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EMVI - Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies

WP2: National Report Austria* July 2022

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I. Participation and Integration Structures in Austria

1 Statistics on Migration in Austria

1.1 Foreign citizens and persons with migration background

1.5 million people (about 17,7%) living in Austria don't have the Austrian citizenship – out of which a quarter of million people are born in Austria. The largest groups of “foreigners” (1.1.2021) are from Germany (208.732), Romania (131.824), Serbia (121.990), Turkey (117.580), Bosnia (96.990), Hungary (91.395), Croatia (89.007), Poland (65.604), Syria (55.372), Slovakia (45.362) and Afghanistan (44.002) (Statistik Austria, 1.1.2021). About one quarter of the population (2.14 million) has a “migration background” (defined as both parents are born in a foreign country) – 40% of which are from EU and EFTA states, 26% from former Yugoslavia (without Croatia and Slovenia), 12,6% from Turkey, 6% from Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq (ibid., p 28).

1.2 Recognized refugees, subsidiary protection holders and asylum seeking persons

“Austria hosts around 146.000 refugees and subsidiary protection holders and over 18.000 asylum-seekers. Most refugees come from Syria (close to 58.000) and Afghanistan (around 41.000), which are also the top nationalities of asylum-seekers” (UNHCR, no date). According to the Ministry of Interior Affairs (BMI 2021), 39.930 persons applied for asylum in the year 2021 - 25.270 male, 2.700 female and 11.960 under age (among those 5.605 unaccompanied minors); in 2020 only 14.775 persons applied for asylum. The most applications were done by Syrian, Afghan, Moroccan, Iraqi and Somali citizens (ibid.). In 2020, 8.069 persons were granted asylum. Out of those the largest groups are from Afghanistan (2.875), Syria (2.751), Iran (705), Somalia (566) and Iraq (246). Around 39% of all completed asylum procedures were legally positive, 46% of the decisions were negative. 15% of proceedings were discontinued. The average duration of the asylum process is 3,9 months (BFA 2020).

1.3 Gender

Among all persons living but not born in Austria, 51,1% are female and 48,9% are male (1.1.2020). In 2019, one third of all asylum applications were submitted by women, whereas 47% of all positive asylum decisions in the same year were issued to women (ÖIF 2020), mainly from Afghanistan (1.800), Syria (1.200) and Somalia (470). More women (54,5%) than men were naturalized (ibid.). Interestingly, 45,4% of women with migration background have a high school or university degree, compared to 37,9% of women without migration background. 11,8% of women with non-Austrian citizenship were unemployed, whereas 6% of Austrian women did not have a formal, paid employment in 2019 (ibid.).

1.4 Regional distribution

The proportion of the population with a migration background is quite different among the federal states. It is particularly low in Burgenland (13.4%), Carinthia (14.5%), Styria (15.3%, 187.058 persons) and Lower Austria (16.4%). In Upper Austria (20.0%), Tyrol (22.0%) and Salzburg (23.6%) there is only a slightly below-average proportion of persons with a migration background, while in Vorarlberg (26.6%, 104.529 persons) there are slightly more people with a migrant background than the national average. Vienna has by far the highest proportion of persons with migration background with 46.2% (866.647 persons) (Statistik Austria 2021).

A look at the citizenships: in Burgenland 9,6% do not have the Austrian citizenship, 10,6% in Lower Austria, 11,3% in Carinthia, 11,9% in Styria, 13,6% in Upper Austria, 16,7% in Tyrol, 18,2% in Salzburg, 18,6% in Vorarlberg and 31,5% in Vienna (ibid.).

Graz

In 2021, out of 333.049 inhabitants, 77.411 people registered in Graz have a different citizenship than the Austrian one. Out of these, the 10 largest countries of origin are: Croatia (9.076), Romania (8.827), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.160), Germany (7.068), Turkey (5.577), Hungary (3.494), Syria (3.121), Afghanistan (3.112), Slovenia (2.513) and Russia (2.325). 38.978 persons living in Graz are EU citizens and 38.433 are non-EU citizens (Graz 2022).

Lustenau

Lustenau has a long history of immigration. Especially in the 20th century many people, so called “Gastarbeiter” came to the municipality to work in embroidery. In 2011, there were people from 60 different nations living in Lustenau (Heinzle and Scheffknecht 2011). In 2022, there are already people from 89 different nations living in Lustenau. The five biggest nations apart from Austrians are Turkey (1.459), Germany (890), Romania (502), Bosnia and Herzegovina (267), and Syria (240). Today (status of July 2022), Lustenau has in total 24.984 inhabitants. 5.884 people have a different citizenship than the Austrian one. 3.178 people are from non-EU states. Around 2.500 are from EU states (source: anonymized lists from the registration office of the municipality).

2 Main official Institutions & Stakeholders for Migrant Integration

The main political institution responsible for “integration” is the **“Federal Ministry for Women, Family, Integration and Media”**. The ministry is headed by the ÖVP (Austrian People’s Party), just like the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of European and International Affairs – the two other relevant ministries dealing with asylum and migration. The ministry has been under the critique to frame gender-based violence and patriarchal structures as problem that is imported or is only happening in migrant communities and at the same time using the narrative of the “dangerous foreign/Muslim man”, carrying out a restrictive migration/integration policy in the name of gender equality (e.g. Der Standard, 2020).

The **Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)** is responsible for the integration courses and exams mentioned in the Integration Act (see below), provides funding for integration projects and publishes integration reports. It has close links to the Austrian People’s Party and is under the critique to fulfill the conservative restrictive agenda of the people’s party (compare Bridge 2020). Also under harsh critique by the civil society was/is the **Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services (BBU)**, which is responsible for the legal advice and representation of asylum seekers and refugees, return counselling, and human rights monitoring of deportations. Since 2021, the legal advice of persons in the asylum process has been taken away from independent NGOs and put in the hands of this nationalized agency, which sole shareholder is the Ministry of the Interior.

Relevant NGOs in the sector integration and asylum are, but not limited to:

- Asylkoordination
- Caritas Österreich
- Diakonie Österreich
- Hilfswerk Österreich
- Integrationshaus
- Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz
- Ute Bock Haus
- Volkshilfe
- ZARA Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismusarbeit (publishing the annual racism report)

3 Main legal framework for the Regulation of Integration

3.1 The Integration Act

The „**Federal Act for the Integration of Persons without Austrian Nationality Legally Resident in Austria**“ builds the main legal framework for the “integration of persons entitled to asylum, persons holding subsidiary protection status and other third-country nationals legally settled in Austria. According to this Integration Act, „integration measures are intended to enable persons to participate in social, economic and cultural life in Austria“ (RIS 2017) - *political* participation is not mentioned.

One main part in the Integration Act, is the so-called “integration agreement”, which legally settled TCNs have to sign and that regulates that German language courses and “value and orientation courses” are obligatory and an “integration exam” has to be taken (RIS 2017). Further, the Act regulates the establishment and functions of an “expert council for integration”, an “advisory committee on integration”, the “integration monitoring” and a “research coordination office”. The following key areas of integration are listed in the Integration Act: “participation through gainful work, access to and acceptance of education offers, equal treatment of the sexes, and the rapid achievement of the ability to earn one’s living”. Further, it is said that the receipt of the Austrian citizenship is the “final point of a comprehensive integration process” (ibid.).

3.2 The Citizenship Act

The “**Federal Act on the Austrian Citizenship**” is particularly relevant for the political participation of migrants. It is evaluated as one of the most restrictive in the European Union (MIPEX 2020). According to the law (RIS 1985/2022), the citizenship may only be granted to a “foreigner” if, the person has resided lawfully and *without interruption* in the country for *at least ten years*. Furthermore, the proof of a fixed and regular own income is required (currently, after deducting fixed costs, around 1.000 Euro for individuals, around 1.600 for families). Additional criteria are: no court convictions, no pending criminal proceedings, no serious administrative violations; knowledge of German and a test proving “basic knowledge of the democratic order and basic principles as well as history” (see integration exam), no close relationship to an extremist or terrorist group, no danger to public peace, order and security. Persons receiving the Austrian citizenship lose the previous citizenship(s). The legal process takes several months up to years, and costs several thousand Euros of fees. Only under certain conditions (e.g. marriage to an Austrian, born in Austria, sustainable personal integration, extraordinary achievements) the citizenship can be given already after six years of residence in Austria (ibid.).

An amendment of the citizenship law (October 2019 with adoptions in May 2022) regulates the **granting of the Austrian citizenship for victims of NS-persecution and their descendants** (BMEIA 2022). Therefore in 2021 and the first quartal of 2022, the highest numbers of naturalizations are persons from Israel, the US, and the UK. In previous years, the highest numbers were among persons with previous citizenships from Bosnia, Turkey, Serbia and Kosovo.

Other relevant laws are:

- Federal Act Concerning the Granting of Asylum
- Federal Act on Settlement and Residence in Austria
- Federal Constitutional Law (regulating suffrage)
- Federal law on the external legal relationships of Islamic Religious Societies

4 Main policies in the country dealing/responsible for migrant integration

4.1 The Government Program 2020-2024

The topic of migration is probably the most controversial within the Austrian government between the Austrian People's Party and the Green Party. Interestingly enough, therefore in the joint government program a so-called "escalation mechanism" is described, guaranteeing a "coalition free space" in the case of a new "migration crisis" on the basis of which the People's Party would be allowed to act without the agreement of the Green Party and search for another majority in the parliament (e.g. with the right-wing Freedom Party) (Republik Österreich 2020). The government program further states that the "Austrian integration policy continues to be guided by the principle of 'integration through performance' ("Integration durch Leistung") and the principle of 'support and demand' ("Fördern und Fordern")" (ibid.). Under the topic of asylum a "preventative detention" for persons that *could* be a danger to the public security was planned but then evaluated as not in line with the Austrian constitution by experts and the Minister of Justice (Green Party). Under the topic of integration, the prohibition of the headscarf under the age of 14, more controls of child care and educational institutions with Islamic background and an "obligation to cooperate" for parents in schools is elaborated (ibid.).

4.2 The National Action Plans on Integration and Racism

In the **NAP on Integration** measures to implement the Government Program and the agenda of the Ministry for Integration are formulated. It focuses on the areas language and education, work and profession, rule of law and values, health and social affairs, intercultural dialogue, sport and leisure as well as housing and the regional dimension of integration – political participation is not on the agenda. There is a certain focus on strengthening migrant women, particularly regarding education, German courses, labor market integration, health care and gender-based violence (BKA, no date). The development of a **National Action Plan against Racism** is also in the Government Program but until now not formulated.

Graz

The newest Integration Strategy of the municipality of Graz is from the years 2015-2022. Five pillars are mentioned: languages, rights and obligations, culture and values, interreligious dialogue and identification. It has to be mentioned that Graz has had a mayor from the People's Party from 2003 to 2021, forming a coalition with the Freedom Party since 2017. Since November 2021, Elke Kahr from the Communist Party is the mayor of Graz, building a coalition with the Green Party and the Social Democrats. Thus, the municipality is in a transitional period and is currently developing a new Integration Strategy. The focus lies on a positive narrative of integration/migration, affordable housing, work to live on and a livable city (Graz 2022_1).

Lustenau

The municipality of Lustenau has worked out an integration concept in 2014 (Marktgemeinde Lustenau 2014). It is called "living together in Lustenau". The main fields are appreciating the cultural diversity, politics and administration, education and further training, health and wellbeing, living and neighborhood, children and young people. In every field the concept contains goals, good practices and ideas for the future. There is no focus on women in the integration plan, but one on young people and children – political participation is not mentioned (ibid.).

There is no written Anti-racist action plan in Lustenau, but networking meetings take place. There is a committee of experts for extremism prevention (school directors, a delegate of Vorarlberg who is responsible for protection against violence, employees from the municipality, and from security services), that gathers regularly. They discuss cases in schools or the security apparatus to find a common solution.

5 Inclusion of migrants in the design and implementation of integration policies on national, regional, local level

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX 2020) ranks Austria among the countries that promote only “temporary integration”, criticizing that Austria goes “only halfway towards granting immigrants with basic rights and equal opportunities”. Furthermore, it does “not provide immigrants with a secure future in the country. Policies [...] encourage the public to see immigrants as foreigners and not fully as equals and neighbors”. Austria’s access to nationality as well as migrants’ political participation is labeled as “unfavorable” (ibid.). It further states, that “Austria continues to experience unfavorable policies towards their political participation as they still have no voting rights, few local consultative bodies and weak support for immigrant organizations” (ibid.).

The restrictive naturalization law leads to the fact, that about 1,5 million people (about 17,7%) in Austria – out of which a quarter of million people *born* in Austria - have no citizenship and are therefore not allowed to vote. In the age group 27 to 44, the percentage is over 40 percent. These numbers are rising, as every fifth child born in Austria has a foreign citizenship. Statistics show that the strict naturalization law mainly affects workers¹ / low-income earners - and in this group especially women, who tend to work in lower-paid professions (Kücüktekin and Odobašić 2022). These numbers even raise concerns how representative the democracy in the country is. According to expert estimates, about a third of autochthonous Austrians could not afford the citizenship or would not meet the conditions that were mentioned above (ibid.).

5.1 Examples of Political Participation of Migrants

The current **“Black Voices” referendum (Anti-racism referendum)** is one way of and a call for more political participation of migrants. It calls for a National Action Plan against Racism and demands targeting structural racism in areas such as education, health care, police and the labor market. The referendum also asks for the “introduction of the right to vote and stand for election at all political levels, starting from a registered period of residence of five years in Austria” (Black Voices 2022).

Alma Zadic is for sure a role model for political participation of migrants, having been a refugee from Bosnia in the 1990s, she is now the Minister of Justice - the first minister in Austria with a migration background.

The **Migrants’ Advisory Council Graz** is a political representation of the interests of third country nationals in Graz (10% of the total population of Graz). The council consists of nine members (non-EU citizens) elected also by non-EU migrants living in Graz. Members are elected through a direct and secret ballot that takes place on the same day as the Municipal Council elections Graz and serve for the same legislative period of 5 years. The council members work on a voluntary basis and convene regularly. The Migrants’ Advisory Council (formerly Foreigner Advisory Council) was established in 1995 by a policy resolution of the Municipal Council of Graz (Migrants’ Advisory Council).

¹ E.g. in Vienna about 60% of workers are not allowed to vote (Kücüktekin and Odobašić 2022)

The Migrants' Advisory Council has the following tasks:

- Preserve and protect the interests of migrants
- Advise the city council and the administration through suggestions, recommendations and opinions
- Promote a better cohabitation among all inhabitants of Graz
- Inform and advise the associations and communities about its activities
- Reporting on the state and well-being of immigrants in Graz
- Organizing seminars, events and workshops on such themes as culture, politics, education, social issues and sports
- Networking and cooperating with the Graz municipal authorities, institutions and NGOs (ibid.)

6 Main Migrant Organizations

6.1 Graz

Graz has around 50 migrant-led associations, many of which are very active and well-organized. The following is a selection of three organizations founded by people with migrant background that have become important institutions in Graz, and two rather young associations, whose founders also participated in focus group discussions for this research.

- **IKEMBA** - Low-threshold, community-based access to outreach work, counselling, information: www.ikemba.at, www.facebook.com/VereinIkemba/, office@ikemba.at: IKEMBA is an association for intercultural, conflict management, empowerment, migration accompaniment, education and work.
- **CHIALA Association** - Culture, Diversity, Development: www.chiala.at, www.facebook.com/ChialaGraz/, office@chiala.at: CHIALA offers counselling on social issues, housing, employment, family and legal counselling for migrants, creative & anti-racist workshops for schools, youth centers and adults, cultural work, annual Chiala Africa Festival in Graz, first African media library in Graz, African buffet & catering
- **JUKUS Association for the Promotion of Youth, Culture, Sport**: www.jukus.at, www.facebook.com/www.jukus.at/, ali@jukus.at: JUKUS offers anti-racism, youth work, leisure pedagogy, a youth center, promotion of health literacy, art and culture and programs for the promotion of social participation.
- **Katib Farsi Library**: <https://de-de.facebook.com/KATIBFarsiBibliothek/>, roohullah.borhani@gmail.com: The first Persian-language library in Styria, offering German and English books about Afghanistan or by well-known Afghan writers.
- **Fivestones Association**: www.fivestones.at, <https://www.facebook.com/FIVESTONES.at/>, fereydun.zahedi@gmx.at: The platform has set itself the task of supporting the integration of immigrants into Austrian/European society and of attaching great importance to qualitative communication with others. It organizes events, workshops and conferences, and functions as central institution of the Afghan diaspora in Austria.

6.2 Lustenau

In Lustenau there are mainly cultural and religious migrant organisations and a sport association.

In the municipality there are three different mosque associations:

- **ATIB Lustenau**, Tavernhofstraße 17a, <https://kum.atiblustenau.at/>, chairman: Hassan Tas
- **VIKZ Lustenau** (Lustenauer Bildungs- und Kulturverein), Flurstraße 30, chairman: Mustafa Aktepe
- **AIF Lustenau** (Süleymaniye-Moschee), Kneippstraße 6, chairman: Mücahit Balkaya

There are two cultural migrant organisations:

- **Kizilca & Lustenau**, Kultur- und Sportverein, Reichsstraße 42, chairman: Halil Ilgeç
This culture association is named after a Turkish village. In Lustenau there live about 700 people who come from this village.
- **Habes Kultur und Unterstützungsverein**, Bahnhofstraße 44a, chairman: Coskun Medet

Furthermore, there is one sport association:

- **Bocciacclub Galeb Lustenau**, Mesnergut 10 a, 6850 Dornbirn
This culture and sport association was founded in 1971 by people from former Yugoslavia (source: <http://www.boccia-verband.at/bc-galeb-lustenau/chronik/>).

All associations in Lustenau can be found here: <https://www.lustenau.at/de/freizeit/vereine>

All mosque associations in Vorarlberg can be found here: <https://www.okay-line.at/Informationen/moschee-und-alevitische-cem-vereine-in-vorarlberg-kontaktaten/>

II. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

1 General Information

In Austria 16 in-depth interviews were conducted from May to July 2022. Seven Interviews were conducted with migrants living in Graz and seven in Lustenau, Vorarlberg. Among the interviewed there are persons who have been living in Austria for a long time (around 30 years) and persons who have been living in Austria for only a short period of time (around 4 months). The country of origin differs, but all are third-country-nationals: one person is from New Zealand, three from Iraq, one from Nigeria, one from Libya, one from Sierra Leone, one from South America, one from Iran, two from Syria, two people with a Turkish background and one person with a Philippine background. The age range is from around 20-70 years. 9 male and 5 female persons were interviewed. Although the situation of the people, their personal history and their needs differ, common identified obstacles regarding political participation and demands in order to make the voices of migrants heard, could be found. In order to gain more information about the situation in Lustenau there were additionally conducted 2 interviews with stakeholders. One person is councilwoman and one person used to work for the department “living together” in the municipality of Lustenau.

In order to get a realistic picture of the political participation of people with migrant background in Lustenau, there are two main groups that have to be considered. As already mentioned in the desk research the municipality has a long history of migration. The people who came in the 20th century, nowadays live here in second and third generation and of course many of them already have the Austrian citizenship, but still since they are the biggest group, they have to be considered. The other group are refugees and other TCN that came to Austria in the last 10 years.

1.1 Understanding of Integration

The Austrian Integration Act defines Integration as „a two-way process characterized by mutual appreciation and respect, with clear rules ensuring social cohesion and social peace“ (Bundeskanzleramt 2022). The understanding of Integration of migrants sometimes differs from the understanding of the native population and also from how integration is defined in a scientific way. *“Integration is the process during which a person gets to know the traditions of the place where they moved to and adapt to said traditions.”*, describes this young man how he sees integration (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022).

A young man from Libya stated that he feels personally integrated but physically not. He feels part of the society in Austria and he is able to communicate with it, but still there are a lot of things he is not allowed to do, but the native population is (e.g., to vote) (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022).

All the interviewed persons stated that especially language is one of the key factors for integration. Without speaking the language of the country where you live, it is hard to be a full member of the society. It is not only hard to interact with the local population, but you also cannot voice your demands, ideas and rights.

Integration is seen by the interviewees as an adapting and exchanging process in which they want to enter. *„Adapting does not mean you have to change yourself or where you came from. It’s the differences that make the place look so beautiful.”* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022)

Measures like language classes or orientation classes are named as being helpful in the first month when arriving to a new country, but actual integration takes a lot longer (Iraqi man_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). On this path of integration and adaption to the new country a lot of challenges are met, not only language barriers but also discrimination and racism make the day-to-day life very hard, a young woman from Iraq points out. (Personal Interview, May 24, 2022). Discrimination is not only an issue in Austria, but also in the home countries, often being the reason why someone had to flee. *“I am used to discrimination, also in my home country, this is why I left my country.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) The lack of empathy, the racism towards someone only because having a different skin color, not been taken seriously and threats of calling the police make the integration process hard for migrants. A refugee from Sierra Leone shares his experience about racial profiling: *“They put me in a car that is meant for criminals. But I was not a criminal, I was an asylum seeker, so I did not deserve to be in this car. [...] Asylum seekers and citizens should be treated the same way when it comes to being a suspect. Being in a cell, with no window, I was really scared. I did no crime that I deserved such a punishment.”* (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

To stay positive, stay engaged, go to German courses, seek for work and try to get in contact with the locals is hard but essential for the interviewed. A young man from Iraq highlights, that it is hard to be so involved and positive about circumstances you never wished for and to learn a new language you might have never been interested in (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Support is extremely important and mostly the support comes from civil society, friends and other engaged persons. *“I was very lucky, that so many people helped me, without them it would not have been possible to start my life here.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

Especially at the beginning migrants face a lot of challenges because they are not used the country and its society. This starts, as already mentioned, with languages but goes further, not knowing how to use

services, how to interact with authorities. This can lead to stress and depression (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

The lack of information is mentioned as one major challenge for migrants. Often, they are not fully informed about procedures, where to get support from or even if they receive money from whom it comes (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

2 Migrant Needs

2.1 Most important political needs for you/community/migrants

One of the main needs identified throughout the interviews is the need of information. Often it is not clear, where to get information about political participation, education or work possibilities from. The interviewees pointed out that often they do not know what kind of possibilities to participate politically exist. It is important to gain more knowledge about how politics and political engagement work in Austria. To know the rules and circumstances of Austrian Politics is crucial to them, in order to be active. *“Sometimes I wonder if some regulations and laws do not exist in Austria, or if I just simply do not know about them and do not know where to find this information.”* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). Also, in Lustenau the problem of lacking information regarding political participation was mentioned. *“I have been living here for 8 years, but I unfortunately do not have enough information about that.”* (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022). She mentioned twice that she does not have enough information: one time when she was asked how she could politically participate and where, and once when she was asked which organizations could support her. A man with Turkish background (personal interview, June 4, 2022) also said, that *“the right for participation, the right for petitions, as well as the right to gather for example exist, but the people of his community are not informed about those things and about what they can do”*. Furthermore, he also mentioned, that the people are often not aware of the opportunities that are offered like for example language courses, tutoring or leisure time facilities.

The need to be heard as a Non-EU-Citizen is also mentioned several times. Not only do TCN often feel not informed, also if they raise their voices, they do not feel heard. (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022; Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

This is why gatherings as described by the Head of the Migrant Council Graz are very important. *“We meet up with migrant organizations in Graz to speak about current topics. This can be topics like the difficulties about Corona and homeschooling, especially because migrants often live in small flats. To provide this exchange about topics is very important.”* (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022) Topics raised in those meetings are brought to the city council by the Migrant Advisory Council, in order to represent the voice of TCNs.

Besides not being heard one person in Lustenau also mentioned that their success is not seen. A Syrian man points out (Personal Interview, June 14, 2022): *“We do not have a platform to talk, or to say something, the parties/the actual government does not give us the platform or the space to say something or to talk about us. There is no spotlight on the good things. Many refugees for example study at university or work as doctors or engineers but the spotlight is always on the negative things. If a refugee does something bad everybody writes about it and this is unfair”*. He also mentions his feeling about a lack of statistics showing the numbers of refugees attending university, working as doctors or engineers. He finds such data is only available for Germany and USA but not for Austria. The only data that is provided here is the number of arrivals and departures to the home country. *“There are many*

young people with a very good level of German and good work, but no one sees them. For the government this does not matter” (Syrian Man, personal Interview, June 14, 2022).

Culture and media, theater and music are important to give a space and a platform where being loud and demanding is tolerated. The two interviewed artists stated that art can be highly political and gives migrants a way to express themselves, because otherwise they are often not heard. (New Zealand man, personal interview, May 4, 2022; Iraqi man, personal Interview_2, May 24, 2022)

Not being able to vote in any elections is seen as a discrimination and something that has to be changed. It is not clear to the interviewed persons why EU-citizens do have the right to vote in municipality elections but third-country-nationals do not. *“This is the painful thing, because government should be from the people for the people. This is what a democratic government is.”* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022) Not having the same rights as other people living in the same city is hard to understand. *“Politics has been one of the greatest forms of joy. [...] I am not allowed to. It’s like I should keep mute but I love politics.”* (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022). Although they have been living here for a long time and they are not planning to go somewhere else, they are not allowed to vote: *“If I think after 8 years here, where will I be in 10 years, I think that I still will be here, my husband is here, my children are here, where should I go? In my opinion it is a pity, that we live here, but we are not allowed to vote here”* (woman with Philippine background, personal interview June 7, 2022). For people with a migrant background who already have the Austrian citizenship and therefore the right to vote it also does not seem right, that TCN are not allowed to vote: *“It would be great if they would get an opportunity to vote, they are also part of this country, they live here, they work here, they are people like we are, but are not allowed to vote, this really is a problem”* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022).

It could be seen that if someone does not plan to stay in Austria, also the right to vote does not seem so important. *“For me it is important to vote in my own country.”* (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022).

Two persons mentioned the problem, that even though they are married to a person with Austrian citizenship, they only get their visa for a short period: first for one year and later for three years. Every three years they have to apply for a new visa. In addition to that, the family allowance (Familienbeihilfe) is linked to their visa, which means that they do not get the money for some months until the authorities finished their process of approving the visa again (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022; woman from Iran, personal interview, July 1, 2022). The woman from Iran also mentioned that the recognition of the validity of foreign driving licenses is quite difficult in Austria. In addition to that, it is difficult and takes quite a long time to get the Austrian citizenship. *“My children [who are born in Austria] are stateless, me and my wife have old Syrian passports which are expired and getting the Austrian citizenship is very difficult. We need B2 German level and 1000 € for the application.”* (Syrian man, personal interview, June 14, 2022). Before even thinking of citizenship, one must be legally in the country for at least 10 years.

Another difficulty that was mentioned is that *“the Austrian government does not give [the refugees] enough time to learn German before starting to work, and that is difficult. [...] I have got a degree in tourism, which means I have passed the A-levels and a 2-year long formation at an institute, and now I work in a packaging company. I do not have a problem with that. Work is Work, but I did not have enough time to work what I like and what I am good at. I have a lot of experience in tourism, also in the office and with the computer, but did not have enough time.”* (Syrian man, personal interview, June 14, 2022). Furthermore, he has the wish to get more support from the government, more German courses and possibilities to travel. The woman from Iran (Personal interview, July 1, 2022) mentioned that the German classes are quite expensive.

The main problems are seen in the fact that a lot of services are only accessible when having received a legal status in the country. While waiting for a positive asylum decision the rights of people are very limited. The restrictions regarding work, German classes or rights to travel make it hard for migrants to fully arrive and integrate into the society. Also, political participation is not really possible at this stage. The issue of long waiting times for a positive decision (up to several years) paralyzes the people. This quote of a young family father shows his frustration: *“During five years we were not allowed to work! We could not do anything! We were not even allowed to take part in official German classes. And now we cannot ask for an EU-residence title, because we have not worked. But we were not allowed to work!”* (Iraqi man, personal interview, May 24, 2022)

The wife of one interviewee (man with South American background, personal interview, June 7, 2022) supports voluntarily a family from Afghanistan that are seeking for asylum in Austria. He criticizes, that asylum seekers are often in the country for a long time - in this case 7 years - and not even allowed to work. For example there is a program from the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) where refugees from Ukraine are trained within 4 months to work in tourism. Such things are possible if there is a political will.

Another problem that was mentioned is racism, discrimination and a lack of chances. *“I cannot say that I have often seen that somebody tried to protect a person with migrant background”* (female community representative, June 9, 2022). She also states that the people often do not get enough chances because of wearing a headscarf or having a name that does not sound Austrian. *“If you send a job application to a company you often do not get a chance for a personal meeting, because of your name or your migrant background. That is a pity”*.

For migrant organizations providing infrastructure is one of the main political needs. In order to organize themselves, have meetings and plan activities, they need infrastructure like rooms, computers, printers etc. The frame to be a politically active has to be provided (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

It is especially important to include female voices when talking about political needs of migrants. Often men are visible and seen when raising demands, although women have a lot more to say and more concrete ideas when it comes to certain topics e.g., school, family, education (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

2.2 Most important fields of political life (e.g. right to vote/assemble)

Besides the right to vote, as mentioned in all the interviews also the receiving of information is raised as an important field of the political life. To know about political participation, what it means and why it is important, is crucial, mentions Eyawo Godswill, the head of the Migrant Council Graz (personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Associations which organize and cluster political demands and work in a community are fundamental for the participation of migrants in Graz. To be part of a migrant association in order to increase the power of the voice is seen as essential. How to find an association and what should be considered, in order to be successful is important and a need for migrants. To provide trainings and information regarding those topics can help migrant organizations to better organize themselves (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Political principals like protection from discrimination, freedom of religion, opinion and expression as well as the right to assembly are all perceived as important. The right to speak up and voice demands and ideas is pointed out positively in Austria. Freedom of speech exists, as states a young woman from

Iraq, but often the stated demands are not heard. (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). The majority of participants in Lustenau highlighted freedom of opinion. The Syrian man expressed it this way: *"I can say everything, my own opinion about politics, political parties, the president"*. In comparison he also mentions at another point of the interview how the situation in his home country used to be *"we had only one political party. The party of the president- a radical one. This was dictatorship. In school before or after taking the A levels you had to enregister for Al-Baath Party, or you end up in prison. One party, no chance of thinking differently or expressing the own opinion."* (syrian man, personal interview, June 14, 2022). Beside the freedom of opinion, the freedom of religion is very important for the man from Syria: *"For example I don't have a religion. Here I can just say this. In Syria not everywhere"*. He also highlights the democracy in general, the protection of women and children, insurance, elections and schools.

2.3 Organizations/institutions/policies that promote political engagement

Civil society organisations play an important role when it comes to support for migrants and also the possibility to engage in a political way. Red Cross and Caritas are stated as institutions which help with questions, counselling or providing information about e.g., German classes (Libyan man, personal interview, May 12, 2022).

Political engagement is also found in work, regarding women empowerment and art. A young Iraqi woman points out that especially her engagement in different projects about women rights, languages classes for women and empowerment workshops held her quite busy. She was not only participating but also leading projects like those mentioned above. Engagement in such projects gave her motivation, led to new contacts and she felt as an active citizen (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). Often engagement like this is not merely seen as political engagement even though this work is highly political. The common understanding of political engagement seems to be firstly engagement in a political party.

Art associations also are fundamental when it comes to institutions which promote political engagement. A young artist from Iraq mentions the support he got from different art associations and civil society organization in order to establish his own shows and work as a self-employed artist. *"They really supported me. Thanks to Spektral, KAMA, Büro der Nachbarschaften or Mischmasch I got to know a lot of people and this is why I can do theater today."* (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

Throughout the interviews another organization called Megaphon was mentioned (a street magazine in Graz sold by migrants without official permit of residence/asylum seekers). The work for this magazine was seen as political participation since it gives the space to discuss and bring up ideas. This way it also gives hope to the sellers. *"The only organization we have is megaphone. These people have the information because they put it into the newspaper and then people will see this, and lawyers will see what is going on with these people and influence the policy makers."* (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

In Lustenau, all interviewees said that they do not know institutions or organisations that promote political engagement. Most of them only know sports clubs or cultural and religious migrant associations, as well as Caritas and the municipality that helped the refugees a lot at the beginning but of course their focus is not on political engagement, even though participation in one of those organizations can also be political. The cultural and religious associations that were mentioned in the interviews, were already shortly described in the desk research. One more cultural association was mentioned in the interviews (man with South American background, personal interview, June 7, 2022) which is not only active in the municipality Lustenau, but throughout the federal province of Vorarlberg.

“Tierra Madura” is a sociocultural Latin-American initiative. They organise concerts, exhibitions, lectures, orientation help and have a radio program in Spanish that is called “La Hora Latina” every Wednesday evening from 8-9:30 in Radio Proton which is a free regional radio station in Vorarlberg.

3 Migrant’s readiness to politically participate/ engage

3.1 Possibilities to participate politically for migrants now

Third-country nationals don’t have the right to vote in Austria. One fundamental human right is taken away from them, nevertheless are there ways how to participate politically nowadays.

Civic participation is important to a young Libyan man, in order to show concern for the society and to shape the society and city you live in. In Graz he sees various ways how to participate: be a member in a cultural association, participate in a protest/demonstration, volunteer etc. He points out that if activities are offered rather than people have to search for ways of participation, it is easier to participate e.g.: a radio workshop is offered to learn about activism and media (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022).

One possibility to make the voice heard is listed by a family from Iraq. They made good experiences by having direct contact with politicians in Graz. By taking an appointment and being able to raise concerns, questions and ask for help, they felt respected and heard by the politics. *“I have already talked a couple of times to politicians. I told them about our situation and the woman I talked to was committed to help us. But some people and some political parties do not want to hear us.”* (Iraqi man_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

Events, local activities, community celebrations are seen as a possibility to engage with politicians. To have informal talks with them is pointed out as positive opportunity to participate (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). These events should bring politicians and people from different ethnic communities living in Graz together (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Social Media was also mentioned to be a platform where migrants can make their voices heard. (Iraqi man_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) Even though sometimes it is not clear who is really hearing the messages.

To be asked by politicians about own opinions and views is stated as something which would be great in the future. Often TCNs are not seen or heard as if they did not exist, states one woman from Iraq. (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). The children’s parliament in Graz is mentioned as a good practice example where people, without the right to vote (because they are too young) have the opportunity to formulate demands, ideas and raise concerns. *“Our son is part of the children’s parliament in Graz and there he speaks with politicians. There is no difference between people coming from Austria or not.”*, highlights a man from Iraq the fact that in the children’s parliament every child has the right to say something – regardless of being Austrian or not (Iraqi man_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Participation in social projects was firstly not seen as political engagement by some interviewees, even though it is crucial and highly political. To be active in an association or in social projects is another possibility to be politically engaged for migrants. It can be even very important to them, since it is a way to raise their voice (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022). One interviewee in Lustenau for example participates in a women’s group where they for example prepared little presents and visited people in the retirement home who do not have any relatives to visit them. Furthermore, she gives tutoring sessions for children. Sometimes she also accompanies people from her community

to official authorities or social services or advises them where they could go (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). Another interviewee is member of the parent's association at the school of his children (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

To participate through art in a political process is relevant to two of the interviewed, as they are artists and see in their art a way to express themselves. „*I write a lot of political texts. Theater is political. I write about my home country and also about Austria. Art and Theater are clearly a form of political participation.*“ (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) To play music, work at a radio station and try to make the unheard heard, is a way to participate for this young man from New Zealand (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022).

The Migrant Advisory Board in Graz is strongly arguing for the foundation of migrant associations. It is seen as fundamental that migrants organize themselves in associations so that their voices can be heard by politics. The more voices are gathered, the louder demands can be raised (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Three interviewees of Lustenau do already have the Austrian citizenship linked with all its political rights. One of them is a member of the municipal council for a political party that is called “Heimat aller Kulturen (HAK)” (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). One person is politically interested and participated for ATIB in the meetings with the municipality regarding the construction of the mosque, but he does not actively participate in a political party or take a function in the municipal council (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022). The third interviewee who already has the legal right describes his political activities this way, “*You think politically and if you think politically, you are already doing politics*” (man with South American background, personal interview, June 7, 2022). He also added that he is active in the culture initiative “Tierra Madura” and in the climate alliance “Klimabündnis Vorarlberg”, but not in a political party and he also does not want to do so.

All interviewees in Lustenau said that it would be good and helpful to have a Migrant Advisory Board in Lustenau. Three interviewees would like to participate if there would be founded a migrant advisory board. “*It would maybe feel a bit unfamiliar to me. At the beginning I would rather listen and then try step by step getting into it.*” (woman with Philippine background, June 7, 2022). She also added that it would be good to have a Migrant Advisory Board because this way she would get more information and learn a lot. Another interviewee (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022) states, “*it would be helpful, because then the people would immediately know where they should go [with their concerns]*”. The woman from Iran (July 1, 2022) says it would be easier if there would be an official Migrant Advisory Board because then there would be a direct link to the mayor. One person thinks it would be very helpful and she would wish to have something like that, but she expresses the concern that she cannot imagine that something like the Migrant Advisory Board gets funded under the current government (Female community representative, June 9, 2022).

3.2 E-Participation

„*To have an online portal to vote about how the city should look like would be great. Actually, it would be fair! If everyone could use it, that would be awesome!*“ (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022) The statement of this young man from Iraq points out that participation in a city for everyone regardless the nationality is needed. He mentions the fact of living, working and paying taxes here but lacking opportunities to decide about the city he lives in. To have the possibility to raise ideas online could be a great opportunity for all citizens of a city (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

One concern about E-participation was raised regarding the accessibility for all people, such a platform needs to be multilingual and provide different languages spoken by the migrant communities (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022). Furthermore, the language must be easy to understand and the design has to be inviting and friendly. The user-ability should be guaranteed by a smooth procedure on the phone, as migrant communities are merely reached via phone. It could be a good tool, if it treats topics that are important to the users (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

In Lustenau five out of seven interviewees believe that a E-Participation Tool could be helpful. *“That would be for sure a good idea. Giving everybody the possibility to participate without excluding somebody, is very good”* (female community representative, personal interview, June 2022). One person was sceptic *“because the people have to use the internet and that is not so easy. Some people do not know enough about it”* (man with South American Background, June 7, 2022). He added, *“you have to have certain abilities. At least you have to know reading and writing in German.”* Another interviewee is not sure if an online device would be helpful: *“I do not think that this helps. I would say that rather the personal contact helps. For example, to ask the people on the street at Saturday in front of the shopping mall. There you would for sure get more input”* (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

3.3 Wishes for possibilities to participate politically

In all the interviews the opinion was shared that also non-EU-citizens have a lot to say and want to share their point of view, but it feels as if their voices are not accepted, not allowed and not wanted. The wish to participate, to bring input and to contribute to the residing country is seen throughout the conversations. *“I would appreciate group discussions in meetings, because that way we can get the first-hand information and after all information is everything.”* (Libyan man, personal interview, May 12, 2022) Round tables with politicians could be a good idea in order to raise concerns, ideas and discuss them (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

Not only to participate in the election of the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz, but also to participate actively in the community is something Eyawo Godswill wants to promote. *“We want, that migrants are also active in their district, in their housing areas and show that they are interested.”* (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

All interviewees said that topic-oriented meetings and round tables would be helpful, *“because talking to each other is the best opportunity we have”* (woman with Philippine background, June 9, 2022). *“That would be a great idea to involve all members of the public. That they can also say something and get the feeling of being recognized. That immediately gives you a better feeling”* (female community representative, June 9, 2022). One interviewee raises an important point by saying *“Yes for sure it would be helpful, if regular meetings take place and if they are also taken seriously. If there are meetings between people with migrant background and the major, they also must be taken seriously, otherwise it does not make sense”* (man with South American background, June, 2022). One interviewee (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022) raised in this context again the difficulty that information often does not reach migrant communities. He says it would be helpful but *“some things are already open for public, but as already mentioned the migrant communities do not know it”*.

4 Main obstacles for Migrants' participation/engagement

4.1 Main obstacles

The first challenge is of course the legal situation that was also mentioned again by talking about obstacles *"I find that it is important to give everybody the right to vote. This is the right of everybody"* (woman from Syria, personal interview, June 21, 2022). *"I do not understand why this is not permitted. Exchange of ideas is always good. In my opinion this is a pity, because most of them are born here or grew up here [or are living here for a long time] and only because they do not have the Austrian citizenship, they are not allowed to say something. That really is a pity. They work here and pay taxes here. There are many hard-working people who are achieving good things for Austria"* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022).

As main challenge the language barrier was listed by all the interviewed. The difficulty to communicate and to understand especially at the beginning of a stay in Austria was pointed out. To learn the German language is hard and takes a lot of time, but is essential to the interviewees. The lack of information of German courses and the lack of free German courses makes it even harder for migrants to engage politically (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). A man from Syria (personal interview, June 14, 2022) describes the same problem by saying, *"Yes, German is a problem, but it is not only a problem of the refugees, but also from the Austrian government"*. In Lustenau the language problem is even bigger, since they have a very strong dialect. *"In my opinion it is beautiful to talk the dialect but especially with people who are learning the language we should talk standard German. People in Germany and Vienna for example, are better in talking the standard German than people here [in Vorarlberg]"* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022).

"People want to feel accepted. Having a different cultural background, a different language, a different skin tone, a different age... these aspects can create some sort of mental barrier" (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022). Differences regarding the ethnic background or the ethnic minority someone belongs to are also seen as barriers to engagement. Often people with migrant background feel not accepted by Vorarlberg's society which is also an obstacle for political engagement for them. *"The narrow- mindedness of the people in Lustenau is an obstacle"* (man with Turkish background, June 4, 2022). Especially the Turkish community faces the problem, that many of them are born here, but still not fully accepted by the society. *"I don't have to adapt [to society here]. I am born here. My parents had to adapt, but I do not have to do so anymore. I don't have to apologize for being part of this society. I always feel resistance, that is very exhausting. We are always held accountable for being here."* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). The man with South American background (personal interview, June 7, 2022) says *"I am here and I don't have to apologize every time I open my mouth like the Turkish community always does, this is not right, because they are here since many years and paying their taxes and still always have to say please let me in. That is absurd"*.

Also, traditions and not knowing the habitus (how to "usually behave in society") were mentioned as an obstacle for political engagement. Different cultural backgrounds sometimes are seen as barriers, as seen in this example: *"As in Libya, one is not allowed to make eye contact with older people (including your parents), as this is seen as a sign of disrespect."* (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022). Furthermore *"not knowing anybody"* was stated as an obstacle (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022).

Integration policies also hinder the way to participate as they are often quite restrictive and demand a lot of effort of the migrants. Not only does work in order to gain a minimum wage take up a lot of the time, also missing child's care reinforces the hurdles to political participation. When time is simply

limited and concerns about nourishing the family are taking up the mental space, political participation seems to be a luxury for some, who can afford it (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). There are a lot of reasons why someone might have different things on their mind like work, housing, children, education, etc. Sometimes there is simply no time left for participation (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

Another barrier was mentioned regarding the fear of deportation. Being in a vulnerable position can inhibit someone to actively participate, because the fear of having to leave the country is too big (Sierra Leonean man, personal interview, May 17, 2022).

As Austria has strict laws regarding the naturalization process, it is not easy to be active as a politician, points this young man from Iraq out: *“I believe it is very hard to work as a politician when you are not born in Austria.”* (Iraqi man_2, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

“I like to speak up, also in a loud way. But it is not heard. The right channels don’t exist. Maybe this is the case because I am a foreigner. They don’t see me. Maybe I am not important to them.”, shows a man his frustration about the invisibility of foreigners (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Furthermore, the lack of information is pointed out as an obstacle to participation. As already described before the interviewed migrants have the feeling that they are lacking information about participation possibilities and also about their rights. They do not know where to get information from and where to ask for engagement. This sometimes may be a question of lack of language skills but even more often the accessibility to information is not ensured. The information is here, but it is not accessible by migrants. *“In the intercultural field we have to take an extra step. It is not enough putting a piece of paper at an entrance of a building, to make it accessible to everyone. You might have to knock on doors and invite personally.”* This classical problem of information transmission is explained by the Head of the Migrant Council Graz, and he stresses the importance of oral communication in migrant communities (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022). A Man with Turkish background (personal interview, June 4, 2022) also describes the same problem, that his community is lacking information about possibilities to participate. He mentions this several times.

The demand of changing the laws to make it more accessible to migrants to learn German, work and engage politically is raised. The feeling of not getting all the information needed stays. Some of the interviewees are very active and engaged, they are showing a lot of effort and courage, the system would have probably failed them, but with own will they could surrender.

4.2 Demands for overcoming obstacles

Dissemination of information is seen as highly important, to be politically active. To know what is happening in politics, which decisions are taken and where to voice own opinions should be transparent. The interviewed migrants feel a lack of information, which hinders them to participate actively. Since language was listed as a main barrier, this information should be accessible in different languages.

“I would need an organization which represents the opinions of people who are not allowed to vote. This organization should be invited the city council on a regular basis.” (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022). (Note from the author: this man did not know about the existence of the Migrant Advisory Council in Graz) To get more attention is seen as fundamental. Associations which are lobbying for TCNs, civil society organizations which are working with refugees, human rights organizations focusing on rights of migrants etc. are important to make problems visible. In Lustenau, where no Migrant Advisory Board exists there is the need for a *“leading hand”* mentioned to overcome obstacles. He asks for *“a*

board or organization which really gets into contact with the people and talks to them” (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

Throughout the research the high expectations and positive opinions of the new city government in Graz were expressed. (Note from the author: coalition of communist and green party since December 2021) A lot of hope is set into this coalition in order to strengthen migrant’s rights. To transform Graz into an international hub with different festivals, projects, community-driven initiatives by different ethnic communities is one approach to more political participation. To share and interconnect for cultural projects and to mix up people from different ethnic backgrounds is the vision of this artist: *“I want to make projects with different people, coming from different countries. I want to end the stereotypes. Just because someone is black, this does not mean he sells the Megaphon [a street magazine in Graz]. We need to mix up Graz, to bring the different communities together. I feel like in different worlds, when going from one district to another one in the city.”* By doing more cultural activities together, by promoting diversity in the city, he thinks political engagement throughout the whole society could rise (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

In order to reach more migrants in Graz and inform them about possibilities of political engagement for the Migrant Council it would be useful to write and communicate more often with all the migrants living in Graz. Due to data protection this is only possible before elections in close cooperation with the city. But to have a wider visibility also by working with NGOs together could reduce the gap of migrants who are eligible to vote for the Council and the actual electoral turnout (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

One advice for overcoming obstacles is *“talking more helps a lot. Like this I got to know for example one local councilor and received information this way”* (woman with Philippine background, personal interview, June 7, 2022). As already mentioned, a lack of information in the communities about their rights and where to get information from was stated as a problem. *“For this reason, it would be good to have a Migrant Advisory Board which can enlighten people about their rights”* (man with Turkish background, personal interview, June 4, 2022).

