

# PROMOTING MIGRANT INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN DECISION MAKING

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Migrant  
Integration through  
Locally designed  
Experiences

**MILE POLICY BRIEF 5**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

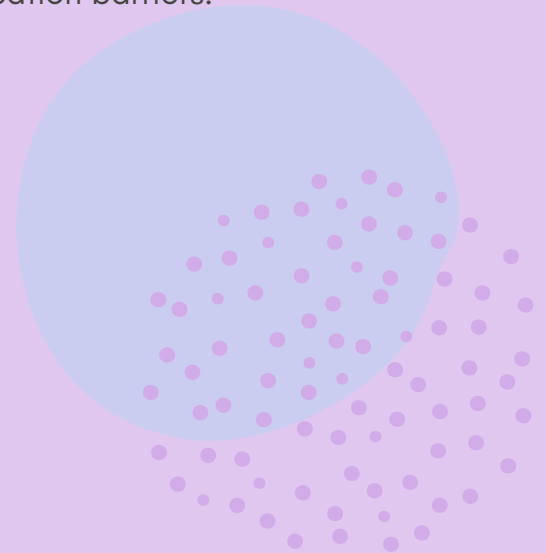
Migrants are increasingly shaping towns and cities across Europe. To create public policies that are responsive to the needs of ‘superdiverse’ communities in many European municipalities, it is vital to include migrants in local decision-making. Yet, civic and political participation is often one of the weakest areas of migrant integration.

This policy brief explores how the inclusion of migrants in decision making is promoted, locally and transnationally. It builds on the research conducted in four municipalities of very different population sizes and experiences of migration, and at the European Union (EU) level, as part of the [MILE project](#) seeking to promote migrants’ empowerment and active citizenship.

In each municipality, a partnership comprising a local authority, a migrant-led organisation and a research institute facilitated knowledge exchange while the [Integrating Cities Toolkits](#) provided a framework to assess participation, integration and equality policies and practices.

Using secondary data and primary research with local and EU stakeholders resulted in the publication of reports on [Ioannina](#) (Greece), [Riga](#) (Latvia), [Ripollet](#) (Spain), [Birmingham](#) (UK) and the [European Union](#).

Migrant integration is a complex issue<sup>1</sup> requiring collaborative efforts of a range of organisations. Authorities often work in multi-stakeholder partnerships with actors from across sectors, including migrant-led organisations, statutory agencies and businesses, to promote the inclusion of migrants. Whilst the importance of ‘shared responsibility’ across sectors has been emphasised, challenges remain when working in partnership, including communication barriers.<sup>2</sup>



1) Scholten, P. (2020) ‘Mainstreaming versus alienation: conceptualising the role of complexity in migration and diversity policymaking’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(1): 108–126.

2) Broadhead, J. (2020) ‘Building inclusive cities: reflections from a knowledge exchange on the inclusion of newcomers by UK local authorities’, *Comparative Migration Studies* 8(14).

There is often a lack of coordination in the governance of migrant integration between local and central governments, but also between local authorities and key stakeholders, such as private providers of support services.<sup>3</sup> Our knowledge of how multi-stakeholder partnerships coordinate migrant integration is limited,<sup>4</sup> especially in the context of promoting civic and political participation of migrants.

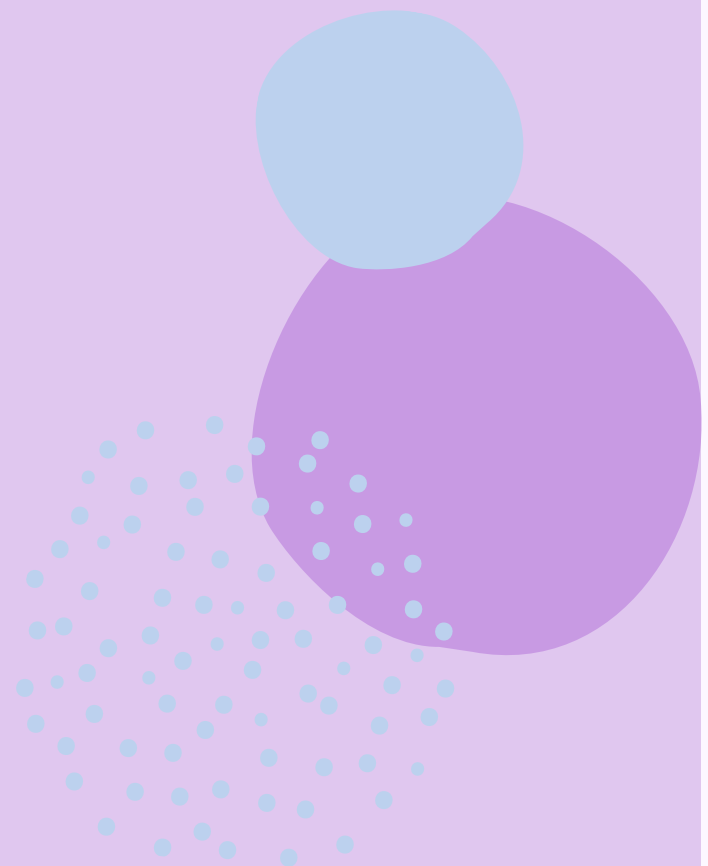
”  
**TO ENSURE THAT  
 MIGRANTS MAKE USE  
 OF THEIR POLITICAL  
 OPPORTUNITIES, THE  
 CITY HAS TO ACTIVELY  
 ADVERTISE AND  
 PROMOTE THEM.** ”

