



## **EMVI-LII - Empowering Migrant Voices for Local Integration and Inclusion**

### **Baseline Assessment of local integration strategies and migrant participation**

**WP 3: Capacity Building for and advocacy with local and regional authorities to engage migrants in local integration strategies and action plans**

**January 2025**



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## I INTRODUCTION

“Integration happens in every village, city and region where migrants live, work and go to school or to a sports club. The local level plays a key role in welcoming and guiding newcomers when they first arrive in their new country. In addition, civil society organisations, educational institutions, employers and socio-economic partners, social economy organisations, churches, religious and other philosophical communities, youth and students’ organisations, diaspora organisations as well as migrants themselves play a key role in achieving a truly effective and comprehensive integration policy.”  
(EU Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027)

This Baseline assessment analysis brings together the most important findings about the possibilities for the local integration and inclusion of migrants in seven project consortium countries, with a special focus on local/regional areas: Austria (Municipalities of Graz and Lustenau), Croatia (Medimurje County and City of Zagreb), Germany (Municipality of Berlin), Greece Crete Region (and Municipality of Heraklion) and Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies, Italy (Municipality of Empoli), Luxembourg (Schifflange Municipality) and Slovenia (Municipality of Ljubljana). The Baseline assessment is prepared as a deliverable of the project **EMV-LII – Empowering Migrant Voices for Local Integration and Inclusion (2024-2027)**.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the review of the possibilities of migrant integration and inclusion in each local/regional area with emphasis on both migrant and local/regional authority’s needs, obstacles and gaps, policy recommendations have been designed in order to encourage the structural and systemic improvement of migrants’ participation on a local and regional level. Good practices from each local/regional area have been presented as well. This Baseline assessment is prepared for decision-makers, public authorities, migrant leaders and organisations, local stakeholders and all those who will find it useful for implementing policies and methods for structural migrant participation, inclusion and emancipation.

The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 recognizes the central role of local authorities in welcoming and guiding newcomers, emphasizing that the inclusion of migrants is more effective when they actively participate in community life. Our project and this Baseline assessment aim to foster this policy and emphasize it among LA/RA in the project consortium countries. In the context of local integration policies, migrant participation is crucial. Increasing their involvement fosters more effective integration and helps develop policies that are more inclusive and responsive to their needs. The goal of the EMV-LII is to promote an innovative mechanism that enhances migrant participation in local integration processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Project is continuation and builds on a good practices and experiences of a previous, also AMIF co-financed project EMVI – Empowering migrant voices on integration and inclusion policies (2022-2023). Find more on a project website: <https://diaspora-participation.eu/>.

In line with the EU Action Plan, the term "migrants" refers to people with a migratory background, such as asylum seekers, refugees with international or subsidiary protection, people with humanitarian status, third-country nationals (TCNs) and their descendants, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This also includes EU citizens with a migratory background, meaning those who became EU citizens through naturalization or those whose parents were born in third countries.

The primary goal of the Baseline assessment is to identify the main gaps and needs of both local/regional authorities (LAs/RAs) and migrant communities, to support the design and implementation of local or regional integration strategies, or to enhance existing ones. Additionally, it aims to support the active involvement of migrants and their organizations in the co-design and co-implementation of these strategies. Based on the initial assessment and identified gaps, tailored training programs will be developed at the local level for officials and LA/RA representatives. These programs will cover topics such as anti-discrimination, intercultural understanding, intersectionality, e-participation, and local integration strategies, and will promote the exchange of best practices among partner authorities.

## II LOCAL/REGIONAL CONTEXTS

### AUSTRIA

#### City of Graz

In 2024, out of 303.270 inhabitants, 42.017 persons (14%) had another EU citizenship, 44.771 (15%) were third country nationals. Out of these, the 10 largest countries of origin are: Croatia (12.110), Romania (10.568), Germany (9.550), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.783), Turkey (6.137), Hungary (5.126), Ukraine (3.789), Syria (3.715), Afghanistan (3.414), and Slovenia (3.144) (Migrant Advisory Council, 2024/1). There are two city districts with a relatively high percentage of third country nationals (Gries: 30%, Lend: 25%) (Migrant Advisory Council 2024/2).

Migrant communities in Graz are well organized. The Migrant Advisory Council lists 62 migrant-led associations. These are mainly focusing on activities around organizing social and cultural events to strengthen the sense of belonging among migrants, offering basic information to members regarding issues of integration and inclusion and representing the interests of fellow migrants.

Graz is among those few cities in Austria with a well-established and well-integrated **Migrant Advisory Council (MAC)**. The MAC has the task of advising the bodies of the City of Graz by making suggestions, recommendations and statements. It is intended to protect and safeguard the interests of migrants in Graz. Third country nationals (TCNs) that can't vote in the municipal elections vote for the MAC, elections take place at the same time as municipal elections. The board consists of nine elected, unpaid members, who function as the political representatives of the migrant population (Migrant Advisory Council, 2003). The MAC maintains a respectful exchange and a good working relationship with the local authorities, particularly the **Integration Counsellor** and the **Department of Integration**, as well as the **Mayor of the City of Graz**. The MAC was also very well integrated in the development of the **Graz' Integration Strategy**.

The [online participation platform Shaping Graz together!](#) has been established by Südwind and the MAC in the frame of the EMVI project and used to collect migrants' demands towards the City of Graz. Also, the Department of Integration organizes quarterly networking meetings with migrant-led organizations in the City Hall, as well as an annual "Festival for All", where a variety of associations active in the city represent themselves. MAC and other organizations such as Südwind, the Afro-Asian Institute or the association "base Graz" regularly conduct issue-raising meetings with migrants.

City of Graz has a Human Rights Advisory Council (since 2007), Interreligious Council (since 2006) and a Women's Council that aims to build alliances and empower all women in Graz but has no particular focus on migrant women. There are 21 neighbourhood community

centres in the city run by the Peace Office Graz. Further, the city is an ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities against Racism) member.

The city also has a Department for Citizen Participation, that manages an online platform called “Graz mitgestalten” (“Helping to Shape Graz). Yet, the platform focuses more on the (re-)design of urban spaces and does not specifically target migrants. The Advisory Board for Citizen Participation functions as an advisory body for the department.

Intercultural mediators do not exist in Graz, at least not in a sustainable, well-structured, well-known way that really empowers and includes migrants. Yet, some institutions and organizations offer similar initiatives. There is for example the municipal Peace Office Graz, offering neighbourhood mediation, but it has no intercultural focus and no intercultural team; or the NGO Innovative Social Projects (ISOP) offering intercultural “integration assistance” and “health assistance” i.e. mediation and support in the health system.

The City of Graz has a comprehensive integration strategy, consisting of a mission statement and a work programme. The **Integration mission statement “We are all Graz”** was adopted by Graz City Council in 2023. It was created in a two-and-a-half-year participatory development process and builds the basis for the working program of the Department of Integration. Experts from practice, academia and administration as well as representatives of migrant-led associations, NGOs and committees, citizens and the Migrant Advisory Council were involved in the design and development of the document. The process included a utopia workshop, internal meetings, expert interviews, an online citizens’ survey (1300+ participants) and workshops with relevant organizations, institutions and councils. The mission statement – available in German, English, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Turkish and Ukrainian language – focuses on promoting and enabling participation, working in partnership with relevant institutions and associations as well as academia, sensitizing citizens and the city administration and positively shaping diversity. Related to the political participation of TCNs, it is stated in the mission statement that “The overriding goal of the city of Graz is to enable the participation of people with and without a history of migration. Participation is understood as the equal opportunity to participate in different spheres of society”. Furthermore: “the City of Graz is committed to promoting the participation of all people living in Graz in the development and implementation of measures for living together in diversity. Participation creates voice and identification opportunity” (We are all Graz. Integration Mission Statement of the City of Graz 2023, p. 34 and 13).

The additional **Work programme for the integration mission statement “We are all Graz”** defines goals and measures in four fields: “Come Together” measures for orientation in Graz and to promote mutual understanding and dialogue; “Work Together” measures in cooperation with other municipal departments and our partners to support people with a history of migration in shaping their everyday lives in terms of housing, health, work, environmental and climate protection; “Learn Together” provision of language-learning opportunities, educational counselling and educational support to children, adults and

families, and “Stand Together” measures to prevent and get active against violence, racism and discrimination. All projects funded by the Department of Integration will have to be in line with the strategy, while the MAC is also involved in the selection process of funding applications.

## **Municipality of Lustenau**

Lustenau has a long history of immigration. During the 20th century many people, so-called “Gastarbeiter” (ger. “guest workers”) came to the municipality to work in embroidery. In 2011, there were 60 different nations living in Lustenau (Heinzle and Scheffknecht 2011), while in 2024, there are already 96 different nations. The five biggest nations apart from Austrians are Turkey (1.741), Germany (1.115), Romania (567), Bosnia and Herzegovina (296), and Syria (394). As of October 2024, Lustenau has 25.656 inhabitants, of which 6.638 people have a different citizenship than the Austrian one. 3.576 people are from non-EU states and approximately 2.350 are from EU states (Anonymized lists from the Registration office of the municipality).

The main migrant organizations in Vorarlberg Federal State are mosque communities.<sup>2</sup> The core activity of these associations is providing religious infrastructure for their members. However, they also organize open days, markets and festivals. In recent years, a number of new associations have emerged that are run by refugees. Their activities often focus on cultural and language activities, support of newly arriving refugees and sports programs. Additionally, a few Arabic and Syrian clubs have been founded.

A new **Advisory board for diversity and coexistence** was established in 2024 in the Municipality of Lustenau following the initiative of the EMVI project in cooperation between Südwind and the municipality. This board, consisting of up to 12 members, will regularly engage with political representatives to provide suggestions and recommendations for the community living in Lustenau, open new avenues, and facilitate integration processes. This is important keeping in mind that in Austria TCNs have no voting rights on any level.

The municipality of Lustenau has worked out an **Integration Strategy in 2014** called “Living Together in Lustenau”. The key areas include the appreciation of cultural diversity, politics and administration, education and professional development, health and well-being, community living, and the needs of children and young people. In each of these fields, the concept outlines objectives, best practices, and forward-thinking ideas. However, in the integration plan, there is no focus on women and political participation.

The **online platform “Vorarlberg Thinking Along”** by the Vorarlberg Federal State and the Vorarlberg Association of Municipalities aims to create a new form of citizen participation and

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<sup>2</sup> List of mosque communities: <https://www.okay-line.at/Informationen/moschee-und-alevitische-cem-vereine-in-vorarlberg-kontakt Daten/>

engagement in Vorarlberg, facilitating interaction between citizens, administration, and municipalities. This interactive online platform allows residents to easily and quickly contribute their opinions on important issues and local political decisions in their communities. Yet, the platform has no focus on migrants' participation.

Within the EMVI project Lustenau also established the **online platform Do you want to help shape Lustenau?** Focussing on migrant participation and youth, that will be further utilized in the EMV-LII project.

There is no Anti-Racist Action Plan in Lustenau but networking meetings have been organized to discuss it. Furthermore, there is no intercultural mediation program established in Lustenau.

