, enabling good cooperation between the two national associations beyond the project's duration.

"Aleview" took place both digitally and in person through youth encounters. Monthly group meetings were held via Zoom, and in

April 2022, there was an exchange of the associations officials in London. Additionally, two on-site group encounters were planned, one in London (July 2022) and one in Berlin (July 2023).

Through a series of immersive and engaging digital and non-digital activities, workshops, and cultural exchanges, Alevi youth from both nations had the unique opportunity to explore the rich tapestry of their shared cultural heritage, delve into their common history, and celebrate the values that unite them. They were encouraged to embrace and learn from their differences, gaining a deeper appreciation of the Alevi traditions, beliefs, and practices that have evolved and flourished in different contexts.

Participants also had the chance to interact with local communities, exchange ideas on pertinent societal issues, and actively contribute to promoting diversity and inclusivity in both the UK and Germany. By engaging in joint seminars and discussions, they strengthened their capacity for empathy, collaboration, and cross-cultural understanding, breaking down barriers and forging lasting friendships across borders.

The "Alevview" project group consisted of twenty-four dedicated participants and five officials from the UK and Germany, who actively shaped the project's course and content. Participants have been given the opportunity from the beginning to determine the thematic priorities and event formats through regular feedback.

This is how the idea for this brochure and its contents came about. All group contributions were independently researched and put into writing for this brochure. The contributions were also visually prepared on Instagram and can be found on our BDAJ account under the "Alevview" highlight.

The "Alevview" exchange project undoubtedly created an enduring impact on the lives of the young participants, equipping them with valuable skills and a broader perspective that will serve them well in their personal, educational, and professional

journeys. Moreover, it will be a testament to the power of cultural exchange in building a more interconnected and harmonious world.

We are happy to have witnessed the profound transformation that this exchange has brought about and the friendships that have blossomed between the UK and Germany's Alevi Youth. ALEVIEW is no longer just a project, but it has become a connection, a family that will stand the test of time.



OUR ORGANISATIONS

BDAJ

We are the Federation of Alevi Youth in Germany (BDAJ) e.V., an independent youth organization representing the interests of approximately 78,000 children and adolescents in 130 member associations across eleven federal states within the Alevi Community of Germany.



Gulistan Özmen-Tuncel,
BDAJ Project coordinator

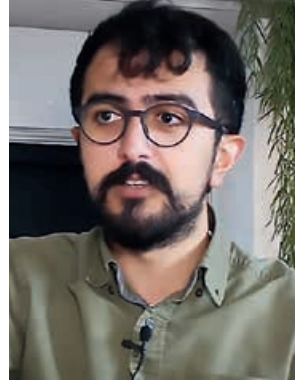
As an Alevi-democratic workers' youth association, we are actively involved in advocacy, non-formal education, and recreational activities. Encouraging young people to engage in critical thinking, democratic participation, and active involvement in all aspects of society is a crucial aspect of our work.

Our objective is to empower young Alevi individuals to perceive themselves as equal and integral parts of German society, encouraging their participation in various fields. The BDAJ actively combats racism and firmly opposes any ideology of inequality.

In terms of content, the BDAJ is guided by the humanistic-social worldview of Alevi people. This perspective embraces values such as equality, compassion, gender equality, education, and science. The organization advocates for an integration-specific approach that enables its members to see themselves as equal participants in German society and actively engage in diverse areas of life.


BAYF

The British Alevis Youth Federation (BAYF) is the youth committee associated with the British Alevis Federation. The first BAYF committee was formed in 2014 with the aim of uniting young Alevis from across Great Britain. Dotted across the country, Cemevis and Alevis cultural centres have acted as focal points for young Alevis to have access and a means of expressing their cultural, religious



Ali Arslan,
BAYF Project assistance

and ethnic identities. Local Alevis youth groups provide at the very minimum a social outlet for like minded young Alevis. However the ultimate goal is to teach and learn about Alevism and to create the means for its existence in modern day Britain. The BAYF strives to act as a coordinating body to unite the activities on a national level. From its onset this has involved the organisation of annual winter camps, wherein youth from all places meet to spend up to a week together, building connections and learning attending workshops on various topics in Alevism. Furthermore the BAYF exists to lead and coordinate the education of youth on Alevism, by providing materials and access to connections internationally who are experts in their respective fields. Within the United Kingdom the BAYF has supported the All Party Parliamentary Group on Alevis within the British parliament, while playing roles in various charitable organisations like Citizens UK. The persistence of Alevism lies in the hands of the youth, and the problems faced by young Alevis are widely varying in nature, where possible the BAYF looks to help and aid the many trials and tribulations that come with being an Alevis in Britain. Finally, the work of the BAYF is to also provide a formal link between Alevis youth in Britain and internationally. Our strongest connections of which exist with Alevis youth organisations in Europe through the European Alevis Youth Association.