INTEGRATING CITIES TOOLKIT,  
 EUROCITIES AND MIGRATIONWORK

This policy brief discusses five mechanisms for promoting migrant inclusion in decision making – commitment, innovation, capacity building, coordination and activism – drawing on the findings and examples of best practice from the published reports as well as wider integration literature.

Our analysis sought to identify what works, or does not work, and under what conditions, rather than generalising across municipalities.

Although migrant inclusion is being promoted especially in municipalities with larger share of migrant population, more can be done across the board to create enabling conditions through these five mechanisms, particularly in smaller municipalities and those with a recent history of positive net migration. The brief concludes with a set of recommendations aimed at local authorities and migrant-led organisations.



3) Broadhead, J. (2020) 'Building inclusive cities: reflections from a knowledge exchange on the inclusion of newcomers by UK local authorities', *Comparative Migration Studies* 8(14).

4) Yeo, J. (2022) 'Interorganizational Coordination for Immigrant Integration into Local Society', *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Published online 31 May 2022.

# FINDINGS

Civic and political participation is generally valued by policy makers. Including residents in decision making, particularly at the local level, leads to more responsive and effective policies. Migrant participation has been encouraged in different forms and to various degrees.

**Five key mechanisms** for promoting the inclusion of migrants in decision making are discussed in what follows, drawing on the experiences of the four municipalities and the EU as well as wider integration literature.

## 1 COMMITMENT

### DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION

Setting out an explicit strategy to promote participation can signal **long-term commitment to funding and supporting civic and political participation** of residents. Whether and how the strategy addresses specific needs and obstacles to participation experienced by diverse groups, including migrants, can shape residents' engagement in practice.

A **participation strategy** does exist in the four municipalities and at the EU level, but typically in the form of objectives or priorities within wider policies, rather than an explicitly written policy (apart from Ripollet). For instance, citizens' engagement is one of the priorities of the EU Cohesion Policy aiming to create a more competitive, fair and sustainable Europe. Where participation is regulated by central government, a national framework may be adopted, as in the case of Ioannina municipality.

Including diverse voices in decision making is encouraged to **create policies that are more responsive to diverse communities**. In Birmingham, the largest of the four municipalities, commitment to 'localism' or the transfer of decision-making powers to neighbourhoods aims to address diverse needs more effectively. Residents are envisaged to work together to improve their neighbourhoods and are given more powers, including the ability to propose agenda items and to set priorities in local Ward Forum meetings.

There is a **tendency to adopt a 'universalistic' approach** where participation is promoted to all irrespective of background, although explicit reference to migrants or newcomers is made within integration policies, for example, in the EU's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) and in Riga's 'Guidelines on Societal Integration' (2019-2024).

Birmingham City Council’s Equality Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2023) and the City of Sanctuary Policy Statement (2018-22) highlight the importance of hearing diverse voices, including those of migrants. Ripollet, the smallest of the four municipalities, recently formalised its citizen participation policy, the ‘Reglament de Participació’ (2021), although there is no reference to migrants.

**Approaches to ‘intersectionality’** – tackling multiple inequalities simultaneously (for example, the under-representation of migrant women) – vary from explicit commitment (EU, Birmingham) to informal acknowledgement (Ioannina, Ripollet, Riga). In Ioannina, intersectionality is addressed within wider integration work, but it has not yet entered strategic thinking on participation. Where recognised, intersectionality is applied inconsistently across policies, highlighting a commitment-implementation gap, exacerbated by the challenges of coordinating migrant ‘superdiversity’ and diversity more widely.