## **CROATIA**

### **Međimurje County**

Since 2021, when Croatia abolished quotas for employing foreign workers, Međimurje County (population 113.804 residents) has recorded an increase in TCN workers, predominantly from South and Southeastern Asian countries. The latest data (February 2024) indicates that about 3.600 TCNs are currently employed in Međimurje, representing 6.5% of the workforce in the region, many of whom work diligently in factories, hospitality, construction, metal and food production and other industries. The majority are citizens of the Philippines (approx. 970), Nepal (approx. 656) and India (approx. 554). Although Međimurje is an open and inclusive environment, such sudden social changes provoke resistance and intolerance in parts of the population, including hate speech.

There are no recorded gatherings of migrants in civil society in Međimurje County. What does exist is the initiatives of the civil society organization Platform for Community Centre Čakovec, whose efforts are aimed at improving the quality of life and integrating migrant workers from the Philippines, Nepal, India and other countries .

In Međimurje County there is no integration strategy or implementation plan. There is however, **“Paths of Integration” initiative, developed by a civil society organization Platform for Community Centre Čakovec that can serve as a basis for creating a local strategy.** This Initiative is aimed at improving the quality of life and integration of migrant workers in Međimurje County through a participatory approach. The key activities of the initiative include building trust within the community of foreign workers, defining the methodology and conducting research on real needs in the community, forming and training teams of mediators from the community of foreign workers and promotion at sports and cultural events, digital analysis of collected data and development, presentation and implementation of customized recommendations and guidelines for employers and local authorities. The



initiative represents the first such attempt in the wider region that directly addresses the specific needs of workers, thereby laying the foundations for a long-term increase in social integration and cohesion of all groups in social and economic life. This initiative is financed by both Međimurje County and the City of Čakovec.

Also, there are no organised regional consultative bodies or advisory boards consisting of migrants living in the region. There is no specific policy regarding migrant integration and participation, nor has participative budgeting been developed. No specific policy (or practice) regarding migrant integration and participation and other alternative offline or online participation methodologies (e.g. e-participation portal, participative budgeting, issue-raising meetings) has been introduced. There are currently no cultural mediators employed within Međimurje County nor within different city public institutions of the county.

## City of Zagreb

There is no official data on the exact number of migrants living in Zagreb. In 2023, 68.114 persons expressed intentions for international protection in Croatia, but only 1.783 applications were submitted (1.685 new applications and 98 subsequent) by persons mostly from the Russian Federation, Afghanistan, Turkey, Syria and Burundi<sup>3</sup>. In the period 2004-2024 only 1.171 persons received international protection<sup>4</sup>, additionally 27.615 requests for temporary protection for Ukrainians have been approved until January 2025<sup>5</sup>. Although there is no official data on the exact number of people under international protection residing in Croatia<sup>6</sup>, most of them live in Zagreb.

When it comes to migrant workers, in the period between January and December 2024, 27.227 new work and residence permits have been issued by the Police Administration Zagrebačka.<sup>7</sup> On 31st January 2023 there were 20.508 TCNs with temporary work residence residing in the City of Zagreb. From those, the biggest number of migrants were from neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, then from Nepal and India, 128 TCNs have been enrolled and 450 foreign citizens (including EU nationals) are staying in Croatia as part of the EU Erasmus+ mobility program. The largest number of students comes from Spain (78),

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<sup>3</sup>Asylum Information Database - AIDA, Croatia Country report, ECRE, 2023, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/croatia/>, page 37

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Interior, Statistics, International Protection, <https://mup.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama-16/statistika-228/statistika-trazitelji-medjunarodne-zastite/283234>

<sup>5</sup> source: Government of Croatia, Proposal of the Law on Amendments And Complements of the Law on International And Temporary Protection, with the final Bill, 16th January 2025, [https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2025-01-16/174802/PZE\\_115.pdf](https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2025-01-16/174802/PZE_115.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of Croatia, Social Inclusion of persons granted international protection ([Društvena uključenost osoba kojima je odobrena međunarodna zaštita u Republici Hrvatskoj](#)), page 12

<sup>7</sup>Ministry of Interior, Statistics, Foreigners, <https://mup.gov.hr/gradjani-281562/moji-dokumenti-281563/stranci-333/statistika-169019/169019>

France (66), and Germany (64). and Philippines. At the University of Zagreb in 2023<sup>8</sup>, 128 TCNs have been enrolled, and 450 foreign citizens (including EU nationals) are staying in Croatia as part of the EU Erasmus+ mobility program. The largest number of students comes from Spain (78), France (66), and Germany (64).

Several established migrant-led associations and initiatives, most of which have been established in the last 4-5 years exist in Zagreb. Additionally, there are several established local-migrant initiatives and associations that gather both refugees and other migrants together with the local population, with aims of promoting intercultural dialogue and practices. Some of them are: PADUH - Pan-African Society in Croatia, Association of Ukrainian women SVOJA, associations and initiatives of the Nepalese community such as Myagdi Migrant/Overseas Nepalese Association (MONA), Association of Non-Residents from Nepal in Croatia (NRNA Croatia), Tamang Samaj Croatia, Africans in Croatia Connect, The International Women's Club Zagreb, Living Atelier DK and the Women to Women collective, Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed POKAZ, Association Afro Badinya, Homeguests Choir, Bicycle repair shop, Football club Zagreb 041. Finally, more and more individuals with migration and refugee experience are becoming more prominent and visible in talking publicly and advocating for improvement of their rights and the rights of their communities.

In Croatia, on a national level there is no plan or strategy that regulates migrant integration and/or participation which makes it difficult for local and regional self-government units to adopt legislations, plans or strategies on the local and regional level. In 2018, the state Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities created the Framework for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection at the local level<sup>9</sup>, as a supporting document for local and regional self-government units in their preparation of local strategies and action plans for the integration. They also produced the Procedure protocol for the integration of persons granted international protection<sup>10</sup>, as one of the steps in overcoming challenges faced by local authorities working in the context of migration and integration. 18 special integration coordinators at the local level were appointed in the following municipalities: Slavonski Brod, Duga Resa, Bjelovar, Sisak, Daruvar, Zadar, Zagreb, Lepoglava, Osijek, Karlovac, Koprivnica, Lipik, Varaždin, Zaprešić, Rijeka, Požega, Čakovec and Velika Gorica.

**City of Zagreb is the first city in Croatia with the local Action plan on integration** (Action plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of international protection seekers and persons who

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<sup>8</sup>Srednja.hr, Domestic students are decreasing: We checked how many foreign students there are at universities in Croatia, 2023

<sup>9</sup>Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of Croatia, [Okvir za integraciju osoba kojima je odobrena međunarodna zaštita na lokalnoj razini](#) - Framework for the integration of persons who have been granted international protection at the local level (available in Croatian and English language

<sup>10</sup> Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of Croatia, [Protokol postupanja prilikom integracije osoba kojima je odobrena međunarodna zaštita](#) - Protocol for the integration of persons granted international protection, 2023

have been granted international protection for 2022<sup>11</sup>), aimed at supporting persons with international and temporary protection. This plan outlined various measures in areas such as social protection, healthcare, language learning and education, employment, strengthening local integration capacities, and inter-city and international cooperation. The City of Zagreb is currently implementing a second action plan, titled Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024<sup>12</sup>, that, in its scope, includes migrant workers as well.

In 2022, the City of Zagreb established the **Coordination of the City of Zagreb for the integration of the persons under international protection**, as an advisory board on integration issues that initially included one refugee, but since 2023 now includes 4 persons with migration experience. Its main task is the creation and monitoring of the Action plan for integration. Its competencies include: promoting the integration of persons granted international protection and other foreigners; defining activities for developing integration policies and encouraging the involvement of stakeholders in the creation of strategic documents; coordination of city administrative bodies and public institutions owned by the city, civil society organizations, religious communities, representatives of migrant groups and the academic community in the implementation of integration measures; preparing new solutions and creating conditions for their implementation; encouraging the cooperation of the city and the exchange of experiences with other cities in Croatia and abroad, as well as civil society organizations; monitoring the integration process in the city.

In addition, in 2024 the City of Zagreb opened **One-Stop Shop**, a welcome centre space in the city centre, that functions as a centralised place where all migrants living in the city can receive information on services provided, find out more about the scope of their rights, receive free legal advice and so on.

City of Zagreb conducts public consultations concerning legislation, strategic policies or action plans by inviting the people to participate via its website, however there is no specific policy (or practice) regarding migrant integration and participation and other alternative offline or online participation methodologies (e.g. e-participation portal, participative budgeting, issue-raising meetings).

The City of Zagreb currently does not have an integration strategy, but in its current Action plan anticipates the creation of it. The strategy should be based on the results of the research on the realization of the rights of migrant groups and the use of services provided by the City

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<sup>11</sup>Action plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of international protection seekers and persons who have been granted international protection for 2022, [https://web.zagreb.hr/Sjednice/2021/Sjednice\\_Skupstine\\_2021.nsf/0/C12586DF003A998EC12587C00048F0A9/\\$FILE/02%20Prijedlog%20akcijskog%20plana.pdf](https://web.zagreb.hr/Sjednice/2021/Sjednice_Skupstine_2021.nsf/0/C12586DF003A998EC12587C00048F0A9/$FILE/02%20Prijedlog%20akcijskog%20plana.pdf).

<sup>12</sup>Action plan of the City of Zagreb for the implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024, <https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/ljudska%20prava/web/Akcijski%20plan%20GZ%20za%20provedbu%20Povelje%20Integriraju%C4%87ih%20gradova%202023-24.pdf>

of Zagreb and drafted by the external expert, however there is no news on implementation of this measure. The City of Zagreb has allocated some funding for translators and cultural mediators through its Action plan, recognizing the importance of these roles in supporting migrant integration. However, the funding was for external assistance and mediation – for NGOs that have received funding to implement the City’s Action plan for integration – as there are also no cultural mediators employed within the city nor different public institutions of the city. Additionally, the City of Zagreb has also employed external translators at their One-Stop Shop, to help facilitate access to essential services for migrants.

Right to vote is conditioned by the Croatian and/or EU citizenship, as provision of the Voter Registration Act<sup>13</sup>. Only Croatian citizens can be elected in city district councils or neighbourhood boards.

## **GERMANY**

### **City of Berlin**

According to the Berlin Statistical Office, a total of 3.878.100 people lived in Berlin on 31 December 2023. Of these, 1.537.944 people (39.7%) have a migration background<sup>14</sup>. Within this group, 591.575 (15.3%) have German citizenship, while the majority, 946.369 (24.4%), do not have it (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg 2024 (1), p.10). Of the group of EU citizens, 130.496 have German citizenship, while 276.409 don’t have it. (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg 2024 (2), p. 12-14). In this context, it should be noted that of the 24.4% of Berliners without German citizenship, 669.960 are TCNs who are denied the right to vote and stand for election (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg 2024 (2), p. 10). The fact that 17.3% of Berlin residents are denied the right to vote and stand for election due to their nationality indicates a democratic deficit and highlights the need to strengthen the political and social participation of this group.

