Weaving the Digital Fabric Between Newcomers & Locals

Aiding Integration with Start with a Friend

Gillian Ebeling, Michael Geary, Emily Lin, John Marcotte

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Aiding Integration with Start with a Friend

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by
Gillian Ebeling
Michael Geary
Emily Lin
John Marcotte

Abstract

Germany has accepted over one million displaced people since 2015, becoming one of the top countries in the world to do so. Germany has also had an extensive history of immigration, dating back to 1685 with the Edict of Potsdam, allowing French refugees to settle in Berlin. Since then, Germany has continued to improve and add to its immigration policies to help newcomers to the country. Although there are policies that help newcomers, there are also barriers that prevent them from integrating such as discrimination, trauma, and xenophobia. Therefore, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) are relied on to fill gaps in policy, helping to integrate these newcomers in Germany. Start with a Friend (SwaF) is one of these NGO's, using its Tandem matching program to build social networks for newcomers among other programs. As of 2022, SwaF has created over 7,800 Tandem pairs. However, its database was built in 2015, when the organization was first founded, and cannot keep up with SwaF's growing demands as it expands to locations across Germany and Austria. Our team created a prototype of a new database using the Agile framework to iterate based on feedback of our prototype. We worked closely with our sponsor to gain feedback and created an evaluation form to be completed by SwaF employees who create matches after interacting with our prototype. Before creating this prototype, however, we conducted a literature review, collected first-hand accounts of migration, and observed SwaF to learn about SwaF's operations through the lens of Germany's history of migration. This was essential to develop solutions that work for both the participants of the program and SwaF's employees. We then evaluated the current database and determined necessary improvements through workshops that consisted of actual users of the database. This allowed us to create a successful prototype, tailored to the needs of the organization, and helping SwaF in their goal to have a new, improved, and more efficient database. By aiding SwaF's Tandem matching process, our project will contribute to the overall humanistic effort to integrate newcomers in Germany.

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Weaving the Digital Fabric: An Overview

As of mid-2021, over 84 million people worldwide have been displaced from their country of origin, more than any other time in history according to the United Nations[2]. Of these displaced people, Germany has accepted 1.2 million since 2015, placing the country amongst the top 5 in the world last year for the number of displaced people accepted. Germany's acceptance of displaced people stems from its history. The nation's responsibility for World War II, during which 60 million people fled from war and genocide, led to a collective desire in Germans to correct these wrongs (known as Vergangenheitsbewältigung)[3]. After the War, Germany invited "guest-workers" to address labor shortages that had resulted from the displacement of workers and the loss of life brought by the war. These guest-workers, most of whom came from Turkey, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Yugoslavia, were expected to leave Germany after their contracts expired. Their contracts were extended multiple times, however, and many of the erstwhile guest-workers became permanent residents—without any integrative planning by the German government. In light of this history, Germany has adopted new policies toward welcoming and integrating immigrants, especially within the last decade.

Berlin has led the country in actively welcoming and integrating migrants through proactive government policies. As early as 1685, Friedrich Wilhelm enacted the Edict of Potsdam to give French Huguenot refugees a guaranteed tax-free status in addition to religious freedom[6]. Leikkilä, Faehnle, and Galanakis reported that communities of diverse ethnicity have existed within Berlin since World War II, with specific inner-city neighborhoods in West Berlin hosting a diverse set of foreign newcomers dating back to the late 1960s and 70s[7]. Following World War II, the city's policies evolved to promote the participation of ethnic groups in communal bodies throughout the city. However, the Berlin city government must do more to adequately support diverse newcomers and empower these communities. According to de Graauw and Vermeulen the needs of all newcomers, especially those displaced by conflicts such as the Syrian civil war, demand greater attention and support[8].

Newcomers still struggle in many ways to live in Germany. For example, many newcomers to Berlin face psychological stressors that affect their ability to integrate. According to EL-Awad, many refugees moving to Berlin have experienced trauma, as most refugees have experienced potentially traumatic events before migration[9]. Furthermore, certain groups within German society actively discriminate against newcomers to their country, with many more apathetic to the struggles that migrants face when adjusting to German culture. This is evident in the support for right-wing populists such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and PEGIDA, with both providing a platform for anti-immigrant rhetoric[10]. Despite legislation to counter systemic prejudice toward newcomers, discrimination against

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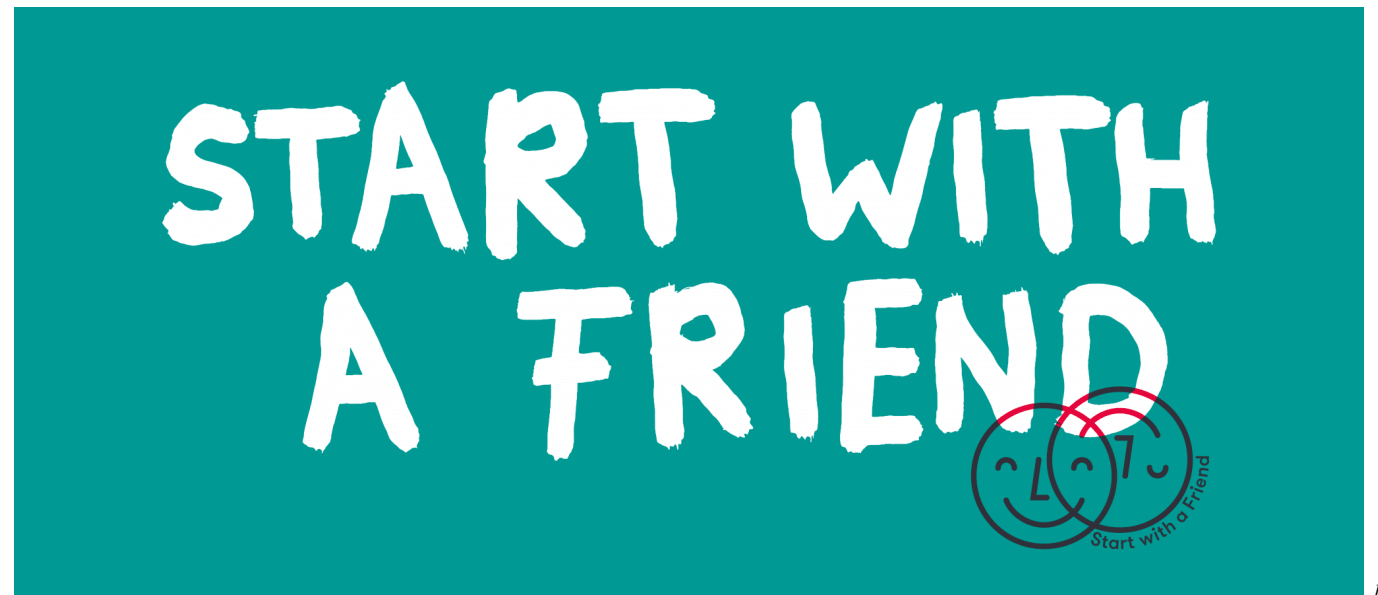
immigrants has not been eliminated in the communities these laws affect. As a result, the remaining burden of integration is left to NGO's.

The young NGOs supporting newcomers to Germany often operate under tight budgets and resources. When Start with a Friend (SwaF) first began in 2015, it was challenged by the financial constraints associated with small NGOs. As a result, its database was developed by a third-party developer using generic tools to cut costs. As SwaF has expanded to different locations across Germany and even Austria, the requirements for this tool have changed, but the current system cannot adapt. In order to remedy the shortcomings of the database, SwaF hired a full-time software developer to build a new database. Our team's goal was to evaluate and improve Start with a Friend's Tandem database in conjunction with the new software developer. Our objectives were threefold. First, we evaluated SwaF's mission and operations through the lens of Germany's history of immigration. Next, we defined what a successful Tandem database looks like for its various stakeholders through requirement workshops with SwaF's Bundesteam and Local teams. Finally, we worked within Agile Framework to produce and evaluate prototypes of the SwaF database. The Agile Framework to allow for dynamic feedback that can address new insights made during our continuous research. This will lay the groundwork for future prototypes to be successful and help create vision for the final database that can achieve SwaF's goals.
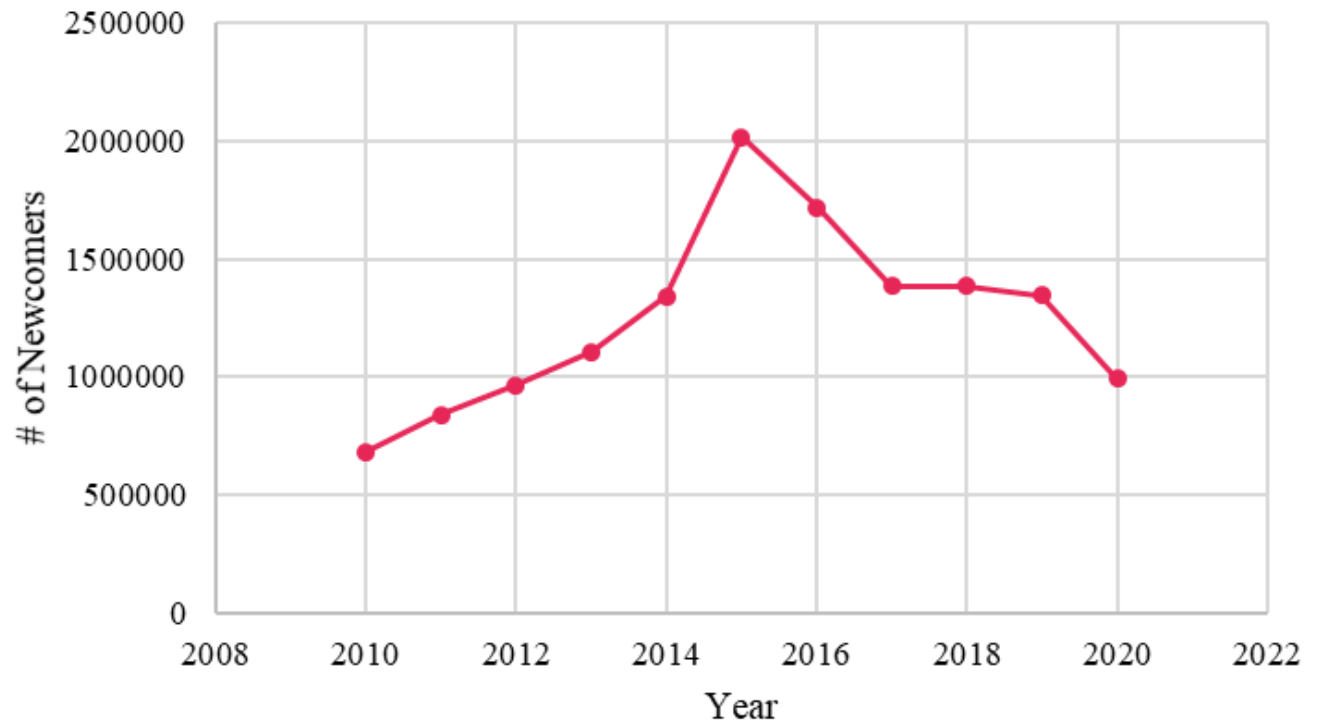

Figure 1: The Number of Newcomers Migrating to Germany from 2010 to 2020[5]

Background

Historical Influence on Immigration to Germany

In 2015, Germany took a bold response to the Syrian refugee crisis by allowing large numbers of displaced refugees to claim asylum. That year, 2,135,954 immigrants arrived in Germany, many of whom were Syrians fleeing a civil war in their country[11]. The European Parliament defines refugees as "people with fear of persecution who have been accepted and recognised by their new country"[12]. Thus asylum seekers to the European Union (EU) are not refugees until the host country agrees that they can stay. In addition, they are required to apply for asylum in the first country they enter in the EU and receive no international protection until they are officially declared refugees. The legal status given by Germany to asylum seekers allowed them to skirt previous EU mandates requiring asylum seekers to claim residency in the country where they first arrive[13]. Germany's actions allowed over 1.2 million asylum seekers, the majority of whom are Syrian, to claim, or attempt to claim, asylum in Germany. As of 2021, Germany hosts 59% of the Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees who settled in Europe[2]. Germany is now the third most popular immigrant nation in the world with one out of every four people being an immigrant or a direct descendent of an immigrant[7].

Germany's guilt for the Second World War, which has manifested itself in a decades-long process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung (*coming to terms with the past), influenced the national response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in 2015. Fleeing war and genocide, 60 million people were displaced from their homes in the middle of the twentieth century[3]. As many as 14 million German-speaking civilians who lived in the surrounding countries were forced out of their homes into the Ally-occupied ruins of Germany[14]. Because of the situation created during World War II, many Germans feel a special obligation to support the refugees coming from Syria to atone for previous actions.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung —

coming to terms with the past

Another historical factor that influenced Germany's response to aid Syrian refugees was native Germans' hostile response to foreign "Gastarbeiter" ("guest-workers") and subsequent lack of integration assistance. Due to a labor shortage post-World War II, Germany signed treaties starting in 1955 with Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Portugal, and Yugoslavia to bring in hundreds of thousands of workers[15]. The treaties outlined expectations that the

Germany hosts 59% of the Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees who settled in Europe

- Germany - All Other European Countries

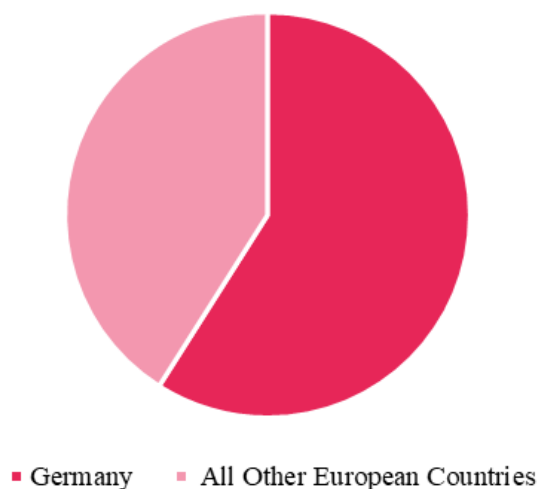**Figure 2: Germany hosts 59% of the Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees who settled in Europe during the Syrian refugee crisis[2]**

workers were to be replaced and returned home after two years of labor because they didn't want the workers to migrate permanently. However, due to expensive and time-consuming efforts to replace workers frequently, the treaties were changed multiple times, and, as a result, workers stayed longer than expected. Many of these workers permanently relocated to Germany with their extended families[16]. Among these newcomers, the Turkish workers, in particular, were met with resentment and rejection due to a "threat of cultural difference"[17]. As a result of the foreign background of guest-workers, the workers were not given "rights of their own or a clearly defined status as immigrants". In addition, since the 1970s, when the number of Turks amounted to almost 470,000, there had been a growing unwillingness to rent property to Turkish immigrants. This practice was based on xenophobic stereotypes and unreasonable fear of damage to property. Their racial background and Muslim religion marked them as outsiders. As a result, discrimination negatively impacted Turkish migrants' attitude toward integration in Germany. According to a 2009 study by the Berlin Institute for Population and Development, the 2.5 million Germans with a Turkish background were deemed to be the "least integrated" racial/ethnic minority based on political participation, income earned, and education level. Germans with a Turkish background scored behind immigrants from the former Yugoslavia and Africa, the Middle East, southern Europe, the Far East, and other EU countries[18]. In addition, fewer than one third of German-born Turks sought to obtain German citizenship due to high unemployment rates and lower rates of educational attainment when compared to other groups.