**Migrant participation in decision making is promoted unevenly across policy domains.**

In Birmingham, for instance, including diverse voices in consultations is recognised explicitly in the urban planning and sustainability policies, but not other policy areas. Nonetheless, there is evidence of minority groups being consulted on issues such as health inequalities. The EU’s Action Plan highlights the need to increase migrants’ participation in education, employment, health and housing.

**Decision makers aim to make participation a two-way process of communication.** The EU’s Action Plan encourages a dialogue between local and central governments, fostering of cohesion between migrants and host societies, and efforts to build sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships. In Birmingham, the importance of ‘responding’ to diverse voices as well as hearing them is noted in the Equality Strategy. Yet not all participation strategies promote dialogue, or institutional responsiveness (see [MILE policy brief 1](#)). Decision makers’ responsiveness to consultations with migrants tends to be implicit and informal.

**Authorities promote informal participation as a means towards including more residents in decision making;** for example, using social media platforms or organising cultural events that bring together policy makers, civil society and migrants. A key challenge is to sustain such informal activities in longer term. Moreover, there is generally no expectation to respond to any concerns raised informally which potentially limits the effectiveness of informal platforms.



## 2 INNOVATION

### CREATING NOVEL PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

Innovation in civic and political participation can **empower and engage residents in more creative ways**. Local and the EU authorities have initiated various participation structures to promote migrant inclusion in decision making. First, direct participation structures such as consultation bodies involving individual migrant residents. Examples exist at the EU level, for instance, the Expert Group on the Views of Migrants in the Field of Migration, Asylum and Integration. Second, indirect participation structures, where migrant organisations represent the interests of various groups of migrants. These are more common and include the European Migration Forum, the Migrant Integration Council (Ioannina), and the Birmingham Migration Forum. Third, project-based initiatives, funded primarily by the EU, where participation of migrants is a core objective; for example, EMBRACE (Ioannina) or MiFriendly Cities (Birmingham) projects.

Notably, most participation structures and projects targeting migrants specifically have been introduced recently and often in response to critical events such as the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. This suggests that **policy makers tend to be reactive to external crises** rather than pro-actively seeking to include migrants in decision making.

Crises can encourage reflection and stimulate development of new ideas to promote engagement, but such a passive approach potentially undermines migrants' trust in the authority.

Examples of innovative civic participation initiatives include 'Participatory Budgets' in Riga **promoting active citizenship**. The scheme, while not targeted at migrants, enables registered city residents aged 16 and over to propose ideas for the improvement of urban environment. The Riga City Council publishes calls for initiatives and allocates funding. Residents can vote on the submitted initiatives and the municipality-appointed commission evaluates their feasibility. The 'Riga City Neighbourhood Residents Centre' is responsible for the implementation of this scheme.

Similar innovations could **reduce obstacles to participation experienced by migrants**, such as distrust in politics, a lack of awareness about opportunities to participate, limited time, language barriers, or work mobility preventing migrants from becoming more locally embedded. It is yet to be seen whether such mainstream initiatives attract migrant residents. A lack of monitoring and evaluation often limits our understanding of migrant engagement with wider participation structures and platforms.

## 3 CAPACITY BUILDING

### SUPPORTING KEY ACTORS TO ENABLE PARTICIPATION

A key enabling mechanism for migrant inclusion is to **invest resources in providing appropriate support** whilst creating a culture where migrants are encouraged to voice their concerns. This can be achieved by building capacity of all relevant actors – the authorities, migrant organisations, individual migrants themselves and the wider public – acknowledging that integration is a two-way process of communication between the host society and migrants. The EU’s Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021–2027) recognises the need to build capacity of local and regional authorities to involve migrant communities. Key stakeholders across different levels of governance and across sectors are encouraged to collaborate and support the authorities, aligning with the argument that migrant inclusion is a ‘shared responsibility’.<sup>5</sup>

**Supporting the authorities.** Organisational capacity building across different levels of governance can involve awareness raising, provision of dedicated training or resource allocation for staff time. Availability of resources and support varies across municipalities.

In Riga and Ripollet, full-time dedicated roles of ‘Neighbourhood Coordinators’ and a ‘Participation Councillor’ respectively exist to promote participation of residents in general. Birmingham City Council has increased its efforts to raise awareness and provide training on migration-related issues to frontline staff and service providers. A dedicated role of ‘Refugee and Migration Engagement Officer’ was created to promote migrant inclusion internally within the council and externally with relevant actors.