The organisational landscape for migrants in Berlin is complex. It includes a large number of umbrella organisations, migrant self-organisations (MSOs), initiatives and associations as well as advisory boards that deal with participation and the concerns of migrants. Umbrella organisations of MSOs in Berlin represent different interests and are divided into general or specialised groups. They claim to represent both the social and political rights of their members and often act as their socio-political advocates. In Germany, there are an estimated 18.000 migrant self-organisations that deal with various aspects of social and political

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<sup>13</sup>Law on the Register of Voters, Zakon o registru birača (Narodne novine/Official Gazette Nos. 144/2012, 105/2015, 98/2019)

<sup>14</sup> The term “people with a migration background” is used only in this context, with regard to statistical analyses. According to the Federal Statistical Office, a person has a migrant background ‘if they themselves or at least one parent was not born with German citizenship’ For more information see: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Glossar/migrationshintergrund.html>

inclusion and participation (Teichmüller and Yılmaz-Günay 2023, p. 34). However, the exact number of organisations in Berlin is not centrally recorded, which underlines the diversity and high number of civil society organisations in the city. **The Berlin Engagement Strategy**, a document of the Berlin Senate contains a total of 26.500 associations and almost 1.000 foundations with legal capacity under civil law in Berlin (Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt 2020, p. 6). Although it is not noted how many of these organisations are migrant self-organisations, these figures give an indication of the local diversity of organisations in the city, many of which play a crucial role in supporting and integrating migrants. Thanks to the already established networks and structures, new migrants can orientate themselves more easily in Berlin society and receive the support they need in their native language (Stapf 2023, p. 14).

The migrant population in Berlin represents an essential and dynamic component of the city's society. The large number of organisations and initiatives shows the commitment of these groups, both to their own interests and to the strengthening of democratic principles. As political work in this area is carried out at both state and federal level and many demands are mutually dependent, both organisations at federal level and initiatives with a Berlin-specific focus are presented.

At a national level, the Federal Conference of Migrant Organisations (BKMO) provides a forum for the exchange and networking of migrant associations, representing political interests and campaigns for a participation law at federal level. The Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations (NeMO) is committed to enhancing the status of migrant organisations and combating racism and socio-economic inequalities. As a women-specific umbrella organisation, DaMigra represents the interests of over 60 migrant women's organisations. The alliance 'Pass(t) uns allen' campaigns for fair citizenship, naturalisation and voting rights and formulates demands through advocacy work.

At federal state (local) level, too, organisations work together within umbrella associations and initiatives to represent the interests of migrants. For example, the Migrationsrat Berlin e.V. has set itself the goal of promoting the legal, social and political equality of migrants in Berlin. Its activities include education, counselling, lobbying and fight against racism. The Landeskonzferenz der Migrant\*innenorganisationen (LKMO) promotes the exchange between migrant organisations and Berlin governance system and works towards formulating and achieving common goals. The Berlin Polyphon initiative unites over 200 migrant initiatives and campaigns for equal opportunities and democratic conditions.

The legal framework for the participation of migrants in Berlin has been institutionalised since 1981 through the institution of a Commissioner of the **Berlin Senate for Integration and Migration**. This commissioner acts as an ombudsperson and has the task of developing concepts and measures that promote the equal participation of migrants (Teichmüller and Yılmaz-Günay 2023, p. 19). The **Law on Participation in the Migration Society in the State of Berlin, known as PartMigG**, forms the central legal framework for the integration and

participation of migrants and their descendants at state level. It defines integration as a task for society as a whole and promotes participation in all areas of life (ibid, p. 18).

The law contains three objectives, which result in three approaches to action:

- The interests of migrants should be consistently considered and the orientation of administrative action towards the migrant community should be strengthened.
- The employment of people with a migration background in the public sector should be specifically promoted in accordance with their proportion of the Berlin population
- The structures that promote participation at state and district level should be secured and further developed, and migrants and their civil society organisations should be promoted, integrated and supported.

The interaction of internal administrative processes (better orientation of measures towards the migrant society, participatory administrative action), the ongoing provision of resources to promote migrant involvement (grants) and the creation of participation structures and opportunities (committees, initiatives, cooperation) are prerequisites for participation.

At district level, the **District Assemblies of Councillors (BVV)** and the **District Offices** are responsible for implementing the opportunities for participation of migrants.

TCNs are excluded from participating in elections for the BVV, but can participate in the committees (working groups for specific topics) as citizen deputies. These persons, who are nominated and elected by the parliamentary groups of the BVV, have the right to speak, propose motions and vote in the committee (ibid, p. 14-15). The District Administration Act (2021) also allows non-Germans to be active as citizen deputies and stipulates that the diversity of migrants in Berlin should be adequately represented in these committees (BezVerwG, BE § 21). Within the BVV, there is a **Committee for Participation and Integration**, which is responsible for participation of migrants and their descendants. (BezVerwG, BE § 32)

Despite these legal regulations, the SVR Integration Barometer 2022 shows that there are considerable differences in political participation between German citizens with and without migrant background. People with migrant background are less likely to use their right to vote and are less politically engaged than residents without a migrant background. This participation gap can have a negative impact on the political representation of migrants. Voter turnout among migrants and their descendants was 70.4%, compared to 87.9% among people without a migrant background. This discrepancy is an integrative obstacle and affects not only elections, but also other forms of political participation, such as participation in demonstrations or involvement in political parties (Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration 2022, 20 ff.)

The political participation of migrants is particularly characterised by their residence status. Refugee women in particular, who are undergoing asylum proceedings, are confronted with

a number of restrictions that affect their access to political participation and the labour market (DaMigra 2020, p. 40).

Berlin is a member city in European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR) network.

There is a wide range of cultural mediation programs designed to facilitate access to social and public services for migrants and refugees in Berlin. One key offering is the role of Integration Guides (Integrationslots\*innen), who act as bridges between target groups and society, promoting participation and equal access. They assist both migrants and Berlin's social institutions in making their services more accessible.

Another important initiative is the "Stadtteilmütter" (neighborhood mothers), who serve as contacts for families from similar cultural backgrounds. They help families navigate access to support and assistance services, thereby improving educational and participation opportunities for children from migrant families.

Additionally, there are various linguistic mediation services available, such as language support in schools, for the healthcare sector (SprInt), and a telephone interpreting service for government agencies, all of which support intercultural exchange and integration.

Moreover, specific projects like "MiMi" and the Intercultural Awareness Teams (IKAT) in Neukölln have played an important role in providing information and support to affected communities, particularly during the pandemic. These projects and services contribute significantly to promoting integration and social participation in Berlin.

## **GREECE**

### **Region of Crete (and Heraklion Municipality) and Neapoli-Sykies Municipality**

According to the official statistics<sup>15</sup>, until 2021, 29.557 migrants were registered in the region of Crete, while 11.377 were in Heraklion Municipality (pg. 13). In the region of Crete, out of the 37.216 applications for housing allowance in 2021, 15.537 were from foreigners, while 47% of the Municipal Community Centres' beneficiaries were non-Greeks.

Statistical data from the office of Decentralized Administration of Crete present the following findings: 5.609 issued permits to migrants during the year 2023 and early 2024 in the Prefecture of Heraklion and 2.058 permits under revision (not yet approved) during the year 2023 and early 2024. Data from the Community Centre, Municipality of Hersonissos present the following findings: 675 migrants supported since 2017, 267 of whom registered during the year 2023 and early 2024.

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<sup>15</sup> Read more in: Region of Crete, (June, 2023). *"Special Electronic Edition of the Observatory for the social and spatial planning of sustainable development in the Region of Crete"*. Retrieved (20/09/2024) from: <https://socialobservatory.crete.gov.gr/index.php?lang=gr&com=news&id=46>

Yet these numbers do not capture the real size of the migrant population, since many of them remain undocumented, thus invisible in official records. It is also important to highlight the reluctance of some organisations to share their data, including the Regional Asylum Office of Crete and municipal sources. Other sources publish fragmentary recording (e.g. Ministry of Migration and Asylum publishes data solely about unaccompanied minors) or an unsystematic and unclear recording (e.g. 7th Health Region of Crete reports on all foreigners served by the health sector, and not only the ones residing in Crete, and as a result tourists and visitors are included). There is no official recording of the second-generation migrants.

A similar case can be observed in Neapolis-Sykies in Thessaloniki metropolitan area where approximately 12% of the population consists of migrants, primarily from Albania and Georgia, many of whom have resided in the area for over fifteen years. The local Greek Language School, established in 2009, has seen about 100 graduates annually, helping facilitate the integration of non-native speakers. While the Community Centre offers access to social solidarity and housing allowances, the actual size of the migrant population is likely larger than recorded statistics indicate, as many remain undocumented and are therefore not reflected in official records. Additionally, inconsistencies in data reporting among various organisations contribute to challenges in accurately capturing the full scope of the migrant population in the area.

The above information illustrates that there is no systematic public sector recording of data about the migrant and refugee population. Most of the organisations keep partial track of the population they serve (during a specific period and/or under specific circumstances). Some of them, do not share information as procedures are protected by GDPR protocols, while others tangle their data, rendering them inadequate for accurate processing.

Migrants are organised in various forms of civil society organisations, according to Greek law. Active immigrant communities in the wider Heraklion area who have developed initiatives, such as cultural and educational activities (e.g. native language learning) or other actions for societal support of their members are: Pancretan Kurdish Association, LELEKI – Pancretan Ukrainian Association, Heraklion Albanian Union, Chersonissos Albanian Union, Greek – Egyptian Association, YEDINSVO - Russian-speaking Association, Russian-speaking Association of Chersonissos, Arab community (informal), Bulgarian Union of Crete, Serbian community in Chersonissos (informal), Dutch community in Chersonissos (informal), Tritomartis Women Association in Chersonissos, Association of Poland’s Friends.

Similarly, in the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykies, migrants have formed their own associations over the decades, primarily consisting of individuals from Albania and Georgia. This municipality actively supports various initiatives, including cultural events that promote inclusion and social cohesion. Additionally, a municipal Centre for the Integration of Migrants has been established to provide essential social, accounting, and legal services to migrants and refugees, showcasing the municipality's commitment to organising resources that foster community support and integration.



In Greece, the legal framework for migrant integration and participation at the local and regional levels is primarily outlined by the **Kallikratis Programme and Law which introduced Migrant Integration Councils (MICs)**, that serve as advisory bodies within municipalities. These councils aim to identify and address the challenges faced by migrants, proposing local actions to promote their integration and enhance their participation in decision-making processes. MICs also facilitate communication between migrant associations and local authorities. Law mandates that foreign councillors, if elected, must participate in MICs, ensuring representation of TCNs in local governance. However, the formation of MICs is discretionary, leading to inconsistent implementation across Greece. Municipalities such as Athens, Patras, Korydallos, Heraklion, and Thessaloniki have established MICs, but many others have not, often due to a lack of political will, fear of backlash, or resource constraints.

