MIGRANT INCLUSION IN DECISION MAKING AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

MILE – Migrant Integration through Locally designed Experiences

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research of the past few decades has shown the importance of local policies for migrants' integration.[1] This policy paper is about the role of city authorities in facilitating the inclusion of migrants in decision making. Drawing on data from the preliminary MILE Reports that investigated the participation of migrants and refugees[2] in local decision making in four European municipalities (Birmingham, UK; Ioannina, GR; Riga, LV; Ripollet, ES) and the EU, we provide a selective overview of existing policies and initiatives, barriers and challenges local governments face and opportunities they may benefit from.

The four municipalities differ in terms of population size, migrant populations, administrative capacities and political orientations. While it seems difficult to establish common patterns among them, they can be used as examples of similar or diverse pathways to inclusion in local policy making.

According to the European Commission's EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027,[3] "inclusion for all is about ensuring that all policies are accessible to and work for everyone". Thus, while integration in the EU is broadly defined in societal terms as "a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all migrants and residents of EU member states",[4] inclusion can be seen as a policy-oriented concept.

We consider inclusivity as a multi-level process consisting of three steps:
(1) migrants being recognised by local governments as beneficiaries of local services as well as contributors to local communities;
(2) migrants' voices being heard by local governments and other local stakeholders regarding local issues;
(3) migrants' voices being incorporated in local decision making.

1) For example: Alexander, M. (2003) Local Policies toward Migrants as an Expression of Host-Stranger Relations: A Proposed Typology. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 29 (3): 411–30. DOI: 10.1080/13691830305610. de Graauw, E. & Vermeulen, F. (2016) Cities and the politics of immigrant integration: a comparison of Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 42 (6): 989–1012. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2015.1126089. Spencer, S. & Delvino, N (2019) Municipal activism on irregular migrants: The framing of inclusive approaches at the local level. Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 17 (1): 27–43. DOI: 10.1080/15562948.2018.1519867. Furri, F. (2017). Villes-refuge, villes rebelles et néo-municipalisme. Plein droit, 115, 3–6. DOI: 10.3917/pld.115.0003.

2) We treat migrants and refugees as a single target group. Despite some distinctive characteristics deriving mainly from differences in legal status, the density of actors and services devoted to each category and sometimes time of residence, migrants and refugees face many similar barriers towards inclusion in decision-making.

3) COM (2020) 758 final: Action plan on the integration and inclusion, 2021-2027.

4) COM (2005) 389 final: A Common Agenda for Integration Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union

For example, getting a housing allowance is a preliminary form of inclusion but being able to express your opinion in a consultation process about housing allowances is more than that and participating in a body with decision making powers on the allocation of allowances is an even more integrated form of inclusion.

While the third "step" is certainly the capstone of what we can describe as inclusion process, the two first steps shape the ground on which the process unfolds. Even if subsequent steps are pending, each of the preliminary ones creates opportunities for promoting inclusivity. Moreover, the three steps do not necessarily unfold in a simple linear order. The provision of basic services will always be necessary even when a municipality has moved 'forward' to the incorporation of migrants' voice into mainstream policy and towards migrants' direct participation. Steps 2 and 3 should be adopted early on to shape how basic services are delivered. Eliminating previously established methods of consultation and participation is also a possibility where they become outdated as migrants' needs change over time. Hence the process of inclusion is rather cyclical and involves an ongoing reflection on each step.

Inclusion can be understood both at the individual and the collective level. Individual inclusion, i.e. an individual's participation in decision making institutions and mechanisms depends mainly on one's own social ties, cultural background, education and economic prosperity. Collective inclusion is about being included as a member of a group and involves group organisation and representation. **Collective representation** becomes more important towards the third step of inclusion, as migrants' voices need to be incorporated and their impact assessed. Following the timelines of inclusivity in the four municipalities, we identify specific sets of inclusivity tasks (ITs) that make up the role of local governments in migrants' inclusion. Some of them are more related to the first step of inclusivity, such as providing basic services that **increase migrants' capacity to participate (IT1)** and making migration **beneficial for local communities (IT2).** Other tasks are more connected with the second step of inclusivity, especially those of **changing local discourses (IT3)** and establishing **methods of consultation (IT4).** Another set of tasks concerns the third step and consists of methods for migrants' **direct participation in decision making (IT5)** and methods to improve **institutional responsiveness (IT6).** The rest of this brief consists of key examples of policies that correspond to each of the ITs based on the MILE Reports and concludes with a set of recommendations.