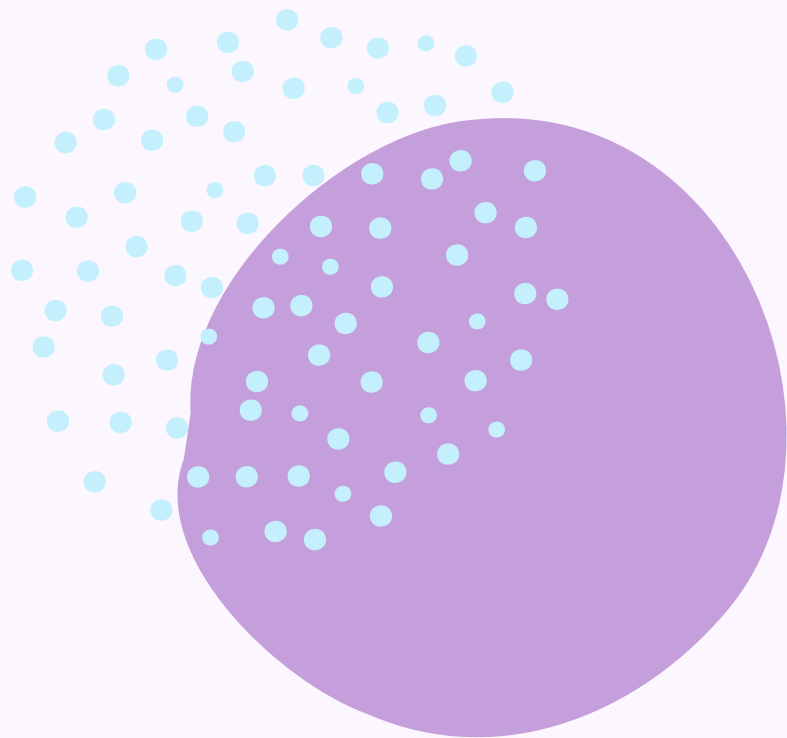
**Supporting individual migrants and the wider public.** Participation support for individuals is at an early stage and much of the activity focuses on the management of cultural diversity. The EU institutions have long promoted ‘intercultural dialogue’ as a cornerstone of democracy, for example, through the Erasmus programme. A dialogue between migrants and native population is also encouraged through the Council of Europe’s ‘Intercultural Cities’ programme.<sup>6</sup> Migrant integration is recognised as a two-way communication and the migration-based diversity perceived as beneficial for urban development.

5) Broadhead, J. (2020) ‘Building inclusive cities: reflections from a knowledge exchange on the inclusion of newcomers by UK local authorities’, *Comparative Migration Studies* 8(14).

6) White, B. W. (2021) ‘City-based inclusion networks in a post-multicultural world: the Intercultural Cities programme of the council of Europe’, *Local Government Studies* 48(6): 1070-1090.

Intercultural policies range from support for recruitment of migrants to language training and funding of cultural events. While such policies support migrant inclusion, they have also been criticised for placing responsibility for integration on individuals rather than **tackling wider structural inequalities**.<sup>7</sup> Birmingham City Council encourages exchange between diverse communities through art, culture and sports as a means of uniting people. It also aims to increase provision and uptake of English language training to support migrant participation in local democracy. **Citizenship and knowledge of city services** are embedded into language courses to help migrant learners understand their rights and responsibilities. In Riga, funds are allocated to encourage interaction between different ethnic groups, to promote civic education and citizenship, to help newcomers learn the language and improve accessibility of information in different languages, and to foster a sense of belonging. The Intercultural Centre for Social Integration "Akadimia" in Ioannina provides **interpretation and intercultural mediation** services for key services and institutions while also organising cultural activities.

Some groups of migrants are particularly under-represented in local politics, Albanian nationals in Ioannina for instance, despite having a long-established presence in the municipality. More recent arrivals from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan already participate in the local Migrant Integration Council. This possibly reflects the investment of EU funds to support asylum seekers and refugees while less attention has been paid to **economic migrants**. In Birmingham, civil society highlights the under-representation of **asylum seekers and refugees**, given their limited voting rights in the UK.<sup>8</sup> Migrants are under-represented in the UK's democratic system; they are less likely than the wider population to register to vote and turn up for elections, particularly EU migrants and Black African minorities.<sup>9</sup>



7) Schiller, M. (2016) *European cities, municipal organizations and diversity: The new politics of difference*. Springer; Desille, A. (2019) 'Revisiting the diversity-urban development nexus: Perspectives from Israeli immigrant towns', *Political Geography* 73: 1-16.

8) Bekaj, A. et al. (2018) 'Political Participation of Refugees: Bridging the Gaps', *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*.