The right to vote and be elected could not be extended to foreign nationals by the Greek Constitution, which restricts these rights to Greek citizens only. This ruling creates a significant barrier to the TCNs' participation in local governance. Consequently, they remain excluded from formal political processes, lacking the ability to influence decisions that directly affect their lives. Despite some local initiatives aimed at fostering integration, such as **Migrant Integration Councils (MICs)**, the inability of TCNs to vote undermines the effectiveness of these efforts, limiting their representation and voice in the political landscape. Ultimately, it is important to note that there are no policies regarding the right to vote at the local level, as this issue is addressed solely at the national level.

In 2018, with the re-evaluation of their operational framework and procedures under Article 79 of Law 4555/2018, the mandate of the local MICs was extended to include refugees and asylum seekers. **The Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (MRIC)** play a vital role in facilitating civic participation and enhancing the integration of migrants and refugees within local communities. However, the establishment and effectiveness of MRICs can vary significantly across different municipalities. While some larger cities, such as Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Korydallos, and Heraklion, have successfully set up these councils, many smaller municipalities lack the political will, resources, or infrastructure necessary to implement them. Additionally, the operational framework for MRICs is often left to the discretion of local governments, leading to inconsistencies in their functioning and impact. Even though the constitution of a regional/local consultative migrants' body/ advisory board is obligatory by the law, in every municipality nationally, only one municipality from the Heraklion Regional Unit – the Municipality of Heraklion is fully aligned with this guideline. The other two municipalities, Malevizi and Hersonissos, both home to many migrants, are aware of the need and significance of the MRIC and are in the process of its constitution. Respectively, for Malevizi MRIC, a call has been announced to migrant communities. Hersonissos, despite having data about local communities, has not reached out to them yet with an official call for participation.

**The Heraklion Municipality MRIC** was established already in 2012 and seems to work on a regular basis (recorded more than 50 meetings from its activation date).<sup>16</sup> Heraklion's MRIC is comprised of 6 municipal councillors and 5 refugee/migrant community representatives as members, while at the same time, local stakeholders may participate as observers. Since the last elections which took place in 2024, the members of the new Council have met once informally to coordinate actions for the "Refugee Week festival".

In summary, while the MRICs represent an effort to create regional and local consultative bodies for migrants in Greece, their implementation is inconsistent, and their impact on integration and political participation remains uneven. Active e-participation, as well as active in situ participation in issue-raising meetings, are goals yet to be achieved within the local context.

**The Local Action Plan on integration of Municipality of Heraklion**<sup>17</sup> was written in 2020 with the collaboration of their social services including Heraklion Development Agency (HDA) as collaborating local stakeholder. The Local Action Plan was subjected to consultation by the MRIC and was approved by the Municipal Board and constitutes the main and most holistic initiative on local integration strategies. However, this Action Plan never came into action or got a budget allocated for its purpose. Thus, this plan is now evaluated as inadequate and outdated, because many conditions/aspects have changed in the field since its writing and adoption. Therefore, its enhancement and update with specific proposals, including actions for refugees and migrants and advocacy towards re-discussing and adopting an updated Local Integration Strategy, can be envisaged.

The Municipality of Neapolis-Sykies will still be developing a Local Integration Action plan.

Cultural mediators are employed as interpreters, while several more, former associates, are available upon request in exceptional cases in order to meet a beneficiary's specific need. Several migrants are informally acting as cultural mediators beyond the operation of the existing programs. They are very active members of their communities, and have obtained this role unofficially, either by themselves or it was assigned to them by the members of these groups. The significant difference between the two categories is that the people who have been employed within the context of a program act more as interpreters and less as cultural mediators, whereas the people who are members of the communities act more as cultural mediators and less as interpreters, at large at an ad hoc basis. Yet both are largely untrained, and an official registry still does not exist, nor are professional qualifications standardised. It is important to note that, this limited group of people, able to provide interpretation, is

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<sup>16</sup> Read more about Heraklion MRIC in: Municipality of Heraklion. (October, 2020). "Local Action Plan on social integration of refugees and immigrants", (pp. 14 ff.). Retrieved (25/09/2024) from:

[https://www.heraklion.gr/files/items/7/75408/topiko\\_shedio\\_koinonikis\\_entaxis\\_d\\_irakleioy.pdf](https://www.heraklion.gr/files/items/7/75408/topiko_shedio_koinonikis_entaxis_d_irakleioy.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Municipality of Heraklion. (October, 2020), as mentioned before.

constantly requested by service providers involved with refugees and migrants (i.e. the police, the port authority, courts etc) to assist them with standard procedures, very often at the expense of their personal time and responsibility.

## ITALY

### Empoli Municipality

As of January 2024, according to [Istat](#) the Province of Florence (Città Metropolitana di Firenze) had 130.700 foreign residents, making up 13.2% of the total population. The largest communities are Chinese: 18.2%, Romanians: 13.2% and Albanians: 11.9%. In the municipality of Empoli the number of foreign residents reported is 8.646 making up 17.6% of the total population. This data shows an increase compared to January 2022, when 7.799 foreigners were residing in Empoli, accounting for 16.1% of the population.

The organization of migrants and citizens with a migrant background in these areas is through several local associations and initiatives which support the integration and community engagement of migrants and refugees. For instance, in Empoli, organizations such as La Misericordia, Oxfam Italia, and Empoli per la Pace are active in providing services and promoting inclusion. Additionally, the [Empoli Partecipa](#) participatory platform created in the framework of the EMVI project offers information on services, rights, and opportunities for foreign migrant citizens, facilitating their involvement in the community and aims to promote the participation of migrants through online and offline contributions.

While for migrant associations, it is not possible to estimate the exact number, but the most active ones are: Centro Culturale Islamico, New Generation Club, Comunità Filippina in Toscana, Associazione Disso. Many more operate on a province level offering services to migrants residing within the territory.

In Empoli the social services and specific services regarding migrants are managed by the Società della Salute (SDS) which is a public entity managing all social services for the territory of Empoli–Valdarno-Valdesa. **SDS plays a crucial role in supporting migrants through various services, including accommodation, health care, legal assistance, language courses, and initiatives aimed at social inclusion.**

For migrants requiring assistance and specific services in Empoli, four cultural mediators speaking the most common community's languages are provided and around 10 of them operate in the central offices of the Società della Salute. On a political level Empoli does not have an Integration plan regarding migrants but abides by the National Multiannual Integrated Programming in Employment, Integration and Inclusion.

Thus, on a more national level overview, local authorities in Italy possess autonomy in certain areas of governance, largely due to the decentralization outlined in the Italian Constitution

and subsequent legal reforms. Specifically, regions are responsible for planning, organizing, and coordinating social services at the local level, playing a key role in the delivery of social and welfare services.

The impact of the recent changes in national and EU laws regarding migration is considerable at the regional and local levels, where authorities now face reduced resources and capacity to support integration.

On the other side, participation still struggles with formality meaning that only informal participation is promoted and encouraged in the country with the right to vote for resident migrants still a mirage. On the national level migrants cannot vote and the process of naturalisation takes as long as 10 years making it even more difficult for migrants to gain full rights and be active on the political level. Since 2024 though a referendum and a national campaign have been taking place to reduce the years required to apply for Italian citizenship to 5 and official voting on the national level is expected to be in April 2025.

In previous years the participation of migrants has been promoted through the creation of regional and local migrant councils all of which are currently inactive. In 2012, the municipality of Empoli introduced a migrant council. However, the initiative was not effective because the community's requests were treated as a single, uniform entity, without considering the diverse needs and differences among the various groups within the migrant population. The council survived only one mandate and was not re-elected.

## **LUXEMBOURG**

### **Schifflange Municipality**

As of the most recent data, Schifflange has 4.587 residents born outside Luxembourg, making up about 41% of the commune's population. Foreign nationals represent 40.7% of the population, with 75.9% of these foreign residents being EU citizens, amounting to roughly 3.540 individuals or 30.9% of the total population. The remaining 24.1% of foreign nationals (around 1.096 individuals) are from non-EU countries, contributing to the commune's rich diversity, represented by 93 nationalities.

There are currently no formal migrant organizations or structured associations in Schifflange. The municipality has not yet initiated to formally initiate or support organizational structures for migrant communities, leaving a gap in the integration and inclusion process. This lack of institutional support limits the opportunities for migrant communities to connect and be proactive. Migrant engagement therefore largely relies on informal networks and community-driven initiatives. Young people with migrant backgrounds frequently attend community spaces like the language café, one of the few informal resources available to

foster engagement, where they can practice language skills, meet peers, and discuss social and political topics.

In Luxembourg as a country, the distinction between the local, regional and national levels is very limited, due to the fact of the small size and demographic composition of the country. That's why it is important to understand that the engagements of migrant communities on the national level, can affect local level as well. Most of the initiatives, gatherings and events are taking place in the capital (Luxembourg City) but it doesn't mean that it only involves associations and migrant communities that live in the capital, since there is a maximum of 40 min. needed to reach the capital city by car from any point in the country.

The Law on Intercultural Coexistence – Living Together (2023) is Luxembourg's key legislation addressing migrant integration and participation at both the local and regional level. This law, which replaced the Law on the Integration of Foreigners (2008, updated 2017) is designed to promote social cohesion and diversity by defining intercultural coexistence as a participatory, dynamic, and ongoing process based on mutual respect, tolerance, and active efforts to counter racism and discrimination. As part of the law, the Citizen's Pact allows all residents to participate in educational programs that raise awareness and promote understanding of intercultural values. Through this pact, citizens can engage in initiatives that reinforce the values of respect, tolerance, and active participation, helping them to integrate better within their communities.

A cornerstone of the law is the **Communal Pact for Intercultural Coexistence – Living Together, which provides a formalized, six-year framework for municipalities to foster local integration through a participatory process.** By signing this pact, a municipality commits to: ensuring access to essential information for all residents and promoting transparency and awareness about civic rights and duties; encouraging active participation from all members of the community, whether they are residents or individuals who work in the municipality; combatting discrimination and promoting diversity as a vital resource within the commune. A pilot phase of the Communal Pact, conducted in the years 2021-2023, demonstrated the potential for success through local engagement, providing a basis for its wider implementation. For municipalities that sign the Communal Pact, the government provides several forms of support, including financial aid to cover costs related to implementation or hiring of a coordinator. Technical assistance is also available through government advisors and partner organizations, such as ASTI (Association for the Support of Immigrant Workers) and CEFIS (Centre for Intercultural and Social Studies and Training), ensuring that each municipality has the resources to foster integration effectively, but for this you need human resources, projects and foreign expertise as well.

The municipality of Schiffflange signed the Communal Pact in 2024 and committed to a six-year participatory process. However, the activities are until now mostly oriented towards

offering some basic language courses in English and Luxembourgish and hosting an annual “Fête des Cultures” festival, which celebrates the community’s cultural diversity. No structured integration programs specifically aimed at improving migrants’ participation or social inclusion on a broader scale are introduced. While Schifflange does have an external mediator, it does not employ a cultural mediator to assist with intercultural communication and understanding. The absence of a cultural mediator means that there is limited direct support to bridge cultural divides or address specific challenges that might arise from the commune’s diverse demographic, especially in areas where language and cultural differences could impact effective communication and social cohesion. While Schifflange has formally committed to integration by signing the Communal pact, the municipality has been hesitant to fully embrace initiatives that ensure access to information for all residents, foster active participation from community members—including those who work in the commune—and combat discrimination to promote diversity. to proactively implement integration strategies or take additional local initiatives.