Many Germans believe that Germany should learn from the failure to integrate guest-workers and atone for the atrocities committed during the Second World War by welcoming Syrian refugees with open arms. When speaking to the German parliament, Angela Merkel said that "those who come to [them] as asylum seekers or as war refugees need [their] help so they can integrate quickly," and that it is also important to help people learn German and find a job quickly[19]. Merkel told the German parliament that "many of them [Syrian refugees] will become new citizens of [Germany]" and that they "should learn from the experiences of the '60s when [they] asked Gastarbeiter to come to [them] and make integration the top priority from the start." Merkel's words demonstrate the commitment many Germans hold to improving the integration of newcomers to their country.


Map of the different German states[20]

Immigration Policy in the Federal Republic of Germany

German policies on immigration have continuously evolved to meet new challenges; however, some newly enacted laws were not motivated with the interest of migrants in mind. These laws did not go far enough to embrace a fuller integration and in some cases, have even worked to disenfranchise migrants and refugees. According to Gottlieb & Schülle, policies enacted during the Yugoslav wars (1991 to 2001) made it difficult for refugees to seek asylum in Germany[21]. For example, the 1992 "Asylum Compromise" banned refugees from claiming refugee status when they had arrived in Germany through a "safe country". In 1993, this policy was followed by the "Asylum Seeker Benefits Act", which gave asylum seekers limited healthcare outside of the German welfare system. While these policies enforced some rights for refugees in the country, the refugee community was left with insufficient resources as the deeper need for refugee integration and support were still not seen as a policy priority.

Presently, Germany's asylum process is more robust than the policies developed in the early 1990s, settling newcomers across the country and offering them improved services aimed to assist with integration. After arrival in Germany, asylum seekers are interviewed by the German government to determine if they can claim asylum[22]. If they are accepted, the Königsteiner Schlüssel, a quota system, distributes them across the country[23]. Asylum seekers are assigned to one of the 16 German states and are then allocated to local municipalities or district administrations[21].
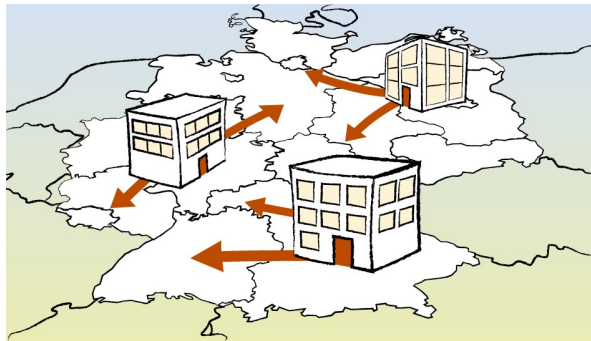
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Then, they are granted refugee status along with a temporary residence permit and are allowed on the federal social insurance system on the same level as native Germans. They are also granted child benefits, child-raising benefits, integration allowances, and free language courses. Depending on the ability of an individual to function in German society, an integration course may be required, and is designed to improve this ability[25]. Additionally, the Federal German Government funds migration advising to help immigrants through the immigration crisis. They will provide immigrants with a social worker to help them look for jobs, housing, and work through daily life in Germany. These services help refugees to create a normal life in Germany and integrate into society, in addition to marking a major step forward from prior immigration policy.

While the current asylum system in Germany offers robust support for asylum seekers, German politicians are working to expand the support offered to newcomers. Potential legislation currently being pushed by the coalition of the Social Democrats, Green Party, and the FDP in the German government aims to address these issues and give increased support for German immigrants on the national level beyond what is already in place[26]. The parliament created a policy that specifically aims to reduce the process time for asylum seekers, provide certain legal rights to current immigrants with no legal status, reduce the barriers to achieve full citizenship, allow dual citizenships, and promote family reunification among many other policy points.

The stages of the asylum procedure[24]

Some political parties, namely The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), actively campaign against supporting asylum seekers and refugees. The AfD is a radical right, nativist, and authoritarian political party[27]. As of March 2022, the AfD was even categorized as a suspicious entity, which was held up through a court hearing, allowing German intelligence to surveil the party[28]. The AfD opposes pluralism, constitutional protection of minorities, and a civic notion of citizenship, which are central principles of liberal democracy. In 2019, researchers analyzed data from the 2013-2017 German Longitudinal Elections Study tracking polls using multilevel modeling. The analysis helps to explain why the AfD was able to rise, revealing that negative biases towards immigration combined with overall right-wing beliefs are the core incentives to support the AfD. This is reflected in the 2017 AfD Manifesto, which also displays the work AfD does against policies advocated by the current coalition of the Social Democrats, Green Party, and the FDP in the German government[29]. For example, the manifesto states "the AfD demands an end to unlimited family reunions for approved asylum seekers, as this opens the door to a direct and permanent influx of new migrants into the social security systems." The AfD's advertisements reflect their biases against immigrants. One advertisement (see Figure 3), showing a picture of a pregnant woman, reads: "New Germans? Let's do it ourselves" to discourage immigration in Germany[30]. The AfD campaigns against the integration of immigrants to create their vision of a racist, exclusive, and authoritarian Germany.

Figure 3: AfD Advertisement, "New Germans? Let's do it ourselves".[28]

Immigration Policy in Berlin

Berlin has its own long and unique history of immigration and integration, enacting contradictory policies that both discourage and support integration in the city. This includes policies that predate those of the national government[22]. Since the 1960s, inner-city neighborhoods in West Berlin have experienced immigration, internationalizing already multicultural neighborhoods. This early wave of immigration pushed Berlin to enact policies earlier than the national government. In particular, Berlin introduced policies in the 1980s that sought to reduce its large immigrant population[8]. However, other policies were passed in tandem with a law aimed to help naturalize second and third-generation Turkish immigrants; the children and grandchildren of those brought over from the guest-workers program. Policy makers gave the enacted policies the slogan "integration or departure", presenting newcomers with the ultimatum: integrate or leave. One can infer that the term "integration" was used to cover up the overt desire of these policy makers to assimilate immigrants. These racially motivated policies were based on valuing a homogeneous "German" community over a more diverse culture, especially when regarding non-European traditions of Turkish newcomers. Racism towards non-white newcomers played a significant factor in their lack of early integration, which can still be seen today.

In the 21st century, Berlin continues to develop its own immigration policies. In 2000, the Berlin Senate published its first integration plan, which promoted immigrant participation in communal bodies such as local government, educational institutions, social services, and neighborhood institutions[8]. This policy aimed to bridge the gap between immigrants and minorities, and the broader Berlin community by getting immigrants and minorities involved in government and other institutions. To display further support for the integration of immigrants, the first Berlin Senator for Integration Affairs was appointed, and the name "Ausländerbeauftragte" (Commissioner of Foreigners' Affairs) was changed to "Integrations- und Migrationsbeauftragte" (Commissioner for Integration and Migration). These accommodations in Berlin and German policy show a willingness by local

and national governments to support newcomers to their communities, and that the needs of newcomers can and should be accounted for through policy and social program support.

Factors for and Barriers to Successful Integration

The effort to integrate newcomers involves several factors related to the environment, levels of stress and trauma endured, and discrimination endured. These factors reveal gaps in current policy which need to be addressed and provide direction for future action to improve integration. First, psychological influences constitute an important factor that shapes a newcomer's ability to integrate successfully into a new environment. A study exploring Syrians' integration into Germany used the Multidimensional Individual Difference Acculturation (MIDA) model to research psychological factors[31]. The researchers found that psychological strength is important to integration. It is associated with lower levels of psychological distress in addition to having fewer poor physical symptoms. Psychological distress negatively correlates with both cultural competence and support outside the refugee group. Therefore, a newcomer is less likely to be enduring psychological distress when they receive support from outside of their group and have cultural competence. Distress is mediated by orientation to host culture, which means that learning and understanding German traditions and culture may aid Syrians in decreasing their psychological distress. Some examples of potentially helpful psychological resources are guides to daily

tasks (food-shopping, for example), help finding jobs, counseling, general health resources, and access to psychological evaluations.

Many refugees coming to Germany already face mental health challenges[9]. As shown in Figure 4, up to 97% of refugees have experienced potentially traumatic events associated with war, violence, rape, or grief before migration, creating a prevalence rate of post-traumatic stress disorder of 40-60% (Figure 4). After arrival, refugees show only marginal increases in mental health, along with an increase in post-

migration stress. This stress, frequently associated with tasks such as establishing new relationships, learning a new language, learning about a new culture, and acquiring other relevant knowledge, accounts for a significant amount of variance in depressive symptoms.

Additionally, connecting to natural environments enables newcomers to form new memories, compare their new country to their old country, and feel nostalgia for their home (if this home has a similar ecology to their new country)[32].

% of Refugees who Experience Potentially Traumatic Events

■ Experienced Event(s)   ■ No Experienced Events

Prevalence of PTSD in Refugees

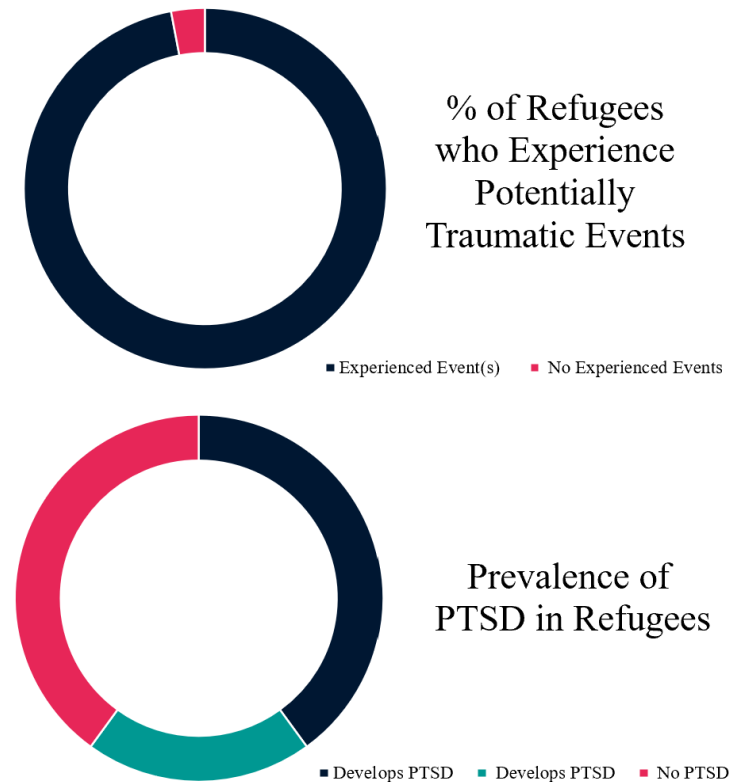■ Develops PTSD   ■ Develops PTSD   ■ No PTSD

Figure 4: Percent of Refugees Who Experience Potentially Traumatic Events and Prevalence of PTSD in Refugees[9]

This connection can help to decrease stress and improve concentration through the relaxing effects of nature. Furthermore, discovering new environments can help newcomers manage daily life while they begin to envision a future in their new country. Unfortunately, the role of connecting to natural environments in integration is largely overlooked[7]. Researchers interested in this connection interviewed immigrants in the Helsinki metropolitan area of Finland. Their interviews revealed that immigrants feel more comfortable with urban nature and want to get involved in urban planning. The immigrants wanted to know more about their neighborhoods in particular. Involving immigrants in land use planning

Viktoriapark, Berlin
April 23, 2022 John Marcotte

can help immigrants to feel more at home, creating a larger sense of belonging and aiding integration.

Policy is unable to fully address the discrimination experienced by many immigrants in Germany, such as anti-Syrian sentiments that are alive and well. Some Germans have expressed an unfounded fear that the Syrian refugees are extremists who may attack the German population[13]. Based on dozens of interviews with Syrian refugees, Lily Hindy concluded that many interviewees had experienced being characterized as extremists by Germans. One Syrian family joked about how some Germans believe that all the Syrian refugees are cousins of Osama bin Laden. Despite their lighthearted manner, the family was pointing out the injurious prejudices Syrian refugees face. Furthermore, one Syrian refugee shared that he experienced discrimination at a town hall when the audience was whispering anxiously that he could be an extremist. Discrimination is reflected in a wide set of issues, such as difficulty in finding independent housing. Several interviewees stated that landlords are afraid of Syrian refugees, thinking that refugees bring problems.

The discrimination faced by Syrian refugees, many of whom practice Islam, is similar to the discrimination faced by Turkish immigrants. One example of the discrimination faced is how the terms "Turk" and "Muslim" have been used interchangeably[33]. This is inaccurate: Germany's Muslim population is made up of people from Iran, Iraq, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Albania, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, and Lebanon. Additionally, not everyone from Turkey practices Islam. Studies have shown proof of discrimination of Turkish and Muslim Germans. Specifically, one study found that when looking at two equally qualified job applications, employers will choose to employ an applicant with a German name rather than one with a Turkish or Arabic name[13]. Another study found that when teachers grade two papers of equal quality, a higher grade is given to the paper with a German name than the paper with a non-German name.

Furthermore, German politicians and members of German society have debated whether Muslims should be able to immigrate into Germany at current rates due to fears of Middle Eastern newcomers posing a threat to the German way of

Furthermore, German politicians and members of German society have debated whether Muslims should be able to immigrate into Germany at current rates due to fears of Middle Eastern newcomers posing a threat to the German way of living. The sentiment is fanned by politicians, biased media coverage, and certain online circles. Specific incidents motivating these fears include the 2015-16 New Year's celebration in Cologne, where more than 1,200 criminal complaints were made, with 511 of them involving sexual assaults[34]. These crimes were perpetrated by a crowd of primarily North African newcomers. As a result, a heated national conversation began questioning Germany's welcoming culture to migrants. Groups like the AfD were able to gain traction in subsequent elections, although no long-term policy was enacted in response to the event. As a result of increased media coverage, and media being pushed by the AfD, some Germans questioned the widely accepted open attitude of Germany towards immigration. These unfounded fears and attitudes have a real effect on the newcomer's sense of belonging.

