



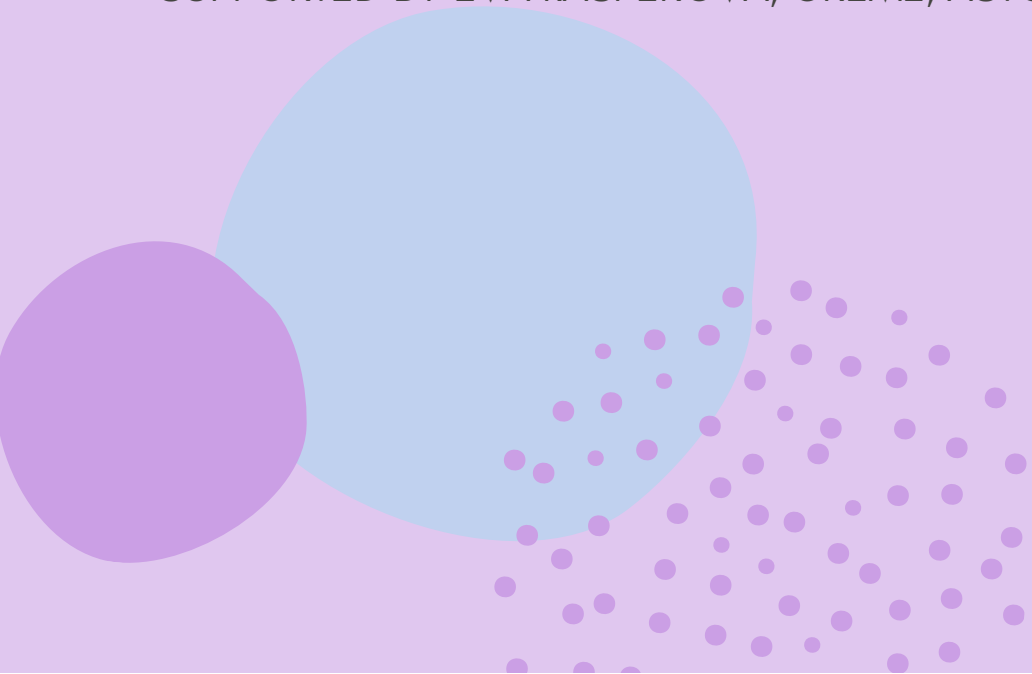
MAKING LOCAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES ACCESSIBLE TO MIGRANTS

MILE POLICY BRIEF 4
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper seeks to identify critical steps that can guide municipalities in the creation of **inclusive political participation structures for migrants**. The targeted audience of this paper includes **professionals who are involved in the management of local governance** and are committed to advancing political inclusion.

The recognition of the importance of inclusive policy making is reflected in the 10th priority of the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs). This priority aims to achieve political inclusion for all by 2030. This includes granting equal opportunities for citizens of diverse backgrounds, ages, physical conditions, and origins, including migrants, to participate in shaping policies and practices.

The priority to include migrants in policymaking is also reflected in the European Union's **Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027**,¹ which emphasises the importance of **engaging all citizens, including migrants**, and ensuring their participation in the policymaking process.

In turn, the EU plays a vital role in providing funding, developing practical tools, coordinating actions, and establishing partnerships with national governments and other stakeholders to support their efforts.

The European Commission (EC) has launched this New Plan, clarifying that national governments hold primary responsibility for designing integration and social policies and that promoting participation structures for all is crucial to ensure policy responsiveness.

To accompany the EU policy making, **a number of funding schemes** are available to support political participation structures, migration and integration policies, including the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Erasmus+ and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Several European projects have been launched to promote inclusivity and accessibility to institutions and services for all. These initiatives include WELCOME, IMMERSE, INTERACT, which employ technology to enhance accessibility. Additionally, projects such as MICADO and REBUILD use technology to improve accessibility to services, while NADINE or EASYRIGHTS apply artificial intelligence to promote inclusion.

