

**EMVI** Empowering  
Migrant Voices on  
Integration  
and Inclusion  
Policies

National  
Report  
Germany

**move**  
**GLOBAL**

**Voice** „We need to talk to  
people where they are: In refugee  
shelters and less at expert panels.”

**Women's  
Rights Expert**

**Voice** “Our existence as a migrant  
organisation is always at risk. You don't  
know if the project will be funded or  
for how long and whether you will even  
have a job next year.”

**Activist for the right  
to vote non-German citizens**



# EMVI Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies

National  
Report Germany  
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**Voice** “For the migrant advisory councils’ organisations are always re-elected that have always been there. On the other hand, who has the time to do this on a voluntary basis? Most of us foreigners have to work a lot so that we can stay here.”

Interviewee  
for the EMVI project

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# 1 Participation and Integration Structures in Germany

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## 1 Facts and Figures: Migrants in Germany

Germany is considered an “Einwanderungsland” (an immigration country), which means it is perceived as a country to which a high number of people immigrate and thus a country with a high ratio of inhabitants with migratory backgrounds (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022). In 2021, 22.3 million people (27.2% of the population of Germany) had migratory backgrounds. This corresponds to every 4th person in the country. 53% of these people (almost 11.8 million people) held German citizenship in 2021, while 47% held non-German citizenships (almost 10.6 million people) (ibid.). As of 31 December 2021, around 1.4 million people living in Germany with permanent resident status had been granted protection in Germany (Bundesregierung, Antwort auf Kleine Anfrage, Drucksache 20/584, March 2022: 3). 43,684 of them were entitled to asylum according to Article 16a of the Grundgesetz (the German Constitution), 760,918 were refugees according to the Geneva Refugee Convention, 255,671 persons were entitled to subsidiary protection, and 136,156 people were subject to a deportation ban. Another 239,000 people had been granted protection due to various circumstances, for example for pursuing a profession or because humanitarian reasons prevented their deportation (Mediendienst Integration, “Zahl der Flüchtlinge”).

Almost two-thirds (62%) of all persons with migratory backgrounds are immigrants from other European countries or their descendants. This corresponds to 13.9 million people, 7.5 million of whom have roots in other member states of the European Union. The second biggest region of origin is Asia. The 5.1 million immigrants from Asia and their descendants make up 23% of persons with migratory backgrounds, of which 3.5 million have a connection to the Middle East. Less than 1.1 million people (5%) are of African descent. The most common countries of origin are Turkey (12%), Poland (10%), the Russian Federation (6%), Kazakhstan (6%) and Syria (5%). In 2021, 1% or 308,000 of the people living in Germany with migratory backgrounds originated from Ukraine. Due to the current influx of refugees, the number of people with Ukrainian migratory backgrounds could increase significantly in the future, according to the Federal Statistical Office (Federal

Statistical Office, press release no. 162 of 12 April 2022). As of June 19, 2022, about 867,214 Ukrainians were registered in the German Central Register of Foreigners (Ausländerzentralregister AZR) since February 2022 (Mediendienst Integration, “Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine”).

In Berlin, 811,334 inhabitants with roots in other countries do not have a German passport, and 569,972 Berliners have a migratory background (Statistical Office Berlin-Brandenburg, December 2021). This constitutes 36.6% of Berlin’s population, according to the Office of Statistics Berlin-Brandenburg (Statistical Office Berlin-Brandenburg, December 2021). Of these almost 1.4 million people who have migratory backgrounds or non-German origins, about 400,000 come from EU countries, most of them from Poland (112,000). 183,000 people have Turkish roots, about 150,000 have origins in Arab countries and about 145,000 people have roots in countries of the former Soviet Union (RBB24, February 2022). As of 31 December 2021, there were 2,552 living people who were entitled to asylum (Die Bundesregierung, Antwort auf Kleine Anfrage, Drucksache 20/584, March 2022: 4).

## 2 The Main Official Institutions & Stakeholders Responsible for Migrant Integration

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which is a division of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI), is responsible for immigration issues, asylum and refugee protection, as well as the coordination and management of migration and integration policies (Bundesbehörden BMI). As of 2022, the BMI has a budget of EUR 882,385,000 and commands 8,141 employees in 63 locations (ibid.).

The BMI is also responsible for organising and setting the agenda of the Deutsche Islam Konferenz (German Islam Conference) (DIK), which, as a forum for dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, also addresses issues of participation and integration. The DIK has been held regularly since 2006. Since 2012, the Federal Government has also been hosting the so-called Integration Summit, at which central points of German integration politics are

discussed among all stakeholders. Together with the National Action Plan on Integration, the summit constitutes an important instrument for the orientation and design of integration policies in the Federal Republic of Germany.

### 3 Legal Framework for the Regulation of Integration

For a long time, Germany refused to acknowledge that it is an immigration country, with the result that integration policy only became a political issue with the Immigration Act, which came into effect on 1 January 2005 together with the Residence Act (Hanewinkel and Oltmer 2017). After the Bundestag elections in 2005, the office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration was upgraded to the rank of a Minister of State by the Chancellery. Since 1 December 2021, Reem Alabali-Radovan has been holding the office of Minister of State for Migration, Refugees and Integration. She is simultaneously the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism (Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, press release of 23 February 2022). The office of Commissioner for Anti-Racism was first introduced by the current government (in power since 2021). After the refugee movement in 2015 and the accompanying debates on long-term integration of asylum seekers in addition to an overload of the administration services, the Integration Act came into effect at the federal level on 6 August 2016. Contrary to what the name suggests, it does not regulate comprehensive aspects of integration in Germany but contains regulations on the right of residence, labour promotion and language as well as integration courses (Exzellencluster). With this law, the German government pursues an integration strategy of “fördern und fordern”, that is promoting and demanding. This means migrants should be supported in learning the German language and receive professional qualifications, while facing sanctions if they do not take advantage of these offers. There was some controversy during the discussion of this concept of integration and the law. The law was criticised by different civil rights groups and charity organisations, mainly because of its

far-reaching restrictions, especially the reduction of financial support below the minimum standard of living in case of non-compliance with the measures, as well as its restrictions on the right of residence for recognised refugees (ProAsyl, June 2016).

In addition, there are integration laws in the federal states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Berlin (Sachverständigenrat Integration und Migration, press-release of 05.10.2017). Although integration and migration policy in Germany are federal responsibilities, the implementation of national policies remains in the hands of the federal states, as many areas relevant to integration, such as education, are constitutionally the competence of the federal states. Apart from the integration laws Germany also has a very complex catalogue of regulations and laws for different areas of life concerning asylum seekers and refugees, as well as a Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz, which is an immigration law for specialists to reduce skills shortages.

After different crimes related to racism and xenophobia in the last years, the Federal Government has come to see itself responsible for protecting the liberal democratic basic order more strongly (Diskussionspapier von BMFSFJ und BMI für ein Demokratiefördergesetz 2022: 1). Thus, the government aims to pass a Democracy Promotion Act which is still in the drafting phase. This law will form a legal basis for the long-term promotion of anti-racism, democracy education and extremism prevention (ibid: 2–3). The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) are responsible for drafting the act. The government also plans to pass a law on participation in the current electoral term.

## 4 The Main National Policies Dealing with Integration

On the positive side, migration and integration in Germany have increasingly been understood as interdisciplinary tasks in recent years. The “National Action Plan on Integration for the 2020s” (NAP-I), for example, is a guideline for shaping German integration policy and constitutes the product of the cooperation of 11 federal ministries and commissioners as well as representatives of the federal states and municipalities, of civil society, migrant organisations, international organisations, academia, business, the media, sports and cultural organisations, trade unions and social associations (Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, “Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration”). The newly revised action plan is divided into five phases, each with 24 projects dealing with different aspects of integration, from immigration to social cohesion. Women of migratory descent are given special consideration in the integration plan in the field of the labour market (Integration Commissioner: Women in the Labour Market). Here, the Federal Government focuses on advice for women who are third country nationals. Since May 2020, for example, there has been the model project Fem.OS in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency and the BAMF. The Company “Minor – Projektkontor für Bildung und Forschung” has been commissioned with its implementation. In the form of “digital street work”, the employees advise women in eight languages on 741 social media channels and test interface management for access to the labour market in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (Ferchichi 2022: 1).