Some Germans have even gone as far as to show their discriminatory views through large social movements, such as the demonstrations by the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA). PEGIDA is a far-right movement that discriminates against immigrants in Germany[35]. Far-right activists had been heavily campaigning against refugees and asylum policies they found too liberal after the number of asylum seekers rose in 2009. These far-right activists held demonstrations to show their frustrations. Around 4,500 right-wing populists went to the streets in Cologne in 2014, many even clashing with police. Lutz Bachmann created Pegida as a Facebook group in 2014 in response to the events in Cologne. The group grew, and its early leadership had little to no previous exposure to professional politics[36]. The group began having rallies, the first of which took place in Dresden on October 20, 2014, with 350 participants. By January of 2015, 25,000 people were attending these rallies in various cities across Germany[35]. This growth can be seen in Figure 5. In many German cities, localized initiatives similar to PEGIDA began to form. In January of 2015, PEGIDA began to lose respectability as Bachmann's character became called into question; first, global headlines circulated a picture in which Bachmann had dressed as Hitler, and then [the media] revealed racist statements by Bachmann[36]. As the extremism of PEGIDA became clearer, attendance at rallies declined and its supporters transitioned to similar but more mainstream groups such as the AfD. While PEGIDA stopped having rallies after January 2015, it still offers "evening strolls." In spring and early summer of 2016, between 1,800 and 3,600 people took part in these "evening strolls" every week, which can also be seen in Figure 4. While the group is not active in the German parliament, the idea of right-wing populism that the group stands for is still present.
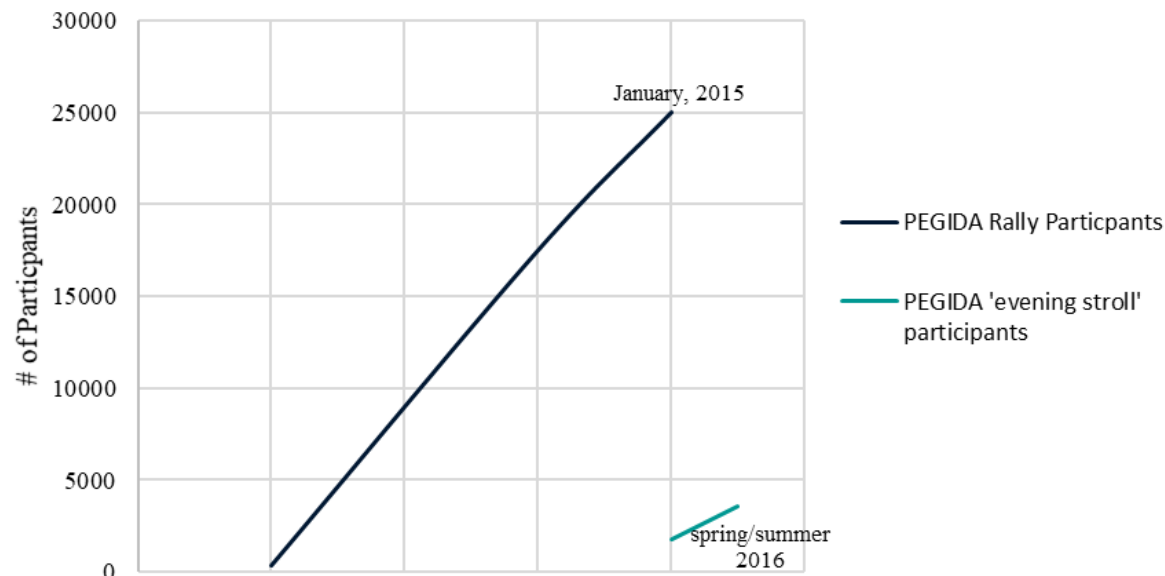

Figure 5: Rise in PEGIDA Rally Participants[35]

Beyond overt discrimination, Turkish and Syrian immigrants have experienced pressure to "assimilate" to their new host country by abandoning their cultural heritage and traditions to become "perfectly German". This stems from a German fear of belonging to a "divided country", dating well before the 20th century Germany as a result of divides between North and South Germany, Protestants and Catholics, and class divides in the Weimar Republic[37]. To decrease this sense of divide and create a sense of unity among Germans, the cultural value of "being German" is placed on a pedestal and has been used as a source of nationalism and country pride. Although this sentiment persisted throughout the 20th century, the reunification of the East and West in the early 1990s again elevated the value of "Being German" at the expense of non-European immigrants. This sentiment can also be seen through the concept of *Leitkultur*[38]. Leitkultur, a term meaning "guiding culture", has been used since the late 1980s in the debate of accepting immigrants in Germany. According to Bassam Tibi, a German academic, Leitkultur is the idea that there is a universal set of liberal values that people should follow regardless of where they came from. He believes that German society can be held together against disintegration with the "normative consensus" provided by Leitkultur. However, this concept has been used by some Germans to justify the idea that newcomers must assimilate by dropping all non-European aspects of their identity. completely adopting the liberal values of Leitkultur.

The idea that newcomers must assimilate is reflected through the previously mentioned interviews conducted with Syrian refugees. These interviews show that Syrians wish to maintain traditions from home, despite some Germans' belief that they must assimilate[13]. As of 2017, 52% of Germans believed that immigrants should conform to the culture of mainstream society[39]. This view was opposed by 36% of the German population, who believed that cultures should be merged and another 11% of the German population that believed immigrants should keep their own cultures. Despite the opposition to the idea that immigrants should conform, about half of Germans still want Syrians to adapt to German culture. Syrians feel as though there is a "one-way conversation" occurring: Germans feel they have plenty to teach the Syrians, but nothing to learn from the Syrians[13]. One Syrian refugee, Noura, said that "Germany has many positive things. On the other hand, for me it has something I don't like: it's not in my religion, but in my culture. I should have a balance between them for my children." Clearly, Noura wants to be a part of Germany, but also wants to preserve her culture to share with her children. Some Syrians have even become more religiously conservative because they feel so strongly that their culture is being taken from them. Another Syrian who recently completed his master's in urban planning in Berlin, Moutasem Alkhnaifes, stated that "[Germans] just tell them what to do and what to be. You have to speak German, you have to go to school, you have to do this and this and this to be able to succeed here. But I have never seen a person who is using his abilities that he already

has". Barbara Meyer, a member of a refugee advocacy group who directs a nonprofit for youth arts education with many participating refugees, shared that many refugees are blocked from sharing and using their own skills and talents. Despite the fact that many Syrians are stopped from giving, working, or continuing to personally develop, some Germans report frustration, claiming that refugees "get or take everything" without properly giving back. This documented inability to work effectively with those of diverse backgrounds provides another layer to slow integration and incentivizes newcomers to avoid integration entirely.

> *"Germany has many positive things. On the other hand, for me it has something I don't like: it's not in my religion, but in my culture. I should have a balance between them for my children."*
> **- Noura**

> *"[Germans] just tell them what to do and what to be. You have to speak German, you have to go to school, you have to do this and this and this to be able to succeed here. But I have never seen a person who is using his abilities that he already has."*
> **- Moutasem Alkhnaifes**

COVID-19 has also been a barrier to integration for Asian immigrants to Germany. One study that illustrates this point looks at the increase in discrimination against minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic[40]. This discrimination is called "COVID-19-associated discrimination" or "CAD". Asian migrants first started to come to Germany in the 1970-1980s; these immigrants were mostly made up of Vietnamese refugees going to West Germany. More recently, Asian immigration to Germany has been small but steady, with immigrants typically immigrating for employment, education, or marital reasons[41]. From 2011 on, most Asian immigrants have been from China, and East Asian immigrants have been the best integrated migrant group. However, this changed due to COVID-19. Asian migrants and their descendants had never reported such a large volume of discrimination as they did during the COVID-19 pandemic[40]. After collecting data from over 3,500 individuals from April 2020 to June 2020, the researchers found that CAD was experienced due to a perceived threat of higher COVID infection levels. Levels of CAD were even dependent on the dynamics of COVID-19 in the residential area of the respondents. This discrimination, as it did for Syrian and Turkish immigrants, is a barrier to integration overall.

Non-Governmental Organizations' Role in Integration

While the German government has services directly aimed at integrating newcomers, the government also funds and supports non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in helping immigrants. During the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) cooperated with UNICEF and 30 NGOs to accommodate the influx of refugees[42]. During this time, most of the support for refugees came from NGOs supported by local policy makers. While administrative bodies provide a regulatory framework for NGOs, NGOs shape many of the protection-standards about how refugees are treated, specifically related to gender, showing how important they are in the national scope of accommodating refugees.

Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend

BMFSFJ[43]

Berlin is home to several NGOs that support immigrants and refugees where policy is often lacking. The German-Arab Center for Education and Integration is one example that dates back to 2008[44]. Funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, this organization offers newcomers legal services for immigrants seeking asylum, along with providing an environment for immigrants to make connections with those of a similar background. "Give Back to Berlin" is another NGO that operates out of Berlin to enhance the experience of immigrants in a new country, providing programming that involves bringing Berlin locals together with immigrants to work to improve the city[45]. Among many other NGOs that aim to help immigrants and refugees find their place in Germany, Start with a Friend (SwaF) provides services to both match newcomers with a "Tandem" pair and connect them to relevant resources and community events, which helps set the organization apart from others. NGOs that bring together newcomers and locals provide a mutually enriching cultural exchange and work to counteract the challenges affecting integration described above. This shines a positive light on newcomers, creating opportunities for greater exposure, mutual exposure, and learning instead of feeding negative stereotypes and fitting them into the mold of an assimilated German.

NGOs occupy a unique spot in Germany's immigration and integration process. The deep history Germany has, between World War II and the guest-workers, led to the country taking in more refugees than other European countries during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. The continuous policy development of Berlin and Germany to support immigration and integration has helped make up for historic shortcomings, namely the issues integrating guest-workers, but policy cannot solve this problem alone.

Organizations such as PEGIDA and the AfD are actively protesting against immigrants and advocating for tightly restricted immigration policy. NGOs are left to fill the holes in immigration policy, offering culturally enriching experiences for newcomers as well as mitigating the negative stereotypes that anti-immigrant groups push as the truth. As current events continue to develop, NGOs working to help adjust newcomers, such as Start with a Friend, need to adapt as well.
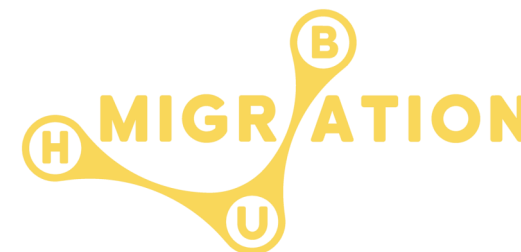
Give Something Back to Berlin[46]

Refugees on Rails[47]

Start with a Friend[4]

Migration Hub[48]

Über den Tellerrand[49]

NGOs with the goal of helping newcomers find their place in German society, specifically in Berlin

Methods

Overview

Our team's overall goal was to evaluate and improve on the Start with a Friend (SwaF) database. The final deliverable is a prototype our team developed using stakeholder feedback in collaboration with SwaF. We produced this deliverable by achieving three objectives. First, we aimed to evaluate Berlin's history of immigration and how this history informs SwaF's operations through a combination of literature reviews, observation, and interviews. Next, we planned to learn what the new database we create needs to look like through focus group workshops with SwaF's core team and SwaF's local team. Finally, we aimed to produce a prototype of a database. The database was developed using the Agile Framework and allowed us to create UI mockups of the database which we can evaluate using heuristic evaluation. To summarize, our objectives were to:

1. Evaluate SwaF's mission and operations through the lens of Germany's history of immigration.

2. Define what a successful Tandem database looks like for its various stakeholders.

3. Work within Agile Framework to produce and evaluate prototypes of the SwaF database.
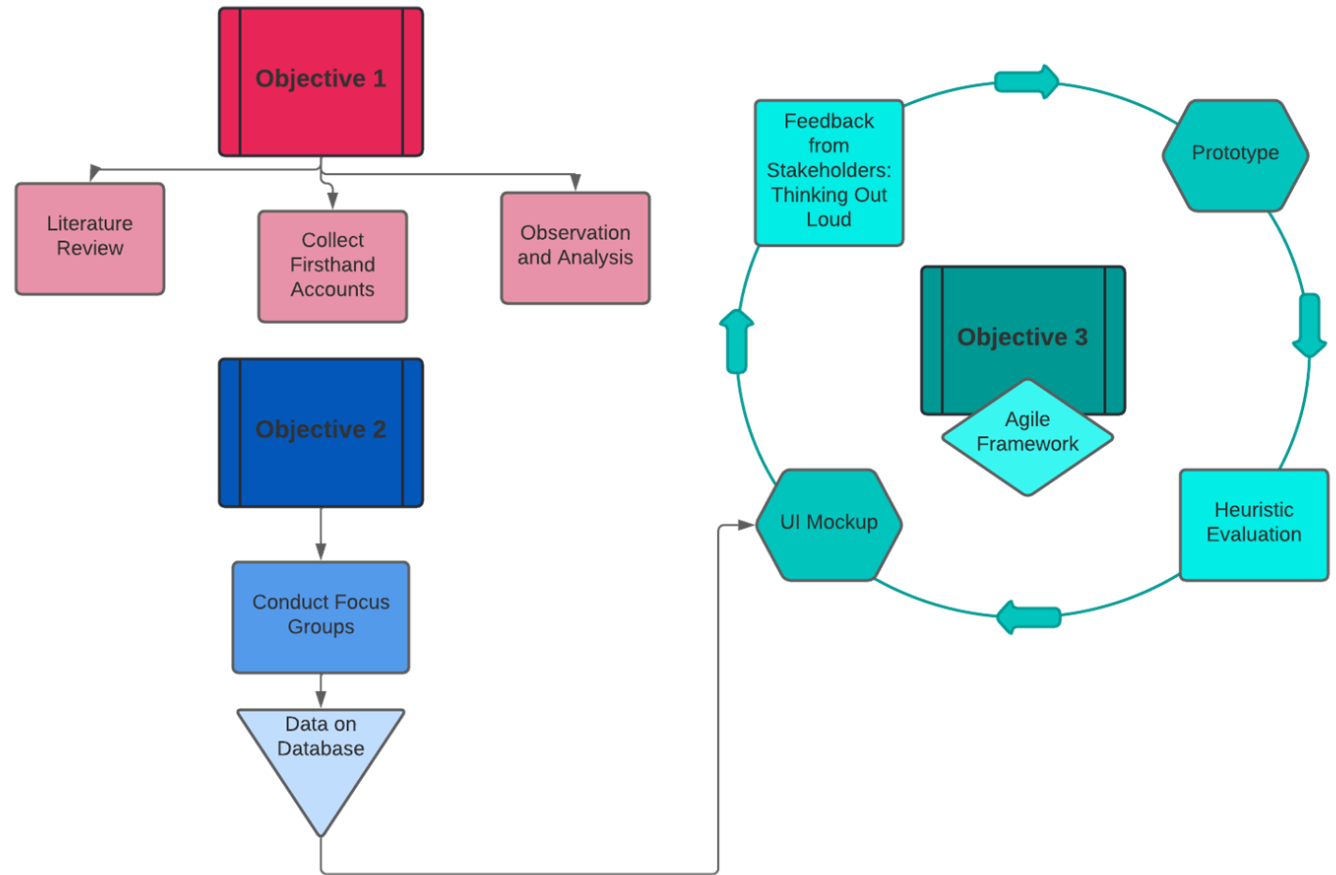
Figure 6: Methods Graphic.

Case Intro

Start with a Friend is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and takes a unique approach to integrating immigrants in Germany. One of the organization's primary programs matches Berlin locals with newcomers to allow them to "Start with a friend". The "Tandem" pairings enhance both the locals and newcomers by enriching each other with their own cultures and backgrounds. It also provides the newcomers with a resource to consult with finding jobs, an education, or helping them through the asylum process. Starting in 2015, SwaF has created over 7800 pairs, or "Tandems", and has expanded to 20 locations across Germany and Austria[1]. SwaF also offers other programs such as the SwaF Clubs and SwaF Women. Since the onset of COVID, SwaF developed programming which teaches newcomers about the efficacy of vaccines[50].

Start with a Friend is able to provide their services, especially their Tandem program, through the use of a digital database. As the organization has grown since its start in 2015, requirements for the database have changed significantly. The ways that SwaF currently engages the newcomer and local communities in Germany have drastically changed with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic[50]. The current database is unreliable, lacks features required with the way SwaF operates, and is maintained by an external organization[51]. This leads to the database going down at inopportune times and when features need to be added or changed there is often a long delay due to the fact that this is outsourced. When workshops or community events are being held, and services related to SwaF's database are inaccessible, this can lead to unsuccessful programming within the organization.

The new database will be designed with more flexibility, better performance, and increased useability; it will automate multiple processes[52]. SwaF's own team designed this version of the database, which allows faster changes to the database, and maintenance in a timely manner[51]. Updating SwaF's database is integral to SwaF improving the services they offer and expanding to cover more locations.

Start with a Friend's primary location is in Berlin, but they have 20 locations across Germany.