1) European Commission. (2020). Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758&qid=1632299185798>

Following the EC call to action, and the funding opportunities, municipalities across Europe are beginning to promote political participation for all while also offering both **formal and informal structures** to encourage the participation of migrants in policymaking. Examples of participation structures vary in size and focus from **forums for community engagement, consultative bodies** for stakeholder input, **chatbots**, and **online questionnaires** for gathering feedback.

This policy paper from the [MILE project](#) builds on the results of a comparative study on participatory structures present in four EU municipalities – Ripollet (Spain), Riga (Latvia), Ioannina (Greece), and Birmingham (UK) – as well as in the broader [EU context](#). This paper relied on the [five MILE reports](#), which were developed by the five research teams during the first phase of the project. These reports gathered quantitative and qualitative data on the existing participation structures in the four municipalities and the EU, all using as a common methodology the **[Integrating Cities toolkit](#)**² to produce consistent and comparable data.³

Through the analysis of reports, this policy paper has identified **five crucial steps** that can guide municipalities in creating more inclusive participation structures, with the aim to encourage **active participation and representation of diverse voices** in the policymaking process:

- 1) establishing partnerships with migrant-led organisations;
- 2) improving the accessibility of political participation structures;
- 3) exploring diverse and alternative forms of engagement;
- 4) promoting participatory budgeting;
- 5) establishing clear and measurable success indicators of participation structures.

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PARTICIPATORY STRUCTURES WILL ONLY HAVE IMPACT IF A MECHANISM IS IN PLACE TO ENSURE THAT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS RESPOND AND INCORPORATE THE MIGRANT VOICE IN THEIR DECISION MAKING PROCESSES.

[INTEGRATING CITIES TOOLKIT](#),
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2) *Eurocities/Migration Work (2014). Integrating Cities Toolkit*

3) *The conclusions drawn from the analysis of [MILE reports](#) and previous literature are subject to a limitation: they are derived from a comparison of a small number of disparate municipalities to provide an analysis of both effective and ineffective approaches, while considering the specific conditions and contexts of each municipality and country.*

FINDINGS

Political participation structures are **mechanisms and processes** that allow individuals and groups to engage with political decision-making and influence policy outcomes. These structures can take many forms, including participatory budgeting, community meetings, public consultations, referendums, advisory committees, and online feedback mechanisms.

The study found that the four municipalities have different mechanisms in place to encourage political participation. Ripollet and Riga have implemented participatory budgeting, allowing residents to propose, discuss and vote on projects. In Ioannina, a consultation platform and informal meetings are used to discuss policies.

Birmingham has set up various means, such as its "Be Heard" consultation page and social media platforms, to engage with residents.

Despite the various strategies implemented by the four municipalities to **encourage political participation**, there is still a deficiency in **well-defined formal frameworks with measurable benchmarks** for assessing the participation of migrants. Our analysis focuses on identifying **obstacles to the development and implementation of such structures**, while also highlighting examples of good practice. In what follows, we discuss **five key steps towards fostering more inclusive participation structures at the municipal level**.

1 KNOW AND ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WORKING

As underlined in previous studies such as Alternative Regionalism from Below: Democratizing ASEAN's Migration Governance (2014), to better understand and engage with migrant communities municipalities can **establish partnerships with migrant-led organisations** in order to build bridges with disenfranchised migrant communities. Such partnerships can help the authorities understand the needs of diverse communities of migrants and to engage them more directly in local decision-making.

Although **partnering with migrant-led organisations** and those working with migrants can yield valuable insights and enable tailored engagement efforts, reports show that in the municipalities of Riga, Ripollet, and Ioannina, collaborating with migrant organisations and migrants themselves is challenging due to several factors that affect migrant engagement with political participation structures (see MILE policy brief 2).

For example, in Riga, limited understanding of the official language and a lack of motivation or availability to engage is a key barrier. Similarly, in Ripollet, migrants face challenges due to being unfamiliar with their legal status or uncertainty surrounding their asylum applications. As a result, they may hesitate to actively participate in local politics. Ioannina tends to serve as a transit point for numerous migrants in search of improved employment opportunities. Consequently, their primary focus may be on finding sustainable work rather than engaging in political activities.