The Law on Intercultural Coexistence also mandates that each municipality creates a consultative committee with a mission to promote intercultural coexistence. These committees, designed to bridge the gap between Luxembourgish citizens, migrants, and local authorities, have been empowered with expanded roles and responsibilities. Notably, 16 members from these consultative committees were elected for the first time to the Superior Council for Intercultural Coexistence in June 2024, giving them a formal voice in shaping national policy on integration.

**The Integration Consultative Commission of Schifflange** is the primary advisory body focused on migrant integration at the local level. It comprises of seven TCNs and seven Luxembourg citizens, representing political parties. It serves to advise and assist communal authorities on matters related to integration, promote dialogue, and propose actions that support social cohesion. According to the Living Together law (2023) the Integration Consultative Commission is transformed to the Commission of Intercultural Living Together. The composition does not require TCN status anymore, but members can be anyone who lives or works in a municipality. It also lacks structured local programs or platforms specifically supporting migrant organizations or structured community groups, reflecting a gap in active, municipality-led integration strategies.

Also, the Law on Luxembourgish Nationality (2017) allows participation in intercultural modules to be counted towards the application process for Luxembourgish nationality, formally recognizing civic engagement as part of integration. This legislation acknowledges the central role of municipalities in implementing integration policies. Municipalities are encouraged to act as the first point of contact for new residents, long-standing inhabitants, and daily commuters, fostering an environment of harmonious intercultural coexistence. Although participation in the Communal Pact remains voluntary, the law promotes municipal

involvement, underscoring that local integration is crucial to social cohesion and the recognition of diversity as a key strength.

In Luxembourg, TCNs can vote in local municipal elections, which are organized every 6 years, provided they meet certain residency requirements. Migrants in Schifflange can exercise this right in communal elections, giving them a say in communal governance and decisions. However, the rate of voters among TCNs in Schifflange is relatively low, around 20%, below the national average of 23%. This low participation suggests the need for initiatives to encourage registration and civic engagement among foreign residents, which could foster greater representation in local decision-making.

Schifflange has been hesitant to embrace e-participation which limits opportunities for migrants to engage in civic matters digitally, however there are first steps like a survey on Living together. This kind of participation could otherwise provide more accessible ways for those unfamiliar with traditional processes to participate in local governance.

## **SLOVENIA**

### **Municipality of Ljubljana**

On July 1st, 2024, 298.227 inhabitants lived in the Municipality of Ljubljana, of which 144.666 man and 153.561 women. The share of foreign citizens in Ljubljana is 14,1% of the total population, which represents 42.116 people, namely 24.892 men and 17.224 women. This is a significantly higher percentage of the total population in comparison with Slovenia in total where the percentage of foreign citizens is 9,8 %. Foreigners living in Ljubljana are citizens of the following countries: Bosnia and Hercegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Croatia, Bulgaria, China, India, Montenegro, Italy, Turkey, United States, Iran, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Romania, Hungary, Thailand, Syria, Belarus, Afghanistan, Spain, Poland, Kazakhstan, Austria, Netherlands, Slovakia, Egypt, Bangladesh, Japan, Czech Republic, Israel and other foreign counties. (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024)

Migrants in Ljubljana are not very well organized when it comes to their respective organisations. There are only a few organisations led by migrants themselves, such as Cultural Society Danilo Kiš, whose activities go beyond the Serbian community and are dedicated to reflecting on minority status in general and discussing all relevant topics from the Balkan region. Then there is Global – Institute for Global Learning and Project Development, focusing mostly on global equality with a focus on development cooperation. Similarly, there is the Institute for African Studies – Centre for Research, Education, Migration, Diversity, which is not so active lately. The Intercultural Dialogue Society was established 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. African Village Slovenia is a society focused

on counselling migrants but especially for organising a yearly African fest in the centre of Ljubljana. 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. Non-government organisations dealing with the integration issue in Ljubljana are: Slovenian Philanthropy – Association for the Promotion of Volunteering, Association Odnos, The Humanitas Association – Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation, Advocacy, Sustainability and Global Perspectives, ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) Slovenia, Cultural Association Gmajna. Besides, there are self-organised collectives that have been active within the Rog Autonomous Factory - Rog Embassy and Second Home, followed by Infokolpa a self-organised migrant community. In recent years, more and more individuals with migration and refugee experience are becoming more prominent and visible in talking publicly and advocating for improvement of their rights and rights of their communities.

There is no legislation that explicitly covers migrant integration and participation on local/regional level. However, 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 came into force. The first, as the most important innovation, introduces the right to vote in local elections 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 other foreign citizens, e.g. such as ex-Yugoslav citizens, who make up the largest group of foreign nationals in Slovenia).

In Slovenia, the field of integration, is entirely within the competence of the state, ie. Ministry of Interior and the government Office for Integration and Inclusion of Migrants. So far, the state, has not transferred integration obligations and opportunities to local communities, nor have any policies been developed on that matter, yet. However, the field of local integration in Slovenia is for the first time defined in the Strategy for Integration of Foreigners, from October 2023, in the Section IV: Integration in the local environment. According to the Strategy, the Office for Integration and Inclusion of Migrants is responsible for implementing local integration measures, including the following activities: Raising awareness of the importance of coexistence and promoting intercultural dialogue; Establishing municipal Councils for Foreigners as a consultative body of the local authority or designating a person in the municipal administration for the rights of foreigners that relate to the competences of municipalities; Establishing a system of intercultural mediators - pilot project; Establishing legal bases for the transfer of competences for the integration of foreigners at the local level. Still, it is not clear how these measures will be implemented as in the Local Self-Government Act which regulates the tasks of municipalities, there are no tasks related to the integration of foreigners among the work areas of local self-government.



"Neither in Slovenia nor in Ljubljana is there such a body 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)

In the Municipality of Ljubljana there is no policy regarding local integration. According to Municipality of Ljubljana representatives, a local integration strategy is not necessary as the responsibility of integration lies at the state level. However, in 2021, the Municipality adopted its third Social welfare development strategy for the period 2021 - 2027, one chapter of which is also dedicated to the integration of migrants. As a consequence of cooperation with the non-government organisations (Peace institute, Cultural Association Gmajna and African village Slovenia), within the EMVI project, **the Working group for the establishment of the Migrant advisory board** has been established in the Municipality of Ljubljana led by the vice-mayor. Members of the working group are municipality administrative workers, representatives of non-government organisations, migrant organisations and representatives of the government Office for Integration and Inclusion of Migrants. However, the working group is not yet fully functional and needs better structure and administration.

The City of Ljubljana finances some social welfare programs implemented by non-governmental organizations and intended to help and support migrants in their social integration (Mozaik Society, Slovenian Philanthropy, MISSS Institute, Ključ Society). The Municipality does not employ cultural mediators and, given the tasks assigned to municipalities by law, in their opinion, they do not need them for the time being.

Besides the online platform [Decidim Ljubljana](#), which has been established by the non-government organisations within the EMVI project, there are no other offline or online participation methodologies for migrants developed in the city of Ljubljana.

### III MIGRANTS COMMUNITIES NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. Right to vote

In Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece and Italy, TCNs don't have the right to vote, even on a local/regional level. This creates a sense of exclusion and alienation, especially in environments where migrants live and work for a long time (like in Croatia, Germany and Greece) or are even second generation (like in Austria and Italy) and are an integral part of society in all its aspects. Their political inactivity provoke frustration and feeling of powerlessness as they cannot freely decide about their future in the environment where they create their lives. In this process, migrant women are particularly vulnerable. The process of obtaining citizenship is usually long and complex, and even when it is acquired, migrants often continue to feel politically excluded due to the colour of their skin or their ethnic background.

On the other hand, Slovenia and Luxembourg provide access to voting rights for TCNs at local/regional level. However, due to lack of political education, bad representation of migrants in political processes, the lack of attention that migrants receive in election campaigns and political discourse, they are often politically inactive. In Luxembourg, only a minority of around 20% of migrants are registered in the voting list. In most of the countries, political parties simply ignored certain groups during election campaigns because it was assumed that these groups either did not have the right to vote or were not interested in political participation. This neglect was described by one participant as "racial profiling in election campaigns", which leads to certain population groups being marginalised and excluded from political agendas. Migrants are often only included in political discussions when it comes to typical migration issues (which are usually connected with criminalisation). This leads to the engagement of migrants being reduced to a single identity characteristic instead of recognising their opinions on a broad spectrum of social issues.



Migrants, also interviewed in EMV-LII research, strongly demand the introduction of the right to vote. Without that, it is difficult to talk about real political participation. Not being able to vote in any elections is seen as a form of discrimination that must be changed. It is still not clear 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 has the right to vote in their country of origin—different than the majority of foreigners who live, work and, last but not least, 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.

Long-term migrants live and work in the country and are an integral part of it. The right to officially participate in political life is crucial. Political integration means that immigrants are involved in political decision-making processes in the country, can actively participate in these processes and influence decisions. 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 legally reside for the long term 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. Additionally, the time limit for citizenship should be shortened, and access to citizenship should be eased. Speeding up the citizenship processes and raising awareness among migrants about their civic and political rights and responsibilities will make our communities more cohesive and better places for all.

## **2. Language skills**

The lack of language skills among some TCNs is another important obstacle to political and civic participation. This influences both, their access to services and understanding their rights, which is also closely connected to their (lack of) engagement in political and civic life. Constant barrier is the interpreting problem when dealing with the authorities, as their services are very often not multi language inclusive. This hampers their efforts to navigate bureaucratic processes, access to essential services, and engagement with local communities, and also policy makers; as well as in networking and building relationships. The language barrier not only inhibits the understanding of administrative procedures but also restricts migrants from fully participating in discussions about policies, strategies, and available resources related to integration and participation that affect their lives.

Some cities/regions (like Luxembourg) are multilingual which complicates the situation even further, and in some cities/regions (like in Italy and Austria for some permits) possessing an A1 or A2 language proficiency is required for long-term residency permits, and lacking these language skills excludes many migrants from full civic and social participation. That's why it is a great challenge for the first generation of migrants to join the political field due to the language barrier.



a) More language courses should be organized for migrants on local/regional level. In Slovenia this has been advocated by the migrant organisations in the past years as it was understood as one of the main obstacles for political participation of migrants. Expanding the availability

of free or affordable language courses, tailored to different proficiency levels and different language needs, would help migrants to better understand local policies and participate in civic life. More language hours, better teachers and more availability during the day and in an available place are necessary. Classes should also be flexible, accommodating work schedules and providing childcare where needed. Alternative forms of language learning also in the form of language cafés for children, men and women would enhance the ability to participate politically. This should also be combined with measures that achieve greater language accessibility (targeted language courses), translations of documents available, translators at meetings etc.) allowing for greater participation throughout. Also, participation topics should be used more in language classes as teaching content.

b) Local and regional authorities should ensure that materials related to access to migrants' rights and available services, but also information about legislation and information about ways of participation in policy processes and development of strategies and plans are translated into different commonly spoken migrant languages and easily accessible both online and in-person. The participatory processes should also be organised guided with the thought of language accessibility. Multilingual information accessibility would help bridge the communication gap and enable migrants to better understand their participation options.

c) Local TV and radio programmes should be available in multiple languages, ensuring that migrants can stay informed about current regional issues in their native language. Many of the political discussions are happening in the national language only, so migrants are often excluded. The information and news should be available in multiple languages. Partnering with local/regional and national media outlets would help amplify the voices.