Civil society organisations have criticised the Action Plan mainly because the guidelines are exclusively aimed at immigrants and people with a migratory background, whereas majority society is not named as a group to be active (FAQ NAP-I No.4). This is seen as a deficit, as the inclusion of migrants is seen also as the responsibility of the German majority society. Furthermore, the Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations – “Bundesverband Netzwerke von Migrant\*innenorganisationen (BV NeMO e.V.)” – criticised that the current action plan does not focus enough on measures to

improve the participation of migrants and that there are no concrete and practice-oriented proposals for more participation in legislative projects that affect migrants (Rudolph 2022).

## 5 Inclusion of Migrants in the Implementation of Integration Policies

### 5.1 No Voting Rights for Third Country Nationals in Germany

Elections in Germany take place at local, state, and federal levels. Only German citizens and EU citizens can vote in local elections. Third-country nationals (TCNs) are therefore excluded from conventional political participation, including holding political office. Most political parties in Germany also allow foreigners to become party members, but they cannot stand for election (Schu et al. 2021: 34). People who have been living in Germany for decades but have a foreign passport are not eligible to vote. However, the coalition government in power since 2021 is planning to reform citizenship law to facilitate naturalisation. The coalition agreement states that multiple citizenship is to be possible again also for non-EU citizens.<sup>1</sup> In addition, naturalisation will be possible after five years instead of the current eight years, and already after three years in the case of special integration achievements (Coalition Agreement 2021–2025: 188). The extension of the right to vote in municipal elections to third-country nationals has so far been rejected on constitutional grounds. The Federal Constitutional Court has interpreted Article 20 (2) of the Grundgesetz (the German constitution) in such a way that only nationals can participate in national elections, allowing only EU citizens to participate in local elections. Therefore, it would require a constitutional amendment if the legislative also wanted to grant third-country nationals the right to vote in municipal elections in Germany (Schu et al. 2021: 37). Attempts to extend the right to vote in municipal elections have so far been unsuccessful (ibid.).

## 5.2 Non-Electoral Participation

For the reasons elaborated in the chapter before, non-EU citizens in Germany only have the possibility of “non-electoral participation” (Müssig 2020: 33). Since the 1970s, there have been so-called “foreigners’ advisory councils” and “integration advisory councils” at the municipal level in Germany. These are bodies of participation for people with migratory backgrounds and/or without German citizenship (Schu et al. 2021: 34). Migrant organisations, new German organisations<sup>2</sup>, self-organised refugee associations<sup>3</sup> and trade unions also play an important role in communicating and representing the interests of the migration society. Third-country nationals living in the Federal Republic of Germany, migrants, and people of migratory descent also participate in petitions, go to demonstrations or do voluntary work (Schu et al. 2021: 64–67).

### <sup>A</sup> The National Level

Since 1998, there has been the Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat (BZI) (Federal Immigration and Integration Council) at the federal level, with its headquarters in Berlin. It is a nationwide association of the state organisations of municipal integration, migration and foreigners’ advisory councils, acting as a point of contact for the federal government, the Bundestag and Bundesrat, as well as for the national centres and organisations at the federal level. The BZI is represented in various bodies, including being involved in the shaping of the National Action Plan on Integration from 2019 to 2021 and participating in thematic forums for the individual phases of the Action Plan (BZI participation bodies). Apart from its function as an advisory board, it is also responsible for various projects that deal with empowering citizens with a migration history. For example, from May 2021 to June 2022, the BZI has launched the project “KommPAktiv – Kommunale Integrationsbeiräte qualifizieren, Demokratie stärken”. The project aims to train voluntary migration and integration advisory boards, providing them with tools with which they can participate actively in local politics. It is important to mention here, however,

that the BZI is not a permanent body but an association dependent on funding. But the new federal government has signalled in the context of the coalition agreement that a participation law at the federal level will be initiated, which will also include the establishment of a participation council as a permanent body (Coalition Agreement 2021–2025: 118).

Apart from the Federal Immigration and Integration Council, migrant organisations represent the interests of people with a migratory background. They are experts and partners at the federal, state, and municipal level and advice on issues of migration, integration, and participation. Migrant organisations are also channels of communication for municipalities to reach citizens of migratory origin and, in particular, provide a voice for the concerns of migrant communities. At the national level, for example, there is the Bundesverband Netzwerke von Migrant\*innenorganisationen e.V. (Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations) (BV NeMO e.V.). It aims to increase the ability of migrant organisations to operate and advocate on a professional level and to have an impact on policies regarding migration and integration as well as participation. The German government provides structural funding to some nationally operating migrant organisations. Structural funding is granted for a longer period than project funding and aims at strengthening the organisational structures, different to funding for projects which only can be used for the implementation of activities within the project.

The federal states also have integration and migration commissioners who are part of the state administration. North Rhine-Westphalia has established so-called municipal integration centres dealing with integration on the municipal level. Most federal states also have migration and integration advisory councils. These are advisory bodies often introduced by municipal laws that represent the population with a migratory background in political decisions. How they are formed varies depending on the federal state regulations. In some federal states the representatives are elected, in others appointed, while in some there is a mixed form. The advisory boards have no decision-making powers and in many municipalities there is no legal obligation to establish an advisory board.

In some federal states, however, both the establishment of an advisory board and its tasks and powers are regulated by the participation and integration laws of the federal states. In other cases, there is a lack of specific provisions on the establishment of migration councils or when councils must be consulted, and there are often no provisions on the right to make motions and to speak (Kersting 2020: 190). An exception are federal states that have stipulated the establishment of a migration council in their municipal code (ibid. 191). However, many migrants who are entitled to vote for the advisory boards hardly seem to perceive or accept the actions of the advisory boards, as the Sachverständigenrat Integration und Migration (Expert Council of German Foundations for Integration and Migration) (SVR) states in its annual report of 2021 (Schu et al. 2021: 59). This could be mainly because the impact of these bodies on political decisions is considered low and many migrants do not feel sufficiently represented by the advisory boards (ibid.).

In Berlin, Katarina Niewiedzial has been the Commissioner for Integration and Migration since May 2019. Her task is to shape migration and integration policy within all Senate administrations and policy areas. In addition, the Commissioner is responsible for steering Berlin's overall integration policy. She is also the contact person for migrant organisations and head of the counselling centre "Welcome Centre" for new arrivals, immigrants, and people of migratory descent without a German passport. On the federal state level, Berlin has a Law on the Regulation of Participation and Integration in Berlin that was amended in 2021 and renamed the Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft (PartMigG) (Law on the Promotion of Participation in the Migration Society of the State of Berlin). The PartMigG was passed on 17 June 2021 and is also referred to as the "Open Door Act". It regulates binding measures to promote diversity in the administration and the economy as well as the political participation of people with migratory backgrounds. The law was developed with significant participation of the State Advisory Council for Participation (Brandalise 2021: 1), since the amendment must first be implemented, the Advisory Council will only be constituted in its reformed way at the end of 2022 or the beginning of 2023.<sup>4</sup>

Established by Senate resolution on 29 April 2003, Berlin's State Advisory Council for Participation will be composed of 13 members, representing migrant communities who are entitled to vote, out of which one has to represent ethnic German migrants, one refugees and one the LGBTQI\* community with a migratory background. One member will represent the Council of the Roma and Sinti communities within the Advisory Council (§17 I PartMigG). The PartMigG also lists other stakeholders and representatives of the administration who need to attend the meetings of the council. A central reform of the law is the obligation to establish integration and migration advisory boards at the district level, the smallest municipal level in Berlin (§19 PartMigG). It is only with the amended PartMigG that the districts are required to establish advisory councils and provide funds for the administration of the advisory councils.

## 6 Migrant Organisations

Only in some districts, non-organised migrants are members of the council, representing their communities. All the other members are representatives of migrant organisations, non-migrant NGOs as well as charity organisations which have to apply for the seats in the council and will be selected by the integration office of the district. Due to the PartMigG, there is now also the possibility for TCNs to work in the committees for participation and integration of the district assemblies as knowledgeable citizen representative with voting rights within the committees of the assemblies. Next to the PartMigG, the Berlin State passed the Berliner Landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz (Anti-Discrimination Act) on 21 June, 2020 which is the first of its kind in Germany and closes a legal gap that still exists, particularly in the area of discrimination caused by state action.