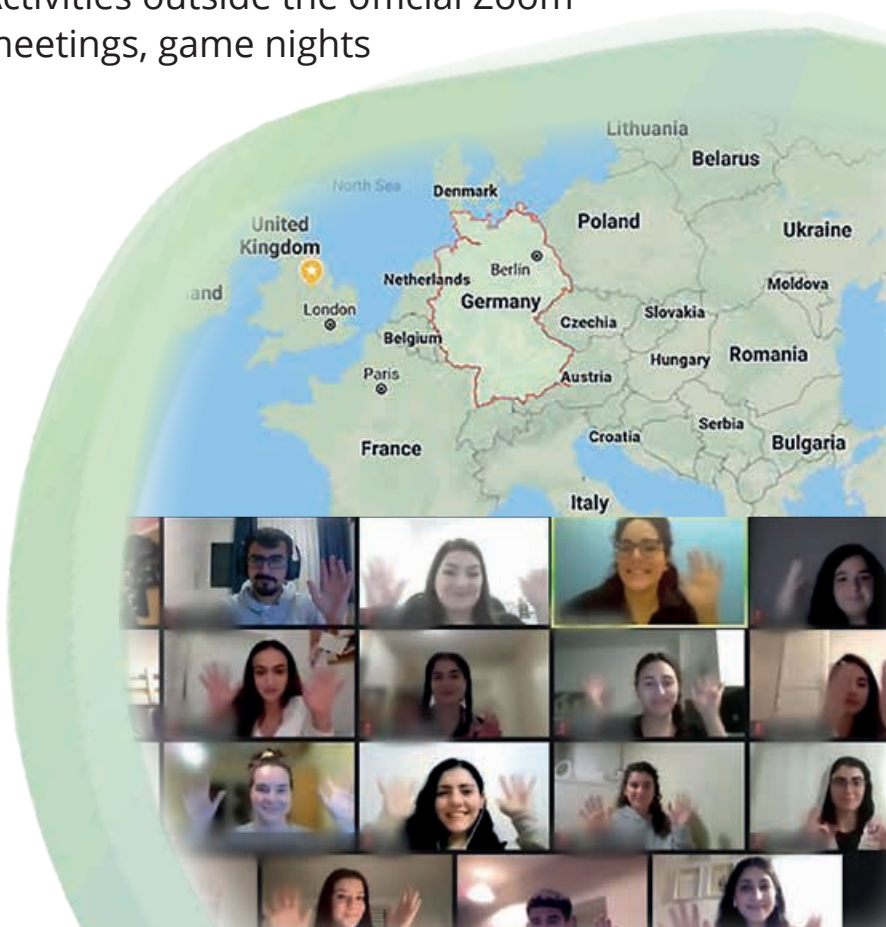


Aleview *in 10* *Sentences*

by Ilayda, Selina, Seren and Suna

1. Alevi allows you to be connected with other youth.

- German, English and Scottish Alevi youth
- Monthly Zoom call
- Interactive group work
- First exchange in London 2022
- Final exchange in Berlin 2023
- Activities outside the official Zoom meetings, game nights



2. Encourages personal growth.

11.07.22

Dear diary,

Today is our last day in London.
It has been an amazing experience,
with lots of laughter. I have met lovely
people with very kind hearts.

Every evening we spent time at the Tower
Bridge, playing games, singing, playing
the baglama, halay and having many
interesting conversations.

I was feeling very nervous before meeting
everyone and wasn't sure how it was go-
ing to be, but everyone was very nice and
this allowed me to feel like a big family.

I can not wait to meet everyone again in
Germany next year.

xoxo

3. We were able to shape the Alevi exchange project.

- Filling in of questionnaires
- Regular feedbacks on the project
- Feedback form after the exchange in London about things we liked and disliked
- The organisers appreciated our ideas by taking them in to account while organising the project
- The organisers always listened to us and were very kind



4. *Allows you to reflect on your identity and get new perspectives.*

- Aleview world café
- Panel discussion
- Exchange information about our experiences living in Germany and the UK as a Alevi



5. Learn about challenges on Alevi's in different countries.

Interviewer: What challenges did you face as an Alevi when growing up?

UK

Participant: Growing up I found it hard to explain what my belief is and when I asked my parents about it they found it very challenging to explain.

GERMANY

Participant: There were many challenges, for example explaining my identity and where I belong within the Turkish community.


Interviewer: What challenges do you face now as a grown up?

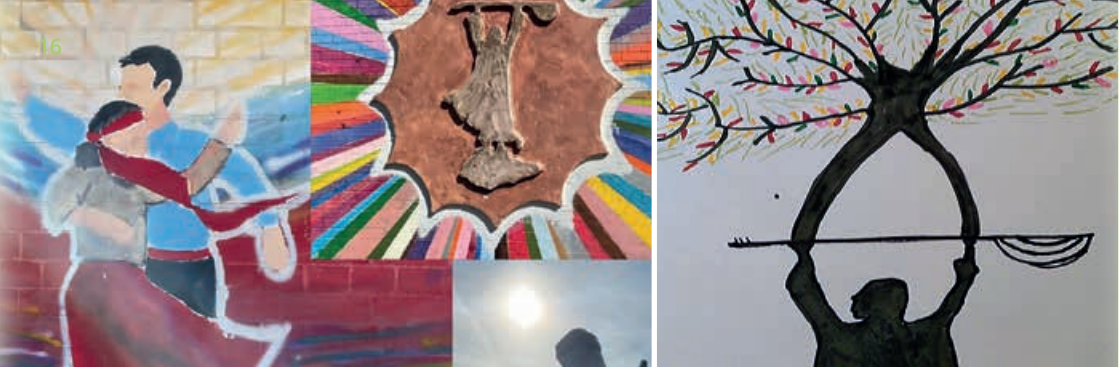
UK

Participant: I don't feel as challenged now as an adult as I find it less challenging to explain myself and I do not get discriminated by my peers due to my belief.

GERMANY

Participant: Now as a grown up it hasn't changed that I still need to explain what Alevism is but we are faced with more in-depth questions. The questions are not always about their interests but can be discriminating.





6. Allows you to be creative and to participate in different games.

- Art sessions
- Scavenger hunts
- Official sightseeing tours
- Alternative sightseeing tours
- Team games
- Discussions

(think outside the box)

7. *Opens you new doors by gaining and improving your skills.*

- Career opportunities
- Language
- Communication
- Education
- Confidence
- Team working
- Being independent
- Organisation
- Interview skills

8. *Encourages you to learn about different cultures.*

- Being open to different lifestyles
- British culture
- German culture
- Turkish/Kurdish British culture
- Turkish/Kurdish German culture



9. *You have fun!*





*10. You make
life long
friendships!*



ALEVIEW – PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE

Our first project in the field of international youth work over a period of two years! Together with the British Alevi Federation in Great Britain we started this project and were very excited...

Over the Easter holidays from April 14 to 18, a professional exchange between BDAJ and Alevi Youth Great Britain took place in London as part of the project.

Our federal chairmen Helin Tufan and Deniz Kasal, finance chairman Ali Haydar Kaya and education officers Gulistan Özmen-Tuncel and Özge Erdogan were together with Ali Arslan (chairman of the British Alevi Youth) and Mert Gürgür in London to plan the upcoming exchange events with the participants of the project to London and to Germany. In July, the participants of the project were supposed to go to London to meet the Alevi youth and in 2023 the exchange to Germany was supposed to take place. For this reason, the exchange of professionals took place beforehand in a small setting to plan the upcoming exchanges.

On the first day everyone arrived and at a common dinner we talked about the next days. We had so much planned!

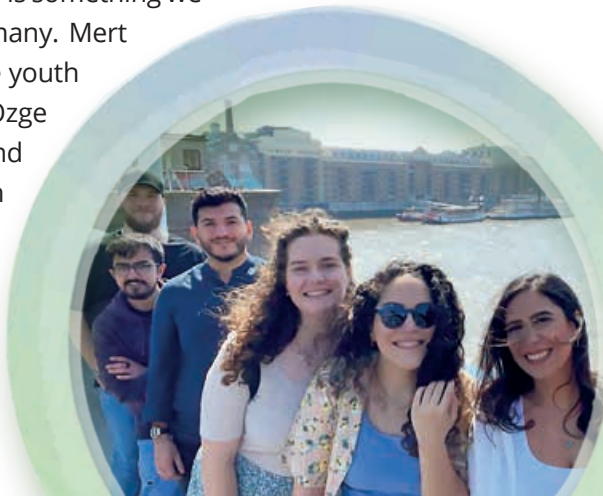
The next day, after breakfast, we boarded one of London's famous red buses and made our way to Wood Green to the Alevi Cultural Centre. We sat of course, like showcase tourists in the front of the bus and could see everything. For example, we drove





through Harringay, a district in London where a lot of Alevis live. When we arrived at the Cemevi, we were welcomed as warmly as if everyone had known us for a long time. We looked at the Cemevi for a while, including the Cem room, and then headed up to the meeting room to begin our session.