Another interviewee (man with South American background, June 7, 2022) stresses that welcoming all people with migrant background regularly (every year or half year for example) as it was promised by the municipal government in a former integration project is very important. This way the people in the municipality are informed who is here. This could be a way of overcoming obstacles.

Acceptance would also be important to overcome obstacles. *“We now live in 2022 and everybody should broaden his mind and acknowledge us. We are part of Austria, nobody can deny that”* (female community representative, personal interview, June 9, 2022). She also says *“through exchange we can get to know other cultures. That is also important in the municipal politics. In order to get active and bring together cultures also in associations”*. This could be helpful against racism and discrimination problems.

4.3 Migrant Advisory Board in Graz

The Migrant Advisory Board in Graz is a consultative organ of the city politics. It is foreseen by law that cities in Styria who have more than 100.000 migrants living in the city should have a Migrant Advisory Council. In order to make it successful it though needs political will and political motivation, as the Head of the Council in Graz states: *“At the foundation of the Board the mayor at that time was extremely important.”* The support of the city of Graz is fundamental for the work, the financial support for the rooms, infrastructure, the two employees and the budget dedicated to the Board makes the work possible (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

As successes of the work of the Council Eyawo states the following: the greater visibility of migrants in the city, the installation of an Integration Council at the City Government, an Integration Office and a budget which is dedicated to Migrants' interests. Also, the foundation of NGOs like the Anti-Discrimination-Office is seen as a success of the Board. Improvements in the housing sector, as opening community housing to migrants is also seen as fruits of their work.

The Migrant Council comments on current issues and gives statements, always highlighting the importance of equality amongst humans. „*We are a mouthpiece for migrants. Migrant associations voice their demands and issues and we bring them to politics, since we have meetings with the mayor or the speaker for Integration.*” (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022)

Empowering the Council by giving it more budget and a higher stand in politics is one of the current topics it is working on. The councilors are working on a voluntary basis and only get a small compensation for the meetings.

The model would need elected councilors who are experienced in politics and who know well how politics work in Austria, but the reality often is different, as there is a lack of these people. Eyawo describes this as a structural problem of the Board.

Another main difficulty is the rather low voter turnout. The majority of the migrants does not vote or does not even know that they could vote at the election for the Migrant Advisory Board. To reach the migrants is described as difficult, since the Board can only communicate with and actually reach migrant associations. However, a lot of migrants are not part of an association. To have a greater visibility is one the goals of the Board. Steps towards this direction are always taken, as a new column in a local newspaper. (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022)

To be a powerful body politics have to take the Board seriously and involve them in decisions. „*The signals of the government in power are very positive. Now we can think big and do a lot of things*”, states Eaywo, but he acknowledges that progresses and power should be enshrined in law, and not the goodwill of the politicians. It is important that the Migrant Advisory Board has real power and that their demands are heard and put into practice. This is sometimes very hard, since politics do not represent migrants, who cannot even vote for them (Eyawo Godswill, personal interview, July 4, 2022).

One of the main concerns regarding the Migrant Advisory Board was its power. Since it is not a decisive body, but a consultation body most of the interviewees were quite skeptical about its possibilities to change something. Insecurities and doubts about the official status of the board also led to not voting. „*I got an invitation to vote, but in the end, I didn't go, because I thought they couldn't change anything anyways.*” (Iraqi woman, personal Interview, May 24, 2022)

A lack of information is also to be stated here. Not everyone who is allowed to vote in the Migrant Advisory Board is aware of his/her right. The demand that information about the elections is officially and wide spread by the city of Graz is raised (Iraqi man, personal Interview, May 24, 2022).

Nevertheless, it was stated that a consultation body like the Migrant Advisory Board could be a good instrument and should exist in other cities and countries as well. (Libyan man, personal Interview, May 12, 2022) „*Some sort of civil council could be interesting, but not too often in order that people want to participate.*”, wishes this man from New Zealand. (New Zealand man, May 4, 2022)

III. Evaluation of the Focus Group Discussions

1 General Information

In total three focus groups were conducted in June and July 2022 in Austria, two of them in Graz, Styria and one in Lustenau, Vorarlberg. The majority of the participants has a migrant background themselves and gender equality was given. Representatives of the Migrant Council Graz, heads of migrant associations, politicians and social workers were amongst the participants.

In Vorarlberg the focus group was a mixture of politicians or people that work for the municipality, politicians with migrant background and people with migrant background that are not allowed to vote. Since Vorarlberg is quite small the participants of the focus groups are also kept anonymously. There were three male and two female participants.

2 Political Participation and Integration

2.1 Understanding of political participation

„Actually, everything you say is political, by only opening your mouth it starts to be political.“ (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022) The chair-woman of the Migrant Council Graz is giving a wide and open picture of political participation. In the focus groups the understanding of political participation was quite vast. *„You cannot do anything in an unpolitical way“,* stresses also Masomah Regl, the speaker for Integration at the City Council in Graz (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The participants agreed that political participation starts with small acts, small decisions to take and does include a lot more than active participation in e.g., demonstrations, protests or elections. Political participation is found in schools, community centers, art and discussions about needs and strategies.

In the focus group in Lustenau the participants concentrated on the importance of being allowed to vote rather than talking about political participation in general. Being allowed to vote is seen as motivation and enrichment (person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). This man raises the question: *“Why should people who live here, who have Lustenau as their home town not be allowed to vote?”*. Another participant (local councilor in Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) states that not giving people the right to vote leads to confusions, because it is often not linked with the habitual residence (e.g. Turkish people living in Austria since years are not allowed to participate and vote here but in Turkey, a country they only visit some weeks per year to make holidays there).

2.2 Understanding of Integration

“To organise yourself in a cultural community is totally normal. It gives you the feeling of belonging and of home. Something familiar in the midst of the strange. Security. To deduct from that, that you don’t want to integrate is malicious.” (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022)

Integration is a concept widely discussed, always present in media and still so unclear in its practice. Often it is connoted negatively, but actually community and connection should be important is claimed in one of the focus groups (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022). The concept of giving and receiving is the base of integration. Mutual respect should be the ground (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). For real integration same rights and same chances are needed. This means also participation, the right to vote. People should not be treated differently due to their nationality or their right to vote, stretches Ali Özbaş (focus group, June 8, 2022).

All agreed that for integration the language of the residing country is important. Only by knowing the language one can understand the system and actively participate in the community (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022). Therefore, it is extremely important to have a wide offer of German classes, being accessible to all people living in Austria not knowing the language yet. However, it should not hide other problems by only focusing on the language barrier. For integration a lot more is needed than just knowing the language (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022) However, it was seen throughout the research that if authorities or the service sector don't offer their services in different languages the same access for everyone is not guaranteed.

Institutionalized structures are often racist and unfair. It is important that everyone has the same rights and obligations. Often certain qualities are attributed to certain ethnic minorities, which are then applied to the whole group. However, it is important, that persons with a migrant background are not seen as a homogenous community, because they are not *"When talking about integration we need to free ourselves from structural racism. But how?"*, demands the Chair-woman of the Migrant Council Graz, by a change in the narrative of migration and a reframing when talking about those topics. Structural problems have to be taken care of; it is not possible that we only see certain communities represented in our daily lives (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

Integration is missing, claims the former Chair-man of the Migrant Council Graz, when certain schools only have children with native German language in a class and other schools not even one. This is especially problematic, because by segregation and clustering of minorities a real integration will never be possible. *"Integration has to start with the children, today multilingual children are very common, to me it seems that just politics is behind here."* (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) Even though, it is important to show successful stories of people with migrant background, especially for children and teenagers it is important to not only show successful persons, but also show that not being at the top is ok. People should also be welcome without a top career here (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022).

According to Emina Kofrc the most important task regarding integration would be to see a human being with its interests and skills, not whether he/she is a migrant (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022). One participant (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022) confirmed that integration for her is a *"two sided process"* and added that she does not like the termini *"integration or inclusion or worst case even assimilation"* because they suggest that *"here is the right thing and people have to adopt and subordinate to it and become like the people here"*. It is also criticized that the local community does not understand that it is not only upon the migrants to integrate but also upon them to broaden their horizon. She criticized that she often hears *"they have to integrate"*. She appeals to the majority population to understand that integration can only work if *"we first open our doors and are ready to let people in, only then we can expect people to walk through it towards us"*. Being allowed to vote would also have an effect *"on the feeling of belonging and promote the idea of integration"*. People have to be allowed to be part of the decision process and the society and able to participate in shaping this country in order to get the wish to give something back. Having the feeling of only being tolerated does not led to this wish (ibid).

Another participant (man from Syria living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022) mentions that the integration politics in Austria is *"sharp on Arabic refugees or Muslims"* and that he does not understand why. Even if someone wants to integrate, laws often hinders that process. If someone loses everything, he/she needs time to understand that and adapt. Integration needs time instead of facing the expectation of immediate integration with a lot of rules and directives. People need time and another form of integration. He also gives the example that although he has finished his B1 level in German and

is working, the ÖIF keeps calling and telling him that he should come to their office and register for German courses.

Education is seen as very important for integration, but not only for migrants but also for the majority population. One participant (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) states that he does not care whether it is called integration or inclusion but for him *“education is the key”*. Beside education upbringing is an important factor.

The participating community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background (focus group, July 5, 2022) raises the point that integration has nothing to do with religion. He gives the example that *“some people say if a woman does not talk German but does not wear a headscarf, she is integrated but it would be more important that the woman has studied, knows German and can actively participate”*. Furthermore, it is stressed that integration is a two-sided process and one example is mentioned: if the government does not allow teachers with headscarf, this means that female teachers wearing the headscarf have to decide between working or wearing the headscarf, although the decision to wear the headscarf is also a women’s right (man from Syria living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022).

The female local councilor of Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) points out the urge of change, since the integration policy has not worked until now. There were always only migrants in the focus of the policy and she opts for a change.

2.3 Most important fields/rights of political life of migrants

The right to vote is in Austria linked with the citizenship. All people without the Austrian nationality are not allowed to vote and this number increases. Even if a person has lived for a long time (like for example 30 years) in Austria, the right to vote and participate politically in this way is taken away from him/her.

“As long as migrants don’t have the right to vote, they are not important to politicians”, points out Jakša Buljubašić and shows the problematic that in that way politics and laws are not made in the interest of migrants. (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) This invisibility feels highly unsatisfying to the participants of the focus groups.

The right to vote is crucial, but still a high approach. Without low-threshold approaches the possibility of a low voter-turnover remains. The core mission of the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz is to make migrants visible in Graz. This means also the voter-turnover has to increase. Furthermore, the power of the Board has to be strengthened in the City Council. The demands and ideas have to be heard and taken into consideration. (Frösch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022) To bring the demands of migrants to politics is highly important, since it is only them who know what they need. The Migrant Advisory Board is a speaking organ for these migrants, who do not have the possibility to voice their opinion in other elections (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022).

“In Vienna already one third of the population is not allowed to vote. Only seven members of the 183 members of the parliament in Austria have a migration background and of course all of them have been through the naturalization process a long time ago”, points out Edith Glanzer, who has been actively lobbying for human rights for a long time. The problem is still seen in the gap between social milieus as high social capital still shows more initiatives against traffic e.g. (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022).

Important political fields for migrants don’t differ from what is needed by the native population. Housing, work, mobility, green spaces, parking spaces etc. – all those issues concern migrants as well as Austrians (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Political engagement requires first of all time to be involved, if someone does not have the resources, he/she will not be active (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022). The same statements could be found throughout the personal interviews as well. This approach claims though that political participation would come after basic needs like housing, education, food, family etc. However, this does not take into account that all of these topics are highly political. When looking at the housing or education sector migrants often suffer from racism and inequalities or access is not given the same way to all inhabitants of a city. This makes those topics relevant also in a broader point of view.

„Now is the time to really strengthen the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz. The legal framework should be strengthened and the actual idea of the Board should be put forward in order to be prepared if the wind changes again.“ (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022)

3 Structure of Political Participation

3.1 Organizations/institutions/policies that promote political engagement

In other cities in Styria, Austria (Kapfenberg, Leoben, Mürzzuschlag) a Migrant Advisory Board also existed, but these Boards failed. Migrants were interested and involved, but local politics were not supportive and interested enough to keep this organ alive. In Graz there was more pressure, more migrant communities who wanted to be visible and actively engaged (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Other organizations promoting political engagement were not mentioned in the focus groups in Graz and Lustenau.

3.2 Possibilities to participate politically for migrants now

Social and cultural capital play its part when it comes to political participation. Persons with a lower level of education often are not aware of their possibilities to participate. *“This can also be seen in the city. In some areas houses and streets are constructed without asking the residents. In other districts this would not work, because the residents complain, make a petition, talk to a district politician. People often do not know of the existing possibilities to raise their voice.”* (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022)

The social background plays a significant role in the question whether someone is politically active. Amongst migrants and amongst Austrians there are some interested in being active citizens and others not. Whether someone is used to live in a democracy and voice their opinion may play a part in the understanding of being an active citizen (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

“Without the Migrants Advisory Council there would not be any political participation at all.” (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022)

As mentioned in the interviews as well personal discussion with politicians are seen as positive and important in order to empower migrants.

Art and cultural events also play a role and can serve as connecting hub and opportunity to meet and discuss with politicians or other interested active citizens. Linked with an intercultural program, events like those can also reinforce integration and exchange between communities (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022). The interviews showed the same findings, highlighting the importance of events and come-togethers in order to stimulate participation.

Informal groups on social media play an important role when exchanging help, demands, questions etc. *“The facebook group „Jugo-Gruppe-SOS-Graz has almost 15.000 members. You can find anything there: workers for construction work, help regarding child care etc. For me this helps to see the problems in the*

community. Then I can meet up with the city councilor in charge and lobby for the interests.”, claims the Chairwoman of the Migrant Advisory Board (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

In Lustenau there is no Migrant Advisory Board. For this reason, there is almost no legal way to participate for TCN unless they have the Austrian citizenship. There is one process regarding the construction of a mosque in Lustenau which could be perceived as somehow integrating migrant voices into politics. As already shortly mentioned in the interviews there were two meetings between the municipality and members of the mosque association ATIB. The interviewees that participated for ATIB did not describe the meetings in a negative way, but the participation female local councilor of Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) criticizes that there was no real involvement of migrant’s wishes. ATIB rather presented the project and then tried to adopt it to the wishes of the municipal council to get a permission. This process is still going on. The community representative (focus group, July 5, 2022) mentioned that it was a pity that those people who were against the project did not openly say it and express what they expected to be changed. The female local councilor (focus group, July 5, 2022) also criticized this and added that there was no honest discussion, because instead of saying what they want to be changed, they said nothing and in the end they even claimed that ATIB did not adapt their plans at all which is not true.

3.3 Obstacles of political participation

One of the main obstacles defined is the priority of political participation. As already mentioned above to participate politically is often not important if other issues are taking the energy, resources and space. *“Someone who has been in the asylum process for six years might not have neither energy nor the mental capacity to engage politically. The question here is how to empower refugees.”* (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022) It is claimed throughout the focus groups that only if the personal existence is assured political engagement can happen (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022). It has to be clear to the people, why they should engage politically. Making visible how this engagement can lead to improvement in personal areas would be important (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022). If someone struggles to survive, is traumatized and the access to education, asylum and language is not given, the question whether to go voting or not might not even come to his/her mind (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Another identified obstacle is the vulnerability of migrants. A person in a vulnerable situation might be afraid to raise the voice, denounce something publicly or get active in political art. If a political action could minder the right of residence, have negative consequences on the personal situation or even play a negative role in the asylum or naturalization process, it is understandable that the wish to participate politically is low. If fear plays its part, the voices get quiet. *“Austria has one of the strictest naturalizations laws in Europe and we are seeing constant aggravations of the asylum right. Of course, those people are not politically active!”* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The accessibility is mentioned as a further obstacle concerning participation. To reach migrants is easier if they are organized in associations. Around 20% of the migrants in Graz are organized, but 80% are hard to reach. (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022)

A certain tiredness of politics is also seen, no interest or motivation, since change is not expected to come (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

A different understanding of politics hinders the engagement as well. Information and explanations about the political situation and power of politics in Austria would be helpful in order to engage more migrants. The political knowledge has to be transmitted for those who want to participate (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022).

There is an inhibition to say something for people with migrant background. Both interviewees without the right to vote mentioned that: "I rather say nothing, otherwise they say what do you want" (man from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). This is highly interesting because he neither has a language nor a cultural barrier, but still does not dare to talk. "If I say something against it, they say go back to Syria" (man from Syria living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). He also shortly explains that in Syria it was forbidden to talk about politics and that he never was allowed to participate in free elections in 30 years. He took only part once in elections in Syria but this was not on a voluntary basis.

4 How could Political Participation work in the future?

4.1 E-Participation

E-Platforms can be a good tool, as long as they are easy to use, accessible and usage on phones is guaranteed. Posting, reading and writing might have a lower barrier to participation. It is easier than speaking up in a meeting or in front of a group (Kofrc Emina, focus group, June 8, 2022).

One concern was raised, that E-Participation should not be the only tool, since personal discussions and events are important. Only Online-Tools will not reach everyone or be suitable for every community (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). Personal contact is needed and a lot more efficient in local contexts (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022). Especially complex subjects might not be able to be treated on an Online-Platform. Age differences were also mentioned and could play a role regarding the success of such a portal. For younger generations it might be easier to use, but for older generations it might be too complicated (person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022).

The usability in different languages was mentioned as an important asset. In Lustenau also the concern that there could be a language barrier in using the tool was mentioned (female local councilor of Lustenau focus group, July 5, 2022).

Another thought raised was the follow-up of the issues raised on an E-Platform. *"The question is, what happens afterwards?"* (Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022) An efficient and trustable system, how to follow-up with the topics has to be ensured.

Additionally, it was mentioned that there would be needed a linking person who animates people to express their opinion in the E-participant tool, otherwise people might not participate because they believe that their opinion is not important enough (female local councilor of Lustenau focus group, July 5, 2022).

4.2 Wishes for possibilities to participate politically

„The question is not about how can someone with a migrant background make oneself heard, but how can the Austrian institutions make sure that migrants are included? For political participation it should actually not matter where you come from.“ (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022) Glanzer underlines that also political parties should not ignore migrants and take their demands seriously.

To overcome the obstacle of lack of information about political participation, the organization of associations is proposed. Associations have a wider range of information, bring ideas, demands and people together. Therefore, their influence can be higher. In associations members can learn about political participation and information can be transmitted and spread to friends, family etc. (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022). To work with associations also has the advantage to recognize political or religious hardliners and talk with them, preventing that they go underground. The Migrant

Advisory Board then has an overview of their activities. Furthermore, it is easier to reach women groups inside those associations (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

To focus on community building activities like neighborhood initiatives, sports events, language exchange cafés etc. is seen as an important opportunity to connect, engage in discussions, raise awareness about political participation (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022; Fröch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022; Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022). To connect persons between communities and promote intercultural, international organizations was seen as important. To organize beyond ethnic associations is fundamental for good cooperation and participation which goes further (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

Since there is no Migrant Advisory Board in Lustenau, there is a strong wish for it to be established as possibility to participate. There are many topics that affect all people living in Austria and the majority population is not aware of the needs of other communities with migrant background regarding those topics. Therefore, it would be very important to establish a migrant advisory board to have an official platform where those needs can be heard and taken into account by the politicians (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022).

Another participant (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) states that the migrant advisory board could also be a good way for people with migrant background to get to know the municipality politics. From his own experience he knows that entering the community politics is very hard at the beginning. The first five years it was quite hard to keep up not even imagining to take part in the discussion, because there are many different resorts like sports, construction, and so on and you are not an expert in all these fields. It would also be important to have experts for the different topics in the Migrant Advisory Board. A teacher in school or kindergarten with Turkish or Syrian background could easily contribute to the education committee, because he/she is an expert in this field. Without this knowledge it is more difficult to follow.

Afterwards the legal form that the migrant advisory board should have in order to be successful was discussed. The female local councilor of Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) states that if there was a Migrant Advisory Board founded in Lustenau there has to be a political resolution to ensure that it is taken seriously in consideration and accepted by politicians. She proposes that cornerstones would have to be determined that for certain decisions, like for example decisions of a certain financial volume, and certain topics the advisory board has to be consulted. She compared it to the environment committee or the “Gestaltungsbeirat” which means advisory council for design.

Additionally there was discussed that many people of the Turkish community have problems that can be solved without being a politician or councilor. For example, they want that somebody talks to the housing department. It would be helpful to have somebody working in the municipality who speaks their language, like an ombudsman. Some municipalities in Austria have something like that and in Germany as well. There it works even better (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022). He says that he could quit his job if he would not need the money and help 8-10 hours per day people from his community with their problems. Another participant (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group July 5, 2022) says that she knows a second politician with migrant background that even had to withdraw from politics, because there where so many things people thought she is responsible for, like for example letters they could not understand, that she could no longer combine her work as politician and her family situation. The idea to have speakers in the municipality that are accepted and trusted by the community and could be a connector between the politics and the administration, was raised.

Furthermore some ideas of forms of political processes that could facilitate the participation of all people were collected. One proposal was having workshops or innovation laboratories when it comes to designing something in the municipality. A second one was an idea box, where people could write anonymously, when they have a proposal (person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). Others perceived it critical to have anonymous proposals, because they believe everything that is anonymous is not taken seriously (man from Syria living in Lustenau and a community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022).

There is a platform, which is called “tuoscht mit” in Lustenau which means “participate!” in the dialect of Lustenau. People can send their problems or proposal over the platform to the municipality and then they are distributed to the responsible person in the municipality (female local councilor of Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). According to the desk research some workshops and innovations labs already took place in Lustenau in the past.

5 Role of authorities, consultative bodies and CSO

5.1 Possibilities of authorities regarding increase of political participation of migrants

The possibility to work in the municipality should be opened to third country nationals. *“I am very optimistic that there will be some positive changes in the coming years.”* (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022) There is a need for sensibilization and awareness raising amongst public institutions, the city authorities and the service sector (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022).

To work against racial profiling and to stop and prevent racism should be one of the main concerns of authorities. Especially women wearing a headscarf suffer from racism (98% of racist incidents are reported by Muslim women) (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The service sector and authorities are lacking interpretation for non-German speakers. In Austria there is no recognition for linguistic diversity. Stefanie Stadlober demands sensibilization concerning this topic and linguistic support in public institutions (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022).

Another possibility for local authorities to include migrants more in a participation process is to reinforce the cooperation between the Migrant Advisory Board in Graz and district offices and district councilors (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022). Especially migrants not having experience with this political process would need the help of the Board in order to be politically involved in their district. A system should be invented, which empowers the Board to help citizens, invite them, organize meeting etc. (Frösch Christopher, focus group, June 8, 2022).

5.2 Migrant Advisory Board in Graz

The Migrant Advisory Board in Graz was founded in order to give third country nationals the opportunity to vote for a political councilor who represents their ideas. Since they are not allowed to vote in Austria, the Migrant Advisory Board is an organ which represents migrants in the city of Graz. This consultative body has the power to bring collected demands into municipality politics, nevertheless is the power limited (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022). *„Our work is not easy, we are only a consultative body and do not have real political power. We can advise as much as we want, it won't help if nobody listens.”* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022) It is important that the Board is given power and taken seriously, if not the voters will not see the reason of going to an election (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022). Clear communication about our possibilities, about what is in the power of the Board and what not towards the electorate is therefore important (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022; Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022).

The strategy of the newly elected Board is to demand more budget, work on visibility, to have an international team, be a connecting hub, to strengthen the relationships between communities and associations and to make a review of existing associations after Corona. Content which is treated is concerning all habitants of Graz: cost of energy, child care, housing, how to deal with war etc. (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

One of the weaknesses of the Board is its dependence on politics. Only if there is political will, the Board can work well (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022). *„Is it the right way to make special institutions for persons with a migrant background? Will it than not always be good will?“,* critics Edith Glanzer the low power of the Board and the dependence on politics. This strong dependence should be ended, in order to strengthen it. A lot of the success of the Board also depends on the engagement of the elected councilors and their degree of involvement and participation (Regl Masomah, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The Advisory Council is seen as tool which is fair enough, but only because nothing better exists. It is felt as unfair, that community elections are not accessible for migrants. *“Some have therefore also not voted for the Advisory Boards – as form of protest. But more information about its work and power has to be distributed.”* (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022)

The vote-turnover at the last election was with 4,5% quite low. One explanation is that the power of the Board was suppressed the last years. Migrants have not seen successes, because the political will was missing (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). There is a lot of hope regarding the coming years, since the political parties in power have changed.

To raise more awareness about the Migrant Advisory Board the idea, to distribute leaflets before municipal elections was raised. Every information stand of a political party could hand out those leaflets to people, who are not allowed to vote (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022).

The difficulty of reaching all migrants is a problem for the Board. Due to data protection, it can only reach migrants who are organized in associations (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022). However, a lot of migrants are not organized in associations and the question remains how to reach and involve them (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022).

„Actually, we do not need the Migrant Advisory Board, we just need the right to vote in municipality elections – active and passive voting rights.” (Özbaş Ali, focus group, June 8, 2022)

6 Gender Aspect of Political Participation

This aspect generally is a huge topic in politics. In Austria only 5% of all majors are female. One reason probably is because the working hours as politician are not very family friendly. Another problem are prejudices. The female local councilor in Lustenau (focus group, July 5, 2022) gives an example: from women it is rather expected that they are familiar with topics like education but not with building houses for example. There are very rigid prejudices, against which women have to fight but they are often not ready to do so. Not having enough women in politics is generally a huge problem, which should be tackled (ibid.).

The importance of role models was mentioned twice during the discussions. Once when it comes to gender aspects and a second time regarding people with migrant background in politics. It is stated that the number of female politicians and politicians with migrant background has to increase in Austria (community representative of Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022).

The local councilor in Lustenau observed decreasing numbers of women wearing a headscarf nowadays comparing to a couple of years ago. She raised the question if women were pushed from society to take

off their headscarf, because this is often wrongly associated with a low standard of education and German language. For this reason role models of women wearing a headscarf in politics would be important (female local councilor in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022). She added that she hopes to have such role models in the Migrant Advisory Board, once it is established in Lustenau.

7 Legal framework, integration policies

A strong inequality is seen in the treatment of refugees from different countries. Not only is the perception of the society, influenced by media, differently when it comes to migrants from different countries, but also the legal framework differs between e.g., refugees from Afghanistan or Ukraine. Although both communities fled from war, they are received and treated in a different way, which is seen as highly problematic and unfair. Everyone should have the right to education, regardless the asylum status (Borhani Roohullah, focus group, June 8, 2022). Throughout the focus groups as well as the interviews this problematic was mentioned several times. *“This whole debate about the naturalization process and voting rights is extremely frustrating. We have had this discussion for several decencies already.”* (Glanzer Edith, focus group, June 2, 2022)

In all the focus groups the missing right to vote was discussed and criticized. The right to vote is linked to the feeling of belonging. If people are not allowed, they will always feel like second-class persons. People feel in many things not addressed (female local councilor in Lustenau, focus group, July 5, 2022) She gives the example that teachers often complain that parents with migrant background do not assist parent- teacher conferences and says *“I believe this comes, because no political concessions are made, so that they can fully participate in decisions, and be part of the society, but are always somehow excluded, maybe even consciously.”* Another participant (local councilor in Lustenau with Turkish background, focus group, July 5, 2022) concludes *“I can understand if people are not allowed in the first year after coming to Austria, but after maximum three years everybody should be allowed to vote at least in the municipal elections”.*

“What does the native population think regarding voting rights for migrants? This should also be part of the public discussion. We need to sensitize the locals concerning this issue.” (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) The missing voting right is seen as a discrimination. The goal should be to have voting rights on community level (Stadlober Stefanie, focus group, June 2, 2022). *“It’s time, that working people, who pay taxes are allowed to vote. It is a scandal! This I wanted to change in my work at the Migrant Advisory Board – but of course without success.”* (Buljubašić Jakša, focus group, June 2, 2022) This statement well summarizes the whole debate about the Migrant Advisory Board, which is a good tool, but only because the real tool does not work. The actual solution to have voting rights also for TCNs seems to be impossible to install, even though in other countries this right already exists. *“If we take the last opportunity to participate from people, what remains? If we take the voice of people away who are brave enough to say something, what remains? We have to ensure a least this type of participation.”* (Karamarković Irina, focus group, June 2, 2022)

In contrast to TCN, EU citizens are allowed to vote in the municipal elections. But this can also lead to confusion as this man shows with an example: His wife has a Turkish background and the German citizenship and he has the Austrian citizenship, his son therefore the German and the Austrian citizenship. His wife is allowed to vote in Germany if there are parliamentary elections and in Austria if there are elections in the municipality. This is only one example how confusing it can be. This man clearly states that it would be better if people were allowed to vote where they live and not elsewhere. Additionally, he sees a missed opportunity of Austria and the EU of not granting voting rights to people with migrant background here, when the Turkish President Erdogan allowed Turkish persons living abroad to vote in Turkey.

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Interviews

Graz:

Personal Interview (2022, May 4) with a man from New Zealand.

Personal Interview (2022, May 12) with a man from Lybia.

Personal interview (2022, May 17) with a man from Sierra Leone.

Personal Interview (2022, May 24) with a man from Iraq.

Personal Interview_2 (2022, May 24) with a man from Iraq.

Personal Interview (2022, May 24) with a woman from Iraq.

Personal Interview (2022, July 4) with Eyawo, Godswill Head of Migrant Council Graz.

Lustenau:

Personal Interview (2022, June 4) with a man with Turkish background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 7) with a woman with Philippine background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 7) with a man with South American background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 9) with a female community representative
(Gemeindevertretungsmitglied) with Turkish background.

Personal Interview (2022, June 14) with a man from Syria.

Personal Interview (2022, June 21) with a woman from Syria.

Personal Interview (2022, July 1) with a woman from Iran.

Focus Groups

Graz:

Focus Group (2022, June 2) with Irina Karamarković (Chairwoman Migrants Council Graz, Artist, Activist for Human Rights and Labour Rights for Musicians), Jakša Buljubašić (Singer, Former Chairman Migrants Council Graz), Stefanie Stadlober (Member of Association “gemma! GEMEINSAM MACHEN” – migrant association focus civic participation), Edith Glanzer (former managing director of „Zebra“ – counselling for migrants, now: Head of the Office of Green Party at municipal level), Masomah Regl (interpreter; Speaker for Integration in the Council for Integration, City Government of Graz; founder of the migrant association “Five Stones”).

Focus Group (2022, June 8) with Roohullah Borhani (Head of Kardib Farsi Library), Emina Kofrc (head of Counselling Office at „Zebra“, social worker), Ali Özbaş (Head of association „JUKUS“), Christopher Frösch (Speaker for Health in the Council for Health & Integration, City Government of Graz).

Lustenau:

Focus Group (2022, July 5) with one female local councilor (Gemeinderätin) of Lustenau, one male community representative (Gemeindevertretungsmitglied) of Lustenau with Turkish background, one refugee from Syria living in Lustenau, one person from Switzerland living in Lustenau, one female employee of the office Zusammen.Leben (living together) in Lustenau.



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EMVI

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WP2: National Reports



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WP2: National Report Germany* July 2022

***Responsible researcher for the writing of the national report is Daryna Sterina, the EMVI
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I. Participation and Integration Structures in Germany

1. Facts and Figures: Migrants in Germany

Germany is considered to be an “Einwanderungsland”(a migration country), which means that it is perceived as a country to which a high number of people immigrate and thus is a country which has a high proportion of people with a migration background (Statistisches Bundesamt, Pressemitteilung Nr. 162 vom 12. April 2022). In 2021, 22.3 million people (27.2% of the population in Germany) had a migration background. Which equates to every 4th person in the country. 53% of these people (almost 11.8 million people) held German citizenship in 2021 while 47% had non-German citizenship (almost 10.6 million people) (ibid.). As of 31st December 2021, around 1.4 million people living in Germany with a permanent residence status had been granted protection in Germany (Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage, Drucksache 20/584, March 2022: 3). 43,684 of them were entitled to asylum according to Article 16a of the Grundgesetz (the German Constitution), 760,918 were refugees according to the Geneva Refugee Convention and 255,671 persons were entitled to subsidiary protection, and 136,156 people were subject to a deportation ban. Another 239,000 people had been granted protection due to various circumstances. For example, because they were pursuing a profession or because they could not be deported for humanitarian reasons (Mediendienst Integration).

Almost two-thirds (62 %) of all persons with a migration background are immigrants from another European country or their descendants. This corresponds to 13.9 million people, of whom 7.5 million have roots in other Member States of the European Union. The second biggest region of origin is Asia. The 5.1 million immigrants from Asia and their descendants make up 23% of persons with a migration background, of which 3.5 million have a connection to the Middle East. Less than 1.1 million people (5 %) are people of African descent. The most common countries of origin are Turkey (12 %), Poland (10 %), the Russian Federation (6 %), Kazakhstan (6 %) and Syria (5 %). 1 % or 308 000 of the people with a migration background living in Germany in 2021 came from Ukraine. Due to the current influx of refugees, the number of people with a Ukrainian migration background could increase significantly in the future, according to the Federal Statistical Office (Federal Statistical Office, press release no. 162 of 12 April 2022). As of June 19, 2022, about 867.214 people from Ukraine were registered in the German Central Register of Foreigners (Ausländerzentralregister AZR) since February 2022 (Mediendienst Integration, Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine, June 2022).

In Berlin, 811.334 people live without a German passport and have roots in other countries. 569.972 Berliners have a migration background (Statistical Office Berlin-Brandenburg, December 2021). This equates to 36.6 percent of the population of Berlin, according to the Office of Statistics Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB24, February 2022). Of these almost 1.4 million people who have a migration background or non-German origin, about 400,000 come from EU countries, most of them from Poland (112,000). 183.000 people have Turkish roots, about 150,000 have origins in Arab countries and about 145.000 people have roots in countries of the former Soviet Union (RBB24, February 2022). As of 31 December 2021, there were 2.552 living people who were entitled to asylum (Antwort Bundesregierung auf Kleine Anfrage, Drucksache 20/584, March 2022: 4).

2. The Main Official Institutions & Stakeholders Responsible for Migrant Integration

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which is a division of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs (BMI), is responsible for immigration issues, asylum and refugee protection,

as well as the coordination and management of migration and integration policies ([Bundesbehörden BMI](#)). As of 2022, it has a budget of 882.385.000 Euros and has 8.141 employees in 63 locations (ibid.).

The BMI is also responsible for organising and setting the topics of the [Deutsche Islam Konferenz](#) (German Islam Conference) (DIK), which, as a forum for dialogue with Muslim citizens, also addresses topics of participation and integration. The DIK has been held regularly since 2006. Since 2012, the Federal Government has also organised the so-called Integration Summit, at which central points of the German integration politics are discussed across all stakeholders. Together with the National Action Plan on Integration, the summit constitutes an important instrument for the orientation and design of integration policies in the Federal Republic of Germany.

3. Legal Framework for the Regulation of Integration

For a long time, Germany refused to acknowledge that it is a migration country, with the result that integration policy only became a political issue with the Immigration Act, which came into force on 1 January 2005 together with the Residence Act (Hanewinkel and Oltmer 2017). After the Bundestag elections in 2005, the office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration was upgraded to the rank of Minister of State directly in the Chancellery. Since 1 December 2021, [Reem Alabali-Radovan](#) has held the office of Minister of State for Migration, Refugees and Integration. She is also simultaneously the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism (Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, press release of 23 February 2022). The office of the anti-racism commissioner was first introduced by the current government. After the refugee movement in 2015 and the accompanying debates about the long-term integration of asylum seekers in addition to an overload of the administration services, the Integration Act came into force at the federal level on 6 August 2016. Contrary to what the name suggests, it does not regulate comprehensive aspects of integration in Germany but contains regulations on the right of residence, labour market promotion and language as well as integration courses (An "Integration Partial Act" Interview with Professor Dr Daniel Thym, 2016). With this law, the German government pursues an integration strategy of "promoting and demanding". This means that migrants should be supported in learning the German language and receive professional qualifications, with the consequences of sanctions if they do not take advantage of these offers. This concept of integration as well as the law were controversially discussed. The law was criticised by different civil society and charity organisations above all because of its intensive restrictions, especially the decrease of financial support below the minimum standard of living in case of a non-compliance with the measures as well as its restrictions on the right of residence for recognised refugees (ProAsyl, June 2016).

In addition, there are integration laws in the federal states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Berlin (Sachverständigenrat Integration und Migration, press release of 05.10.2017). Although integration and migration policy in Germany is a federal responsibility, the implementation of national policies remains the responsibility of the federal states as many areas relevant to integration, such as education are by the constitution the competence of the federal states. Next to the integration laws Germany also has a very complex catalogue of regulations and laws for different fields of life that concern asylum seekers and refugees as well as a [Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz](#), an Immigration Act for specialists to cope with skills shortages.

After different crimes related to racism and xenophobia in the last years, the Federal Government sees itself as responsible for protecting the free democratic basic order more strongly (Discussion Paper on the Democracy Promotion Act by the BMI and BFSJF 2022: 1). Thus, the government aims to pass a Democracy Promotion Act which is still in the drafting phase. This law will form a legal basis for the long-term promotion of anti-racism, democracy education and extremism prevention (ibid: 2-3). The Federal

Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs (BMI) and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BFSFJ) are responsible for drafting the Act. The government also plans to pass a law on participation in this electoral term.

4. The Main Policies in the Country dealing with Integration

On the positive side, migration and integration in Germany have increasingly been understood as a cross-cutting task in recent years. [The "National Action Plan on Integration for the 2020s" \(NAP-I\)](#), for example, is a guideline for shaping German integration policy, on which 11 federal ministries and commissioners as well as representatives from the federal states and municipalities, from civil society, migrant organisations, international organisations, academia, business, the media, sports and cultural organisations, trade unions and social associations have worked together (Integration Commissioner: National Action Plan on Integration). The newly revised action plan is divided into five phases, each with 24 projects dealing with different aspects of integration, from immigration to social cohesion. Women of migrant descent are given special consideration in the integration plan in the area of the labour market (Integration Commissioner: Women in the Labour Market). Here, the Federal Government focuses on counselling for women who are nationals of a third country. Since May 2020, for example, there has been the model project [Fem.OS](#) in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency and the BAMF. The Company Minor - Projektkontor für Bildung und Forschung has been commissioned with its implementation. In the form of "digital street work", the employees advise them on 741 social media platforms in eight languages and test interface management for labour market access in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (Interim Report Fem.OS, May 2021:1).

Civil society organisations have criticised the Action Plan mainly because the guidelines are exclusively aimed at immigrants and people with a migration background, while the majority of society is not named as a target group ([FAQ NAP-I No.4](#)). This is seen as a deficit, as the inclusion of migrants is also the responsibility of the majority society. Furthermore, the Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations—"Bundesverband Netzwerke von Migrant*innenorganisationen (BV NeMO e.V.)" criticised that the current action plan does not focus enough on measures to improve the participation of migrants and that there are no concrete and practice-oriented proposals for more participation in legislative projects that affect migrants (Florian Rudolph, SWR2, 31.1.2022, 15:25).

5. Inclusion of Migrants in the Implementation of Integration Policies

5.1. No Voting Rights for Third Country Nationals in Germany

Elections in Germany take place at local, state and federal level. Only German citizens and EU citizens can vote in local elections. Third-country nationals (TCNs) are therefore excluded from conventional political participation, including holding political office. Most political parties in Germany also allow foreigners to become party members, but they cannot stand for election (Annual Report SVR 2021: 34). Citizens who have lived in Germany for decades but have a foreign passport are not eligible to vote. However, the ruling coalition government has undertaken to reform the citizenship law and thus facilitate naturalisation. The coalition agreement states that multiple citizenships are to be possible again. In addition, naturalisation will be possible after five years instead of the current eight years, and even after three years in the case of special integration achievements (Coalition Agreement 2021 - 2025: 188). The extension of the right to vote in municipal elections to third-country nationals has so far been rejected on constitutional grounds. The Federal Constitutional Court has interpreted Article 20 (2) of the Grundgesetz (the German constitutional law) in such a way that only nationals can participate in national elections, allowing only EU citizens to participate in local elections. Therefore it would require

a constitutional amendment if the lawmaker also wanted to grant third-country nationals the right to vote in municipal elections in Germany (Annual Report SVR 2021: 37). Attempts to extend the right to vote in municipal elections have therefore been unsuccessful so far (ibid.).

5.2. Non-Electoral Participation

Thus, non-EU citizens in Germany only have the possibility of "non-electoral participation" (Stephanie Müssig 2020:33). Since the 1970s, there have been so-called "foreigners' advisory councils" and "integration advisory councils" at the municipal level in Germany. These are bodies of co-determination for people with a migration background and/or without German citizenship (Annual Report SVR 2021:34). Migrant organisations (MO), new German organisations¹, self-organised refugee associations² and trade unions also play an important role in communicating and representing the interests of the migration society. Third-country nationals living in the Federal Republic of Germany, migrants and people of migration descent also participate in petitions, go to demonstrations or do voluntary work (Annual Report SVR 2021: 64-67).

5.2.1. The National Level

Since 1998, there has been the Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat (BZI)(Federal Immigration and Integration Council) at the federal level, with its headquarters in Berlin. It is a nationwide association of the state organisations of municipal integration, migration and foreigners' advisory councils, which acts as a point of contact for the federal government, the Bundestag and Bundesrat, as well as the national centres and organisations at the federal level. The BZI is represented in various bodies, including being involved in the shaping of the National Action Plan on Integration from 2019-2021 and participating in thematic forums for the individual phases of the Action Plan (BZI participation bodies). Apart from its function as an advisory board, it is also responsible for various projects that deal with empowering of citizens with a migration history. For example, from May 2021 to June 2022, the BZI has launched the project "KommPAktiv – Kommunale Integrationsbeiräte qualifizieren, Demokratie stärken." The project aims to train voluntary migration and integration advisory boards and to provide them with tools with which they can actively participate in local politics. It is important to mention here, however, that the BZI is not a permanent body but an association dependent on funding. But the new federal government has signalled in the context of the coalition agreement that a participation law at the federal level will be initiated, which will also include the establishment of a participation council as a permanent body (Coalition Agreement 2021-2025: 118).

Apart from the Federal Immigration and Integration Council, Migrant Organisations represent the interests of people with a migration background. They are experts and partners at the federal, state and municipal level and advice on issues of migration, integration and participation. MOs are also channels of communication for municipalities to reach citizens with a migration origin and, in particular, a voice for the concerns of migrant communities. At the national level, for example, there is the Bundesverband Netzwerke von Migranten Organisationen e.V. (Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations) (BV NeMO e.V.). It aims to increase MOs' ability to operate and advocate on a professional level and to have an impact on policies regarding migration and integration as well as participation. The German government provides [structural funding](#) to some nationally operating

¹ The [new German organizations \(ndo\)](#) are a post-migrant network of associations, organisations and projects from all over Germany. They advocate for all kinds of people (migrants and Germans) with migrant descent.

² Self-organised refugee organisations and initiatives are those created by people who are refugees or asylum seekers. They are campaigning for the concerns and rights of refugees.

migrant organisations, which is different to project funding granted for a longer period and aims at strengthening the organisational structures.

5.2.2. The Federal State Level

The federal states also have integration and migration commissioners who are part of the state administration. North Rhine-Westphalia has established so-called [municipal integration centres](#) dealing with integration on the municipal level. Most federal states also have migration and integration advisory councils. These are advisory bodies often introduced by municipal laws that represent the population with a migration background in political decisions. How they are formed varies depending on the federal state regulations. In some federal states, the representatives are elected, in others only appointed, while in others there is a mixed form. The advisory boards have no decision-making powers and, in many municipalities, there is no legal obligation to establish an advisory board. In some federal states, however, both the establishment of an advisory board and its tasks and powers are regulated by the participation and integration laws of the federal states. In other cases, there is a lack of specific provisions on the establishment of migration councils or when councils must be consulted, and there are often no provisions on the right to make motions and to speak (Kersting, Norbert 2020: 190). An exception are federal states that have stipulated the establishment of a migration council in their municipal code (ibid.191). However, many migrants who are entitled to vote for the advisory boards hardly seem to perceive or accept the actions of the advisory boards, as the Sachverständigenrat Integration und Migration (Expert Council of German Foundations for Integration and Migration) (SVR) states in its annual report from 2021 (Annual Report SVR 2021: 59). This could be mainly because the influence of these bodies on political decisions is considered low and many migrants do not feel sufficiently represented by the advisory boards (ibid.).