A long-term project funded by the Berlin Senate was Berlin Entwickelt Neue Nachbarschaften (BENN), the name of which means “Berlin Develops New Neighbourhoods”. It has been established in 2017 in the neighbourhoods of refugee accommodations as part of a Berlin-wide integration management program. Since then, 16 BENN locations were created within the city. The goal was to support the participation of refugees in social life activities in the neighbourhood, but also to promote active citizen participation as well as engagement between the newcomers in the neighbourhood and its long-term residents.

Another crucial instrument for strengthening the participation of migrant organisations and organisations of refugees is the Participation and Integration Programme of the Berlin Senate. Organisations funded by the programme receive project funding for three years. This allows migrant organisations to create a more stable and sustainable situation.

There is no information available on how many migrant organisations are operating in Germany. In 2020, the Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration (SVR), Expert Council on Integration and Migration, published a study (Friedrichs et al. 2020), in which a statistical estimate was made. The statistical survey took place in four federal states. The SVR estimates that in 2020 there were about 12,400–14,300 migrant organisations in Germany (Friedrichs et al. 2020: 13–14). Migrant organisations often work at the municipal level, focused on their immediate neighbourhoods and are anchored in the structures of the municipality. Across municipalities, migrant organisations often cooperate to form umbrella organisations to communicate their concerns with combined strength (ibid. 18). Most organisations are registered as associations and in some rare cases they can also be limited liability companies (GmbH). Apart from registered associations, there are also initiatives that are formed for a specific purpose and dissolve after a certain period (Friedrichs et al. 2020: 12). To provide an idea of the variety of migrant organisations in Germany, this report lists only a small selection of 10 different migrant organisations operating on the national level but also specifically in Berlin, where the EMVI project is implemented.

At the national level, for example, there is the Bundesverband Netzwerke von Migrantenorganisationen e.V. (BV NeMO), the Federal Association of Networks of Migrant Organisations, which aims to strengthen the participation of migrant organisations at the level of federal politics, responsible ministries and institutions and to advocate for a beneficial framework and conditions for the operation of migrant local alliances. The nationally operating umbrella association DaMigra e.V. focuses on the empowerment and the equal political, social, professional, and cultural participation of migrant women in Germany, including the fight against all forms of discrimination. There is also the DaMOst—Dachverband der Migrant\*innenorganisationen in Ostdeutschland e.V., which is an umbrella organisation specifically for migrant organisations that are rooted and operating in the Eastern part of Germany, in the states which used to belong to the German Democratic Republic. On

the local level in Berlin, the Türkischer Bund in Berlin-Brandenburg e.V. (TBB) (the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg) needs to be mentioned, which is an umbrella organisation of different Turkish-diaspora organisations, as well as individuals. Their goal is to advocate for (minority) rights on a legal, social, and economic level as well as to promote participation and equality. The TBB also has expertise in anti-discrimination counselling. The Migrationsrat Berlin e. V. operates as a council representing the cross-sectional interests of all kinds of migrant organisations in Berlin. The Afrika-Rat Berlin-Brandenburg e.V. aims to strengthen and connect the African diaspora, to advocate for the minority rights of people of African descent and against any form of racism and discrimination, while also empowering small migrant organisations and their representatives. Club Dialog e.V. stimulates and promotes cultural and political dialogue between Russian-speaking and German-speaking Berliners and promotes the integration of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This organisation currently conducts projects for the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees. GePGeMi e.V. is the Society for Psychosocial Health Promotion among migrant groups, especially from Asian countries. They advocate for health promotion in the psychosocial field, mainly for migrant families and elderly migrants from East Asian cultural areas. Zaki e.V. focuses on the support of Afghan and Arabic communities, providing political education, support and consulting as well as empowerment, advocating for equal participation for people on the move. Women in Exile and Friends is an initiative of refugee women who united in Brandenburg in 2002 to fight for their rights and advocate for the concerns of refugee women facing intersectional discrimination.

- 1 According to the Staatsangehörigkeitgesetz, the German Nationality Act, multiple citizenship is only possible if one parent of a child has a foreign passport (§ 4). If a person has two nationalities at birth, they need to decide between them when they are between the age of 18 and 23 (§ 29 StAG). Only in individual cases can a person become a German citizen while keeping the passport of a non-EU country (§§ 10 Abs. 1 Nr. 4, 25 Abs. 1 Satz 2 StAG). In general, multiple citizenship is only allowed for nationals of other EU member states (§§ 17 Abs. 1 Nr. 2, 25 Abs. 1 S. 1 StAG).
- 2 The New German Organisations (ndo) are a post-migrant network of associations, organisations and projects from all over Germany. They advocate for all kinds of people (migrants and Germans) of migratory descent.
- 3 Self-organised refugee organisations and initiatives are those created by people who are refugees or asylum seekers. They are campaigning for the concerns and rights of refugees.
- 4 With the amendment of the Law for the Regulation of Participation and Integration in Berlin (now PartMigG) the State Advisory Council on Questions of Integration and Migration was renamed to the State Advisory Council for Participation.

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# 2 Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

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10 one-to-one interviews were conducted online and in person in Berlin. The interviewees with a migratory background selected for these interviews were individuals who are politically active and have a history of migration themselves. Despite the limits of qualitative research to have a selection with great variety of cases, this research focused on interviews with 10 individuals varying in regard to gender, age, and origin as well as residency status. Additionally, all interviewees are active in different political fields, either as representatives of migrant organisations, members of migrant advisory councils, citizen representatives, or activists and volunteers.

## 1 Migrant Needs

### 1.1 Stable resident status as a precondition for participation

Despite the structural access to political participation for migrants, as described in the previous chapter, all interviewees voiced the opinion that even if structural participation exists in theory, migrants need to have stable resident status to put them into practice. It was presumed that people who are in the process of seeking asylum are very afraid to jeopardize their chances to obtain asylum. Many also fear the confrontational atmosphere when going to their appointments in the foreigners' registration office, making them afraid of speaking out. One of the interviewees also pointed out that as long as people are not sure if they will be allowed to reside in one place for a longer time, they do not have the motivation to participate in political initiatives, especially if they have to move from one accommodation to the next and sometimes from one federal state to another. Many interviewees found that political involvement on the municipality level under such conditions is very difficult to expect. Moreover, some conversation partners also mentioned that their communities or groups of migrants they work with sometimes have very little interest in political engagement because they are too occupied with existential difficulties such as looking for employment, paying bills and finding housing. It was also pointed out that

if establishing a stable residency is a precondition for participation, then for migrant women especially this is often difficult to achieve because they (as presumed) have less access to information about counselling centres because of their personal situation.

One interviewee in Berlin described her personal situation as follows: "In my case, it was not possible to ask on the street for help or google counselling centres and projects. I wasn't very active on social media and I just stayed at home because of my ex-husband. I didn't have any opportunities at all. Only after I separated from my husband did I create a Facebook account, talked to many women on social media and found out that there are so many counselling centres in my neighbourhood. Then, I found a counselling centre on the subject of residence, which advised me on my resident status. That's how I got my resident permit. Only then did I start to work on my career and became politically active."

### 1.2 Fighting Discrimination and Racism

Most of the interviewees mentioned that it is difficult to be politically active in groups or structures which are dominated by members of majority society. One interviewee said that many migrants experienced being patronised because they do not speak the language fluently. Another participant felt being used as a token for diversity campaigns. Some stated that they think that as long as they are viewed as migrants because of their features or skin colour, they will not be seen as equals in such structures. Furthermore, there is a general demand for more critical post-colonial perspectives when talking about participation or creating and funding projects that deal with integration and migrant issues. Many people interviewed for the project said that they reject the word "integration." They associate it with a one-way approach, feeling that they are forced to assimilate to majority society rather than being seriously included and accepted. One interviewee also mentioned discrimination associated with the word "integration" when it comes to the ques-

tion of who is demanded to integrate. She felt that the expectation “to integrate” is only expressed towards migrants coming from the Global South. Especially women migrant representatives pointed out that they face a lot of racism in everyday life, which hinders their participation. One of the interviewees said that racism needs to be dealt with more in the school system and on the job market to make access easier for women. Discrimination was often mentioned regarding women in hijabs. Nevertheless, one participant stated that global movements like “Black Lives Matter” had increased the social awareness of racism and contributed to a better understanding in her circles of how many people are affected by discrimination.