Germany is well known as an immigrant country, so much so that it was nicknamed "Flüchtlingsrepublik Deutschlands", or "The Refugee Republic of Germany"[53]. The large Turkish population from the 1960s and the refugees from Syria in recent years are some of the largest minorities in Germany. Berlin has an especially high concentration of immigrant populations, with about one third of Berlin's population being residents of foreign origin and their children[23]. Since the 1960s, inner-city neighborhoods in West Berlin have been home to international immigration, internationalizing already multicultural neighborhoods, with immigration in recent years following a similar trend. Currently, Berlin's division into the inner and outer-city is the most decisive factor in residential mixing of immigrants and natives, and segregation of immigrant groups is declining.

SwaF Club(s)[4]

SwaF Women[4]

SwaF Tandem[4]
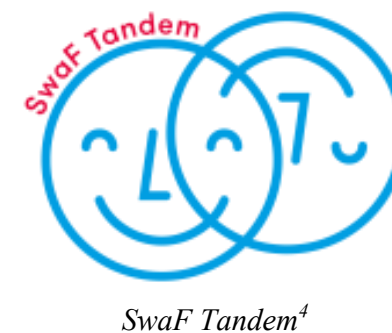
Objective 1: Evaluate SwaF's Mission and Operations Through the Lens of Germany's History of Immigration

Our team's research aimed to connect the historical context and experiences of Berlin's newcomer community to the needs that SwaF tries to address through its programming. The main method to better our understanding of this goal was to conduct historical and other qualitative research on Berlin's newcomer community. Our research also included interviewing newcomers and finding firsthand accounts of migration to Germany to gain perspective of the effects of SwaF's work. Overarching themes this objective tried to address include urban resource access, discrimination directed against newcomers, and experiences of newcomers moving to Berlin. Not only will we learn about how SwaF developed within the context of certain historical events, but we will understand how this context shapes SwaF's operations.

Collect Firsthand Accounts

Firsthand accounts allowed our team to gain insight into aspects of newcomer life that cannot be studied within database resources online. Many of the individuals in question were newcomers themselves, whose insights gave an intimate view into their daily experiences, and both the regular and exceptional struggles that come with being a newcomer to Berlin. Accounts of individuals working at NGOs to help support newcomers provided further insight on this subject. The individuals whom we interviewed had extensive background in working with migrants through SwaF Tandem and the public programming it hosts on a regular basis. The SwaF team members provided information on what they believed were the most important needs not being met for many immigrants, and what they have seen change in the community since the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, when SwaF was created. Specific Interviewee groups, along with pertinent questions to ask each group, are shown in Figure 7.

Querstadtein offers tours by newcomers about their experiences and notable sites across Berlin. By taking one of the tours Querstadtein offers, we were able to draw info from their accounts to understand firsthand experiences from the tour guide. For the SwaF and Über den Tellerrand employees, we conducted individual interviews to gain insight into NGOs that support this newcomer community. We conducted the interviews for around one hour and were semi-structured so that topics can be explored in

Person/Group	Description	Information to be gained
Querstadtein Tour	Organization that offers tours by newcomers through the city	Firsthand accounts of newcomers' stories when they came to Berlin in the context of the city
Über den Tellerrand	A newcomer support organization in Berlin	Information about how their organization supports newcomers and information about NGOs as a whole
Start with a Friend	Organization that offers services aimed at helping newcomers find their place in Germany	Firsthand accounts of a newcomer's experience, and how that relates to Start with a Friend's goals
Janina Botsford	Clinical psychologist and therapist	Information concerning PTSD and trauma within newcomers

Figure 7: Sources of Firsthand Accounts

depth wherever the conversation leads. The division of roles for the interviews were designated as such:

- Emily Lin - Interview Preparation
- John Marcotte - Primary Interviewer
- Gillian Ebeling - Secondary Interviewer
- Michael Geary - Notes/Editor

The interview data collected was stored confidentially by removing any identifications from the questions, along with limiting access to the notes taken to only members of our IQP group. By securing the information we needed and planning the question topics ahead of time to not be intrusive, our group strived to conduct interviews in line with the ethics training conducted to be responsible when representing WPI abroad. We looked at the content of these accounts through the themes described in the objective goals, and extraneous questions may be asked as needed to get a more complete answer that fits with the themes.

Generate an Annotated Bibliography

In support of the objective goal, the Annotated Bibliography section is intended to outline sources helpful for learning about migration and integration in Germany. It provides websites, articles, and studies that may be used to find information on different aspects of migration. The section can provide usage for both our group and subsequent IQPs in order to provide context on the history of migration in Germany and Berlin. Important events and topics that we addressed include:

- **The Syrian refugee crisis**
- **The recent rise of right-wing nationalism in response to increased immigration**
- **European guest-workers immigrating in the 1960s, in particular Turkish guest-workers**
- **Proposed and enacted immigration and integration policy**

Outlining sources that describe important events will help support the objective goal by giving readers of this paper concise access to the resources we used to inform our writing, and to highlight articles with the most importance to further understanding the domain that German refugee NGOs work in. It will help develop a better understanding of the topic at large, which will therefore help readers to understand the work our group did when developing SwaF's database.

Become Familiar with Both the SwaF Team and Structure of the NGO

In order to better understand Start with a Friend's goals and vision, our team immersed ourselves in the work culture and day to day life of SwaF employees and attended SwaF events when possible. Doing so gave perspective on how the SwaF team defines its own standard for success, which was then applied as a framework to create our own success. Specifics on what this standard looks like include how SwaF maintains a professional

environment, how the company creates a culture of care for its own employees, volunteers, and participants, along with how the company is critical of itself and addresses mistakes to grow as an organization. Specific ways to integrate our research team into SwaF include participating in internal and external SwaF events and working in person at the SwaF offices to establish a professional rapport. By learning more about SwaF, our body of work benefited by being more cohesive with the work SwaF produces. By adapting to its work culture and fully understanding its goals, our team was able to produce quality work to support its visions of a more understandable and user-friendly database. We will also use information from the interviews conducted with Start with a Friend employees to contribute to our understanding of SwaF.
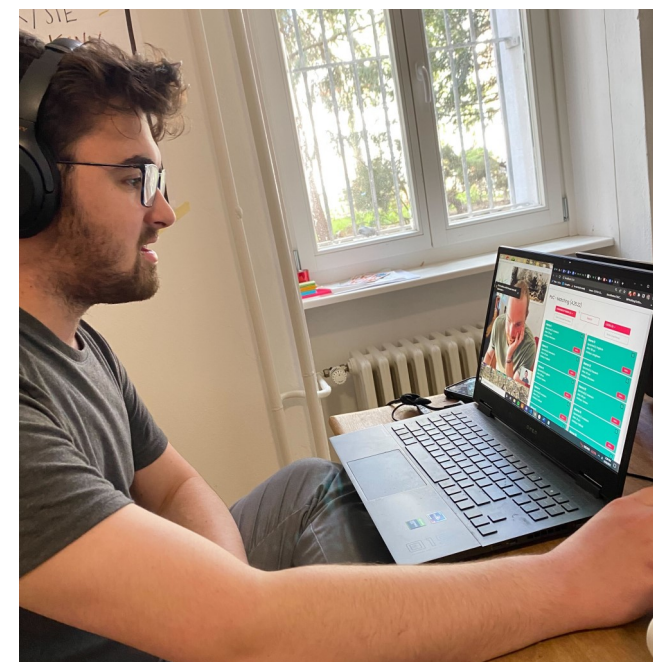
Objective 2: Define What a Successful Tandem Database Looks Like for its Various Stakeholders

To define the metrics of a successful database, the team consulted with relevant stakeholders. We collected feedback via running focus group workshops in order to identify SwaF's needs for the Tandem database, and what improvements they would like to see. We put the needs of the stakeholders mentioned during these workshops into a requirement list for the new database, allowing the team to keep their work on track and relevant to the needs of the stakeholders as the new database was developed.

Focus Group Workshops

We conducted focus groups between different stakeholders for what needs and wants they have in regards to SwaF Tandem ("the database") with the assistance of members of the SwaF team. This information was obtained by running two workshops within the first week of our time in Berlin, with different focus groups representing important stakeholders:

1. SwaF core team (Bundesteam)
2. SwaF local team (matching members)

During the focus groups we touched on topics including framing the problem and solution through the "Design Thinking method", listening to all stakeholders to best represent their needs, along with facilitating discussion in order to challenge assumptions that individuals may have of the database

that could be false[54]. Each workshop lasted 3 hours, was facilitated by moderators, and included 6 interviewees. First, the moderation team explained the given requirements of the database. Then pros and cons of the current database were discussed in pairs. These pairs will also brainstorm desired features for the new database. The group then discussed database features, using "stickers" to indicate if features are important, nice to have, or not necessary. The interviewees were then divided into groups of 3 to take a deeper dive into some of the features expressed above. The two groups then presented their ideas to each other and gave each other feedback. The focus groups ended with a brief recap of the event and closing remarks. Each group focused on the aspects of the database that they most closely interact with. The workshops were run through a Miro board (figure 10 and 9) to enable users to interact with ideas remotely. These workshops gave vital information about what changes need to be made to create a successful database for each of our stakeholders.
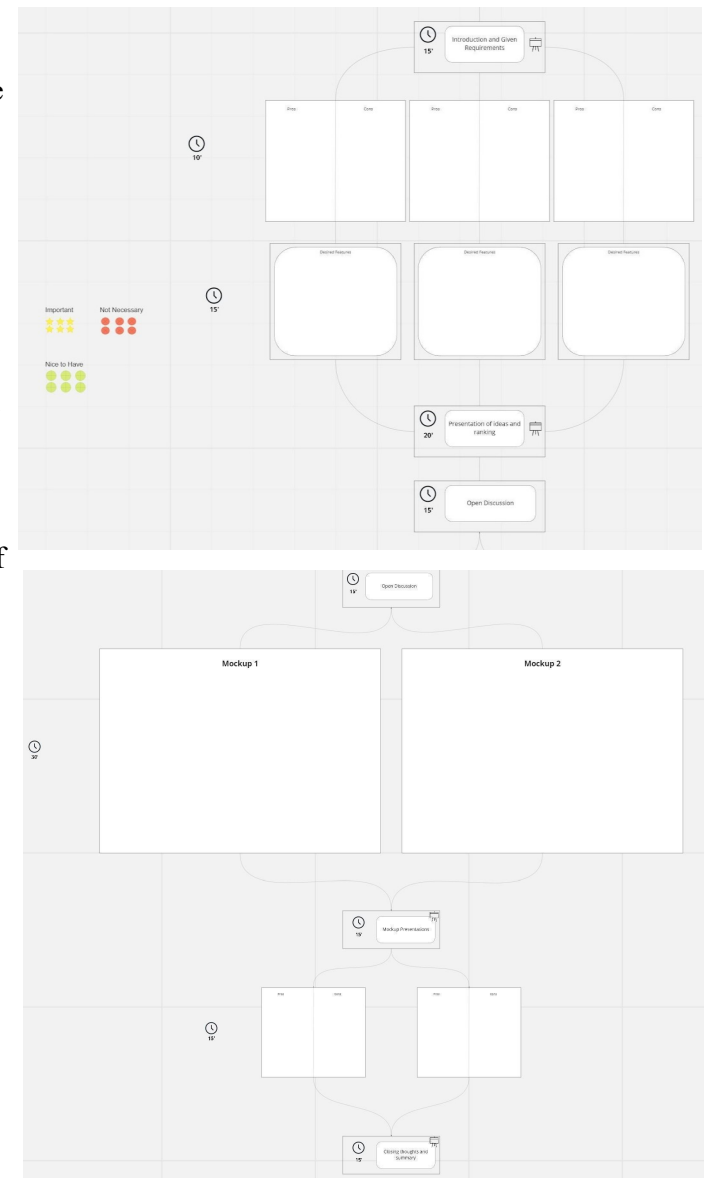
Figures 8 and 9: Miro Board for Workshop Design
Note: A Miro Board is an online platform that allows group collaboration. These are pictures of the blank workspace that will be filled in with user input.

Objective 3: Work Within Agile Framework to Produce and Evaluate Prototypes of the SwaF Database

Using the requirements developed in Objective 2, our team developed a prototype of the new database. We followed the Agile Framework (see Figure 10), created UI Mockups, and used both the "Thinking Out Loud" method and heuristic evaluations to receive feedback, all of which will be explained further in detail below, to create this prototype. We participated in the first round of this cycle, which will be repeated several more times after the end of this report. This objective explores the themes of receiving criticism and feedback, making changes based on feedback, and creating a product based on users' needs. This objective was crucial to achieve the goals defined in the previous objective, allowing our team to develop the prototype in such a way that helped progress towards a finished database to satisfy the needs of SwaF, and by extension the newcomers they help support.

Developing our prototypes within the Agile Framework enabled small iterative improvements that can be easily adjusted based on new problem specifications emerging over time[55]. For context, a prototype in this case represents an incomplete version of the database, with some essential features being fleshed out at each discrete time step ("iteration"). At the end of each development cycle, there will be a version of the database produced. In this process, we will continuously meet with SwaF

team members to present the current prototype to them. They will then provide feedback based on the real user's point of view, meaning that they are to act as the target user of the database and give feedback based on a real user's needs. This feedback was then used to make changes to the prototype.
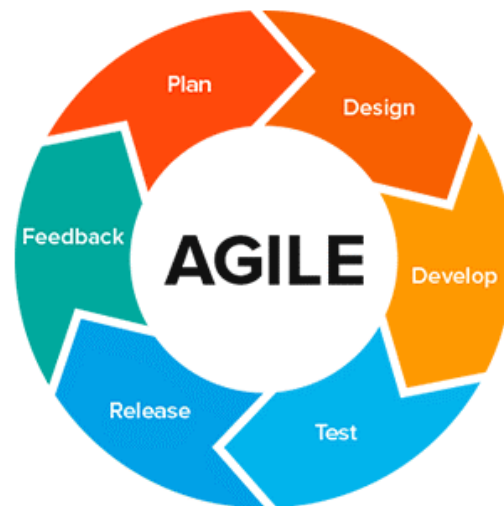

Figure 10: Iterative loop descriptive of Agile Framework

Create UI Mockup to Show Prototypes

A UI Mockup is an early prototype of how the user interface would look like and function[56]. For our purposes the mockup was created specifically using Google Slides, in order to allow for rapid prototype design. Because this mockup was a simple prototype, the visuals did not look like a final design of how the database would look like. Because the visuals were simple, it allowed our team to focus more on how the prototype should function. The prototype's functionality should be a basic structure of the

database's functions that can be enhanced through each prototype iteration. Therefore, each prototype iteration should be an upgraded version from the previous prototype and thus the final database should be the "best" version of all the prototypes. We presented to and received feedback from the SwaF team members and other stakeholders, then made iterations to the prototype as described through the Agile Framework.

Receive feedback from Heuristic Evaluations

We received feedback through Heuristic evaluations. Heuristic evaluations are when multiple evaluators test the prototype, find different problems, and provide feedback based on a metric of evaluation. These evaluators will then aggregate all the findings, which would ultimately help improve the next prototype iteration. A simplified example of a metric evaluation is shown in Figure 11. This method of receiving feedback provided us with consistent information regarding how to further improve our prototypes through each iteration.

