

NOVEMBER 2022

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE ON EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION TOOLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**EMVI. EMPOWERING MIGRANT VOICES ON
INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION POLICIES**

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Co-funded by
the European Union



EMVI EMPOWERING
MIGRANT VOICES

EMVI – Empowering migrant voices on integration and inclusion policies

WP2: Executive summary of the Good Practice Guide

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This research was co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union. The content represents solely the views of the EMVI project partnership and is its sole responsibility. The European Commission assumes no responsibility for the use of the information contained herein.

The Executive summary of the Good Practice Guide brings the most important recommendations regarding political participation of migrants, based on the findings of the research process which took place in Austria, Greece, Germany, Italy and Slovenia as part of the project **Empowering migrant voices on integration and inclusion policies (EMVI)**.¹

The consortium of the EMVI project believes that for the effective functioning of democratic systems, it is important that all members of the political community play an active role and have equal rights. Therefore, it is important to promote the political participation of migrants in the country they reside. The political participation of migrants can help them settle in, feel a part of the community and develop a social network. It ultimately supports diversity in the European community.

Recommendations:

1. Implement the right to vote (at least on the local/regional level) for all long-term residents in the country

In Austria, Greece, Germany and Italy, third-country nationals (TCNs) do not have the right to vote in local and national elections, as the right to vote is strictly linked with their citizenship status. The general right to vote in Slovenia is also tied to citizenship status, which means that some people who reside in Slovenia cannot influence its political future, especially asylum seekers and refugees. On the other side, permanent residency enables voting at the local level. The right to vote in local elections, as the Slovenian case shows, is a fundamental instrument for the political participation of TCNs. This good practice from Slovenia shows that laws can be changed to enable political participation and inclusion of migrants and consequently contribute to building a more equal and democratic political community.

Not being able to vote in any election is seen as a form of discrimination that must be changed. It is not clear migrants why EU citizens have the right to vote in municipal/local elections, but third-country nationals do not. The paradox caused by the mutual conditionality of citizenship and voting rights or political participation is well seen in the case of the diaspora, which also does not live in the country and does not necessarily have close contact with it, but they have the right to vote in their country of origin—different from the majority of foreigners who live, work and, pay taxes in the country. In short, those who do not even live in the country have more rights to make decisions about it, just because they are citizens or their descendants than those who actually live in the country and contribute to society, just because they are foreigners.

The right to vote is very important for political integration. Political integration does not only mean the possibility for immigrants to participate in political processes but also have an actual presence or participate through elections, political parties, special forms of minority representation, etc.

All people who are legally long term residents in the country should be granted voting rights at the local/regional level equivalent to voting rights at the local/regional level for EU citizens.

¹ National reports in English are available on the web site of the project:
<https://diaspora-participation.eu/material-two/>

2. Improve, encourage and value migrant participation, representation and engagement in public bodies that deal with the issues of integration, inclusion, and diversity

Of all the consortium partners only Germany has already established a national consultative body and regional consultation structures for migrants on the federal level in Berlin, where councils are appointed and not elected, having a legal ground with the Participation Law. Austria, Greece and Italy are among the countries that do not have national consultative bodies, but there do exist structures on the local or regional level, such as the EMVI project partner Migrants' Advisory Council in Graz. Slovenia does not have any of that yet.

Political integration is a reciprocal process. There is a need to sensitise local, regional and national administrations to finding more effective tools to involve migrants in the political and decision-making processes. Participation begins with information about possibilities and opportunities, and there is a need to improve it.

The Migrants' Advisory Council Graz, a political representation of the interests of third-country nationals in Graz (10% of the total population of Graz), can be considered a good practice. The council consists of nine members (non-EU citizens) elected 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 in Graz and serve for the same legislative period of five years. The Council members work voluntarily 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).

All countries and levels of government should accept the motto that no decisions on migrants should be made without migrants. Therefore, migrant advisory bodies should be installed or enhanced (if they already exist) on local, regional and national levels.

3. Improve and develop integration/inclusion/activation programmes with a special focus on education and training for political participation

To be motivated and skilled to participate in political processes, migrants, in the first place, need to understand how the political system works in the country they reside in and how they can participate in such processes. As the interviews and focus groups with migrant representatives in every country showed, the more migrants are informed, educated and skilled, the more they will feel part of the country and will be motivated to participate in the political processes actively. Nonetheless, more evaluation must be done to understand how politics and political participation structures are put into practice in each country.