5.2.3. The Local Level (Berlin)

In Berlin, Katarina Niewiedzial has been the Commissioner for Integration and Migration since May 2019. Her task is to shape migration and integration policy within all Senate administrations and policy areas. In addition, the Commissioner is responsible for steering Berlin's overall integration policy. She is also the contact person for migrant organisations and head of the counselling centre ["Welcome Centre"](#) for new arrivals, immigrants, and people of migration descent without a German passport. On the federal state level, Berlin has a Law on the Regulation of Participation and Integration in Berlin that was amended in 2021 and renamed the [Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft](#) (PartMigG) (Law on the Promotion of Participation in the Migration Society of the State of Berlin). The PartMigG was passed on 17 June 2021 and is also referred to as the "Open Door Act". It regulates binding measures to promote diversity in the administration and the economy as well as the political participation of people with a migration background and history. The law was developed with significant participation of the State Advisory Council for Participation³ (brochure "Shaping Participation" Elena Brandalise 2021:1), since the amendment must first be implemented, the Advisory Council will only be constituted in its reformed way End of 2022 or beginning of 2023.

Established by Senate resolution on 29 April 2003, Berlin's State Advisory Council for Participation will be composed of 13 members, (representing migrant communities) who are entitled to vote, out of which

³ With the amendment of the Law for the regulation of Participation and Integration in Berlin (now PartMigG) the State Advisory Council on Questions of Integration and Migration was renamed to the State Advisory Council for Participation.

1 has to represent ethnic German migrants, 1 refugees and one the LGBTQI* community with a migration background. One member will represent the Council of the Roma and Sinti communities within the Advisory Council. (§17 I PartMigG). The PartMigG also lists other different stakeholders and representatives of the administration who need to attend the meetings of the council. A central reform of the law is the obligation to establish integration and migration advisory boards also at the district level, the smallest municipal level in Berlin. It is only with the amended PartMigG that the districts are required to establish advisory councils and provide funds for the administration of the advisory councils. Only in some districts, non-organised migrants are members of the council, representing their communities. All the other members are representatives of migrant organisations, conventional civil society organisations as well as charity organisations which have to apply for the seats in the council and will be selected by the integration office of the district. Due to the PartMigG, there is also now the possibility for TCNs to work in the committees for participation and integration of the district assemblies as knowledgeable citizen deputies with voting rights within the working committees of the assemblies. Next to the PartMigG, the Berlin State passed the Berliner [Landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz \(LADG\)](#) Anti-Discrimination Act on 21.06.2020 which is the first of its kind in Germany and closes a legal gap that still exists, particularly in the area of discrimination caused by state action. A long-term project funded by the Berlin Senate was [Berlin Entwickelt Neue Nachbarschaften \(BENN\)](#), which means „Berlin Develops New Neighbourhoods.“ It has been established in the neighbourhoods of refugee accommodations since 2017 as part of a Berlin-wide integration management program. Since then, 16 BENN locations were created within the city. The goal was to support the participation of refugees in social life activities in the neighbourhood but also to promote active citizen participation and also engagement between the newcomers and people living for a longer time in the neighbourhood. Another crucial instrument for strengthening the participation of migrant organisations and organisations of refugees is the [Participation and Integration Programme](#) of the Berlin Senate. Organisations funded by the programme receive project funding for three years. This allows migrant organisations to create a more stable and sustainable situation.

6. Migrant Organisations

There is no information on how many MOs are operating in Germany. In 2020, the Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration (SVR), Expert Council on Integration and Migration, published a study ([SVR Research Report MO 2020](#)), in which a statistical estimate was made. The statistical survey took place in four federal states. The SVR estimates that in 2020 there were about 12,400-14,300 MOs in Germany (SVR Research Report 2020:13-14). MOs often work at the municipal level, in the immediate neighbourhood and are anchored in the structures of the municipality. Across municipalities, MOs often join together to form umbrella organisations in order to communicate their concerns in a bundled way (ibid. 18). Most organisations are registered as associations, in rare cases, they can also be limited liability companies (GmbH). Apart from registered associations, there are also initiatives that are formed for a specific purpose and dissolve after a certain period of time (SVR Research Report MO 2020:12). To provide an idea of the variety of MOs in Germany, this report lists only a small selection of 10 different migrant organisations operating on the national level but also specifically in Berlin, where the project is implemented.

At the national level, for example, there is the [Bundesverband Netzwerke von Migrantenorganisationen e.V. \(BV NeMO\)](#), the Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations, which aims to strengthen the participation of migrant organisations at the level of federal politics, responsible ministries and institutions and to advocate for a beneficial framework and conditions for the operation of migrant local alliances. The nationally operating umbrella association [DaMigra e.V.](#) focuses on the

empowerment and the equal political, social, professional and cultural participation of migrant women in Germany, including the combating of all forms of discrimination. There is also the [DaMOst—Dachverband der Migrant*innenorganisationen in Ostdeutschland e.V.](#), which is an umbrella organisation specifically for MOs which are rooted and operating in the Eastern part of Germany in the states which used to be part of the German Democratic Republic. On the local level in Berlin, the [Türkischer Bund in Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.\(TBB\)](#) (the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg) must be mentioned, which is an umbrella organisation of different Turkish-diaspora organisations, as well as individuals. Their goal is to advocate for (minority) rights on a legal, social and economic level as well as participation and equality. The TBB also has expertise in anti-discrimination counselling. The [Migrationsrat Berlin e. V.](#) is an umbrella organisation which is a council representing the cross-sectional interests of all kinds of migrant organisations. The [Afrika-Rat Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.](#) aims to strengthen and connect the African diaspora and to advocate for the minority rights of people of African descent and against any form of racism and discrimination and to empower small migrant organisations and its representatives. [Club Dialog e.V.](#) stimulates and promotes cultural and political dialogue between Russian-speaking and native Berliners and promotes the integration of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. At the moment they conduct projects for the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees. [GePGeMi e.V.](#) is the Society for Psychosocial Health Promotion among Migrant Groups, especially from Asian Countries. They advocate for health promotion in the psychosocial field especially among migrant families and elderly migrants from East Asian cultural areas. [Zaki e.V.](#), especially focuses on the support of Afghan and Arabic communities, providing political education, support and consulting as well as empowerment, advocating for equal participation for people on the move. [Women in Exile and Friends](#) is an initiative of refugee women who came together in Brandenburg in 2002 to fight for their rights and advocate for the concerns of refugee women facing intersectional discrimination.

II. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

10 one-to-one interviews in-person and online were conducted in Berlin, the main region where the project is being implemented. The people with a migration background selected for this interviews were individuals who are politically engaged and have a history of migration themselves. Despite the limits of qualitative research to have a very broad variety of cases, it was tried to choose a broad selection of 10 individuals in regard to their gender, age, and origin as well as residency status. Additionally, all of them are active in different political fields being either representatives of migrant organisations, members of migrant advisory councils, Citizen Deputies⁴, or activists as well as volunteers.

1. Migrant Needs

1.1 Stable residence status as a pre-condition for participation

Despite the structural accesses for migrants to participate in politics which were described in the previous chapter, all participants in the interviews had the opinion that even if structural participation exists in theory, migrants need to have a stable residence status to put them into practice. It was presumed that people who are in the process of asylum seeking are very afraid to jeopardize their chances to obtain asylum. Many also fear the confrontational atmosphere when going to their appointments in the foreigners' registration office, making them afraid of speaking out. One of the interviewees also pointed out that as long as people are not sure if they will be allowed to reside for a longer time in one place, they do not have the motivation to participate in political actions, especially if they have to move from one accommodation to the next and sometimes from one federal state to another. Many interviewees found that political involvement on the municipality level under such

⁴ Citizen Deputies are citizens who take part in the work of the committees of a Berlin district assembly. They have voting rights in the committees of the district assembly.

conditions is very difficult to expect. Moreover, some conversation partners also mentioned that their communities or groups of migrants they work with sometimes have very little interest in political engagement because they are too occupied with existential difficulties such as looking for employment, paying bills and finding housing. It was also pointed out that if establishing that a stable residency is a pre-condition for participation, then for migrant women this is especially often difficult to achieve because they (as presumed) have less access to information about counselling centres or because of their personal situation.

One interviewee in Berlin described her personal situation as follows:

“In my case, there was no possibility to just go out on the street and ask and google counselling centres and projects. I wasn’t on social media much and I was just at home because of my ex-husband. I didn’t have any opportunities at all. Only after I separated from my husband, I made a Facebook account and talked to many women on social media and found out that there are so many counselling centres in my neighbourhood. Then, I found a counselling centre on the subject of residence, which advised me on my residence status. That’s how I got my residence permit. Only then did I start to work on my career and became politically active.”

1.2. Fighting Discrimination and Racism

Most of the interviewed people mentioned that it is difficult to be politically active in groups or structures which are dominated by members of the majority society. One interviewee said that many migrants made the experience that they are being patronised because they do not speak the language fluently. Another participant felt being used as a token for diversity campaigns. Some stated that they think that as long as they are viewed as migrants because of their look or skin colour, they will not be seen as equal in such structures. Furthermore, there is a general demand for more critical post-colonial perspectives when talking about participation or creating and funding projects that deal with integration and migrant issues. Many people interviewed for the project said that they reject the word “integration.” They associate it with a one-way approach, feeling that they are forced to assimilate to the majority society rather than being seriously included and tolerated. One interviewee also mentioned discrimination associated to this word when it comes to the question of who is demanded to integrate. She felt that this expectation “to integrate” is only expressed towards migrants coming from the Global South. Especially women migrant representatives pointed out that they face a lot of racism in everyday life which hinders their participation. One of the interviewees said that racism needs to be dealt with more in the school system and on the job market to make access easier for women. When it comes to women with a hijab, discrimination was often mentioned. Nevertheless, one participant found that due to global movements like “Black Lives Matter” there is a greater social awareness of racism and a broader understanding in her circles that many people are affected by discrimination.

1.3. Accommodation and Living Conditions

Another requirement for the possibility to focus on political activities that was very often verbalised is permanent accommodation and stable living conditions. Finding apartments or proper housing was mentioned many times as a major problem which hinders a focus on political activities when having spare time. One participant, who works together with migrant women in the countryside, said that despite having an apartment, the living conditions are sometimes very difficult because the women often feel excluded from neighbourhood activities or contact to Germans in their environment. They also face discrimination where they are based and have difficulties to find help from outside. When living in shelters one female interviewee also mentioned that women sometimes face sexual

harassment and she even heard of a case of rape. She also pointed out that the women who have children are worried when others in the shelters consume alcohol or drugs. Another participant also mentioned that rumours and wrong information can easily spread when living in refugee shelters which also hinders participation and makes it difficult to motivate people to become politically active. In his own words he described it like this:

“When living and having contact with people only in the refugee shelter, there is a high risk that people do not get proper information about their documents or possibilities to participate. In the shelters often rumours accrue such as ‘do not say anything negative about your situation or living conditions because otherwise, you will have problems with your asylum procedure.’ That’s why when you only go there and say ‘get organised’, you’ve already lost.”

1.4. Relevant Policy Fields which should be developed (better) for migrants

a) Better Funding for Migrant Organisations

When planning to get organised one participant pointed out that as a refugee or a migrant who did not live in Germany for a long time it is very difficult to receive funding for projects. She pointed out that more projects need to be created and funded which specifically target this problem. She held the opinion that the empowerment of migrants to become actors of inclusion policies requires a focus on access to knowledge on how to write a project application and where to access funding, as administration processes to acquire such funding are very complex. A common agreement was that more self-empowerment opportunities through information and training is needed. In general, one crucial demand was investing more in self-organised migrant and refugee organisations and to develop structures in which they can directly be involved in policy-making where they do not exist. Many participants saw a solution in creating a better sustainability of projects by structural funding rather than project funding. This was also seen as a way to give migrant organisations more opportunities to advocate for inclusive policies.

One of the interviewed participants explained the major problems like this:

“In my association, I have two months to deal with the content of the project and 80 percent of my work is the administration of the project. It’s all about the formalities and not the content. Everyone working in projects is caught in this bureaucracy trap. And very little of content work can actually be done. And our existence as a migrant organisation is always at risk. You don’t know how long and when the project will be funded and whether you will even have a job next year.”

b) The Right to Vote for Third Country Nationals (TNCs)

Another verbalised demand was the right to vote for TCNs. One participant, who is now in retirement and migrated to Germany many years ago, said that the right to vote would give him a sense of belonging and that when the right to vote on the municipality level was introduced for citizens of the European Union, he felt very excluded living and working in Germany for many years. Other interviewees think that the ability to vote would empower them more to speak up as right now they feel that this is not appreciated. One person said that despite living in Germany for 13 years, having studied here and paying taxes she is afraid that if she is politically too open, she will face difficulties when renewing her visa. In her view, having the right to vote as a TCN would be a solution to this self-silencing. Another participant had the impression that the right to vote would be a very important step

to allow TNCs to legally influence politics on a higher level and also make politicians care more about the concerns of migrants when becoming potential voters.

One participant explained the importance of having a right to vote like this:

“When it comes to topics and decisions that relate to these people, they should have their own voice in it, they should have their own vote in it. We live here, we are building our lives here but there is a good portion of the line that's missing and that's definitely because of the restrictions put by the general law passed by people who have no clue about the suffering of migrant groups.”

2. Migrants’ readiness to politically participate/engage

2.1. Advisory Councils

Migrant advisory councils were presumed as the predominant structural participation opportunity for the representation of perspectives and views of TCNs. However, almost all participants had the impression that the topics discussed are of little concern to the actual needs of non-organised individuals. Instead, many interviewees rather understood migrant advisory councils as a networking opportunity for migrant organisations or as a committee by the municipality to defend itself of accusations of making policies without the consultation of migrants. Others saw the appointment by the municipality as problematic because this allows the administration to invite only those migrant organisations to the table with which they have already worked together for many years. Nevertheless, some of the participants saw advisory councils as very important until migrants do not have voting rights at the municipality level. But this interviewee also had the impression that many councils are not as active as they should be. One participant thinks that the problem lies in missing skills to deal with administrative and legal procedures. In general, there was discouragement in the influence of migrant advisory councils as many felt that they do not have the power to actually influence policies as they are limited by the counselling role. Moreover, the interviewees also had the impression that advisory councils are not widely known by the migrant population. Migrant representatives actively involved in an advisory council saw a possible solution in making visible actions such as events or brochures on relevant topics that can also be accessed by the general migrant population of the municipality. Some also expressed the view that the councils should reach out more to the migrant population in the municipality and introduce themselves. One participant also found that the members should not be appointed but elected to make this procedure as democratic as possible and to allow TCNs to participate in the decision of who should represent them in the council. He had the view that this is not appreciated by the municipalities because this would cost more financial and administrative resources. Although more individual representatives were also perceived as a good solution by others, there were doubts if many individuals would like to become members of the council. Even though some councils in Berlin also allow individuals to be appointed as representatives to the council, there was a commonly shared opinion that newcomers who do not speak the German language will have difficulties to present their demands and participate actively in the discussions with politicians and other council members. In general, everyone felt that the activities of the councils such as regular meetings and working groups are very time consuming and because they are not paid or only compensated with an allowance, it is especially difficult to motivate individuals to participate.

One female migrant representative put it like this:

“I think the problem here is also that old structures exist, i.e. organisations are always re-elected that have always been there. On the other hand, who has the time to do this on a voluntary basis? Most of us foreigners have to work a lot so that we can stay here.”

2.2 Founding of Associations

Another widely used opportunity for participation is founding associations. All participants in the interviews view this as the most effective and widely used way to do projects that have an impact on migrants and as a way to influence certain policies. Only some of the interviewees were active in initiatives or grass-root activism. Migrant organisations are seen as the bridge between politicians and the non-organised migrant population. Many interviewees described a substantial problem to fund their work and doing sustainable work such as empowerment or advocacy. Others have the opinion that although there are many active migrant organisations in Germany there are also those mostly focused on community work and do not really participate in advocacy activities or are members of political committees or bodies such as migrant advisory councils. One reason for that was seen in the lack of supervision and training on how to write applications for projects or to network. One participant also pointed out that many people he knows were first activists before getting organised and did their work voluntarily because they were not able to acquire funding for their work. In his view, there need to be more informal structural ways to give activists the opportunity to get qualifications in order to become political players.

2.3. View opportunities to talk for themselves

Many of the participants in the interviews described the notion that there is no structural opportunity to speak up as an individual migrant for your needs. It was presumed that you need to be organised in an organisation or other political structures to directly have the opportunity to bring your demands to the administrations or political leaders. One interviewee had the impression that because migrant women have cultural or language barriers, they are denied having the intellectual capacity to speak for themselves. Especially, she had the impression that it is more talked about them (as migrant women) than with them. And often, the interviewees felt that the topics discussed are not the ones that concern the women. Another often mentioned problem was the lack of access of politicians to the migrant circles and communities, often not being migrants themselves which was found as a problem to make policies that really are central to migrant needs. It was viewed that this bridge between real life necessities of migrants and policies currently only exists through migrant organisations who have access to these structures. One participant said that round table discussions or more threshold meetings with the local government would be a format which can be joined more easily by individuals who are not organised. The suggestion was also made to have regular public events with politicians or representatives of the municipality to discuss issues that concern the migrant population face-to-face. The need for more involvement of individual migrants in political decision making was often emphasised. Almost all participants saw a voting right for TCNs on the municipality level as a possible solution to this discrepancy.

One interviewee summed it up like this:

“In a democracy, there should be a space that includes the voices of people who lost their voices in the places that they came from and who came here to gain their voice not to have their voices taken away from them again.”

2.4. Informal Participation

When talking about informal ways of participation and grass-root activism, most of the interviewees stated that they regularly participated in petitions and demonstrations and some found it a more faster and independent way to have an impact on policies concerning integration and migration. One interviewee had the opinion that initiatives entail less administrative work and give more independency regarding political demands and the framework you operate in. However, she also mentioned that it is hard to receive donations and they usually cover only costs of materials or rent for an event location.

Another participant who is an activist and regularly organises demonstrations stated that very good knowledge of the law is required. This is especially difficult for people who are new in Berlin and want to participate because not having a stable residency status or when in the asylum-seeking procedure puts them at risk to participate also in informal structures. The information about civil rights and freedoms but also limits for activists should also be distributed among the group of activists who are organising demonstrations to make sure that nobody will have problems with the police or other authorities. His opinion was also that especially as a migrant there is a great chance that you will face the risk that certain activities or your behaviour can be ranged as violating the law, even if operating in line with the law. Thus, he felt that migrants need to be especially cautious about their behaviour when taking to the street.

In his own words he said:

“I think one of the main issues for activists is to know how the law impacts them. So knowing how the law deals also with activism and activities on the ground is very important. Especially to know the consequences and all the rights and duties is very important. “

2.5. Relevant Fields of Life to become politically active

The interviewees saw a major problem in the communication at the foreigners’ registration office. It was mentioned that the staff is often not trained to take the perspective of migrants and they feel often discriminated against or treated and advised not according to their needs. One participant mentioned that more employees with a migration background are needed in such administration structures to understand the perspective of migrants better. This sensitivity was missed in the labour market. They felt that discrimination in the labour market hinders them to get proper jobs even if they have the demanded degrees for the positions. Concretely, the job interview was often perceived as a difficult situation in which you have to present yourself in a language which is not your mother tongue. Another very crucial field where more reform was asked for is the recognition of professional and academic qualifications. A problem which was especially formulated by migrant women representatives mentioning that since they are not able to continue working in their profession, many women are forced to take low-paid employment in the care work sector. Another political field of interest was education and especially the discrimination of children. Interviewees working together with migrant women often described a situation in which women felt helpless because their children were mocked or faced racial attacks. The women often have language barriers and cannot join parental meetings or defend their children against discriminative teachers. These early experiences of children with discrimination was also formulated as a direct barrier to become politically active later on as an adult. One participant also observed that many migrants stay passive or silent about those issues because they often do not see a direct benefit for them to become politically active in these fields.

2.6. E-Participation

Almost all saw e-participation as an opportunity which would facilitate participation. However, most of the interviewees clarified that it would probably be used by them as politically active people and maybe by individuals who have disabilities or no access to public spaces. On the other hand, they saw it as a barrier especially to those who do not have access to the internet or who are not familiar with technology. Many agreed that it would be something used by the younger generation. It was also seen by women migrant representatives as a way to reach women, especially those with children. Many said they would also like such a tool to be clearly explained and provided in different languages. Some of the participants think that the common language should be German as they perceive that people who would know about such a tool and actually use it would be people with a certain knowledge of German and that it would allow for discussions of topics among different communities. Almost all were sceptical if such an online participation tool should be presented by the municipality administration. They felt that

there might be a lack of trust that their suggestions would not be properly taken into consideration when it comes to policy-making. Others suggested to have it introduced by a migrant group or organisation to enable easier participation. One participant said when introduced by the administration during registration in the municipality this could be an opportunity to make it publicly known and give the notion that the municipality is interested in your voice.

3. Obstacles to Participation

3.1. Language

One major barrier for participation which was mentioned by all interviewees was language, especially when it comes to the communication with the administration directly or in official letters, which is often very complex and not comprehensible. This makes it difficult to deal with documents on your own. Many participants feel that the municipality administrations often require them to immediately fluently speak and understand German without having in mind that people are not yet able to understand the documents. When it comes to structural forms of participation like in the migrant advisory council, many participants saw a difficulty for individuals to become a member of such a council because of the language. This was seen as easier for representatives of migrant organisations as they usually live in Germany for many years and have experiences in talking to the administration and politicians and also handling official documents.

3.2. Lack of qualifications for volunteer work

Another obstacle mentioned by most of the interviewees was that migrants often do their political work voluntarily and do not receive compensation for their sharing of knowledge, empowerment work or counselling. Many saw it as hindering to work in public employment or any other high ranked political position because they cannot receive qualifications for their volunteer work, which is not being recognised as professional work experience. A major problem pointed out by one participant was that as long as people are in the asylum seeking procedure, they often do not receive crucial information about their political rights and opportunities for action. In his view, people should gain this knowledge and certificates for workshops even if they need to return back to their home countries in the case of a failed asylum application. He stated:

“It is frustrating when talking about participation that this problem is discussed only superficially. The people who come need political education, everyone wants to have empowered citizens, but nothing is being done about it.”

3.3 Recognition of Foreign Degrees and Work Permit

Furthermore, a very central problem to political presentation and taking up leading roles in society are difficulties many face with the recognition of degrees. This problem was especially brought forward by migrant women representatives who stated that this forces women in more physically challenging and low-paid jobs such as cleaning or care work, instead of political work. Another obstacle which was mentioned by participants working with migrant women was that a work permit is very important, allowing women to build a financially stable situation in which they have the opportunity to participate in political activities. When describing an empowerment workshop one participant was doing with a group of women, she described a situation like this:

“I found it important that the women do this self-reflection and talk about themselves without being forced to say where they come from or what their profession is. I was not allowed to work back then due to my tolerance status. Most of the women in this workshop were from m Syria and they already worked there but were not allowed to work in Germany. “

3.4. Problems of trust in the administration and politics

Almost all interviewees described a scepticism towards political and administrative bodies which they described as a barrier for structural participation. Some substantiated it with experiences of personal disappointment either by having contact only to those administrations they feel very discriminated by or not understood such as the foreigner's authority or employment office. Others saw the cause of this distrust in the experiences they made with authorities in their countries of origin. One participant said that it is common for people from his original country to rely on information from friends rather than going to the administration or taking advice from professional counselling centres because of their experiences with corruption. It was also mentioned that migrants often come from countries not only where corruption is commonplace but also without any experiences of living in a democracy. One participant formulated it like this:

"I have scepticism about politics because where I come from politics does not really work and the politicians and the administration are very corrupt. I imported the bad image I had of politics in my home country to Germany, although I know rationally that the structures are not the same."

3.5. Low-threshold access to information on participatory structures

Despite different opportunities for structural participation many of the participants in the interviews felt that they had to rely on themselves when wanting to be active in structural participation like the migrant advisory council, as a member of a party working group or as citizen deputy to the district assembly. Although these possibilities exist for TCNs, the interviewees felt that there is little information offered about these participatory tools. Low-threshold information was seen as needed in places where migrants are based or go regularly to. Many suggested that this information should be accessible in refugee shelters and in different languages, also offering space for consultation and support. Some said also that this information needs to be shared on social media platforms and in integration and language courses. One participant also pointed out that when not translated into different languages the information should be at least very simply explained.

3.6. Lack of Financial Stability

Many saw the lack of spare time as an obstacle to political participation. In general, there was scepticism to expecting from people who just arrived in Germany to be politically active. Some felt that being occupied with everyday existential challenges is already much to cope with. Many said that migrants often not only have to work for themselves and their families in the country but also for those who live back in their home countries. This makes it difficult to participate in political activities especially when most of the opportunities offered are on voluntary basis. And even those who took the opportunity to become active in initiatives or migrant organisations were sometimes forced to stop these activities due to financial reasons. One participant felt that the work that migrants do on voluntary basis is often not appreciated enough by authorities and politicians. Another person pointed out (based on her own experiences) that although she appreciates that many migrant organisations are actively involved in migrant advisory councils, she feels that they cannot engage enough in their advocacy work and concealing of the municipality on policies because migrant organisations are too occupied with their everyday procedures and pressure to deliver their projects. This opinion was also shared by other interviewees seeing structural rather than project funding as a long-run solution which creates sustainable and strong participatory opportunities for migrant organisations.

4. Conclusions Interviews

Structural participation opportunities (migrant advisory councils, participation in working groups of parties or being a Deputy Citizen to the district assemblies in Berlin which exist for TCNs) are well-known by all participants in interviews conducted for this research. However, they were interviewed as representatives of migrants and are already politically organised or professionals in the local or national

politics. They all stated that these structures are not commonly and widely known by the broader migrant population in Berlin.

As a solution to motivate and empower migrants to be politically involved they saw the right to vote as an important feature and direct opportunity to have impact on policy making. In order to have very strong migrant political representatives, public employers and professionals who are able to influence and reform decision-making on integration and migration, there are certain changes demanded:

- Allowing for a stable residence status with a permit to work
- Fighting Racism and other forms of discrimination
- Having a safe and stable environment and access to proper housing
- Advancement of language courses towards the needs of migrants (e.g. further training for political participation)
- The ability to get qualifications and certificates for voluntary work to be able to get employment in an organisation or the public administration
- Improvement of the recognition of foreign degrees

Strengthening of the migrant advisory councils' impact on inclusion and integration policies:

- Increase of structural funding for migrant organisations on the regional state level to make them able to advocate stronger for inclusive policies and professional counselling of the administration and local government.
- Training and workshops for members of the council to become more familiar with administrative procedures and networking (especially for individual migrant representatives)

For the improvement of knowledge among the migrant population about the migrant advisory councils and other participation opportunities:

- Organising of more public events for the migrant population and development of concrete material such as brochures which give an idea about the work of the migrant advisory councils but also other opportunities to be politically active.
- Development of measures to overcome the distrust for administrations
- Use of e-participation as a tool to get organised and inform people about participatory decision-making also in different languages
- Creating more threshold meetings with the migrant population of the municipality like roundtable discussions or regular meetings in public spaces

III. Evaluation of the Focus Group Discussions

Three Focus Groups were organised with beneficiaries and providers of existing participatory structures. In each group, five different stakeholders discussed access opportunities and barriers to the participation of people with migration backgrounds with a specific focus on the group of TCNs. In each group, next to representatives of migrant organisations, there were also migrants active in migrant advisory councils or as citizen deputies to a district assembly in Berlin. Representatives of the municipality of the district Berlin Mitte (being a Partner of this project) participated in two groups and a representative of the Berlin Senate (regional state administration) took part in another group. Each Group had a focus on migrant advisory councils as well as other formal and informal participatory opportunities. In one of the groups' women migrant representatives were invited to specifically discuss the needs of migrant women in participatory structures of the region. The individual representatives were selected with sensitivity to gender, age, and diversity in the representation of different migrant groups and/or communities.

1. Motivation and Issue Raising

1.1 “Pre-political” Work

One very central topic discussed in all of the focus groups was the question of how people with a migration background become politically active. Offering motivation and raising awareness about the fact that personal concerns can be transferred into political demands were seen as a major challenge and important step. A participant in one group described this “pre-political work” as raising political issues without starting an actual political discourse. The discussants had the opinion that this work not only includes writing flyers, e-mails, and invitations to events but mutual exchange that is rooted in trust. This was perceived as a good strategy to reach communities which are not very active politically. For instance, a participant mentioned this in the context of the post-soviet community not being used to political participation, but corruption. Others agreed that if not growing up in a democracy and being used to corruption, especially in the administration, it is very difficult to create trust and raise motivation for structural participation. One suggested to organise very informal meetings and events as well as small exchange groups with role models for empowerment workshops. Another suggestion raised by one participant was to organise regular but very informal meetings in the neighbourhood where people can discuss important issues concerning their districts combined with cooking or any other activity, where the municipality should only provide the space and framework for the assembly. However, it was also pointed out that this work cannot be only done by migrant organisations as they usually have limited financial possibilities and timely opportunities within projects to focus intensively on this awareness and trust building. One participant also pointed out that this is not done with temporary projects but needs constant structures which intensively allow for political education and alternative training methods. From his experiences, there is a need for word of mouth recommendations for people to know about such offers. He also emphasised the importance of offering such courses in different languages. Nevertheless, it was also mentioned that the group of TCNs is very heterogenic and that with a single offer it is difficult to reach all members of this group. One participant made this statement on the topic:

"There are many offers, maybe too many offers. And we always address the same groups of migrants that already know quite a lot. We don't reach people who need exactly that. We need to talk to people where they are: In refugee shelters and less at expert panels."

1.2 The Basis for Participation: Residence Status and Stable Living Conditions

During the discussion different examples of projects were mentioned that are meant to motivate especially asylum seekers who live in refugee shelters to organise. Most of the participants believed that these projects were not very successful and people living in refugee shelters often did not manage to create councils or other organised ways to channel their demands for accommodation. The reason (as perceived) was that most of the people, especially with a discretionary leave to remain or in the procedure of asylum seeking (as described by participants in the groups), seldom feel wanted in their country of residence and are uncertain if they can build a future in the place where they are based. Some participants also pointed out that the first experiences made with authorities are often not positive, especially when going to the State Office for Immigration (Berlin's foreigners' registration office). Regarding TCNs, the point was raised that this group is excluded the most from many formal participatory opportunities but has at the same time the highest potential to become politically active while being confronted with different existential challenges. A representative of the administration pointed out that “being affected” is something important to hold on to when becoming politically active. She also indicated that offering low-threshold opportunities which are compatible with the time and other resources of this targeted group is a concern of the administration. Additionally, the groups agreed that the representatives of migrants rarely discuss topics that concern non-organised migrants, and that the priorities of the organised faction are often too far away from the questions of actual

political participation. One representative of migrant women stated that discrimination in connection with wearing a hijab should be a topic of discussion with policy makers because this kind of discrimination often involves employment opportunities. Also, fighting racism, in general, was found to be a very important topic, it was suggested that the different stories of women who experienced discrimination should be collected, and a meeting organised for these women to talk directly about their concerns. The participants also agreed that motivation or concern can only be created if people feel a direct benefit from political action. One participant described it like this:

"I think political participation needs a political basis. Basis of 'I have a flat, school and kindergarten for my children and I have health insurance.' Only then I can put my energy into political participation."

1.3 Access to Independent Anti-Discrimination Advisory Services and Legal Enforcement of Antidiscrimination Laws

Despite the presence of various consultation services in Berlin, especially regarding discrimination in the housing market and other areas of life, the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and the compensation on legal grounds were what participants found most essential. It was a common agreement that the protection against discrimination and racism is one of the most important pillars of democratic participation and therefore always needs to be addressed. However, particularly discussants representing migrant women felt that legally challenging a discriminatory act or practice is usually laborious for many migrants because of the difficulty of not only finding legal consultation but accompaniment throughout the process. When it comes to complaints about agents working in the labour agency or other fields that are very substantial, it was pointed out that people are too afraid of filing complaints due to a fear of negative consequences. A female migrant representative pointed out that the people are confronted with discrimination all the time and it is difficult to file complaints constantly while being occupied with everyday challenges. Thus, empowerment work and issue raising were also seen as important when it comes to issue raising for political action.

1.4 E-Tools to Reach People Where They Are

Focus group participants saw issues in the distribution of information about participation opportunities and the regularity of training. One female participant pointed out that offers need to be better adapted to the people who need to be reached. Migrant women can be reached when their children are in school or kindergarten and it was suggested not to have very strict formats instead of workshops and long seminars. One suggestion was to allow communication through social media or smartphones with organisers of meetings. Regarding e-participation, it was suggested to make participation possible without the obligation of registering with an e-mail address. However, participants pointed out that in their experience much time needs to be calculated for the monitoring and updating of the content.

Before using such a tool, they found evaluations important on what kind of opportunities already exist in Berlin, as there is already the <https://mein.berlin.de> website and some other platforms for citizen participation. Nonetheless, they also found that these websites could be developed further and tailored to the needs of migrants. Other participants found e-learning modules in different languages a useful tool but found that they should go further into detail on different aspects of democratic participation. Especially short videos in different languages were valued as a method to motivate for political engagement.

2. Inclusion of Migrant Voices in Policymaking

2.1 The Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft (PartMigG) –Law for the promotion of Participation in the Migration Society

One participant pointed out that all authorities are different and open towards the demands of migrants to varying degrees. She judges it very important that migrant representatives have access to every administration on the federal state and district levels, especially to those bodies which are in charge of policies affecting migrants. Representatives of the administration stated that the Berlin municipalities and the Senate are bound to the PartMigG which is now a very important base for the demands of the migrant population. When it comes to inclusion and participatory approaches, this legal ground facilitates the exchange with different offices. The law (as interpreted by the participant in one of the focus groups) should offer access to the administration as a whole. For that reason, the integration offices in every district are now obligated to enforce this law in the municipalities. This makes it easier for migrant organisations to approach the administration. Every single group mentioned the PartMigG as a very positive signal of the Berlin Senate, among other reasons for the fact that many migrant organisations and the State Advisory Council for Participation were included in the development of the proposal. A participant also said that it is important that with the PartMigG the participation and integration advisory councils in the districts have a legal foundation and financial resources for administration. There was a general wish to have this kind of process for any law that concerns migrants. On the other hand, one participant raised the point that it is difficult for migrant organisations to cope with the number of processes happening in the administration and that resources are so limited that inclusion in policy and law drafting cannot only remain the personal responsibility of migrants. Instead, there is a need for the active distribution of information by the administration in due time. In her own words she said:

“There are different laws that we need to discuss. I can make a list of laws where this participation is very necessary. But this needs to be done properly with very good preparation and with enough time, not with a three-week deadline for an input on this and that like it is often the case.”

2.2 Advisory Councils for Participation and Integration

One participant stated that when designing the PartMigG many migrants wanted the advisory councils to be included in the law as a participatory instrument. However, others felt that relying on the councils and making them stronger as committees makes it more difficult to push for the right to vote for TCNs. Some participants criticised councils as too dependent on the political will of the district majors or integration offices of the municipality, which sometimes hinders the inclusion of critical voices of migrants. And one participant also pointed out that even if the councils operate very democratically with different representatives, they still remain consultation bodies with limited leverage on policymaking. Differing opinions were shared on the question if councils are currently created in a democratic or fair manner, as members are not directly elected to the councils. One discussant felt that enabling TNCs to vote for the representatives would be no more democratic as eventually, the elected representatives would remain in a consulting position. Others held the view that having elections would increase the knowledge about the councils and would force the representatives to have a closer exchange with the migrant population in the municipality about the topics they would like to be discussed in the council. It was agreed that it is also important that individual migrants are members of the councils. In general, there was agreement that the councils have a favourable structural and legal ground to operate. Nevertheless, most of the focus group participants shared the view that the councils are not realising their full potential. The reasons and possible solutions were as follows:

a) In-transparent Consultation Structures

One mentioned problem was that at times members of the council have the feeling that their proposals and demands which they developed over a long and time-consuming process are not taken into consideration within the municipality. They felt that because their work is completely voluntary, with financial compensation limited to 10-20 Euros and only for official meetings of the advisory council-but

not for the working group meetings- proposals should be valued and taken into account to a much higher degree. Otherwise, the members of the council feel discouraged when always seeing their suggestions rejected. Migrant organisations felt that they are providing a free service for the municipality that is not actually part of their regular job, making it voluntarily. One participant pointed out:

“There is a lot of work on the part of the migrants in the advisory councils and in the end you don't even know what happens with what you have proposed.”

b) Presence of Politicians as a Barrier to Communication

Many focus group participants felt that politicians often dominate the communication in the meetings of the council, making it especially difficult for people who do not speak the language fluently to participate in the discussions. They face a twofold difficulty when it comes to communication: communicating in a language they do not speak fluently and coping with the rhetorical strength of politicians. For that reason, the district administration representatives stated that the council in their district also holds formal meetings without the presence of municipal representation, letting it operate as independent as possible from the integration office.

One female member of an advisory council on the district level described it like this:

"I started working in the council when I didn't know the language at all and had to represent a very large community within the district. When you work with politicians who are very experienced in political work and rhetorical language, it's very difficult to collaborate with that imbalance democratically."

c) Better Exchange between the Different Advisory Councils in Berlin

Another suggestion offered by participants was to create a stronger exchange between the members of the different district councils, as well as with the State Advisory Council for Participation, effectively getting to know the work done by others and also to push for collaborative actions. As observed by one participant there is no link between the councils, which creates a problem for strategic work. Additionally, the councils have a different constellation in every district, making it difficult to know the members of every council.

d) Topics that concern many migrant communities

One participant had the opinion that sometimes very clear and common topics concerning every migrant can be a good basis for making proposals of interest to the broader migrant society. A participant had the view that in her advisory council a very well received topic was multilingualism, seen as something concerning every migrant community. She pointed out that multilingualism was not only discussed within the working group of the council but also in public events with different migrant groups. The focus group members had also the view that residency status, communication with authorities, the housing situation and topics concerning children such as discrimination in schools or the labour market are topics crucial also for politically non-active migrants. The participants in every group had the opinion that if people would feel that the council actually has an impact on policies concerning these issues, interest in its work might increase.

e) Increasing the Visibility

Many discussants felt that the councils are not commonly known by non-organised migrants and that the topics and proposals of the council often are only internally discussed and not within the broader migrant society of the districts. Increasing the visibility of the councils through communication and PR measures was viewed as important. It was suggested to invite more external experts with migration backgrounds to the meetings of the councils or its working groups and also to have public events with different migrant groups. A commonly shared opinion was also that advisory councils should have the

possibility to publish press releases and use a website where they can present the different members. Word of mouth recommendations between representatives of the communities about the council were also seen as a method to transfer knowledge about the advisory councils. One discussant said, to increase the visibility of the district's advisory council, they organised a school competition for the design of a logo for the council's working group for multilingualism. Others suggested to form a working group for communication within the council.

f) Training for members of the councils

The participants discussed different possibilities of training, especially for members of advisory councils who are not familiar with the structures and work of the administration. It was suggested to have workshops with representatives of the municipality and informal events with the migrant population motivating more individuals to participate in advisory councils. It was also seen as important that the integration offices in the districts offer support since the members of the council will not have the capacity to implement all the suggested measures with the political work aside.

2.3 Inclusion in Policy-Making

A common demand was to create more micro-focused discussion groups and roundtables which consolidate for a certain period of time to work on specific topics. Also cooperating with members of the Berlin deputy house as a strategic method to build up pressure for certain policies was seen as a way to have more influence on the decisions of the administration. Other discussants representing the administration suggested to approach responsible people directly who are working on certain policies. Being an identifiable expert known to the authorities also helps to be directly included in the policy-making process, as described by a participant. Also being self-confident even as a small organisation was something pointed out as a way to be invited to round tables and for structural inclusion in policy making. One representative of migrant women saw a solution to the language barrier by organising meetings with translators present, enabling also women to participate who have difficulties to explain their concerns in German language. Increasing exchange of experiences and knowledge in between migrant organisations was also viewed as indispensable. In general, the discussants demanded a structured framework in which such consultation processes can be facilitated. A representative of the Senate pointed out that in Berlin, the integration offices (on district and federal state level) have the responsibility to bring different authorities together on issues concerning integration and thus, can facilitate communication. In the case of non-compliance with migrant organisations on policies concerning migration or inclusion, a representative of the district municipality Mitte stated that integration offices also function as ombudsman offices for complaints of the migrant civil society, enabling them to deal with complaints and to approach other authorities in the case of complaints. One participant described the current approach taken by the committee for integration, work and social of the deputy house of Berlin in regard to the arrival structure for Ukrainian refugees as a good practice for a holistic approach to include migrant organisations in policy making because different migrant organisations were invited to discuss measures for the integration of refugees from Ukraine. A representative of the senate put it like this:

“In the conceptualisation of policies, civil society should be involved. It should not be the case that decisions are already taken and organisations have only the possibility to make view suggestions on the policies created by the administration. Ideally, the administration should try to find solutions to problems together with them.”

A representative of the administration said, sometimes it is very important to have the right conversation partners within the administration to have an impact on policy making. Inputs in compliance with deadlines are very important when it comes to influencing of policies. However, she admitted, that also individual people in some positions sometimes hinder inclusive policy-making. A way

to bypass this problem is to use the complaint management in every authority in Berlin, as pointed out. According to the administration representatives these complaints need to be evaluated and reported. One representative working for a migrant organisation said that she plans to use this mechanism more as a way to reach certain authorities which are not well-disposed towards consultation from migrant representatives.

2.4 Public Citizen Participation

One participant saw a good way to motivate for participation to offer different low-threshold ways of citizen participation on the district level which are not tied to citizenship. Working closely together with a municipality and also migrant organisations makes such offers more accessible and also inclusive, as one discussant told from her own experience. She said that this is a way to exchange ideas for the neighbourhood. A problem observed by one migrant women representative was that when it comes to cooperation with authorities, migrant women have a very strong barrier which cannot be easily overcome. She often feels that it is not really in the interest of the authorities to give these women an opportunity to participate politically and she had the opinion that participation on the very local level in the neighbourhood cannot be the solution to non-participation. In her opinion, a stronger push for inclusion in law and policy making is needed. A general opinion was that offering information in different languages needs to be improved in order to allow more TNCs to have an impact on decision making.

3. Obstacles for Structural Participation

3.1 Structural Participation Not for Everyone Accessible

A commonly shared view was that many initiatives or collectives which often prefer informal ways of participation to deliver their political demands, still would like to be included in structural consultation processes. For instance-as broad forward by one discussant-it is not possible for initiatives to vote for the State Advisory Council for Participation. Only associations are allowed to be listed as voters for the members of the council which was perceived as a limitation of the PartMigG. A member of a working group which co-created the PartMigG stated that the reason for this limitation lies within the German association law and no solution was found yet which was judicially and politically sufficient to expand the voting rights to initiatives within the PartMigG. In general, some participants had the view that the ways to be included in structural ways of participation are often very static. Some felt that the most common way to have access to structures is to found an association. Hindering initiatives or other politically organised groups to participate. A group with difficulties to be included in policy making is those of “illegalised” people. A member of a focus group pointed out that some of them are organised but have difficulties representing their group in public or to deliver their demands because they fear to be deported or to face legal consequences being not allowed officially to stay in the country. One representative of the administration mentioned that the state of Berlin plans to develop a sort of city ID to allow them to have better access to social services, facilitating the access to basic needs.

3.2. Financial (In-) stability for Strategic Advocacy on Policies

A shared view was that the framework for consultation and inclusion of migrant organisations needs to be reformed. Many migrant representatives are concerned that institutions and administrations expect them to share their knowledge and expertise with little or no financial compensation or even to consult them voluntarily. It was also seen by many as problematic to depend mostly on the volunteer work of migrants when it comes to law and policy making which concerns them. In the opinion of migrant organisation representatives, being not able to do advocacy work as part of their work but only as volunteers, puts migrant representatives in a weaker position in comparison to decision makers, hampering advocacy for structural change. One concrete demand was to establish structural funding for migrant organisations on the federal state level similar to the model which already exists on the national level. Another participant observed that not only funding for projects themselves hinders often

impactful advocacy but also the constant fluctuation of colleagues as many are forced to change jobs because of 6 Months to 1 year fixed-term contracts. This creates in her opinion a non-sustainable situation for the organisations where knowledge and expertise always fluctuate, causing also a very insecure situation for many organisations. In her opinion, this structural barrier makes it difficult to develop in-depth expertise. It was also suggested that a solution would be long-term funding which is not tied to a certain migrant community or group, allowing to advocate for more inclusive work on migration. One of the discussants put it like this:

„We need first to influence how laws are drafted and then change the existing legislation unless we get proper structural funding, I think we will never address structural issues.“

3.3 More People with a Migration Background in the Administration

Having more people with migration background employed in the administration was also perceived as an important aim. One discussant felt that when working in politics, people with migration background have fewer chances in comparison to native Germans to get prestigious positions. Therefore, many very qualified migrants have to work in migrant organisations or other fields with precarious work conditions. In his view, multilingualism, especially when it comes to non-European languages should be valued more when applying for positions in the administration. The PartMigG regulates not only the participation and inclusion of migrants in the decision making but also measures to increase the diversity of employees in the administration. One representative of the district administration of Bezirksamt Mitte stated that in her municipality diversity training with the human resources department already started. Bezirksamt Mitt also conducted an internal survey on the questions of racism and discrimination as a way to analyse the needs of employees. When the results were accessible, employees with a migration background established a working group which deals now with these issues. Despite the very positive measures which were facilitated with the PartMigG, one participant found that more needs to be done when it comes to bringing diversity into practice within authorities. She pointed out that although now more and more people are being recruited who speak different languages, in practice they are not allowed to provide administrative services in different languages. In her opinion, this discrepancy makes it difficult for migrants to benefit from diversity in the administration. A representative of the district administration responded that although they try to establish service offers in different languages, they first need to make sure that people are legally well consulted and employees are able to use the proper legal terms also in other languages. One solution taken into consideration by the municipality was to employ phone interpreters or language assistants. Nevertheless, there is no solution found yet. Another obstacle to more employees with migrant decent in the administration are the high entering requirements such as very good degrees and education, as implied by one discussant. Thus, in the long-term strategy of these measures (as stated during the discussion), more sensitivity should be given to the fact that many children with a migration background have difficulties in school, discrimination being a very common reason for children to quit school. Some discussants had the view that this structural problem makes it difficult even to apply for jobs in the administration.