### 1.3 Accommodation and Living Conditions

Another often verbalised requirement for the ability to focus on political activities is permanent accommodation with stable living conditions. Finding apartments or proper housing was mentioned many times as a major problem hindering a focus on political activities when having spare time. One participant working with migrant women in the countryside said that despite having an apartment, the living conditions are sometimes very difficult as the women often feel excluded from neighbourhood activities or from contact to Germans in their environment. They also face discrimination in their areas and have difficulties to find help from outside.

When living in shelters one female interviewee also mentioned that women sometimes face sexual harassment and she even heard of a case of rape. She also pointed out that the women who have children are worried when others in the shelters consume alcohol or drugs. Another participant mentioned that rumours and wrong information can easily spread when living in refugee shelters which also hinders participation and makes it difficult to motivate people to become politically active.

In his own words he described it like this: “When you’re living with people in the refugee shelter and they are your only contacts, there is a high risk of not getting reliable information about documents or possibilities to participate.

In the shelters rumours abound, such as ‘do not say anything negative about your situation or living conditions or you will get problems with your asylum procedure.’ That’s why when you only go there and say ‘get organised’, you’ve already lost.”

### 1.3 Relevant Policy Fields Requiring Improvements for Migrants

#### <sup>A</sup> Better Funding for Migrant Organisations

When planning to get organised one participant pointed out the difficulty to receive funding for projects as a refugee or a migrant who had not been living in Germany for a long time. She pointed out that more projects with this specific target need to be created and funded. She held the opinion that the empowerment of migrants to become actors of inclusion requires a focus on access to knowledge on how to write a project application and where to access funding, as administration processes to acquire funding are highly complex. An opinion voiced repeatedly was that more self-empowerment opportunities through information and training are needed. In general, one crucial demand was to invest more in self-organised migrant and refugee organisations and to create structures in which they can be involved directly in policymaking. Many participants saw a solution in the creation of more sustainable projects by structural funding rather than project funding. This was also seen as a way to give migrant organisations more opportunities to advocate for inclusive policies.

One of the interviewed participants explained the major problems like this: “In my association, I have two months to implement the content of the project and 80% of my work is the administration of the project. It’s all about the formalities and not the content. Everyone working in projects is caught in this bureaucracy trap. And very little of content work can actually be done. Our existence as a migrant organisation is always at risk. You don’t know if the project will be funded or for how long and whether you will even have a job next year.”

## <sup>B</sup> The Right to Vote for Third Country Nationals (TCNs)

Another verbalised demand was the right to vote for TCNs. One participant, who is now in retirement and been living in Germany for many years now, said that the right to vote would give him a sense of belonging and that when the right to vote on the municipality level was introduced for citizens of the European Union, he felt very excluded after many years of living and working in Germany. Other interviewees think that the ability to vote would empower them more to speak up, as right now they feel that this is not appreciated. One person said that despite living in Germany for 13 years, having studied here and paying taxes, she is afraid that if she is too politically open, she will face difficulties when renewing her visa. In her view, having the right to vote as a TCN might be a solution to this self-silencing. Another participant had the impression that the right to vote would be a very important step to allow TCNs to legally influence politics on a higher level, and make politicians care more about the concerns of migrants who are potential voters.

One participant explained the importance of having a right to vote like this: “When it comes to topics and decisions that relate to migrants, they should have their own voice in it, they should have their own vote in it. We live here, we are building our lives here but there is a good piece of the cake that’s missing and that’s definitely because of the restrictions put by the general law passed by people who have no clue about the suffering of migrant groups.”

## <sup>2</sup> Migrants’ Readiness for Political Participation

### 2.1 Advisory Councils

Migrant advisory councils were presumed by the interviewee as the predominant structural participation opportunity for the representation of perspectives and views of TCNs. However, almost all participants had the impression that the topics discussed are of little concern to the actual needs of non-organised individuals. Instead, many interviewees understood migrant advisory councils rather as networking opportunities for migrant organisations or as committees of the municipality, used to defend itself against accusations of making policies without consulting migrants. Others saw the appointment by the municipality as problematic because it allows the administration to invite only those migrant organisations to the table with which they have already worked together for many years. Nevertheless, some participants saw advisory councils as very important until TCNs have voting rights at the municipality level. But one interviewee also had the impression that many councils are not as active as they should be. One participant thinks that the problem lies in a lack of skills of the council members to deal with administrative and legal procedures.

In general, the influence of migrant advisory councils was regarded as disappointing, as many felt that the councils lack the power to actually influence policies as they are limited by their counselling role. Moreover, the interviewees also stated the opinion that advisory councils are not widely known to the migrant population. As a possible solution, migrant representatives actively involved in an advisory council suggested visible action such as events or brochures on relevant topics that can also be accessed by the general migrant population of the municipality. Some expressed the view that the councils should reach out more to the migrant population in the municipality and introduce themselves. One participant said that the members should not be appointed but elected to make this procedure as democratic as possible and to allow TCNs to participate in the decision of who should represent them in the council. He had the view that this is not

appreciated by the municipalities because this would require additional financial and administrative resources. Although more individual representatives were perceived as a good solution by others, there were doubts whether many individuals would like to become members of the council. Even though some councils in Berlin also allow individuals to be appointed as representatives to the council, there was a commonly shared opinion that newcomers who do not speak the German language will have difficulties to present their demands and participate actively in the discussions with politicians and other council members. In general, everyone felt that the activities of the councils such as regular meetings and committees are very time consuming and because they are not paid or only compensated with an allowance, it is especially difficult to motivate individuals to participate.

One female migrant representative put it like this: "I think the problem here is also that old structures exist, i.e., organisations are always re-elected that have always been there. On the other hand, who has the time to do this on a voluntary basis? Most of us foreigners have to work a lot so that we can stay here."

## 2.2 The Foundation of New Associations

Another widely used opportunity for participation is the creation of new associations. All participants in the interviews view this as the most effective and widely used way to do projects that have an impact on migrants and to influence certain policies. Only some of the interviewees were active in initiatives or grassroots activism. Migrant organisations are seen as the bridge between politicians and the non-organised migrant population. Many interviewees described a substantial problem to fund their work and doing sustainable work such as empowerment or advocacy. Others hold the opinion that although there are many active migrant organisations in Germany, there are also those mostly focused on community work. These interviewees found that these community-oriented organisations often do not really participate in advocacy activities or are members of political committees such as mi-

grant advisory councils. One reason for that was seen in the lack of supervision and training on how to network or how to write project proposals. One participant also pointed out that many people he knows have started out as unpaid activists because they were not able to acquire funding for their work. In his view, there need to be more low-threshold ways to give activists the opportunity to get qualifications in order to become political players.

## 2.3 Few Opportunities to Talk for Themselves

Many of the participants in the interviews described the notion that there is no structural opportunity to speak up as an individual migrant for your needs. It was presumed that you need to be organised in an organisation or other political structures to bring your demands to the administrations or political leaders. One interviewee had the impression that because migrant women have cultural or language barriers, they are denied the intellectual capacity to speak for themselves. The same interviewee felt that migrant women are treated more as the object of a conversation than as conversational partners in political discourses, with the topics discussed not being the ones truly relevant to the women. Another problem mentioned repeatedly was that politicians, who often are not migrants themselves, were seen as difficult to approach by migrant circles and communities, while also lacking understanding for the central needs of many migrants. It was viewed that this bridge between the real-life necessities of migrants and Politics currently only exists through migrant organisations who have access to these structures. One participant suggested round-table discussions or more low-threshold meetings with the local government as formats which can be joined more easily by individuals who are not organised. The suggestion was also made to have regular public events with politicians or representatives of the municipality to discuss issues face-to-face that concern the migrant population. The need for more involvement of individual migrants in political decision-making was often emphasised. Almost

all participants saw a voting right for TCNs on the municipality level as a possible solution to this discrepancy.