FINDINGS

This section elaborates on three steps towards migrant inclusion in local decision making: **(1)** Recognising migrants as beneficiaries of support services, as well as contributors to local communities; **(2)** Enabling migrants to voice their concerns in local decision-making processes; and **(3)** Incorporating migrants' concerns into mainstream policies **(Figure 1)**. We draw on the findings and examples of best practice from the four municipalities and the EU to illustrate.
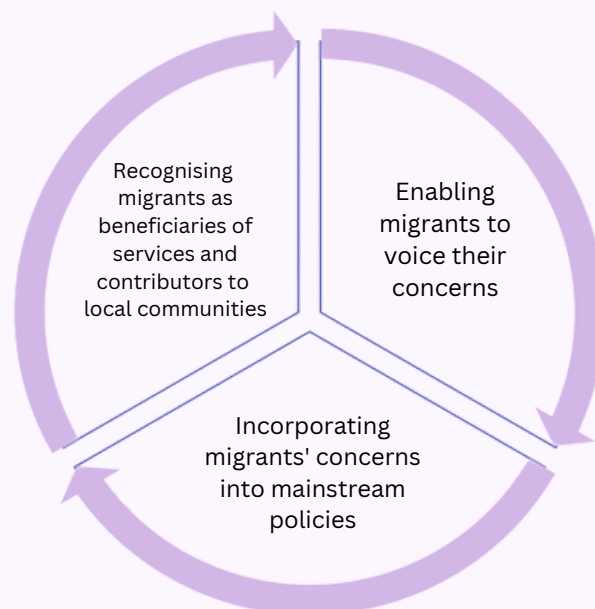
Figure 1: A three-step approach to inclusivity in local decision making.

1 RECOGNISING MIGRANTS AS BENEFICIARIES OF SUPPORT AND CONTRIBUTORS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

INCREASING MIGRANTS' CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE

Recognising migrants as beneficiaries of local support services and meeting their basic needs is a vital precondition of participation for many. At a national level, different categories of migrants may be included or excluded from accessing basic services and welfare support. Legal status affects migrants' entitlement to public funds, such as benefits and housing assistance. Municipalities around Europe have shown very different tendencies towards **irregular residents,** sometimes being overtly exclusive than inclusive but "elsewhere making provision that is more permissive than (what) national policy requires".[5]

Municipalities may wish to develop their own agendas regarding service provision to irregular(ised) migrants both for pragmatic reasons and also to promote their own values and sense of place.

Struggling with the basic necessities of life can be a great obstacle for inclusion both at early and later stages of integration, as material deprivation not only undermines individual self-confidence but also stigmatises and excludes some groups.

5) Bauder, H., & Gonzalez, D. (2018) Municipal Responses to 'Illegality': Urban Sanctuary across National Contexts. Social Inclusion, 6(1): 124-134. DOI: 10.17645/si. v6i1.1273.

Thus, the provision of vital services such as **health and housing support** is indispensable for all city residents regardless of their legal status (recognized refugees, asylum seekers, "non-legal" residents or economic migrants). A range of **integration services** provided by local governments, such as language skills and vocational training, can determine the conditions of integration in the local societies. **Legal advice** is also of major importance for people struggling with complex and indeterminate legal statuses and access to welfare benefits and other support.

Establishing services dedicated to migrants is important to address their specific needs. For example, providing adequate accommodation for newcomers is among the basic prerequisites for promoting a sense of belonging in the local society. The Municipality of Ioannina has recently been involved in two parallel accommodation systems for asylum seekers, the open camp-like facilities and the urban apartments of the devoted "ESTIA" scheme, funded by the EU and operated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, **quality matters:** the two systems differ significantly in several aspects, including living conditions for residents and spatial segregation from local communities.

Residential segregation and poor housing conditions in massive accommodation facilities tend to create social stigmatisation and reduced self-esteem, both being severe obstacles on the way to civic participation.[6]

The development of dedicated services is important even in localities with relatively small migrant populations, but **collaboration with non-dedicated services is also important.** Ripollet has the Department of Inclusion which is made up of units that focus on migrant reception, residential permits and provision of legal and social advice. The department collaborates with other municipal units (for Social Services; for Feminism and LGBTQIA; and for Employment) in a multifaceted approach that seems to respond to the EU's Action Plan call for measures helping migrants integrate, while also making policies more inclusive overall.

Establishing dedicated services is not enough if migrants lack information on how to access them and/or if coordination between different service providers is missing.[7] Birmingham has a separate "Prevention, Communities, and Migration Team" that oversees several migration-related projects and services. The team created the Birmingham Asylum Refugee and Migrant Support (BARMS) online directory of organisations, services, and groups dedicated to welcoming, supporting, and resettling Birmingham's migrant communities.[8]

6) Dārta Pelse, & Ieva Raubiško. (2023). The inclusion of migrants in policymaking. A report on Riga, Latvia. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7941519

7) See more on the need for cooperation between different service providers in the MILE Policy Brief on 'Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making'.

8) https://barms.org.uk/ [Accessed on 19/04/2023]. See also the MILE Policy Brief on 'Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making'.

Establishing dedicated services is also not enough when the local personnel is not familiar with how to deal with non-citizens and address their specific needs. The Municipality of Ioannina organised training seminars for its permanent frontline personnel regarding the reception and behaviour towards third country nationals, as well as on how to respect cultural diversity.

In a broader sense, one way to combat stigmatisation is to **include migrants in services that are not designed specifically for them.** Although Ripollet has no direct education policy for migrants, its Education Plan facilitates services for the study of the Catalan language and the inclusion of all newcomers into the educational system. Children and adolescents are integrated into the city's educational system as soon as they arrive. In a similar perspective, all newcomers holding permanent residence permits in Riga are officially entitled to the same services from the municipality as other inhabitants, including guaranteed minimum income benefits and housing allowances.