Good practice 1: In 2020, the city of Birmingham introduced the role of an **Engagement Officer** within the municipality to handle **communication and outreach with the migrant communities** residing in the area. The officer has effectively engaged with these communities through various means, such as celebrating significant international migration-related events, providing assistance for community-based events, and collaborating with migrant led organisations. Consequently, the engagement efforts have proven to be successful, resulting in an **increase in interaction and participation** between the migrant communities and the municipality.

Additionally, migrants who are struggling financially may find it difficult to **allocate time and resources towards political engagement**. These factors, combined with a lack of engagement strategies, can make it challenging to involve migrants directly in the political process.

In order to overcome these barriers, municipalities need to take **proactive steps to facilitate the communication** with migrant communities. This may involve establishing an Engagement Officer or similar position, as seen in the municipality of Birmingham, who can work directly with migrant-led organisations and community members to promote participation in political activities.

Having a dedicated specialist in migrant engagement can provide the municipality with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the communities residing in the area, and help establish a network that can support the development of an Accessibility Plan, as discussed in the next section (see [MILE_policy_brief_1](#)).



2 MAKE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Municipalities hold a responsibility to create an inclusive and accessible democratic process, where all individuals, including migrants, have equal opportunities to engage in policymaking and voice their opinions.⁴ To achieve this goal, municipalities must consider the diverse needs and perspectives of their community members. One important aspect of this is providing **translations** of important documents, websites, and platforms in the languages spoken by migrant communities within the area.

Our analysis revealed a lack of translations into several languages, hindering the understanding of processes and systems and, ultimately, impeding participation and knowledge of spaces for political engagement. While some municipalities, like Ioannina, have taken steps towards enhancing language access by translating various informative documents into multiple languages, there remains a need for further improvement. Typically, translations are focused on informing migrants about available support services, rather than providing information on opportunities for their participation in decision-making processes. To address this issue, it is crucial to adapt content of information materials, **being sensitive to language and cultural differences**, and to invest in accurate and comprehensive translation services for the target audience. Doing so can facilitate greater understanding and inclusion, so all members of the community can participate fully in the political process.

Conducting research on the primary languages spoken by migrant communities and adjusting the content of official documents and platforms accordingly is crucial for municipalities to foster inclusivity in policymaking and enable equitable access to information for different segments of the society. This view is in line with previous academic studies, such as *Translation and Migration* (2017) which highlight the importance of translation in facilitating social, cultural, and economic relations between different groups and individuals in migratory contexts. An accessibility plan can be developed to address the specific needs of migrant communities in the municipality and establish effective channels for engaging with them. This plan should adopt a comprehensive approach to accessibility that considers diverse groups and intersectionality. For example, it should take into account the unique challenges faced by migrant women who often have childcare responsibilities. By implementing such a plan, access to services and participation opportunities can be ensured for a larger number of people.

Good practice 2: Ioannina has developed a guide for its social services, translated into the seven most commonly spoken languages by migrants in the municipality. This resource has been recognised as valuable by migrant communities, as it enables them to better understand and access essential social services.

4) United Nations (n.r). *Leave no one behind*. <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>.

3 PROMOTE DIVERSITY OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

In order to foster inclusivity and encourage participation from diverse individuals, municipalities should consider **diverse and alternative forms of engagement**, such as culturally appropriate and accessible one-to-one exchanges or informal meetings. It is important to account for factors such as **age, cultural background, language, and ability** to ensure that all groups can participate effectively.

Given the cultural and contextual differences that migrants bring to their host communities, it is vital to recognise that political participation can be perceived differently based on their country or culture of origin. Thus, to foster a more inclusive and equitable community engagement process, it is essential to **consider the experiences and perceptions of migrants**. Previous studies, such as those⁵ by Martiniello (2005)⁶ and Zapata (2010), emphasise the importance of contextualising the concept of political participation and promoting both conventional and non-conventional channels of participation.⁷ Additionally, as noted by Barret and Pachi (2019), being aware of the potential differences in how political participation is perceived by migrants can help **tailor engagement efforts** to better meet their needs.