One interviewee summed it up like this: “A democracy should make some room to include the voices of those who lost their voices where they came from and who came here to regain their voice, not to have their voices taken away from them yet again.”

## 2.4 Informal Participation

When talking about informal ways of participation and grass-roots activism, most of the interviewees stated that they regularly participated in petitions and demonstrations. Some found these faster and more independent ways to have an impact on policies concerning integration and migration. One interviewee believed that coalitions entail less administrative work and allow for more independence regarding political demands and the operative framework. However, she also mentioned that it is hard to receive donations and they usually cover only costs of materials or rent for an event location. Another participant who is an activist and regularly organises demonstrations stated that advanced legal knowledge is necessary for the expression of political views. In his view this is especially difficult for people who are new in Berlin and want to participate. Not having a stable resident status or when in the asylum-seeking procedure puts them at risk to participate also in informal structures such as demonstrations. Information about civil rights and freedoms but also limits for activists should be distributed by activists to the other participants of the demonstration to avoid problems with the police or other authorities. The interviewee related his opinion that migrants are at a higher risk of having their actions classified as violations of the law, even if they are operating well in line with the law. Thus, he felt that migrants need to be especially cautious about their behaviour when taking to the street.

In his own words he said: “I think one of the main issues for activists is to know how the law impacts them. So, knowing how the law deals with activism and political activities is very important, especially to know the consequences and all the rights and duties is of utmost importance. “

## 2.5 Relevant Fields of Life to become politically active

The interviewees saw a major problem in the communication at the foreigners' registration office. It was mentioned that the staff are usually not trained to take the perspective of migrants and that the interviewees often feel discriminated against or not advised according to their needs. One participant mentioned that more employees with a migration background are needed in such administrative structures to understand the perspective of migrants better. This awareness is lacking in the labour market. They felt that discrimination in the labour market hinders them to get proper jobs even if they have the required degrees. Concretely, the job interview was often perceived as a difficult situation in which you have to present yourself in a language which is not your native tongue. Another very crucial field where reform was asked for is the recognition of professional and academic qualifications – a problem voiced especially by migrant women representatives, stressing the amount of women who are forced to take low-paid employment in the care sector since they are not able to continue working in their former professions.

Another political field of interest was education, specifically the discrimination of children. Interviewees working with migrant women often described women feeling helpless when their children were mocked or faced racist attacks. The women often have language barriers and cannot join parental meetings or defend their children against discriminatory teachers. These early childhood experiences of racist discrimination were also cited as a direct barrier to becoming politically active in adult life.

## 2.6 E-Participation

Almost all participants in the interviews saw e-participation as an opportunity to facilitate participation. However, most of the interviewees clarified that it would probably mainly be used by the already politically active people and maybe by individuals who have disabilities or no access to public spaces. On the other hand, they saw it as a barrier especially to those who do not have access to the internet or who are not familiar with technology. Many agreed that it would be used primarily by the younger generation. Women migrant representatives regarded it as a useful option to reach women, especially those with children. Many participants mentioned the need for such a tool to be clearly explained and provided in multiple languages. Some of the participants think that the language of the tool should be German as they perceive that people who would know about such a tool and actually use it would be people with a certain knowledge of German and that it would allow for discussions of topics among different communities. Almost all interviewees were sceptical if such an online participation tool should be presented by the municipality administration. They felt that there might be a lack of trust that their suggestions would not be properly taken into consideration when it comes to policymaking. Others suggested to have it introduced by a migrant group or organisation to enable easier participation. One participant noted that the tool could be introduced by the administration during the migrant's registration in the municipality to make it publicly known and to highlight the notion that the municipality is truly interested in the voices of migrants.

## 3 Obstacles to Participation

### 3.1 Language

One major barrier for participation mentioned by all interviewees was language, especially when it comes to the administrations' communications in official letters or face-to-face, which are often most complex or even incomprehensible. This makes it difficult to deal with documents

on your own. Many participants feel that the municipality administrations typically require them to immediately speak German fluently and understand it, without considering people might not yet be able to understand the documents. When it comes to structural ways of participation such as the migrant advisory council, many participants saw the language barrier as a possible hurdle towards membership in such a council. This was seen as easier for representatives of migrant organisations as they usually have been living in Germany for many years, and have experiences handling official documents and talking to administration and politicians.

### 3.2 Lack of qualifications for volunteer work

Another obstacle mentioned by most of the interviewees was that migrants often do their political work without payment and do not receive compensation for their education, empowerment work or counselling. Many saw this as an obstacle to work in public employment or any other high ranked political position because they cannot receive qualifications for their volunteer work, which is not being recognised as professional work experience. A major problem pointed out by one participant was that as long as people are in the asylum-seeking procedure, they often do not receive crucial information about their political rights and opportunities for action. In his view, people should gain the knowledge about politics and certificates for workshops even if they need to return to their home countries in the case of a failed application for asylum.

He stated: "It is frustrating when talking about participation that this problem is discussed only superficially. The people who come need political education, everyone wants to have empowered citizens, but nothing is being done about it."

### 3-3 Recognition of Foreign Degrees and Work Permits

Furthermore, a very central problem to political presentation and taking up leading roles in society are the difficulties with the recognition of many people's degrees. This problem was especially brought forward by migrant women representatives who stated that this forces women in more physically challenging and low-paid jobs such as cleaning or care work, instead of political work. Another obstacle which was mentioned by participants working with migrant women was that a work permit is very important, allowing women to build a financially stable situation in which they have the opportunity to participate in political activities.

When describing an empowerment workshop one participant was doing with a group of women, she described a situation like this: "I found it important that the women do this self-reflection and talk about themselves without being forced to say where they come from or what their profession is. I was not allowed to work back then due to my suspension of deportation. Most of the women in this workshop were from Syria and they had already worked there but were not allowed to work in Germany."

### 3-4 Distrust Towards Political and Administrative Bodies

Almost all interviewees described a scepticism towards political and administrative bodies which they described as a barrier for structural participation. Some substantiated it with experiences of personal disappointment by having had contact only to those administrations they feel very discriminated by such as the foreigner's authority or the employment office. Others saw the cause of this distrust in the experiences they made with authorities in their countries of origin. One participant said that it is common for people from his country of origin to rely on information from friends rather than going to the administration or taking advice from professional counselling centres because of their experiences with corruption. It was also mentioned that migrants not only often come from

countries where corruption is commonplace but might even be without any experiences of living in a democracy.

One participant formulated it like this: "I am sceptical about politics because where I come from politics does not really work and the politicians and the administration are very corrupt. I imported the bad image I had of politics in my home country to Germany, although I am rationally aware that the structures are not the same."

### 3-5 Low-Threshold Access to Information on Participatory Structures

Despite different opportunities for structural participation, many of the participants in the interviews felt that they had to rely on themselves when wanting to be active in structural participation like the migrant advisory council, as members of a party committee or citizen representatives in the district assembly. Although these possibilities exist for TCNs, the interviewees felt that there is little information offered about these participatory tools. Low-threshold information was seen as needed in places inhabited or regularly visited by migrants. Many suggested that this information should be accessible in refugee shelters and in multiple languages, offering spaces for consultation and support. Some added that this information needs to be shared on social media platforms and in courses on integration and language. One participant also pointed out that when not translated into languages other than German, the information should at least be explained in simple terms to be understood more easily.

### 3-6 Lack of Financial Stability

Many saw the lack of spare time as an obstacle to political participation. In general, the interviewees expressed scepticism towards the expectation that people who have only just arrived in Germany should immediately become politically active. Some felt that being occupied with

everyday existential challenges is already much to cope with. Many said that migrants often not only have to work for themselves and their families in the new country, but also for those who live in their old home countries. This makes it difficult to participate in political activities, especially when most of the opportunities are unpaid. And even those who took the opportunity to become active in initiatives or migrant organisations were sometimes forced to stop these activities due to financial reasons. One participant felt that this type of volunteer work by migrants is often not appreciated enough by authorities and politicians. Another person pointed out (based on her own experiences) that although she appreciates that many migrant organisations are actively involved in migrant advisory councils, she feels that they cannot engage strongly enough in their advocacy work and counselling the municipality on policies because migrant organisations are too occupied with their everyday procedures and with the pressure to deliver their projects. This opinion was also shared by other interviewees seeing structural rather than project funding as a long-run solution which creates sustainable and strong participatory opportunities for migrant organisations.