9) Sobolewska, M. and Barclay, A. (2021) 'The Democratic Participation of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Voters in the UK', A report funded by the UK Democracy Fund.



**Supporting migrant community self-organisation.** Migrant-led organisations represent diverse groups and play a vital role in promoting integration.<sup>10</sup> Yet, not all municipalities with major presence of migrants have a well-established network of organisations. In Ripollet, there are NGOs that support migrants but no official migrant-led groups. The lack of migrant associations in Ioannina prevents more diverse representation in the local Migrant Integration Council. In Riga, similarly, while there are organisations that represent more established minorities at the Consultative Board on Society Integration Issues, there are few newcomer-led organisations. Language barriers, bureaucracy and difficulties attracting funding are some of the key obstacles for newcomers to self-organise.

Activities to promote migrant self-organisation have been initiated across municipalities. In Ioannina, cultural events like exhibitions and festivals **bring together local communities**, including refugees. Riga’s ‘NGO House’ provides free premises for NGOs to host seminars, conferences, exhibitions, and community events.

Self-organisation is vital to solving local problems in Birmingham where, in the face of constrained resources, all are encouraged to collaborate and make more creative use of existing resources.

Our understanding of how migrants in Europe associate is limited but a recent study published by the European Website on Integration shows that while various organisations exist and represent diverse groups, there are differences across regions.

Multi-ethnic migrant-led structures that cater to diverse interests are more common in the Northern and Western countries with longer tradition of being a destination for migrants. Organisations serving only one ethnic or religious group are the most common structure in the Central, Eastern and Baltic countries. There is a particular under-representation of refugee-led and migrant-women-led organisations in this region. Moreover, national politics and laws can sometimes restrict migrant self-organisation. The most common form of self-organising by migrants across Europe are associations.

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**AS AN ADVOCATE OF A LIVELY DEMOCRACY, A CITY SHOULD ACTIVELY SUPPORT MIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN FORMULATING THEIR INTEREST AND THEN ACTIVELY SEEK EXCHANGE AND DEBATE WITH THEM.**

INTEGRATING CITIES TOOLKIT,  
 EUROCITIES AND MIGRATIONWORK ”

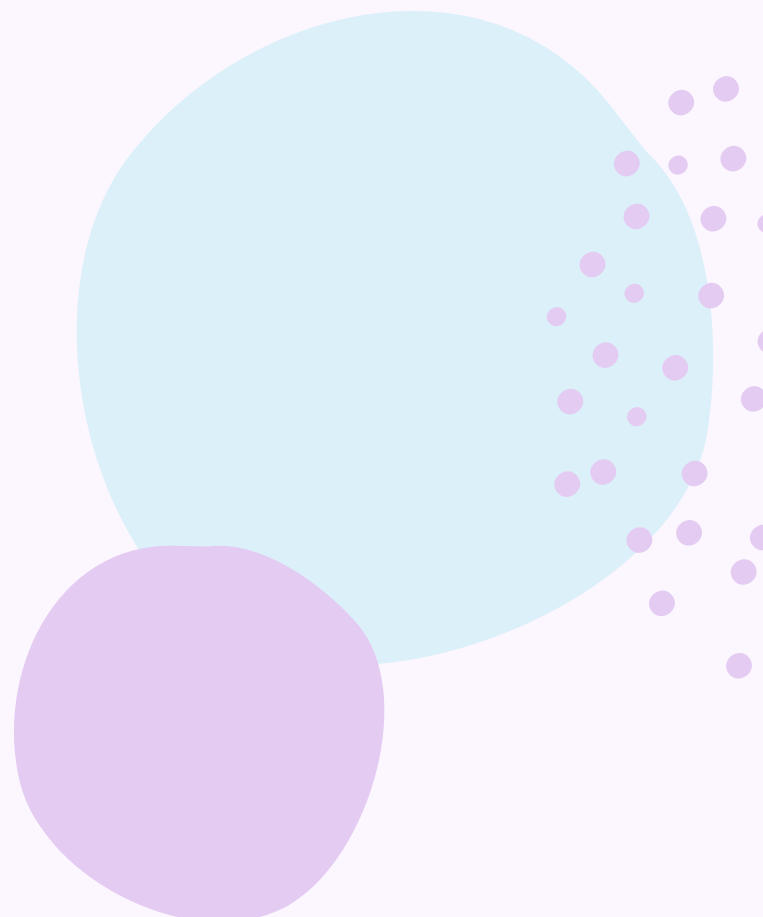
<sup>10</sup> Barreto, C., Berbée, P., Gallegos Torres, K., Lange, M. and K. Sommerfeld (2022) ‘The Civic Engagement and Social Integration of Refugees in Germany’, *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 13(2): 161-174.