The study found that all municipalities involved in the research promote various participation structures, including forums, informal meetings, questionnaires, or dedicated websites.

However, **direct involvement of individual migrants** is not actively encouraged across municipalities, and the language and cultural factors as variables of participation are seldom fully considered. An option to address these language and cultural factors is to seek support from specialised associations in **intercultural dialogue and mediation**, similar to the case of Ioannina that benefits from *Akadimia*. This is an external organisation that, in collaboration with the municipality, coordinates and organises spaces for political participation which are sensitive to cultural and traditional aspects. The diversity of political participation structures can further be enhanced through innovation efforts to address the various barriers to engagement faced by migrant communities (see MILE policy brief 5).

5) Martiniello, M. (2005). *Political participation, mobilisation and representation of immigrants and their offspring in Europe* (Vol. 1, No. 05). Malmö, Sweden: School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Malmö University.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mvkf.9>

6) Zapata-Barrero, R. (2010). *Managing diversity in Spanish society: A practical approach*. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(4), 383-402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2010.491274>

7) Pachi, D. & Barrett, M. (2012). *Perceived effectiveness of conventional, non-conventional and civic forms of participation among minority and majority youth*. *Human Affairs*, 22(3), 345-359. <https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-012-0029-9>

Good practice 3: The municipality of Ioannina has created a network with an external organisation that specialises in intercultural mediation and interpreting, known as Akadimia. This center is financially supported by the Open Society Foundation and offers a variety of services, including intercultural mediation and interpreting, access to social protection programmes, and cultural mediation for all municipal services and their corporate bodies. Additionally, it organises social and cultural events and other intercultural activities, while promoting gatherings and events in different formats.

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WHILST FULL POLITICAL RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS SHOULD BE SEEN AS AN ULTIMATE AMBITION, CITIES CAN ESTABLISH ADDITIONAL STRUCTURES (...) FOR THE MIGRANT POPULATION TO ARTICULATE ITS INTERESTS.

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4 PROMOTE PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory budgeting is a process that enables citizens to participate in the allocation of public resources in their municipality. It is a valuable tool for promoting co-creation and co-development of projects initiated by the community (Cabannes, 2004).⁸ Participatory budgeting can be highly beneficial for migrant community members in municipalities as it allows them to have a say in how public funds are spent, giving them a voice in local decision-making processes.

For example, in Albacete (Spain), participatory budgeting allowed immigrant communities to propose a project and vote on construction of a community centre that meets their needs.⁹ This process not only addresses the unique needs of migrant communities, but also promotes civic engagement and integration by **empowering these communities to take an active role** in shaping their neighbourhoods.

8) Cabannes, Y. (2004). *Participatory budgeting: a significant contribution to participatory democracy. Environment and urbanization*, 16(1), 27-46.

9) Sintomer, Y., Herzberg, C., & Röcke, A. (2008). *Participatory budgeting in Europe: Potentials and challenges. International journal of urban and regional research*, 32(1), 164-178. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00777.x>

Municipalities such as Ripollet and Riga have successfully implemented participatory budgeting, demonstrating their commitment to involving citizens in decision-making. While regulations are in place to guide the proposal submission and review process, there is an opportunity to enhance outreach activities and information provision in order to accommodate the diverse linguistic needs of newcomers. By ensuring that materials and resources are available in the most spoken languages among newcomers, these municipalities can further promote inclusive participation and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to engage in these valuable tools for democratic decision-making.¹⁰

Therefore, it is recommended that municipalities take steps to provide **translations into the most spoken languages by the newcomer population** to facilitate **equal access to information and resources** related to the participatory budgeting process.