Ali Arslan gave us an introduction and explained the structure of the British Alevi youth Federation (BAYF), which was in a few aspects similar to the BDAJ's and yet very different. Ali Haydar then presented the structure of the BDAJ to the British side, and we got into conversation and talked for a while about similarities, differences and different possibilities that young Alevis have in the respective countries. Helin also gave a presentation about the migration of Alevis from Turkey to Germany. So of course, we also talked about experiences of discrimination in the respective regions, which surprisingly were not as high in London as in Germany. In London, the Alevi community is known to the majority society and the public, which is something we are still working on in Germany. Mert Gürgür introduced us to the youth associations in the UK and Özge to the youth associations and association structures in Germany. There were clear differences, and it became clear to us that Germany is better positioned. In the





end, we planned the further course and further content-related topics of the project together with our education officer Gulistan. After this long day we made our way back to the accommodation; we ate together and had a nice evening.

The next day was a sightseeing day because we checked out sightseeing locations for the upcoming exchange in July. We did a big circuit from the Tower of London to the Tower Bridge, Borough Market, London Bankside, Waterloo, Southbank Centre, Parliament Square, the Queen Victoria Memorial and ended up in the Theater District to eat. It was a wonderful day with great memories.

On April 17, that is, the next day, we went to visit the Britain Alevi Federation and the Alevi Cultural Centre in Enfield. It was one of the most interesting Alevi centers I have ever visited. It is a huge green area with several buildings. Great people welcomed us there and we looked at everything. There is a library with Alevi lite-

rature on site, sports like Kung Fu or soccer are offered. Courses are offered for baglama, art, piano, English, violin, math, guitar, chess, music, and also creative drama. It is amazing! There was a small trailer on the lawn that was converted for children to read and draw in it. After seeing everything, we were also allowed to record videos in German for the School of Alevism about Alevism, the Cem ceremony, Semah and the massacre of Sivas. The BAYF currently attaches great importance to informal education about Alevism, including modern media, to be able to offer English-speaking young Alevis a reliable source from which they can draw knowledge. They do this via their YouTube channel "School of Alevism", on which they publish self-produced informative short videos. Since these videos were also very well received by German Alevis, it quickly became clear that the German youth wanted to use their stay to shoot the same videos in German with the support of their British counterparts. Five videos have been shot, some of which have already been published at this point or are currently still being processed. This joint collaboration has initiated some thought processes and future plans within both associations that we can certainly look forward to in the future.

In addition to an exchange of information among the organisers, this April meeting was also used to plan the upcoming exchange in July 2022 for all participants in the best possible way. The result was a five-day program that was intended to give the participants of the project the opportunity to exchange ideas intensively about their Alevi identity, to experience Alevi life in London and, of course, to discover London itself. This was implemented through interactive games, a scavenger hunt and sightseeing tour through London, visits to the local Alevi cultural centers and Cem Evis, a world café on various topics and a panel discussion.

Helin Tufan







LONDON EXCHANGE

The participants of the Aleview project, while first meeting each other online in October 2021, came together in person in July 2022. The location for the first coming together of the entire group was the metropolitan giant of London, within which 5 days were spent together.

After monthly zoom meetings, wherein the youth from both countries (Great Britain and Germany) got to learn with each other, the London exchange made material what had only been virtual up to that point. Having spent 2 hours a month learning and discussing Alevism and political issues, the grounds were set



to solidify the bonds and realise what a young Alevi from the other country actually was.

The first encounter saw the participants travel from across England, Scotland and Germany to London. The anticipation and excitement among all those involved were palpable as each participant entered the hostel throughout the morning of July 7th.

Day 1

The morning of the first day was set aside for the arrival of the participants into our warm and welcoming hostel in the centre of London (Just a 5-10 minute walk from the tower of London!). After all participants had settled into their rooms, we went to one of the famous food markets near Liverpool Street station, the Spitalfields Market, for a late lunch. A true paradise for all food enthusiasts!

Then, on what was a beautifully summer day we walked to Poters Fields Park, located on the Thames River right next to Tower Bridge. There we had some icebreakers and games that lured even the quiet among of us out of their shells. After which it was already clear that we would harmonize perfectly as a group.

Day 2

The second day was scheduled to be the busiest day of our exchange. After breakfast at the hostel we started with a scavenger hunt through London. The participants were split into groups, and given a list of monuments, sights, streets, to find and take pictures with in an allocated time slot. The destination of the scavenger hunt was the Alevi community in Wood Green. Late commers were of course subject to deductions in their points but after tallying up the scores a winning group was crowned.

After a short breather and lunch prepared by the community centre, we were given a tour of the impressive cemevi building in Wood Green. Afterwards we went to the respective rooms of the world café. There were 5 rooms in which each group spent 30 minutes, before moving. In each slot there was a short presentation followed by open discussion. Our topics were the Alevi youth organisations in the respective countries, Alevi migration to the respective countries and finally the topic of Alevi philosophy. Keeping topics short and focused on interaction meant the session was filled with loads of engaging and interesting discussion.

That was not the end of our already very eventful day. In the evening there was a panel discussion at another location, the Cemevi in Enfield, for which we had to travel almost an hour by bus. On site, we also got a tour of the buildings and the





grounds where the British Alevi Festival takes place annually. We found the Alevi-influenced art in the form of murals, statues and paintings particularly impressive.

The subsequent panel discussion on the subject of “Representation of Alevi youth in Europe – achievements and future challenges” was well attended by other interested people of Alevi origin. On the panel were Özge Erdogan (current managing director and former national chair of the BDAJ), Ali Arslan (chair of the British Youth, BAYF), Dr. Ümit Cetin (Sociologist and Lecturer at the University of Westminster) and Ergin Erbil (Enfield City Council Member). This mixture of representatives of youth, science and politics enabled a constructive and diverse exchange.

Day 3

After the previous eventful and well-scheduled day, everyone was now looking forward to a day of sight-seeing. In morning everyone collectively went to the Old Royal Observatory in Greenwich for an unparalleled sight of the east of London atop the hill. The UK organizing team had then planned two different sightseeing tours each, a classic tour that visited the famous sights like the

London Eye, Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace and an alternative tour that visited places that were less commonly tourist destinations like e.g. Kings Cross, British Library, Camden Market and Primrose hill. So, everyone could choose according to their needs, which for many also depended on whether they had previously been in London.

Small side note: Everyone walked over 30,000 steps!