**Supporting existing migrant-led organisations.** Local and national level funding to support migrant-led organisations, or those that work with migrants, tends to be limited, with a few exceptions. Riga Municipality supports existing organisations through the already mentioned NGO House which offers **free access to premises** and collaborates with NGOs to organise informal events and intercultural programmes for newcomers. Support is also available through **project grants**.

In Birmingham, funding from the UK Government's Controlling Migration Fund facilitated **training** of voluntary agencies to advise migrants. At the same time, concerns were raised about a lack of diversity within neighbourhood organisations, insufficient resources, and short-termism in funding for support and training.

The withdrawal of resources in recent years has undermined community engagement in the city. Cuts to public spending following the Global Financial Crisis have impacted on local authorities' capacity to initiate integration support but also, indirectly, on the survival of organisations that help disadvantaged communities. The Council aims to tackle resource shortages through **partnership working** across sectors.

Migration-related EU funds, like AMIF, have stimulated various projects where migrant-led organisations collaborate with local authorities and others to promote migrant inclusion. Increasing access to **procurement opportunities** for migrant-led organisations can also support their sustainability. Local authority-commissioned support services are sometimes awarded to migrant-led organisations, like the ACH (Birmingham) providing refugee integration support. However, the influence of migrant-led organisations on the issue of participation is often constrained by limited **networking opportunities** to coordinate more collective efforts. Only 25 per cent of migrant-led organisations within European countries are members of an international-level umbrella organisation. Competition can also prevent their collaboration.



## 4 COORDINATION

### LEADING AND COLLABORATING TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION

Migrant integration is a complex issue<sup>11</sup> requiring collective efforts of different organisations. **Authorities often work in multi-stakeholder partnerships** with actors from across sectors to promote and support the inclusion of migrants. Whilst the importance of ‘shared responsibility’ across sectors has been emphasised,<sup>12</sup> there are challenges when working in partnership, including communication barriers, conflicts, competing agendas and a lack of effective coordination,<sup>13</sup> not only between local and central governments but also between key stakeholders, such as local authorities and private providers of integration services.

Our knowledge of how multi-stakeholder partnerships coordinate migrant integration remains largely limited, and even more so in the context of promoting migrants’ participation.

**Research identifies a key role of local government in coordinating** multi-stakeholders partnerships to effectively promote the inclusion of migrants. Cities have been stepping up by initiating campaigns – for instance ‘London is Open’ or ‘People Make Glasgow’ – to create positive narratives of migration and help newcomers settle in. But the local ‘cultures of welcome’ have traditionally been driven primarily by NGOs,<sup>14</sup> suggesting a need for more synergy across sectors at the local level.



11) Scholten, P. (2020) ‘Mainstreaming versus alienation: conceptualising the role of complexity in migration and diversity policymaking’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(1): 108-126.

12) Broadhead, J. (2020) ‘Building inclusive cities: reflections from a knowledge exchange on the inclusion of newcomers by UK local authorities’, *Comparative Migration Studies* 8(14).

13) Yeo, J. (2022) ‘Interorganizational Coordination for Immigrant Integration into Local Society’, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Published online 31 May 2022.

14) Broadhead, J. (2020) ‘Building inclusive cities: reflections from a knowledge exchange on the inclusion of newcomers by UK local authorities’, *Comparative Migration Studies* 8(14).

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are actively encouraged in Birmingham and at the EU level. Collaborations exist in other municipalities (Ioannina for instance), although they involve mainly NGOs. Private sector and employers rarely feature in such partnerships. Local authorities must address two key challenges in promoting migrant inclusion: (1) reaching out to organisations from across sectors and fostering partnerships with new actors, particularly in the private sector; and (2) stepping up its leadership role without recreating local hierarchies that prevent partners from being more actively involved in the co-production of initiatives.<sup>15</sup>

**Quality relationships are vital to successfully coordinate** multi-stakeholder partnerships and this often depends on partners' trustworthiness and ability to demonstrate commitment.<sup>16</sup>

Coordination of activities to promote participation of migrants differs across municipalities. The 'Riga City Neighbourhood Residents' Centre' encourages all residents to participate. It collaborates with local neighbourhood associations and its 'Neighbourhood Coordinators' act as intermediaries who raise residents' concerns at the municipal level. The 'Participation Councillor' in Ripollet coordinates activities internally with various departments and externally with citizens.