The response to migrants' needs benefits from a **multi-stakeholder partnership approach** that fosters collaboration with **non-governmental actors** at various levels and promotes non-**hierarchical networks** based on co-operation and consensus.[9]

> ## ❞ ONE WAY TO COMBAT STIGMATISATION IS TO INCLUDE MIGRANTS IN SERVICES THAT ARE NOT DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR THEM. ❞

Municipalities collaborate for this purpose with a variety of other actors, developing local networks that are reminiscent of (at least this aspect of) a **multi-level governance approach.**

In Ripollet, the municipality collaborates with local associations which assist newcomers and serve as "points of entry" before and after municipal authorities step in. In Birmingham[10] the "Foundation for Integration Project" was developed in collaboration with civil society organisations to facilitate migrants' integration. In Ioannina local stakeholders share their experiences and coordinate their activities trough an ad hoc Urban Working Group. A similar approach is present in Riga where several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide support.

9) Caponio, T. (2021) Governing Migration through Multi-Level Governance? City Networks in Europe and the United States. Journal of Common Market Studies, 59(6): 1590-1606. DOI: 10.1111/jcms.13214. Bazurli, R., Caponio, T. & De Graauw, E. (2022) Between a rock and a hard place: mayors, migration challenges and multilevel political dynamics. Territory Politics Governance, 10: 297-305. DOI: 10.1080/21622671.2022.2046633.

10) Birmingham has officially been declared 'City of Sanctuary' in 2015 with a commitment to being a place of safety for people fleeing violence and persecution, extended in 2019 to include all migrants visiting, residing or working in the city. See Birmhingham City Sanctuary.

MAKING MIGRATION BENEFICIAL FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Recognising **migrants as social and economic contributors to local communities** is a crucial step towards their inclusion in decision making. While integration policies are not among the EU competences, migrants' integration is perceived as vital in economic terms, both at the EU, national and local scale. Local policies can foster local economic activity by including migrants and refugees as target groups and by **making explicit the mutual benefits** that occur.

A key task is to **include migrant entrepreneurs** in policies and initiatives that aim at driving local economic development.[11] One example comes from Birmingham where the City Council introduced the "East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy" in 2017 to pioneer a new partnership working approach that would bring together public sector organisations, businesses and the local community to deliver inclusive growth and reduce inequalities in the most deprived city areas.[12] The Council wants to support and empower these communities to get involved in decision-making and work together as equal partners. The Business Leaders Project (BLP), funded by the local authority, aims to enhance business support for migrant-led enterprises operating in the city's impoverished neighbourhoods.

The BLP was developed from the ground up to support marginalised groups of migrant entrepreneurs, while developing their leadership capacity to participate actively in shaping local enterprise policy.[13]

Ethnic diversity in a city brings **increased opportunities for EU funding,** since supporting migrant integration and inclusion is a priority for the European Commission. Over the last 10 years, there have been several organisations working with migrants in Riga which have been participating in calls for projects and received funds.[14] Such fund-raising schemes create employment opportunities both for newcomers and members of the established societies.
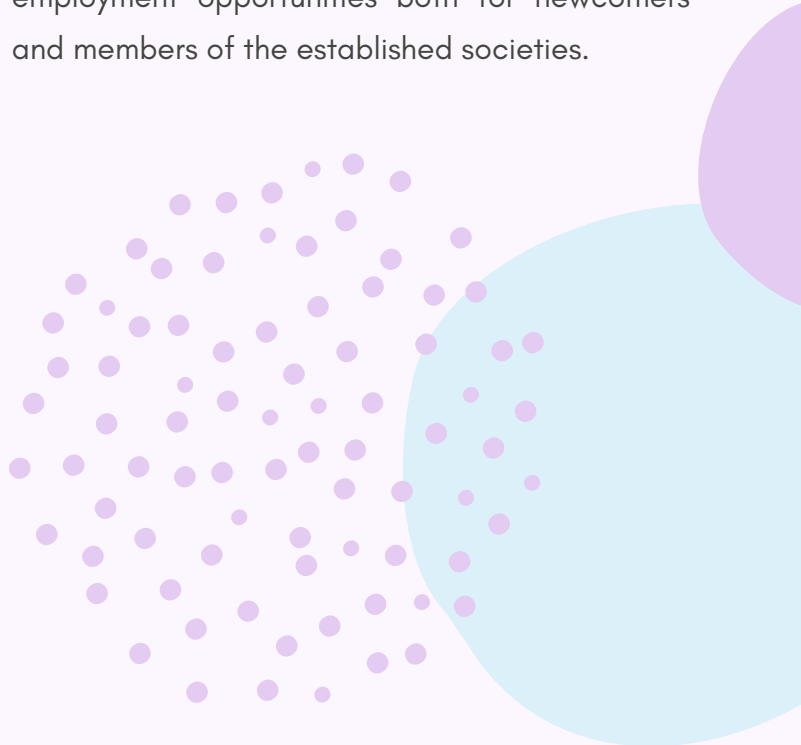
11) Ram, M., Jones, T., Doldor, S., Villares-Varela, M. & Li, H. (2022). What happens to refugee-origin entrepreneurs? Combining mixed embeddedness and strategy perspectives in a longitudinal study. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 45:16:1–27, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2021.1991970