## 4 Conclusions from the Interviews

Structural participation opportunities (migrant advisory councils, participation in committees of parties or being a citizen representative to the district assemblies in Berlin which exist for TCNs) are familiar to all participants in interviews conducted for this research. However, they were chosen for these interviews as representatives of migrants and are already politically organised or professionals in the local or national politics. They all stated that these structures are not commonly and widely known to the general migrant population of Berlin.

As a solution to motivate and empower migrants to be politically involved, they saw the right to vote as an important feature and direct opportunity to impact politics. In order to have strong migrant political representatives, administration staff and professionals who can influence

and reform decision-making on integration and migration, these changes are demanded by the interviewees:

- A work permit as the basis for a stable resident status
- The fight against racism and other forms of discrimination
- The guarantee of a safe and stable environment and access to proper housing
- Improved adaptation of language courses towards the needs of migrants (e.g., further training for political participation)
- The ability to get qualifications and certificates for volunteer work to be able to get employment in an organisation or the public administration
- Improved recognition of foreign degrees

These strategies could contribute to strengthen the migrant advisory councils' impact on inclusion and integration policies:

- Allow structural funding for migrant organisations on the regional state level to enable them to advocate more effectively for inclusive policies and professional counselling of the administration and local government
- Training and workshops for members of the council to become more familiar with administrative procedures and networking (especially for individual migrant representatives)

The knowledge among the migrant population about migrant advisory councils and other participation opportunities could be improved by:

- Organisation of more public events for the migrant population and development of materials such as brochures to give an idea about the work of the migrant advisory councils and other opportunities of political participation
- Development of measures to overcome the distrust towards administrations
- Use of e-participation as a tool to get organised and inform people about participatory decision-making, in multiple languages
- Creation of more low-threshold meetings with the migrant population of the municipality like roundtable discussions or regular meetings in public spaces

Voice “When you work with politicians who are very experienced in political work and rhetorical language, it’s very difficult to collaborate democratically with that imbalance.”

Citizen representative  
for a Berlin district assembly

EMVI  
moveGLOBAL

# 3 Evaluation of the Focus Group Discussions

National  
Report  
Germany

Three focus groups were organised with migrant representatives and providers of existing participatory structures. In each group, five different stakeholders were discussing access opportunities and barriers to the participation of people with migratory backgrounds, with a specific focus on the group of TCNs. Each group included both representatives of migrant organisations as well as persons active in migrant advisory councils or as citizen representatives in a district assembly in Berlin. Representatives of the municipality of the district Berlin Mitte (being a partner of this project) participated in two groups and a representative of the Berlin Senate (regional state administration) took part in another group. Each group had a focus on migrant advisory councils as well as other formal and informal participatory opportunities. In one of the groups, women migrant representatives were invited to specifically discuss the needs of migrant women in participatory structures of the region. The individual representatives were selected with sensitivity to gender, age, and diversity in the representation of different migrant groups and communities.

## 1 Motivation and Awareness-Raising

### 1.1 “Pre-Political” Work

One very central topic discussed in all focus groups was the question of how people with a migratory background can become politically active. Offering motivation and raising awareness of the fact that personal concerns can be transferred into political demands were seen as major challenges and important steps. A participant in one group described this “pre-political work” as raising awareness for political issues without starting an actual political discourse. The discussants stated that this work not only includes writing flyers, e-mails, and invitations to events but also mutual exchange rooted in trust. This was perceived as a good strategy to reach communities that are not very active politically. For instance, a participant mentioned this in the context of the post-Soviet community not being used to political participation, but corruption. Others agreed that if not

growing up in a democracy and instead being used to corruption, especially by the administration, it is very difficult to create trust and raise motivation for structural participation.

One participant suggested to organise very informal meetings and events as well as small exchange groups with role models for empowerment workshops. Another suggestion raised by one participant was to organise regular but very informal meetings in the neighbourhood where people can discuss important issues concerning their districts, combined with cooking or any other activity, where the municipality should only provide the space and framework for the assembly. However, it was also pointed out that this work cannot be done single-handedly by migrant organisations, as they usually have too limited financial means and are restricted by too tight project schedules to focus intensively on this building of awareness and trust. One participant also pointed out that this is not done with temporary projects but needs constant structures which allow for more intensive political education and alternative training methods. From his experiences, there is a need for word-of-mouth recommendations for people to know about such offers. He also emphasised the importance of offering such courses in multiple languages. Nevertheless, it was also mentioned that the group of TCNs is very heterogenous and that it is difficult to reach all members of this group with a single offer.

One participant made the following statement on this topic: “There are many offers, maybe too many offers. And we always address the same groups of migrants that already know quite a lot. We don’t reach people who need exactly that. We need to talk to people where they are: In refugee shelters and less at expert panels.”

## 1.2 The Basis for Participation: Resident Status and Stable Living Conditions

During the discussion, different examples of projects were mentioned that are meant to motivate asylum seekers living in refugee shelters to self-organise. Most of the participants believed that these projects were not very successful and people living in refugee shelters often did not manage to create councils or other organised ways to channel their demands for accommodation. The reason, as perceived in the discussion, was that most of the people, especially with a discretionary leave to remain or in the procedure of asylum seeking, seldom feel wanted in their country of residence and are uncertain if they can build a future in the place where they are based.

Some participants also pointed out that the first experiences made with German authorities are often not positive, especially when going to the State Office for Immigration (the foreigners' registration office of Berlin). Regarding TCNs, the point was raised that this group is the most excluded from many formal participatory opportunities but at the same time has the highest potential to become politically active when confronted with existential challenges. A representative of the administration pointed out that "being affected" is an important feeling to hold on to when becoming politically active. She also indicated that offering low-threshold opportunities compatible with the time and other resources of this target group is a concern of the administration. Additionally, the groups agreed that the representatives of migrants rarely discuss topics that concern non-organised migrants, and that the priorities of the organised faction are often too far removed from the questions of actual political participation.

One representative of migrant women stated that discrimination in connection with wearing a hijab should be a topic of discussion with policy makers because this kind of discrimination often creates a negative impact on employment opportunities. Additionally, fighting racism, in general, was found to be a very important topic. It was suggested that the different stories of women who experienced discrimination should be collected, and a meeting organ-

ised for these women to talk directly about their concerns. The participants also agreed that motivation or concern can only be created if people feel a direct benefit from political action.

One participant described it like this:  
"I think political participation needs a political basis. A Basis of 'I have a flat, school and kindergarten for my children and I have health insurance.' Only then I can put my energy into political participation."

## 1.3 Access to Independent Anti-Discrimination Advisory Services and Legal Enforcement of Antidiscrimination Laws

Despite the presence of various legal consultation services in Berlin, especially on discrimination in the housing market and other areas of life, the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and the indemnity on legal grounds were what participants found essential. The discussion groups agreed that the protection against discrimination and racism is one of the most important pillars of democratic participation and therefore always needs to be addressed. However, particularly discussants representing migrant women felt that legally challenging a discriminatory act or practice is usually laborious for many migrants because of the difficulty of not only finding legal counsel but also support throughout the process. When it comes to complaints about agents of the employment agency or other fields that are of key importance for daily life, it was pointed out that many people are too afraid to file complaints, fearing negative consequences. A female migrant representative pointed out that migrants are confronted with discrimination all the time and it is difficult to file complaints constantly while being occupied with everyday challenges. Thus, empowerment work and alerting others to issues were also seen as important when it comes to political activism.

#### 1.4 E-Tools to Reach People Where They Are

Focus group participants saw issues in the distribution of information about participation opportunities and the regularity of training. One female participant pointed out that offers need to be better adapted to the people who need to be reached. Migrant women can be reached when their children are in school or kindergarten, and it was suggested to have less strict formats instead of workshops and long seminars. One suggestion was to allow communication through social media or smartphones with the organisers of meetings. Regarding e-participation, it was suggested to make participation possible without the obligation of registering with an e-mail address. However, participants pointed out that the monitoring and updating of the content in their experience needs much time.

