

Dear demonstration participants,

My name is Jörg Schmidt Rohr and I am here as an activist participating in the Alliance against Poverty and Discrimination in Heidelberg. I would like to make some comments about the social demands and current social situation.

First, about our alliance: we're a merger of 53 organisations here in Heidelberg. Almost every active Heidelberg group and association is part of our alliance. This includes bigger charity organisations like Caritas, AWO or the DGB as well as smaller groups like the Aids Hilfe (Aid) or Vincent.

Our alliance facilitates the collaboration of and networking between members to enable targeted aid. We understand ourselves as a lobby for poor and/or marginalised people. Once a year, around world poverty day on October 17, we host a campaign week with many different events.

We regard the fight against poverty here and globally as interconnected with the development of sustainability and the fight for climate protection. The SDG, the sustainable development goals as intended by UNO, cover these topics. These goals are mutually dependent since poor people suffer the most under the consequences of climate change. They suffer more despite not attributing as much too it, as they have a considerably smaller carbon footprint. This is true globally, and also here in our city.

Those with no money to spare will never or rarely fly. They might not own a car and are dependent on public transport. They might be experiencing terrible local transport, but this is less impactful on the climate than a car would be.

Now, to speak more specifically about Heidelberg and our demands and wishes to the old or new mayor:

The current situation is difficult for many. Many things are happening at once – the much too low basic income, the massive increase in energy prices (which should be based on a standard rate) and the high inflation. All of this creates fear. Fear of cold apartments, of new debt, fear that what we have just might not be enough.

Many problems like the absurdly low standard rate for basic income are issues to be dealt with at a federal level. I also do not wish to get into the dreadful discussion around the tiny improvement of unemployment benefits (“Bürgergeld”).

But some things can be moved locally. We demand local aid that will help reduce the biggest issues through additional funds. This was just discussed in a municipal committee, welcomed by the participants, but pushed back for now, until they know what federal politicians decide. It might be too late by then.

We also think it's necessary that not just the social department, but the whole administration and the future mayor, understand that small social support groups particularly will experience existential failures due to high energy costs. To prevent this, social infrastructure – which surely is relevant to the system – must be preserved.

Another topic that has occupied us for years is the lack of living space for those with a low income in Heidelberg. Most cannot find a place to live and cannot afford living in Heidelberg any longer. They move into the surrounding area and often have to put up with expensive commutes and insufficient public transport. This changes the social structures within the city. Heidelberg must not become a city for people with a medium to high income only.

Over the last few years, new living space has been created in Heidelberg, though much of it, for example Bahnstadt, is very much unaffordable for people with low or basic income or small pensions. There are a few affordable apartments in Südstadt, but by far not enough of them. We demand a radical change in housing policy from the new mayor. We cannot waste our next chance – the PHV.

Aside from specific conditions for poor persons, we also need specific plans for objectives regarding the social sector. Heidelberg must become carbon neutral and resistant to poverty. Currently, there is a lack of focus on this topic. Aside from the review necessary for the report on the social situation, there is too little long-term and strategic investment into the social infrastructure.

More family-orientated districts, more prevention and investments in equal education, better advertised and financed advisory services, and a higher social employment level are just a few of the steps needed to eliminate poverty.

This is precisely the first goal of the SDG. During the process of creating a new urban development concept, which is starting now, this needs to be considered. And this can only be successful if those on top care.

Inclusion is also a big part of this, and affects not just those with disabilities, but is a comprehensive concept for the whole urban society. Inclusion means that everyone can participate. Every level and constitution must be open for everyone. This begins with accessibility and doesn't come close to ending with diverse living environments for employees of the city administration. It includes all areas and persons who, for whatever reason, tend to be excluded. As an alliance, we work to eliminate every form of marginalisation, and we have a long and winding road ahead of us. We need a mayor at our side who supports us and will make this part of their daily life.

Heidelberg is a relatively wealthy city and can afford many things. So why not better social policies? The municipal council is open to many things, but we need initiative from the administrative and top levels.

This is what we hope and wish for from our new mayor.

Jörg Schmidt-Rohr