	Prototype 1	
	Ease of Use	**Readability**
Scale (1-5)	5	5
	Productivity	**Scalability**
	4	2
Total (Out of 20)	16	

Figure 11: Metric evaluation, simplified example

Results

Findings & Discussion

SwaF's humanistic approach provides a social network for newcomers that supports them as they process previous hardships and traumas. When speaking with Dr. Janina Botsford, a clinical psychologist, we learned that a person experiences trauma when they are faced with more challenges than the resources they have to handle these challenges. Ninety-seven percent of refugees experience trauma before migrating to a new country. Additionally, the journey to a new country can also present many challenges and be traumatic. During the Querstadtein tour, our guide shared his story of his life and of migrating to Germany with us, revealing a number of hardships and the trauma he has faced. Our tour guide faced hardships and trauma before even migrating to Germany. While outside the U.S. embassy, our tour guide told the team of his childhood and the difficulties he faced in this time. He stated that when a tourist learned he was from Iraq, they asked him if he "was in Iraq during the war," and that he replied, "which one?" His childhood consisted of war after war, which was incredibly difficult. In many of these wars, the United States attacked Iraq, which is why he chose to speak at the U.S. embassy. Our tour guide was born during the Iran-Iraq War. The Gulf War began when he was a child, causing him to spend his childhood in a blockade. This blockade, imposed by the United Nations Security Council in 1990, led to the death of about 500,000 children due to a lack of food and medicine. Madeleine Albright, as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, stated that "the price is worth it," implying that Iraqis were merely pawns in the war games of western politicians and not actual people. After this, President George W. Bush invaded Iraq in 2003. Our tour guide then experienced the civil war in Iraq. During times of instability, he would often go to Kurdistan (a safe zone in the north of Iraq); he went about six times in total. In 2015, right before migrating, things became dangerous for our tour guide. He had a hard time finding a car to take to work and could no longer sleep at work, which he had done in the past to avoid dangerous situations. After the governor's assistant was killed, three government coworkers were kidnapped, and his friend was kidnapped in a supposedly safe zone, our tour guide made a final trip to Kurdistan. Not only did he experience trauma during his childhood, but right before migrating he also endured further difficult situations.

When outside Berlin's Tränenpalast (Palace of Tears), our tour guide told us the story of his migration from Iraq to Berlin. He chose this location because, as the train station between East and West Germany where families were split, it reminded him of his own migration journey. This journey was difficult, and likely traumatic for our tour guide. He first went to Kurdistan. The trip usually took about

U.S. Embassy
March 26, 2022 John Marcotte

two hours, however this trip took five hours as his taxi driver took him on unpaved roads to avoid ISIS. He was denied entry to Kurdistan and decided to go to Turkey. In Turkey, he learned that a female friend in his home city in Iraq had been killed. The fact that a woman had been killed indicated that the conditions were incredibly dangerous, as ISIS normally avoided killing women. On the last day of his visa, our tour guide paid 10,000 euros to go to Austria. There, he asked to go to Bulgaria for school, but was told that he must go to Germany. So, he took a train to Munich, and another train to Berlin, which would be his final destination. He arrived after four to five days of no sleep because the journey was so difficult and nerve wracking. When asked about his family, our tour guide admitted he was unable to bring them with him to Germany. His entire journey is visualized in Figure 12.

When conducting our literature review, we found additional stories of refugees' journeys to Germany. A seven-year-old boy, Nawwar, experienced a traumatic journey to Germany from Syria[57]. His journey was long and arduous; he climbed mountains and took a raft from Turkey to Greece. This trip was dangerous and likely traumatic; hundreds of babies and toddlers have drowned on the same trip Nawwar took. Nawwar said that "the most difficult part was sleeping on rocks and climbing up mountains and down mountains – up and down." In order to deal with the perils of his trip, Nawwar pretended there were polar bears floating on ice next to his raft protecting him and his family. His trip was filled with hardships and was overall deeply impactful on Nawwar.
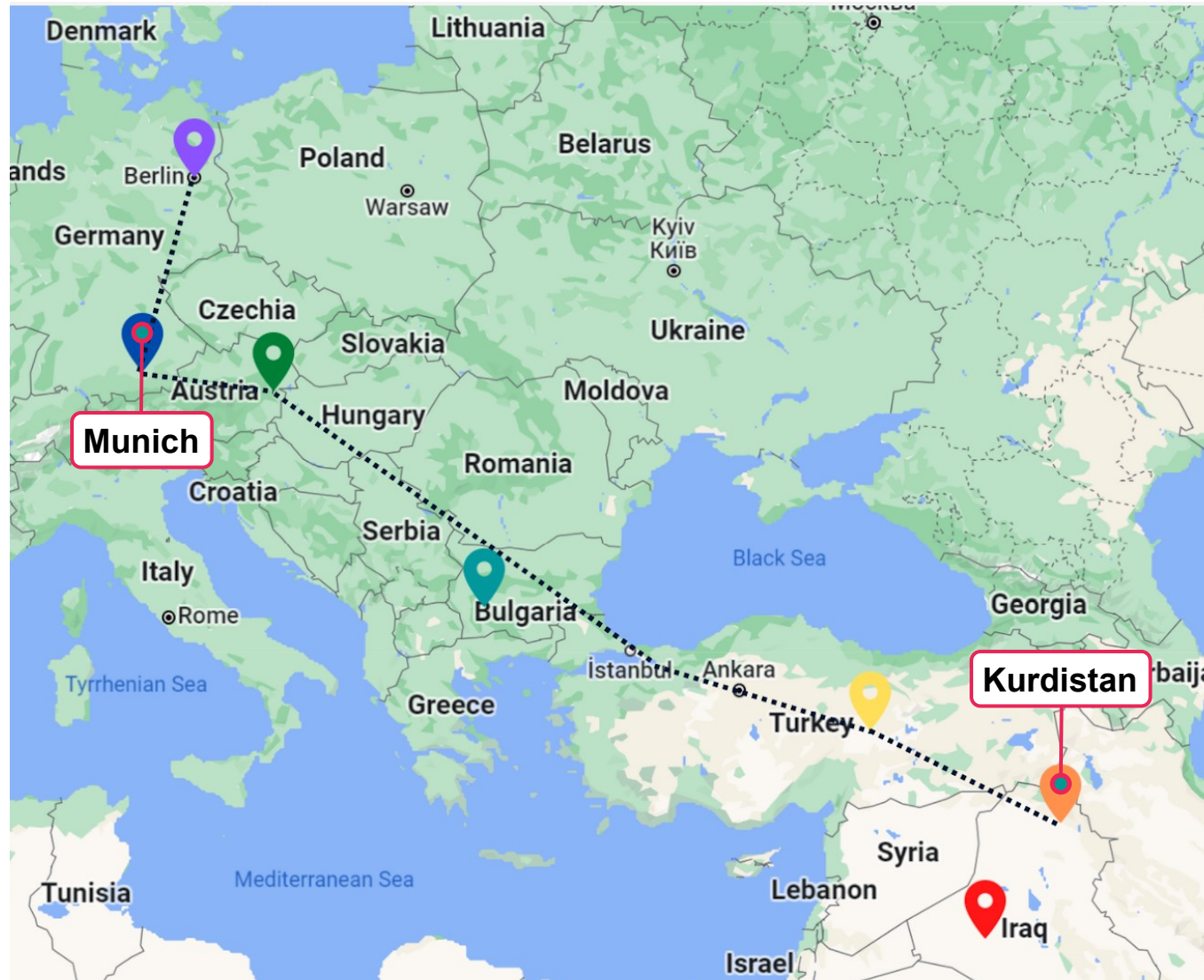

Figure 12: A Map of Our Tour Guide's Journey

A woman named Salma experienced trauma in her home country of Syria before her family's departure for Munich. Salma, along with her husband, two children (aged two and five), niece, mother, and best friend, traveled over 1,500 miles through Syria, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, and Germany[58]. Just like our tour guide, Salma and her family faced many challenges and potentially traumatic events before even migrating. Salma decided to leave Syria after witnessing extensive violence in the capital of Syria, Damascus. She stated that "It's like hell in Damascus…we saw a lot of people die," and that "we didn't have anything. We lost everything in Syria." Seeing such extensive violence and losing everything was traumatic for Salma and her family.

Salma and her family continued to experience traumatic events during their migration. When moving through Syria, Salma took off her headscarf and put extra makeup on in government-held areas to attract as little suspicion as possible. In rebel territory, Salma wore a niqab and took off her makeup because women without face covers are sometimes killed. This was scary and difficult for Salma. When the group took a boat to get from Turkey to Greece, the boat was too small for the number of people on it and water began to flood the boat before it arrived in Greece. During the journey, Salma and her family got little rest, often going days without sleeping. Reflecting on the journey, Salma noted that she felt like the countries she passed through didn't want to truly help the refugees but to take everything from them. This was unsettling and
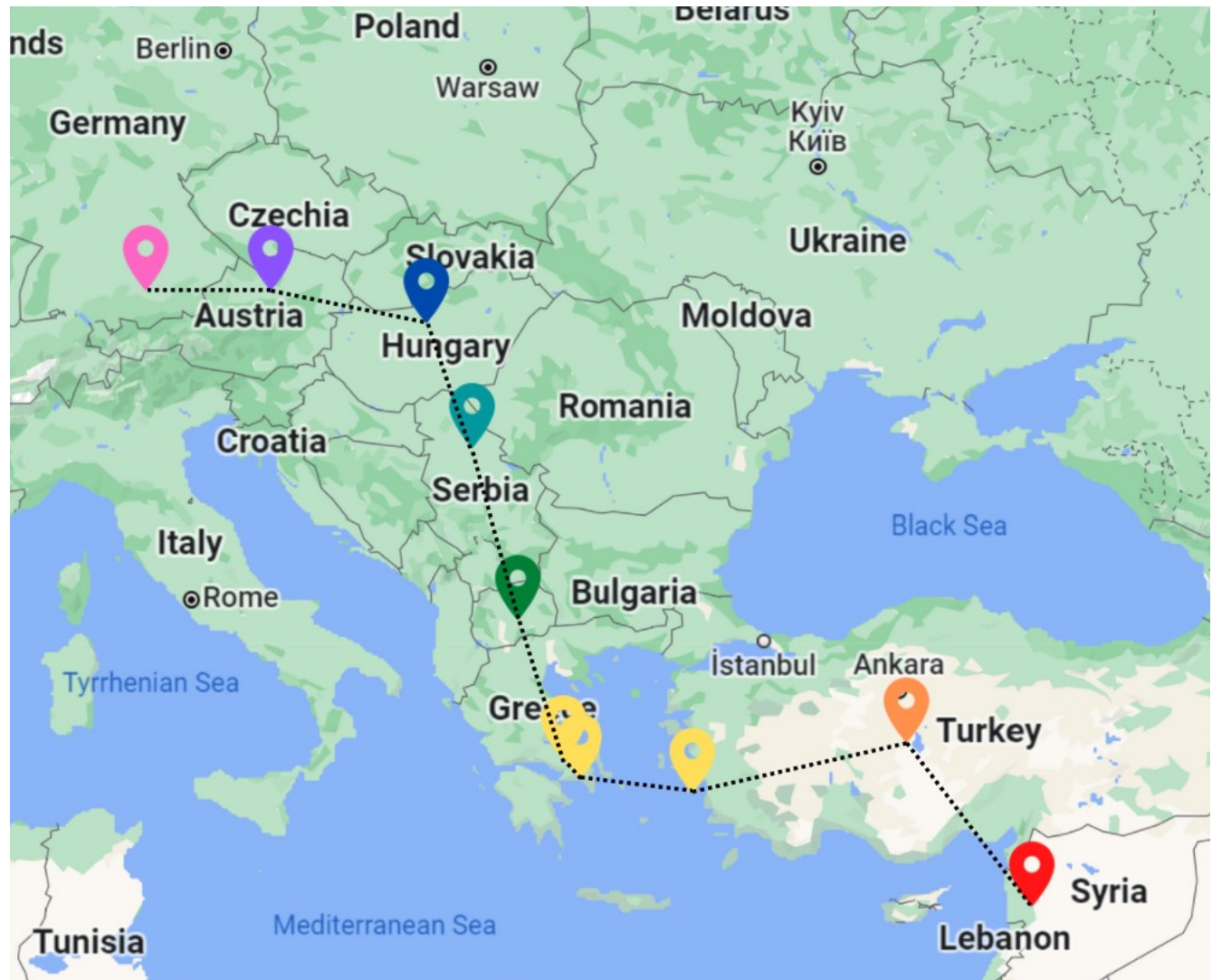

Figure 13: Map of Salma's Journey

Note: This figure shows the journey Salma and her group took from Syria to Munich, Germany. The red pin represents Damascus, Syria, the yellow pins represent Samos, Athens, and Idomeni, Greece, the green pin represents Macedonia, the teal pin represents Belgrade, Serbia, the blue pin represents Budapest Hungary, the purple pin represents Vienna, Austria, and the pink pin represents Munich, Germany.

added to the challenges she faced. Salma had to pay $2,000 to go to Turkey from Syria and each person in the group had to pay another $2,000 to board the boat from Turkey to Greece. However, Salma said that she is happy for the new life for her children that this journey has provided.

SwaF recognizes the trauma that refugees endure and offers them support through social networks. Jakob Filzen, a member of the SwaF Board, explained how SwaF helps newcomers to develop their own social network. The social aspect of a human's wellbeing is something that many NGOs neglect, but is an essential part of integration. Connecting to others and having people to spend time with is important to building a happy, healthy life. Furthermore, having a social network is integral to mental health. Dr. Botsford explained that humans, as social animals, first needed groups to survive. This has stuck with humans through evolution; today, we have very strong responses to social threats and conflicts. Dr. Botsford illustrated this point by saying, "it's our social network and the quality of our relationships [that are] strongly determining how happy we are and also how healthy we are physically." Many refugees must leave their entire social circles when they migrate. However, SwaF helps to create social networks for them through the Tandem program. One of the things that this partnership can provide is emotional first aid. Dr. Botsford described emotional first aid as being a compassionate witness for someone by truly listening to them and spending time with them. Emotional first aid can be a stabilizing force for refugees and is immensely helpful.

"it's our social network and the quality of our relationships [that are] strongly determining how happy we are and also how healthy we are physically."
- Dr. Janina Botsford

SwaF's own social network helps support refugees by giving abundant support and resources. The community within SwaF allows for everyone to check on each other. For example, if a local is concerned about their newcomer match, they have many people they can ask for help. SwaF also has an external community that is well connected with local authorities and many organizations, which allows them to make direct referrals for any newcomer in need of further professional help. SwaF even has a handout with some of these organizations and resources they provide to newcomers. SwaF's network and community are helpful to aid those with trauma, but also helps the organization to combat discrimination.

SwaF People[4]

Discrimination is prevalent in the newcomer community that SwaF aims to help. Going on the Querstadtein tour allowed us to learn about our tour guide's experiences with discrimination. While outside the German Parliament and the ARD (German broadcasting network) buildings, our tour guide explained the large impact the government and media have on the way many Germans view immigration. In 2016, a number of refugees had committed crimes of sexual violence and as a result the media heavily covered this incident. Subsequently, this incident changed some Germans' perspectives about refugees as they began to inflate the threat level of refugees. This caused our tour guide to feel guilty. Although he would never commit such acts, spoke a different language, and came from a different place than the refugees on New years, he also shared the title of "refugee." This coverage also led to a rise in the AfD, giving them seats in parliament for the first time ever. The events made our tour guide feel incredibly heavy, hindering his ability to move forward with his life and his future. He admitted to the team that he had to stop listening to German news altogether to feel better and move on with his life. While this discrimination came in the form of broad stereotypes towards refugees, many refugees experience direct racism as well. When speaking with Ann-Kathrin, the director of press and public relations at Über den Tellerrand, she stated that "there's outrageous racism and especially people from Arabic and Muslim backgrounds face a lot of that in Berlin. If you ask any member of our community, they all have a hundred stories to tell how they were yelled at or attacked by racist people." One Syrian refugee family living in Dresden

One Syrian refugee family living in Dresden experienced this when a few men screamed at the women to take off their hijabs[59]. This family also heard people in a car yell "foreigners out" to them while they were on a walk.