Before using such a tool, they found evaluations important on what kind of opportunities already exist in Berlin, as there is already the <https://mein.berlin.de> website and some other platforms for citizen participation. Nonetheless, they also found that these websites could be developed further and tailored to the needs of migrants. Other participants found e-learning modules in multiple languages a useful tool but thought that they should be more detailed on different aspects of democratic participation. Especially short videos in multiple languages were valued as a method to motivate for political engagement.

## 2 Inclusion of Migrant Voices in Policymaking

### 2.1 The Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft (PartMigG) – Law for the Promotion of Participation in the Migration Society

One participant pointed out that all authorities are different and thus their degrees of openness towards the demands of migrants vary. She thinks it is very important that migrant representatives have access to every administration on the federal state and district levels, especially to those bodies whose policies affect migrants. Representatives of the administration stated that the Berlin municipalities and the Senate are bound to the PartMigG, which is now an important basis for the demands of the migrant population. When it comes to inclusion and participatory approaches, this legal ground facilitates the exchange with different offices. The law, as interpreted by a participant in one of the focus groups, should offer access to the administration as a whole. For that reason, the integration offices in every district are now obligated to enforce this law in the municipalities. This makes it easier for migrant organisations to approach the administration. Every single group mentioned multiple reasons why they found the PartMigG by the Berlin Senate a very positive signal, especially because many migrant organisations and the State Advisory Council for Participation were included in the development of the proposal. A participant also said that it is important that with the PartMigG the participation and integration advisory councils in the districts have a legal foundation and financial resources for administration. There was a general wish to have this kind of process for any law that concerns migrants. On the other hand, one participant raised the point that it is difficult for migrant organisations to cope with the number of processes happening in the administration and that resources are so limited that inclusion in the drafting of policies and laws cannot remain solely the personal responsibility of migrants. Instead, there is a need for the active distribution of information by the administration in due time.

In her own words she said: “There are different laws that we need to discuss. I can make a list of laws where this participation is very necessary. But this needs to be done properly with very good preparation and with enough time, not with a three-week deadline for an input on this and that, as it is often the case.”

## 2.2 Advisory Councils for Participation and Integration

One participant stated that when designing the PartMigG many migrants wanted the advisory councils to be included in the law as a participatory instrument. However, others felt that relying on the councils and making them stronger than committees makes it more difficult to push for the right to vote for TCNs. Some participants criticised councils as too dependent on the political will of the district majors or integration offices of the municipality, which sometimes hinders the inclusion of critical migrant voices. And one participant also pointed out that even if the councils operate very democratically with different representatives, they remain consultation bodies with limited leverage on policy-making. Differing opinions were shared on the question whether councils are currently created in a democratic or fair manner, as members are not directly elected to the councils. One discussant felt that enabling TCNs to vote for the representatives would be no more democratic as eventually the elected representatives would remain in a consulting position. Others held the view that having elections would increase the knowledge about the councils and would force the representatives to engage in a closer exchange with the migrant population of the municipality about the topics on their agenda. It was agreed that it is also important that individual migrants are members of the councils. In general, there was agreement that the councils have a good structural and legal ground to operate. Nevertheless, most of the focus group participants shared the view that the councils are not realising their full potential. The reasons and possible solutions were as follows:

### <sup>A</sup> Intransparent Consultation Structures

One problem mentioned was that at times members of the council have the feeling that their proposals and demands that they developed in a time-consuming process are not taken into consideration within the municipality. They felt that because their work is completely voluntary, with financial compensation limited to EUR 10–20 and only for official meetings of the advisory council – but not for the committee meetings – proposals should be appreciated and considered at a much higher degree. Otherwise, the members of the council feel discouraged when always seeing their suggestions rejected. Migrant organisations felt that they are providing a free service for the municipality that is not actually part of their regular job.

One participant pointed out: “There is a lot of work on the part of the migrants in the advisory councils and in the end you don’t even know what happens with your proposal.”

### <sup>B</sup> The Presence of Politicians as a Communication Barrier

Many participants of the focus group felt that politicians often dominate the communication in the council meetings, making it especially difficult for people who do not speak the language fluently to participate in the discussions. They thus face a twofold communication difficulty: communicating in a language they do not speak fluently and coping with the rhetorical strength of politicians. For that reason, the district administration representatives stated that the council in their district also holds formal meetings without the presence of municipal representation, letting it operate as independent as possible from the integration office.

One female member of an advisory council on the district level described it like this: “I started working in the council when I didn’t know the language at all and had to represent a very large community within the district. When you work with politicians who are very experienced in political work and rhetorical language, it’s very difficult to collaborate democratically with that imbalance.”

### <sup>C</sup> Better Exchange Between the Different Advisory Councils in Berlin

Another suggestion offered by participants was to create a stronger exchange between the members of the different district councils, as well as with the State Advisory Council for Participation, to get to know the work done by others and to push for collaborations. As observed by one participant, there is no link between the councils, which creates a problem for strategic work. Additionally, the councils have a different constellation in every district, making it difficult to know the members of every council.

### <sup>D</sup> Topics that Concern Many Migrant Communities

One participant voiced the opinion that sometimes very clear and common topics concerning all migrants can be a good basis for making proposals of interest to the broader migrant society. A participant expressed the view that in her advisory council a very well-received topic was multilingualism, seen as something concerning every migrant community. She pointed out that multilingualism was not only discussed within the committee of the council but also in public events with different migrant groups. The members of the focus group added that resident status, issues around the communication with authorities, the housing situation and topics concerning children such as discrimination in schools or the labour market are topics crucial also for politically non-active migrants. The participants in every group shared the opinion that if people would feel that the council actually has an impact on policies concerning these issues, interest in its work might increase.

### <sup>E</sup> Increasing Visibility

Many discussants felt that the councils are not commonly known to non-organised migrants and that the topics and proposals of the council often are only discussed internally and not within the broader migrant society of the dis-

tricts. Increasing the visibility of the councils through communication and PR measures was therefore regarded as important. It was suggested to invite more external experts with migratory backgrounds to the meetings of the councils or its committees and to have public events with different migrant groups. Another commonly shared opinion was that advisory councils should have the possibility to publish press releases and use a website where they can present the different members. Word-of-mouth recommendations between representatives of the communities about the council were also seen as a method to transfer knowledge about the advisory councils. One discussant said, to increase the visibility of the district's advisory council, they organised a school competition for the design of a logo for the council's committee for multilingualism. Others suggested to form a committee for communication within the council.

### <sup>F</sup> Training for Council Members

The participants discussed different possibilities of training, especially for members of advisory councils unfamiliar with the structures and work of the administration. It was suggested to have workshops with representatives of the municipality and informal events with the migrant population to motivate more individuals to participate in advisory councils. It was also seen as important that the integration offices in the districts offer support, since the members of the council will not have the capacity to implement all the suggested measures aside of the political work.

## 2-3 Inclusion in Policymaking

A common demand was to create more micro-focused discussion groups and roundtables that form for a certain period to work on specific topics. Additionally, cooperating with members of the Abgeordnetenhaus (state parliament of Berlin) as a strategic method to build up pressure for certain policies was seen as a way to have

more influence on the decisions of the administration. Other discussants representing the administration suggested to directly approach people responsible for certain policies. Being an identifiable expert known to the authorities also helps to be included directly in the policymaking process, as described by a participant. Being self-confident even as a small organisation was pointed out as key for getting invited to roundtables and for structural inclusion in policymaking.

One representative of migrant women saw a solution to the language barrier by organising meetings with translators present, enabling women to participate who have difficulties to explain their concerns in German. Increasing the exchange of experiences and knowledge between migrant organisations was also viewed as indispensable. In general, the discussants demanded a structured framework in which these consultation processes can be facilitated. A representative of the Senate pointed out that in Berlin, the integration offices (on district and federal state level) are responsible for bringing different authorities together on issues concerning integration and thus can facilitate communication. In the case of non-compliance with migrant organisations on policies concerning migration or inclusion, a representative of the district municipality Mitte stated that integration offices also function as ombudsman offices for complaints by the migrant population, enabling them to deal with complaints and to approach other authorities in the case of complaints. One participant described the current approach taken by the committee for integration, work and social affairs of the Abgeordnetenhaus regarding the structures to meet the arrival of Ukrainian refugees as a good practice for a holistic approach to include migrant organisations in policymaking because different migrant organisations were invited to discuss measures for the integration of refugees from Ukraine.