Day 4

Sunday morning was free for the participants, a well-deserved recovery period from the previous two days of learning and walking. Some used this time to sleep in, while others went back to visit other sights and markets. Afterwards, everyone gathered in the Cemevi at Wood Green, where we continued with the program. In our first activity the participants got together in binational groups and interviewed each other. How they live their Alevi identity in their home countries, in Great Britain and Germany, how they were informed about Alevism and about experiences of racism in relation to their Alevi existence. The interviews were filmed and have been processed for a short video on this topic which can be seen on our Instagram account in the Aleview highlights.



After the interview session, the participants gathered for a muhabbet in the Cem room of the cemevi. Ali Arslan, together with two other musicians, Mehmet Gungor and Hasan Huseyin Oyman, led this gathering, accompanied by their baglamas and tenburs. A muhabbet is ultimately the means of worship for Alevi. While translating literally to conversation, the muhabbet is an environment in which people can feel at rest, at peace and get a sense of relief. By listening to, playing, and singing music and by listening to and taking part in an honest and heartfelt discussion, the participants were not only talking about Alevism like you would do in a classroom, but they were living it, in practise. The songs were exchanged and at the end a semah was performed. After that, some participants stayed to continue making music together, while others went to a Turkish/Kurdish music festival. For the last evening together, everyone met again on the lawn by Tower Bridge to talk, dance halay and play games.



Day 5

After breakfast and checking out of the rooms, there was a short oral feedback round and a digital evaluation, where all areas of the exchange could ultimately be evaluated. Finally, we also took the time to give written, anonymous, and positive feedback to every single person along the way. In this way, the participants had a lasting and uplifting memory of this exchange.

And then it was time to say goodbye.

It's unbelievable how quickly the time passed and how much experience we've gained after this exchange. We came as acquaintances and left as friends and as Alevi allies in Europe. A strong community emerged from the Alevi encounter, full of appreciation and enthusiasm for one another.

GENDER EQUALITY IN ALEVISM

by Diren, Selin, Esra and Eda

The equality of men and women is a cornerstone of Alevism. Our faith speaks of the can (soul) and thus does not distinguish between man or woman. They are equal. However, from first- and second-hand experience we have realised that there is a discrepancy between reality and theory. Many Alevis have experienced gender discrimination in some shape or form. We wanted to analyse this further to learn more about the reality and perception of Alevis regarding gender equality. Therefore, we created a survey with a sample of 62 participants.

SURVEY

Demographics

Since most of our participants are in their twenties (figure 1) this survey gives insight into the thoughts and experiences of young Alevis in Germany and the United Kingdom. Apart from that, the survey shows that 79% of respondents are female (figure 2). Moreover,

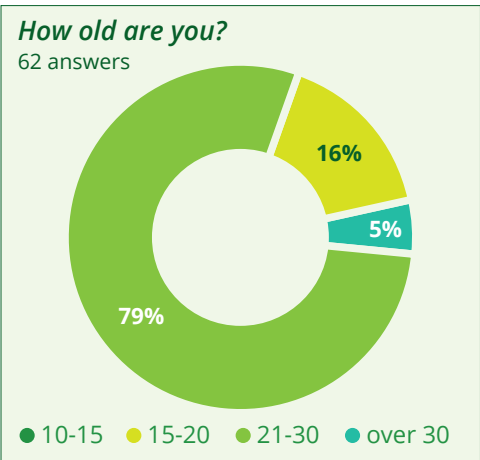


Figure 1

ver, the majority of participants had already engaged with the topic of gender equality (figure 3).

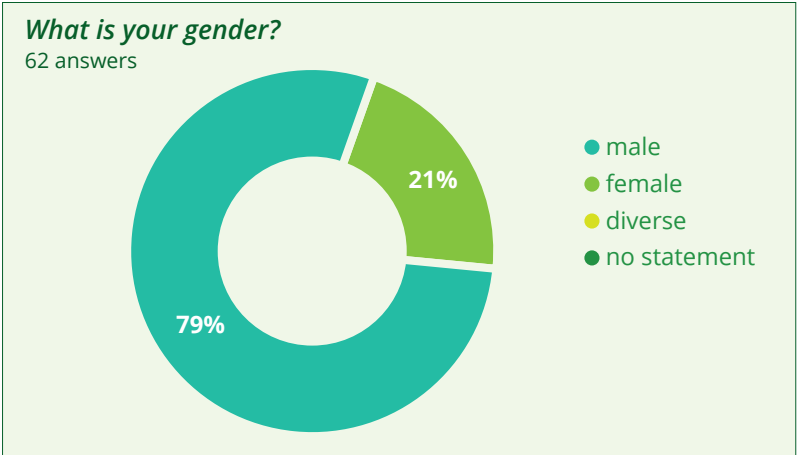


Figure 2

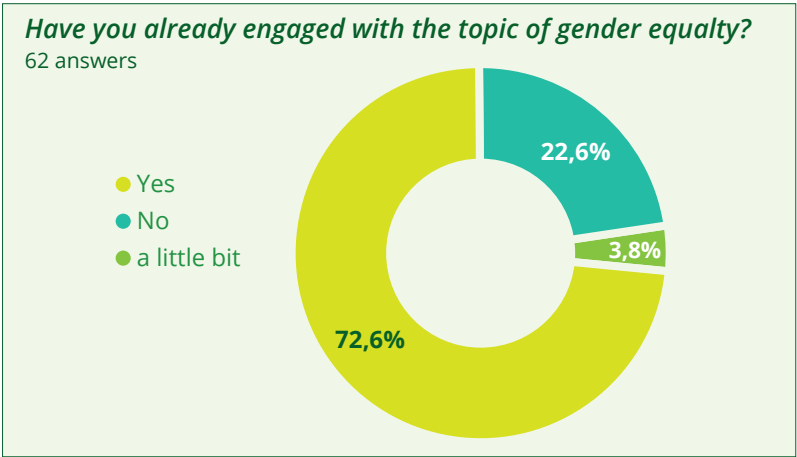


Figure 3

Gender Inequality

We conducted this survey because we wanted to find out if and to what extent Alevis experience gender inequality in their lives. Alevi teachings affirm gender equality. Beyond religious beliefs, our behaviour is always influenced by traditions, social norms, and culture, so there is a high likelihood that many Alevis, especially

women, experience gender inequality. About half of the participants believe there is no gender equality within Alevi communities (figure 4), and nearly 60% have experienced discrimination or inequality by family members in their own households (figure 5).