3.4 Inclusive Access to Civil Services

It was argued that since the new influx of refugees from Ukraine, this community received a more favourable treatment in authorities than others. Many had the opinion that at different levels much more has been made possible for this group of refugees as for previous ones such as the direct receipt of a work permit or the recognition of official documents. Their impression was that services were offered faster and less bureaucratic than previously. In Berlin, the administration now offers services and forms also in the Ukrainian language. Almost all participants in the three focus groups felt that the treatment of Ukrainian refugees has shown that the administration can work in a solution-oriented and flexible manner. Therefore, they shared the common opinion that this openness and flexibility should be extended to other refugees. Especially it was stated that having the possibility to fill in forms in

common migrant languages would facilitate procedures which are very time consuming. In general, an easier and inclusive access to civil services was viewed as a possible measure to overcome sentiments and scepticism towards political authorities, making it more desirable to become politically active.

4. Conclusions Focus Groups

The discussions in the groups revealed obstacles but also concrete demands and solutions on how to make participation on the municipality level better for migrants and how their views and expertise can be included in policy-making which concerns them. The three groups shared the common view that barriers to participation are life substantial problems, like the residence status or the housing situation. The struggle for basic needs and stable conditions was seen as a basis which is needed to become politically active, observing that these problems seldom are canalised into political activism. Representatives of migrant women saw the legal enforcement of anti-discrimination and racism laws in everyday life context as an obstacle to becoming politically active. Having negative experiences with authorities and being used to corruption and illiberal political systems in home countries makes it at the same time difficult for politically active migrant representatives to empower and motivate non-organised individuals for structural participation. Generally, a distinction was made between structural inclusion of associations (migrant organisations) and initiatives, collectives and individuals. It was viewed that opportunities for structural participation often are limited to migrant organisations while there are fewer structures for inclusion in policy making for groups which operate in informal structures and for non-organised individuals.

Most of the discussants felt that more opportunities for exchange with decision makers should be given to non-organised migrants. The focus group participants saw different methods as useful to raise motivation for political participation:

- Organising of informal issue-raising meetings in the neighbourhood, cooking events, meetings with policy makers who have a migration background
- Advocating for a stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws but also empowering and supporting to speak up against discrimination and racism
- Facilitating civil services and acquisition of documents by offering also information, forms, and services in different languages
- Using different digital platforms, social media or communication services such as What's App to reach people better
- Flexible and not time-bound political education, offering training for political language and rhetoric.
- Especially participation opportunities for women should be offered during times when they are not occupied with childcare

For the inclusion of migrants in policy-making a legal basis was considered to be important. As a good practice, the participants saw the Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft (PartMigG) (Law for the promotion of Participation in the Migration Society) which was developed in collaboration with different migrant organisations and the State Advisory Council for Participation.

Many migrant representatives wished to have similar approaches to policy making as for the development of the PartMigG in other political fields which concern them. Also less informal and small meetings or roundtable discussions to develop concrete solutions to urgent problems seemed to be found as good ways to allow for mutual exchange and development of inclusive policies. Ideas for the creation of such meetings were as follows:

- Allow for inclusive participatory processes for the development of laws and policies which concern migrants, seeing integration as a cross-sectional task, involving migrant representatives also to consult on topics such as housing, education, labour and so on.
- Contact migrant organisations for inputs on policies with enough time for them to prepare
- Create more small meetings and group discussions with different representatives of authorities on different topics
- The integration offices should make their ombudsman's function more widely known among the migrant population and for the demands of migrants but also motivate migrants more to approach them when feeling excluded from participation in policy development.
- Making possible that people who cannot speak the German language fluently can participate in public meetings by offering translation in different languages

In all focus groups, the discussants shared the opinion that advisory councils despite being the most established structural way of migrant participation in Berlin have almost no viability in the greater migrant society. This also leads to the observation that most of the migrants do not know which topics are discussed in the migrant advisory councils and in which way they actually represent the demands of especially TCNs.

A gap in communication between the councils and the migrant population in the districts was also described by most of the focus group members. In order to make the councils widely known but also to motivate more individual and non-organised migrant representatives to be active in migrant advisory councils different measures were suggested:

- Advisory Councils should be able to do their own press and communication work (e.g. press releases, website and social media sites)
- Councils should have the possibility to hold meetings without politicians present, facilitating the exchange between council members for those with language barriers
- In order to increase visibility and to build trust, migrant advisory councils should organise public events with different migrant communities and groups in the municipality
- The different councils on district and state level should have a regular exchange and communication being able to work strategically for common concerns of migrants across districts.
- The municipalities or external experts should offer rhetorical and other training (e.g. advocacy, networking, or on administrative work and procedures more general) for the members of advisory councils making them able to cope with the rhetorical skills of policy-makers and for professional consultation on policies.

Regarding the structural inclusion of migrant organisations in the development of policies on integration and migration it was viewed that limited funding opportunities are available for committee and advocacy work, complicating strong political work and impact on policy making. A commonly shared presumption was also that the consultation of migrant organisations needs to be more valued and viewed as an integral part of decision making.

When it comes to the cooperation between administration and migrant organisation the discussants felt that this work should be reimbursed with appropriate project funds or specific for consultation services. The suggestions made were:

- Finding new ways of structural and long-term funding for migrant organisations
- Creating more employment opportunities within the administration for people with a migration background

- Compensate consulting of migrant organisations and individual migrant representatives with professional fees

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Annex

Interviews

Personal Interview (9 May 2022, Berlin) with a women of Arabic origin (deputy citizen to the assembly of a Berlin district)

Personal Interview (11 May 2022, online) with a man from Eastern Europe (representative of the migrants advisory council in a city in the east of Germany and of the Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat (BZI) (Federal Immigration and Integration Council)

Personal Interview (18 May 2022, Berlin) with a women of Asian/Middle Eastern origin

Personal Interview (18 May 2022, Berlin) with a man of African descent (member of a migrant advisory council in a federal state in the East of Germany)

Personal Interview (19 May 2022, Berlin) with a man of African descent

Personal Interview (19 May 2022, online) with a women of African descent

Personal Interview (23 May 2022, Berlin) with a women from Eastern Europe (member of the participation and integration council of a district in Berlin)

Personal Interview (23 May 2022, online) with a women of African descent

Personal Interview (23 May 2022, Berlin) with a man of Middle Eastern background

Personal Interview (27 May 2022, Berlin) with a women from South America

Focus Groups

Focus Group 1 (9 June 2022): 1 female representative of a migrant organisation for Peru who is also deputy citizen to a district assembly in Berlin, 1 male representative of a migrant organisation for the civil rights and participation of the Turkish community, 1 male representative of a migrant organisation who represents the Russian speaking communities (former Soviet Union countries), 1 male representative of a migrant organisation representing the African community, 1 representative of the municipality Mitte of Berlin (the Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin is a partner to the EMVI project)

Focus Group 2 (16 June 2022): 1 female representative of the broader migrant community, 1 female representative from a civil society organisation which works in the field of citizen participation, 1 male representative of a migrant organisation of the Afghan community, 1 female representative of the Berlin Senate Administration in the field of integration and participation

Focus Group 3 (21 June 2022): 1 female representative working in empowerment and health education for migrant women, 1 female representative of a German wide operating umbrella association of migrant organisations working in the field of women's participation and rights, 1 female representative with a Turkish migration background who works in a counselling centre for Turkish women in a welfare association, 1 female activist with a Somali background who works in the field of women's rights, 1 female representative of the municipality Mitte of Berlin (The Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin is a partner to the EMVI project)



2022
EMVI

Empowering Migrants Voices on Inclusion Policies

WP2: National Reports



Project funded by the European
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EMVI - Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies

WP2: National Report Greece* July 2022

***Responsible researchers for the writing of the national report Despoina Syrri and, EMVI
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1. Participation and Integration structures in Greece

1.1. Facts and Figures

As regards legally residing migration, Greece has a long settled migrant population holding long term permits at a 37 percent rate, according to 2019 figures. According to the Ministry of Migration Policy's monthly statistics on resident permits, in 31st of August 2019¹ the stock of migrants legally residing in Greece stood at 552,485, recording thus a slightly increase of 1.5 percent comparing to August 2018 (544,443). If we added to that, the 93,962 resident permit applications that were pending on 31st August 2019, the total number of legally residing TCNs in the country could be estimated at 646,447, which in turn corresponds to 6 percent of the total population (of 10.722,300 inhabitants) living in Greece (GSMPRAS September 2019).² Similarly, 44,898 asylum applications (including Dublin cases) lodged till 31st August 2019 showed around 8 percent increase comparing to the same time cohort in 2018 (41,358) (Statistical data of the Greek Asylum Service, September 2019).

The 2011 national census³ data registered 912,000 foreigners (of which 713,000 TCNs and 199,000 EU citizens/non-Greek) living in Greece accounting for 8.3 percent (6.5 and 1.8 percent respectively) of the total resident population in the country. At the same time, the Labour Force Survey data provide a useful tool to identify trends through the years even if there is an inherent risk that they consistently underestimate the number of TCNs living in Greece. A comparison between the stay permit data with the LFS data demonstrates the LFS data estimates the TCN population to be 140,000 less, which is a 30% difference. This high rate of discrepancy can be attributed to the different goals and methodological approaches applied to collect and classify the data. This is reflected in the way of calculating the total stock of migrant population (of any age and legal status) regardless of its job status, on the one hand, and the labour force/manpower composition, on the other. Data from the 2019 Labour Force Survey (2nd Quarter) suggests an increase of 7 percent in the total migrant population (from 15 to 64 years old) with 411,400 non-Greek citizens residing in the country in 2019 compared to 382,900 in 2018 (Figure 1). Interestingly, while the total number of TCNs increased by 9.5 percent (347,500 in 2019 compared to 314,600 in 2018), the number of EU citizens⁴ (non-Greeks) decreased by 6.5 percent (63,900 in 2019 compared to 2018 (68,300)).⁵

Valid stay permits for TCNs, as provided by the Ministry of Migration Policy in August 2019, point to a slightly increased number (by 1.5 percent) of third country nationals, notably 552,485 persons, comparing to 544,443 in 2018, while the gender distribution

¹ Available: <http://www.immigration.gov.gr/miniaia-statistika-stoixeia>

² General Secretariat for Migration Policy, Reception and Asylum statistics on issuance-renewal of resident permits, the total number of third country nationals

³ While the national census of 2011 does not provide the most up to date data for 2016, it is worth consulting as regards the total migrant population residing in Greece as it does not distinguish between legal and undocumented residents. Even though one might consider that recent arrivals were not registered as at all probability they lacked a fixed domicile.

⁴ Falling under the Eurostat category of "EU 28 countries except reporting country"

⁵ Eurostat database on population by sex, age, citizenship and labour status. Available: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/database>.



remains at the same level. There is a gender balance trend with men constituting slightly over half (290,895) of the total migrant population, while 47 percent of the population (259,917) is relatively young, notably between 30 and 49 years of age. The economic crisis and high unemployment rates combined with legal status' precariousness magnified the size of structural barriers in a way that long settled migrants losing both their (temporary) legal and job status, and lapsing back to informality (Gemi 2019, p. 56). Data from the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy (2019) show that the largest number of legal migrants residing in Greece was recorded in 2010, when 601,675 residence permits were in force, while in the years to come (2012-2017) this number decreased. In terms of job status, the impact of the economic crisis on immigrant workers as the most vulnerable social group was manifold and largely interwoven with the systemic characteristics of the Greek labour market. The unemployment rate of migrants was estimated to be 36 percent during the height of the crisis (2012-2014). At the same time, however, the large economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism have become dependent on migrant labour working informally, while undeclared work has also been the main feature in domestic care where 40 percent of migrant women work under irregular condition (Bagavos et.al 2019, p. 323).

An estimated 65 percent of Greece's foreign population is Albanian, while the numbers of EU citizens residing in Greece are not included in the database of Ministry of Integration Policy. Georgians and Pakistanis (with 4.1 percent and 3.5 percent respectively) are the third and fourth largest communities according to TCN's database on valid permits in August 2019. In terms of resident permits' category, 57 percent of men hold permits for "other" reasons, followed by permits for "family reunification" (26 percent) and residence permits for employment purposes (17.5percent). Most women hold family reunification permits (48 percent which is decreased by 6 percent comparing to 2018), followed by "other" category permits (43 percent, an increase of 5 percent comparing to 2018) and employment permits (8.6 percent, an increase of 7 percent comparing to 2018).

Among EU Member States, the largest differences of the employment rate for the native-born population as compared to persons born outside the EU, were observed in Greece (18.8 points) (Migrant Integration Statistics, Eurostat May 2019, p.7) According to EL.STAT in the first quarter of 2019 the number of employed foreign men and women increased by 11.9 percent. Even though most new jobs were occupied by natives (81.3 percent), the increase in the number of the employed was bigger for foreigners (9.3%) than natives (2.1 percent). The rise in the number of employed foreigners is likely due to the recovery of sectors that prefer to hire low or medium-skilled foreigner workers than natives such as tourism, construction and agriculture (Cholezas 2019, p. 30). The unemployment rates of foreigners were 8 percent higher than of Greek citizens in 2018. Meanwhile, in 2019 the unemployment rates for Greek citizens showed signs of improvement from 19 percent in 2018 to 17 percent in 2019. Foreigners, on the other hand, appear to be more exposed to unemployment (probably due to undeclared job activities), as its rate has been increased by 2 percent in 2019 (29 percent) in comparison to 2018 (27 percent). According to Eurostat, the largest gender gaps in labour market participation among persons born outside the EU were recorded in Greece (27.2 points) (Migrant Integration Statistics, Eurostat May 2019, p.4).

While Greece received over a million refugees and migrants in 2015 and 2016, UNHCR estimates some 43,000 refugees and migrants are in Greece. Yet, statistics about persons from Third Countries in Greece with residence permits have not been made public for the past few years.



Most researchers resort to adding numbers to estimate the total, yet this exercise often proves slippery. For example, in 2018, 36 000 new immigrants obtained a residence permit longer than 12 months in Greece (excluding EU citizens), 18.6% more than in 2017. This figure comprises 8% labour migrants, 48% family members (including accompanying family), 2.3% who came for education reasons and 41.7% other migrants, according to <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org>.

Immigration and asylum-seeking flows via the Greek Turkish sea and land borders have increased during 2018-2021. Flows have increased in 2019 along both the Greek Turkish sea borders (arrivals on the Aegean islands) and the Greek Turkish land border. During the first half of 2019, more than 30,000 people arrived in Greece by sea and over land, the majority from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq (UNHCR, September 2019). In addition, over 7,000 migrants arrived on the Greek islands in August, and over 10,000 in September 2019, the highest monthly figures since the European Union and Turkey signed a deal to limit migrant traffic across the Aegean in 2016, and many more since then. Clamping down on border crossings, in the land and the sea, in the presence of FRONTEX operations, with the European Parliament weary about thousands of pushbacks, the death toll of drowning and deaths in the Evros river and the Aegean Sea has dramatically increased in 2022.

In 2019 nearly 22,000 people (35 percent of whom children) were accommodated in Reception and Identification Centers (RICs) across the Greek islands. These centers' capacity has been exceeded by 500 percent, forcing vulnerable people to live in degrading and dangerous conditions. This increase has been largely attributed to the long delays in processing both asylum applications and family reunification requests. In addition, even when the asylum applications have been lodged, those people remained in the RICs on the islands because of the lack of space in the reception centers on the mainland. In response, 10,000 people have been moved from the islands to the mainland since September 2019, according to the Ministry of Citizens' Protection.

1.2. Main official institutions/bodies/stakeholders in the country dealing/responsible for migrant integration on national, regional and local level

Integration depends on the willingness ability of a country, region, municipality, yet also an intergovernmental entity, to receive migrants and refugees. Greece has experienced two major shifts regarding migration and asylum since 1989. At the beginning of the 1990s, when a considerable number of people from Central and Eastern European countries started to migrate to Greece, and in the period of 2015-2016, with the massive arrival, via Turkey, of people from countries at war or conditions that endanger their lives. Following the mass refugees' arrival in 2015, the Ministry of Immigration Policy was founded, with responsibilities concerning immigration and integration, along with an Independent Asylum Service operating under the Ministry's supervision. The mass inflows overwhelmed the capacity of public institutions to process and look after migrants and refugees while Greece was still adapting to the effects of the ongoing since 2010 economic crisis. The number of asylum applications increased, but so were the recognitions, while there were developments towards the access of children to the educational system. Nevertheless, the access of asylum seekers and refugees to services and employment is difficult and limited, mainly because of the adverse economic conditions in Greece. Following the change in government after the 2019 general election (two months after the



Migration action plan was adopted), the Ministry of Immigration Policy (MIP) was dissolved and subsequently re-established as the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (MIA).

1.3. Main legal framework dealing/responsible for migrant integration on national, regional and local level

Law 3463/2006, known as the Code of Municipalities and Communities, in Article 214, defines as obligation for the municipal and community authorities to promote registration and resolution the problems and needs of the inhabitants of their geographical region, as well as consultation “with collective social actors and population stakeholders both in the preparation of action plans and regulatory acts, as well as when making decisions of general interest.” From this general wording it follows that migrants are not only not excluded from participating in local affairs but, on the contrary, they are considered equal interlocutors with the Greek citizens towards the local principles. The required follow-up was not afforded to this provision. The participation of immigrants in local events without the introduction of new administrative tools and methods of administration, without strengthening the role of civil society, social organisations and without the necessary cuts in the system of government was doomed to remain on paper and this modernizing step to stay meteor.

For first time in October 2009 the then newly elected government tried to create a role and to determine the position of immigrants in Greek society through two legislations: Law 3838/2010 and Law 3852/2010. With this initiative the legislator tried not only to strengthen the integration of immigrants in Greek society, but also to respond to requests from active civil society and local authorities to address local level institutional issues that concern not only the indigenous but also the foreign population of the local community. At the same time, the important responsibility of the municipalities in social inclusion is recognized, and the fact that the relationship of the foreigner with the Greek society is formed in the first place at the municipal level, as well as the success or the failure of this "socialisation".

To develop more coherent management policies, governments' priorities concerning migration and refugee issues led to the introduction and implementation of the National Action Plan for Migration Management in 2009. It was drafted by the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection and was intended to be implemented gradually within a three-year period. This led to the introduction and adoption of Law 3907/2011 which introduced legislative changes in the screening mechanisms, registration procedures, detention, repatriation and returns. It established new services, such as First Reception Service, a new Asylum Service, and more accommodation centers to cover the needs of international protection and those with specific protection needs. The priorities were evident and focused on the border control and combating unauthorized entries while close to zero percentage rates of recognitions of international protection, difficult access to asylum procedures, great delays and long waiting times for decisions, pending asylum applications, detention of asylum seekers and refoulement remained systematic practice. The UNHCR characterized the situation at the borders and the reception conditions as a humanitarian crisis and opposed transfers to Greece under the Dublin Regulation because of inadequate protection of asylum seekers. Following judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *MSS vs Belgium and Greece* the other member states suspended Dublin transfers to Greece since 2011.



The adoption of Law 3838 in 2010 (L. 3838/2010), provided the framework through which children of immigrants that were born in Greece or attended Greek school for several years could be granted Greek citizenship, as well as the participation of citizens of TNCs in the local elections. However, in 2011, the Council of State annulled these two provisions on the grounds of being unconstitutional. Finally, Law 4332/2015 amended the previous L. 4251/2014 making provisions for the framework of naturalization of children of immigrants. During the same period, there was an increase of the number of racial incidents, organized racial attacks, threats and sometimes lethal attacks against migrants and asylum seekers, mainly from extreme right organizations such as the Golden Dawn while in certain cases according to reports with the tolerance of the police.

Table 1: Total number of residence permits issued to migrants in the urban area of Heraklion by country of origin of migrants, April 2016

| Country of origin | Heraklion |
|-------------------|---------------|
| EGYPT | 64 |
| ALBANIA | 9.537 |
| ARMENIA | 64 |
| GEORGIA | 323 |
| INDIA | 56 |
| CHINA | 91 |
| MOLDOVA | 222 |
| BANGLADESH | 23 |
| NIGERIA | 19 |
| UKRAINE | 513 |
| PAKISTAN | 51 |
| RUSSIA | 532 |
| SYRIA | 266 |
| PHILIPPINES | 106 |
| Other | 733 |
| TOTAL | 12.600 |

Source: Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction, March 2016.

Table 2: Categories of reasons for which residence permits were issued in the greater urban area of Heraklion, April 2016

| | | | | |
|--|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
| | Employment | Other | Family unification | Study |
|--|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|

| | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|------|----|
| Heraklion | 1110 | 5268 | 6183 | 39 |
|-----------|------|------|------|----|

Table 3: Basic categories of residence permits under “Other”

| Basic categories of residence permits under “Other” | Heraklion |
|---|-------------|
| TEN- YEAR RESIDENCE PERMIT | 2176 |
| SECOND GENERATION RESIDENCE PERMIT | 673 |
| INDEFINITE -TERM RESIDENCE PERMIT | 829 |
| SPECIAL CERTIFICATE OF LEGAL RESIDENCE | 200 |
| LONG-TERM RESIDENT PERMIT | 903 |
| PERMANENT RESIDENCE | 219 |
| TOTAL CORE SUBCATEGORIES | 5000 |
| OTHER CATEGORIES | 268 |
| TOTAL CATEGORY "OTHER" | 5268 |

Source: Data obtained from the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction, March 2016.

1.4. Main policies in the country dealing/responsible for migrant integration on national, regional and local level

The sudden high arrivals of migrants and refugees in 2015, drastically changing the migration environment in the country, saw national authorities and cities directly confronted with the challenge of reception and quick integration, in the context of a difficult political debate. City authorities found themselves on the frontline, and had to quickly adapt to strengthen their reception, social cohesion and integration policies. Some introduced ad-hoc taskforces for integration, others appointed a refugee coordinator or a municipal counsellor to deal with the situation. Over the past few years, several cities have increased temporary accommodation and provided early integration support, while implementing initiatives to counter a raising negative



attitude towards newcomers, always through external funding. Across local communities, the debate has evolved from how to provide humanitarian emergency assistance to ensure the sustainable management of integration. These city authorities have implemented concrete solutions to provide immediate accommodation, transport, language courses, schooling, vocational training and support to find housing and employment. Certain cities tried to respond by: Creating new bodies, implementing new strategies and strengthening policies; Adopting a holistic approach involving different city offices; Mainstreaming integration across their policies and services; Opening up to a number of local actors to pursue a multi-stakeholder approach.

Political participation and representation of first-generation naturalised migrants and refugees started becoming possible in the European and local elections of 26th of May and national elections of 7th July 2019. The naturalisation reforms (of 2010 and 2015 respectively), and some might argue the amendments (4531/2018 and 4604/2019) on the reduction of naturalization fee and applicants' interview criteria, have led to increasing numbers of citizenship applications and acquisitions mostly by children born in Greece or who came to the country at a very young age and have attended Greek schools (22,060 naturalisations in 2018). Attempts towards management of migration and integration are demonstrated in the newly introduced "Greek integration model" (National Strategy for Integration, July 2019). Yet the challenges Greece faces as regards immigration and asylum seeking are still significant.

In 2019 the government has announced a plan which foresaw the deportation of 10,000 people and the transfer of other 20,000 asylum seekers from the island camps to less crowded facilities on the mainland. According to the same plan, six new "closed pre-departure centers" were constructed where asylum-seekers are held until they are either granted refugee status or supposedly sent back to Turkey if their applications are rejected. In the context of a tougher migration stance, on 31 of October 2019, Greek government introduced a highly controversial asylum law amidst mounting criticism that it will curtail fundamental human rights as regards integration. These developments suggest that Greece is faced with two different migration realities. On one hand a long term settled population that has changed the ethnic demographic composition of the citizenry. On the other, a recently arrived population of mostly asylum seekers that remains in highly precarious status as well as living conditions. Struggling with a prolonged migration crisis fatigue, the efficiency of its governance (both at EU and national level) and the security as well as "law and order" rhetoric are questioning, particularly when it comes to humanitarian issues, legal status and social integration as the major challenges for Greece in the coming years. The current 'refugee emergency' situation constitutes a moral and political dilemma for both Greece and the entire EU, demonstrating that even if managing the flows is a legitimate policy goal both at the national (Greek) and the EU level, it is neither legitimate nor acceptable to keep people in inhumane conditions, lacking access to basic facilities and services.

1.5. Inclusion of migrants in the design and implementation of integration policies on national, regional, local level

The National Strategy for the social inclusion of third country nationals, published by the Ministry of Interior in April 2013 has until recently been the only possible blueprint for strengthening the participation of migrants at local level in general and the role of MICs. The Migrant Integration Councils (MIC) are an institution in the field of Greek Local Government, introduced with the law



3852/2010, also known as the Kallikratis Programme. Together with the institution of the Municipal Consultation Committee and its Supporter/Ombudsman of the Citizen and Business, these initiatives are invited to contribute to the most immediate and more effective citizen participation in local events, in pre – consultation decision-making, the transparent exercise of power and the upgrading of municipal institutions governance.⁶

The provision for the formation and operation of MIC is not an innovation of the Greek self-governing organisation. Already, since the mid-90s, similar consulting institutions exist and operate in many European cities with the aim of strengthening its political and social cohesion of local communities with strong intercultural elements.

In parallel with Law 3838/2010 the government launched the "modernisation" of the provisions of the law on citizenship and attributed the right of political participation of expatriate and legally residing immigrants in the elections of Local Government.⁷ The government considered this political participation imperative for three reasons. First, to harmonise national legislation with the guidelines of the "Convention on the participation of foreigners in public life at the local level" according to with the requirements of the Council of Europe (05/02/1992) .⁸ Secondly, for the adoption of the, provided for at EU level, right to participate in local events which was included in the guiding principles of the Stockholm Program under preparation (European Council, 2010) .⁹ Third, to highlight the pioneering role of Local government in the implementation of a model of democratic and open society, as well to lift blockades and ghetto entrapments.

The publication of Law 3838/2010 preceded that of Law 3852/2010 for about two and a half months, something not accidental. In the first instance legislation launched and strengthened the institution of MIC provided in the second and gives it an increased momentum and an expectation. Articles 14 and 17 of Law 3838/2010 recognise for the first time the right to vote and to be elected to those immigrants who meet the conditions set by law. And the right to participate does not remain on paper as one formal right. On the contrary, it is reinforced through article 78 of Kallikrates, where the law mentions the participation of the elected foreign municipal councillors in the MIC as mandatory¹⁰, securing the latter ones a role in local affairs, as well as to all foreigners participating in the electoral process the principle of forming a political identity.

⁶ Explanatory memorandum of the draft law "New Architecture of Local Government and Decentralized Administration - Kallikratis Program ", <http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/2f026f42-950c-4efc-b950-340c4fb76a24/r-topanad-eis.pdf>

⁷ According to the then government, this participation is part of an asset integration policy aimed at creating a social osmosis among immigrants and local host communities and highlights the essential role of local government in implementation of a model of a democratic and open society in provoking difference,

<http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/2f026f42-950c-4efc-b950-340c4fb76a24/SMETAGEN-EIS.pdf>

⁸ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/144.htm>

⁹ The Stockholm Program provides in point 6.1.4. that an 'active policy integration should aim to recognize [third-country nationals] rights and obligations corresponding to those of the citizens of the Union. That should remain as a goal of the common immigration policy and to be implemented as soon as possible and by 2014 at the latest ".

¹⁰ According to article 78 "in the above councils foreign members who may have been elected are obligatorily appointed as members ".



The establishment of the Migrant Integration Councils (MICs) since 2010 became the first local government body specifically aimed to this end. With all their weaknesses and limitations, the formation of the MIC in a municipality signals its intention to promote integration. They also established a forum where migrant associations can communicate their concerns and interact with other interested actors in the city. Greek municipalities can do so a) through the way in which they implement general policies, and how actively they seek to reach and bring in TCNs so that they equally benefit from general policies that target the population at large (i.e. such as social policy, education and urban regeneration, among others), and b) through projects, programs and initiatives that are specifically designed for and target TCNs, and which often have to secure national or European funding outside of the municipal budget.

The MIC is an advisory body at the municipal level which is composed by the decision of the municipal council in order to assume a triple role.¹¹ First, recording and investigating the problems faced by migrants living permanently and legally in the region of the municipality concerned and which impede the integration migrants in the local community and their contact with public authorities. Second, formulating recommendations and proposals to the municipal council for the development of local actions to promote the smooth social integration of migrants and to resolve obstacles they face. Third, creating structures so that dialogue is not random and informal, but specific and targeted.¹²

According to article 78 of the Law 3852/2010, MICs (MICs in Greek) consist of five to eleven members which are appointed by the relevant municipal council. Their involvement towards strengthening social inclusion of legal migrants is allegedly ensured through their composition. The members are appointed municipal councilors, representatives of migrant organisations,¹³ whose seat is located within the administrative boundaries of the municipality concerned, or representatives who are selected by the migrant community residing permanently in the municipality concerned, according to on the terms provided by a relevant regulation issued by the court of first instance. At the same time, social representatives should be included in the composition, actors who develop within the administrative district of the municipality activities related to addressing problems of migrants. The Council chairman, one of the elected councillors, is elected by the same decision appointing the members, while in the case that a foreigner councillor has been elected his appointment to the Council becomes mandatory. The participation of the members in the Council is honorary and unpaid,¹⁴ while for its formation no a deadline is set by law.

¹¹ There is no deadline by law for the formation of the council, see, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Eng. No. 59 74896 / 30.12.10: Institutional changes of the "Kallikratis" Programme.

¹² It should be noted that this is not the first time that local government bodies have been called to cooperate with migrants on issues of local interest of the municipality. The Law 3463/2006, also known as the Code of Municipalities and Communities, in article 214 provided for the obligation of municipal and community authorities to 'consult with residents in their areas, collective social actors and stakeholders' population both during the preparation of the action plans and regulatory acts, as well as when making decisions of general interest ", Government Gazette vol. 114 / 08.06.2006.

¹³ The representative of the participating migrant organizations is not required to be a citizen of a specific municipality, Ministry of Foreign Affairs No. 59 AP house 74896 / 30.12.10: "Institutional changes of "Kallikratis" Programme.

¹⁴ For a draft regulation of the operation of SEMs prepared by EETAA see http://www.eetaa.gr:8080/kallikratis/support/Kanonismoi/d_symvoulio_entaxis_metanastwn.pdf



The catalytic role of the relevant municipal council (MC) in the establishment of the MIC, since the latter's formation is left to the MC discretion. Further, the regulation of the MICs operation is an exclusive task of the relevant municipal council, which implies that there may be differences in the mode of operation between the MICs. From the two above-mentioned remarks and from the description of Article 78 follows that the legal framework appears very loose, since in fact it is more a guiding principle (Afouxenidis et al., 2012). The logic of the legislator is that each municipality has its own peculiarities, its own problems and advantages, different proportion of native and foreign population, while the members of the latter have in each locality a different composition. Therefore, each municipal authority, within the axes that the law sets, has the option to adapt the institution to its realities and form its specific priorities. This flexibility is supposed to facilitate the longevity (?) of the institution and the success of his work. The MICs' composition, operation and results of the work, in the very few municipalities where they have been formed, are related to endogenous and exogenous factors. These factors are related to the will of the municipal authority to "wheel" the new institution, the number of immigrants and its composition, the activity or non-local immigration organisations, local geomorphism, local economy and the implemented immigration policy of the Central Administration.

There are municipalities that have set up and operate MICs. However, this is the exception and is found mainly in some large urban centers.¹⁵ There are many reasons why the overall operating is negative. First, in municipalities where MICs have not been formed, the municipal authorities consider the issue this as a formal obligation and not as an essential step in strengthening the whole of the local society. Even more, a formal obligation with a high risk and potential political cost given the racist and xenophobic narratives and attitudes in the general public sphere. In addition, the municipalities are understaffed, burdened with a multitude of responsibilities and without resources. Municipal authorities are reluctant to support administratively and financially such an institution while experiencing a persistent fear that any action in the field of migration will make them accountable to citizens who bear xenophobic attitudes.

In February 2013 the Council of State (CoC) by decision of the Plenary (S.T.E., 2013) considered, inter alia, the provisions of articles 14 to 21 of Law 3838/2010 as unconstitutional, particularly on the right of participation of foreign nationals of third countries as regards the bodies of the Local Self-Government Organisations of the first degree. The highest administrative court considered that these provisions are contrary to Articles 1, 5 and 102 of the Greek Constitution which recognises that the political right to vote and to be elected belongs exclusively to Greek citizens.¹⁶

¹⁵ Examples are Athens, Patras, Korydallos, Heraklion, Thessaloniki

¹⁶ On 5 August 2010, an application for annulment was lodged by a private individual against a) of no. Φ.130181 / 23198 / 30.4.2010 decision of the Minister of Interior, Decentralization and E-Government (Government Gazette B'562) entitled "Determination of supporting documents to accompany the declaration and application for registration in the Municipal Register due to birth or study in a school in Greece, in accordance with the provisions of article 1 A of the Greek Code Citizenship "and b) the 6th Circular of the same with protocol number 24592 / 7-5-2010 Of the Minister entitled "Exercise of the right to vote and to be elected by expatriates and legally residing third-country nationals for the promotion of elected bodies of the primary local government ", in the part that refers only to the provision rights to vote and to be elected to third-country nationals. On the 1st of February 2011, the 4th Department of the Council of State with decision 350/2011, ruled that exercise of the right to vote, as well as the exercise of the right to vote for the promotion of the organs of local self-government is reserved only to the Greeks citizens and cannot be extended to those who do not have this status without revision of the relevant



1.6. Main migrant organisations in the country

Since 2010, municipal authorities in Greece have been at the forefront in dealing with the social dislocations stemming from the economic crisis. They have also directly been confronted with local reactions and pressures that in large urban centers like Athens find expression in the political extremism of the Golden Dawn and occasionally of other political parties. Some city administrations worked together with local volunteers, NGOs, religious organisations and local companies who provided immediate assistance and spontaneously organised support for the integration of the newcomers.

The organisation primarily responsible for the needs of refugees and asylum seekers until 2021 has been the United Nations, through its operational branches: UNHCR and the IOM. The UNHCR (as of May 2021) is represented by a liaison in Crete, who aids local administrators in planning integration policies, while a lawyer conducts appointments with beneficiaries and helps with their cases through a collaboration with the Greek Council for Refugees. From mid-2018 to August 2019 though the UN had assigned two protection case workers who lived in Heraklion and moved around Crete for the needs of the program, providing invaluable services; however, due to organisation cutbacks, the protection workers were either reassigned or laid off. Part of the agreement between the Greek State, the UNHCR, and the local municipalities in 2017 was that the organisations responsible for the realization of relocation and integration programs would be local actors and local chapters of international organisations instead of NGOs, as is often the case in mainland Greece and the borderland islands. As a result of this agreement, an already existing co-operative non-profit organisation comprised of municipalities and local organisations undertook the task of organizing until recently the ESTIA program in Crete: Anaptyxiaki Kritis and Ploigos. The two organisations were originally interconnected, but in 2020 they separated to increase their State funding and operational capacity. Their operations are funded by the Regional Government of Crete and European Union funds, with each of their programs and projects receiving separate funding; in this case ESTIA is funded by UNHCR and the EU. Anaptyxiaki and Ploigos had ESTIA offices in Heraklion, and local partners in Chania, and Sitia, where social scientists, interpreters, and administrative assistants are employed, tasked with the organisation's mandate.

IOM also has had a presence in Heraklion since 2014, with its primary mandate until 2020 being the voluntary return relocation program, which includes two hundred euros, a return ticket, and travel documents for those willing to travel back to their countries of origin. However, in mainland Greece in 2019, and in Crete in 2020, IOM is also tasked with realizing the HELIOS integration program, the plan that is implemented after ESTIA, funded by the General Directorate of the European Commission for Migration and Internal Affairs. HELIOS is a pilot program that aims to support the recipients of international assistance (refugees and the beneficiaries of subsidiary assistance), so they can integrate into the Greek society. The program, according to a leaflet shared with stakeholders during its inaugural presentation, offers services aimed at the promotion of independent living, including rent allowance, language, and culture classes (capacity is currently twenty people per semester), employment support, and integration supervision. The

provision of the Constitution. The case was referred by the 4th Department to Plenary session of the Council of State.



classes and the workshops for HELIOS take place in Gazi, a suburb of Heraklion where access is possible only via public transportation and/or cars, which presents a problem, as bus tickets are expensive¹⁷ for most refugees living in the city center and its neighborhoods. HELIOS also offers preschool activities for children while their parent(s) attend classes and workshops. The exact time that beneficiaries of HELIOS can remain in the program and receive the allowance has not been clarified, with six to twelve (6-12) months being an estimation.¹⁸

Andrea and Maria Kalokairinou Foundations

An important local organisation dealing with the homeless, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers / international protection, but also unregistered are the Andreas and Maria Kalokairinou Charities. The role of the Institutions is particularly crucial for those beneficiaries who are in the "gap" between services. The social workers of the Foundation are often called upon to carry out social research, interventions in services, but also to support bureaucratic procedures of beneficiaries (tax return, applications to the State, allowances, etc.). The Foundation's meals are distributed over two hundred (200) portions of food per day, while the Greek program Agalide of the Foundation (2018-2020) was the largest and most comprehensive in the city, as it contained the element of social intervention and the first steps in integration of displaced people in the city.¹⁹ The food program and the Greek language classes are the two programs most appealing to displaced populations in the Foundation, as they would participate in large numbers. The education program quickly became popular with the various actors in the city and expanded; during 2019-2020 the program had a total of six instructor-volunteers, offering a total 16 hours of classes a week, for more than sixty adult and young adult students. The meal program the Foundation runs relies on European Union funds, and its initial goal was to serve 'Greek people [citizens] in need,' however according to the Foundation statistics (which regularly fluctuate), the majority of the meals' beneficiaries are non-Greeks (a hundred and eighteen displaced persons from Asian countries, twenty-two Europeans, in contrast to seventy-one Greek citizens in 2020). The Foundation often finds itself under scrutiny from local council members and anti-immigrant groups, who believe the food programs and services should only be available to Greeks. However, contrary to what conservative anti-immigrant politicians and activists argue, this form of food assistance responds to current needs and shifts in the demographics. Nevertheless, the food program itself often presents challenges and causes confusion to the beneficiaries, underlining the precarity of food access for those most in need in Heraklion. The administration of the Foundation's meal program does not have a consistent policy outlining why families are removed from the daily meal provision. As to cash distribution, problems started in early 2020, when UNHCR ultimately sent in its place an affiliated NGO, an action that enraged the administration of the Foundation who stood to gain nothing from this collaboration and decided to refuse the free use of its space. There was great uncertainty as to when and where the cash disbursements would

¹⁷ Greece does not have a central bus company system, with each region and city having either State/municipally-funded or private companies providing transportation options. Iraklion is one of the most expensive Greek cities in terms of urban transportation with buses. The company here does not have a socially aware policy, as it does not provide any unemployed citizens with a bus pass, or even a discount. Only people with disabilities, military personnel, and students get discounts. However, students do not get discounts outside their school hours, which is often a point of conflict between drivers and students, causing multiple complaints from the latter.

¹⁸ Interviews, April 2022

¹⁹ Interviews, April 2022



take place again, even though the UN would notify beneficiaries of the meeting location with text messages a few days in advance. Notably, the cash assistance and distribution service turned into a bimonthly operation since March 2020, and its operation moved to a location outside the city. Due to its charity work and the classes it offered pre-pandemic, the Foundation has often been a place that displaced people frequent. This has created tension with neighbours, who feel the daily presence of people with dark complexion negatively affects their business and clientele. The COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant complications. The pandemic led to a sharp decrease in the Foundation's community programs: the administration decided to terminate all educational programs, including the non-formal school for displaced adults.

Thalassa-Sea of Solidarity

The Sea of Solidarity is the only Non-Governmental Organisation of its kind in the city, a relatively new organisation of people with knowledge of the field and intense activism. From when he started their presence in the city, the Sea has helped families and individuals without distinction of ethnicity, origin, sexual orientation, etc. The Sea offers sewing workshops with simultaneous experiential teaching Greek, English classes, and IT. The Sea is not funded by any organisation, and accepts donations that are then directed to the beneficiaries who provide assistance. During the pandemic, the Sea suspended its classes and workshops, but played a key role in providing basic necessities to families and individuals without access to basic necessities.

SOS Children's Villages

SOS Children's Villages play an important role in the city of Heraklion, actively supporting activities and organizing activities for families and young children, but also offering housing to those children who need it, deinstitutionalization programs, and advocacy. In Heraklion, SOS Children's Villages have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Heraklion since July 2020, pledging to provide support in matters relating to the support of families facing issues that affect their functionality and family relationships, through a system of referrals to cases of families with minor children who face domestic issues and are in a state of poverty. At the same time, SOS Children's Villages provide support programs, know-how exchanges, and family empowerment services. SOS Children's Villages have building facilities in Finikia, Heraklion, and a Learning and Pedagogical Support Center (KEMPY) in the city center²⁰ which operates in collaboration with Heraklion Development and mainly concerns the provision of remedial education to children of refugees, immigrants and other vulnerable families. At the same time, SOS Children's Villages actively support vulnerable refugee families with donations of items such as school, baby and children's equipment and food in collaboration with Heraklion Development.

Heraklion Development AAE OTA

Heraklion Development is a development company that operates mainly in the Regional Unit of Heraklion of the Region of Crete, with many years of experience in designing and implementing development programs at local, national and international level. The Region of Crete, the Regional Union of Municipalities of Crete, all the municipalities of the Regional Unit of Heraklion, the Pancretan Cooperative Bank, the Chamber of Heraklion and some agricultural cooperatives participate in its shareholding composition.

²⁰ <https://sos-villages.gr/kentra-mathisiakis/>



The Local Government Organisations (OTA) of A and B degree hold most of the share capital. From 2017 onwards the AN.H. implements support programs for asylum seekers implemented in Crete in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2017-2020) and the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (2021). From December 2020, AN.H. has also co-signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Municipality of Heraklion and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees with the main focus of supporting actions and initiatives for the integration of asylum seekers and recognized refugees, the support of the KEM and the communities and the employment of the target population. At the same time, as a coordinating partner, it implements a SWITCH-ASIA program in the countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, which concerns the development of sustainable tourism and the transfer of know-how to these areas outside the major investment programs (public and private investments) in the hinterland.

NAVIGATOR Educational Development

Educational Development Navigator is a development company with educational and development programs that operates mainly in the Prefecture of Heraklion, Region of Crete. Its shareholder structure includes institutions, cooperatives, associations, and chambers of Crete. The NAVIGATOR participates in the implementation of programs for the support of asylum seekers (ESTIA) and recognized refugees (HELIOS) as well as in training, education and entrepreneurship support programs.

The ESTIA relocation program²¹

The ESTIA Program with a decision of P.E.D. of Crete is implemented by the "Development of Heraklion SA OTA" and the "Educational-Development Navigator." In this context, the Municipality of Heraklion, as well as other Municipalities of the island (Municipality of Malevizi, Municipality of Sitia and Municipality of Chania), cooperates with the Development of Heraklion and the NAVIGATOR for the implementation of the Program of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum "ESTIA - Homeless " According to data from the two bodies in the Municipality of Heraklion and the neighbouring Municipality of Malevizi, (Dec. 2021) about 350 people have been accommodated in autonomous living houses with available accommodation amounts to 800. The low occupancy rate has resulted from the management of referrals from the competent ministry as the percentages of filling positions in the UN High Commissioner for Refugees exceeded 90%.

The Program has been implemented from April 2017 until spring/summer 2022 and included:

- Housing of asylum seekers in fully equipped homes within the urban fabric with access to health services, education, work, etc.
- Interventions and interconnection with the community
- Psychosocial support of beneficiaries with specialized scientific staff
- Integration of children and adolescents in the education system
- Support for access to all levels of the National Health System
- Support in complex bureaucratic procedures (Asylum Service, issuance of VAT, AMA, bank account, etc.)

²¹ <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/>



- Interpretation and escort in services and procedures (vaccination, inventory, hospitals, schools, etc.)

The financial support program, now stopped, has been connected to the ESTIA program as it concerns the beneficiaries who live either in the specific program or in mass temporary structures of temporary accommodation type camps. In its original form managed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, it also concerned the self-accommodated and then the distribution and management took place through regular delegations on the island. The program has been implemented by the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, where they are observed with typical delays in the disbursement of the financial aid.

HELIOS programme

In collaboration with national authorities and experienced operators - partners (NAVIGATOR), through the HELIOS of the Migration and Asylum Ministry, IOM aims to promote the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in the Greek society, residing in temporary accommodation facilities (camps and ESTIA program), through the following actions:

- Integration courses: Conduct integration courses in Educational Integration Centres throughout the country. Each course lasts 6 months and includes modules related to learning the Greek language, cultural orientation, degree of readiness for work and other skills.
- Housing support: Support for beneficiaries for independent housing in apartments with rent in their name, providing them with allowance for rent and relocation expenses and networking with apartment owners.
- Employment Support: Providing for individual employment opportunities and enhancing job readiness through the provision of counselling services, access to job-related certifications and networking with potential employers.
- Monitoring the integration process: Regular evaluation of the integration progress of the beneficiaries, to ensure that they can negotiate successfully with the Greek public services after the completion of the HELIOS program and that they will be able to live independently in Greece.
- Awareness of the host communities: Organizing workshops, activities, events and conducting a nationwide information campaign, to create opportunities for interaction between the guests and the host society, emphasizing the importance of the integration of refugees and immigrants in Greek society.