12) East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

13) For more information, visit the programmes' official video [Accessed on 03/05/2023]

14) For example: https://makeroomeu.com/about/makeroomlatvia/ [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

Times of **emergency** may accelerate fund raising. After the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe, the possibilities for local governments to get funding from EU institutions have increased.[15] The Municipality of Ioannina has participated in several EU funded projects targeting migrants' integration at the local scale. Among them, one can list the "Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation – ESTIA programme", 2016–2021 co-funded by AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) and several research-oriented AMIF projects such as EPIC and EMBRACE.[16]

The Municipality's participation in such projects has provided the local administration with resources that were used

effectively to reach migrant communities and to establish networks of communication and consultation.[17]

Municipalities may make use of existing networks that deal with the local economic environment. Within the Municipality of Ripollet there are various organisations supporting business and entrepreneurial activity but not particularly focused on ethnic entrepreneurship. An example of such organisations is "Ripollet Impulsa" that aims at enabling companies and entrepreneurs to develop and consolidate their business operations.[18]
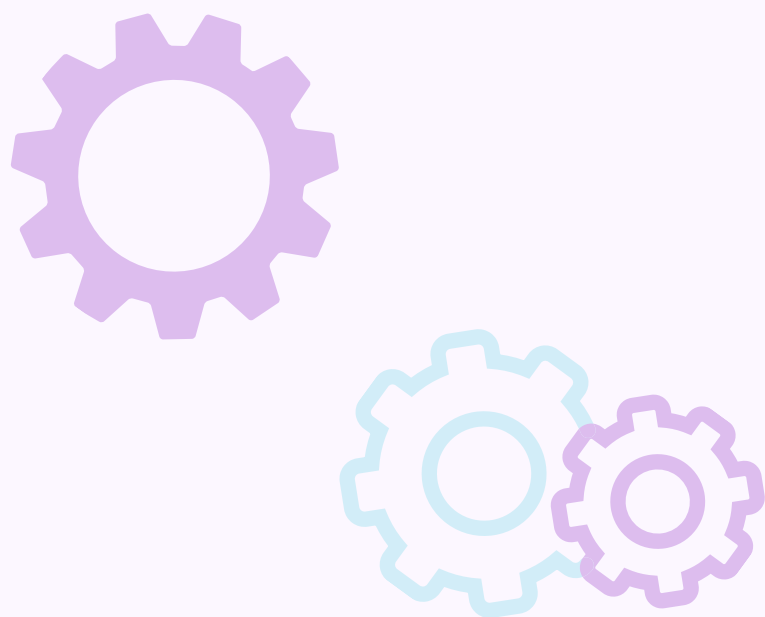
15) Bazurli, R., & Kaufmann, D. (2022). Insurgent Asylum Policies in European Cities: A Multi-Level Governance Perspective. Urban Affairs Review, 0(0), DOI: 10.1177/10780874221091594

16) http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/; https://www.embrace-project.com/goals-and-activities/ ; https://www.ioannina.gr/epic/ [Accessed on 14/12/2022]

17) A preliminary sketch of EU-level financial resources that municipalities should consider is presented in the MILE Policy Brief on Leveraging EU resources to promote migrants' political inclusion.

18) https://www.ripollet.cat/serveis/ripollet-impulsa [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

2 ENABLING MIGRANTS TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS

CHANGING LOCAL DISCOURSES

A key role of local governments is to **challenge negative discourses of migration** to foster community cohesion. This can include various activities, such as public campaigns,[19] training for practitioners about language use and cultural controversies, training for journalists and local stakeholders on stereotyping, as well as organisation of cross-cultural activities and events.

A key tool that Municipalities use to constitute and alter local discourses is the various forms of policy guideline texts they produce.[20] The "Birmingham Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2023" makes explicit reference to migrant populations and highlights the importance of involving diverse voices in decision making. It recognises the social and economic contributions of migrants from over 200 countries who have made Birmingham their home and makes explicit reference to **Birmingham as a City of Sanctuary** with commitments to create a **culture of hospitality**.[21]

In Riga, a Division of Projects and Society Integration was established in 2010, tasked with promoting and sustaining integration processes and recently integration competences were transferred to the Riga City Neighbourhood Residents Centre. The Centre develops strategic planning documents on social inclusion, sets priorities and organises their implementation. It also ensures cooperation with Riga's residents, entrepreneurs, NGOs, religious organisations and citizens' initiative groups on issues of social integration.

The Municipality of Ripollet has adopted a policy document, the "Reglament de Participació (2021)", through which the council communicates its commitment to promote a city open to diversity and inclusion, against racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism and violence. It uses different channels to communicate its vision such as social media, council website, videos, a local TV channel and radio.