### **3. Information and knowledge**

Migrants often lack accessible information and knowledge about their rights, the procedures for accessing services, as well as existing migration and integration legislation, policies, and regulations. Coming from different political systems and maybe not having been politically active in their country of origin, migrants may lack understanding of local/regional governance, and how the process of political participation, rights and responsibilities is shaped. Key information about public services, integration strategies, and participation processes often isn't widely available especially not in the languages spoken by migrants. A lack of knowledge about existing counselling services, the political system and concrete opportunities for participation is a key obstacle and negatively affects migrants' initiative of participation and active citizenship.

Many advocates and members of associations do not know exactly what the mandates of local and regional authorities are and or those of the state, but more importantly, they are unaware of all the available options for participation on either levels – be it for example the online possibility to comment on law propositions or participative neighbourhood talks

organized by cities on different issues, or, of course, self-advocacy methods that could be used to raise different issues on the agenda of the localities chosen.

More knowledge is also needed on how to correctly analyse community needs and how to create positions and recommendations in suggesting changes based on these needs. Knowledge and know-how on how to self-organise, how to influence policy, how to advocate, and what civic and political participation and being active can mean in different contexts is also mentioned by migrants. Those interested in starting associations are not sufficiently aware of all the bureaucratic needs and requirements in regard to starting and more importantly maintaining registered associations, as they struggle with over-bureaucratic system of governance on all levels, and combined with it, lack of information provided in different languages. Issue of capacity is lack of specialized knowledge within the organizations (or with individual activists) on particular problems and questions many of their members reach out with – such as very specific legal questions with regards to status rights, or inquires of assistance in instances of violation of labour rights, or specialized knowledge in fundraising, social networks and promoting events etc.



Increasing knowledge on policy participation processes for migrants is however essential. Educational programs and workshops should be organized by local and regional authorities in collaboration with NGOs, that explain the structure of integration strategies, action plans, and the ways migrants can engage in the creation of these policies. This includes providing clear information on what integration strategies entail, how action plans are implemented, and what role migrants can play in shaping and evaluating these initiatives. The courses should keep in mind language accessibility as well as accommodation of work schedules and providing childcare when needed. These should be integrated in the integration programmes on regional /local level.

Migrants should be well informed on how they can be included in other migrant organisations but also in the bodies within local/regional authorities that are dealing with local integration, including alternative offline and online participation methodologies. Having civic education and engagement initiatives that is targeted to migrants and migrant associations on local levels, to know about voting rights, participation, and having information sessions on the administrative system and understanding the legal obligations is crucial.

#### **4. Capacity, finances and infrastructure for migrants' organisations**

Inadequate capacities, financial resources and lack of infrastructure in migrant-led organizations may limit the effectiveness of members' political and civic participation.

There is a lack of knowledge of advocacy and participation processes themselves. Small or non-existent budgets and lack of possibilities and / or knowledge to fundraise limit the options of the associations and keep them working on small scale activities and financed

primarily through small donations and membership fees. The need for more funding is a recurring issue: many small associations need adequate financial support to survive, which limits their ability to offer services and participate in large-scale integration projects. This is further exacerbated by the fact that associations often struggle to access public funding due to the complex bureaucratic procedures required, which demand technical expertise that is not always available. Also the lack of adequate spaces for migrant associations is a concrete problem, especially in cities where these organizations struggle to find venues to meet and organize activities.



a) To increase inclusion and participation in decision-making processes, authorities in collaboration with NGOs should offer training programs in capacity-building that empower migrant-led organisations, but also individual advocates. These programs could cover themes such as advocacy and public communication skills, legal knowledge, fundraising, understanding local governance systems and means of civic engagement and participation, fundraising and project writing, all to strengthen the ability of migrant communities to represent and advocate for their interests effectively.

b) Migrant organisations should be financed better through different public calls and funds, especially focused and designed to support migrant-led associations and their projects and initiatives, to strengthen their capacity to organise and participate in policy processes and advocacy engagement. Also, easier access to financial and training resources for migrant organizations, which often face difficulties in obtaining the necessary funding to support their activities is needed. It is crucial to simplify bureaucratic complex procedures which are an obstacle to participate in public tenders or carry out projects reducing growth opportunities for smaller associations and limit their impact. More technical and training support for fund management and tender participation should be provided.

c) Consultation of migrant organisations needs to be more valued and viewed as an integral part of decision-making. So, finding new ways of structural and long-term funding for migrant organisations is important. Structural funding for migrant organisations on the local, regional and state levels is crucial to enable them 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. 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 realise 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.

d) It is important to assure public spaces are available and affordable for migrant organisations which will help them in gathering, organisation and working. Migrant and migrant organisations need meeting places for organisation, socialisation and production making as well as public spaces for events, gatherings and presentation of their activities. Migrant and migrant organisations should be visible in order to be better integrated and having their own spaces for production and promotion is one of the crucial conditions.

## **5. Structural obstacles / Visibility**

Structural discriminatory positioning and practices of institutions in charge of integration and migration, coupled with unpreparedness and a lack of understanding of migrants' specific needs in the broadest sense – the need for cultural sensibility, readily available information that can be understood, and services available to all, particularly to most marginalised is one of the biggest obstacles for participation in public life. For most migrants the topics of political and civic participation are a struggle to be worked on once they have managed to go through the bureaucratic barriers and obtain equal access to services and when there are legislative and regulatory changes in different discriminatory practices that still prevent this equal access. The issue of understanding their surroundings, rights and services, as well as organising leisure time through sports activities and culture and getting to know the local community through these activities, is deemed much more important. Economic difficulties and access to the labour market which represents a fundamental part of the integration process also slow down political participation and inclusion. Migrants often face precarious working conditions, with insecure contracts and low wages, making it difficult to achieve economic and personal stability. Without a solid economic foundation, migrants find it challenging to dedicate time and energy to civic and political participation, as they are constantly focused on achieving personal stability. Once people do engage in public discussions and media interviews they are often faced with backlash and increased hate speech, so there is a general need of having a safe and hate-free environment to be able to participate, tackle issues of structural barriers etc.

Also, migrant associations often lack formal representations with municipal / regional governments. Currently there are councils and local commissions. This process doesn't ensure representation from migrants' communities or having representations from migrants' organizations. This lack of acknowledgment and understanding that hearing and taking advice from communities most affected by different policies will ultimately be beneficial for the improvement of the policies themselves, by ultimately bettering their implementation and reaching set objectives and goals to meet community needs, has to be tackled. The main obstacles that migrants, migrant organizations and/or migrant representatives face in the process of participation for more effective integration at local/regional level include the fact that there are hardly any migrants working in the administration who could act as role models. This is why the Berlin Participation Law is so important as it aims to promote the

employment of people with migration backgrounds in line with their proportion of the population.



a) To create a less welfare-oriented and more empowering narrative regarding social inclusion, recognizing the value of cultural diversity and promoting true integration based on dialogue and collaboration between institutions, associations, and local communities is crucial. Also, migrants and migrant organisations should be more included in the integration and participation processes of local and regional governments as well as shaping of the integration strategies with a special focus on political/civic participation. Employment or engagement of cultural mediators in local/regional institutions beginning with municipalities would be an important step in this direction. Cultural mediators can help open the processes of participation and make them more inclusive: dialogue and communication channels between local and regional authorities and migrant-led associations and advocates should be established on a regular basis, and other methods of participation in city and regional policies and issues should be opened to the participation of migrant associations and advocates and made more inclusive to promote/include greater representation of migrants in institutions.

Also, a stronger network between associations and organizations operating in the area of integration should be developed, which should be able to intercept the means and the political focus of local authorities. This kind of widespread perspective could also be useful for addressing the lack of representation of migrant citizens in the public and institutional sector, promoting the creation of spaces dedicated to inclusion and integration.

b) Inclusion and participation cannot be separated from the material needs of migrants. The lack of good working conditions, the housing crisis, and the linguistic difficulties are the first areas of concern. Only with a good reception system can integration be possible. Development for targeted economic, employment support programs to improve the competencies of migrants in job search, employment and entrepreneurship skills is therefore one of the priorities.



## **IV LOCAL/REGIONAL AUTHORITIES**

### **NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. Local integration strategy and implementation plan**

Except for Graz, where local integration strategy is a good example, in other municipalities where strategy exists: Lustenau, Berlin, Heraklion, there is a need to make it more inclusive and communicative. Migrants and migrant communities in the respective cities/regions are not always fully aware with the strategy and its provisions. Strategies are also not always available in several languages, so migrants can read them. In general, there is a need for better understanding of integration strategy policies, including decision-making, public consultations, city/region administration powers, and most importantly how can migrants and migrant communities participate and have their voices heard. In Luxembourg, the main issue with the integration strategy is that it treats the EU and non-EU citizens equally, while the needs of both are different. TCNs often face specific challenges related to employment, housing, social services and language learning that are not adequately addressed. The issues they encounter are often overshadowed by discussions focused on cultural issues (events, festivals or initiatives) that do not directly impact their needs.

In Empoli and Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies the strategy is yet to be developed. In Croatia and Slovenia, the field of integration is still very much centralised, making most issues related to the topic falling mostly under the mandate of the state institutions. Also, most of the budget is centralised, thus local/regional authorities lack special resources earmarked for integration. Legislation, as well, does not enable local/regional activities in the field of integration, and even when the legislative frameworks might exist, the regulation that additionally codifies it in practice is difficult to implement. While City of Zagreb do have documents and action plans that are relevant for integration as well as cooperation with CSO sector is quite strong, Medjimurje Region as well as Municipality of Ljubljana still have not developed their own action plans and protocols for integration, ie. integration strategies and implementation plans. They are also lacking data collection on how many migrants live in their areas, their gender, age, and other identifiers that might help make it clearer what are their specific needs. There is also a lack of guidelines, resources, staff and knowledge on how to deal with local integration. Inefficiency of integration policies is also the result of a weak intersectoral cooperation of competent institutions with local communities and civil-society organisations including migrant communities and organisations, the academic community and, generally, professionals dealing with integration.



Except for Graz which can be a good practice example, in other municipalities where strategies exist (Lustenau, Berlin, Heraklion, Luxembourg,) they have to be more inclusive. They have to be translated in languages that migrant and migrant communities speak and

understand. In the period of preparation and implementation they have to be communicated with migrants and migrant communities in order to address their real needs, wants and aspirations. Once accepted they have to be widely communicated among migrant communities so that migrants are aware of their provisions.