Council for the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees (excerpt from the Plan for the Integration of Refugees and Immigrants of the Municipality of Heraklion)

In 2012, the Municipality of Heraklion, in accordance with article 78 of law 3852/2010 / (bill "Kallikratis"), establishes the Council for the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees (S.E.M.P.).

In 2019, according to Law 4555/2018 "Reform of the institutional framework of Local Government Deepening of the Republic Strengthening the Participation Improving the economic and development operation of the Local Authorities. - Program "CLOSED I" and especially its article 79, is renamed the Council for the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees (S.E.M.P.), operates as



an advisory body by decision of the Municipal Council and with the main purpose of strengthening the integration of immigrants and refugees in the local community.

The objectives of S.E.M.P. are²²:

- recording and investigating problems of immigrants & refugees, in terms of their integration into the local community, their contact with public authorities, the municipal authority and other services.
- The submission of suggestions to the Municipal Council for the development of local actions to promote the smooth social integration of immigrants and refugees
- The development of awareness actions for the smooth integration of the immigrant and refugee population and the smooth coexistence with the local population.
- During the operation of S.E.M.P. From 2012-2019, qualitative studies were conducted in the form of focus groups, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, on the needs, difficulties and expectations of immigrants / refugees and services related to the issues of interest of this population. During the systematization of the views of both parties (representatives of the population and the services-structures) issues arise concerning the sectors: health, education and training and sports-culture.

In particular, the following emerged²³:

- Need to preserve the mother tongue of immigrants and refugees
- Need for the fulfilment of their religious duties and request for the creation of a burial ground for Muslims / non-Muslims.
- Need to inform legal issues of the immigrant and refugee population
- Need for information on issues related to their access to health and social services
- Need for satisfaction of housing, food, clothing, health issues related to the integration of refugees / asylum seekers / economic migrants, who are not included in housing programs.
- Need for more frequent and organized contact of the services with the representatives of the immigration / refugee Associations of the Municipality of Heraklion
- Need for training of employees of services serving immigrants and refugees
- Need to create a network of cooperation of services related to the issues of the population in question (communication, acquaintance, contact points, support, exchange of ideas and practices).

Immigrants' expectations are for the improvement of their living conditions both for themselves and for their children, who are the second generation. For these reasons, they want a future with fewer difficulties and more opportunities in their education, training and subsequent

²² More details of the actions of SEMP at: <https://www.heraklion.gr/mliaement/sem-draseis/sem13217.html>.

²³ Interviews and focus group discussions, April 2022



employment. There is a trend where several immigrant families (mainly from Balkan countries) invest primarily in their children's education.

The families of refugees / asylum seekers, especially those who do not benefit from housing schemes, expect to soon feel secure about their integration plan. They participate less in the social life of the city while many face serious issues such as finances, health, etc.

The relations that take place between the locals, the immigrants and the refugees have a positive sign in the Municipality of Heraklion. The same seems to be true of immigrants and refugees. The shared experiences and the plan to integrate them into some of these groups have a common point of contact, which positively affects their relationship and interaction.

Local Action Plan for Social Integration of Refugees & Immigrants of the Municipality of Heraklion

To strengthen the collaborations between the local bodies and the cities / members of the City Network, the Local Plan for the Social Integration of Refugees & Immigrants was prepared²⁴, which was consultation between Members & Associates of Immigration & refugee integration Council (18 to S.E.M.P. / 09.30.2020 Plenum).

The Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Heraklion is a collective effort between Services & Structures of the Municipality of Heraklion (Deputy Mayor of Social Services / Directorate of Social Development) and between the Municipality of Heraklion and collaborating Bodies (Development of Heraklion). The Local Action Plan was put into consultation between the Members of the Immigrant & Refugee Integration Council and its Collaborating Bodies. With the Action Plan, the Municipality of Heraklion forms the framework for the integration of immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers in the city and in Greek society in general, respecting diversity and recognizing their rights and obligations.

To achieve the objectives of the Action Plan, the axes of the Plan are outlined:

- Development of tools for integration, coordination and cooperation
- Empowerment and education of immigrants, asylum seekers & beneficiaries of international protection
- Employment of immigrants, asylum seekers & beneficiaries of international protection
- Information and awareness actions of the local community
- Strengthening of existing municipal structures
- Strengthening municipal structures with new services
- Mechanism for dealing with emergencies of vulnerable groups

Heraklion Municipal Integration Council

The members of the MIC comprise locally elected representatives of the city council, representatives of the migrants' communities and associations, and representatives from the other local bodies, with which the MIC cooperates. According to its internal regulation, the regular members of the MIC in the Municipality of Heraklion are nine, while the

²⁴ The entire Plan is available at the following link:

https://www.heraklion.gr/files/items/7/75408/topiko_shedio_koinonikis_entaxis_d._Heraklioy.pdf



alternate members are from nine to thirteen.²⁵ In the term following the 2014 local elections, the MIC had eleven regular members and sixteen alternates, while numbers fluctuate according to availability as years pass.²⁶ Non-Greeks who are members of the City Council participate directly in the MIC. There are three regular members of the MIC who are representatives of migrants' associations (including 3-5 alternate members).²⁷ Since 2014, to enhance the participation of migrants at the local level, the MIC members from migrant associations were increased from three to four (and the alternate members to five). The members from the migrants' associations who participate in the MIC should have under the current legislation their residence authorization documents and they must reside in the city of Heraklion at least for the last two years.²⁸

Apart from the elected representatives and the migrants' communities who participate in the MIC, its members have over the years included representatives from the Bar Association of Heraklion, the Medical Association of Heraklion, the Labour Centre of Heraklion, the Hellenic Red Cross, the 'Oasis' Association for child, the Association of Women of Heraklion, representative from the International Union of Police of the prefecture of Heraklion and representatives from the Environmental Organisation 'Agia Triada'.²⁹ The wide local network of member and partner organisations that are engaged with the Heraklion MIC reflects the way in which integration is understood as a multi-faceted social process.

The members of the MIC are appointed with a decision of the City Council. The president and the vice president are elected representatives of the City Council and they are appointed by the same decision of the City Council which also defines the members of the MIC.³⁰ In each new term, a public call to the migrants' communities of Heraklion is issued, inviting them to participate in the MIC. The participation in the MIC is honorary and unpaid and the members are people who are involved in activities related to migrants' integration and the protection of human rights. The term of the Migrant Integration Council is two years and ends with the election of the new Board.³¹

According to its internal regulation (Article 3), the Heraklion MIC aims to record and investigate the needs of migrants who reside in the municipality, address issues relating to

²⁵ See City Council decisions 23 / 8-9-2011, 327 / 27-3-2014, available at

<http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>

²⁶ See City Council decision 215/11 –2016. Available at <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-melh/sem-melh.html>. According to the internal regulation (City Council decisions 23 / 8-9-2011, 327 / 27-3-2014), the elected representatives of the City Council who are regular members of the MIC are four, and the alternate members are 4-5. See <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>

²⁷ Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at : <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>

²⁸ Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at: <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>

²⁹ Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at: <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-melh/sem-melh.html>

³⁰ Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at :<http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>

³¹ Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at: <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>



their integration in and interaction with the local community and the municipal and other public services. The MIC can submit recommendations to the City Council, to organize actions to promote the smooth integration of migrants. In cooperation with the municipal authorities or other stakeholders, it can also organize events and actions to facilitate the interaction of migrants with the public authorities and services, to solve specific problems, to raise public awareness about multiculturalism, to promote social interaction of local residents with different cultural identities, to combat xenophobia and racism and to strengthen social cohesion at the local level.³² The Heraklion MIC is supposed to convene at least once a month (yet since 2018 less regularly), but is entitled to meet also more regularly, if there are urgent matters to be discussed and tackled with. Its role in relation to the City Council is primarily advisory.

Since 2011, to respond to the changes brought about with the “Kallikratis” administrative reform, but also to the rapidly deteriorating conditions of the socio-economic crisis, the Municipal authority of Heraklion, redesigned the social services that it provides. The Directorate of Social Development of the municipality is composed of five departments: Community Care (former KAPI), the Department of Social Policy, Innovative Actions of Public Health and Gender Equality, the department of Social Benefits, and the administrative department. The department of Community Care was established in 2011 and provides primary health care services – primarily information, counselling, and prevention – to the city’s residents. The department’s staff comprises doctors, occupational therapists, a midwife, social workers, sociologists, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists and domestic assistants for elderly. There are ten centres in the Municipality of Heraklion that cover the needs of every Municipal and Local Community. The municipal health services operate as the interconnection of the health facilities at the local and regional level. The department also has the responsibility to aid residents with economic difficulties, depending on the need and the priority.³³ It grants social allowances to handicapped people, licenses to care and preschool education units, and certificates to those below poverty line. Legal migrants and their families have equal access with Greek citizens to the provided services. The Department of Social Policy, Innovate Actions of Public Health and Gender Equality functions as a network between the migrants’ communities and the local social institutions. The Social workers of the department are not members of the MIC but participate in the Council and they have supported the MIC from its beginning. They assist the MIC to organise its members and they propose the implementation of integration actions, which they often organise jointly to extend their reach into the local community. Since 2017 the role of the Development Agency of Heraklion Municipality has also increased and now leads the work on migrants and refugees.³⁴

The Department of Social Policy can handle most cases and effectively provide social services to the beneficiaries through its connection with other municipal services and local stakeholders.³⁵

³² Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at : <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/sem-kanonismos/sem-kanonismos.html>

³³ Interview with the Vice Mayor on Social Policy, competent for the MIC as well, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

³⁴ Interview with the President and the International relations Officer of the Development Agency, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

³⁵ Website of the Municipality of Heraklion, available at: <http://www.heraklion.gr/municipality/epidomatikh-politikh/epidomatikh-politikh-kai-pronoiaka-epidomata.html>



The Department of Social Policy also provides services to migrants and their families who live permanently to the local community. The social workers from the Social Policy Department point out that “the interaction between the migrants and the municipal services varies”.³⁶ The beneficiaries of the services provided of the Municipality of Heraklion are citizens, Greek citizens, citizens of EU Member States, Third Country Nationals (TCNs) citizens with legal residence, TCN who have not been able to renew their residence permit, asylum seekers and irregular migrants (undocumented).

The Municipality of Heraklion provides day care services through the Municipal Organisation for Early Childhood Education, Care and Mass Sports. Its purpose is to provide day care to babies, infants and children for the balanced growth of their personality. It also raises awareness and provides information about education, psychological issues and issues concerning the relationship between children and parents.³⁷ The purpose of the department is the implementation of policies and the participation in activities and programs that are aimed to support vulnerable groups by providing a variety of health services and counselling.³⁸ Most migrants’ children in several kindergartens in the Municipality of Heraklion are from Albania and increasingly from refugee communities. In addition, there are many children from Bulgaria, Russian speaking countries and Romania, and children from Arabic countries.²⁴⁰ Insufficient knowledge of Greek language surfaces as the main obstacle in migrants’ access to municipal day care services. The Organisation for Early Childhood Education does not provide translations of the required documents and the staff tries to help migrants to complete the application form.

Heraklion stands out in Greece as the city where migrants and refugees can find work and can be remunerated for it. A comparison of earnings of 5 euros per day for example in Ioannina with 40-50 euros per day in Heraklion is indicative. In 2007-2013 the EC funded TOPEKO programmes (Local actions for the social integration of vulnerable groups) involved several actions that were designed and managed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare. Their purpose was the activation and mobilization of local actors to create jobs for the unemployment and vulnerable groups find employment.

2. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

2.1. Migrants’ needs

According to official statistics, there are a little over thirty thousand (30,000) regular migrants and around a thousand refugees and asylum seekers currently in Crete, and approximately 60% of those live in Heraklion.³⁹ However, the official numbers are grossly inaccurate. However, given the reality of displaced people in the country with or without legal documents, the number is

³⁶ Interview, Department of Social Policy, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

³⁷ Website of Dimotikos Organismos Proxoliki Agogis, Frontidas Kai Mazikis Athlisis Herakliou , available at: <http://www.dopafmai.gr/proxoliki-agogi>

³⁸ Website Dimotikos Organismos Proxoliki Agogis , Frontidas Kai Mazikis Athlisis Heraklionu , available at: <http://www.dopafmai.gr/proxoliki-agogi>

³⁹ https://www.efsyn.gr/efkriti/koinonia/174091_kriti-32535-oi-metanastes-poy-zoyn-sto-nisi



much higher, probably three times higher. The people that do not appear in the official State numbers live invisible lives: many do not have social security numbers, rent homes without official contracts, or share a home with many others under one name, and rarely visit hospitals if they get injured at work because their labour is also undocumented and could implicate their employers, usually Greek farmers.

Despite the numbers of foreign nationals⁴⁰ in Crete and the position of the island which often makes it a stop for drug and human trafficking from northern Africa and the west coast of Asia, as well as the many different communities of non-Greeks that live at the island (including a Hindu and a Syrian community in Rethymnon, Afghani, Pakistani, Albanian, Russian and Kurdish communities in Heraklion), Crete only got its own Asylum Service Office in late 2017, in light of the 2015 refugee crisis. Up until that point, all asylum applications and interviews were conducted in Athens, which required a six (6)-hour boat trip or a flight for the applicant. Now applicants can apply in Heraklion, and their interviews are currently conducted via Skype due to the volume of applications and pandemic measures.

The largest percentage of migrants who live in the municipality of Heraklion are from Albania (almost 75% of the total population), followed by migrants from Georgia, Russia, Armenia, Ukraine, Moldavia, and Syria. The 2015 “refugee crisis” and the different reactions and attitude changes it has caused in the Greek society have produced visible changes to Crete’s relationship with migration. The tensions between different migration waves have not been systematically studied as of yet, however they slowly have become noticeable. In everyday conversations, beneficiaries of the A&M Kalokairinos Foundation⁴¹ often complained to the social workers about the asylum seekers’ “benefits” in comparison to the lack of State and private support they received now or in the past. Heraklion has been part of the ESTIA program of temporary relocation for recognized refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and asylum seekers, to apartments and other types of residences, which has ended in 2022.

Most migrants’ children in several kindergartens in the Municipality of Heraklion are from Albania and increasingly from refugee communities. In addition, there are many children from Bulgaria, Russian speaking countries and Romania, and children from Arabic countries.⁴⁰ Insufficient knowledge of Greek language surfaces as the main obstacle in migrants’ access to municipal day care services. The Organisation for Early Childhood Education does not provide translations of the required documents and the staff tries to help migrants to complete the application form.

Courses to teach Greek to TCNs, an important tool for the integration of foreigners and immigrants to Greek society, for employment and social inclusion, during the period 2008-2011, took place within the Educational Project Odysseys “Education of migrants in the Greek language, the Greek history and Greek culture” in several cities and towns across the country. The “Odysseus” involved the teaching of the Greek language as a second language, as well as the teaching of Greek history and culture, to Europeans and to TCNs over the age of 16 with legal residence permits.⁴² The program aimed at providing the language skills, as well as

⁴⁰ [The data of this section come from the operational program of the Municipality of Heraklion [2015-2019]

⁴¹ Interview during visit in Crete, April 2022

⁴² Geniki Gramateia Dia Biou Mathisis website, available at: <http://www.gsae.edu.gr/en/press/275--lr-l-r>



the social and intercultural competences required for the social inclusion of the participants and their families.⁴³ The program was also implemented in the Municipality of Heraklion. These types of programmes were abandoned following the arrival of refugee populations, when all notions of and efforts on integration were replaced by reception, the responsibilities of the state were transferred to UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations, and EC funding channels changed without any regard for sustainability or ownership of processes. The Municipalities were bereaved of their capacities and often mandates and were left to join the queues of actors begging donors for funding.

Municipal and State agencies in Greece do not have dedicated translators and interpreters, despite the increased numbers of people who do not speak Greek (or English). In many cases said State and municipal services count on the presence of interpreters from the ESTIA program and other NGOs to provide their services to displaced people. However, the number of beneficiaries in the reception programs is small in comparison to the non-Greek beneficiaries that do not belong in any refugee reception program. There are thus many possible non-Greek beneficiaries of the social, civil, and medical services outside the mandate of ESTIA and HELIOS that cannot receive assistance. It is solidarity initiatives by citizens and private entities that attempt to cover this communication and services gap. The “Community Centre,” a City of Heraklion service funded mostly by the EU, hosts several services for Roma and migrants, offering legal, psychological, and social work assistance. The “Center for Migrants’ Integration” (CMI), a component of the Community Centre, works with a system of referrals to relevant services and organisations, which are suggestions; the language gap though often leads beneficiaries to believe the referral is compulsory or connected to State benefits. The Community Centre has recently hired an Arabic speaking cultural mediator to help with its operations. The CMI is housed at facilities that need renovation, and it is understaffed and overworked: the staff does its best to social services yet cannot be often effective as the numbers of beneficiaries have been steadily on the rise.

The municipality of Heraklion, through its Lifelong Education initiatives, also organized intensive short-term (8 weeks, 40 hours) Greek language and Culture programs for adult refugees and migrants with very limited capacity, offering only evening classes. The City of Heraklion also has a Council for the Integration of Refugees and Migrants, however its function and activities are not often made public and their presence and activities are difficult to find online.

2.2. Migrants’ readiness to politically participate/engage

The Migrant Integration Council (MIC) in the Municipality of Heraklion was established in 2012, and it engages in actions that are related to migrants’ integration and the protection of human rights (yet the Vice Mayor responsible could not differentiate between the MIC and the Centre for Migrants’ Integration, a municipal service).⁴⁴ It is supervised by the Deputy Mayor of Social Policy, and it is supported by the Department of Social Policy, Innovative Actions, Public Health and Gender Equality (Directorate of Social Development in the Municipality of Heraklion). The Department of Social Work (Institute of Intercultural Education and Action) of

⁴³ Youth & Lifelong Learning Foundation website, available at:
<https://www.inedivim.gr/προγράμματα/“odysseus-education-immigrants-greek-language-greek-history-and-greek-culture?lang=en>

⁴⁴ Interview, Migrants Integration Council, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.



the School of Health and Welfare Services, Technological Educational Institute of Crete is an associate of the MIC and is supposed to act as an expert on integration of the MIC. The Council also cooperates with a number of other local social entities, such as the Heraklion Bar Association, the Association of Physicians, and the Labour Centre of Heraklion, and several other social actors (some described below).⁴⁵

In the Municipality of Heraklion there are organised migrants' associations with statutes adopted: the Albanian Association and the Russian-Speaking Association of Heraklion. Additionally, there are other migrants' communities that are organized on an informal basis, such as the Filipino Club and the Syrian community.⁴⁶ The Syrian community is a small community that is present in the city of Heraklion for many years, well before the war that broke out in Syria a few years ago. Nowadays, with the wave of the new refugees, the number of the Syrian, as well as Afghani, refugees and migrants has increased. Since the invasion in Ukraine in February 2022, there have been splits in the Russian speaking association of migrants, which started already with the first war in 2014.

The Heraklion MIC has not formulated an integration strategy at the local level. The integration actions that the Council has organised are primarily information dissemination sessions in the local districts of Heraklion on legal issues related to migration and migrant rights, cultural events and various events to raise awareness about racism and ethnic diversity at the local level.⁴⁷ Another important action that it had been organised was an information event in the Albanian Community regarding recent legal changes on residence permits in 2014, and other such events subsequently. Several associations in the past few years organise events on their own, as the MIC umbrella seems irrelevant to migrants and refugees.⁴⁸

The overall appraisal of the MIC of the Heraklion Municipality is positive, yet it is described as distant and not sufficiently active. Its main contribution acknowledged by our interviewees is that it promotes a degree of inclusion of, as well as cooperation and civic engagement among migrant communities at the local level. As members of the MIC state, "the members of the migrant communities who participate in the MIC are involved in actions and events, yet as bystanders."⁴⁹ The president of the Russian-speaking Association points out that "in the MIC all the migrants' communities are united. Through the MIC we used to be able to invite every migrant community at any time and we can easily disseminate information. We should reactivate this practice."⁵⁰

The Municipal Authority in Heraklion aims to explicitly apply the principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunities regardless of nationality, ethnic origin, and religion. The Vice Mayor on Social Policy stresses, "Racism and discrimination have no place in the municipality of Heraklion."⁵¹ In the municipal administration of Heraklion, behaviours that can be recorded as racist have rarely been noted. This does not mean that racism is not present

⁴⁵ Interview, Migrants Integration Council, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁴⁶ Interview, Development Agency of Heraklion, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁴⁷ Interviews, Development Agency and MIC, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁴⁸ Interviews, Development Agency and MIC, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁴⁹ Interviews, Development Agency and MIC, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁵⁰ Interviews, Development Agency and MIC, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁵¹ Interview with the Vice Mayor on Social Policy, competent for the MIC as well, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.



among the local society at large. There are people who disagree not only with the integration but also with the presence of migrants in the city, as the members of the MIC mention.⁵²

2.3. The main obstacles for migrants' participation/engagement (as they perceive it)

A significant limitation in the degree of migrants' civic engagement through the MIC is the low level of organisation among most migrant communities. This was confirmed by the president of the Albanian Association who stated that "the majority of migrants do not participate in the local social and political structures. When you have to travel in a foreign country and to find a job, you do not have enough time to participate and get involved in public life. Even though migrants from Albania are living in the Municipality of Heraklion the last 30 years, we established our own association only in 2013. Albanians who get wealthy are not interested any more."⁵³ Despite the MIC's limitations, not least of which is the low level of migrants' organisation, the MIC is still regarded as a positive structure, in so far as it functions as a network among migrants and other social institutions in the Municipality of Heraklion. Through the MIC, the migrants have been able to find information about the social services of the Municipality and to meet other local social bodies such as the International Organisation for Migration, the Bar association, the Medical Association, and others. Yet now, this function has subsided for three main reasons: those migrants that came a significant time before have learned the city well, the Centre for Migrants' Integration has been established, and most importantly, the newcomers, the refugees who arrived in Heraklion since 2016 are not allowed/welcomed to participate in civic life, nor in the MIC.

Migrant public participation is a taboo for Greek society and the conflict with this entrenched perception implies politics costs that mayors are reluctant to pay. Secondly, there are no migrant organisations in all municipalities. Even if there are, there are often problems of representativeness as most migrants do not participate. Often migrants' organisations interests are conflicting. Third, there are municipalities that firmly believe that there are no problems of social inclusion and cohesion in their region and any operation of the new institution would be discriminatory. Fourth, unemployment does not affect all parts of the country with the same intensity. In areas where there is employment the phenomena of social discrimination are not that intense. Fifth, most importantly migrants have no incentive to participate in the MIC, an institution they perceive as unable to improve their daily lives. They do not believe in the benefits of its operation and distrust the intentions of the Local Government.

In all municipalities most of the time there is no action to follow up programming, there are no specific targets and indicators. In addition, there is no funding for specific initiatives that will promote or strengthen fruitful coexistence. There are no municipal employees working for MICs, on the contrary employees consider dealing with MIC obligations as an additional workload.

Despite the large number of violently displaced people in Crete and the existence of communities in various cities, (Sikh and Syrian community in Rethymno, Arab community in Chania, Albanian, Russian, Arabic, Kurdish, Egyptian and Pakistani community in Pakistan) its own Regional Asylum

⁵² Interviews, Development Agency and MIC, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁵³ Interview, Development Agency and MIC, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.



Office in 2017. Until then, asylum applications were made only in Athens with consequent problems and delays.

A particularly important problem in the field concerns the fact that the municipal and public services in Greece do not have translators and interpreters, despite the increased number of third-country nationals who do not speak Greek or English. In many cases, the services seek the help of interpreters of ESTIA / HELIOS programs for everyday cases, but they are not enough to meet the needs of an extensive network of services (hospitals, schools, courts, police, etc.) for a population that are not part of the beneficiary population they serve. The number of beneficiaries included in housing programs is small compared to those living on the same means. There is therefore a large population that is largely excluded from social and health services. This gap is filled by civil society initiatives, bottom-up solidarity actions, and (limited) liaison.

2.4. Conclusions

In an era of anxiety about migratory flows to Greece, the intersection of refugee reception, migration and work finds its way on the news in different ways. Following the tension at the Greek borders in early 2020 for example, a group of workers travelling from mainland Greece to Crete in February 2020 to find work at its numerous olive groves was mistaken for refugees by a local racist group who were part of a relocation program, creating confusion and causing the mobilization of police authorities.⁵⁴ However problematic, such incidents are not as many or frequent in Crete as they are on a national scale in the mainland and the border islands. For example, Golden Dawn, the neo-Nazi party responsible for organizing racist attacks and pogroms which had a strong presence in the rest of Greece, did not have a consistent presence in Crete, and since early 2019 does not have offices in Heraklion anymore. This might be partially explained by the different ways Crete has approached refugee relocation, Crete's economy that heavily relies on the labour of migrant persons, as well as the island's antifascist and progressive history.

Heraklion, as the administrative center of Crete, often sets the example for integration policies, and a successful implementation would mean that it could be set as a reproducible example for other Cretan cities and even in mainland. The "Local Integration Plan for Migrants and Refugees" is a document authored by an experienced social worker that worked in ESTIA and modified by the Refugees and Migrants Integration Council members. The debates in the Committee were often procedural, most of the members had not read the plan during the designated debate sessions.⁵⁵ The document mentions the ESTIA (UNHCR and Greek State) and HELIOS (IOM) programs, the aforementioned "Refugees and Migrants Integration Council," the Regional Asylum Office, socio-medical Services largely present at all Greek cities, "access to education," and the "possibility to absorb migrants, asylum seekers, and international protection beneficiaries in the workforce in the agricultural and tourism sectors." What stands out in the document, which makes the Heraklion case unique, is the "political will to integrate," which translates into the support for the housing programs that the City of Heraklion manages.

The "Integration Plan" identifies several difficulties and shortcomings for Heraklion, all of which are corroborated by the present research. For example, all the services and programs in place are

⁵⁴ Tvxs.gr, "Far-right amok."

⁵⁵ Interview discussion, April 2022.



of limited reach, face difficulties in their implementation, and are all characterized by the lack of access to their intended recipients. The ESTIA and HELIOS programs only served asylum seekers and recognized refugees respectively, while the socio/hygienic services lack the necessary personnel to provide services to speakers of languages other than Greek, some basic English, and/or rarely Arabic. Both have now ended. Their workload also severely hinders their ability to accommodate the numbers of people needing them now. In many of the guesthouses, Offices, and Centers, the paperwork required excludes displaced populations that either do not have identifying paperwork or do not know how to obtain it: they are often unaware about their rights to use those services. Finally, access to education has been limited, with the number of integration classes fluctuating annually despite the population of displaced remaining steady or rising; volunteering initiatives being vulnerable because there are no guarantees for their viability other than the tireless work of the participating teachers and social workers.

3. Evaluation of the Focus groups Discussions

3.1. Motivation and Issue Raising

Crete, with a robust economy that was largely unaffected by the economic crisis of 2010 and geographically positioned in the southern part of Greece, has not been a stranger to multiculturalism, with a long history of population exchanges, empires, and civilizations that have left a mark on Crete's geography and culture. Crete's economy is primarily based on tourism, hosting over three and a half (3,5) million tourists annually. Construction, agriculture, and tourism in Crete require large numbers of seasonal workers and laborers. As tourism (and tourism-related construction) became a prosperous sector after the 1980s, along with economic developments in the field of agriculture (with the opening of new export markets as the European Union formed), increased labour needs have been covered by the migration of foreign workers to the island, at first from the Eastern Balkans (primarily Albania and Bulgaria), Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia) and later from the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria). Male workers from the Balkans arrived first, later bringing their families with them. The Olympic Games of 2004, and the prosperity Greece had from the mid-90s until 2010 worked to the benefit of those Balkan populations' assimilation, with second generation migrants attending Greek schools, taking the Greek nationality, joining the army, and often adopting Greek names and customs. For laborers from the Middle East, the situation has been different; most have come alone, leaving their families back in their countries, sending remittances through wire transfers whenever possible. In the agricultural southern Crete, particularly in Heraklion and Lasithi regions, many laborers rent houses they share with as many people as possible to cut down costs, often in difficult conditions; the laborers face intense scrutiny and racist behaviors from locals, leading them to only rent houses that are old and/or in dire need of renovations.

The department of Community Care was established in 2011 and provides primary health care services – primarily information, counseling, and prevention – to the city's residents. The department's staff comprises doctors, occupational therapists, a midwife, social workers, sociologists, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists and domestic assistants for elderly. There are ten centres in the Municipality of Heraklion that cover the needs of every Municipal and Local Community. The municipal health services operate as the interconnection of the health



facilities at the local and regional level. The department also has the responsibility to aid residents with economic difficulties, depending on the need and the priority.⁵⁶ It grants social allowances to handicapped people, licenses to care and preschool education units, and certificates to those below poverty line. Legal migrants and their families have equal access with Greek citizens to the provided services. The Department of Social Policy, Innovate Actions of Public Health and Gender Equality functions as a network between the migrants' communities and the local social institutions. The Social workers of the department are not members of the MIC but participate in the Council and they have supported the MIC from its beginning. They assist the MIC to organise its members and they propose the implementation of integration actions, which they often organise jointly to extend their reach into the local community. Since 2017 the role of the Development Agency of Heraklion Municipality has also increased and now leads the work on migrants and refugees.⁵⁷

The Department of Social Policy provides services to migrants and their families who live permanently to the local community. The social workers from the Social Policy Department point out that "the interaction between the migrants and the municipal services varies".⁵⁸ The beneficiaries of the services provided of the Municipality of Heraklion are citizens, Greek citizens, citizens of EU Member States, Third Country Nationals (TCNs) citizens with legal residence, TCN who have not been able to renew their residence permit, asylum seekers and irregular migrants (undocumented).⁵⁹

Heraklion stands out in Greece as the city where migrants and refugees can find work and can be remunerated for it. A comparison of earnings of 5 euros per day for example in Ioannina with 40-50 euros per day in Heraklion is indicative. In 2007-2013 the EC funded TOPEKO programmes (Local actions for the social integration of vulnerable groups) involved several actions that were designed and managed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare. Their purpose was the activation and mobilization of local actors to create jobs for the unemployment and vulnerable groups find employment.

The waves of internal migration towards the urban centers of the island have left many Cretan villages scarcely populated; in some, the abandoned houses are bought by Balkan migrant families that renovate them and make them their new homes in the 1990s. Nowadays, the different generations of persons with refugee and migrant origin co-exist in the cities; working from agriculture to tourism; their lives and experiences in Crete have been largely underrepresented in public discourse. A simple Google search reveals ample information online for example about the Sikh community in Rethymnon, which numbers around 1000 members. The Sikh community members all live in rural areas around the city, having migrated to Greece through an international agreement with the State of India to work for a local meat processing factory. Around the time when there is an annual festival organized by the community, they are usually featured in the local press where they are described as a "model minority" that has quickly adapted to Cretan

⁵⁶ Focus group with the Vice Mayor on Social Policy, competent for the MIC as well, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁵⁷ Focus group with the President and the International relations Officer of the Development Agency, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁵⁸ Focus group, Department of Social Policy, Municipality of Heraklion, Heraklion, April 2022.

⁵⁹ Website of Dimotikos Organismos Prosxolikis Agogis, Frontidas Kai Mazikis Athlisis Herakliou, available at: <http://www.dopafmai.gr/prosxoliki-agogi>



ways. Other cultural organisations representing significantly larger demographics though, including Albanians (68% of the island's migrant population) have little to no public presence online or the press. In contrast, Western expats that have bought property in Crete or are engaged in entrepreneurial activities are regularly featured talking about Cretan hospitality and making a new home in the island; often they are at the center of tourism/information campaigns organized by Crete's prefecture. The choice of (re)presenting who lives in Crete has cultural and socioeconomic motivations, leaving out experiences crucial in understanding the unique case of the island as a reception place in Greece.⁶⁰ When the tourist season is over and winter comes, the population of the island is less diverse, comprising mostly of permanent residents: Cretan-Greeks are the majority, but there is also a significant and rising number of Balkan migrants who have chosen Crete as a place to work and raise families. The workers from the Middle East, primarily Pakistan and Afghanistan, are mostly single men.

Racism and discrimination in Crete are present, right along the island's perceived welcoming atmosphere, two co-existing and seemingly contrasting cultural behaviors; one that is performed often ritualistically towards well-off visitors, and the other omnipresent against those perceived as culturally inferior, even if the latter have lived in Crete for years. The socioeconomic stratification of Cretan society and the strategies followed by the organisations tasked with refugees have provided an excellent opportunity to local governance to organize in ways that will benefit all those that have come before and face tremendous difficulties in their everyday activities. It is on the neighbourhood level in Crete that we see integration occur, often by chance and with the help of benevolent neighbours.

Racist incidents, often classified as "minor" when discussed later, include comments from other Greeks at social services, interactions with other patients and/or a few members of the personnel at health services, paired with navigating the maze of bureaucracy, which becomes even more difficult for speakers of other languages without interpreters. In more than a few cases State services employees even refuse to implement the Greek law in the cases of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Nevertheless, reporting discriminatory behaviors rarely occurs.⁶¹ The reasons are related with maintaining social relations among community members with whom they routinely interact and co-exist in multiple social environments. Crete's administrative lack of experience with refugee issues and social integration means that, on a municipal and regional level, the island lacks the tools to promote a social integration agenda.

3.2. Inclusion of Migrant Voices in Policymaking

All organisations in Heraklion report as positive the strategy of urban placement of the refugee population through the above housing programs, as it has reduced to a minimum social reaction related to the reception of refugees. The challenge in Heraklion mainly concerned the integration of the migrant and refugee populations, who live outside the programmes and are deprived of equal access to services and benefits. "Invisible" people live lives that are on the margins of Greek society: they have no insurance, work in precarious conditions, rent houses without contracts and rarely visit hospitals in the event of an accident at work. The Heraklion Labour Centre has shown a strong interest in supporting employees and helping them to be informed about their rights to

⁶⁰ Focus group discussion, April 2022

⁶¹ Focus group discussion, April 2022.



combat undeclared work and exploitation and has sought cooperation with the Development of Heraklion for co-organisation of relevant actions and publication of information material.⁶²

A positive development in the context of the services provided to the target population, presents the "Community Center" of the Municipality of Heraklion, which offers legal, consulting, social services. Although the level of services provided is relatively high, it is judged to be understaffed and often unable to manage the volume of beneficiaries. By strengthening its human resources, the Community Center could expand its services and operate with less pressure and better results. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Center for the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees (a branch of the Community Center) is the only service of the Municipality that has an Arabic and Urdu interpreter. The Municipality of Heraklion through Lifelong Learning programs also organised intensive Greek lessons of short duration (8 weeks, 40 hours), which in the midst of a pandemic took place through e-learning. The classes were in the afternoon, and were attended mainly by immigrants, with a few beneficiaries of refugee reception, housing and integration programs. The demand for Greek courses is very high.

The question that arose, as a result of the disastrous decision 460/2013 of the Council of State regarding the unconstitutionality of Law 3838/2010, is whether this unconstitutionality jeopardised the operation of the MIC, which is not the case. Undoubtedly, however, the definition of MICs as a mixed body serving the needs of the whole local community has been called into question. Moreover, if migrants who have developed for decades life relations in a given locality, pay taxes, get married and buried in a municipality, have no right to vote and be elected, if citizenship acquisition and renewal of residence permits becomes a nightmare, then MICs stand no chance. The absence of a central policy aimed at ensuring continuity in the development and implementation of a social inclusion policy has tormented the MICs in Greece since their inception. The inability of the Greek state to come to terms with migration and the changes this impacts on the homogeneity of the population is detrimental to the exercise of democratic processes and rule of law.⁶³

In 2017, local authorities proposed to the Greek government to host in all interested Cretan cities a temporary relocation program for asylum seekers and recognized refugees with the cooperation of the United Nations High Committee for Refugees (UNHCR). In contrast to mainland Greece where, in tandem with housing programs run by NGOs and UNHCR, several refugee camps operate, often in locations previously used as barracks by the Greek army, in Crete there are not multiple relocation programs. The presence of refugees and asylum seekers is spread across the city of Heraklion; displaced persons that have lived in Heraklion for the past thirty years never formed neighborhoods with a prevailing ethnic character, nor were there any significant city council policies contributing to ghettoization.

The spread of asylum seekers and refugee families throughout the city of Heraklion is not wholly positive. The distance between the homes makes the forming of a community difficult, though for many that see Heraklion as another stop towards the European North, building a community is not necessarily a priority. There are shops and stores owned by non-Greeks in Heraklion, however they are usually owned by displaced persons that have been here for a while, often a decade or more: a few convenience stores and kiosks, and hairdressers' establishments are the

⁶² Focus group discussion, April 2022

⁶³ Focus group discussion, April 2022



most notable mentions. The location of displaced owners' stores, along with the strategic placement of refugees and asylum seekers affect not only the visibility of the displaced populations in the city, but also the places they choose to hang out and their transportation habits. As a result, displaced persons are quite often required to use public transportation, or walk for a while to reach many of their desired locations.

In Heraklion there are multiple organisations that help refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, even if it is not part of their formal mandate. Many of the organisations were created or (re)activated after 2015 to deal with the emergency of the "refugee crisis." However, as several organisation employees have admitted, the administrators soon found that the beneficiaries of their services are not limited to people that came to Crete in the previous five years. While most refugees and asylum seekers leave after a year or two of their arrival in Crete, other migrants come to the island for the chance to make a living, appear to be planning to stay in Crete for longer, and immediately attempt to find connections that will help them navigate the new reality they enter.

3.3. Obstacles for Structural Participation

If we consider the MIC as the central pillar of local integration policies, the extent to which local government authorities pursue the latter varies across the Greek municipalities. The views and commitments of the elected mayor and the support that these enjoy among the city's municipal council bear a decisive influence and make a difference. It is entirely up to the elected municipal authority to establish a MIC, and to pursue an explicit and active migrant integration policy. In Greece cities found it particularly difficult to coordinate their efforts with national level governments. Municipalities do not have de jure competencies in the area of migrants' integration. However, they strongly shape the local environment within which it takes place, promoting or conversely undermining the prospects of integration.⁶⁴

Greece remains a country that completely lacks an integration program for its non-Greek communities. The management strategy of the Greek State and most organisations involved in the process begin with the assumption that displaced persons in Greece have a temporary presence in the local societies. This approach, while successful in the first years of the people passing through Greece en masse, now proves to be inefficient due to the strict border controls and the delays in the asylum application process. The humanitarian management falls on the shoulders of municipal services and NGOs, which follow the same trope of temporary relief and perpetuate the sense of "waiting" for their beneficiaries, effectively excluding displaced people that arrived with previous migration waves.

HELIOS has been the first programme that specifically talks about displaced people's integration to Greek society, however it is not a fundamentally Greek State initiative, as it is organized by IOM, hence it lacks long term planning and commitment from the State. ESTIA, despite being a program primarily concerned with short-term accommodation of asylum seekers and recognized refugees, often became the primary agent of integration, through initiatives organized by its employees and administrators, operating outside the program's mandate.

⁶⁴ Focus group discussion, April 2022



The island provides ample blue-collar jobs for migrant people interested in them (whether legal work or under the table), while it has local politicians that recognize that the best management of displaced populations does not include isolation or the creation of “ghettos,” but the support of programs that provide housing in Greek neighborhoods and opportunities for socializing with locals. To that end, and recognizing the pressing needs for more accommodations, the Cretan ESTIA-involved organisations have repeatedly requested to increase the number of beneficiaries that can be served by the organisation on the island, but their request has been denied by the conservative New Democracy administration, as it would be perceived as contrary to the deterrent policy it enacts. The limited number of openly racist protests and attacks (in relation to the rest of Greece) shows that the Cretan culture is hostile to open and systemic acts of racism. In April and May 2020 there was a number of racist, anti-refugee protests, fueled by rumors that the Greek State decided to nominate Crete as a safe harbor for intercepted displaced populations sailing from Northern Africa.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the antifascist sentiment remains strong; on June 4th 2021, more than two and a half thousand people marched in the city center against fascism and racism, while also showing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA in light of George Floyd’s murder by police authorities. Even though there are significant numbers of invisible displaced persons who have been working for years in Crete, there are often calls against the implementation of urban housing programs from racist cells in Crete. The protests rarely find significant sympathy from the local officials or the wider Cretan community, although the anti-refugee discourse gradually leaves its mark on local media and public opinion. The “Refugees and Migrants Integration Council,” the municipal committee with a mandate to help networking among humanitarian organisations and promote sustainable integration strategies rarely met in 2020, with several elected council people choosing to abstain or never attend. Its deliberations had very few produced outcomes, and several public officials did not know the agenda or consult the documents to be discussed; there was a constant urgency to incorporate matters loosely related to the committee’s mandate, while more than often there was no representation from organisations or initiatives representing displaced communities.⁶⁶

With Crete’s economy based on the agricultural sector, tourism, and construction, some communities are male-dominated (Pakistani), while others are more gender-balanced because over time they have brought their families with them and have gradually started assimilating, such as Albanian and Armenian communities. The Arab-speaking communities in Chania, Rethymnon, and Heraklion have been a pull factor for Arab speakers. In Crete there are thousands of displaced people (particularly from the Middle East) living in areas where very limited research has been conducted.

Humanitarian workers and officials often discussed the needs of minors beyond the reception stage. Accommodation and education of minors are two of the emerging needs that must be covered as soon as possible after moving asylum seekers and recognized refugees out of the refugee camps in the borderlands. When it comes to education, the administration quickly assigned that responsibility to regional education directors and administrators that oversaw the process of creating reception classes at schools that would help acclimate the students so they

⁶⁵ More information for operation “Irin” can be found at the operation’s website, while the rumors for Crete’s involvement made it to national and local press through a Guardian article; Wintour, “Libya fighting.”

⁶⁶ Focus group discussion, April 2022



could later fully integrate into the general classrooms and follow Greek curricula. The assigned Regional refugees' education administrator at first, in 2017, did not have direct contact with parents and children. However, in the second year of the reception class program implementation (2018), social workers and education administrators organized house visits at refugees' residences to conduct mediations and explain the benefits of school enrollment in the Greek system to parents and children.

Mobility of beneficiaries is not limited to moving students to friendlier schools; humanitarian workers also move adults and families around to make more effective use of Greek services and avoid tensions. The inconsistency of the implementation of Greek laws and regulations regarding social and health services has led to a strategy of identifying cooperative State employees within different branches of the same services and directing displaced individuals to those more helpful workers, even if that means going to a different city to complete a bureaucratic process such as getting a social security number (AMKA). Even in cases when a certain service becomes unattainable because of a racist employee or systemic exclusion of beneficiaries, workers report that solidarity movements and employees themselves, often outside their mandate and against their service policies, find a way, off the books, to provide the most needed services, mainly concerning health; in one case an ESTIA official paid out of their own pocket for a beneficiary's utility bill, because bureaucracy would take too long.

The development of strategies to deal with State Services is often connected with a lack of a comprehensive framework that dictates the rules of conduct for displaced people in Greece. The respondents note that occasionally, in their interaction with State employees, there is a lack of communication with their supervisors and the ministries responsible, the legal framework is unclear, or in the cases when information is available, it has not trickled down through the chain of command. The example of child protection is characteristic of the systemic dysfunction. Eva frustratingly explains how her service must contact the district attorney in the case of abuse, but after the child is removed from its family environment there would be no service that would take responsibility for the child's safety. The lack of child protection services in Heraklion, in combination with the lack of interpreters, often means that the child would end up in a hospital in accordance to the district attorney's guidelines. However, the hospital does not usually have the means to take care of said child, and any private entities that deal with child protection refuse to take responsibility for its caring, creating a legal vacuum that only further traumatizes the victim of abuse. The situation is even more complex with unaccompanied minors; in one case a couple of humanitarian workers adopted a young refugee to ensure he could have the supportive environment he needed.

3.4. Conclusions

"Integration" has often been the topic in political fora and local authorities' briefings, but a look at the participants in those proceedings reveals that there is little interest to consult the displaced themselves and their needs. In deliberations on formal committees in Crete there is limited participation of the people directly affected by integration policies. Like most organisations in Greece that take initiatives to integrate people to local societies, the initiatives usually proceed without any consultation or coordination with other actors in the field. The lack of coordination and the omission of the beneficiaries in the design and implementation of integration policies



results in low participation of beneficiaries. UNHCR, as the most recognizable actor in the field of refugee and migrant sector, often shares videos of refugees and migrants who have successfully integrated, or are in the process of integrating. Several details though of their integration process, including systemic obstacles the refugees had to overcome, or the solidarity networks in place that were more helpful than the services provided, are silenced in the name of the systemic humanitarian work of the UN chapter.

The City of Heraklion seems to distance itself from this national policy, signing a memorandum with UNHCR in late 2020. The memorandum focused on “searching for new ways to deal with challenges that concern *prosfygiko* [refugee crisis] to the benefit of asylum seekers and the local community.”⁶⁷ The document should be read carefully, as it only focuses on the “asylum seekers,” leaving out other categories of displaced persons, who also constitute the majority of displaced populations on the island. In the public announcement of the MoU, the case of an asylum seeker that found a job and has started integrating is showcased as an example of the success of the program. Through research on the case of the showcased asylum seeker, it became clear that the UNHCR and partnering organisations in Heraklion have had little to do with his family’s integration process.