**Coordination mechanisms to promote participation of migrants have emerged** in Birmingham, Ioannina, and at the EU level. The European Website on Integration publishes latest news, research, best practice and calls for grant proposals. The website is managed by the DG HOME and supported by the Migration Policy Group which develops content and oversees a network of Country Coordinators who supply national-level information. Directories of migrant support organisations, such as BARMS in Birmingham, are examples of online platforms that help the sector navigate the increasing complexity of migrant integration support services.

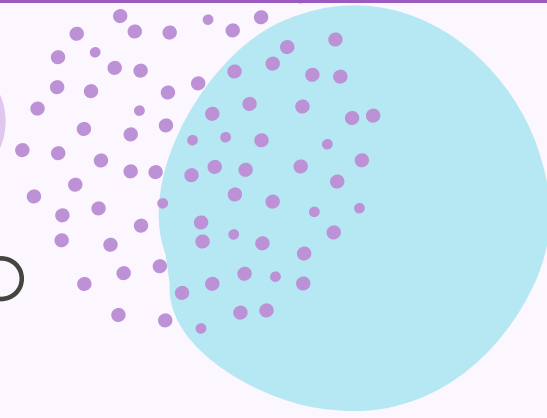
Migrant targeted participation structures, like the 'European Migration Forum', the 'Birmingham Migration Forum', and the 'Migrant Integration Council' (Ioannina) also fulfil an important coordination function by facilitating **information sharing and collaboration**. Finally, the role of the 'Refugee and Migration Engagement Officer' within Birmingham City Council is an example of a more pro-active approach. The Officer promotes and coordinates migrant inclusion activities internally with council staff across departments as well as externally with migrant organisations, service providers, universities, leisure centres, and others to raise awareness about migration issues and to engage migrants.

15) *Ibid.*

16) Yeo, J. (2022) 'Interorganizational Coordination for Immigrant Integration into Local Society', *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Published online 31 May 2022.

## 5 ACTIVISM

# CAMPAIGNING FOR CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



**Local authorities can undertake a more proactive approach** in promoting migrants' civic and political participation, for example, by raising awareness about opportunities to naturalise.<sup>17</sup> Decentralisation of competencies has enabled many authorities to set their own priorities and develop local policies. Being more closely connected with local communities and civil society, the authorities are also at the receiving end of any disturbances and grassroots pressure to change policy.<sup>18</sup> Hence, **local activism and the authorities' willingness to be influenced can drive progress** in this area.

In Birmingham, the Council supports the 'Lift the Ban' campaign, a coalition of organisations calling on the UK Government to give people in the asylum process the right to work. At the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, public support and grassroots pressure from civil society to resettle refugees in the UK played a major role in securing support from local authorities whose participation in the resettlement scheme was

voluntary. This coincided with Birmingham becoming a City of Sanctuary – joining a national movement and network of cities that welcome and support asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

The influence of local and EU authorities in the legal and political domain of migrant integration is partly limited as the powers to grant citizenship remains a competence of national governments. Yet, there has been an increasing **trend towards promoting political rights of legal long-term residents** irrespective of whether they hold citizenship of their host country.<sup>19</sup> Extending voting rights to immigrants is believed to enhance their integration as well as encouraging engagement in other political activities.<sup>20</sup>

**Political and voting rights for national elections** are strictly connected to citizenship and national policies which vary across EU countries. Most citizens of EU acquire citizenship through descent rather than country of birth.<sup>21</sup>

17) Manatschal, A., Wisthaler, V. and C. I. Zuber (2020) 'Making regional citizens? The political drivers and effects of subnational immigrant integration policies in Europe and North America', *Regional Studies* 54:11: 1475-1485.

18) Gebhardt, D. (2016) 'Re-thinking urban citizenship for immigrants from a policy perspective: the case of Barcelona', *Citizenship Studies* 20(6-7): 846-866.

19) Triandafyllidou, A. (2015) 'Reform, Counter-Reform and the Politics of Citizenship: Local Voting Rights for Third-Country Nationals in Greece', *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 16: 43-60.

20) Groenendijk, K. (2008) 'Local Voting Rights for Non-Nationals in Europe: What We Know and What We Need to Learn', Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/local-voting-rights-non-nationals-europe-what-we-know-and-what-we-need-learn> [Accessed on 15/09/2022]

21) European Website on Integration (2020) 'Trends in Birthright Citizenship in EU 28 (2013-2020)', Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/trends-birthright-citizenship-eu-28-2013-2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/trends-birthright-citizenship-eu-28-2013-2020_en) [Accessed on 25/09/2022].