Good practice 4: Each year, the Riga City Council allocates funding for the initiative of participatory budgeting and residents can vote on submitted ideas. The Riga City Neighbourhood Residents Center is responsible for implementing the initiative, which is evaluated by a commission appointed by the city council to determine feasibility and compliance with rules.

5 MEASURE YOUR IMPACT

The European Union has provided funding to support various projects that aim to increase political participation in municipalities across Europe. One of the municipalities that has benefited from this funding is Ioannina. However, a critical issue that has been identified is the lack of resilience in these projects. Although they may initially succeed in providing temporary benefits,

their impact tends to be short-lived and ends once the project is completed. To establish participation structures that are more resilient and can sustainably promote long-term political engagement of all, it is vital to measure the impact of existing and new structures and understand the extent to which they engage residents, including migrants (see [MILE_policy_brief 3](#))

10) The Global Hub of Participatory Democracy has developed guidelines on how to engage migrants and refugees through Participatory Budgeting. These guidelines can be assessed on the following website: <https://www.peoplepowered.org/university-content/immigrants-and-refugees>

Establishing clear and measurable **key performance indicators (KPIs)**¹¹ is crucial for municipalities to evaluate the effectiveness of their participation structures and ensure that they are promoting inclusive political participation for all members of the community. To achieve long-term political engagement, mechanisms must be put in place to gather data on the impact of policy implementation and infrastructure development, as well as to report on these indicators.

KPIs should be tailored to the needs and characteristics of each community, and **regularly monitored** to ensure that they are effectively promoting equitable and inclusive engagement.

Examples of indicators to evaluate a city's performance include the framework proposed by Carli et al (2013)¹² for classifying performance indicators of a smart city, or the indicators proposed by Mapar et al. (2017)¹³ to evaluate the sustainability assessment of public sector organisations, including municipalities, with a focus on integrating health, safety, and environmental issues.

Another example is the Integrating Cities Toolkit, which offers practical, tested guidance and inspiration to help cities reach European standards in key areas of migrant integration. The toolkit provides a range of indicators that can be used to assess a city's performance on issues related to the integration of migrant populations, including access to housing, education, employment, health, social inclusion, and participation in civic life.

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PARTICIPATION BY RESIDENTS (...) BECOMES A REALITY WHEN THEY FEEL THEIR CONTRIBUTION IS VALUED AS MUCH AS EVERYONE ELSE'S. THE CHALLENGE MAY BE ESPECIALLY GREAT FOR MIGRANTS, PARTLY BECAUSE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF PUBLIC CONTROVERSY ABOUT MIGRATION

INTEGRATING CITIES TOOLKIT, EURO CITIES AND MIGRATIONWORK

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11) KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are metrics used to measure the success of organisations or projects in achieving their goals. They can be used to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and validity of various initiatives, such as those aimed at promoting political participation in municipalities. Focus groups can be used to gather feedback on the effectiveness of current political participation structures, which can then be used to identify areas for improvement and develop new KPIs.

12) Carli, R., Dotoli, M., Pellegrino, R., & Ranieri, L. (2013, October). Measuring and managing the smartness of cities: A framework for classifying performance indicators. In 2013 IEEE international conference on systems, man, and cybernetics (pp. 1288-1293). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/SMC.2013.223>

13) Mapar, M., Jafari, M. J., Mansouri, N., Arjmandi, R., Aziznejad, R., & Ramos, T. B. (2017). Sustainability indicators for municipalities of megacities: Integrating health, safety and environmental performance. *Ecological indicators*, 83, 271-291. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2017.08.012>

The lack of **robust monitoring tools to measure the impact of actions** aimed at promoting political participation for all is evident in all four municipalities. As a result, it becomes challenging to **evaluate the effectiveness of these actions** and identify areas that require further attention or improvement.