SwaF's large and diverse community works to combat discrimination and power imbalances. In our interview with Jakob, he spoke about how the organization recognizes power imbalances that can arise between locals and newcomers in their relationships and the systems they have in place to combat it. For example, before a match is even made, a member of SwaF talks at length with both the local and newcomer. This helps to create trust, hopefully making this SwaF member someone a newcomer could reach out to. Additionally, SwaF's community, including employees, volunteers, locals, and newcomers, is large and diverse with many members who share similar experiences of discrimination and hardship. The voices of refugees facing discrimination are brought together and amplified. Furthermore, SwaF offers online seminars to their community from experts on migration, diversity, and anti-discrimination. By offering these seminars, SwaF strengthens the knowledge of the community. These principles are echoed in SwaF's code of conduct, which it hands out to employees, volunteers, and program participants. This document's primary focus is to protect SwaF's community against discrimination. It first outlines exactly what discrimination is and then lists all forms of discrimination, to make clear what is unacceptable behavior at the organization. The code of conduct

places emphasis on the values of respect, empathy, dignity, and creating a safe space. SwaF wants to make sure the connections formed in and by the organization are ones in which all employees and participants in programs feel included, safe, and accepted. The code of conduct even says, "please let your contact person at Start with a Friend know, if you feel unsafe and are being discriminated, disadvantaged, mistreated and if you witness any harm to others," further drawing upon the SwaF community to combat discrimination.

SwaF prioritizes human connection both in its internal policies and external programming. One instance of this is SwaF's refusal to allow an algorithm to create Tandem matches. SwaF insists that a person makes these pairs, emphasizing the human connection in the program. A SwaF employee meets with all newcomers and locals in the Tandem program before making the matches in order to get a

better sense of each participant and create optimal pairings. The process centers around connections made by real people. When talking with Jakob, he mentioned another tandem program that was fully automated. Jakob discussed why this program was unsuccessful: a lack of human connection. Because the program was completely online, no one truly knew who they would be matched with. There was a lack of trust because meeting with your partner was, as Jakob put it, a bit like going on a blind date. People then stopped using the program and wouldn't meet up with their matches. This organization is an example of how automation can kill a program very similar to SwaF's tandem program.

SwaF also prioritizes human connection simply through the language the organization uses. For example, in its English communications, SwaF uses the word *newcomers* instead of *immigrants* and *refugees* and uses the word *locals* to describe the
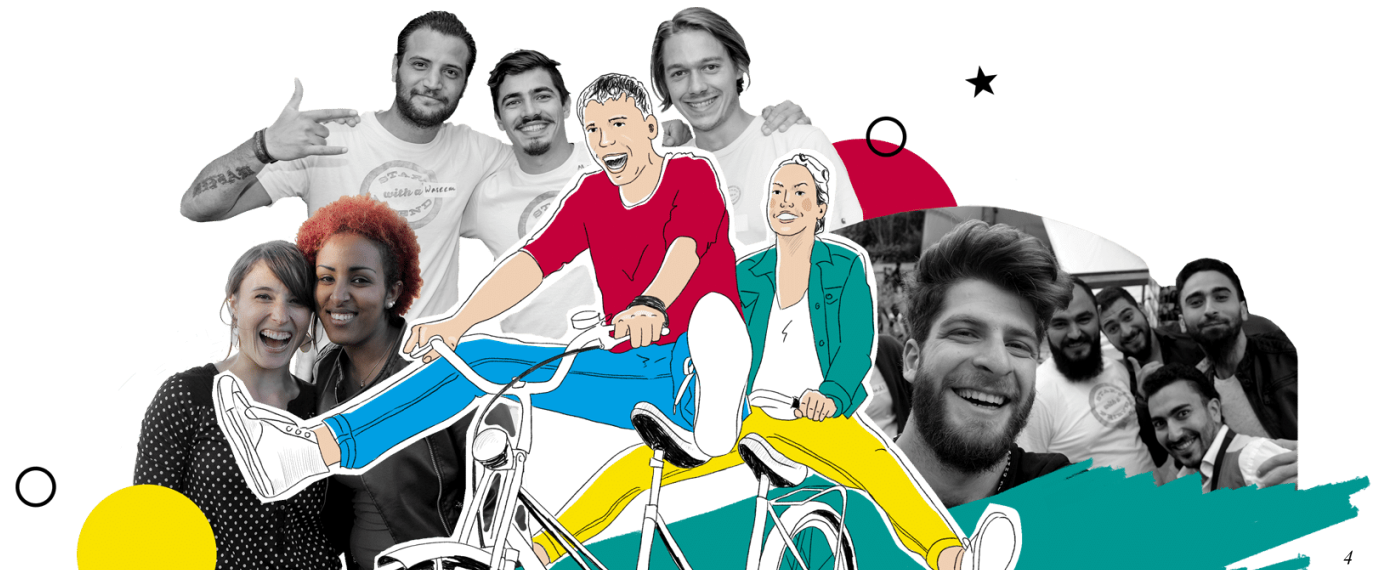
people living in Germany who volunteer in the Tandem program. This is to ensure that the newcomers do not feel as though they are being othered and feel as welcomed and supported as possible. Other organizations such as Über den Tellerand use similar terminology. When speaking with Ann-Kathrin, the press and public relations representative at Über den Tellerand, she mentioned the organization makes sure to continue to update their terminology to keep up with the most up to date, politically correct terminology. At the moment they use the term Mensch mit Fluchterfahrung, which means "person with experience of flight," indicating that although they have experienced the difficulty of forced migration, it does not define them in the present. Using terminology such as "newcomer" or "person with refugee experience" helps newcomers to feel comfortable and accepted. This creates a stronger bond in their pair so the newcomer can make the most of the program.

Further, no distinctions are made among "newcomers" in relation to their country of origin in any of the programming found. In our interview with Jakob, he stated that SwaF doesn't create a hierarchy between different newcomers based on differences in situations. They do this by offering programming that is universal to all newcomers instead of catering to specific groups, ensuring that the program benefits as many newcomers as possible. This also allows newcomers to feel comfortable and accepted, again allowing newcomers to make the most of the program. While more specific needs of different refugee groups may differ based on when they

arrived, or where they are fleeing from, all refugees can benefit from developing a social network through the Tandem program.

> *"Respect, empathy, dignity are the most important values at Start with a Friend. We always try to understand the perspectives of others."*
> **- Start with a Friend protection against discrimination**

Our Prototype for SwaF's Tandem Database

The Initial Requirement Workshops we conducted with seven Bundesteam (core team) members and five local team members revealed an overall need to make the Tandem matching process easier and more intuitive. Both workshops began by outlining requirements that the database must fulfill. These requirements are that the database must be able to match a newcomer and local based on the information SwaF receives from the newcomer and local applications, as well as the content of one-on-one interviews with each applicant, and that the pairs must be put together by a SwaF employee, not an algorithm. During the first workshop with the Bundesteam members, participants

brainstormed certain new requirements. For example, the email application and calendar should be linked to the database to allow data to be shared, and more statistics to be gathered for reporting purposes. Also, the program reports should be more thorough, including timestamps of status changes, and better documentation of Tandems from beginning to end. This data should be displayed in an easily read format. Lastly, the website should be multilingual and use diversity-sensitive language. During the second workshop with the local team members, we discovered even more takeaways. One requirement is that searching should be easy and allow filtering of participants and locals by criteria (hobbies, distance, languages, etc.). Additionally, the database should be flexible, allowing easy movement of participants between locations as well as easy adjustment of participant statuses. Lastly, communication between facilitators and participants should be traceable and easy.

The new requirements developed in the Initial Requirement Workshops all point to a common theme: increasing the database's ease of use. For example, linking all the calendar and emails to the database will make it easier to reach out to tandems. Also, presenting data on Tandem pairs and the matching process allows for reflecting on the program more easily, and therefore adjusting the process may be easier as well. The requirements developed by the local team (being able to search and filter, having a flexible database, and including easy and traceable communication) all make the matching process more effortless for SwaF team members.

The feedback from the Initial Requirements Workshops was used when creating our first proof of concept for the matching platform. This proof of concept started with our sponsor developing a sketch of his vision of the tool, and a few PowerPoint slides to explain his vision. Our sponsor's sketch and PowerPoint can be seen in Figure 15 and 16. These initial tools, combined with the new requirements, gave us a foundation for our first proof of concept. The general idea behind our sponsor's vision was to have two columns: one with newcomers and one with locals to simplify the interface and allow for easy comparison. There would be a box for every person, with the person's name and basic information. Additionally, there would be a way to filter the boxes. One box in each column could be checked before clicking a matching button to create a Tandem pair.
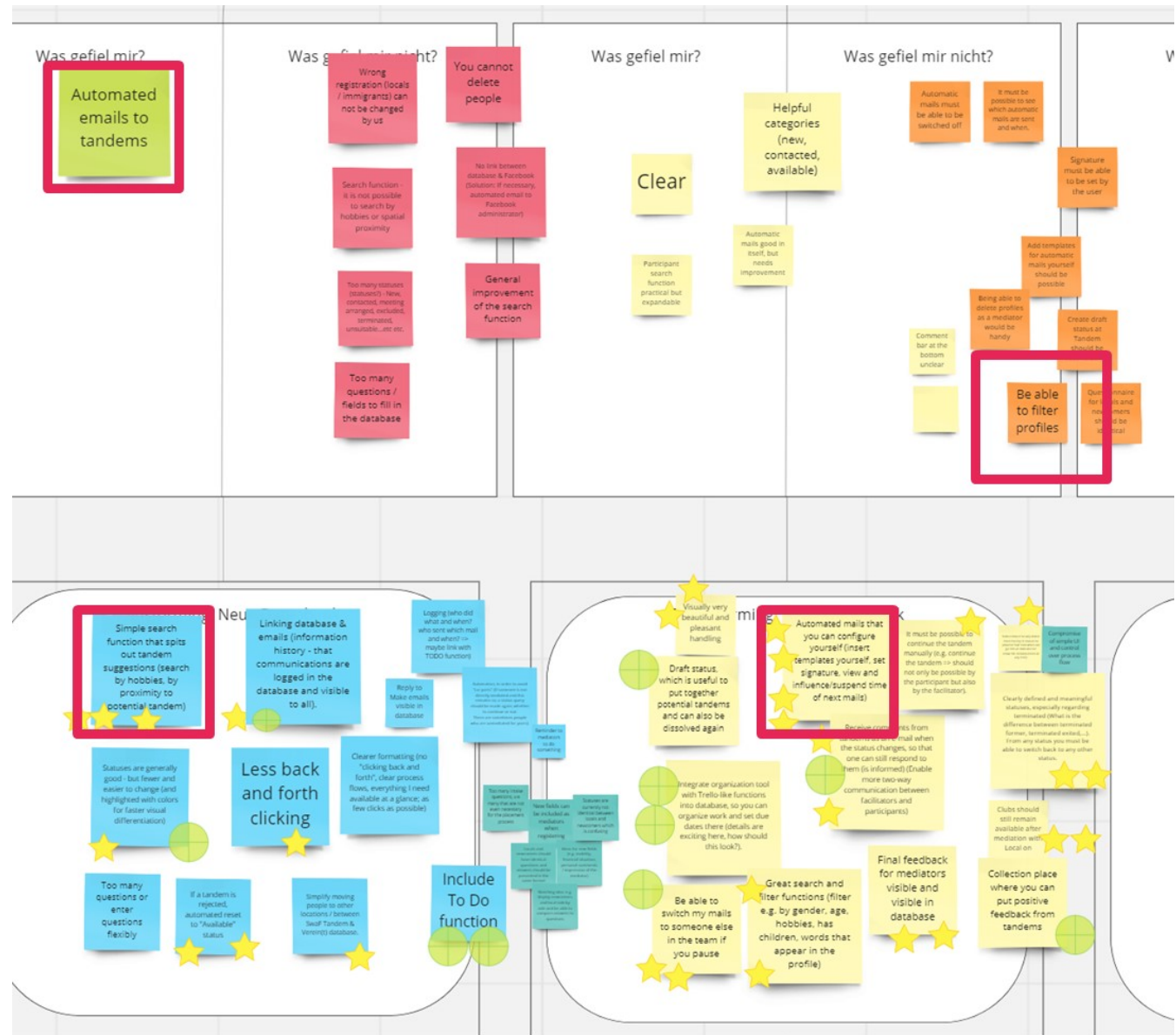
Figure 14: Pros and Cons, Local Team

Note. This figure shows a portion of the completed and translated Miro board from the workshop with the local team. It not only shows how the team participated in the workshop, but displays the new requirements of filtering profiles, having a search function, and automating emails.
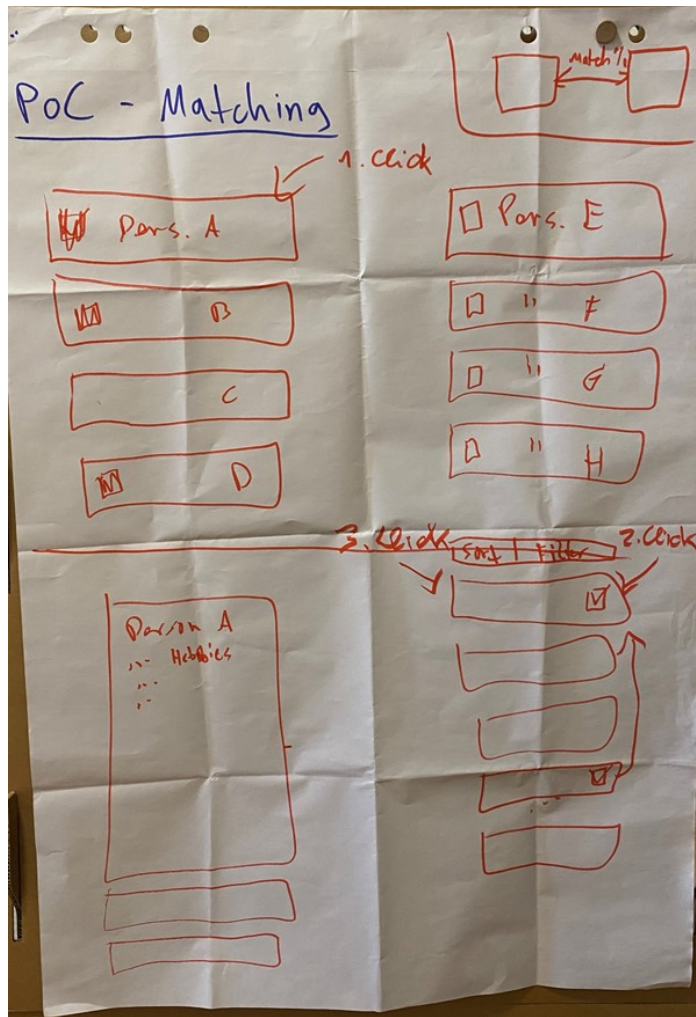
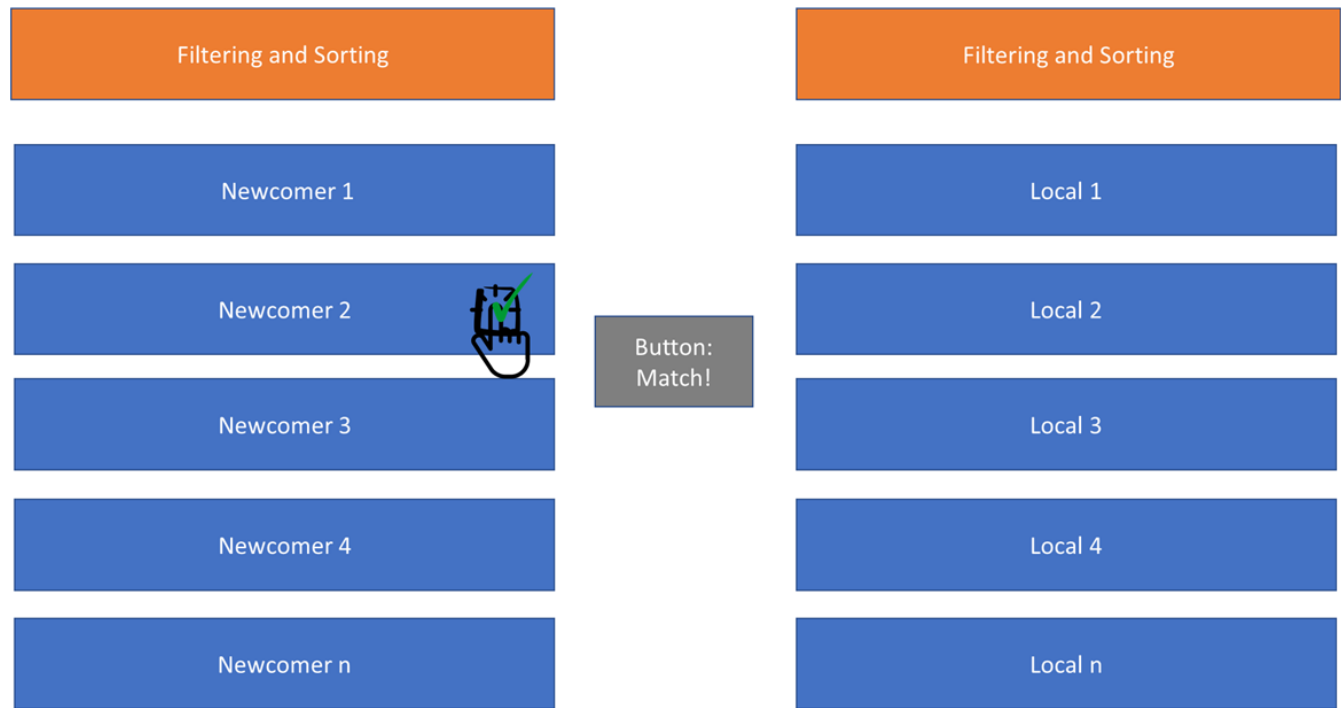**Figure 15: Initial Proof of Concept Sketch**