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19) See more on city campaigns in the _MILE Policy Brief on Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making_.
20) See more on commitment and development of local strategies in the _MILE Policy Brief on Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making_.
21) Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2021 – 2023, _Document.ashx (cmis.uk.com)_ [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

Apart from strategic planning, altering local discourse needs **specific initiatives from dedicated departments.** Among the four MILE cities, Birmingham leads the way with a dedicated role in raising awareness about the city's commitments under the City of Sanctuary policy. The Municipality further encourages council staff to participate in **cultural events that promote positive representation** of migrants, such as the Refugee Week[22] or the Migrants Festival.[23] One of the guiding principles of the city's Community Cohesion Strategy is to "unite people and communities through art, culture and sports".

Another example of a specific activity comes from the Municipality of Ioannina which was set as a focal point in cooperation with the Racist Violence Incident Reporting Network of Greece (coordinated by UNHCR) to report incidents of racist violence occurring in the city. The Network also undertook the task to inform and **train journalists** on local media channels about hate speech and the use of racist language.
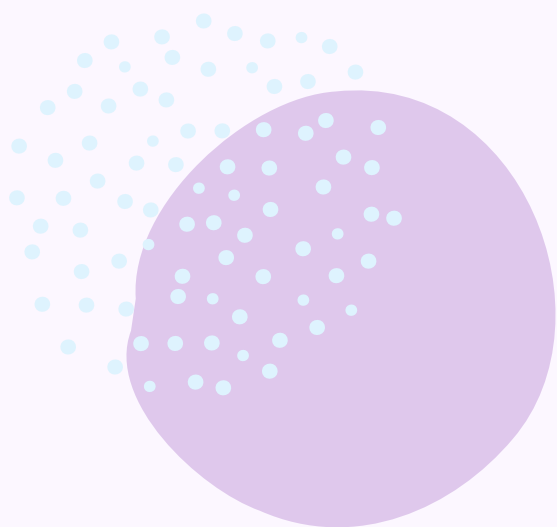
Despite its small size, Ripollet is especially committed in using **neutral terminology** in the official documents, as well as in the municipality's website and social media, thus avoiding the victimization/stigmatization of migrants and refugees. Moreover, Ripollet encourages a new perspective on migration that emphasizes **historical memory** in order to establish a non-discriminatory discourse, away from xenophobia. The city runs a specific programme called "Memory=Dignity" aiming to prevent human rights violation and to promote democracy through education about Ripollet's migratory past. [24]

Local (pro or anti-migrant) discourses are generally fluid and tend to reflect contentious politics at the national level. They are also vulnerable to local political competition, especially during pre-election periods. **Establishing stable dedicated local institutions** (e.g. a municipal officer monitoring the emergence of local racist discourses) can be an antidote to such fluctuations.

Local cultural events can contribute to the creation of positive narratives about diversity. However, instead of focusing only on cultural particularities of migrant groups, they should give members of different communities the opportunity to meet each other and promote **intercultural dialogue.** [25]

22) Celebrating Sanctuary Birmingham: https://www.celebrating-sanctuary.org.uk/ [Accessed on 19/04/2023]
23) The Migrant Festival: https://www.ikon-gallery.org/event/the-migrant-festival-4 [Accessed on 19/04/2023]
24) https://www.ripollet.cat/ajuntament/comunicacio/sala-de-premsa/notes-de-premsa/28181 [Accessed on 19/04/2023]
25) See more about how to support the participants in intercultural dialogue in the MILE Policy Brief on Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making

ESTABLISHING INCLUSIVE METHODS OF CONSULTATION

Consulting migrants concerning problems and challenges they face and solutions they propose for local issues is a crucial stage for their inclusion in local decision-making. Municipal authorities must make sure that migrants' concerns, claims and complaints are heard by practitioners, local politicians and other local stakeholders. They can do so by establishing official consultative bodies with participants of migrant background, creating multiple links with migrant-led organisations,[26] as well as promoting informal mechanisms of communication.

More often than not, informal consultation processes take place through **wide networks of civil society organisations.** In Ripollet, community interaction is encouraged through organisations such as "La Gresca", "Escola d'Adults", and "Oficina de Català", which do not have migrants as their primary target group but serve as gathering places for them. In several cases these networks exceed the administrative boundaries of the municipalities. For example, language schools are among the first places where migrants' and refugees' voices can be heard in a safe environment and claims can be made.

Informal consultation processes can be **institutionalised through official agreements** that enable civil society organisations to transfer migrants' opinions, complaints and claims to municipal authorities. In Riga, a great number of NGOs have joined a renewed Memorandum with the City Council since 2013. The Memorandum is dedicated to the active cooperation between the NGOs and the City Council in the decision-making process and includes a Memorandum board that expresses the overall opinion of the NGO sector in several policy areas.[27]

Progress has also been made by widening the overall possibilities of participation through various channels, including citizens' forums and the idea of **participation through neighbour-hoods.** The creation of Riga City Neighbourhood Residents Centre makes local services and participation opportunities more accessible to all residents and provides networking opportunities by introducing activists to neighbourhood associations.