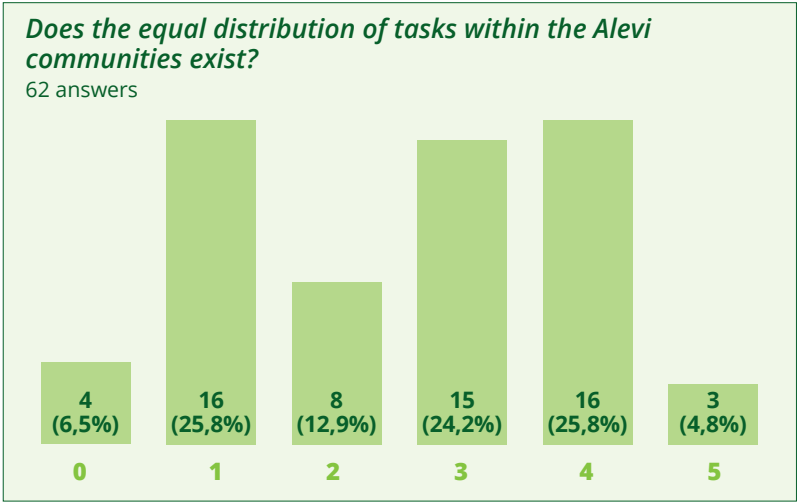


Figure 4

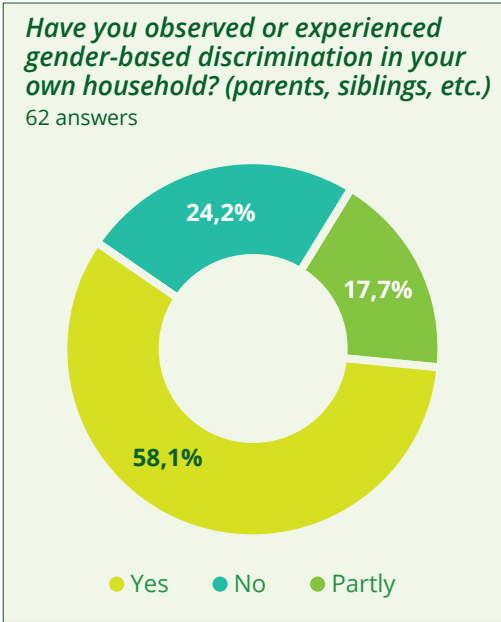


Figure 5

This can be seen with chores. Around 45% of participants claim that chores are not equally divided between male and female family members. On the other hand, roughly 42% state that the work is split partly. Only 13% have stated that chores are divided equally (figure 6). As stated above, religion comes hand in hand with a country's traditions.

Is there an equal division between care work and gainful employment in Alevi households?

62 answers

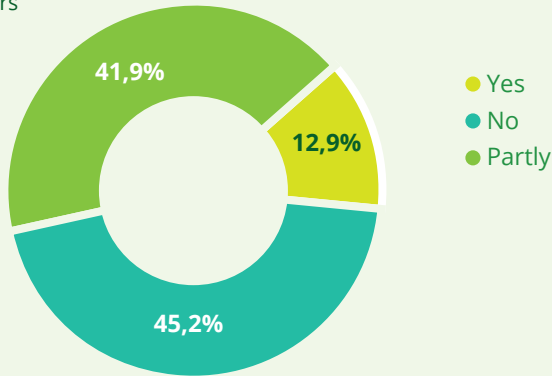


Figure 6

One example is the red ribbon tradition that brides have to wear on their wedding day. This tradition symbolises the bride’s “purity”, in other terms this is said to “prove” her virginity. It is usually frowned upon if a bride does not wear the red ribbon. We asked the participants whether the tradition of the red ribbon is in line with the teachings and tenets of Alevism and over 72% disagree with this tradition. Interestingly, 24% said that the red ribbon is partly in line with Alevism (figure 7). This could have the potential for further research and discussion.

Is the tradition of the Red Ribbon inline with the teachings and tenets of Alevism?

62 answers

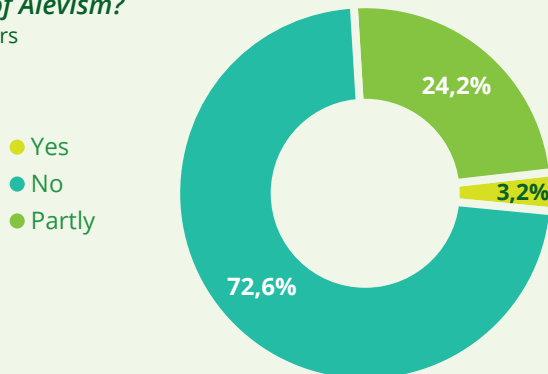


Figure 7

Through an open-ended question, the participants had the opportunity to name a couple of other traditions that came to mind where the relation to Alevism is unclear. The tradition that was mentioned the most is *kız isteme* or wedding traditions in general, followed by gender roles and family structures. In addition, more than once it was mentioned that there is also inequality between female and male clergy, although it should not exist, or the widespread belief that one can only become a Dede or Ana if there is a spiritual reference from the father's side. The presence of Anas' is also not as common, as 50% of our respondents confirmed that they do not have an Ana in their Cemevi (figure 8). This might reinforce the gap between Anas and Dedes. When asked about the origin of gender discrimination, most of the answers mentioned patriarchy, gender stereotypes, lack of education and an outdated societal mindset.

A tradition that came up quite often is *kurban/kurban bayramı*. We thought the topic of animal rights is worth mentioning. However, since this sparks up a different debate and to not go beyond the scope of this essay we will not dive further into this topic.

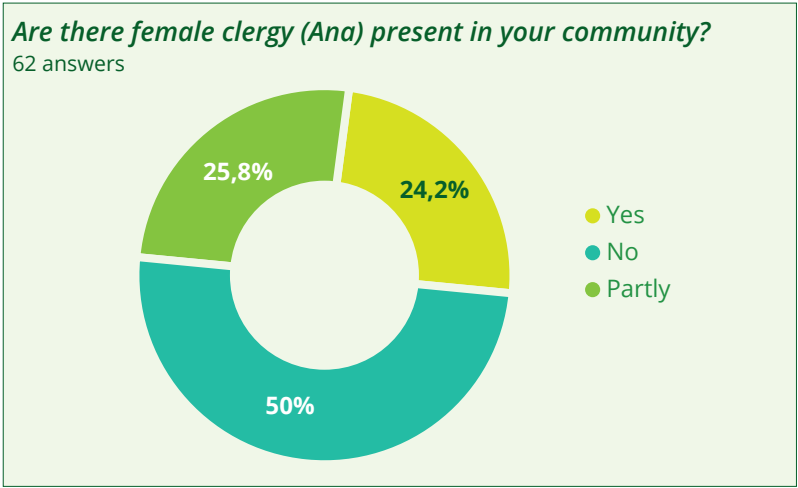


Figure 8

What can be done?