The humanitarian workers representing the Greek State and civil society recognize the shortcomings, voicing their criticism.⁶⁸ They often feel like they are cogs in the machine of the humanitarian regime in place that justifies its existence by the services it provides to the displaced and the funding it receives from European and national sources. The shift of services from immediate relief and reception to integration must recognize first that the process of integration requires cooperative and willing participants. Educating the displaced persons and teaching them the “European ways” becomes part of what integration is about; the focus is currently on short term relief, with mental health services cognizant that they are working as a buffer to Northern European countries, who get to choose who they want to receive. The humanitarian workers are tired, and many of them are disappointed and pessimistic about the relief programs in place and their viability. They recognize the need for integration programs, acknowledging that the current conservative administration only sets obstacles to any such process, even attempting to disrupt many of them in process. Failure to comply would mean that a person is to be cut off from State monetary assistance and prone to detainment and/or deportation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made all the shortcomings in the management of displaced populations worse than they already were. The current administration has imposed severe restrictions on movement in and out of camps since March 2020, for almost a year. Social workers and interpreters working at relief organisations (both State- and private-sponsored) rarely accompany their beneficiaries to their medical appointments, and many appointments with social and medical services have been postponed indefinitely, unless they are deemed absolutely urgent. This exclusive focus on just short-term responses to only the most immediate crisis contributed to another long-term crisis of mental health: in turn, this requires immediate, short-term responses of its own. Regarding COVID-19 vaccinations, displaced populations in detention camps have not been prioritized as vulnerable populations, instead following the age group

⁶⁷ UNHCR Greece, “The City of Iraklion, UNHCR, and Anaptyxiaki.”

⁶⁸ Focus group discussion, April 2022



grouping the administration has imposed, raising protests from civil society organisations as the living conditions in refugee camps are horrific, often inhumane.

In the end of 2021 within 48 hours 31 persons drowned in shipwrecks close to Crete as smuggling routes have changed⁶⁹, with not even one official statement on changing policy on forced displacement neither at the European nor the national level. The question begs as to the role of the local, particularly since institutionalization of migrants' and refugees' integration requires that these people survive and are safe, namely the implementation of rule of law and international conventions.

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⁶⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/12/61cabf664/unhcr-regrets-loss-life-aegean-sea-31-dead-missing.html>



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5. Interviews and Focus groups Data



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Michalis C. Markodimitrakis, UNHCR Associate Liaison Expert | Iraklion, Crete

Woman from Russia 1

Woman from Russia 2

Woman from Ukraine 1

Woman from Ukraine 1

Woman from Belorussia 1

Focus group discussions

Social actors

Municipality Officials and Staff

Migrants' organisations



2022
EMVI

Empowering Migrants Voices on Inclusion Policies

WP2: National Reports



Project funded by the European
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Integration Fund





EMVI - Empowering migrant voices on integration and inclusion policies.

WP2 - National report Italy*

July 2022

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I. Participation and Integration Structures in Italy

1. Introduction: research objectives and methodology

The importance of the political participation of migrants and their descendants is emphasized in numerous European legal documents such as the **Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level**¹ (1992). The document, ratified by only nine countries including the Czech Republic, Sweden, Italy, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Albania, Iceland, and Norway enshrines the freedom of expression, assembly and association, that of the establishment of consultative bodies at the local level for citizens of foreign origin residing in a Council of Europe member country and the right to vote and stand for election in local elections in those countries. However, the last chapter of the convention, considered of more difficult implementation and which relates to the right to vote, has been ratified by only four countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands).

On the other hand, at the European Union level, despite the implementation of integration policies set out in the document **"Common Principles on Immigrant Integration Policies at the EU Level"**² (2004 and 2014) by national governments, significant disparities remain between EU citizens and third-country nationals in all areas of integration. Principle No. 9 of that document emphasizes that *"The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration. Giving immigrants a voice in the formulation of policies that directly affect them can lead to policy that better serves immigrants and enhances their sense of belonging. Where possible, they should be involved in elections, have voting rights and be able to join political parties."* Rights on political participation of migrants in Italy have not evolved much over the years and have mainly stopped at the legislation of the 1980s and 1990s related to the first migration flows.

The **FRA** (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) report **"Together in the EU - Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants"**³ (2017) concludes that the **political rights of migrant citizens are very limited in member countries**.

In order to understand their classification, three categories of rights are mentioned: the right to vote, the right to be voted for and the right to be consulted which is not expressly codified. Within the European Union, only 11 countries recognize the right to vote for third-country nationals (TCNs) (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden). Of these, only 8 admit the possibility for these citizens to stand for election at the local level (Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Sweden). In contrast, Spain, Portugal, and the United Kingdom recognize the right to vote for a limited number of third-country nationals linked to their country of origin. Portugal and the United Kingdom (although no longer part of the European Union) recognize the right to run for office in local elections. In 11 Central and Southeast European countries, third-country nationals do not have the right to register in political parties. On the other hand, with regard to the right to be consulted as a form of representation, albeit informal, enshrined in various European documents, including those mentioned above, it is noted that national consultative bodies exist in 10 member countries. In other countries, consultative bodies have been established at the regional and local levels since the 1990s.

¹ Convenzione sulla partecipazione degli stranieri alla vita pubblica a livello locale (STE no. 144)
<https://www.coe.int/it/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=144>

² Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/common-basic-principles-immigrant-integration-policy-eu_en

³ FRA (2017) Together in the EU: Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants
https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-together-in-the-eu_en.pdf

Another key document for integration policies is The European Commission's new **Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027**⁴. Drawn up on the basis of recommendations and consultations that took place with organizations and members of civil society in many European countries, while also taking into account the results that emerged from the previous 2016 plan, the new plan aims to be more inclusive by recognizing difficulties and problems in the integration process even for citizens who have attained citizenship of a member state as a result of the naturalization process. The new action plan thus focuses not only on non-EU migrants, but also on EU citizens with a migrant background. With 34 million EU residents born outside its borders (8 % in 2019) and 10 % of young people aged 15-34 born in the EU having at least one of their parents of foreign origin, democratic structures within member countries cannot exclude their voices for much longer. The new plan emphasizes **that integration and inclusion are critical for people moving to live in the European Union, for local communities, and for the long-term well-being of our societies and the stability of our economies. If we are to help our societies and economies thrive, we need to support everyone in the society, as inclusion is both a right and a duty for all.** The Action Plan reaffirms that promoting an inclusive society on a democratic basis is in line with the core values of the European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is based on the principle that "the European way of life is an inclusive one," and since European societies are not yet able to deliver on this promise, as migration is still closely linked to issues of discrimination, one of the main goals of the action plan must be to raise awareness in the host societies about the importance of inclusion and participation of all.

Based on the context mentioned above, the **EMVI - Empowering migrant voices on integration and inclusion policies project** aims to investigate through research activities conducted in each partner country (Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovenia), aspects related to the integration process of migrants and the characteristics of their political participation. The research uses a multi-method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative analysis, desk research, interviews, and focus groups in each partner country. It focuses on migrants/people with migration backgrounds in the broadest sense, meaning: people with refugee status (international or subsidiary protection, humanitarian status) as well as third-country nationals (TCNs) and their descendants including people of different racial, ethnic origin, religion, age, gender identity and sexual orientation. The research provides a basis for exploring existing arrangements and structures and developing new ways for migrants' participation in consultative and decision-making processes concerning the design and implementation of integration policies. It aims to investigate, in this specific case, the situation in Italy in order to understand how migrants are politically involved and empowered and how their needs are met, and their voices heard, including their rights to participate in civil society and politics such as the freedom of association, the right to assemble, the right to petition, and the right to vote. The focus on women is particularly important and will be given special attention.

This report is structured as follows:

The first section introduces the research objectives and methodology

The *second section* presents a quantitative and qualitative overview of migration flows and migrants residing in Italy with specifics on the most numerous nationalities, gender, regions of the country with the most immigrants, etc.

The *third section* traces the legislative framework underlying migration and integration policies in Italy from the 1980s' to the present.

The *fourth section* analyzes the main institutions that are responsible for migrant integration policies at the national, regional and local levels.

⁴ CE Piano d'azione per l'integrazione e l'inclusione 2021-2027
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/qanda_20_2179

The *fifth section* analyzes the national plan for the integration of foreign nationals and other relevant documents

The *sixth section* makes an analysis on the national data on migrant associations in the country and gives some examples of good practices that aim to promote migrant participation.

The *seventh section* analyzes the model of migrants advisory council in Italy.

The objective of the *qualitative survey*, carried out through one-to-one interviews (section 8) with political representatives of migrant origin who serve in their roles in various Italian cities, candidates and elected members of city councils, and representatives of parties and institutions, is to understand what are the elements that condition the political participation of citizens of foreign origin.

The *focus groups*, on the other hand (section 9) have a more territorial focus, concentrating in the Municipality of Empoli where participatory pathways for citizens of immigrant origin residing in the municipal area will be tested during the course of the project.

1. Facts and Figures: Migrants in Italy

The past three years have been particularly difficult for people globally, with serious social, economic, and psychological repercussions, including consequences on migration movements.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates a decline in the number of migrants internationally by about two million due to consequences related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Italy, immigration has seen three different phases starting in the 1970s and 1980s with an initial phase of arrivals contained in numbers, then continuing in the next two decades with significant flows and finally the most recent phase, characterized by economic crises and humanitarian emergencies during which new arrivals are mainly people seeking humanitarian protection and family reunifications.

According to ISTAT, the National Institute of Statistics, Annual Report 2022⁵, the resident foreign population in Italy as of January 1, 2022, was 5,193,669. In 2019, it amounted to 4,996,158, and thus increased by less than 200,000 in three years. Also, ISTAT In another document *Cittadini non comunitari in Italia 2020 -2021*⁶ on non-EU citizens in Italy 2020-2021, ISTAT analyzes how in recent years, starting from 2018, there has been a decline of 26.8 percent in new entries and residence permits issued to non-EU citizens, which amounts to a national total of 106,500 residence permits, the lowest number in the last 10 years and almost 40 percent lesser than those issued in 2019. This decline is due to a decrease in permits granted for study (58.1% lesser than the previous year) and asylum permits (51% lesser than the previous year). In 2020, there were 13,467 new permits for asylum and international protection, amounting to 12.6 percent of total new permits issued. The decrease affected all the main non-EU countries of origin, with Indian and Ukrainian nationals the most affected (more than 80 percent compared to 2019). However, this situation has been altered by recent entries due to the war in Ukraine that began in February 2022. Permit for family reunification, which has always been the main reason for entry in Italy, accounted for only 59% of new residence permits issued, recording a drop of by 38.3% from the previous year. Regarding entry for work, there was a significant decrease of (8.8%) compared to the other reasons for entry, partly due to a reduction in the annual entry quota (*decreto flussi*) for reasons of work.

⁵ ISTAT (2022): La situazione nel paese;

https://www.istat.it/storage/rapportoannuale/2022/Rapporto_Annuale_2022.pdf

⁶ ISTAT (2021) Cittadini non comunitari in Italia 2020-2021 https://www.istat.it/it/files//2021/10/Cittadini-non-comunitari_2020_2021.pdf

Some of the reasons for this decline in admissions and issuance of residence permits are obvious, for example, the limitation of travel due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the lockdown led to a nationwide slowdown in services delivery, resulting in delays in processing residence permits. In fact, in 2020, the Ministry of the Interior recorded a significant increase in arrivals on Italian shores that only partially translated into an increase in the number of residence permits issued. The processing of applications for regularization under article 10 Law Decree Nr. 34/2020⁷, an amnesty which provided the regularization of workers in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, fishing or related activities or those in care work (domestic help, caregivers) was also slower than in previous regularizations. As of January 2022, only 13% of the 240,000 applications had been examined. The remaining 87% are yet to be examined.

Another reason for the decrease in the number of non-EU citizens is the acquisition of citizenship. Between 2011 and 2020, more than 1.2 million people acquired Italian citizenship, and it can be estimated that **as of January 1, 2021, new citizens by acquisition of citizenship residing in Italy were about 1.6 million; as of January 1, 2020, they were about 1.517.000**. Considering the whole population with migratory background (foreigners and Italians by acquisition of citizenship), the population of foreigners has continued to grow, although not at the pace of the past, **reaching almost 6 million 800 thousand residents as of January 1, 2021**.

2.1 The most numerous nationalities

According to ISTAT's Annual Report 2022, the most numerous and well-established nationalities in Italy are 5. in the territory with different immigration patterns. The largest one is the Romanian community. Though Romania is an EU Member State, Romanian citizens, like all EU citizens resident in Italy and who do not have Italian citizenship as well, are still counted in immigration statistics EU migrants. as they amount more than 1 million of the foreign population by January 2021. Romanians are very close culturally to Italy and can be considered a recently settled community, characterized by family-based migration. The gender ratio within the community is relatively balanced, with 73.6 men for every 100 women. The second community, the Albanian community has similar characteristics in terms of migration pattern, which is also family-based. The gender ratio is 105 men per 100 women. The number of resident Albanians in the country is 433,000.

The third largest national group is Moroccan with about 429,000 residents. Immigration of the Moroccan community is mainly due to employment and initially it was the heads of households who migrated. However, there has been no shortage of family reunifications over the years, as the gender ratio indicates with 116 men for every 100 women.

The fourth largest community is the Chinese community with 330,000 residents and family-type migration characteristics. For every 102 males there are 100 females.

The fifth community is Ukrainian and is well established in Italy besides the new arrivals due to the outbreak of war in February 2022. As of 1 January 2021, there were 236,000 Ukrainian residents, and according to data from the Ministry of the Interior, by June 11, 2022, 132,129 new arrivals of people fleeing the country were recorded - 69,493 women, 20,181 men, and 42,455 minors. Ukrainian immigration first emerged in a big way during the 2002 regularization exercise under the Bossi-Fini Law, when 107,000 Ukrainians, mostly women working as domestic help, applied for regularization. Today, women are still the majority, making up 77.6 percent of Ukrainian residents.

⁷ D.l 34/2020 Emersione di rapporti di lavoro Art. 10

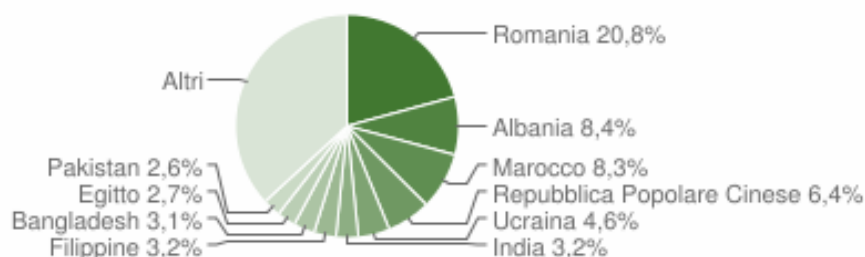


Figure 1 Source: www.tuttitalia.it

Other nationalities present that make up most of the arrivals also due to economic changes and political balances in various parts of the world are: Filipinos (3.2%), Indians (3.2%), Bengalis (3.1%), Egyptians (2.7%) and Pakistanis (2.6%). Among new arrivals in 2020, particularly among those who applied for international protection, the most numerous nationalities were: Pakistan (3,683 permits, 27.3% of which for protection), Nigeria (1,395 entries, 10.4% of total for international protection) and Bangladesh (1,152, 8.6% of those entering for asylum).

2.2 Gender balance in the Italian migratory scenario.

The gender balance within different national groups of migrants in Italy presents very interesting features because it is linked to some migration patterns where the first to migrate were women. A phenomenon not studied in depth, female migration began with a first wave in the 1980s and 1990s where the first to migrate were women from Cape Verde, the Philippines and Brazil. They emigrated out of economic needs, mostly alone and became the mainstays of their families, the "breadwinners" who supported their country with the remittances they sent back. In the same years, many women from warring African and Middle Eastern countries moved to Italy. These were Muslim women, who in many cases rejoined their husbands who had immigrated years earlier. The same scenario happened with the Albanian women who rejoined their husbands who immigrated starting from the end of the communist regime in 1990. In the 2000s, many women arrived from Eastern European countries (Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Russia) and most of them were educated. Leaving their husbands and children at home, they moved to Italy to work as child and elderly caregivers. Care work became a trap because beyond immediate earnings, there were no other career prospects. According to ISMU Foundation (Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity), **from 1 January 2005 to 1 January 2020, the number of female immigrants increased by 141%** (compared to a 112% increase in the number of men). Female immigration has changed the balance of the migration phenomenon, and **in 2020 amounted for 52.4% of legal adult migrant residents in Italy**, excluding the resident minor's population within which the prevalence is male. The largest nationalities are equal to the national estimates by numerical percentage, but the highest percentage of female presence is estimated to be Ukrainian (77.3%), followed by Polish (74.1%), Moldovan (66.1%) and Bulgarian (62.6%). More skewed to the male side, however, are all Asian and African national groups: Sri Lankans, Moroccans, Indians, Nigerians, Tunisians, Egyptians, and especially Pakistanis, Bengalis, and Senegalese. Among the latter three, women account for only 30.4%, 28.1% and 25.4% respectively.

In terms of new arrivals, among those seeking international protection, it can be said that there is an increase in the presence of women. In 2016 men represented 88.4% of asylum-seekers; in 2020 they slightly exceeded 76%.

2.3 Geography of migration in the country

Although Southern Italy represents a gateway for many non-EU nationals, their presence is concentrated in the central and northern parts of the country. ISTAT data highlights that, as of 1 January 2021, only 14% of permits were issued or renewed in the South where, among other things, due to the reduction in incoming flows, the decrease in regular residents was most noticeable between 2020 and 2021.

Northern and southern regions differ also in terms of the prevailing reasons for the permit: the share of residence permits for asylum and other forms of protection reaches 9% in the South and 11% in the islands (Sardinia and Sicily) against a national average of less than 5%. In contrast, long-term permits are around 60% in the South and below 55% in the Islands against an Italian average of over 64%.

Slightly less than half of non-EU citizens live in cities or densely populated areas; about 41% live in small towns and suburbs; and just over 10% in rural or sparsely populated areas. In the Northwest and Central regions, non-EU migrants are concentrated in cities and densely populated areas; in the Northeast and the South, their presence is prevalently in small towns (45% and 43% respectively), while rural areas are home to one-sixth of non-EU residents in the Northeast and non-EU regular residents in the South. The territorial location of the various communities responds to different migration and job placement patterns. Concentration in cities is highest for Filipinos (84%), Egyptians (69%) and Bangladeshi (68%) while Moroccan and Albanian nationals, the two oldest settled communities, prefer small towns.

3. The legal framework of immigration and integration of citizens with a migrant background

The legal framework on immigration in Italy is quite complex and has evolved in a restrictive direction over the years with a regulatory bias in terms of security, having included the phenomenon in many legislative documents as a matter of public safety. The first legislative document regulating migration flows is the **1986 Foschi Law**⁸, enacted after a series of amnesties and ministerial circulars that sought to address the migration flows of the 1980s¹. Until 1986, in contradiction to the provisions of Article 10(2) of the Constitution, which states that "The legal status of foreigners is regulated by law in accordance with international norms and treaties," the influx of foreign nationals into Italy was regulated by the 1931 TU (Unified Text) of Public Security Laws.⁹ **The Foschi Law** had the merit of introducing a rule on family reunification, providing for tourist and study stays and **declaring (formal) equality between Italian and foreign workers; the law was accompanied by a large amnesty involving more than 100.000 immigrants.**

In 1990, the first comprehensive law on immigration was enacted, **Law nr.39/1990**, better known as **Legge Martelli**, named after the Vice President of the Council of Ministers who sponsored it¹⁰. It was introduced following evidence of widespread exploitation of migrant workers across different sectors and in the agricultural and construction sectors. It contained, among others, a provision that required the definition of an annual quota of immigrants to be allowed entry into the labour market with regular stay permit. It contained also criminal provisions and, for the first time, procedures for the expulsion of foreigners in irregular condition in the country. Provision was also made for the amnesty of irregulars already in the territory and the first measures to promote the integration of immigrants, including the establishment of first instance

⁸ L. Dec. 30, 1986, No. 943 Norme in materia di collocamento e di trattamento dei lavoratori extracomunitari immigrati e contro le immigrazioni clandestine. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1987/01/12/086U0943/sg>

⁹ Regio decreto 18 giugno 1931, n. 773 Approvazione del testo unico delle leggi di pubblica sicurezza.

¹⁰ L. 28 febbraio 1990, n. 39 Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 30 dicembre 1989, n. 416, recante norme urgenti in materia di asilo politico, di ingresso e soggiorno dei cittadini extracomunitari e di regolarizzazione dei cittadini extracomunitari ed apolidi già presenti nel territorio dello Stato. Disposizioni in materia di asilo.

reception centres. It was during this period that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and communist governments in Eastern Europe, Albanian citizens began migrating to Italy. This led to a change in the perception of migration flows in the Italian society that would influence many subsequent policies in a negative direction. The following years saw a succession of laws and decrees designed to remedy loopholes in the existing law.

In 1992 a **new law on acquisition of Italian citizenship¹¹ was enacted**. This law, among other things, increased the minimum number of years of legal residence required for a non-EU migrant to qualify to apply for Italian citizenship, from 5 to 10 years. In 1993 the **Mancino law¹²**, against racial discrimination, incitement to discriminate or commit acts of violence, was enacted.

Law nr. 40 of 1998, known also as Turco - Napolitano Law¹³ was the first law of a general and systematic nature. Among the major innovations this law introduced were stay permits with minimum duration of two years, a permanent stay permit after at least 5 years of regular stay, with a duration of ten years and renewable on expiration, a sponsorship scheme that allow non-EU prospective migrants to enter and stay for one year to seek employment, under the sponsorship of an Italian or EU citizen or a legally resident non-EU citizen who undertakes to cover the person's cost of living during the said period. The Turco-Napolitano Law was later unified with all other provisions of the legal system on the status of foreigners, giving origin to the **Consolidated Act on Immigration¹⁴**. This law operated both with a view to the labor and social integration of immigrants, through measures such as the provision of entry for job search, the introduction of a residency card to stabilize long-term residents and the extension of basic health care to irregular immigrants as well, and by strengthening control and deportation policies, which were deemed necessary and complementary to integration measures and national needs. Temporary Stay and Assistance Centers (CPTs), created to detain and identify immigrants and eventually deport them, were introduced with this law. Detention at these centers, was provided for a maximum of 30 days, and has been the subject of much criticism over the years due to discretion rights granted to law enforcement agencies, as well as the fact that prolonged detention at these centers entailed a limitation of fundamental rights.

In the following years, there was an increase in new arrivals due to the enlargement of the European Union, which made the political debate on these issues even more heated. **Law No. 189 of 2002¹⁵**, the so-called **Bossi-Fini Law**, amended the Turco-Napolitano in a restrictive way for non-EU citizens interested to immigrate to Italy. It shortened the duration of residence permits from 3 to 2 years, gave greater role to CPTs (Temporary Residence Centers) and the deportation to the border, introduced fingerprinting for all foreigners and the crime of illegal stay. This law changed the procedure on new entries, introducing the residence contract for immigrant workers, which made the procedure much more complicated. The law was accompanied by a gigantic amnesty, which involved more than 650.000 foreign nationals.

In 2008, the center-right government issued the so-called security package (*pacchetto sicurezza*) through three main legislative instruments:

¹¹ L. 5 febbraio 1992, n. 91 Nuove norme sulla cittadinanza.

¹² Testo coordinato del DL 26 aprile 1993, n. 122 recante: "Misure urgenti in materia di discriminazione razziale, etnica e religiosa".

¹³ L. 6 marzo 1998, n. 40 Disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero

¹⁴ D.lgs 25 luglio 1998, n. 286 Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero

¹⁵ L. 30 luglio 2002, n. 189 Modifica alla normativa in materia di immigrazione e di asilo.

Law No. 125/2008¹⁶ introduced new criminal offenses for irregular immigrants and those who facilitate their stay in Italy (including employers who hire non-EU workers irregularly), with a new aggravating circumstance of illegal stay, harsher penalties for those who declare false personal information and expulsion of EU or non-EU citizens convicted of crimes that carry jail terms of more than 2 years.

Legislative Decree No. 160/2008¹⁷ provides rules that restrict the possibility of family reunification by limiting the number of family members that can be reunited and increases the level of income required to access this right.

Lastly, **Law No. 94/2009¹⁸** introduced several public security provisions such as the crime of illegal entry and stay, harsher penalties for the crime of aiding and abetting illegal immigration, increase by six months of the maximum period of administrative detention in the Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE), the introduction of new economic and other stakes for entry, family reunification and renewal of residence permits, including the integration agreement and the points-based residence permit.

3.1 The most recent legal measures

Law no.46 of 2017¹⁹ introduced regulations aimed at speeding up international protection proceedings and combating illegal migration: in particular, 26 specialized immigration courts were established to deal with, among other things, the numerous cases of appeals against the rejection provisions of the Territorial Commissions on Asylum; more streamlined procedures for the recognition of international protection and the deportation of irregular migrants, based largely on interviews of applicants for protection at the Territorial Commissions. It also raised the maximum period of administrative detention of migrants inside the Identification and Expulsion Centres.

The Security Decree (Decree-Law No. 113 of Oct. 4, 2018, converted into Law No. 132 of Dec. 1, 2018) has significantly altered the regulatory scenario regarding immigration, worsening the status of the rights of third country nationals already residing in Italy and of those who enter the country for international protection. The law, containing **provisions on immigration and public security, as well as measures for the functionality of the Ministry of the Interior and the National Agency for the management of assets seized and confiscated from organized crime**, introduced major changes within the Consolidated Act on Immigration (TUI) and in other provisions implementing EU regulations regarding the recognition of different forms of protection for asylum seekers (refugees, holders of subsidiary and humanitarian protection). Among many, some changes concern the repeal of humanitarian protection and introduction of the "special cases" typology. New cases of revocation and denial are provided for international protection. For the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees SPRAR modified in SAI (Reception and Integration System) in 2022, the number of beneficiaries is reduced; the procedure for the acquisition of Italian citizenship by naturalization is modified by bringing the waiting period for the evaluation of the file from 2 to 4 years. The aim of this reform was to limit the system of entry and stay of foreigners in the national territory with more stringent conditions.

¹⁶L. 24 luglio 2008, n. 125 Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 23 maggio 2008, n. 92, recante misure urgenti in materia di sicurezza pubblica.

¹⁷D. lgs 3 ottobre 2008, n. 160 Modifiche ed integrazioni al decreto legislativo 8 gennaio 2007, n. 5, recante attuazione della direttiva 2003/86/CE relativa al diritto di ricongiungimento familiare.

¹⁸ L.15 luglio 2009, n. 94 Disposizioni in materia di sicurezza pubblica.

¹⁹L. 13 aprile 2017, n. 46 Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 17 febbraio 2017, n. 13, recante disposizioni urgenti per l'accelerazione dei procedimenti in materia di protezione internazionale, nonché per il contrasto dell'immigrazione illegale.

A change of government, a pandemic and various political vicissitudes led to the latest **Immigration Decree**²⁰ of 2020, which was created with the aim of amending the Security Decree. This decree has been much criticized because it was supposed to neutralize the harms and limitations introduced with the Security Decree, but this was achieved only partially. The reformed parts concern reception, a form of humanitarian protection and the system of widespread reception are restored. It fails to repeal the criminalization of sea rescues put in place by the Security Decree and the process for obtaining Italian citizenship is reduced from 4 to 3 years. This process was then restored to 2 years except for its extension to 3 years due to the need to longer proceedings period. The provision for revocation of Italian citizenship for those with final convictions of terrorism-related crimes also remains in place.

In the span of 2022, public discussion has begun in Italy about reforming the citizenship law²¹ which dates to 1992. Specifically, the change concerns the status of immigrant's children, the so-called "*ius scholae*," which would give those born in Italy and those who arrived in by the age of 12, the opportunity to obtain Italian citizenship once they have successfully completed a schooling cycle of at least five years.

It is a much-debated reform on terms and content and was discussed in the House of Representatives in June 2022. The political situation in Italy in July and the early dissolution of the Houses of Parliament postpones discussion on the decree-law until a date to be determined.

4. Multilevel governance on immigration issues

The competence par excellence in immigration matters lies with the European Union regulated by Articles 79 and 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). In particular, it defines the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals who enter and reside legally in one of the member states, including family reunifications. Member states retain the power to set admission volumes for people from third countries seeking work. In the area of integration, on the other hand, it does not provide for harmonization of regulations among all member states but provides incentives and support for the measures they take to promote the integration of third-country nationals.

4.1 Distribution of the competences on immigration at the national level²²

In Italy, responsibility for immigration matters is divided among several ministries. The Consolidated Text on Immigration²³ established the Committee for the Coordination and Monitoring of Provisions Concerning the Discipline of Immigration, chaired by the President or Vice-President of the Council of Ministers or a delegated minister and composed of the ministers concerned with the issues discussed at each meeting and a representative designated by the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces. Supporting the Committee is a Technical Working Group established at the Ministry of the Interior, whose members include, in addition to the Ministry of the Interior, representatives of other ministries and three experts designated by the Unified Conference (State-City and Local Self-Government Conference, ex art. 8 of Legislative Decree 281/1997). The Technical Group is configured as an open inter-institutional body where other representatives of the public administration can also be invited.

²⁰ D.L. 130/2020. Disposizioni urgenti in materia di immigrazione e sicurezza, convertito in legge il 18 Dicembre 2020 n.173

²¹ LEGGE 5 febbraio 1992, n. 91 Nuove norme sulla cittadinanza

²² V Rapporto European Migration Network Italia

http://ssaistorico.interno.gov.it/download/allegati1/rosa8_fifthemnitalyreport_immigrantsandrefugees_legislation_institutions_and_2012_ita.pdf

²³ Legislative Decree 286/1998, Article 2 bis

The responsibilities of ministries are organized as follows:

Ministry of the Interior. The organization of the Ministry of the Interior regarding migration policies hinges on the **Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration and the Department of Public Security**. The Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration carries out the functions of **civil rights protection, including those concerning asylum and immigration** by making use of the Central Directorate for Immigration and Asylum Policies, the Central Directorate for Civil Services for Immigration and Asylum, and the Central Directorate for Civil Rights, Citizenship and Minorities. **This Department is responsible for the initiatives conducted in the territory for the integration of immigrants and the various types of centers provided for immigrants and asylum seekers** (those for reception, identification and deportation and those for asylum seekers). Operating within, it's the "**National Commission for the Right of Asylum**," the State's highest authority on asylum and the recognition of international protection status, which performs the functions of guiding and coordinating the "**Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection**" and has decision-making power on immigrant and refugee matters. At the decentralized level, the Ministry of the Interior is organized into **Territorial Councils**, which are functional for the development of a network between the center and the periphery that improves the cognitive system and promotes the most appropriate choices for **removing obstacles to the economic, social, and cultural integration of immigrants**. They bring together the various local problems related to immigration; promote consultation among all administrations; promote the participation within them of associations representing migrant communities in Italy; promote initiatives for the socio-territorial integration of immigrants; and convey to the central government level the areas of intervention and proposals emerging at the provincial level.

Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Within this ministry, the **General Directorate of Immigration and Integration Policies** has on the one hand, competencies that are related to the discipline of entry for work, such as the programming of flows and entry quotas for migrant workers, the monitoring of the labor market with reference to entry flows, and bilateral cooperation with countries of origin. On the other hand, there is a number of competencies related to the policies of inclusion and social cohesion of foreign citizens, such as the promotion of initiatives pertaining to active policies and the involvement of the relevant services in the activities of job placement and reintegration of foreign workers, the coordination of policies for the social and labor integration of immigrant foreigners, initiatives aimed at preventing and combating discrimination, xenophobia and the phenomenon of racism; maintenance of the register of associations and entities that carry out activities in favor of immigrants, coordination of activities related to policies for the protection of foreign minors, etc.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Through the **Directorate General for Italians Abroad and Migration Policies** this ministry holds some important competencies in immigration matters. In particular, the Directorate General oversees consular affairs and dealing with issues concerning foreign nationals in Italy, as well as analyzing social and migration issues in relation to international organizations and bodies. It has competence in matters of visas and the entry regime for foreign nationals.

4.2 Integration policies at regional and local level²⁴

The National Government has exclusive legislative powers on immigration matters. Following the amendment of Chapter V of the Constitution²⁵, the Regions were granted areas of intervention both on profiles of exclusive state competence and on those of concurrent or residual competence - such as social services, health care, school insertion and social integration of foreign citizens, legitimizing them to a promotional action to be realized through the involvement of local authorities. In aiming first and foremost at the realization of social inclusion and the fight against discrimination, the law conceived of local authorities and, above all,

²⁴ Lino Panzeri Osservatorio Costituzionale Fasc. 1/2018

²⁵ Modifiche al titolo V della parte seconda della Costituzione

municipalities as co-leaders in its elaboration and implementation. They have thus been recognized as holders of specific functions, either in "competition" with the Region or exclusively - such as, for example, in the implementation of socio-cultural integration projects, in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees, in the promotion of tools for consultation and participation in the social and institutional life of the entity, in the proper use of legal protection tools or, again, in language mediation services and awareness-raising activities on issues of intercultural dialogue. In implementing Directive 2013/33/EU²⁶, laying down rules on the reception of applicants for international protection, Legislative Decree No. 142/2015²⁷ so-called Reception Decree has in fact defined the role of local authorities through their involvement in the management network SIPROIMI modified into SAI by Law Decree 130/2020²⁸, which is the pivot of the Italian reception system.

5. National plan for the integration of third country nationals and other relevant documents

Planning of integration of third-country nationals is the responsibility of the **Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Directorate General of Immigration and Integration Policies** and is carried out through the drafting of the document of **"Multiannual Integrated Programming in Employment, Integration and Inclusion"**²⁹. It is produced every 6 years in response to European programming such as the **European Commission's Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027**³⁰ which is precisely transposed into national programming documents. Programming is also carried out taking into consideration the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by identifying objectives, targets, and lines of intervention. After the previous 2014-2020 programming between October 2021 and January 2022, a long series of qualified stakeholders were invited to comment, make suggestions and proposals on a first draft of the Integrated Multiannual Programming in Employment, Integration, and Inclusion 2021-2027. The version that followed, benefited from contributions from nearly 100 international organizations, other central governments, regions and municipalities, social partners, universities, and public and private research bodies, third sector entities, associations working on behalf of migrants registered under Article 42 of the TUI and associations of migrants and new generations. At the level of the Region of Tuscany, on the other hand, the latest planning document is the **Integrated Address Plan for Immigration Policies 2012-2015**³¹ which has not been updated in subsequent years. Other important documents that have defined an articulated work plan to be followed at the national level regarding the condition of citizens of foreign origin is the **National Action Plan Against Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance (2014-2016)** drafted by **UNAR** (National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office).

In early 2022, UNAR launched a notice addressed to associations and entities working in the field of preventing and combating discrimination to define the new National Action Plan 2021-2025. Recently, the document **"National Strateg for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Sinti 2021-2030"**³² was adopted

²⁶ DIRETTIVA 2013/33/UE DEL PARLAMENTO EUROPEO E DEL CONSIGLIO del 26 giugno 2013 recante norme relative all'accoglienza dei richiedenti protezione internazionale (rifusione) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=lv>

²⁷ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2015/06/22/142/sg/pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/12/19/20A07086/sg>

²⁹ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle politiche di integrazione PROGRAMMAZIONE INTEGRATA PLURIENNALE IN TEMA DI LAVORO, INTEGRAZIONE E (2022) <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/Documents/Programmazione-integrata-gennaio-2022.pdf>

³⁰ Piano d'azione per l'integrazione e l'inclusione 2021-2027 CE (2020) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/qanda_20_2179

³¹ Regione Toscana (2012) PIANO DI INDIRIZZO INTEGRATO PER LE POLITICHE SULL'IMMIGRAZIONE 2012-2015 <https://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/71336/Piano%20Immigrazione/523ed7e1-0722-459d-bdba-6735349227e7>

³² UNAR (2012) Strategia Nazionale di uguaglianza, inclusione e partecipazione di Rom e Sinti 2021-2030 https://unar.it/portale/documents/20125/113907/Strategia_Nazionale_di_uguaglianza_inclusione_partecipazione_di_Rom_e_Sinti_2021-2030+%28ITA%29.pdf/1e4ccc9c-aeba-e7b2-864d-ee1eced7e4df?t=1653399043993

following the EU Council Recommendation of March 12, 2021 (2021/C 93/01) of which the document bears the same title.

6. Associations founded by migrants.

According to data published by ISTAT in 2019, - "Structure and profiles of the nonprofit sector"³³ (*Struttura e profili del settore non-profit*), the number of nonprofit organisations in Italy was 362,634. The study analyzed the activities composition of the associations that make up the sector. It surveyed but did not make a distinguish between associations founded by migrants and / or Italian citizens with a migrant background. It did not provide a ranking of the most relevant associations at the national level. This information can be partly found on the *Integrazione Migranti*³⁴ website of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, which has been mapping migrant associations in the country since 2014. However, this database is not exhaustive because it is based on requests by associations that must voluntarily apply for membership. There are currently 1150 member associations on the database.

Also, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies on the basis of Article 42 of the Consolidated Immigration Act (Legislative Decree 286/98)³⁵ established the **"Register of Associations, Entities and Other Private Bodies Carrying Out Activities in Favor of Immigrant Foreigners"** (Presidential Decree 394/99, Article 52)³⁶. This register includes associations that promote the integration of foreign citizens through activities pertaining to different areas such as providing language courses, disseminating information to support the process of integration of migrants in the society, enhancing the cultural expressions of the country of origin, preventing and combating all forms of discrimination and xenophobia; intercultural mediation, organizing training courses for those in public or private offices who work in contact with the migrant population, etc.

The register is organized as follows:

- The First Section includes organizations and associations that carry out activities for the social integration of foreigners.
- In the Second Section, associations, organizations, and private bodies qualified to carry out social assistance and social integration programs are registered. In this section belong organizations that carry out social assistance and provide services in the areas of violence against women, prostitution, trafficking, violence and child abuse, and assistance to workers under severe exploitation.

Membership in the registry requires registered organizations to complete by January 30 of each year a report on their activities of the previous year on behalf of immigrant citizens. Only upon submission of the report will the association appear on the list updated annually by DG Immigration. While the list of associations registered in the First section is published on the Ministry of Labor's institutional website www.lavoro.gov.it and on the Migrant Integration Portal www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it, the list for the Second section is not public. Even from this list it is difficult to infer how many associations are composed or founded by migrants.

³³ ISTAT (2021) *Struttura e profili del settore non profit*
<https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/10/Report-nonprofit-2019.pdf>

³⁴ <https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-Associazioni>

³⁵ DECRETO LEGISLATIVO 25 luglio 1998, n. 286 Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1998/08/18/098G0348/sg>

³⁶ DECRETO DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA 31 agosto 1999, n. 394 Regolamento recante norme di attuazione del testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero, a norma dell'articolo 1, comma 6, del decreto legislativo 25 luglio 1998, n. 286.
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1999/11/03/099G0265/sg>

What can be pointed out in general, however, is that over the years there has been an evolution regarding associations founded and/or managed by third-country nationals. There has been a shift from the first type of associations founded by the first generations of migrants with a strong imprint of supporting their communities of origin in the territories, as they are mostly associations organized on a community basis, to the rise of multicultural type associations founded by migrants and second generations, children of migrants born and/or raised in Italy who are born as associations that invest on capacity building, acquire project skills, obtain funding and manage to promote co-development projects with their countries of origin.

One example is CONNGI³⁷ (Coordinamento Nazionale Nuove Generazioni Italiane), which began as a project of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and then became established as a second-level association gathering within it 35 associations founded by second-generation youth nationwide. Another example, which supports migrants' associations in increasing their skills is the A.MI.CO Program³⁸ promoted by IOM (International Organization for Migration) which offers the possibility of subsequently participating in a call for proposals and obtaining funding in the form of grants.

Mention can also be made of other such funding promoted by the International Activities sector of various regions such as the Tuscany Region through the "Simple Projects on International Cooperation," the Lombardy Region, etc., which have over the years also provided funding for migrant associations in the form of regranting.

7. Inclusion of migrants in integration policies ³⁹

Given the restrictive legislation on the right to vote and the lengthy process provided by Italian law on the acquisition of citizenship by naturalization, which consists of 10 years of uninterrupted legal residence plus 2 years of file evaluation, after fulfilling a series of other requirements such as income, housing, etc., third-country nationals find as the only way for political participation in the territories where they reside alternative tools of participation that contribute to their paths of integration and that promote active citizenship. These tools consist first of all, of the right of association and assembly and thus the establishment of associations by foreign nationals as a means of unity in the community and interlocution with the local government. Secondly, Presidential Decree 394/1999⁴⁰, in compliance also with the provisions of the Strasbourg Convention on the participation of foreigners in local public life, in Article 57 gave the possibility to local authorities to establish ad hoc consultative bodies that can, in part, make up for the non-recognition of the right to vote. With the emergence of these consultative mechanisms at the local and regional levels, participation has been taken to another level. The Advisory Boards and Councils of Foreigners are bodies composed of representatives of the various communities present in the territory and appointed by national associations and communities or directly elected by resident foreign citizens. They do not have decision-making powers but have an advisory function on immigration policies and aim to represent the voices and demands of immigrants.

In Italy, the National Council for the Problems of Non-EU Workers and their Families and the Regional Councils were introduced by the first immigration law (L. 946/1986)⁴¹ with the aim of dealing with the initial reception and job placement of migrants. In the following years, some local experiments of Advisory Boards and Councils

³⁷ <https://conngi.it/>

³⁸ https://italy.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11096/files/documents/Amico_Digital_.pdf

³⁹ https://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/512216/COSPE_Operation+Vote_Rapporto+di+ricerca.pdf/01f15b1b-9227-4c26-82f0-23e8dfb016e5;jsessionid=D3814FF21AF12A838408CC40E7056C9B.web-rt-as01-p1?version=1.0

⁴⁰ DPR 31 agosto 1999, n. 394 Regolamento recante norme di attuazione del testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero, a norma dell'articolo 1, comma 6, del decreto legislativo 25 luglio 1998, n. 286.

⁴¹ DECRETO-LEGGE 9 dicembre 1986, n. 832 Misure urgenti in materia di contratti di locazione di immobili adibiti ad uso diverso da quello di abitazione. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1986/12/10/086U0832/sg>

of Foreigners were reported, while other municipalities established the figure of the Deputy Councilor, who could participate in the City Council and could present petitions regarding resident immigrants, but without voting rights. The consultative bodies implemented at the local level appear to be more oriented toward promoting the cultural and political integration of immigrants. The first experience was in 1994 in the municipality of Nonantola, where the figure of the Deputy Foreign Councilor was established. Despite the significant turnout in the elections and the experimentation of this figure in other Italian municipalities as well, the initiatives implemented, like the Advisory Boards and Councils, have never been considered satisfactory (Martiniello 1999). Empoli had one such consultative body, which it intends to re-launch. There are, however, positive effects such as the socialization to voting. Indeed, in order to compose the Councils on an elective basis, real elections were held, involving a plurality of lists and candidates.

Another effect induced by the creation of the migrant councils has been the increase in the number of associations, as the mechanism of the councils is based on a horizontal relationship between representatives of different communities, but also on a vertical relationship between representatives and their own compatriots. To this respect, the instrument of migrant councils has often ended up marginally nurturing real dynamics of dialogue and cooperation between national groups, on the contrary reinforcing the ethnicization of forms of representation. In general, researchers who have studied the dynamics activated by these instruments have revealed their weak capacity to affect decision-making processes, emphasizing their predominantly symbolic character (Caponio 2006; Recchi 2006; Colloca 2008). Years after the first experiments, migrant councils and advisory boards now seem to have concluded their function of creating networks between institutions and migrant communities and between migrant communities themselves. Experience teaches that consultative instruments, marked by ethnic representation, cannot replace individual mobilization within the circuit of representation, and they fulfill their function in contexts in which the priority is recognition, and this is all the truer since the Councils, as of 2004, no longer involve a significant proportion of foreign nationals, who have meanwhile become communitarian, thus reducing their target population. Other municipalities, given the obstacles encountered in granting the right to vote in local elections, have introduced into their statutes the right to participate in local referendums to all those registered at the registry office, providing a very short time of residence as a requirement (six months/one year). This is the case in the municipalities of Turin, Milan, Livorno, Pescara, and Gorizia.

As far as Tuscany Region is concerned, as early as 2004 it included in the general principles of its Statute and 'without prejudice to constitutional principles, the introduction of the right to vote in local elections for immigrants'. In addition to experimenting with the tool of the Advisory Boards and the Migrant's Council in different municipalities and provinces, to stimulate the desire to participate present in society, the Region approved Law 69/2007⁴² with the aim of enhancing the civic spirit of the territory, in order to contribute to increasing the quality of collective decisions. This legislation promotes the active involvement of individuals, entities, groups, parties, and associations in the elaboration of regional and local policies, expressing the clear institutional will to introduce forms of participatory and deliberative democracy to nurture the legitimacy of institutions. Citizens, migrants, or stateless persons who are resident in the territory or temporarily present in Tuscany for study or work can take part in participatory processes. The opening of processes to nonnationals as well, whether resident or not, is seen as a symptom of awareness of regional multiculturalism. The participation of nonnationals encourages their social and political inclusion, allowing the visibility of their needs and interests. ANCI (National Agency of Italian Municipalities) has actively supported this "bottom-up" push, asking the Parliament to pass a bill entitled Norms for Political and Administrative Participation and the Right to Elect without Discrimination of Citizenship and Nationality, aimed at foreigners who have been

⁴²Legge regionale 27 dicembre 2007, n. 69 Norme sulla promozione della partecipazione alla elaborazione delle politiche regionali e locali.

<https://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/11537824/Legge%20regionale%20N.69%20del%202007/e782eb5a-8787-4647-acb6-518b6c56cf8e>

residents for five years (Giovannetti and Perin 2012). The text of the law drafted by ANCI was later re-proposed as part of the "*L'Italia sono anch'io*" 2015 campaign, a broad mobilization promoted by a plurality of civil society organizations, which through committees established throughout the country collected signatures to present the text as a popular initiative bill, along with another text, concerning the recognition of citizenship to children born in Italy to legally resident immigrants. The continued closure of institutional participation spaces to non-EU immigrants thus introduces an internal differentiation within the population of foreign citizens residing in Italy, attributing the right to vote, with the exclusion of political elections, only to EU citizens.

II. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

8. Qualitative survey: The individual interviews

For the purpose of the qualitative survey, 10 individual online and in-person interviews were conducted to political representatives with migration backgrounds, active association and community members in the month of June and July 2022. Interviewees were chosen taking into consideration aspects of origin, gender (5 women and 5 men were interviewed) age (24-47), and personal history of political activism. Almost all the representatives have a history and experience in the world of associationism, such as volunteers, former members of regional councils of foreigners, city councilors, etc. Special attention was paid to the geographical aspect, trying to include respondents residing in different cities in Italy. This made it possible to gather different points of view and bring to light different policies on migrant inclusion and participation at the local level.

8.1 The needs of migrants

8.1.1 The right to vote as the main instrument of political participation

Much debated by national politics over the years, the right to vote in local elections still remains a contention between political forces, social parts and people of foreign origin living in Italy. A right that is currently acquired through the acquisition of Italian citizenship and therefore not accessible to all those immigrants who have lived in Italy for many years, often more than 10 years of residence and cannot vote in local elections in the places where they reside. The absence of the right to vote touches everyone. Newcomers, long-time immigrants who for various reasons cannot or do not want to apply for citizenship, and new generations.

Two of the respondents considering the issue of utmost importance expose the problem as follows:

"An important need concerns granting the right to vote in local government for long-term residents, as it works in many European countries, while in Italy we still struggle to conceive of the fact that working citizens can take the floor and express themselves through voting. " (Int. No. 1, Santa Croce sull'Arno)

"I believe that you cannot think of involving foreign communities in the world of politics if they de facto do not enjoy the right to vote. Taking my own personal experience as an example, that of a young boy who grew up in Italy from the age of three, being active in politics as a teenager and then being denied the opportunity to vote generated a lot of frustration in me as I did not understand why I had fewer rights than my peers who were perhaps even less interested and engaged in the field. " (Int no. 6, Quarrata)

8.1.2 The right of citizenship and the protagonism of the new generations

Most of the respondents are immigrant children born or raised in Italy. People who have concluded their entire education and vocational training in Italy and, despite this, most of them have become Italian citizens in adulthood. Italian law does not provide for those born in Italy to foreign parents the right to become citizens at birth. This issue has been extensively debated and starting from February 2022 there is a bill⁴³ being debated in the Chamber of Deputies which discussion has been postponed in September and that provides new cases for the acquisition of Italian citizenship for those who arrive in Italy before the age of 12. The same law on citizenship as underlined by the interviewees should be reformed from many points of view also in reference to the first generations but in the meantime, it is necessary to recognize a new protagonism that has arisen in Italy in recent years on the part of second generations through the birth of numerous associations at the national level. One of them is the CONNGI network that all interviewees mention as a relevant organisation and among the few that they consider doing important work on the political participation of people with a migrant background. Another network working on political participation is IDEM network⁴⁴, which also has goals of creating trainings in the political sphere. There have also been numerous campaigns and social movements in support to changing this law, some of which were mentioned in section 6 such as *L'Italia sono anch'io*⁴⁵, *Rete G2- Seconde generazioni*⁴⁶, the *Italiani senza cittadinanza*⁴⁷ (Italians without citizenship) movement, *Dalla parte giusta della storia*⁴⁸ (On the right side of history), *Tavolo Cittadinanza* (Citizenship round Table), etc. Several of the interviewees have been and are currently active in these initiatives. Many of them, now professional politicians are familiar with the issue of participation and have a high awareness and knowledge regarding the area in which they work.

One of them says:

There is a citizenship law that dates to the 1990s and does not reflect the needs and structure of today's society, in which there is now a strong representation of young people, from immigrant families, born and raised in Italy.

We even speak of a third generation, yet there is no compatibility between the need for participation expressed by this portion of the population and the official recognition of new Italian citizens, regardless of having formally obtained Italian citizenship. They are still citizens who participate and work in daily life and build the future of Italy and deserve attention from politicians. There have been proposals that have failed and that I think change is urgent.

I think it is vital for there to be active forms of participation and for there to be regulatory adjustments that formally make these people an integral part of the Italian population.

(Int. No. 1, Santa Croce sull'Arno)

8.1.3 Bureaucracy: Optimising and simplifying procedures

The bureaucracy of residence permits, constant renewals, and updates of residence documents are complicated and time-consuming. They often require procuring documents from the country of origin and their possession is critical to the life of a foreign person and their family in Italy. Services are interconnected

⁴³ <https://www.giuseppebrescia.it/ius-scholae-ecco-il-testo-per-una-nuova-legge-sulla-cittadinanza/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/IDEMITALIA>

⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/italiasonoanchio/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.secondegenerazioni.it/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/italianisenzacittadinanza/>

⁴⁸ <https://dallapartegiustadellastoria.it/>

and the lack of a residence permit prohibits access to other services such as health, education, etc. Even when access is granted, the bureaucratic process of documents and forms to be filled out makes access to services very difficult. These are some aspects identified by the interviewees of how bureaucracy in reference to immigrant people makes it extremely difficult to deal with their path to inclusion and how simplification in this regard is needed to make services more accessible to all and avoid discrimination. One respondent recounts how in Emilia-Romagna, in order to have their children participate in summer centers, it is necessary to register them through a bonus and an online application. However, almost 80 percent of parents of children of immigrant origin do not take advantage of summer centers, as they are expensive but above all they are not aware of the existence of this service due to a long and cumbersome document in which personal data entry is required. Not only that, but the existence of this bonus that allows a facilitation for children's enrollment is poorly disclosed and is only in Italian language and present on the website of a few municipalities. The fact that administrations are often unable to engage the migrant population through adequate information is also emphasized.

Another need identified by other interviewees regarding bureaucracy is precisely the need for an integrated system of migration policies. The current system often deals with so many regulations on multiple fronts such as on citizenship, surfacing of irregular flows, protection of human rights for applicants for international protection, etc. The need to create a more organic system is highlighted.

8.1.4 Language inclusiveness and capacity to listen

The language that is used in various media, books, political and public discourse is crucial to building a correct collective imagination when talking about immigration. It is important to overcome the stereotypes of the past and to recognize dignity to the experience and present life of foreign nationals. Language is especially important in school and educational settings. Some of the interviewees who have experience as educators or teachers in various contexts emphasize that there is still a lot to be done on the level of how immigration is communicated even in written texts but not only. On the local policy level, language is also crucial.

One of them relates:

During a research I carried out with some colleagues, looking for documents related to the school environment, we realized that the language of the school is poor in elements that would make it clear that there is a willingness to include diversity in general. In Genoa, starting in the mid-1990s, a very important path was started, which led to the creation of a cultural center that entertained a dialogue between the community, the university, and the regional school office. This was a model for the inclusion of children and adults within the city, offering workshops, spaces for discussion and reflection. This is to come to the point that policy innovation must also correspond to an innovation in the language that is used to describe the intentions and policies that are to be put into practice. Reversing the order of certain words would allow the construction of a new paradigm, capable of giving impetus to the formation of policies that can thus consolidate a living and authentic participation of immigrant citizens. (Int. No.4, Genova)

Another element mentioned is the ability of municipal governments to listen so that they can be able to produce inclusive policies that also meet the needs of immigrant citizens.

"I think that the local migrant communities have not been listened to about their needs, an example of this is the fact that in certain localities there is no ad hoc butcher shop that the Islamic community uses, thus depriving them, particularly during the pandemic, of the possibility of eating meat for quite some time. This example, points to a need of the Islamic community that no one, however, has tried to solve because the local governments basically did not care.

More generally, at the national level, especially during the critical period of the pandemic, we experienced the serious problem that prevented the transfer of corpses to the country of origin, and besides, not all cities have a space reserved for foreign citizens.

Administrators are still quite rigid about meeting certain needs of migrants, let alone promoting real involvement of the immigrant, not just because of immigration issues alone, but because of the mere fact that he or she is not a citizen." (Int. No. 8 Castelfranco Emilia)

8.1.5 Training

All respondents emphasize the importance of training to promote the participation of immigrant citizens on multiple fronts.

Among the suggestions on topics and methodology we can mention the following:

- Training on the importance of exercising the right to vote. One of the interviewees stresses the importance of explaining the value of the right to vote and how it can affect a person's life while also starting from a local administrative dimension.
- Training courses on active citizenship that can combine theoretical aspects of citizenship and concrete ones to demonstrate the results achievable through participation. The importance of informing and raising awareness among foreign communities about the choices and decisions that are made and that directly affect them is emphasized.
- Training on the sphere of constitutional rights and civic education aimed primarily at foreign nationals but also at the entire citizenry especially at a historical stage when they can increase their awareness about the fragility of rights and the threat of their eventual suppression. Offer a reading of national political history, but also bear witness to the political history of the countries of origin of foreign nationals.
- Empowerment, skills assessment and working on one's attitude that can enhance the linguistic and cultural background of people as an added value for the whole community of the area where one works with the aim of generating protagonism and working on identity and self-esteem by making a person feel welcomed and an integral part of the community.
- Political training to give tools on how to communicate engagement, do advocacy and lobbying, question an institution, and so on, to what tools are available to boost participation and learn how to build a winning campaign.

8.2 Willingness of migrants to engage politically

Often the willingness of migrants to participate politically is related to their level of awareness regarding the possibility and opportunity to be active in the political sphere. This is confirmed by all interviewees, and some of them assign this element to a lack of habit of exercising the right to vote in the migrants' country of origin, poor representation in relation to local citizens, lack of information and communication capacity on the part of institutions, and insufficient training that is able to better develop activism in the political sense.

As also mentioned in the previous section, the interviewees come from various cities in Italy and report examples from their reality and community of experience regarding the level of migrants' involvement and participation from a political perspective.

8.2.1 Participation at the city level

One of them residing in the city of Pistoia tells how there is a large community of Albanian citizens in Pistoia, almost 11,000 residents out of about 90,000 citizens. A very large group whose members share membership in the same area of Albania and a community linked by a structured and strong internal social network, which in part has meant that its members are not very active outside their own community. However, the municipal government and local associations have tried to activate the community by promoting public and social participation, but there is still a low level of cooperation due to a sense of detachment and distrust towards institutions, and this results in the absence of participation in social activities. In fact, out of 11,000 community members, only in 20 to 30 are recognized active members among local associations.

In Reggio Emilia, on the other hand, one of the interviewees points out that in the face of the local government's work to promote multiculturally oriented associations, there is medium to high participation level of foreign citizens in the city's social and cultural activities.

8.2.2 Migrant advisory boards and councils

It was mentioned in paragraph 7 the history of Advisory Boards and Migrant's Councils in Italy and some of the interviewees report some insights and reflections due to their personal experience.

In particular, the case of Emilia-Romagna is mentioned, which has initiated projects for the activation of councils at both municipal and regional levels. Initially, Emilia-Romagna also decided to appoint 2-3 migrants, bearers of a different vision within the regional council, but without voting rights. The same figure was also provided in the province of Bologna, where a citizens' council was created, composed of 30 councilors, which met within the provincial council and could give an opinion on the provincial budget. This was a very effective tool, bringing very important and innovative issues to attention, which were followed by a vote. Subsequently, the BODs discussed and approved by the provincial council were forwarded to the president of the province. This path lapsed when the provincial council was disestablished by the time Bologna became a metropolitan city. Today, the Metropolitan Cities Council is represented by the mayors of the metropolitan cities or capital city.

The respondent on this topic shares the following reflection:

"What I think is useful in today's day and age, given that the time of migrant's councils is outdated, are the activation of real councils as bodies of the City Council to which associations sign up to discuss specific issues. This solution in my opinion would be viable for 2 main reasons: first, there are no nominations, and second, it involves associations that are representative of the interests of a sometimes very large group. However, we are aware of the existence of realities that are not represented by associations, but this solution could at the same time spur people to take this step, that is, to associate so that the satisfaction of needs, primarily political, reaches them as well.

In general, the goal to which I refer is to establish an innovative migrant's council that will transform the needs emerging from a portion of the citizenry into bills, services and more. " (Int. No. 3, Bologna)

8.2.3 Informal participation

It is the opinion of most respondents that the model of Advisory Boards and Councils of Foreigners composed only of foreign nationals is an outdated model. All of them agree on the importance of the existence of participatory paths that can involve both migrants and natives at the same time in informal and why not even mono thematic forms of participation.

One of the interviewees suggests as a model of informal participation the creation of a shared table between politicians and representatives of associations who, often more than the administrations themselves, are in direct contact with citizens, thus enabling an interactive and shared dialogue from which interesting proposals can emerge. Such a model, with the presence of politicians would imply a commitment to meeting the needs and what is represented by local communities.

Another proposal concerns the creation of mixed groups in the various neighborhoods, in which foreign and native citizens, and possibly social science scholars, can discuss and pursue together a path of growth that can promote participation.

8.2.4 Participation through digital tools (e-participation)

All interviewees agree that using a digital platform as a space for discussion and participation would be easily accessible to many people. They emphasize, however, that the virtual space should not only be a place in which to denounce and complain, but also a space where activism can be done, and positive energy can be

transmitted through a path of activation. To be effective, virtual work must also be juxtaposed with real, concrete work where people are engaged and involved as bearers and carriers of demands and needs.

One of the interviewees explains this point as follows:

"Online participation is a way to gather and raise awareness of more and more people. The platform alone is not enough, but together with all the opportunities it can certainly work. This, in fact, also allows to find varieties of participation and engagement, but especially drawing this diversity from the most sensitive individuals, such as the younger generation who can act as a bridge to the rest of the community. " (Int. No. 5 San Pietro Terme)

Respondents agree that online participation is a tool that can get more feedback and use from young people and second generations. Conversely, those of a certain age want to be physically present and thus have more physical contact with those who represent them, especially if language and digital skills difficulties are present. In general, people of a certain age, e.g., parents, need support to be able to combine participation and use of the web platform. Respondents recommend providing technical help.

8.3 Barriers to participation

8.3.1 Meeting key needs

All interviewees point out that participation in many cases can be considered a privilege especially for those immigrants who find themselves in specific situations of stay and encounter various kinds of limitations and do not have even the main basic human rights such as health, study, etc.

One of the interviewees recounts how in her work she has heard the story many migrant women who have had great difficulty in carrying a pregnancy to term because of the lack of information about access to certain services. Because of this, these women felt left alone, deprived of adequate medical care.

In the area of health, another respondent highlights a case of discrimination involving those with study permits, for whom access to public health services is not included but this burden falls on the shoulders of foreign students.

A final interviewee from Bologna, on the other hand, recounts how immigrants have great difficulty in finding housing and often face situations of discrimination from tenants who do not want to grant rent even migrant families with good incomes. Such a situation is reported by others, and the situation is so difficult that they feel it is easier for them to buy a house rather than look for rent, but this is of course very difficult for those who have recently arrived in Italy.

8.3.2 Formal and institutional obstacles

A first obvious obstacle that all interviewees identify regarding political participation is related precisely to the oft-mentioned recognition of rights. The absence of the right to vote is the first step and affects in a negative way people's sense of belonging to the territory by stifling their voices. On the other hand, however, they agree that even if the right to vote were to be recognized, the social work to be done on raising awareness would still be great because electoral abstentionism touches everyone and is a global phenomenon.

Still on this level, one of the interviewees explains how there is also often a lack of feedback from public institutions for those who need adequate help and support. Specifically, she recounts the example of Pistoia where the immigration office was closed in 2017, offloading this responsibility, costs, and burdens onto the shoulders of many immigrant families who found themselves paying unsustainable costs just, for example, to be able to send an email to their country's embassy or even just to be able to renew their passport. In addition, she reports that there is also a lack of diplomatic support in general.

Another example comes from Genoa, where one of the interviewees reports that the URP (Citizen Relations Office) has been closed in some town halls. The absence of this channel, he says, ends up stifling a dialogue. **"For this reason," he continues, "I think it is essential to revive these kinds of tools, either by strengthening the Citizen Relations Offices or still renewing the ones that are already there. "**
(Int. No.4, Genova)

8.3.3 Barriers to the participation of migrant women

When questioned about the level of participation of immigrant women, participants reported various difficulties affecting the status of immigrant women.

The obstacles according to them are the following:

- Women are more prone to discrimination for various reasons such as gender factor, origin, but also strictly cultural factors such as the disadvantage of Muslim women who wear the veil. It is possible to observe from the point of representativeness that a person who comes from another country, even if she was born and raised in Italy, is not considered capable of being able to represent the expectations of the community. Not only that, this condition, however, may be exacerbated just by the mere fact of being a woman, adding further degree of negativity to what may be the feeling to the political representative.
One of the interviewees recounts her experience as a candidate in municipal elections where she often found herself bringing her infant daughter along during the campaign. **"I experienced the unpleasant feeling of being judged and frowned upon for merely bringing my daughter, who was only a few months old, to meetings. I later realized that when I was not bringing my daughter to work, people were more willing to interact with me and listen to me. In short, the message I got was that if I want to engage in politics, I cannot do it with my daughter in my arms. "**
(Int. No. 2, Pistoia)
- The existence of occupational barriers. Companies today are still not ready to welcome diversity into the workplace. Unemployment is not conducive to participation.
- Recognition of educational qualifications. Many women who in their countries of origin held high professional roles, in Italy suffer occupational segregation that leads some nationalities to be relegated to certain work sectors such as care work or domestic work.
- Sometimes, the migrant community they belong can take on negative connotations for a woman, especially if the community is tied to cultural aspects that can shrink her space for activity. For example, playing sports and taking care of one's body or even using means of transportation such as a motorbike, all can be contestable factors in some communities. In fact, these sort of "escaping" from culturally acceptable patterns tend to make the community feel like a "prison," so it is important to work on smoothing out the corners and allowing them to emerge from a safe but highly limiting shell.

8.4 Conclusions and recommendations

When talking about participation, the regulatory aspect cannot be ignored. All interviewees repeatedly stress the urgency that migrants feel in Italy for the amendment of the citizenship law and the introduction of the right to vote for long-term residents. Without these changes, it is difficult to talk about real political participation. Despite this, among the second generation in recent years there have been many candidates at the city hall and municipal level and many cities now have a councilor or councilwoman with a migrant background. For several cities such as Genoa, Turin, etc. that have had a right-wing city government and anti-immigrant policy for many years, a counselor with a foreign background is a first.

All of them, (7 of the interviewees are political representatives) implement or plan to activate city or migrant councils, innovating their model, within their area. They are familiar with the history of city and/or regional councils of migrants in Italy and agree that this chapter would seem to be over, but the model should be innovated. This is because the migration landscape in recent years has changed and there is a need to invest in activation and participation pathways for inclusion and insertion on multiple fronts of newcomers.

On the other hand, there is a strong protagonism of the second generation who have become spokesmen of instances, have founded associations and movements, and are extensively trained on the mechanisms of participation of migrants. Each of the interviewees is familiar with the migratory composition of his or her city, and they all stress the importance of getting immigrants to participate in policies that directly affect them. They say that the work to be done is two-sided in the sense that there is a need to sensitize administrations in finding more effective tools to inform and involve foreign citizens. Participation begins with information about possibilities and opportunities, and there is a need for higher attention to the way in which communication is done. In addition, a need to innovate the mechanisms of participation at the local level is also highlighted, the very systems of advisory boards which is a mechanism of participation that still exists.

Many of the interviewees agree that the most effective way to talk about participation today is to do it in a transversal way by treating all foreigners as citizens who can also have a say on issues beyond immigration alone but with their specific needs in mind.

Some recommendations collected from respondents are the following:

- Support and promote processes of representation. Foreign nationals need role models that are more than just active members of a political party, but they need representatives with a migrant background. Representation processes often strengthen community-government dialogue.
- Create spaces and channels of access to promote the participation of new generations to enable to participate and share their demands.
- Beware of the invisible. In Italy, regularization of undocumented immigrants is carried out through a decree that provides an amnesty which comes as a concession, points out one of the interviewees. More programmatic policies are needed to this regard.
- Improving immigration policies requires social and cultural work to raise awareness of the added value that migrant citizens bring to society in various spheres (schooling, training, work, welfare, tourism, etc.). From a point of view of employment, for example, there are many young people who, having graduated from Italian universities, currently represent the new ruling class (engineers, nurses, lawyers, doctors and so on), and Italy must take note of this, paying particular attention to the recipients of these policies, namely those who are directly involved and immersed in the problems of the "administrative cage" and within which migrants have to move in order to be recognized at the formal level and beyond.
- Develop policies and processes targeting migrant women by promoting their empowerment, autonomy, and awareness of their own value and abilities.
- Greater focus on facilitating access to services and meeting migrant's main needs (health, schooling, residence permits, etc.)
- In policymaking, more attention in promoting cultural discovery is requested. One respondent points out that foreign-born citizens are less considered when it comes to cultural activities, but even they themselves undervalue themselves simply because they believe that some cultural offerings are reserved exclusively for natives.

III. Evaluation of the Focus Group Discussions

9. Focus groups with migrant communities in Empoli.

For the purpose of this research, 3 Focus Groups were conducted with representatives of migrant associations of the Municipality of Empoli, active members in the Council of Migrants which was active until 2013 and local political representatives. The objective of the discussion was to analyze the history of participation of migrants in the city of Empoli, think of new ways to involve migrant citizens, young people and second generations, think about current needs, pay special attention to the needs of migrant women. The focus groups, carried out in June and July 2022, had a total of 19 participants who were selected taking into consideration their level of active participation in the city of Empoli. All focus groups were held in person. Among the participants 4 were women aged 20-50 and 15 men aged 20-60.

9.1 Motivation for participation and its effectiveness.

Empoli is a small municipality of Tuscany with 7890 foreign nationals representing 16.2% of the resident population. The municipality for several years now, no longer has an immigration office, but such services are outsourced to other associations and cooperatives in the area such as *“La Società della Salute Empolese Valdarno Valdelsa”*, *“Associazione Arturo”*, etc., which in addition to services also offer training courses, Italian language for foreigners and others.

Regarding migrant associations operating at the local level, the historical ones reflect the larger communities in the area such as Senegalese, Filipino, Albanian, and so on.

What the participants testify to and emerges from the discussion is that communication or relationship with the city government often happens through the association or community representative and that community associations have not evolved over the years at the level of expertise but have remained at the level of self-financing.

That said, the role they play in the community they belong where these associations organize social and cultural events for their members, provide information about services, etc. should not be underestimated. One of the participants recounts how in these pandemic years, so many families in economic hardship were unable to find information on how to apply for financial aid, manage their children's online education, etc. so the association became a point of reference to make up for these shortcomings.

Regarding the level of participation within the associations they mention that it is varied and that after the pandemic and lockdown period there is a greater difficulty for people to resume relationships and activate. Despite this, these associations still manage to organize socializing moments for their members even on national or religious holidays, such as on Eid Al Fitr for Muslims, the independence holiday of their home country, beauty contests for women, and traditional festivals to celebrate their culture.

9.1.1 Youth involvement

Additional concern for participants, reported particularly by members of the Senegalese community, is the low involvement of second-generation youth. The hurdle for them to access and engage in politics seems insurmountable because they lack citizenship. In fact, this appeal is echoed by the youngest member of the community, a university student and worker, who claims to have many of the rights proper to a citizen recognized. However, despite his 13 years of schooling, he is not granted the right to exercise his right to vote, denouncing in his view the existence of an imbalance in the system of citizenship recognition. The same participant points out that many other young people like him are restricted in their right to study, as they cannot study abroad because they are tied to their residence permit and its renewal, and in his case, he cannot participate in certain public competitions in Italy to make his professional dream come true.

Beyond the documentary aspect, other members report difficulties in involving their children in association activities or in social work in general because after finishing their studies, many of them emigrate to other European countries to seek work and build a better future for themselves. For those who instead decide to stay in Italy, their main focus is finding a job.

9.1.2 Involvement of women

Unlike the interviewees, the participants in the focus groups were mostly male.

When questioned as to why they think women do not participate, they put forth a multiplicity of reasons. In the area of Empoli and neighboring municipalities, most migrant women work as street vendors. They have greater language difficulties as they are often unable to participate in training courses due to childcare and household care in addition to the jobs they procure. This was particularly highlighted by members of the Senegalese community who also point out the absence of services in the target area referred to women.

As for the Filipino community, greater participation of women in the association's cultural activities is reported. For example, the association involved organizes an annual beauty pageant with a public event open to the entire citizenry where there is a high involvement of women of the community. Even their members report, however, difficulties of sustained and continuous commitment precisely because women are very busy with work, often more having than one job and engaged in jobs that fall under the sphere of personal care. They also highlight language difficulties that make it more difficult to become active outside the association.

9.1.3 Online participation platforms.

Almost all first-generation participants report training needs on digital skills for both them and the women in their community. They see the use of digital tools to send their petitions as difficult and impersonal. However, they agree that it can be one more tool to complement other tools and pathways however they feel the need for support in this regard. They agree that young people are more likely to use such tools as in most cases they were educated in Italy, speak the language better and have a higher level of schooling.

9.2 Inclusion of migrants' voices in the decision-making process

9.2.1 The migrants' point of view.

Several of the participants are aware of the existence of the ex -Migrant's Council in Empoli. One of them served as its vice president. It has been 9 years since the last council, and participants report that in fact already since its instauration the council has not functioned. It was a considerable commitment for its participants and unpaid, with meetings taking place in the evening hours. Its functioning governed by regulations issued by the municipality which are still in force, provided for demanding procedures regarding decision-making, elections, etc. When questioned about the willingness to participate in joint tables or new avenues to bring their demands to the municipal administration and have a voice on local policies that directly affect them some showed interest and willingness stressing, however, the importance of activating the youth and that participation in this initiative should be aimed at all members of the community, as each must be heard and taken into consideration. Other participants, particularly from the Filipino community show interest but report difficulty in participating due to lack of time cause of onerous work commitments.

9.2.2 The views of political representatives

The members of the municipal administration of Empoli who participated in the focus groups express the willingness and desire of the administration in establishing an ongoing dialogue with foreign citizens residing in the territory. During a focus group dedicated to them, there was an opportunity to analyze the previous experiences of the Council of Migrants and to analyze in detail the regulations still in place.

There is a vision within the administration and a desire to innovate the model of the Migrant's Council and through the activities of this project in which the municipality is a partner, to co-design together with the members of the migrant community of Empoli a participatory path that is sustainable and long lasting.

9.3 Barriers to participation

9.3.1 Formal obstacles.

Most of the participants emphasize of how after years of participating in projects, initiatives, and dialogue with the municipal administration they are still not Italian citizens, much less their children. They, too, like the respondents mentioned in paragraph 8, point the need for new laws, amendment of the current ones, and the allocation of the right to vote in order to have a say in choosing their political representatives.

They reiterate that their social engagement will continue to exist but there is a need for progress and evolution in their legal status.

9.3.2 Training needs

Participants report that to activate migrants and make them participate more actively on more fronts there is a need for training. Starting with language courses for which participants report an insufficiency in the city of Empoli, other training needs are also identified particularly of a professional nature aimed at women such as, in the hotel industry or other sectors that can provide more job opportunities and a better psycho-physical condition without seeing themselves obliged to continuous and long journeys around the region. They also report the need for support and courses in the IT and digital sphere, courses on bureaucratic aspects related to residence permits and citizenship, etc.

9.3.3 Precarious condition

The training mentioned above, is considered a precondition for finding satisfactory employment to provide for the needs of their families but it is also a prerequisite for participation. In fact, participants report that it is very difficult for them to become politically engaged when they are living in a situation of hardship and cannot even provide for their basic needs. Many of the Senegalese community members recount that the area offers few job opportunities, and that some of them only after years of precariousness have managed to find a job with a regular contract. They do not feel supported and do not feel that they can rely on the administration in case of need, but many issues they solve with the support of other members of their community.

9.4 Conclusions and recommendations

What can be seen from what emerged from the focus groups is that the pandemic left a bitter feeling in the lives of these people who during these years more than ever felt abandoned and no tools to cope with economic difficulties, bureaucracies, digitization of services, the closing of offices where they could no longer go to attendance, not being able to bring the corpses of their loved ones to their home country, not being supported in applying for housing, being discriminated against in seeking housing, etc.

What emerges is that during these very difficult years the association and their community has been their only reference and support in dealing with these problems.

Complete informational darkness about services and subsidy possibilities for families in need has created even more of a mechanism of self-sufficiency of these communities that continue to solve everything internally.

On the other hand, however, awareness about the need for dialogue and joint work with the city administration to raise awareness and create more support for migrant citizens has increased, especially for their representatives.

Participants are convinced of the importance of effective dialogue mechanisms with the city administration and the need to involve and activate as many members as possible. As also emphasized in the paragraphs above, participation is a difficult process, requiring persistence, perseverance, but above all, vision. Higher awareness is needed on the importance of the presence of migrants in the territories, recognizing them as citizens and bearers of economic, social and cultural value.

Lastly, participants stress the importance of involving the younger generation, who most need reference points and belonging and who can bring informed points of view on all issues.

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Appendix: List of interviews and focus groups conducted

Interview 1: Arturo Association - Santa Croce sull'Arno

Interview 2: Municipal election candidate, ICSE&Co Association - Pistoia

Interview 3: City councilor, Former president Next Generation association - Bologna

Interview 4: City Councilor, CONNGI President - Genoa

Interview 5: City Councilwoman - San Pietro Terme

Interview 6: City Councilman - Quarrata

Interview 7: City Councilwoman - Reggio Emilia

Interview 8: Former - city councilwoman - Castelfranco Emilia

Interview 9 : Mbolo Association - Empoli

Interview 10: Philippine Community Tuscany - Empoli

Focus Group

Focus group 1: Mbolo Association , Arturo Association

Focus group 2: Philippine Community Tuscany

Focus group 3: Representatives of the Municipality of Empoli.



2022
EMVI

**Empowering Migrants
Voices on Inclusion Policies**

WP2: National Reports



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EMVI - Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies

WP2: National Report Slovenia* July 2022

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I. Participation and Integration Structures in Slovenia

1. Facts and Figures

In the current year, 2,106,215 inhabitants live in Slovenia, of which 1,057,473 are men and 1,048,742 are women. The share of foreign citizens in Slovenia is 8.3% of the total population, which represents 174,340 people, namely 112,217 men and 62,123 women. Slovenia is one of the ageing societies—the natural increase in population growth has been negative every year from 2017 onwards, as more people die each year than are born. On 1 April 2022, Slovenia had 965 inhabitants less than three months earlier. In the first quarter of the current year, the number of Slovenian citizens decreased by 2,900, while the number of foreigners increased by 1,900. Of all foreigners, the largest number of foreigners in Slovenia are citizens of the former Yugoslavia (137,484), followed by citizens of the European Union (21,192), and the least number of citizens of all other countries (13,766) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022). Here, the migrant population in Slovenia is understood as people who have migrated from other countries, including asylum seekers, refugees (people who gained international or subsidiary protection), as well as third-country nationals. Most of them are non-EU and come from the former Yugoslavia's successor states. Croatia's status changed from third-country to EU Member State in 2013. As for the statistical composition of the female migrant population in Slovenia, it follows the general trend, as the majority are classified as third-country nationals and come from neighbouring Western Balkans, much smaller numbers come from the EU, and a tiny population are refugees. (Bajt and Frelj, 2022)

| Country of origin | Number |
|------------------------|--------|
| Albania | 156 |
| Austria | 486 |
| Belgium | 104 |
| Belarus | 182 |
| Bulgaria | 3,281 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 79,616 |
| Cyprus | 16 |
| The Czech Republic | 202 |
| Montenegro | 928 |
| Denmark | 30 |
| Estonia | 30 |
| Finland | 41 |
| France | 316 |
| Greece | 72 |
| Croatia | 10,234 |
| Ireland | 64 |
| Iceland | 7 |
| Italy | 2,766 |
| Kosovo | 22,386 |
| Latvia | 55 |
| Liechtenstein | 2 |
| Lithuania | 44 |
| Luxembourg | 4 |
| Hungary | 666 |
| Malta | 10 |



| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Moldova, Republic of | 233 |
| Monaco | 1 |
| Germany | 984 |
| The Netherlands | 255 |
| Norway | 23 |
| Poland | 279 |
| Portugal | 71 |
| Romania | 412 |
| Russian Federation | 3,519 |
| San Marino | 1 |
| North Macedonia | 14,048 |
| Slovak Republic | 472 |
| Serbia | 17,257 |
| Spain | 150 |
| Sweden | 76 |
| Switzerland | 103 |
| Ukraine | 2.397 |
| United Kingdom | 692 |
| Algeria | 25 |
| Angola | 1 |
| Benin | 1 |
| Botswana | 1 |
| Burkina Faso | 6 |
| Chad | 3 |
| Egypt | 111 |
| Eritrea | 87 |
| Ethiopia | 7 |
| Gabon | 1 |
| The Gambia | 27 |
| Ghana | 21 |
| Guinea | 3 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 2 |
| South Africa | 55 |
| Cameroon | 18 |
| Kenya | 18 |
| Comoros | 1 |
| Congo, the Democratic Republic of the | 10 |
| Liberia | 1 |
| Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | 12 |
| Madagascar | 11 |
| Malawi | 1 |
| Mali | 3 |
| Morocco | 34 |
| Mauritius | 4 |
| Mozambique | 3 |
| Namibia | 1 |
| Nigeria | 76 |
| Rwanda | 4 |
| Senegal | 2 |
| Sierra Leone | 2 |



| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Côte d'Ivoire | 3 |
| Somalia | 20 |
| Sudan | 3 |
| Tanzania, United Republic of | 3 |
| Tunisia | 70 |
| Uganda | 4 |
| Zambia | 4 |
| Cape Verde | 2 |
| Zimbabwe | 6 |
| Argentina | 52 |
| Barbados | 1 |
| Belize | 1 |
| Bolivia, Plurinational State of | 3 |
| Brazil | 158 |
| Chile | 17 |
| Dominican Republic | 165 |
| Ecuador | 9 |
| Guyana | 1 |
| Guatemala | 5 |
| Haiti | 3 |
| Honduras | 2 |
| Jamaica | 5 |
| Colombia | 50 |
| Costa Rica | 10 |
| Cuba | 71 |
| Mexico | 63 |
| Nicaragua | 4 |
| Panama | 3 |
| Paraguay | 3 |
| Peru | 37 |
| Saint Kitts and Nevis | 1 |
| St Lucia | 2 |
| El Salvador | 2 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 5 |
| Uruguay | 1 |
| Venezuela, the Bolivarian Republic of | 45 |
| Canada | 81 |
| United States | 437 |
| Afghanistan | 56 |
| Armenia | 9 |
| Azerbaijan | 23 |
| Bangladesh | 40 |
| Philippines | 161 |
| Georgia | 12 |
| Hong Kong | 5 |
| India | 275 |
| Indonesia | 55 |
| Iraq | 80 |
| Iran, the Islamic Republic of | 201 |
| Israel | 63 |



| | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Japan | 87 |
| Yemen | 4 |
| Jordan | 25 |
| Cambodia | 2 |
| Kazakhstan | 194 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 12 |
| China | 1,382 |
| Korea, Republic of | 43 |
| Kuwait | 1 |
| Lao People's Democratic Republic | 3 |
| Lebanon | 20 |
| Maldives | 11 |
| Malaysia | 6 |
| Myanmar | 1 |
| Mongolia | 3 |
| Nepal | 21 |
| Oman | 1 |
| Pakistan | 41 |
| Palestinian Territory, Occupied | 29 |
| Saudi Arabia | 5 |
| Singapore | 4 |
| The Syrian Arab Republic | 271 |
| Sri Lanka | 16 |
| Tajikistan | 3 |
| Thailand | 327 |
| Taiwan, Province of China | 23 |
| Türkiye | 406 |
| Turkmenistan | 2 |
| Uzbekistan | 26 |
| Vietnam | 22 |
| Australia | 82 |
| Fiji | 2 |
| New Zealand | 18 |
| Papua New Guinea | 2 |
| Solomon Islands | 1 |

Foreign citizens in Slovenia in 2021

(Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022)

The main reasons for migration in Slovenia are work, family reunification, studies, other reasons, a family member of a Slovenian citizen, and a family member of an EU citizen. Like other EU countries, Slovenia is substituting its labour deficit with migrant workers due to the declining number of people in employment. Yet, state immigration policies have long remained embedded in understanding Slovenia as a transit country (Bajt and Pajnik 2014; Bajt and Frelih 2019), and migrant integration is not deemed a policy priority.

In August 2022, 910 persons in Slovenia had recognised international protection, but 159 of them lived abroad, so 751 refugees currently live in Slovenia, mainly from Syria, Ukraine, Eritrea, Iran, and the former Yugoslavia. There are also some from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Palestine, the Russian Federation, and least from Sudan, DR Congo, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Yemen, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Albania, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (Office for the Support and Integration

of Migrants, 2022) Even otherwise, Slovenia is quite restrictive in terms of granting international protection, as shown in the table below.

| Year | Asylum proposals | Approved statuses |
|------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1995 | 6 | 2 |
| 1996 | 35 | 0 |
| 1997 | 72 | 0 |
| 1998 | 337 | 1 |
| 1999 | 744 | 0 |
| 2000 | 9244 | 11 |
| 2001 | 0 | 25 |
| 2002 | 640 | 3 |
| 2003 | 1101 | 37 |
| 2004 | 1208 | 39 |
| 2005 | 1674 | 26 |
| 2006 | 579 | 9 |
| 2007 | 434 | 9 |
| 2008 | 260 | 4 |
| 2009 | 202 | 20 |
| 2010 | 246 | 23 |
| 2011 | 357 | 24 |
| 2012 | 304 | 34 |
| 2013 | 272 | 37 |
| 2014 | 385 | 44 |
| 2015 | 277 | 46 |
| 2016 | 1308 | 170 |
| 2017 | 2442 | 152 |
| 2018 | 2868 | 104 |
| 2019 | 3821 | 88 |
| 2020 | 3548 | 83 |
| 2021 | 5301 | 19 |

Proposed and approved international protection statuses in Slovenia in the years 1995–2021
(Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, 2022)

According to the interviewees' experiences and corroborated by the experts' advocacy work with migrants, bureaucratic matters are problematic in Slovenia. This also involves getting correct and quick information regarding various issues. Access to services is particularly difficult in smaller towns and villages (or in places where there are considered to be no immigrants). Also, there is a lack of services or support that would include migrant women in the needs assessment process. The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the integration processes of migrants in Slovenia has been extremely negative, especially for female migrants. Even though the latest analyses show how education services—particularly language courses—were the most likely type of service to be moved online across all EU countries (EWSI 2022), the Slovenian reality was that most language courses for foreign nationals were stalled or even cancelled, resulting in a massive backlog in terms of accessibility. (Bajt and Frelih, 2022)

2. Main Official Institutions in the Country responsible for Migrant Integration

Within the Ministry of the Interior, the Directorate for Migration operates, whose task is to plan and implement migration policy, which means regulating the field of regular migration, decision-making procedures on international protection and integration of foreigners and persons with recognised international protection. Under the Directorate operate Migration Policy and Legislation Division, International Protection Procedures Division and Regular Migration Procedures Division. The Directorate also prepares and coordinates proposals for measures for the implementation of migration policy and normative acts, which are the basis for the work and decisions of the government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants.

Established in 2017, the Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants is taking over part of the responsibilities that were previously under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, such as providing asylum seekers accommodation, support and psychosocial assistance and offering integration support to persons granted international protection, while devising policies and administrative procedures for obtaining the status of international protection remain under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Asylum seekers are received by the Reception and Support Division, which provides accommodation at the Asylum Centre or one of its units. Through different programmes at the Asylum Centre, asylum seekers may exercise their rights per the applicable legislation. Following the successful completion of the procedure, persons granted international protection are provided assistance through the Integration Division to better integrate into Slovenian society. Each person granted protected status is provided accommodation at one of the integration houses and assigned an integration counsellor, who helps devise a personal integration plan. To ensure faster integration, persons under international protection may participate in various programmes, among which the most important is a Slovenian language course. Despite its broad name, the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants is only responsible for asylum seekers and people with the recognised status of international (refugee or subsidiary) protection.

The vast majority of foreigners in Slovenia, however, are not asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Hence, integration measures in this regard remain without a proper implementation. In addition, local communities lack the formal power to implement integration policy, even though it is in actuality conducted at the local community level and sustained by various non-governmental sector programmes and short-term projects (Ladić et al., 2020).

The Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for National Minorities is an independent governmental professional service that globally monitors the implementation of constitutional and legal provisions relating to the special rights of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national minorities and the position and special rights of the Roma community in Slovenia. The implementation of constitutional and legal provisions relating to individual areas is monitored by the competent national authorities or the authorities of self-governing local communities. The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia affords special rights only to the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national minorities in Slovenia, which are directly represented in the representative bodies of local self-government and in the National Assembly (parliament). The Roma community is also recognised a special status regulated by a special law. But the largest community of the ex-Yugoslav members does not have this status.

The only government agency that deals with the ex-Yugoslav minority is the Cultural Diversity and Human Rights Service at the Ministry of Culture, which ensures that rights are realised in a considered and coordinated manner in various areas, from the protection of cultural heritage through the media and concern for language policy to creativity. Therefore, they monitor the situation, consult with stakeholders and analyse the needs of vulnerable social groups, especially ethnic communities and the disabled. They propose legislative and other measures enabling these communities to preserve and develop their own cultures and allowing everyone access to the rich treasury of all kinds of cultures. They financially support cultural projects enabling social integration and social coexistence. Together with other ministries, they represent the Republic of Slovenia in international institutions that ensure the realisation of human rights and participate in creating special measures that strengthen intercultural dialogue.

3. Main Legal Framework in the Country responsible for Migrant Integration

The Constitution of RS defines the right to asylum, but the institute is further defined by the 2016 International Protection Act. With the latter, the fundamental principles and guarantees in international protection procedures, the procedure for recognition, extension and withdrawal of international protection, the duration and substance of international protection, and the scope of rights and duties of applicants for international protection and persons granted international protection are determined. The law was amended in March 2021 so that the standards and rights of asylum seekers and persons with recognised international protection were lowered. As the Ombudsperson also stressed, “some changes raise questions about their impact on the fairness of procedures and their constitutionality and compliance with EU legislation and international law” (2021: 18). The first negative change in the law is the shortening of the integration period from three to two years, which means that system support for integration is now only guaranteed for two more years after status recognition. The new amendment also introduces a so-called “integration activities agreement”, which the beneficiary must conclude with the Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants within one month after the recognition of the status (Article 90), which shows the state’s patronising attitude towards individuals with recognised international protection. This is another measure from above that places persons with recognised international protection in a subordinate position. If a person with recognised international protection signs this contract, they have access to the rights that should be guaranteed to every person with recognised international protection, regardless of such conditionality. Indeed, integration should be an inclusive two-way process, not a contractual obligation. (Ladić et al., 2022) Another damaging amendment to the law introduces restrictions on the free movement of asylum seekers (Article 78), who can only move freely within the municipality where they are accommodated. (Ladić et al., 2022) Among the most problematic changes is the newly introduced obligation of legal advisers (lawyers) who represent asylum seekers to disclose personal information about their clients to the Ministry of the Interior, under the threat that they will not be allowed to represent asylum seekers in the future. (Ladić et al., 2022)

The basic framework for migration and integration policies in Slovenia is also provided in the 2011 Foreigners Act, which regulates permission to stay by distinguishing between temporary and permanent residence status. The law further prescribes the conditions and methods of entry, exit and stay of foreigners in the Republic of Slovenia. In 2017, the law was amended to allow restrictions on the right to asylum. Indeed, the National Assembly (parliament) could vote on stopping access to the asylum procedure if migration posed a “threat to public order and internal security in the Republic of Slovenia”. These provisions were later declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia and annulled. However, the government coalition, which at that time had a majority in the National Assembly, contrary to the decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia,



reintroduced a similar option in 2021 with amendments in the case of a “complex crisis in the field of migration” (Articles 10a and 10b), which would allow the National Assembly to temporarily suspend the implementation of the law and limit access to asylum. (Ladić et al., 2022) The amended Foreigners Act (Article 47) also introduces the passing of the Slovenian language exam at entry-level A1 as a condition for extending the residence permit of family members of third-country nationals in general, which also affects family members of persons with recognised international protection if they fail to initiate the family reunification process under more lenient conditions (within 90 days of status recognition). In addition, the amended law introduces a new condition for obtaining permanent residence status, i.e. passing the test of knowledge of the Slovenian language at level A2. This is a significant change for persons with subsidiary protection and their family members who apply for a permanent residence permit after five years of residence in Slovenia. (Ladić et al., 2022)

The 2005 Temporary Protection of Displaced Persons Act regulates the introduction, duration and termination of temporary protection of displaced persons, the conditions and procedures for obtaining and terminating temporary protection, and the rights and obligations of persons with temporary protection.

Important for the context of the political participation of migrants is the fact that in 2002, amendments to the 1993 Local Elections Act and the 1994 Political Parties Act entered into force. The first, as the most important innovation, introduces the right to vote in local elections also for foreigners with permanent residence (but not for foreigners with temporary residence or asylum seekers), while the second allows EU citizens to become members of Slovenian political parties (but not for all other foreign citizens, e.g. to ex-Yugoslav citizens, of whom there are the most in Slovenia).