For the Empoli Municipality, renewal of the strategy has to be done. In Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies, Ljubljana, City of Zagreb and Medjimurje Region local integration strategies and / or implementation plans should be developed and adopted. Preliminary activities should be done in cooperation with migrants and migrant communities as well as with other non-government organisations and experts dealing with the topic. Policies should be grounded in empirical evidence and data analysis to ensure that they are responsive to the actual needs of migrant communities. Establishing mechanisms for regular research and evaluation will help policymakers adapt strategies based on what works.

The sustainability of integration strategies beyond local elections should be ensured. Relevant stakeholders should make sure that the strategy will be followed regardless of the results of the local elections and political options.

Public outreach campaigns should emphasise the benefits of migration for local communities, showcasing the positive contributions migrants make to the economy, culture, and social fabric. This will help counteract negative perceptions and promote a more inclusive narrative.

Education and developing awareness about the need to develop and implement local integration strategies are the main areas that should be improved in the work of local and regional self-government units in order to support the development and implementation of local integration strategies.

Regular town hall meetings or forums where citizens can voice their concerns directly to local officials would foster a sense of community and trust, allowing officials to better understand the needs of their constituents.

## **2. More inclusive/diverse structure of the LA/RA**

In some communities (Graz, Lustenau, Heraklion, Empoli, Berlin, Luxemburg, Zagreb), local structures or integration units have been established within the LA/RA, with staff employed in the field of local integration and intercultural mediators have been engaged. Some others (Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies, City of Ljubljana and Medjimurje region) do not have any of that. One of the most pressing legislative issues is the lack of adequate representation and participation of migrants within the local/regional legislation. There is a strong need to establish these instruments where they don't exist and improve them where they are in operation.

The issue is the absence of coordination within the communities as well as with other local, regional and national institutions making it difficult to establish clear paths for local/regional integration. There is also a need for local/regional authorities to have stronger coordination and collaboration with migrant organizations, not only through participation in multicultural festivals or occasional projects and encounters but within mechanisms that provide and discuss local integration strategies and needs and organizing a public consultation on integration in local areas. To include migrants in political processes, many municipalities lack community engagement and awareness: effective outreach programs to engage migrant communities and raise awareness of their rights and available resources. Local and regional authorities need more structure to develop integration and inclusion programmes in their work. They need special departments, offices or at least a person responsible only for local integration and inclusion.

Low visibility of participation opportunities is a key obstacle to political participation. Many participants reported that it takes a lot of time and research to find out about existing opportunities. Information on advice centres and opportunities for participation is often difficult to find and fragmented. This makes it particularly difficult for newly arrived people to access these services. There is a need to make the positive contributions of migrants more visible in order to change the problematic and deficit-oriented narrative about migration and to increase the visibility of participation opportunities.



a) Where Integration departments do not exist, they should be established with educated staff and allocated budget for their activities. Where they exist, Integration departments should be run by a culturally diverse team. Moreover, the diversity of the staff should be present in all departments of the city/regional administration. Establishing a diversity team or manager who can serve as an additional consultative body to the local decision-making process is another proposal. Also, employment of intercultural mediators, who support the municipalities to improve the accessibility of services and increase the presence of underrepresented minorities. The employment of migrants in the public sector should be one of the priorities of local/regional authorities.

b) Implementation of intercultural dialogue programs through online platforms, allowing residents to engage in discussions about cultural differences, shared values, and community-building is important. Participation programmes should be advertised in a targeted manner and made available in several languages. In addition, more trustworthy contact persons are needed for communities. Political education and participation programmes should generally be available in the native languages of the target groups in order to facilitate access and increase participation. The administration therefore also needs to utilise digital tools to reach migrants.

c) Mainstreaming migrant integration in policymaking should be one of the priorities. Integration efforts should be mainstreamed into all areas of policymaking rather than treated as standalone issues also by incorporating the perspectives and needs of migrants into broader policy frameworks. Improved communication strategies should be developed to ensure that migrants are informed about their rights, the services available to them, and how to engage with local governance processes.

In order to enhance the participation of migrants in their localities, as well as to develop policies that answer to different community needs, it is crucial for local and regional authorities to focus on increasing direct outreach to individuals and migrant communities rather than relying solely on intermediary organizations. By engaging directly with the groups, local governments can foster better communication and understanding of the needs and concerns of migrants, which can directly impact the policies they create in different areas – not only policies on integration. These spaces could be created with different inclusive and participative methods – such as an open day for discussions on different themes relevant to communities (access to health, education, safety in public space), keeping in mind the need for translators and mediators, and other things. In addition, the city could be more proactive in creating educational spaces that inform migrants about their rights, services available to them on a city level, as well as different local participation strategies, and available resources. These initiatives can empower migrants to actively engage in local policy-creation and more generally, in active local community life. Multilingual materials and events, the provision of childcare and the opportunity to bring people of trust to the programmes would further enhance participation.

d) Supporting the visibility and audibility of migrant communities is essential for empowering these groups and ensuring their voices are heard in policy discussions. This could involve creating platforms for migrants to share their experiences and contribute to public discourse. Special focus should be put on the empowerment of migrant women, so more empowering activities for migrant women should be designed and offered by the municipality and associations in order to help them feel a sense of self-efficacy.

### **3. Migrant advisory boards**

In some communities (City of Graz, Heraklion, Berlin) there are already well established or newly established (Lustenau) migrant advisory boards. In Luxemburg there is also a board but with council members primarily from political parties, which creates a barrier for ordinary citizens, particularly those from migrant backgrounds. City of Zagreb has since recently established the Coordination, that has only an advisory role and in addition, consists of only a few appointed persons with migration background, together with employees of the City of Zagreb and several NGO workers. While some others (Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies Empoli, City of Ljubljana and Medjimurje region) do not yet have any boards. One of the most important issues in the field of local integration and inclusion is the lack of adequate

representation and participation of migrants in local/regional communities and migrant advisory boards are one of the good practices to make participation happen.

Advisory boards for participation and integration are sometimes not visible enough, both for the target groups and within the administration. The limited visibility also means that only a few people applied for vacant positions on the advisory boards, which impaired diversity and representation on these bodies.



a) In communities that already have established Migrant advisory boards, they should include migrants and migrant associations more effectively in working on integration and inclusion politics. More regular consultations directly with migrants' associations should be organized by policy makers and strengthened modalities for soliciting their opinions during decision-making processes should be developed. Providing the opportunity for board members to provide input on the official integration process will help the municipality to identify the real needs of the migrants living there.

In addition, the existing ways of participation of advising on city actions and city policies in other policy spheres – such as culture, sports, youth and others should also be encouraged from migrant communities and, more importantly, should be made more inclusive – with language accessibility, open forums inviting migrant communities living in different neighbourhoods and other measures.

To enhance the effectiveness of the advisory boards, improving communication channels, such as radio, social media, and public engagements should be done. Advocacy is essential for understanding how and where migrants can participate; there should be additional support specifically for women in this context. Workshops focused on effective communication would be beneficial.

b) Migrants and migrant organizations should be actively involved in policy discussions and policy co-creation, as well as evaluation. Establishing Migrant advisory boards therefore should be the priorities for local/regional administrations. They can help with regular consultations with migrant communities when drafting, revising or evaluating integration strategies and action plans can ensure that their needs and perspectives are adequately represented. Prior to that, research into the needs of migrant communities should be concluded regularly, so that the policies developed are informed by research.

Together with migrant communities, consultative advisory boards consisting of representatives of migrant organisations, communities, non-government organisations, experts and individual advocates in whichever way suits best to the regional and local context (be it by expanding existing bodies or establishing new or additional ones), and also to include into the mandates of these bodies some concrete mandates, actions and activities that can

actively shape, monitor and develop integration and inclusion measures in local/regional environment.

c) Establishing clear pathways for non-partisan citizens, particularly migrants, to join advisory councils should be one of the priorities. Consider quotas or dedicated seats for representatives of migrant communities to ensure their voices are included in decision-making processes. Encourage a more democratic process in setting meeting agendas that actively seek input from all council members, not just those from the majority party. This could include regular forums or workshops where migrants can share their concerns and suggestions. Shift the focus of discussions to the specific challenges faced by migrants, such as access to housing and employment opportunities. Initiatives should be developed that directly address these issues, with input from migrant communities to ensure their needs are met.

d) Visibility of the advisory boards should be raised. The low visibility contributes to the fact that potential interested parties and those affected are hardly aware of the opportunities for active participation in the advisory boards. The participants therefore should consider it necessary to increase awareness of the advisory boards through targeted public relations work in order to utilise the full potential of these bodies for political and social participation.

#### **4. Capacity building of the LA/RA**

Employees of the LA/RA face many challenges from administrative and bureaucratic to socio-cultural and political. Most of them are lacking information and knowledge about the importance of local integration and inclusion as well as awareness and understanding how this influences the local community as such. Due to hierarchical structure of the LA/RA many are lacking personal initiative and have usually a go with a flow attitude. Some don't know the language and culture of the different people who they have to deal with, so there is a need for creating multilingual communication. Some employees do not know fully the legal frameworks and legislation for different migrants with different administrative status, are not aware of the broad scope of issues and problems they are facing, and some also might have prejudice towards migrant groups they are in contact with. Sometimes the LA/RA count too much on the civil society sector to engage and assist in integration issues – reaching out to communities, implementing actions etc., without being fully aware of the precarious nature of work of NGOs in a field that is lacking funding and support from structures, while the needs of communities are ongoing and numerous.

A lack of trust in administrative structures is a key obstacle to the equal participation of migrants. The administration often does not have sufficient knowledge of the perspectives and needs of these target groups and is therefore hardly able to understand why certain offers are not accepted by those affected. This leads to misunderstandings and a lack of trust, which makes access to counselling and support services more difficult.

Despite the integration strategies and migrant boards, which aim to integrate the perspective of migrants into politics and administration, political and individual resistances often make it difficult to implement these requirements. There is an urgent need to address and root out institutional racism and hate speech within public institutions and society at large. Implementing anti-discrimination policies and promoting awareness initiatives can help foster a culture of respect and inclusion.



a) The importance of greater representation of migrants within the administration and political institutions is enormous. Increasing the proportion of migrant employees is crucial to ensure that the perspectives of this population group are taken into account in decision-making processes and in the day-to-day work of the administration. Assuring enough staff are available to work on issues of integration and inclusion, and in particular finding ways of employing cultural mediators and staff with migration background should be a priority. Also, treating migration and the participation of migrants in the administration not just as a specific task of individual departments, but as a comprehensive cross-cutting issue. The establishment of permanent networks and direct communication structures between MSOs and all administrative units was considered fundamental in order to make the perspectives of migrants visible in all areas of society.

b) Capacity building trainings should be organized for LA/RA focusing on building existing staff's capacity to work effectively with migrants and migrant-led organizations. These could involve training programs, workshops and various educations that focus on:

- understanding the importance of local integration, inclusion, anti-discrimination, multiculturalism, tolerance and equality;
- integration skills, such as navigating public services, understanding local customs, and building social networks;
- intercultural competencies, communication skills as well as skills needed to work with persons with trauma;
- meaningful participation, co-design and other participatory methods of inclusion of migrant voices in the development and implementation, as well as evaluation of policies and measures;
- raising anti-racist and anti-discrimination values, and understanding the unique challenges faced by migrants;
- civic rights and responsibilities, including information on how to navigate local governance and participate in political processes, tailored for various cultural backgrounds;

- political advocacy, equipping residents with the tools and knowledge needed to advocate for their interests within the political system;

- language trainings for municipal staff are crucial including translation services/interpreters to improve communication with TCNs and implementing multilingual resources and signage within municipal offices to help guide citizens.