Next, we wanted to take a look at the current state of the youth organisations and what improvements could be made. For that, we asked if there were enough contact points or appropriate platforms to deal with gender discrimination in the first place. Sadly, around 63% percent said that there weren't and 30% do not know if there is a place to go when faced with discrimination (figure 9). Fortunately, almost 94% of respondents stated that in the youth

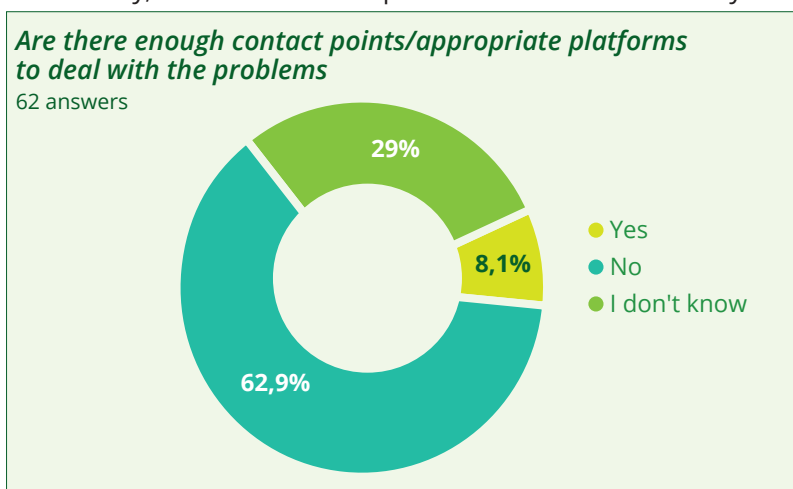


Figure 9

organisation there is better gender equality (figure 10). Since most youth are satisfied with the gender equality in our youth organisations, we asked what exactly it is that young Alevis like. Many pointed out the cooperation with each other on equal terms and the presence of many female chairwomen. Moreover, there is no separation between boys and girls or men and women. You hold discussions with each other, and everyone has the right and opportunity to voice their opinion. Furthermore, the answer about the feminist mentality among the youth, no matter the gender, comes up quite often. There are a few answers that talk about feeling proud, conscious, competent, and confident to see girls and women holding workshops, being in leadership positions and voi-

cing their opinions without fear. What can be inferred from these answers is the importance of visibility and representation. This is something that we as youth organisations have been doing well and should keep doing; facilitating marginalised people and giving them the chance to raise their voices.

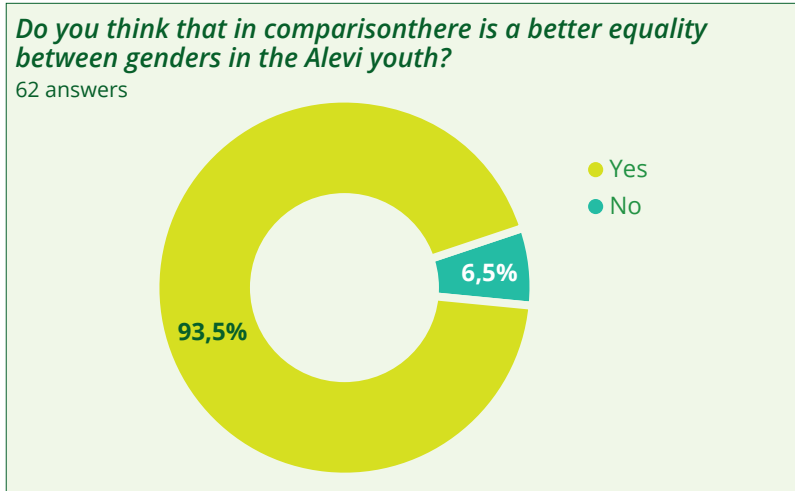


Figure 10

Last but not least, the participants had the chance to state what they would want to see more of regarding gender equality. These are some of the answers:

- Educational work (e.g. workshops, seminars, discussions...))!!
- Open communication about inequalities.
- Usage of learned knowledge.
- Reflection of one's own behaviour.
- More empowerment for girls and women.
- More room for LGBTQ+.
- Fighting for and empowering each other, regardless of gender.

To sum it up, our participants were very fond of this survey and that we are taking a closer look at gender discrimination in our youth organisations. This shows the big demand for this topic and that we have not reached our goal yet. Deconstructing current identities, ideals and patterns is crucial because without

questioning our behaviour we will not be able to change. Gender discrimination is influenced by sociocultural factors that are based on centuries of patriarchy. As a consequence, Alevism is affected by this as well. It is on us to fight gender discrimination for a more inclusive society and community.

Interview with a Dede

Besides the survey and looking at the reality in our society, we also wanted to look more into the theoretical teachings of Alevism. For this reason, we interviewed Pir Mahmut Yildiz Dede in Berlin, who is already 90 years old.

In the interview, he explained the importance of women in Alevism. One statement he always repeated was that *'hak kapisi* is the same as *ana kapisi'*. This can be translated as the gate of the mother (the birth) being the same as the gate of God. Women, mothers, and Anas are the origin of everything, the origin of life. Ana symbolises nature and has therefore a huge role in our faith. However, Pir Mahmut concedes that it is precisely this role of women that has been pushed into the background, while men have maintained their position. *'Kadınlar geri düstü ve dedeler önde kaldı'*. However, women have ensured the preservation of many traditions, such as bringing of Lokmas. *'Lokma nezaman yapılır ve delil nezaman yakılır ana iyi bilir'*.

We would have liked to get a perspective of an Ana on this topic and have a conversation with a female spiritual figure. Unfortunately, we were not able to arrange an interview with an Ana.

This concludes our essay on Gender Equality in Alevism. If you have any other suggestions or wishes that either your local Alevi organisation or the Alevi youth organisation as a whole should implement, do not hesitate to contact the people who are directly in charge!

Advice to Young Self/Youth

By Berna, Yagmur, Can & Ceren

Religion

As Alevis it has always been difficult to explain what we really are, regardless of your age or what country you were raised in. As a younger adult and teenager this becomes an even more difficult task. At a stage where you are forming opinions and beliefs it is very important to be confident and proud of what you are. Living in a country with many religions it is difficult to find and keep our own. As Alevis we have rituals, values, and traditions however they can be difficult to explain when asked. Many people answer what we are by saying what we are not, which can lead to further confusion for us and those who we are expressing ourselves to.

We should unlearn to justify ourselves; we do not have to explain ourselves, especially if we do not want to. It can be exhausting to constantly explain Alevism to others while at the same time growing up and finding your own way in life.

The baglama is seen as one important way to discover your religion within Alevism. It is sometimes referred to as the 'telli Kur'an'. Just like a huge part of Alevism, it is not mandatory for Alevis to learn how to play the baglama however integrating aspects of culture through the music is a good way to get involved with Alevism from a young age.

ADVICE

- Do not be denied what you are and how you feel by others.
- Be proud and confident.
- Remember that everyone can have different takes on life and this is normal.
- You should not be afraid to say who you are, what you believe in and how you practise your faith.
- Explain what Alevism is rather than what it is not.