Figure 16: Initial Proof of Concept PowerPoint

After reviewing and analyzing the visual aids, we generated an initial proof of concept (PoC). This PoC was developed on PowerPoint and can be seen in Figures 17 and 18. We followed our sponsor's vision closely while adding more detail as needed. Specifically, we added information about the participants in each box. These boxes would first show the participant's age, the languages the participant speaks, and where the participant lives. Our team decided that these are the most important criteria for matching because some newcomers want a peer in their match while others may want a mentor; it is essential that both people in the Tandem have at least one language in common; and it is important that they are close in location so that they can get together easily. However, we also acknowledged more information is important to the matching process as well, and to address this we allowed each box to expand to include more information. This information includes hobbies, the time commitment one can make to the program each week, and occupation. We wanted to ensure that the hobbies were included, as we remembered how our guide on the Querstadtein tour had discussed how a classical music concert was integral to the positive experience of his first few days in Berlin. He had a love for classical music throughout his life and when he first came to Germany, he found a classical concert and spent half of his money on a ticket. This hobby of his was something familiar in the new environment he just arrived in. Hobbies provide something familiar to newcomers and allow them to connect with locals more easily. Additionally, we

added a search bar. This will allow users to search for a keyword and for applicable participants to rise to the front of the list. For example, if one searches for the word "English," all English speakers will rise to the top. We developed the filter idea further to include options for most of the information in the expanded view of the boxes. The number of people in each column was added to the column title to keep track of the total people waiting for a match. Lastly, we added a "Sort by: Date Applied" button so that people who entered the program first may go to the top of the list. This highlights those people who have been in the system longest, alerting the person doing

the matching so that they can match them first. After checking two boxes, the matching button turns green, allowing for a pair to be formed.

Our team created the first proof of concept, and reviewed it with our sponsor, generating feedback that each column must be able to filter independently. So, our team created a revised proof of concept, also on PowerPoint. The revised proof of concept can be seen in Figures 19, 20, and 21. Figure 19 shows an overview of the design. Our design also includes menus that drop down from the column title. The filters can then be selected to affect only people in one column. Additionally, we deleted "Sort by:

Figure 17 : Initial Proof of Concept, Collapsed and Unchecked Boxes

NEW COMERS (13)

Newcomer 1   Age: 35   ☒
Languages: English
Location: Bergmannstrasse, Berlin
Hobbies: Soccer, Drawing, Running
Time Commitment: 5 hrs
Occupation: Construction
Less ▲

Newcomer 2   Age: 35   ☐
Languages: English, German
Location:
More ▼

Newcomer 3   Age: 35   ☐
Languages: English, Arabic
Location:
More ▼

Newcomer 4   Age: 35   ☐
Languages: German

🔍Search:

Filters

Languages ▼
Location ▼
Age ▼
Time Available ▼
Family ▼
Hobbies ▼

Sort by: Date Applied

Button: Match!

LOCALS (13)

Local 1   Age: 26   ☐
Languages: English
Location: Bergmanstrasse, Berlin
More ▼

Local 2   Age: 35   ☐
Languages: English
Location:
More ▼

Local 3   Age: 35   ☒
Languages: English
Location:
More ▼

Local 4   Age: 35   ☐
Languages: English
Location:
More ▼

Local 5   Age: 35   ☐
Languages: English

Figure 18 : Initial Proof of Concept, Expanded and Checked Boxes

EINWANDER*INNEN (2) ▼
🔍Such:

Match!
Undo

LOCALS (2) ▼
🔍Such:

Name 1   Alter: 25   ☐
Sprache(n): Englisch
Adresse: Liebigstraße, Berlin
Mehr Info ▼

Name 2   Alter: 36   ☐
Sprache(n): Deutsch, Arabisch
Adresse: Brunnenstraße, Berlin
Mehr Info ▼

Name 3   Alter: 26   ☐
Sprache(n): Englisch, Deutsch
Adresse: Bergmanstraße, Berlin
Mehr Info ▼

Name 4   Alter: 30   ☐
Sprache(n): Englisch
Adresse: Lottumstraße, Berlin
Mehr Info ▼

Figure 19: Overview of Revised Proof of Concept

Date Applied" and plan on including this feature in the filter drop down menu. This drop-down menu can be seen in Figure 20. We also decided that after a match is made, the boxes will turn gray. This is to ensure that if a better pair can be made with someone already matched, the person making the matches can see this. Then, they can click the undo button, unmatching the pair, allowing for the better pair to be matched. This can be seen in Figure 21. This revised proof of concept has also been translated to German for the members of SwaF. While it is not explicitly shown in Figures 19 through 21, the boxes will expand to show the same information as they do in Figure 18. Additionally, using the linking tool on PowerPoint, one can click through the database and drop down the filter menu, make matches, undo matches, and filter by German in this proof of concept. Our revised proof of concept provides the basic visuals and functions for our first prototype.

After creating the first initial proof of concept, we received feedback from our sponsor to further develop the filtering system. Developing this was important, as it will be the main feature used by SwaF employees to make pairs. It will also make the process of making matches much easier, which the team prioritized after finding it was a common theme from the Initial Requirements Workshops. We had a brainstorming session, the notes of which can be seen in Figure 22. From this session, we made choices about how to filter by location. After a participant is selected by clicking the checkbox, all other boxes will show the distance from this person. This will allow the person making matches to see
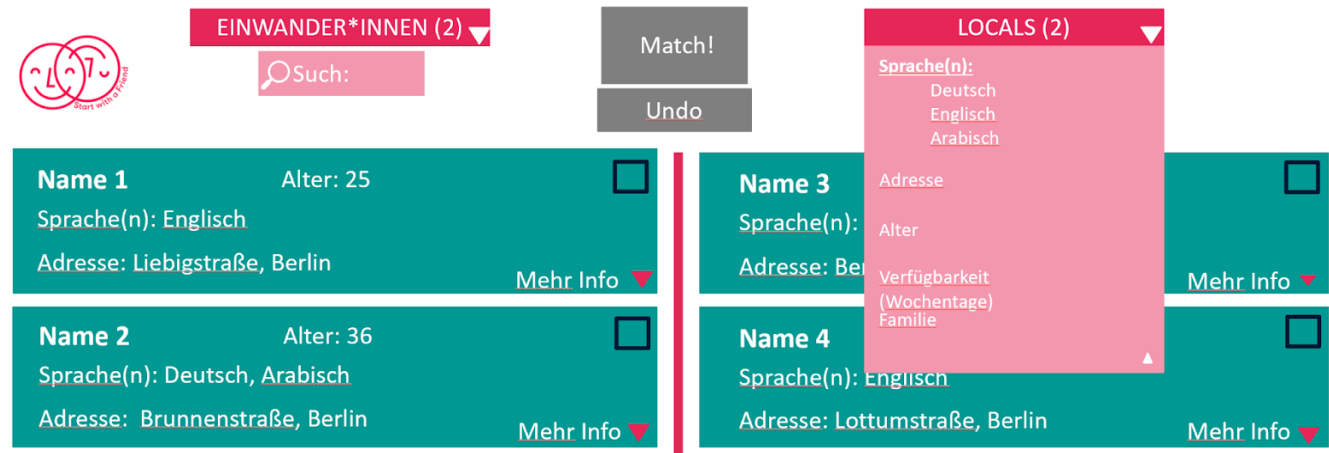

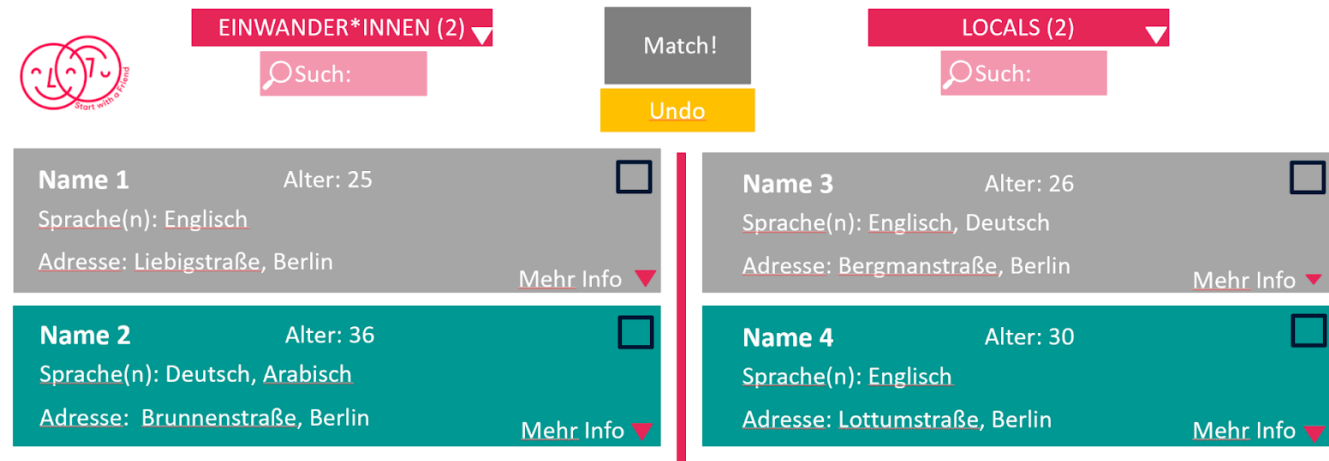**Figure 20: Revised Proof of Concept with Filters**

Figure 21: Revised Proof of Concept with Matched Pair

approximately how close participants are from each other. Then, a slider will allow for filtering by maximum distance apart. Additionally, one will be able to filter by age using a slider. This slider will allow one to pick an age range by which to filter. This brainstorming session also allowed us to further develop the boxes with information of each participant. We decided that the collapsed box will include the same information as our first proof of concept. However, when the box is expanded, one
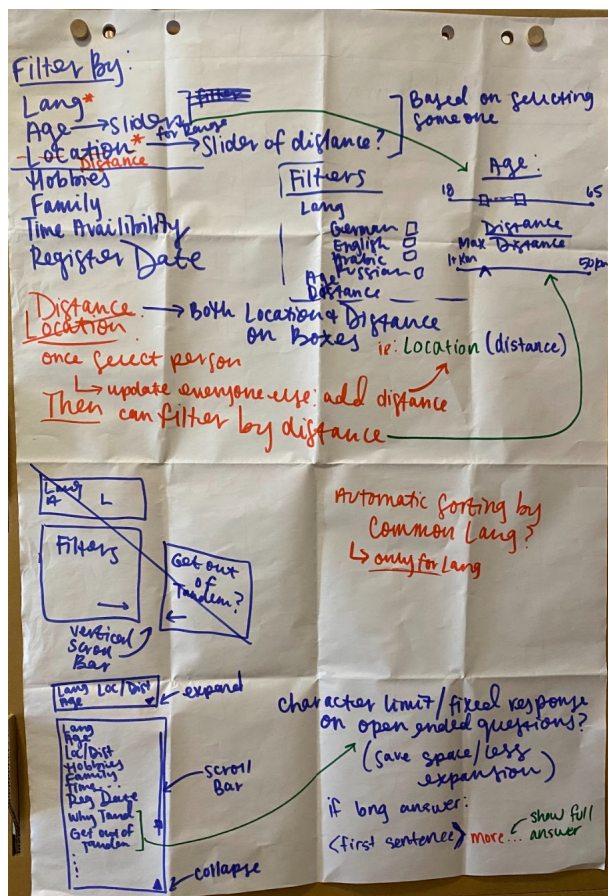
will be able to use a scroll bar to see all information all participants are asked before matches are made. These ideas were included in another PowerPoint proof of concept, which can be seen in Figure 23.