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26) See also the MILE Policy Brief on Migrant inclusion in decision making and the role of migrant organisations.
27) https://www.riga.lv/lv/sadarbiba-ar-nevalstiskajam-organizacijam [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

In another example of institutionalisation, the Birmingham Migration Forum (BMF) was established in 2017 to provide a forum for key stakeholders to collaborate on **shared concerns and opportunities** concerning the integration and well-being of economic migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The Forum brings together organisations from the public, private, and voluntary sectors to ensure that agencies have access to information about existing services and projects, that migration-related issues are taken into account in local policies, that there is a coherent multi-agency approach to supporting migrant communities and that stakeholders develop a shared view and consensus.[28]

Since 2021 Ioannina has established its Migrant Integration Council (MIC) as stipulated by the national institutional framework for local governments, in order to assist migrants in getting access to local services, to suggest relevant policy measures and to support collaboration between the authorities and migrant's associations. However, the influence of MIC is rather questionable, since there is no concrete mechanism to ensure that discussions that take place there have an **impact on specific municipal policies.** Moreover, attracting migrant representatives to participate has been rather challenging, mainly due to the lack of adequate resources and the lack of official migrant associations.[29]

In several cases **ad hoc consultation processes** unfold in the context of specific projects. A MILE focus group discussion with migrants in Birmingham revealed that participants face challenges in accessing language courses and the broader education system, as well as not having their qualifications and prior work experience recognized, which can be a barrier to employment. Concerns have also been raised about a lack of translation services, unequal treatment of migrant groups and racism related to Brexit.

Ad hoc consultative bodies are very important for several reasons. They can improve the quality of decisions, help in creating local expertise, alter public opinions and contribute in contesting stereotypes.[30] However, the challenge remains whether such bodies produce sustainable structures of consultation and contribute to mainstreaming participation in the long-term. Municipal authorities must put their efforts into **creating stable and reliable consultation mechanisms.** To do so they should help migrant-led organisations to attract members and select their own representatives. They also have to invest in the public visibility of consultation processes and bodies in a way that will convince local societies about their impact.

28) Birmingham Migration Forum: Terms of Reference [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

29) George Kandylis, Iris Polyzou, Katerina Vezyrgianni, Stavros Spyrellis, & Pavlos Baltas. (2023). The inclusion of migrants in policy making. A report on Ioannina, Greece. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7941608

30) Schiller, M. (2023). Local Immigrant Councils as a Form of Participation and Governance: How Institutional Design and Agency Matter. Int. Migration & Integration. DOI: 10.1007/s12134-023-01038-4.

3 INCORPORATING MIGRANTS' CONCERNS INTO MAINSTREAM POLICIES

The incorporation of migrants' concerns into mainstream policies goes beyond consultation practices and mechanisms and involves methods to make sure that their voices have a real impact.

ESTABLISHING METHODS OF DIRECT PARTICIPATION

The core of inclusivity is to make room for migrants in the structure and mechanisms of decision making. Municipal authorities can support autonomous organisation of migrant communities in order to improve their participation. They can also provide training for migrant representatives and include migrants in the administration of municipal agencies. Most importantly, they can give decision-making powers to consultative bodies for certain issues and grant local voting rights to migrants, so that migrants become equal participants in the local political process.

The 2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion sets out the goal of having more migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background participating in decision-making processes at local, regional, national and European levels. For the time being, migrants' engagement in EU policy making is often limited to recommendations, while unclear policymaking processes hinder the flow of information to migrant-led initiatives.[31]

As a response to this call, today there are several programmes supported by EU funding that focus on establishing methods of participation of migrants at the local scale. For example, the "Cities and Regions for Integration Initiative" provides a political platform for the European mayors and regional leaders to showcase positive examples of integration.[32]

In European multi-ethnic societies the connection between political rights and national citizenship has been increasingly problematized during the last decades.[33] **Voting rights for migrants at the local level** is certainly one of the most direct methods of participation in local policy making. It is also a clear recognition that political rights are an expression of local belonging and inclusion and that if non-national residents are excluded, then a democratic deficit occurs.[34]

31) EPIM (2019) 'Migrant-led advocacy across Europe. Challenges and Opportunities', Available at: https://www.epim.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Migrant-led-advocacy-across-Europe-Report.pdf

32) Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants. [Accessed on 19/04/2023]

33) Sontag, K., Herzog, M. & Lässer, S. (2022) Struggles for democracy: strategies and resources of initiatives for non-citizen voting rights at local levels in Europe. Comparative Migration Studies 10, 17. DOI: 10.1186/s40878-022-00286-0

34) See more about local voting rights and some recent developments in the MILE Policy Brief on 'Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making.'

In Birmingham, eligible migrants can vote in local elections and run for City Council. In terms of effectiveness, there is some evidence that the representation of ethnic minorities as councillors has improved over the years. While in the mid-1980s, there were only six councilors from minority backgrounds, in 2022 a larger number of councillors are from ethnic minority backgrounds, yet this may not be entirely representative of the diversity of migrant communities living in the city.[35]

Greek cities make up a remarkable case in this respect, since voting rights to long-standing migrants were granted in Greece in 2009 but later canceled, after populist reactions.[36] Active lobbying[37] on the part of municipal authorities is necessary for voting rights to be accepted and institutionalised. As the late Mayor of the city M. Elisaf stated in his interview for MILE,

"*the participation of migrants in local elections is essential to achieve social osmosis between migrants and local host communities. We cannot spend European funds on achieving the equal social integration of migrants and at the same time deny them one of the most basic rights*".[38]

On the other hand, participation is not exhausted in voting rights. Even when voting rights exist, residents of migrant and refugee background need mechanisms and methods of collective representation in order to express their interests in an organised way.