Hence, second-generation migrants often face obstacles in obtaining these voting rights, prompting migrant-led organisations to advocate for wider citizenship rights at a national level. A proposal to reform legislation on voting rights in Europe was submitted by civil society to the European Commission in 2020 to extend the right to regional, national elections and referenda to EU citizens.

### **Extending full voting rights in local elections**

to EU nationals and third country nationals (TCNs) in the country of residence has long been promoted by the EU. Since 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht grants all EU nationals residing in another EU Member State local voting rights.<sup>22</sup> EU nationals living in another EU country also have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in the European elections held in that country.<sup>23</sup>

Operating within the constraints of national laws and politics, none of the four municipalities actively lobby for granting or extending full local voting rights to TCNs.

The EU can only encourage Member States to amend their national laws and the Council of Europe has promoted this right for many years.<sup>24</sup>

Over time, more countries have granted local voting rights to TCNs. In 2014, 12 states had provisions for full local political rights of TCNs, including Spain and the UK (conditionally), and further 2 states allowed voting but not standing for election. 13 out of the 27 EU States, including Latvia and Greece, do not grant TCNs local voting rights. In the UK, Commonwealth citizens can vote while in Spain reciprocal agreements exist for citizens from some countries. Local voting rights for TCNs were introduced in Greece in 2010 but reversed in 2013. Studies suggest that the presence of left-wing governments is a key favourable condition for extending local voting rights to TCNs. Indeed, the counter-reform reversing TCNs' right to vote in Greece was attributed to the conservative party coming to power, alongside a rise of right-wing politics across Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Research suggests that even non-nationals who do have local voting rights tend to have lower participation in local elections than citizens. Participation rates vary across migrant groups, cities and over time, but are importantly influenced by local political circumstances,<sup>26</sup>

suggesting **more can be done at the local level to encourage migrants to vote.**

22) Groenendijk K. (2014) 'Voting rights for Nationals of Non-EU States' in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Available at: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/kurzdossiers/184711/voting-rights-for-nationals-of-non-eu-states/> [Accessed on 15/09/2022]

23) European Commission (2022) 'Citizens' Rights', Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/know-your-rights/citizens-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/know-your-rights/citizens-rights_en) [Accessed on 15/09/2022].

24) Council of Europe (1992) 'Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level', Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168007bd26> [Accessed on 01/04/2023]

25) Triandafyllidou, A. (2015) 'Reform, Counter-Reform and the Politics of Citizenship: Local Voting Rights for Third-Country Nationals in Greece', *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 16: 43-60.

26) Groenendijk, K. (2008) 'Local Voting Rights for Non-Nationals in Europe: What We Know and What We Need to Learn', Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/local-voting-rights-non-nationals-europe-what-we-know-and-what-we-need-learn> [Accessed on 15/09/2022]

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst good practice exists across the board, there is more that can be done to create favourable conditions for migrant inclusion. Several recommendations aimed at local authorities and migrant-led organisations are proposed, building on good practice examples as well as wider integration literature.

### Local authorities:

- Demonstrate commitment to migrant inclusion in decision making by developing an explicitly written strategy and action plan to promote civic and political participation of migrants.
- The strategy should promote migrant inclusion across policy areas, specify how decision makers will respond to the voices of migrants and consider how to address multiple disadvantages faced by some groups of migrants, such as refugees.
- Support diverse communities of migrants to create associations and organisations that represent groups particularly excluded from the existing participation structures; for example, through administrative help or start-up grants.
- Foster the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships to stimulate knowledge exchange, innovation and sustainability in local efforts to promote civic and political participation of migrants.
- Provide leadership by reaching out to new actors from private sector and civil society to promote collaboration while levelling up power imbalances in the relationship by encouraging co-production.

- Invest resources in relationship building activities to establish links with potential collaborators from across sectors, for example, networking opportunities and social and cultural events.
- Create a dedicated, permanent role of a migrant engagement officer or civic participation champion to coordinate and lead on local authority activities to promote the inclusion of migrants in decision making, internally and externally.
- Reach out to newcomers early on, for example, by offering council tours or sending city welcome packs to encourage a sense of belonging and connection with the city.
- Campaign to advance migrant inclusion in local decision making, for instance, by lobbying central government to sign up to the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (developed by the Council of Europe), granting third country nationals the right to vote and stand as candidate in local elections.

### Migrant-led organisations:

- Develop local campaigns to promote the inclusion of migrants in decision making. This may include, for example, demanding better monitoring of migrant population and its engagement with existing civic and political participation structures and platforms.
- Invest resources in relationship building activities to establish links with potential collaborators from across sectors, for example, networking opportunities and social and cultural events.



**Migrant  
Integration through  
Locally designed  
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