4. Main Policies in the Country Responsible for Migration Integration

The field of integration in Slovenia is defined in the Strategy on Migration adopted in July 2019, where integration is one of its six pillars. (Ministry of the Interior, 2019) Previously, some aspects of integration were defined in the Decree on Aliens Integration, which was in force in 2008–2013 (supplemented in 2011) and determined the methods and conditions for the inclusion of foreigners who have a residence permit in Slovenia in cultural, economic and social life, such as: learning the Slovenian language and familiarising themselves with Slovenian history, culture and the constitutional system; inclusion in the educational system for obtaining a publicly valid education and in procedures for obtaining certificates of national professional qualification; promotion of mutual knowledge and understanding with Slovenian citizens; information regarding their integration into Slovenian society, especially regarding their rights and duties, employment opportunities, education and personal development. The 2002 Resolution on Immigration Policy confirmed and supplemented the principles, goals and foundations of the Resolution on the Immigration Policy of the Republic of Slovenia, with an emphasis on measures for its implementation in the context of modern migration movements and new approaches to the development of the European Union's common migration and asylum policy. The Government also briefly described its integration policy on the website of the Ministry of the Interior, with objectives based on the EU's Common Basic Principles, placing emphasis on the two-way dynamic of integration. The integration pillar of the 2019 Strategy on Migration underlines the importance of a holistic approach: cooperation and complementarity of all actors in formulating and implementing policies and practices. Integration is, therefore, formally recognised as a complex process involving various fields, including protection against all forms of discrimination. It appears, however, that the question of integration is frequently reduced to learning the host country's language, which reveals an understanding of integration as only the immigrants' responsibility (Jalušič and Bajt, 2020).

In Slovenia, the field of migration, including integration, is entirely within the competence of the state, and this is primarily how the local authorities see it. The state does not transfer integration obligations to local communities, although it is evident that integration takes place at the local level. However, the Strategy states: "A large part of social and cultural integration belongs to the areas that should be regulated at the local level. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilise personnel resources also at the local level and to consider the transfer of powers and resources for certain integration activities to the local level" (Ministry of the Interior, 2019: 39). Some local authorities carry out some activities on their own initiative or on the initiative of non-governmental organisations, but these activities are minimal and are not necessarily aimed at supporting the integration of persons with recognised international protection, but at migrants in general. The City of Ljubljana, for example, provides free premises for some non-governmental organisations (for example, Slovenian Philanthropy, which runs a day centre for refugees). On the other hand, in some local communities, there is a lot of resistance and xenophobia against migrants in general and refugees in particular. The strategy states: "It is necessary to strengthen the integration programmes of migrants and the majority population. Programmes of intercultural centres should be implemented in various Slovenian places and day centres for migrants should be established, which would give especially vulnerable individuals the possibility of information and counselling as well as participation in various group activities." (Ministry of the Interior, 2019: 43) However, this is not the case in most cases. (Ladić et al., 2022)

As stated in the 2020 Report on the work of the Migration Directorate (Ministry of the Interior, 2021: 30), in 2020, projects were implemented to organise centres of intercultural dialogue in Koper, Maribor and Velenje, and for the implementation of these projects the amount of EUR 59,496.92 was spent: “The key goals of the project are: to create an aware and informed environment that will accept and encourage the integration of foreigners into Slovenian society, offering assistance in the integration of foreigners (applicants for international protection; persons who have already obtained it, and citizens of third countries) into the local environment, activating and connecting the local population, which is ready to participate in creating an environment open to the integration of foreigners, and raising awareness among the local population about integration as a two-way process” (ibid.). Although this sounds adequate in theory, in reality, a significant gap exists between theory and practice (both nationally and locally). There is no such body, neither at the national nor the local level, which would also include persons with recognised international protection and consult with them regarding issues related to their integration. (Ladić et al., 2022)

Another substantive gap between theory and practice can be observed if the fieldwork data is compared with the strategy statements: “It is necessary to study the possible forms and methods of participation of migrants both in the formulation of the integration policy and in the implementation of integration activities, as it will be possible to detect actual needs and simultaneously increase the motivation to participate in activities, which will lead to greater efficiency in the implementation of integration measures. It is necessary to encourage the self-organisation of persons with international protection to defend and represent their rights and the possibility of active inclusion in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of integration policies and measures. Other immigrants are mostly already organised within associations. Following the example of the Council for the Integration of Foreigners, which operates at the national level, it is necessary to consider a similar form of body that would operate at the local level to identify integration problems, find appropriate solutions and preparing additional integration activities.” (Ministry of the Interior, 2019: 43) However, in practice, this encouragement is yet to materialise, and at most, migrants are forlorn, isolated, underrepresented and disorganised. (Ladić et al., 2022)

Slovenia introduced its first and current integration programme in 2008 called Initial Integration of Immigrants. It is a free programme for learning the Slovenian language, including learning about Slovenian society. The free and optional programme is intended for third-country nationals. The programme focuses on Slovene history, culture and constitution, and includes a mutual introduction course between foreigners and Slovene citizens. It provides language courses and civic education, but does not offer vocational training. Third-country nationals can follow 180-, 120- or 60-hour language courses, depending on the type of permits they hold and the duration of their stay before their enrolment.

For refugees, the Slovenian language course is 300 hours which is obligatory and which can be prolonged for 100 more hours in the event of 80% attendance. A variety of institutions provides the classes, usually NGOs, which are selected through a tendering procedure every two years. Within this programme, refugees get some basic information about Slovenian society carried out by NGOs.

For persons relocated to the Republic of Slovenia based on the annual quota, an orientation programme is organised aimed at learning the basics of the Slovenian language, getting to know the institutions and practical knowledge of everyday life in the Republic of Slovenia. Each individual is involved in the programme for 3 months. Similarly, basic integration support for displaced persons from Ukraine with temporary protection in Slovenia is organised and includes information on the rights and duties of persons with temporary protection for a period of 12 hours, as well as literacy and educational support for persons with temporary protection.

Web portal Info tujci (<https://infotujci.si/>) brings main information for third-country nationals and persons under international protection about the integration into Slovenian society, including information about free Slovenian language courses, examination of the Slovenian language at the basic level, health care, social security, education, accommodation, marriage, birth and parenting, motor vehicles in Slovene and English language.

The 2011 Declaration of the Republic of Slovenia on the Position of the National Minorities of the Peoples of the Former SFRY in the Republic of Slovenia refers to the members of the Albanians, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Croats, Macedonians and Serbs who had an actual and formal constitutive role in the former common state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Upon independence and the Constitution of Slovenia as an independent state, they were placed in an objectively new and different national minority position, where they are afforded all individual rights and human freedoms, but not collective ones. Although there are various societies, associations and federations of societies and associations to ensure the preservation of their own national identity by cultivating their culture, using their mother tongue and script, preserving their history, nurturing contacts with their mother nation, developing scientific research and activities in the field of public information and publishing and strengthening the awareness of all citizens of the Republic of Slovenia about their presence and activities, their main demand to be officially recognised as a national minority is still not fulfilled. The members of the mentioned national minorities enjoy all the individual rights afforded to citizens by the Constitution, but they have the status of a “new national minority”, which is a specific legal and political conglomerate. Research in this area shows “that on one hand these minorities are not adequately represented in the existing system, while on the other hand such formal representation is not strictly necessary; of far greater importance is identification of these communities as the new national minorities and establishment of the relevant Council in the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, which would represent their voice within the Slovenian political system. Above all, it is further necessary to create an adequate socio-political climate through the school system and the appropriate support in the cultural domain, all of which would ensure that these minorities no longer required special forms of political representation.” (Striković, 2011: 15)

5. Inclusion of Migrants in the Design and Implementation of Integration Policies

“Political integration means that immigrants are involved in political decision-making processes in the country, that they can actively participate in these processes and also influence decisions. The right to vote is very important for political integration. The right to vote in parliamentary or other elections at the state level is usually obtained by immigrants only with citizenship, while at lower levels (local and regional elections) a certain period of legal residence in the country is increasingly sufficient to obtain the right to vote. Political integration does not only mean the possibility for immigrants to participate in political processes but also the actual presence or the participation of immigrants either through elections, political parties, special forms of minority representation, etc.” (Bešter, 2007: 111)

In 2012, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia established the Council for the Integration of Foreigners, which—officially—performs the following tasks: gives opinions and recommendations on national programmes important for the integration of foreigners, gives opinions and recommendations and participates in the procedures for the preparation of laws and other regulations that affect the field of integration of foreigners, monitors the implementation of integration measures, analyses the situation and reports on this annually to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. However, at least as of 2018, foreigners (neither persons with recognised international protection nor third-country nationals) are not members of this Council. Namely, the Council configuration was changed to include only two representatives of the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants and state secretaries—representatives of ministries of the interior, of labour, family, social affairs and equal opportunities, of education, science and sport and of culture. The Council failed to meet at all in 2018 and 2019. In 2020, it did meet, and according to its annual report, it ordered two analyses related to persons with recognised international protection: 1. Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants shall prepare data on abuses of social transfers by foreigners with recognised international protection who leave Slovenia, and shall send it for further consideration to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; and 2. by the end of 2021, an analysis of the inclusion of foreigners in the “Initial Integration of Immigrants” programme (Slovene with elements of learning about Slovenian society) should be carried out, which should monitor the success and adequacy of programmes for learning Slovenian and propose possible changes (Ladić et al., 2022). The annual report also shows that the Council considers the reduction of the period of integration of persons with recognised international protection from three to two years as a tool for “encouraging persons with recognised international protection to integrate into Slovenian society more actively in the field of employment” (ibid.). The functioning of this Council is thus far controversial.

Based on the positions of the 2011 Declaration on the Status of National Communities of the Nations of the Former Yugoslavia, the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia was established for issues of national communities of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Republic of Slovenia, as the consultative body of the Government for the area of these “new national communities”. Although—unlike the Council for the Integration of Foreigners in which no foreigner has a seat—in this Council, except for representatives of the Ministry of Culture, Education, Science and Sports; the Ministry of the interior; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Nationalities; Public fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Cultural Activities; there are also representatives of the Albanian, Bosniak, Montenegrin, Croatian, Macedonian and Serbian national communities in Slovenia, this Council is not functional, has no power and exists only formally.

From May 2022, when the new left-centre government in the Republic of Slovenia took office, the Ministry of the Interior also experienced its own transformation, which with the new minister also approached the issue of migration in a more democratic, inclusive and civilised manner, and established a Working Consultative Group for the field of migration, in to which a large number of the most prominent NGOs from the field of migration are invited. Although it is not clear, how this body will operate and how binding its proposals and findings will be, it is positive that this group includes representatives of three migrant organisations: Gmajna Cultural Association, Infokolpa and Intercultural Dialogue Society.

Also, the Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants plans to establish a consultative working group composed of refugees, but for now, this is only in the conceptual phase.

In 2006, Slovenia signed Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, but never ratified it. According to The Migrant Integration Policy Index, Slovenia have numeration 30, meaning slightly unfavourable regarding enfranchised or regularly informed, consulted or involved in local civil society and public life. Although this is not the best, it is still better than Italy (25), Austria (20) and Greece (20), and regarding the countries from the project consortium, only Germany (60) is better regarding political participation of migrants. (Solano and Huddleston, 2020).

However, as the research emphasises, all integration measures will not give satisfactory results if we do not also think about how to prepare the entire society to be more open to others and different and to be able to accept and respect cultural differences between people (Bešter, 2003: 116).

6. 6. Main Migrant Organisations in the Country

There are many cultural societies operating in Slovenia that nurture the language, culture and traditions of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which are united in the Association of Cultural Societies of Constituent Nations and Nationalities of the dissolved SFRY in Slovenia. The Association has tried to recognise the minority status of these peoples officially, but so far, without success. The most active of the individual organisations is the Serbian Cultural Society Danilo Kiš, whose activity goes beyond the Serbian community and is dedicated to reflecting on minority status in general and discusses all relevant topics from the Balkan region.

Other migrants—asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants—are primarily not organised in their own societies but join non-governmental organisations that enable them to participate, integrate and engage.

Slovenian Philanthropy – Association for the Promotion of Volunteering is a humanitarian organisation that has been working in the public interest since 1992. As part of the Migration Programme, they deal with various aspects of modern migration. Individuals and groups of migrants, such as asylum seekers and persons with recognised international protection, unaccompanied children, undocumented and other migrants are offered counselling, information, psychosocial and psychotherapeutic assistance and advocacy. They organise various activities to facilitate the integration of migrants into the new environment, such as familiarisation with the local environment, organisations and institutions and the habits of the majority population, assistance in arranging documentation, learning the Slovenian language and teaching assistance, social, sports and cultural activities and other forms of integration assistance. At the systemic level, they advocate for appropriate legislation and practice in the field of migration in Slovenia and Europe, as well as for adequate access for migrants to health care and other public services. Day centres for migrants were established in Ljubljana and Maribor, which, with the constant increase in users, prove how important it is to implement such programmes, especially in larger cities, which also represent a safe spot for all migrants. Since 2010, every year on World Refugee Day (20 June), Slovenian Philanthropy has organised the Migrant Film Festival to offer domestic audiences a selection of insightful and provocative films that highlight current topics related to migration, asylum and refugees. They also prepare a rich festival programme with various workshops and talks with filmmakers every year.

Association Odnos – an organisation for the development and integration of social sciences and cultures, develops community activities aimed at supporting and helping asylum seekers and persons with international protection in arranging their living situations, i.e. it offers personal information, counselling, educational assistance, and organises various group meetings. The purpose of their activities is social inclusion, including the upbringing and education of children and young people for a creative, non-violent, socially diverse, and responsible life. In this way, they create the conditions for encouraging creativity and obtaining diverse informal learning and social and cultural experiences. They strive for social science literacy or sensitising children, adolescents and adults for active and responsible citizenship and participation in a culturally plural modern society. They have specially designed social literacy and integration and emancipation programmes for migrant women.

The Humanitas Association – Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation is a non-governmental, non-profit and independent organisation that has been working in the field of global learning and support programmes for children and local communities since 2000. In 2019, they created the interactive performance *Through the Eyes of a Refugee*, which puts the audience in the role of a refugee on a dangerous journey to Europe and thus brings the refugee experience closer to the audience through empathy. The performance has already had 60 repetitions and was seen by more than 2,000 people.

Global – Institute for Global Learning and Project Development is a young non-governmental organisation founded in 2010 that realises its goals through activities divided into two main areas: global learning and project development. In the field of global learning, they want to encourage a process of learning and action that emphasises interdependence and the individual's involvement in global events. In the field of project development, they offer individuals and organisations professional support in the form of finding financial resources, finalising ideas into concrete projects, and project management and implementation challenges. The most recognisable project of Institute Global is the launch of the restaurant and catering company Skuhna (2012), which offers authentic dishes from Africa, Asia and South America prepared by international chefs, in most cases migrants themselves. The value that pervades Skuhna's entire concept is that diversity enriches us and mutual cooperation infuses us with strength.

The Institute for African Studies – Centre for Research, Education, Migration, Diversity, Intercultural Dialogue, Advocacy, Sustainability and Global Perspectives is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation that operates nationally and internationally with the aim of being an educational and research centre in the field of discrimination, advocacy, social justice, migration and global perspectives. Their vision is to become a research and education centre and information bank on African and global perspectives.

ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) Slovenia is part of an independent international humanitarian organisation, ADRA International, founded by members of the Adventist Christian Church. One of the areas of their activity is migration. They work mainly at the humanitarian level and help refugees to collect funds to pay the costs of family reunification.

Cultural Association Gmajna is a non-governmental and non-profit association established in 2002 to implement social welfare, culture, and education activities. Since its establishment, it has worked with asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. After opening and closing the Balkan corridor (2015–2016), it has been actively engaged in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Members of the organisation are volunteers, activists, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who daily work with people on the move before and after the reception phases. Association carried out necessary steps in the first period of integration just after the recognition of international protection status; these are social and child allowance rights, opening a bank account, searching for housing units and needed supplies, volunteer opportunities or paid work, a broad range of information on services available and suitable for refugees and organising cultural and public events. The association is a member of the initiative Infokolpa involved in border monitoring and research of the push-backs and chain push-backs on the Balkan Route.

The Intercultural Dialogue Society was established in 2007 by Turkish intellectuals inspired by the teachings and example of Muslim scholar and peace advocate Fethullah Gülen, although it is not a religious or ethnic organisation. The organisation's main aim is to advance social cohesion by connecting communities, empowering people to engage, and contributing to the development of dialogue and community-building ideas. It brings people together through discussion forums, courses, capacity-building publications, and outreach. It stands for democracy, human rights, the non-instrumentalisation of religion in politics, equality, and freedom of speech. Activities include weekly meetings of reading, listening and speaking of the Slovene language, intercultural dialogue activities such as join activities, personalised courses for immigrants, culturally connecting through cooking and connecting families of Turkish immigrants and Slovenian families that both feel excluded.

Two self-organised collectives have been active within Rog Autonomous Factory, a squatted bicycle factory in Ljubljana that was used as a self-managed cultural, social and political centre from 2006 until 2021. After years of debate over its future, the City Council evicted the centre in January 2021.

Rog Embassy was a self-organised community established in 2017 managed jointly by refugees and activists, new and old squatters, artists, students and workers from all over the world. Together they were dealing with bureaucracy and helping one another survive in an increasingly hostile Europe. Their work involves linking communities, organising events, cooking free meals, educational activities, and social and legal assistance. They work outside the framework of the institutions and primarily rely on the solidarity network of activists and supporters who want to create a different environment with them. Especially for persons without status, it represents a space where they can engage, meet, share, and plan various activities.

Second Home was a self-organised community established in 2016 in the void of official integration programs in Slovenia. The idea from the beginning was to assist migrants with their daily errands and connect them and organise them in a political sense by organising assemblies of migrants, meetings, and lectures in primary and secondary schools, faculties, youth centres, and squats around Slovenia, until violent eviction, their space was opened—unlocked for 14 months in 2016 and 2017—and also functioned as a sort of caravan-saray for migrants passing through Slovenia and homeless migrants (mostly sans-papier). The main goal of their engagement was for migrants to understand the reality of Europe's periphery, their limited chances, the ideology of the European border regime, growing racism and economic devastation.

Infokolpa is a self-organised migrant community formed from the disbanded group Second Home and is currently the most prominent and engaged organisation of migrants for migrants. They continue activities dedicated to the political emancipation of migrants and also research and point out the push-backs happening in Slovenia-Croatia and the chain push-backs (Slovenia-Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina).

There are only three exposed and well known prominent individuals in Slovene public space in high political positions so far that are migrants, of which two of them moved to Slovenia already in times when it was a part of SFRJ.

Dr. Emilija Stojmenova Duh is economist and politician, minister without portfolio responsible for digital transformation, member of The Freedom Movement political party. She moved to Slovenia in 2002 from Macedonia, when she received a scholarship from the agency Ad Futura for schooling as part of the International Baccalaureate.

Peter Bossman, a Slovene physician and politician, in 2010 as the first black citizen of Slovenia, as a member of the Social Democrats political party, was elected mayor of the Municipality of Piran, where he remained for two terms until 2018. In the 1970s, due to the heated political situation and the coup d'état in his native Ghana, he decided to study medicine in what was then Yugoslavia. The Guardian described him as the first black mayor of Eastern Europe, the BBC portrayed him as the first black mayor in Slovenia and the former Yugoslavia.

Zoran Janković, Slovenian economist, businessman and politician, immigrated to Slovenia from Serbia as a child. After 1978, he started working in economics and management, and in 1997 he was appointed to the position of director of the Mercator board. In 1990, he founded his own company Electa Inženiring. In 2006, he was elected for the first time to the position of mayor of the City of Ljubljana and in every election thereafter. In 2011, with his own newly founded political party, Pozitivna Slovenija (Positive Slovenia), he ran in the parliamentary elections and won. He accepted a mandate from the President of the Republic to form a new Slovenian government, but he failed to receive enough support in the vote in the National Assembly. Then he froze his position as party president, returned the parliamentary mandate and returned to the position of mayor, where he is still today.

II. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

Ten interviews were conducted, namely: Biljana Žikić (naturalised immigrant from Serbia, 20 years in Slovenia), journalist, cultural and NGO worker in Serbian Cultural Centre Danilo Kiš; Denis Striković (first generation of immigrants, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia), NGO worker in Association of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Slovenian Friendship Ljiljan; Zlatan Čordić (first generation immigrant, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia) rap musician, cultural worker and political activist; Max Zimani (naturalised immigrant from Zimbabwe, 35 years in Slovenia), NGO worker in Institute Global / Skuhna, political and cultural activist; Alaa Alali (refugee from Syria, 5 years in Slovenia), political activist, cultural mediator; Wafaa Alburai (refugee from Palestine, 1 year in Slovenia, family reunification), Aber Algendi, (refugee from Syria, 4 years in Slovenia, family reunification), Furkan Güner (political refugee from Turkey, 8 years in Slovenia), NGO worker in Intercultural Dialogue Society, Aigul Hakimova (naturalised immigrant from Kyrgyzstan, 21 years in Slovenia), political activist and NGO worker in Cultural Association Gmajna; Prabh Singh (refugee from India, 10 years in Slovenia), cultural worker.

1. Migrants' Needs

1.1 Better Education about Political Engagement within Integration Process

The most important need, which all interlocutors highlighted, is better integration of migrants in Slovenia in the field of political participation, which means more information, education and teaching about the political system in Slovenia and their rights and duties.

“We as migrants are not aware of our rights and obligations, so this is the most important issue that has to be improved.” (Alaa Alali)

The interlocutors perceive the need for better education about systemic possibilities and levers and ways that as asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants or members of a minority can integrate and co-create political life in Slovenia. But they also have to understand the Western world, the concepts of democracy and representation, because only when they understand them can they actively use them.

“But also migrants should be educated to be open and aware of issues of human rights, women rights, the rule of law... the pure fact that you are migrant does not entitle you for political participation. You should be politically aware as well, including about western society. So, first is good integration, rights and duties and then political participation. That’s why the integration process is important, and language is the most important. Good language courses are missing. And the course about how the system functions, how politics, culture, society function.” (Alaa Alali)

“It takes some time to be in the environment to realise that you are informed, aware so that you can vote.” (Zlatan Čordić)

The more migrants are integrated into society, the more they will experience it as their own and the more engaged they will be. If political participation is not made possible for them, they will feel excluded and unmotivated, which is not good for them, other citizens, or society as a whole. The integration process in Slovenia is focused on language, employment, health and housing, and education about political participation is lacking.

“I don’t know what my rights are exactly, as nobody is talking about that. In the integration course, nobody mentioned anything about political engagement. They only spoke about language, education, health system and labour market, how to find a job, that’s all.” (Wafaa Alburai)

The problem is also that certain rights only exist on paper, but one thing is right, and the other is whether one has the power to assert that right. Therefore, not enough people are aware of the importance of politics, engagement and their rights.

“I personally don’t feel like I’m anywhere, neither a migrant nor anything, but I’m simply a person who has the right to live anywhere in the world and engage politically.” The interlocutor also stresses that the Western Balkans countries must join the EU as soon as possible so that everyone can enjoy the same rights. “When you are a migrant in another country, you are always treated worse, you do work that the locals don’t want, and you are always subordinate.” (Zlatan Čordić)

“Immigrants who come from countries that are not in the EU and do not have Slovenian citizenship, they have no chance, no one asks them anything or helps them to integrate. Then the other thing is that those who achieve certain citizenship can then participate, but in this process, when they tried to achieve this, 10 years passed, and they were not involved anywhere because they were only concerned with work and survival. Society does nothing to help them through these years. Maybe only these small cultural and religious associations help them feel at least a little bit at home. Now, those who are from the former Yugoslavia, for example, are more educated, they had the opportunity for greater inclusion, but they are treated willy-nilly as citizens of the second or third world.” (Denis Striković)

1.2. Involvement of Migrants in Decision Processes in all Levels

The next important need in connection with previous is that migrants are involved in all processes on policies, laws and provisions that apply to migrants and migrant issues.

“The needs are actually to be engaged. When the government is setting policies, laws or new provisions to deal with migrants or migration issue, the migrants should be included in this process.” (Alaa Alali)

“It is important for people that they can influence the system, that they can express their needs, that the state hears them and deals with it.” (Biljana Žikić)

All interlocutors expose the vital need to be involved in the decision process and be included more systematically in policy-making regarding migration in Slovenia at all levels.

“I need some more space to share my opinion, and experience. I need that decision maker can hear us more because they should listen to us because we know what we need better than the other stakeholders or organisations, so we have to be a part of the decision making process for new legislation, policies, laws... anything that the government do in connection with migrants, that will influence us.” (Wafaa Alburai)

As for the members of minorities, especially the first generation of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, of whom there are at most 200,000 in Slovenia, they do not have any special, collective rights, and although they advocate for minority status, they only have a Resolution that allows them individual, but not collective status.

“We oscillate between two extremes, assimilation and integration, but we have no concept of inclusion in society. It means that people feel that they are part of society. That they are not perceived as strangers, other and different. That there are more other cultures, languages, and traditions of other countries, not only Slovenia. They talk about integration, but in reality, it’s assimilation.” (Denis Striković)

“Whenever a certain community starts seeking its rights, a problem arises. Everyone who wants to live and work in Slovenia should have the same rights. When you give a person the opportunity to socialise and integrate, he will also contribute and feel part of this country. He will also be more active and co-create the political landscape.” (Zlatan Čordić)

“There is no systemic financial scheme for the former Yugoslav cultural associations. As small cultural minority associations, we apply for tenders with large national associations and sometimes only get crumbs. It is not fair.” (Biljana Žikić)

1.3. Systemic Solutions, Collective Representation, Giving a Voice

There is a need for a representative consultative body of migrants (asylum seekers, refugees, minorities) to represent migrants and be a government interlocutor. And that migrants have actual seats in these councils. The interlocutors recognise that an inclusive policy towards migrants is good for everyone, society as a whole, not just for them.

“Migration is a fact, and there will always be migrants together with war, climate changes and development ... and so more migrants are included the better for Slovenia in total and all of us.” (Wafaa Alburai)

“Individually you can cooperate but it should be more systematic. Including migrants in the society is good for the entire Slovenian society and for the Slovenians as well not just for us, migrants.” (Alaa Alali)

“Africans in Slovenia have no leverage to influence Slovenia’s policy towards Africa. It would be good if there was a consultative body that would shape Slovenia’s attitudes towards Africa and give advice in this area, especially with regard to development cooperation.” (Max Zimani)

Of course, one representative cannot represent all migrants, so it would be necessary to have a group of migrants and also a system of exchange, rotation and exchange.

“Not one representative, but a heterogenous group of representatives of different languages, cultures and nationalities, to represent all migrants. Also with a special focus on migrant women who are even more vulnerable than male.” (Wafaa Alburai)

2. Migrants’ Readiness for Political Participation

2.1. Political Activity

Almost all the interviewees expressed their desire to participate in a consultative body, political organisation or institution if given the opportunity. They are ready to share their knowledge, experience and ideas. Many are already engaged in various ways, some more than the average Slovenian citizen.

Biljana Žikić leads a minority association that popularises Serbian culture in Slovenia, but their activity is also broader and opens up the issues of minorities in general, political participation and a fairer society. After ten years of operation, Biljana says: “I can’t imagine that someone from the Middle East or Africa would be chosen for an important political position”.

In Slovenia, political participation is only possible at the individual level. You can only participate as a citizen. It would be important to democratise the political system and political parties. That immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers can also participate. Things are slowly changing, though.

Denis Striković at the time (2012–2016) worked as a city councillor of the United Left coalition in Ljubljana, but again not as a representative of any minority, but as an engaged individual (with a minority background) within the framework of a political party. As he says: “Personally, as a member of the Bosniak minority, I am of course more sensitised to minority issues, but I was a councillor as a party politician and not as a representative of the minority”.

If people feel excluded from society, they will not even participate politically. The more they are included in society, the more motivated they are to participate. The more systemic levers for engagement, the more engaged they will be.

Zlatan Čordić ran for office in the last parliamentary elections (April 2022) on the ticket of the newly founded party Our Future, but again as a citizen, an individual, or, as he says, “as a human being” and not as a minority representative. He invested his recognition as a musician and his energy as an activist for political engagement. Although the party failed to enter the parliament, this process and this experience were important for him. “Why did I run for office? Because only through politics can you change something, through music, through film, through art, these are stories for small kids”.

In addition to his other work, Max Zimani is active as the head of the Working Group for Politics at Platform SLOGA (Slovenian Global Action).

Aigul Hakimova has been politically active since she arrived in Slovenia in various self-organised collectives and non-governmental organisations. As she says: “I would shortly like to share my experience of how I understand political participation. I came here in 2001 as a student. I wanted to go away from Kyrgyzstan to study, to know the world. I met some people here who are trying to fight for the rights of people that were discriminated: the erased, migrant workers and others. I didn’t come from Palestine – where you know your fight. It was a learning process. You fight for your community. [...] Political participation is a long process where you unite yourself on a problem. You work, find what

kind of problems you have, speak up, and find supporters. Sometimes problems are solved, and sometimes they are not. Political participation is a moment of visibility.”

2.2 Self-organisation

There is a messy situation regarding the self-organisation of migrants. In Slovenia, there is no single organisation that is strictly migrant-led and managed by migrants for migrants. “We don’t have a voice, no representative, no strictly migrant organisation in Slovenia.” (Alaa Alali) Different NGOs are dealing with migrants, but there is no base just for migrants to serve to migrant issues at all levels.

“Self-organisation is not possible without a system of education, emancipation, push.” (Wafaa Alburai) That’s why orientation, training, and workshops should come from the state for a migrant to get as much information as possible. Only then, emancipation can follow.

“We Africans are poorly organised, and the question is whether we even deserve the name community. Many people are individually active. I am successful not because of the African Community in Slovenia, but because of my actions. Likewise, Mr. Bosmann, who became mayor, or Sekumadi Conde, who is a very good journalist. The community does not function as such.” (Max Zimani)

The work of non-governmental organisations empowering migrants to be engaged is, therefore, important. However, the most important thing is that the migrant feels like an equal part of society. Only then can they engage.

“If you want to create something new, it has to be something real influence the organisation should be new, wide, big with including a lot of migrants from different background, nationalities that they can deal in their own language as well. And economic stability of that organisation should be assured to change something really.” (Alaa Alali)

E-participation would help but is not crucial because it is a systemic disempowerment of migrants. Some migrants experience discrimination or even systemic racism and as a result, fear to engage politically.

2.3. Right to Vote

The right to vote in Slovenia is tied to citizenship status, and permanent residence enables voting at the local level. It means that some people who stay and live in Slovenia cannot influence the political future, especially asylum seekers and refugees.

“I have a Slovenian child, but I don’t have an opportunity to vote and influence politics for the future of my child.” (Alaa Alali)

“I don’t have any political rights at the moment, as all political rights are connected with the status of citizenship. From the perspective of refugees and especially women family reunification, Slovenian society is very closed. Many people come here, but a small amount stays here. The asylum policy is very restrictive. We don’t have any political influence in Slovenia.” (Abir Algendi)

However, the interviewees note that Slovenians themselves are passive in political activity. Sometimes immigrants are more motivated and engaged than natives, and this could have a positive impact on the development of the political culture in the country.

“Slovene people don’t participate in the political process. Migrants are already excluded from society in Slovenia, but even Slovenes are excluded – especially young people. They don’t even go vote. If the migrants knew half of what Slovenes knew, they would be active in society, and this would help Slovenia become a more cohesive society. It is good to have better ties with the country. Because when you are excluded, you don’t do anything for the country. When you feel your word counts, you participate and contribute. This is actually the vision of Slovenia. It is our responsibility. I’m from NGO. To help people live freely.” (Furkan Güner)

3. Recommendations

- Systematically involve migrants and migrant communities in formulating policies that relate to them.
- Systematically include migrants and migrant communities in consultative bodies that relate to them:
 - a) There is not a single representative of foreigners in the Council for the Integration of Immigrants. This must be changed urgently;
 - b) The Council for the Issue of National Communities of the Peoples of the Former SFRY is not functional, has no power and exists only formally. This must be changed urgently.
- All people who legally reside in the country for at least one year should be afforded full voting rights.
- The Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants should be more engaged into the integration of all of all immigrants (now, they deals mostly with asylum seekers and refugees).
- The Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants would need a consultative body that would include refugees and asylum seekers.

III. Evaluation of the Focus Groups

Three focus groups were organised and attended by: Biljana Žikić, Cultural Center Danilo Kiš (NGO); Saša Hajzler, Infokolpa (self-organised collective); Sonja Gole Ašanin, Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants (government office); Polona Mozetič, Human Rights Ombudsperson (government office); Wafaa Alburai, refugee; Katja P. Nussdorfer, Ljubljana Public Education Center – Cene Štupar (public educational institution); Špela Kastelic, Slovenian Migration Institute at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (public research institution); Katarina Kromar, Association Odnos (NGO); Franci Zlatar, Slovenian Philanthropy (NGO); Iva Perhavec, International Organization for Migration Slovenia (international organisation); Albin Keuc, Platform SLOGA (NGO network); Romana Zidar, UNHCR Slovenia (international organisation) and project team members, as moderators: Lana Zdravković, Katja Utroša and Aigul Hakimova.

1. Main Fields for Empowering Migrant Voices

1.1 Decentralisation of Integration and Holistic Approach

The participants pointed out, as one of the most important findings, that the field of migration is a double-edged sword, which is used by each political option in power in accordance with its ideological orientation and pragmatic interests, but none of them systematically regulates it to the end. So, on the one hand, we have an acceptable government policy that understands the importance of integration and regulates the rights of migrants. On the other hand, we have one that cuts these rights and is more

conservative. Some participants, therefore, advocate the decentralisation of integration and moving the integration process to the local and regional level, which is undoubtedly more suitable than centralisation from the perspective of efficiency and implementation.

“The key thing that should be done is, of course, decentralisation. This means that integration and all these activities are brought down to the local level because it is easiest to do these things at the local level. Not only from the perspective there are fewer people in quantity, less of this particular issue, or rather it is specific to a certain local environment. Moreover, also because it is significantly more effective because all the structures know each other, they know each other’s operations, and solutions can be found more quickly. So, certainly now, at least for me personally, they are closer to models where it is already arranged at the local level that they have representatives of migrants involved, in the planning of activities and elevation meetings, based on which problems are perceived or some problems that start anew appear in a certain environment. So that all these local structures can react in time and can prepare some plans, solutions and rehabilitation of problems. Now everything is done centrally in Slovenia, which is, of course, significantly more difficult. If, once, when the state policy accepts to go to the local level, I believe that then funds will be allocated for this purpose, and everything will be easier from that point of view.” (Sonja Gole Ašanin)

The participants also agreed that a holistic, integrated approach to integration is important, as emphasised by Albin Keuc, which includes consultations at the local level with all important actors or institutions that shape the integration process: mayor, local authorities, police, centre for social work, healthcare centre, school, kindergarten, library... Mutual coordination between all involved actors is necessary, and SLOGA has already implemented some projects that tried to encourage this coordination at the local level.

1.2 Universality of the Right to Vote

Regarding the universality of the right to vote, the participants agreed in principle that people living in a particular area should all enjoy the same rights. However, for the right to vote, some believe that a person should have lived in Slovenia for at least some time to be entitled to vote. “However, if we are talking specifically about the right to vote, it is difficult for someone who has been granted a permit for one year but then will never be here again to decide on something because he does not even live in this country anymore.” (Sonja Gole Ašanin)

Saša Hajzler pointed out the paradox caused by the mutual conditionality of citizenship and voting rights or political participation, namely in the case of the Slovenian diaspora, which also does not live in Slovenia and does not necessarily have close contact with Slovenia, but has the right to vote—different than the majority of foreigners who live, work and, last but not least, pay taxes in Slovenia. In short, those who are not even in Slovenia have more rights to make decisions about Slovenia, just because they are citizens or their descendants, than those who actually live in Slovenia and contribute to society, just because they are foreigners.

Nevertheless, the participants agreed that a certain amount of information and understanding of the political system is necessary for political participation and a certain length of stay in the country. “I think that you can live in one environment for a while to understand the system itself. Thus, the right to vote is certainly possible, but not immediately. There must be a certain period, for example, that you live in an environment, in a country. I wouldn’t provide it right away, I don’t know, the first year.” (Katja P. Nussdorfer)

Research in the field of migrant integration, as pointed out by Iva Pehavec, shows that political participation is one of those areas that can significantly contribute to the social inclusion of migrants and also give legitimacy to the democratic systems that Western countries are supposed to represent. Therefore, she advocates that the right to vote is also an essential part of the integration of migrants. Having a voice on policies that concern you and also the possibility of co-decision-making in the country

helps migrants begin to experience the country as their own. “Research and practice show that migrants are generally not less politically active or they are not less politically engaged than the native population. It’s just a matter of whether they have that option or not.” (Iva Pehavec)

Engagement at the political level is different and should also increase with age and level of education among migrants, points out Špela Kastelic. Their research confirms that the higher these two factors are, the greater the political participation. This is also influenced by the length of stay in a certain country and, of course, the naturalisation process, which also allows the expansion of these rights the most. It also turned out that second-generation migrants are, in principle, more active than first-generation migrants, and this is because, in principle, they are no longer supposed to solve basic needs, for example, which arise, but also because the level of belonging is much higher. “So, in addition to education, which is necessary to understand political processes, political participation is also influenced by knowledge of the language, inclusion in the labour market, and also being together with family members, because we see this from our own practice that until these basic things are arranged, for each person, it is difficult to deal with other matters. There are some priorities.” (Špela Kastelic)

1.3 Active Citizenship

Active citizenship, as empowerment for political action and political education, is important for everyone, both those who have just arrived in the country and those who were born in the country but actually did not know exactly how things work. “Only, these rights are not an abstraction. This also comes with a certain responsibility. It seems to me, how will you work with people from the point of view of rights and certain responsibilities, that it is actually necessary to have general political education, not only for people who would technically or theoretically want to integrate or to get some rights but also for those who live with them. So both ways, right, citizens of Slovenia, who are citizens of Slovenia only because they were born here and actually somehow did not go through some kind of political education.” (Saša Hajzler)

In particular, the need for educating migrants towards active citizenship was highlighted, as they often come from radically different environments. “There is no such thing, and the biggest thing is in the Initial Integration of Immigrants programme, where the political scheme in Slovenia and the electoral system are explained to them. Then there is the integration into the labour market, which we implement in cooperation with the Employment Agency, and these are the only two such programmes where there is actually a pinch of this active citizenship. All others in Italy, Greece, and Austria basically have the Slovenian language course included as part of the basic programme, but when the immigrants arrive in the new country, they have additional lectures of active citizenship. We don’t have that here, and we miss it. All the others, other European countries, are ten years ahead of us.” (Katja P. Nussdorfer)

The interlocutors noted that women migrants who come to Slovenia because of family reunification are in the most difficult position and have the hardest time integrating into society, so it is especially necessary to work on special integration programmes for them.

«I am here for one year only for the reason of family reunification, and I believe that it’s still too far to talk about a real political participation. First of all, because I can consider myself a newcomer and I can say that I still don’t know about my rights for political participation in Slovenia because when we arrived here, of course, we got different integration courses which were really helpful, but nothing was mentioned about our rights regarding political participation.» (Wafaa Alburai)

1.4 Inclusion of Migrant Voices in Policymaking

a) Self-organisation of Migrants

The participants agree that education is important, as is the right to vote, but that for the political engagement of migrants, it is also necessary to encourage their self-organisation since political participation transcends a mere right to vote. “It seems to me that many times when we talk about political participation, we focus only on the right to vote, which is very important and has some

symbolism, but not in these nation states. But on the other hand, there is probably also room for some political activity, which is not so much regulated, but is possible as some kind of political self-organisation, and creating pressure, for example, on the authorities.” (Saša Hajzler)

This self-organisation, which goes beyond the political rights granted by the state and is formed based on the concrete needs of the migrants themselves, is considered quintessential. This raised the question of how much time and capital migrants have to be socially engaged with all the work they have to do with rebuilding their lives, and with the everyday challenges of integration, learning the language, finding a job, housing, or in general by working in several shifts.

“So, it’s just a question of whether a person is even capable, despite the abundance of things that he has to deal with in his life every day, week and month, plus also support his family, to even engage in this way, to try to somehow change the situation, to influence someone etc.” (Špela Kastelic)

Migrants who come to the country have a lot of work at the beginning to do with learning the language, and looking for housing, and employment, so socio-economic problems are often above political organisation. However, the participants agree that they usually do not have the time and energy to engage, as some work 12 hours a day, taking care of their families, and many send money home.

“I think that here first this primary goal is to satisfy the basic needs and only later in the second phase when that is covered, because the vast majority 95% of them still take care of the whole extended family in their country and send, in my opinion, 90% of what they earn money back home, there is political engagement.” (Katja P. Nussdorfer)

Many interlocutors stressed that Slovenia is a rather hostile environment for migrants to settle down and gain status. Although many have lived here for 10, 15 years, they still do not have the opportunity to mobilise fully. Likewise, the absence of systemic funding and incentives for migrant, minority and immigrant organisations affects the difficult political self-organisation.

b) Political Engagement

Experiences, when organisations encourage people and help them self-organise, are good. The research conducted by the interlocutors shows that a bottom-up approach is necessary and very effective and that asking people directly about their needs encourages their engagement.

“Political capital is built slowly, and until you have some clean basics, it is very difficult to even think about getting involved politically. That’s why we talked to asylum seekers and asked them what they wanted. So, start from the bottom up, so that they have the opportunity to co-decide on things that are connected to their daily life in the house.” (Romana Zidar)

“We also noticed that, in fact, this bottom-up approach of the migrant initiatives themselves, with our minimal support, exclusively in the sense of giving them some push to organise themselves and begin to recognise their rights, possibilities and how to carry out the whole matter, they organise it themselves, somehow informally, if they start organising it on others because this is basically the best way. Without us, the saviours, who enable them by basically being on another project through other activities, we try to direct this into a kind of self-organisation, self-initiative, which is the easiest, so that it is not only projects that start, some may end, but that matter, if nothing else, constantly develops through projects”. (Špela Kastelic)

However, some participants emphasised that political organising can arise precisely as a result of a bad life or that the search for ways to improve life is political activity par excellence.

“I don’t know, but it seemed to me that all the migrants I came into contact with, regardless of how many jobs they had or how many children they had, regardless of whether they were men or women, were quite politically articulate, and if only they had the possibility of some leverage for their voice to be heard, they would use it. I haven’t noticed, at least with the people I work with, that they are very passive. Rather the opposite. The only question is whether they have an addressee whom they can turn to now with their problems. And I also have a lot of problems with what I would call it middle-class political activity, that is to say, you have to have a stable first and a cow and then you will engage in politics. It seems to me that this is not the best strategy, not because of this, but because once you have a stable and a cow, why exactly are you fighting? For a slightly larger stable or another cow. No, the duty, basically political participation or engagement, comes when you have a serious problem. At this point, people need to be engaged.” (Katja Utroša)

c) Representation of Migrants

Many participants understand political organising as mutual help and integration within one ethnic, national or religious community or collective action and advocacy for rights. The discussion was about how to get the right representative, whether each ethnic community should have its own representative, and how to organise this representation in the first place. Many agreed that an umbrella organisation for migrant organisations would be a good interlocutor with the state and also successfully carry out advocacy both at the national and local levels.

“That’s why I think it’s missing in Slovenia—in other countries, it’s more developed, because there has been a tradition of immigration for so long, and communities have really already been created and so on—some organisation that would really represent and connect, in fact, all migrants and that it could really be an equal partner in all political processes. There is no such thing. So, if there is no umbrella organisation, like we have, for example, CNVOS for non-governmental organisations, then everything is more difficult. It seems to me that this is exactly what is missing here: some kind of umbrella organisation that would connect it and have some power and validity.” (Sonja Gole Ašanin)

In this sense, the need for institutions to employ more intercultural mediators was also highlighted, which would help the broader society to become more aware of migration and also help migrants to integrate into society more easily. Intercultural mediators would also be excellent political representatives of migrants and their interests and good interlocutors for the government in political processes.

3. Recommendations

- Education for political engagement is needed for both migrants and the Slovenian population.
- It is necessary to systematically and financially encourage and support the self-organisation of migrants, their organisations, networks and associations. Bare rights do not mean much if there is no power, empowerment, or emancipation to realise these rights.
- State and other institutions should employ and involve more people with a migrant background, including cultural mediators.

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Annex

Interviews and Focus groups Data

Ten interviews were conducted, namely: Biljana Žikić (naturalised immigrant from Serbia, 20 years in Slovenia), journalist, cultural and NGO worker in Serbian Cultural Centre Danilo Kiš; Denis Striković (first generation of immigrants, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia), NGO worker and Association of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Slovenian Friendship Ljiljan; Zlatan Čordić (first generation immigrant, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia) rap musician and political activist; Max Zimani (naturalised immigrant from Zimbabwe, 35 years in Slovenia), NGO worker and Zavod Global / Skuhna, political and cultural activist; Alaa Alali (refugee from Syria, 5 years in Slovenia), political activist, cultural mediator; Wafaa Alburai (refugee from Palestine, 1 year in Slovenia, family reunification), Aber Algendi, (refugee from Syria, 4 years in Slovenia, family reunification), Furkan Güner (political refugee from Turkey, 8 years in Slovenia), NGO worker in Intercultural Dialog, Aigul Hakimova (naturalised immigrant from Kyrgyzstan, 21 years in Slovenia), political activist and NGO worker in Cultural Association Gmajna; Prabh Singh (refugee from India, 10 years in Slovenia), cultural worker.

Three focus groups were organised and attended by: Biljana Žikić, Cultural Center Danilo Kiš (NGO); Saša Hajzler, Infokolpa (self-organised collective); Sonja Gole Ašanin, Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants (government office); Polona Mozetič, Human Rights Ombudsperson (government office); Wafaa Alburai, refugee; Katja P. Nussdorfer, Ljubljana Public Education Center – Cene Štupar (public educational institution); Špela Kastelic, Slovenian Migration Institute at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (public research institution); Katarina Kromar, Association Odnos (NGO); Franci Zlatar, Slovenian Philanthropy (NGO); Iva Perhavec, International Organization for Migration Slovenia (international organisation); Albin Keuc, Platform SLOGA (NGO network); Romana Zidar, UNHCR Slovenia (international organisation) and project team members, as moderators: Lana Zdravković, Katja Utroša and Aigul Hakimova.