The Birmingham Migration Forum is a mechanism for ensuring that public institutions respond to the voices of migrant communities in decision-making. It seeks to ensure that migrants' concerns are addressed in a variety of policy areas, including housing and health.[39]

> **THE PARTICIPATION OF MIGRANTS IN LOCAL ELECTIONS IS ESSENTIAL TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL OSMOSIS BETWEEN MIGRANTS AND LOCAL HOST COMMUNITIES. WE CANNOT SPEND EUROPEAN FUNDS ON ACHIEVING THE EQUAL SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND AT THE SAME TIME DENY THEM ONE OF THE MOST BASIC RIGHTS.**
>
> MOSES ELISAF,
> LATE MAYOR OF IOANNINA

35) Scuzzarello, S. (2010) "Caring Multiculturalism: Local Immigrant Policies and Narratives of Integration in Malmö, Birmingham and Bologna", Lund University.

36) Christopoulos, D., (2012) "Law 3838 on citizenship and the vote of immigrants: The decision of the Supreme Court is a major state mistake". Enthemata 18/11/2012 (In Greek). [Accessed on 19/04/2023]

37) See more about activism at the municipal level in the MILE Policy Brief on Promoting Migrant Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making.

38) George Kandylis, Iris Polyzou, Katerina Vezyrgianni, Stavros Spyrellis, & Pavlos Baltas. (2023). The inclusion of migrants in policy making. A report on Ioannina, Greece. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7941608

39) Birmingham Migration Forum: Terms of Reference' [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

Migrants can also participate in local decision making via **online channels of communication**. Such platforms exist in Birmingham and Ioannina and solicit feedback from local residents on a variety of issues and policies. However, no data has been collected in Birmingham or Ioannina to determine the extent to which migrants participate directly in consultations such as "Be Heard"[40] or "Live Laboratories for Participant Planning"[41] respectively.

Establishing institutions for direct participation must take into consideration the fluidity of migrant populations. Economic migrants frequently change jobs and residence within a host country, which may prevent them from becoming more locally embedded and involved in local policymaking. For this reason, decision-making bodies should invest in mechanisms to ensure **collective representation of migrant communities**, beyond the individual participation of usually their prominent members.
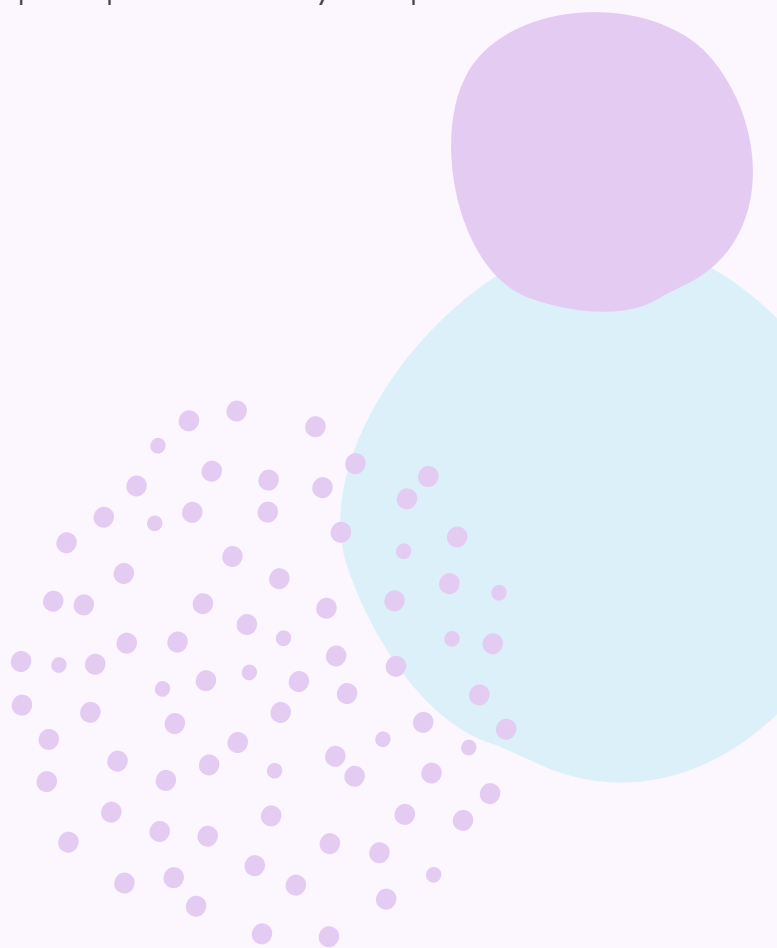
> **THE SELF-ORGANISATION OF CITIZENS IS AN IMPORTANT PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY. ASSOCIATIONS ARE PLACES WHERE COLLECTIVE INTERESTS CAN BE IDENTIFIED, FORMULATED AND PURSUED.**
>
> INTEGRATING CITIES TOOLKIT, EUROCITIES AND MIGRATIONWORK

In order to fulfill their role as facilitators of direct inclusion in decision-making, bodies and mechanisms in which migrants are invited to participate need to acquire decision-making powers. This can be tried even in small-scale initiatives, as for example in giving an existing consultative body the power and the resources to organise local intercultural events or to promote migrants' employability by identifying specific local businesses and offering them economic incentives.