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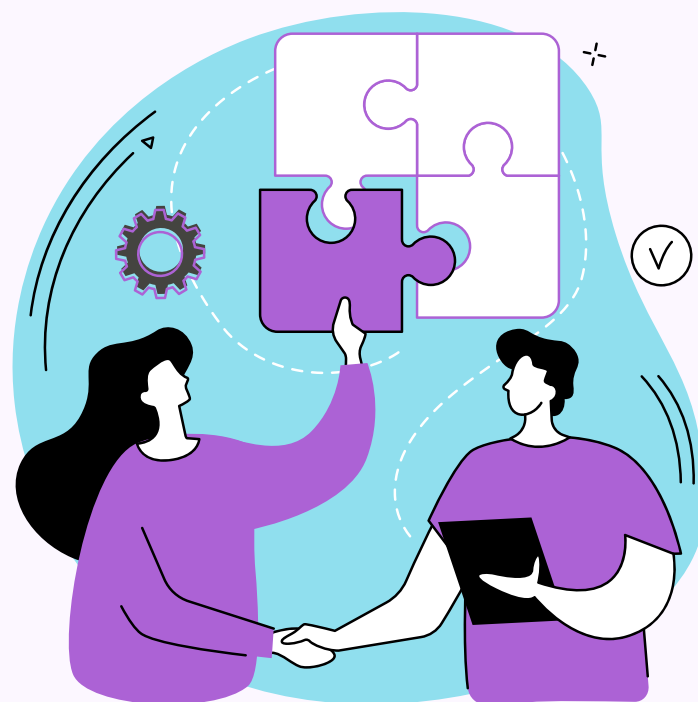
PROVISIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION MUST RESPOND TO LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CAN CHANGE OVER TIME. (...) THIS CAN BEST BE ACHIEVED WHEN A CULTURE OF INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING IS ESTABLISHED AND PROMOTED.

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EU-funded projects such as the MILE project have a monitoring requirement to ensure they achieve their intended goals. However, smaller locally developed initiatives often lack the resources and knowledge to establish a comprehensive monitoring system, which can hinder their long-term impact. **Increasing funding and providing education and resources** for effective monitoring strategies for both large and small-scale initiatives is necessary to ensure project success.

Good practice 5: During the analysis, no good practices related to the implementation of Key Performance Indicators were found. However, Birmingham City Council has established **informal focus groups** to gather qualitative data that could be useful to define KPIs. These focus groups allow the municipality to evaluate the needs and suggestions of residents regarding communication within the municipality. In one particular focus group conducted by the municipality it was revealed that migrants lacked knowledge of public consultations, petitions, and procedures for registering complaints, and were unaware of how to participate.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Municipalities, as a cornerstone of democracy, should be committed to making democratic processes and structures accessible and inclusive for all members of the community. To achieve this, **accessibility**, **usability**, and **inclusivity** should be a priority in establishing and developing political participation structures and platforms. We have identified **five main steps** that municipalities can take to promote inclusive and accessible political structures, which are as follows:

1. Know and engage your community through partnership working:

Actively engage with the migrant community to understand their needs, expectations, concerns, and priorities. Collaborations and partnership working with migrant-led organisations can help build bridges between local decision makers and migrant communities.

2. Make political participation structures accessible to all:

Municipalities should ensure that no citizen is left behind and can access relevant information and engage with the opportunities for civic and political participation. Providing translations into most spoken languages of the local migrant community can help improve access.

3. Promote diversity of political participation structures:

Municipalities must provide various means for citizen participation. This includes traditional methods such as public meetings and surveys, as well as online platforms. It is crucial to acknowledge the diverse needs and communication preferences of the community, including language barriers. By offering multiple options, municipalities can increase engagement and transparency in decision-making, resulting in more informed and inclusive outcomes that reflect the community's needs and desires.

4. Promote participatory budgeting:

Introduce participatory budgets to promote more active participation of residents and to empower disenfranchised groups, such as migrants. Make sure that information on existing participatory budgets are promoted to various segments of the residing population, including migrants.

5. Measure your impact:

Municipalities should define measurable indicators to regularly assess the effectiveness of their efforts to promote inclusive and accessible political structures, in order to identify areas for improvement and ensure that they are meeting their goals.



**Migrant
Integration through
Locally designed
Experiences**

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