These activities could and should be organised in collaboration with local migrant and other local non-government organisations. Also, creating self-led intra-regional and intra-local networks of collaboration, so that local and regional governments can become more proactive and less dependent of state provided information, so that they can connect with other cities and regions to exchange good practices and advice, network for potential funding possibilities and so on is desirable. LA/RA should also strengthen cooperation with civil society sector in their localities, as NGOs have shown to have good contacts with migrant communities and good knowledge of specific needs.

All these measures can equip local/regional authorities with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support migrant integration.

## **5. Political will**

The issue of political will and political structure within the city and regional governments are crucial. Many things can be planned and implemented even without clear national policy when political will for them exists. On the other hand, if political power relations change, things can easily shift. There is a need to build structures and mechanism which are sustainable and not overly dependent on each political representative/party in power. The other issue is long term concentration of power in one person (usually the mayor), which leaves employees with no autonomy or space to make changes or take action without orders from the top.



The general issue of decentralisation of governance and civil service reform should be advocated. By having a decentralised approach to integration, the local and regional authorities would have more power, freedom and flexibility to respond to the often rapidly changing needs of their local and regional localities and develop localised and contextualised policies and approaches. This decentralisation would also be coupled with decentralised budgeting for integration, with more funds becoming available to city and regional authorities to develop and implement inclusive policies, as well as services to cater to the needs of all members of their communities, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Developing comprehensive, coherent, needs-based and long-term policies and strategies on inclusion, as well as anti-racism is a priority. There has to be increased awareness that



although local governments and policies are following national legislation and policy, many measures can be developed as above-minimum standards, thus filling the gaps of the lacking national framework. In addition, there is growing awareness that policies on integration and inclusion have to be coupled and complemented with policies combating racism and discrimination – in particular that of a structural nature. In this way, cities and counties can be at the forefront of tackling issues of structural and institutional discrimination and establishing good practices that other localities and ultimately the state can look up to.

A stronger commitment from political leaders and local authorities is essential for creating an inclusive environment for migrants. Advocacy for migrant rights and integration must be prioritised to foster a supportive atmosphere that recognises the contributions of migrants to society.

Besides building knowledge of migrant advocates and communities, there should be an equal process of building knowledge with policy and decision-makers on both the importance of centering migrant voices in general policy creation, and in particular policy that is specifically thematising them as a group. Decision and policy makers should be equipped with knowledge on how to meaningfully engage with communities and how to create spaces of dialogue, co-creation and co-design, where communities feel safe to voice their needs and concerns, problems and barriers they are facing and ideas and recommendations to solve them. There should also be knowledge building on effective and inclusive ways of increasing migrant participation on local levels in other already existing participation methods of cities and counties.

## **V GOOD PRACTICES**

## **City of Graz**

### **Participatory development process of the Integration Strategy**

The approach the Integration Department in Graz took was highly participatory, including migrant-led associations, NGOs, practitioners and academia. Above all, the MAC is outlined as main cooperation partner in the design and implementation of the integration strategy. The entire development took two and a half years, including several different formats of participation. Participation is further formulated as an overarching approach of the strategy. Through this highly participative and appreciative process, the mission statement is supported by the MAC and many migrant associations and is therefore widely accepted and sustainable. Also, it was published together with an implementation plan and is available in the migrant languages.

## **Municipality of Lustenau**

### **Successful community work in the Hannes-Grabher-Siedlung estate**

An innovative community work project was initiated in the Hannes-Grabher-Siedlung, a neighborhood in Lustenau, to improve the quality of life of the approximately 400 residents. The aim was to strengthen the sense of community through active participation and creative approaches. The activities involve regular workshops with residents to identify their needs and desires, the design and implementation of community projects such as the playground redesign, and the organization of events to encourage resident interaction. This initiative is backed by local funding and supported by a dedicated team of social workers and volunteers. The community work in this neighborhood shows how participatory approaches can sustainably improve the quality of life in a residential area.

## **City of Zagreb**

### **One stop shop**

The One Stop Shop /Welcome Centre is a newly opened city space located in the centre of Zagreb that serves as a central point for providing information to migrant populations living in the city about services and rights available to them under the responsibility of the city. The centre, opened in September 2024, is the first service of its kind in the Republic of Croatia, designated to serve migrant populations of different statuses: seekers of international protection, recognised refugees, migrant workers with information, assistance in accessing services, free legal aid and other types of support. The designated business premises for the One Stop Shop are located in Zagreb, Petrinjska Street 31 (intended for receiving clients and the permanent presence of office staff and representatives from the Croatian Red Cross) and Petrinjska Street 73 (intended for holding workshops, language courses, etc., in cooperation with civil society organizations). This creation of the One-stop shop was one of the planned

measures in the City of Zagreb's Action Plan for the implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024.

## **Međimurje County**

### **The Taste Fest**

In November 2023, a pilot event called the Taste Fest was organized for the first time in Međimurje County by Platform for Community Center Čakovec, with the aim of reducing prejudices among the local population. The event Taste Fest 2024 was repeated this year, on April 12th. In the center of the town of Čakovec, there were several teams cooking dishes from their national cuisines, including migrant workers from the Philippines, Nepal, and India. The mission of the festival this year is once again the integration of migrant workers who live and work in Čakovec and Međimurje, connecting them with the local community and reducing prejudices. The main chefs at the festival were once again migrant workers from the Philippines, India, Nepal, Cameroon, Senegal, and Japan, joined by displaced persons from Ukraine, members of Kalinka – the Association of Russian-speaking people in Međimurje, as well as our fellow citizens originally from Lebanon. The City of Čakovec financially supported the Taste Fest, recognising its importance for the city.

## **City of Berlin**

### **The State Advisory Council for Participation**

The State Advisory Council for Participation in Berlin plays a key role in representing the interests of migrants and their descendants. The council has been enshrined in law and reformed as part of a broader strategy to encompass German Society as significantly and historically shaped by migration. It solidifies and at the same time widens the scope of political participation on migration to all spheres of administration policies, politics and society.

This advisory body collaborates closely with policymakers and administrative bodies, including the responsible senator and state secretaries, and meets regularly to discuss topics, propose motions and pass resolutions. Thematic working groups enable targeted engagement with various areas of life, while training sessions support the professionalization of its volunteer members. Cooperation with other institutions further enhances the council's impact.

Challenges primarily lie in the limited time resources due to the voluntary nature of the members' work, as well as in the development and consolidation of structures and workflows. Knowledge transfer is another critical factor to ensure continuity and long-term effectiveness. A significant milestone is the legal establishment of district councils for participation and integration in Berlin's 12 districts. This addition enables more comprehensive participation at both state and district levels, strengthening democratic involvement. The State Advisory

Council serves as a model for promoting participation through targeted advocacy, professionalization, and collaboration, even as ongoing improvements remain necessary.

## **Municipality of Heraklion**

### **Includ-EU project (2022 / 2023)**

The Region of Crete in collaboration with the Health Region and the national health authorities, aimed at ensuring the provision of inclusive health services:

- launched the Personal Health Record (e-PHR) building on the knowledge and experience from other regions,
- trained health staff on the use of the e-PHR,
- provided health promotion materials and health mediation services (i.e. interpretation and mediation support) to ensure common understanding between beneficiaries and health promoters,
- established “Info Help Desks” to enhance information provision for migrants at local level in Crete, starting by assessing the prevalent needs and gaps in service provision with all relevant stakeholders.

The aim of the electronic Personal Health Record (e-PHR) and its platform was to enhance knowledge amongst stakeholders about refugees’ and migrants’ health needs, to ensure that migrant health assessment records would be available at transit and destination countries and to strengthen national and cross-border disease surveillance and response capacities. This project was implemented in two periods, the first from February 2022 – August 2022 and the second from June 2023 – August 2023.

## **Empoli Municipality**

### **HUGO - Human Geography Organizer**

This project was born from the cooperation between the Municipality of Empoli and the COeSo Empoli Consortium and proposes actions aimed at redeveloping/regenerating the "station area" focusing on enhancing the relationships between the people (migrants, citizens, young people), who live and work there and pass through it during the day and at night. HUGO is a construction site open to everyone's creativity, it hosts all cultures and supports the participation of every person.

With the aim to guarantee active listening to the specific needs and support in resolving problems related to the inclusion of migrants, HUGO has set up an InfoPoint which offers orientation on services such as legal support for migrants, support for employment, housing, language courses etc. The desk also wants to be a point of collection for needs and proposals from all citizens. To promote social cohesion HUGO also organises social and intercultural activities, movie screenings etc.

## **Municipality of Schifflange**

### **Café polyglot (Linguistic café)**

Language café (café Polyglot) is more than a place of learning – it is a vibrant interplay of people, stories, and emotions that create a unique community. For three years, it has been a space where people not only meet but truly connect. Those who have been with us since the beginning are like the roots of a strong tree: they provide support, stability, and ensure that the café continues to grow and flourish.

Our dog is more than just a silent companion – he is an invisible bridge-builder between people. He brings smiles, lightness, and a sense of closeness that words sometimes cannot convey. Often, it is these small, quiet moments – a hand stroking his fur while a shy participant is gaining courage – that shape our special atmosphere. But the heart of our language café is what we create together: an atmosphere full of empathy, acceptance, and trust. It is a safe place where everyone is welcome with their fears, hopes, and dreams. Here, boundaries dissolve – not only linguistic ones but also cultural and personal.

Like a perfectly balanced recipe, every participant, every encounter, every laugh, and every story contribute to the whole. Some bring spice, others sweetness, and some add a surprising note that enriches everything. No ingredient is too small, no role insignificant. Everyone who is part of our café – whether human or dog – has their place and makes it what it is: a living, unique recipe that shows us all what community truly means.

## **Ljubljana Municipality**

### **The Intercultural Centre**

The Intercultural Centre is a learning environment where people enrich each other through mutual respect and cultural understanding. Free activities are intended for both immigrants and the majority population of the Municipality of Ljubljana of all generations. The Intercultural Centre project is part of the City Adult Education Programme and is financed from the City budget of the City of Ljubljana. The Intercultural Centre is a meeting point for different cultures: a place of mutual respect, where the majority population connects with immigrants, where we learn about Slovenian culture, customs and traditions, but also the cultures, customs and traditions of other nations.

Through activities, they strengthen ties between the majority population and immigrants, encourage acceptance of diversity, raise awareness of the population about the importance of intercultural dialogue and intercultural competences, and encourage the active integration of immigrants into society and the labour market.

They offer free advisory, educational and information activities, activities related to culture and art, public awareness and promotion of intercultural dialogue. The activities are aimed at immigrants and the majority population of all generations.