Culture & Community

Throughout history and leading up to the present day Alevis, as a minority, have been discriminated against, as is unfortunately proven by our history of genocides and massacres. Even in diaspora, Alevis are exposed to exclusion and violence. They form a minority within the minority and are often unknown to the majority society in which they live. For young Alevis living in diaspora, it is difficult to come to terms with all the values and lifestyles that come from their own culture, exemplified by their parents and grandparents, and to reconcile this with the country in which they grew up. This usually makes it more difficult for young adults to form their identity, especially if they are socially and structurally discriminated against and are confronted with complex influences and experiences.

Living in a country with a variety of cultures makes it even more difficult to form your community or feel a sense of belonging. While you are given you the opportunity to create your own identity you are expected to fit in with another community. Young adults become confused about what culture to follow and accept.

ADVICE

- Inform yourself and increase your knowledge so that you can prove facts with well-founded arguments - as they say - knowledge is power.
- Find people and groups with whom you feel comfortable and can share openly with. Support each other.
- Never feel like you need to fit in, being yourself is the best thing you can be.
- It is okay to have a bit of everything, do not feel like you need to only belong to one.
- You do not have to justify and explain yourself.
- Keeping all that in mind your confidence can grow.

Identity

Through my personal perspective, I have been taught the identity of an Alevi by surrounding myself with people from the culture. Like many parts of Alevism, it is not something you can easily define, it is mainly explored and experienced uniquely shaping your view of the identity. By attending events such as a Cem, you enrich your knowledge of being an Alevi by hearing stories regarding Alevism but also gather a stronger understanding of the elements that form an Alevi, enabling you to explore your identity. Rituals such as the oniki hizmetler are also taught in these events to everyone who attends which ranges from young children to the elderly. To an extent, I do believe that the identity of an Alevi can be left for interpretation however there is also guidance and guidelines given.

At the same time, there are young people who do not grow up in a community centre or whose parents have not told them much about Alevism. They may come to terms with their Alevi identity at a later stage. These younger people are in search of their identity and cannot explain themselves as they may wish to. A better understanding of Alevism can be facilitated and supported through seminars and mutual exchange. Knowledge is once again a recurring and central element here.

ADVICE

- You do not have to explain yourself if you do not want to. Do not pressure yourself.
- You do not have to have everything figured out at once. Take your time and do not be afraid to ask.
- To learn and find one's identity is an ongoing and maybe never-ending process.
- Speak to people your age about your identity, they have questions too.
- Take your time to figure yourself out, without the intervention of others.

Youth

The socialisation of many young Alevis from England and Germany is often comparable to their origin from an educationally deprived and socially weak family with a history of migration. From an early age, many young people had to experience social grievances themselves and came into contact not only with racism from the mostly Christian community, but also with discrimination from the migrant, predominantly Sunni Turkish community. The sense of being different conveyed by these experiences not uncommonly led to an identity crisis in the youth, which raised again the question of home and belonging. In the search for supposed answers and the attempt to successfully integrate into the mainstream society, one or the other sacrifice had to be made to meet family and non-family expectations. Two spheres, each with different expectations, which at first sight seem to be incompatible. Finding a balance and a coherent combination of both spheres is a challenge that is posed to young people at an early age and too often must be mastered without supportive offers.

ADVICE

- Actively search for Alevi youth organisations and projects in your area that you can join.
- The exchange with people your age is very valuable, be brave and seek conversation, even on difficult topics!
- School achievements do not define you!
- Everyone believes and practises their religion in different ways.
- Non-belief is also an option.
- Growing up is hard, enjoy your youth years.
- Spend time to know yourself, your beliefs and religion.
- Ask as many questions as you can and want – do not be afraid to take the first step.
- It is no shame if you struggle sometimes, everyone does.

FINAL EXCHANGE IN BERLIN

The final coming together of the Alevview participants took place in July 2023. On occasion the passage of time can surprise us, and prior to the arrival of everyone in Berlin this was exactly the case for everyone involved in the project. The dates were set for a final 5 days together in Berlin.



While it may seem like after having spent two whole years talking about a wide variety of topics, from Alevism to the sociology of Alevis in diaspora to wider aspects of racism, there was still plenty to discuss. While planning the final in person meeting, the location was quite hotly debated, with Cologne and Berlin being the two main options. In end, Berlin, as the capital felt like the more fitting place to go to. With its unique history, unique character the capital of Berlin turned out to be the best choice to complete the exchange. In comparison to the fast-paced life of London, Berlin would demonstrate how different it always was for young Alevis growing up in the two respective countries of Germany and the UK.

Day 1

The morning of Thursday the 6th of July was travel day for everyone. With participants flying in from London, Glasgow and even Zurich, and others taking trains from across Germany 3pm most of the participants had safely arrived at the youth hostel in the east of Berlin. As was the case in the previous year in London, the exchange coincided with a warm spell of weather in the capital. Once everyone had arrived, a short tram journey took everyone to a Treptower park. Here time was spent re-connecting. Playing a few games helped bring everyone back together and back up to speed. After discussing the plans for the next few days the group returned to the hostel for dinner after which the evening was free to enjoy or rest up.



Day 2

As was the case the previous year day two was scheduled to be busy with an early start to the day. Following breakfast from 7am, at 8.45 the group convened by the entrance to start making their way to the Bundestag. Arriving well before the 10am target, the group was to meet Hakan Demir, member of the Bundestag for the Social Democratic party (SPD). While initially there were delays due to voting taking place at the Bundestag requiring all members to vote, Hakan Demir arrived in addition to another member of Bundestag Derya Turk-Nachbaur, also of the SPD. While Derya Turk-Nachbaur did not stay for the session and briefly left after briefly greeting the group, the rest remained as a discussion with Hakan Demir began. The participants had the opportunity to learn about his political career and history in addition to key topics on which he is working within the Bundestag. Being from an Alevi background, an important issue both for the participants and Hakan Demir is Alevi representation and issues of discrimination. In particular, the participants raise the long-standing issue of the presence of the perpetrators of the Sivas



massacre in Turkey in 1993 within Germany. Expressing the need for justice and a strong stance of Germany against both right wing extremism from Turkey and anti-Alevi racism. The discussion was also both ways in that the participants discussed their backgrounds and gave information on the situation of Alevis in the UK as well. Once finished discussing, the group was taken on a tour of the Bundestag, seeing the chamber where discussions are had and visiting various parts, including the rooftop of the renovated home of the German government.