When it comes to integration measures, this is something that should be especially developed. In the interviews conducted for the national reports, many migrants stressed that the integration courses usually fail to provide enough knowledge about where to find information on political participation. In every country in this project, it was evaluated that a general lack of information about possibilities to participate politically and their political rights and duties exists. Integration courses usually are focused mainly on language teaching, education, the healthcare system and the labour market. What is missing in every programme in the project countries is education on how to start associations and self-organisations to be able to advocate for migrants' needs, interests and demands.

Heraklion, as the administrative centre of Crete, sets the example for a good practice on integration policies, and a successful implementation would mean that it could be set as a replicable example for other Cretan cities, Greece and also other countries. The Local Integration Plan for Migrants and Refugees mentions the ESTIA (the UNHCR and Greek State) and HELIOS (the IOM) programmes, 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 support for the housing programmes that the City of Heraklion manages.

To keep the EU on a democratic path and to develop the EU countries in the direction of political communities, integration/inclusion/activation programmes should be improved and developed with a special focus on education and training for political participation as well as a stable life without existential threats should be enabled for migrants.

4. Building the trust of migrants and strengthening the cooperation between migrant communities and local/regional/national authorities

Local, regional and national authorities should work together with migrants of different origins, race, age, sex and gender at all levels to create trust in political processes. The authorities should create a more inclusive and diverse working environment. Fighting racism, discrimination, and the lack of opportunities should be a regular part of administrative work for migrants to feel free, safe and welcomed in the political processes at all levels. To strengthen the cooperation with migrant individuals and organisations, authorities should create more employment opportunities within the administration for people with a migration background on a more structural level. Cultural mediators should be more included in public bodies and employed in public institutions. On the other hand, training and workshops for members of the state officials, local and regional councils and offices are to be organised to become more sensitised to the migrant issues. More opportunities for exchange with decision-makers should be given to non-organised migrants and vulnerable groups such as women.

We can consider as a good practice on this topic the *Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft* – PartMigG (Law for the Promotion of Participation in the Migration Society), which was drafted in collaboration with different migrant organisations and the State Advisory Council for Participation. Many migrant representatives wished to have a similar approach to policymaking as for the drafting of the PartMigG in other political fields which concern them.

More opportunities for political participation and exchange with decision-makers should be given to non-organised migrants and vulnerable groups such as women. Therefore, new innovative ways of migrants participation are recommended like the organisation of informal events such as issue-raising meetings in the neighbourhoods, cultural (cooking, music, arts) events, and meetings with policy-makers as well as the development of e-participation platforms for migrants participation.

In general, structural involvement of migrants and their organisations on all levels of government should be improved, starting with the inclusion of migrants in the

administration staff and innovative tools like e-participation, issue-raising meetings and roundtables for migrants to raise their voices in an organised manner to decision makers.

5. Improvement of integration and inclusion policies on a structural level, including systematic funding for migrant organisations

Improving political integration and inclusion policies requires social and cultural work to raise awareness of the added value migrant citizens bring to society in various spheres. In policymaking, more attention to promoting cultural diversity is requested. When developing policies and processes targeting migrants, special focus should be given to migrant women by promoting their empowerment, autonomy, and awareness of their own values and abilities.

Structural funding for migrant organisations on the local, regional and state levels is crucial to make them able to advocate stronger for inclusive policies and professional counselling of the administration and local, regional and national government and to foster their freedom of association. Migrants should be encouraged to be politically active in migrant organisations, and those organisations should be properly financed to be able to develop their programmes. It is also important 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 implement these rights.

Cooperation between the administration and migrant organisations should be reimbursed with appropriate project funds or specific funds for consultation services. It is only fair to compensate the consulting of migrant organisations and migrant representatives with professional fees.

Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies established the “Register of Associations, Entities and Other Private Bodies Carrying Out Activities in Favour of Immigrant Foreigners”, which includes associations promoting 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, organising training courses for those in public or private offices who work in contact with the migrant population, etc.

Integration and inclusion policies need to be structurally improved including funding for migrant organisations and activities tailored to participation possibilities for women.