Our web prototype was developed within the React Framework and can be seen in Figure 24. In contrast to the previous designs described, the web-hosted mockup allowed for an extremely detailed and intuitive tool to use and receive feedback that prior iterations could not provide. Further, hosting the prototype online allows for easy distribution to test users, as online hosting allows for easy access via

HTML hyperlink. Finally, design of the online tool was more streamlined and reduced the amount of tedious work when recreating similar designs. All these factors allowed our team to not only receive valuable feedback on our final product but enabled a more Agile-inspired workflow as described in Objective 3.
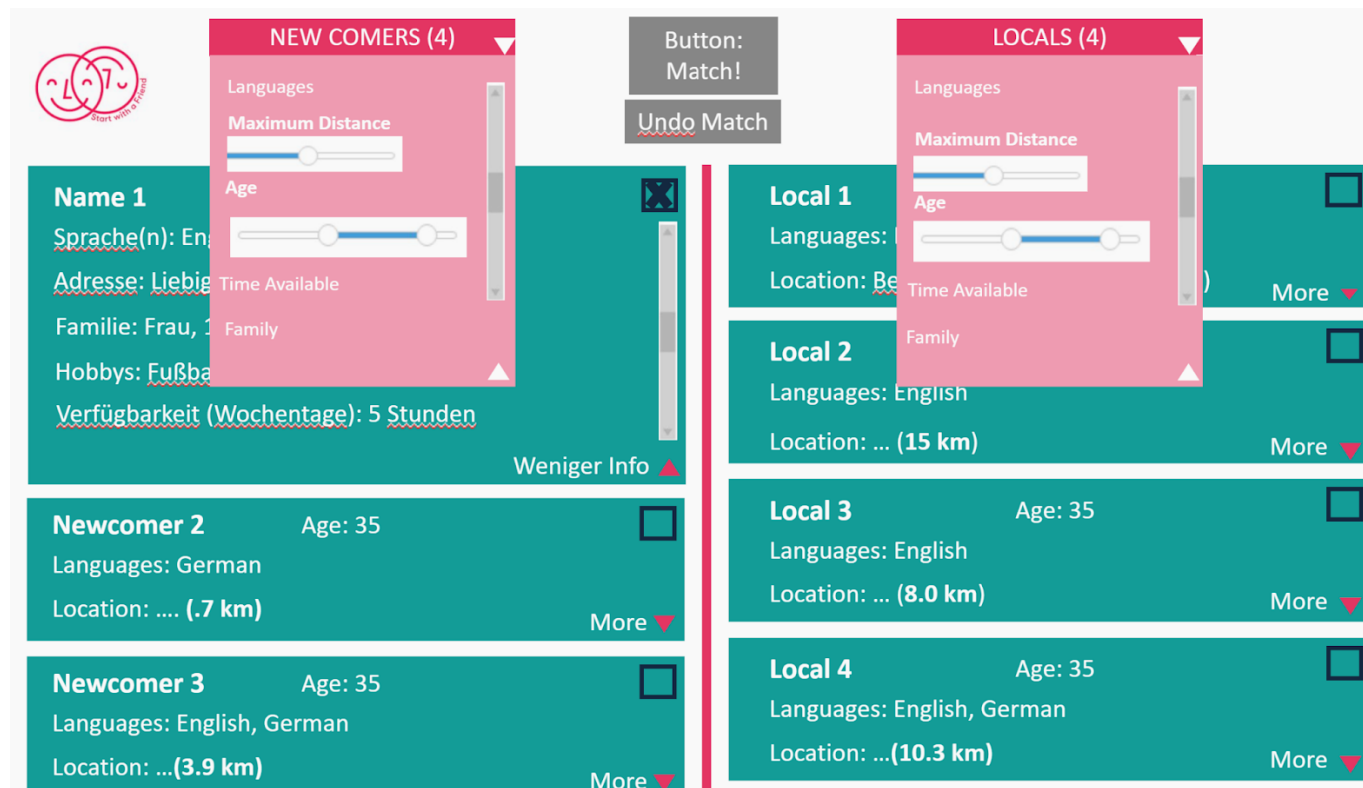

Figure 22: Filtering Brainstorming Notes

Figure 23: Proof of Concept: Developed Filtering System

PoC - Matching (4.25.22)

| EINWANDER*INNEN (5) ▼ | Match! | LOCAL (5) ▼ |

Suche: Einwander*innen (Name)

Suche: Local (Name)

Name 1
Sprache(n): Arabisch
Alter: 25 yrs
Hobbys: Wandern
☐ Mehr...

Name 11
Sprache(n): Englisch
Alter: 38 yrs
Hobbys: Jonglieren
☐ Mehr...

Name 2
Sprache(n): Mandarin
Alter: 30 yrs
Hobbys: Fußball
☐ Mehr...

Name 12
Sprache(n): Deutsch
Alter: 33 yrs
Hobbys: Wandern
☐ Mehr...

Name 3
Sprache(n): Englisch
Alter: 28 yrs
Hobbys: Tanzen
☐ Mehr...

Name 13
Sprache(n): Arabisch
Alter: 28 yrs
Hobbys: Tanzen
☐ Mehr...

Figure 24: First Prototype, Overview

EINWANDER*INNEN (5) ▼   Matc

Suche: Ein

Hobbys »   **Fußball**
Alter »   Wandern
Sprache(n) »   Tanzen
    Unterwegs
    Jonglieren

Name 2
Sprache(n): Mandarin
Alter: 30 yrs
Hobbys: Fußball
☐ Mehr...

Name 4
Sprache(n): Arabisch
Alter: 22 yrs
Hobbys: Fußball
☐ Mehr...

Figure 25: First Prototype: Filters

In order to properly analyze our first prototype, our team created an evaluation form. This form is intended to be completed by members of SwaF's local team after exploring the prototype. There are a few pretest questions to understand who is completing the form and their familiarity with the previous database. Most of the questions on the form are open-ended, to gather more thoughts and opinions than closed questions. There is one closed-ended question to rate their experience with the prototype to be able to quickly evaluate how well the prototype fits their needs. We also asked users which registration questions they found most helpful in the registration process. These questions allow for SwaF workers to make an informed decision about the matches they create and SwaF aims to include as much information as possible from the registration questions in the final database. By gathering both quantitative and qualitative feedback, our team can make as many improvements to our prototype as possible to make sure the new database truly fits the needs of SwaF employees.

The first prototype created was only visual and not functional. This means that while one can see filters and do a few basic functions like expanding a box and making a pair, the prototype can't actually filter participants or connect to actual SwaF data. The implemented prototype will look different than the first prototype as it will be adjusted based on the evaluation feedback. The implementation, outlined in Figure 27, will have its own container (C2 in Figure 27) in the SwaF server architecture. Separating the code into a separate part of the server can help avoid

Figure 26: Section of Evaluation Form

Note: This figure shows a portion of our translated evaluation form with examples of both heuristic evaluation and open-ended questions.

an error in the code from bringing the whole database down. This container will connect with another container (Container 1) which holds the database (1), events management, and volunteer management. The user will need to authenticate themselves when first going onto the dashboard and when going to the matching prototype to ensure protection of data. Additionally, this can allow for the filtering of data based on the user. For example, if the user is from Berlin, they will only be able to see newcomers and locals in the Berlin program.

An important part of the revised database is the ability to receive constant user feedback. This led to the creation of a Padlet Board, which was a suggestion from our sponsor (see Figure 28). While we also debated creating a Trello board, we chose to use Padlet due to its voting and commenting features as well as its accessibility. The board will be accessible by anyone who uses the database without the need to register an account. The board has four columns: Requests, Planned, In Progress, and Completed. Users will be able to create boxes in the Requests column. Once our sponsor looks over the request and creates a plan to address it, they will move the box into the Planned column. After beginning to work on the plan, the box will be moved into the In Progress column and it will be moved into the Completed column once the request has been fulfilled. By moving the boxes from column to column, users will be aware of when their requests are being addressed and progress that has been made. Users will have the ability to upvote and downvote other requests, to show which requests should be prioritized. They may also add comments to elaborate why they have upvoted or downvoted a request.
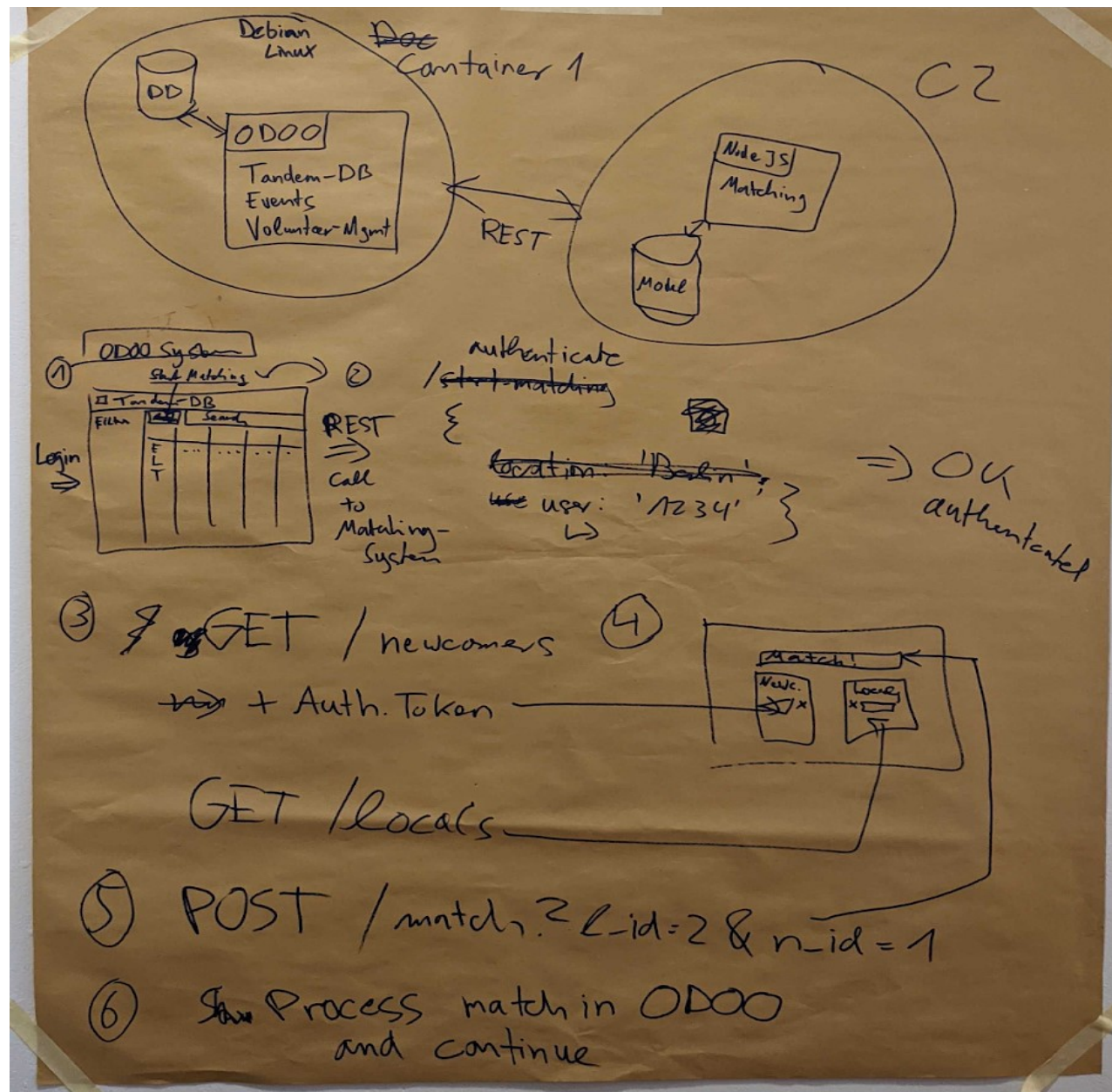

Figure 27: Implementation Online
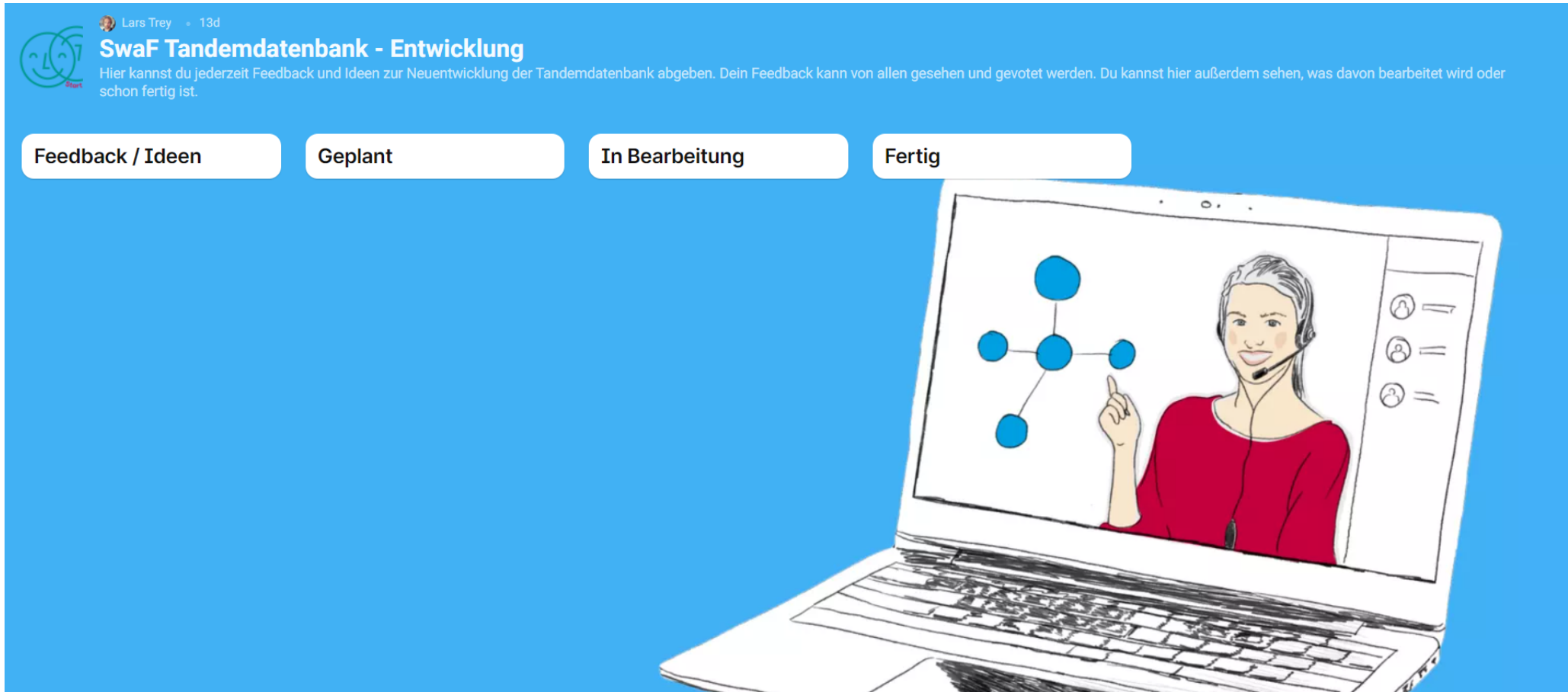*Note: This figure shows a sketch of the outline for implementing the first prototype.*

Figure 28: Padlet Board for Constant Feedback

Conclusion

During our time working with SwaF, we were able to create a successful prototype for an improved Tandem database. We were only able to do so after studying how SwaF helps support newcomers with trauma and works to combat discrimination. The understanding we developed of these topics allowed us to make informed decisions when making design choices for the prototype. Additionally, our prototype was successful because we continually worked with our sponsor to receive and respond to stakeholder feedback through workshops and consistent meetings. Furthermore, we have several recommendations for SwaF. For the database, we recommend using a slider (as seen in Figure 25) to filter location/distance and age. Additionally, we created fixed responses to questions asked of both newcomers and locals before making tandem matches. Participants will be able to select one or more options, as well as an "other" option which is free-response with a word limit. We analyzed previous responses given to these questions to do so. By including questions with fixed responses, the matching process will be easier and each participant box on the database will be clearer and easier to read.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the context in which this work was done. During our time in Germany, millions of Ukrainians have fled the Russian invasion of Ukraine[60]. As of late April, approximately 379,000 Ukrainians have been registered in Germany[61]. Our research team and other members of the cohort have volunteered at the Berlin Hauptbahnhof to help distribute hygiene products and to help newcomers find lodging and travel; we have partnered with other WPI students, moreover, to organize a fundraiser to buy supplies that are being distributed to the refugees. Beyond these most immediate forms of aid, our research and collaboration with SwaF will continue to support not only the newcomer population already being helped, but the Ukrainian refugees as well. SwaF has joined the Alliance4Ukraine along with many other organizations who are working to create a network of resources for Ukrainian refugees. Our project, inasmuch as it aids in the Tandem matching process, will aid Ukrainian refugees in finding a local partner to give emotional first aid and build a social network.

Acknowledgements

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