Following the Bundestag, the group was treated to a tour of main attractions in Berlin. Two participants, Melinda and Seren, had volunteered to lead the tour and provide insights and facts about various parts of the city. Their meticulous planning and preparation made for a more educational tour. Starting from the Reichstag, walking past the memorial to the Sinti and Roma peoples, visiting the Brandenburg gate, the Holocaust memorial before heading for food. After which the group spent a few hours in the Pergamon museum. After leaving the museum everyone was thoroughly tired and headed back to the hostel for dinner and rest.



Day 3

The third day started at a slightly more reasonable time of 9.30am. After breakfast at the hostel, the group met in one of the rooms made available at the hostel for a series of workshops. Following some stretching exercises, the first workshop was on empowerment led by Gulistan Özmen-Tuncel and Özge Erdoğan. Incorporating group activities to reflect on the aspects of their lives. The workshop culminated in a group activity, where the participants had a friendly competition to work in groups and build the tallest structure possible from a set of rudimentary equipment and straw. This was followed by a short presentation on the adventure so far in Aleview by Dilara Kaya, reminding the participants about all the memories and people they had interacted with in the past two years. Before lunch the participants gave their gifts they had bought for each other, with everyone trying to guess who their secret Hizir (the Alevi version of secret



santa) was. After the lunch break, there was time for one more short workshop, this time on art and Alevism given by Ali Arslan. Having not confused the participants too severely with questions like what is art, the group set off for the second tour of Berlin, this time focused on the area called Kreuzberg in central Berlin. Once again this tour was organised by a participant Di-ren and resident Berliner, who took the group through various quarters of Kreuzberg and area famous for its communities of migrant workers of lower social and economic standing. Following dinner the evening came to an end with the participants taking off and enjoying some open air music, albeit from far away, in the warm Berlin evening.



Day 4

Like the previous years exchange, Sunday morning was left free and open to the participants. Of which some went out for some early morning tourist shopping, others went to see some more sights the city had to offer, while others still caught up on much needed sleep. The plan for the group was to meet at 2pm at Berlin Cemevi. After everyone had made their own way there, a quick tour was given of the Cemevi. Even though this was a Sunday, and a warm summers day, there were still people present at the Cemevi, some taking part in Semah lessons, others still enjoying time at their community centre. Following the tour, the group revealed their creative sides in a painting session. Inspired by the discussions on art and with their understanding of Alevism, each person



took to some acrylic painting of various Alevi symbols and images. Our participant Melinda helped lead the session sharing advice on how best to paint, in addition to sharing her own works to provide inspiration. This activity nicely transitioned the group into the muhabbet that took place at the Cemevi. The muhabbet was led by Ali Arslan, who was accompanied by local young musicians from Berlin. As is always the case a muhabbet creates an environment for introspection and for relief both felt intellectually and spiritually. By playing songs from the Alevi tradition, emotions are expressed that are in most cases difficult to explain. The key part of the muhabbet is however the discussions had between those leading and those joining, which in line with the projects aim took place entirely in English. After having sung and played and danced the Semah, the muhabbet came to satisfying end and the group went on to have some dinner. The last evening was spent together by a river, dancing halay, singing and playing some charades.

Day 5

After breakfast, everyone checked out of their rooms and carried out one final short evaluation. Then it was that dreaded time to say final goodbyes to the project. Everyone understood while the project may end the connections would remain. Since everyone had departures at different times, the participants left in ones or twos, giving time for everyone to say goodbye. The strength of the bond between the participants of AleviView is a beauty to behold. On occasions with such youth groups a nice atmosphere is created though can remain somewhat at the surface level. The past two years however has changed and added to the lives of everyone involved and so in the final hours together the group had to somehow express the pride of a two year journey coming to an end. All the participants would view the past years with a smile and a bag full of memories and new insights, but more than anything they would be content that the view they got was an Alevi one, as was promised by AleviView.



AFTERWORD: CELEBRATING UNITY AND DIVERSITY – A JOURNEY OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE

As we come to the end of this remarkable exchange project for Alevi Youth from the United Kingdom and Germany, we take a moment to reflect on the transformative experiences and profound connections forged throughout this journey of cultural exchange.

From the very beginning, our shared vision of building bridges and fostering understanding among Alevi youth from two different nations propelled us forward with enthusiasm and determination. Over the past two years, we have witnessed the power of dialogue, collaboration, and friendship in breaking down barriers and embracing diversity.

Throughout the project, we had the privilege of engaging in deep discussions, workshops, and activities that allowed us to explore our common heritage, traditions, and beliefs. These exchanges not only enriched our knowledge of our Alevi background but also opened our hearts and minds to the richness of our unique cultural identities.

We are immensely proud of the diverse group of passionate participants and committed officials who made this project a reality. Each individual brought their unique perspectives and experiences, contributing to the wealth of insights and the spirit of unity that defined our journey.

Together, we tackled challenging topics, addressing issues of exclusion, racism, and inequality. We empowered each other to be advocates for social cohesion, promoting empathy and unders-

tanding as we navigated the complexities of our cultural heritage within modern societies.

Our digital and in-person encounters facilitated meaningful connections, breaking geographical boundaries and creating a sense of global solidarity. The friendships that blossomed between Alevi youth in the UK and Germany will continue to serve as a testament to the enduring impact of cultural exchange.

As we bid farewell to this formal project, we cherish the lasting connections and memories we have made. We carry with us the spirit of "ALEVIEW" as we step into our futures, armed with new perspectives and a profound appreciation for the value of diversity.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals, organizations, and institutions that made this project possible. The support and dedication of the British Alevi Federation, the Bund der Alevitischen Jugendlichen in Deutschland (BDAJ) e.V., and the funding from the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) were instrumental in realizing this dream.

To all our fellow participants, organizers, and partners: thank you for embarking on this incredible journey with us. Let us continue to celebrate our unity and diversity, carrying the spirit of "ALEVIEW" in our hearts, as we embrace a future of understanding, respect, and cooperation.

With the bonds we have formed and the lessons we have learned, we confidently look forward to making a positive impact on our communities and the world at large. This is not the end; it is just the beginning of a lifelong commitment to creating a more inclusive, compassionate, and interconnected world.

Together, as young Alevi advocates, let us stand strong and continue walking our "yol" our path together.

***With heartfelt gratitude and boundless hope,
The "ALEVIEW" Project Team***

Impressum

Herausgeber:
Bund der Alevitischen Jugendlichen
in Deutschland e.V. (BDAJ)
Stolberger Str. 317
50933 Köln

Telefon: 0221 94985642
E-Mail: Info@BDAJ.de

www.BDAJ.de

Amtsgericht Köln Vereinsregister Nr. 19334

Redaktion:
Gulistan Özmen-Tuncel

Layout:
Adrian Brachman

Druck:
dieUmweltDruckerei

Fotos:
BDAJ

Illustrationen:
S. 12: freepik/aopsan, S. 13: freepik/atlascompany,
S.17: freepik/ luis_molinero