40) *Birmingham City Council* [Accessed on 20/04/2023]
41) *http://www.diavouleusi.eu/* [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

ESTABLISHING METHODS TO IMPROVE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS

Consultation and participation are not enough if local policy makers fail to respond to migrants' claims and concerns. Mechanisms to **ensure that public institutions respond and incorporate the voices of migrant communities** have to be put in place. They also need to regularly assess and evaluate all measures and initiatives that aim at promoting migrants' participation in order to prove their real impact in decision-making processes. This seems to be the weakest part of inclusivity in the four municipalities.

Birmingham and Ioannina have developed certain institutions (the Birmingham Migration Forum and the Migrant Integration Council respectively) that are responsible for the incorporation of migrants' concerns. However, the opportunities to influence strategic policymaking seem to be rather limited and there are no specific provisions to ensure that issues that find their way to these institutions are actually taken into consideration in making decisions.

Usually, the monitoring of policies and activities by the municipal authorities **varies across departments and policy spheres.**

Certain policies come with an obligation to report on whether and how the needs of people from migrant backgrounds are reflected within mainstream policies and strategies.

In Birmingham, one of the key commitments under the City of Sanctuary policy is to conduct annual progress reviews.[42] This is also the case in specific short-term and mid-term integration projects, as in Riga which performs an evaluation of the implementation of its "Guidelines on Societal Integration".[43] However, other municipalities seem not to publicise consistently the results of their evaluations.

Assessment mechanisms may also be established via the participation of municipalities in **international city networks**.[44] Ioannina participates in the Intercultural Cities programme, a joint initiative between the Council of Europe and the European Commission.[45] In this context the city carried out the ICC-Index questionnaire which measures various intercultural indices, including commitment in information provision on intercultural policies, education, public services, neighborhood policies and public spaces. The city took advantage of this tool to assess its own progress and see what it can learn from other cities with concrete experience in the field.

42) _Progress update Birmingham City of Sanctuary Policy Statement v0.8 (cmis.uk.com)_[Accessed on 20/04/2023]

43) _https://apkaimes.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/pamatsnostadnuricibasplans.doc_ [Accessed on 20/04/2023]

44) _Caponio, T. (2021) Governing Migration through Multi-Level Governance? City Networks in Europe and the United States. Journal of Common Market Studies, 59(6): 1590-1606. DOI: 10.1111/jcms.13214. Lacroix, T. (2021). Migration-related city networks: a global overview. Local Government Studies, 48(6): 1027-1047. DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2021.1938553_

45) _Intercultural Cities Newsroom [Accessed on 20/04/2023]_

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While all municipalities examined here have adopted several measures and policies towards this goal, there is more that can be done to create favourable conditions for migrant inclusion. Several recommendations aimed at local governments are proposed, building on good practice examples, as well as wider integration literature:

- Ensure that all local residents irrespective of background and legal status have **access to basic services such as healthcare, housing support and education** to facilitate migrants' capacity to participate in local decision making.
- Explore national, EU and other international **funding** opportunities for migrant integration projects to introduce novel initiatives that promote and support migrant inclusion in decision making.
- Support **migrant entrepreneurship**, especially by assisting existing networks of local entrepreneurs, to foster economic and social contribution of migrant communities and their empowerment at the local level.
- Establish **mechanisms to monitor local migration discourses** to prevent and tackle negative attitudes or hate crime and to promote community cohesion, for example, by providing training for journalists and local authority staff on inclusive language.
- Organise regular cultural events that connect local residents across cultural boundaries in order to promote communication and positive local discourses.

- Create **stable and reliable consultation mechanisms** where migrants and their organisations can express concerns and views and invest in the public visibility of consultation processes.
- **Support migrant-led organisations** to attract members and select their own representatives, while strengthening their networking capacities to work collectively with other organisations.
- Use **user-friendly online channels** of communication and web platforms where migrants can participate in local decision making individually and collectively.
- Grant **local voting rights** to established migrants and campaign for their registration in the voting lists.
- Organise **local referendums** in order to include migrants in decision-making on critical issues that call for wider public attention.
- Measure the public acceptance of implemented policies via **surveys** addressed to migrants and the general public.
- Develop **effective mechanisms** for incorporating migrants' concerns raised through consultations to ensure institutional responsiveness to migrants' voices in local policy making.
- Include specific measurable methods of responsiveness and assessment in **municipalities' strategic plans**.

Migrant Integration through Locally designed Experiences

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