A representative of the Senate put it like this: “In the conceptualisation of policies, the representatives of civil society should be involved. It should not be the case that decisions are already made and organisations only get the chance to make a few suggestions on the policies already finalised by the administration. Ideally, the administration should try to cooperate with migrant organisations to find solutions together.”

The same representative of the administration also said, sometimes it is very important to have the right conversation partners within the administration to make an impact on policymaking. Inputs in compliance with deadlines are very important when it comes to influencing policies. However, she admitted, that individual people in some positions can sometimes even hinder inclusive policymaking. A way to bypass this problem is to use the complaint management every authority in Berlin has, as pointed out. According to the administration representatives these complaints need to be evaluated and reported. One representative working for a migrant organisation said that she plans to use this mechanism more to reach certain authorities which are not well-disposed towards consultation from migrant representatives.

#### 2.4 Public Citizen Participation

One participant saw a good way to motivate for participation to offer various low-threshold ways of citizen participation on the district level that are not tied to citizenship. Working closely together with a municipality and migrant organisations makes such offers more accessible and also inclusive, as one discussant told from her own experience. She said that this is a way to exchange ideas for the neighbourhood. A problem observed by one migrant women representative was that when it comes to cooperating with authorities, migrant women have a very strong barrier which cannot be easily overcome. She often feels that it is not really in the interest of the authorities to give these women an opportunity to participate politically, and she said that participation on the very local level of the neighbourhood cannot be the only solution to non-participation. In her opinion, a stronger push for inclusion in the making of laws and policies is needed. An opinion shared generally was that the range of information in multiple languages needs to be improved to allow more TCNs to have an impact on decision making.

### 3 Obstacles for Structural Participation

#### 3-1 Structural Participation Is Not Accessible for Everyone

A commonly shared view was that many initiatives or collectives, which often prefer informal ways of participation to deliver their political demands, still would like to be included in structural consultation processes. For instance – as brought forward by one discussant – it is not possible for initiatives to elect the members of the State Advisory Council for Participation. Only associations are allowed to be listed as voters for the members of the council, which was perceived as a limitation of the PartMigG. A member of a committee that co-created the PartMigG stated that the reason for this limitation lies within the German Civil Code and no solution was found yet which was judicially and politically sufficient to expand the voting rights to initiatives within the PartMigG.

In general, some participants expressed the view that the ways to be included in structural forms of participation are often very rigid. Some felt that the most common way to have access to structures is the foundation of an association. This legal limitation hinders initiatives or other politically organised groups to participate in such structures. A group with difficulties to be included in policymaking is that of so-called “illegalised” persons. A member of a focus group pointed out that some of them are organised but have difficulties representing their group in public or to deliver their demands because they fear to be deported or to face legal consequences for not being allowed officially to stay in the country. One representative of the administration mentioned that the state of Berlin plans to develop a sort of city ID to allow them to have better access to social services, facilitating the access to basic needs.

#### 3-2 Financial (In-) Stability for Strategic Advocacy on Policies

A shared view was that the framework for consultation and inclusion of migrant organisations needs to be reformed. Many migrant representatives are concerned that institutions and administrations expect them to share their knowledge and expertise with little or no financial compensation or even to counsel them voluntarily. It was also seen as problematic by many participants to depend mostly on the volunteer work of migrants when it comes to the creation of laws and policies that concern them. In the opinion of migrant organisation representatives, not being able to do advocacy work as part of their work but only as volunteers puts migrant representatives in a weaker position in comparison to decision makers, hampering advocacy for structural change. One demand was to establish structural funding for migrant organisations on the federal state level, similar to the model which already exists on the national level. Another participant observed that not only time-limited and low funding for projects often hinders impactful advocacy, but also the constant fluctuation of colleagues, as many are forced to change jobs because of fixed-term contracts between six months and a year. In her opinion, this creates an unsustainable situation for the organisations, where knowledge and expertise always fluctuate, causing a very insecure situation for many organisations and making it difficult to develop in-depth expertise. It was also suggested that a solution would be long-term funding that is not tied to a certain migrant community or group, allowing to advocate for more inclusive work on migration.

One of the discussants put it like this: „We first need to influence how laws are drafted and then change the existing legislation. Unless we get proper structural funding, I think we will never address structural issues.”

### 3-3 More People with Migratory Backgrounds in the Administration

Having more people with migratory backgrounds employed in the administration was also perceived as an important goal. One discussant felt that when working in politics, people with migratory backgrounds have fewer chances in comparison to native Germans to access prestigious positions. Therefore, many very qualified migrants have to work in migrant organisations or other fields with precarious work conditions. In his view, multilingualism, especially when it comes to non-European languages, should be valued higher when applying for positions in the administration. The PartMigG regulates not only the participation and inclusion of migrants in political decision making, but also the measures to increase the diversity of employees in the administration. One representative of the district administration of Bezirksamt Mitte stated that in her municipality diversity training organised by the human resources department has already started. Bezirksamt Mitte conducted an internal survey on racism and discrimination to analyse the needs of its employees. When the results were accessible, employees with a migratory background established a committee which now deals with these issues.

Despite the very positive measures which were facilitated with the PartMigG, one participant found that more needs to be done when it comes to bringing diversity into practice within authorities. She pointed out that although now more and more people are being recruited who speak multiple languages, in practice they are not allowed to provide administrative services in languages other than German. In her opinion, this discrepancy makes it difficult for migrants to benefit from diversity in the administration. A representative of the district administration responded that although they try to establish service offers in multiple languages, they first need to make sure that people are legally well trained and employees can use the proper legal terms in other languages as well. One solution taken into consideration by the municipality was to employ phone interpreters or language assistants. Nevertheless, no final solution is found yet. Another obstacle to more administra-

tion employees with migratory descent are the high entering requirements such as very good degrees and education, as implied by one discussant. Thus, for the long-term strategic development of these measures (as stated during the discussion), more sensitivity should be given to the fact that many children with a migratory background have difficulties in school and that discrimination is a very common reason for children to quit school. Some discussants had the view that this structural problem makes it difficult even to apply for jobs in the administration.

### 3-4 Inclusive Access to Civil Services

It was argued that since the new influx of refugees from Ukraine, this community has received a more favourable treatment by the German authorities than others. Many expressed the opinion that much more has been made possible for this group of refugees at different levels than for previous ones, as for example the immediate issue of a work permit or the recognition of official documents. The participants in the focus groups had the impression that services were offered faster and in a less bureaucratic manner than previously. In Berlin, the administration now also offers services and forms in the Ukrainian language. Almost all participants in the three focus groups felt that the treatment of Ukrainian refugees has shown that the administration can work in a solution-oriented and flexible manner. Therefore, they shared the common opinion that this openness and flexibility should be extended to other refugees. It was stressed that especially the opportunity to fill in forms in common migrant languages would facilitate many time-consuming procedures. In general, an easier and inclusive access to civil services was regarded as a possible measure to overcome scepticism towards political authorities, making it in turn more desirable to become politically active.

## 4 Conclusions from the Focus Groups

The discussions in the groups revealed obstacles but also specific demands and solutions on how to improve participation on the municipality level for migrants and how their perspectives and expertise can be included in the making of policies that concern them. The three groups shared the common view that some main barriers to participation are essential problems of life, like resident status or the housing situation. The fulfilment of basic needs and stable living conditions was seen as necessary step before becoming politically active. It was observed that these problems are rarely channelled into political activism. Representatives of migrant women saw the lack of a reliable legal enforcement of anti-discrimination and racism laws in everyday life as another obstacle. Negative experiences with authorities, corruption and illiberal political systems in many migrants' home countries simultaneously make it difficult for politically active migrant representatives to empower and motivate non-organised individuals for structural participation. Generally, a distinction was made on the one hand between the structural inclusion of associations (migrant organisations) on the other hand initiatives, collectives, and individuals. A commonly held view was that opportunities for structural participation are often limited to migrant organisations while there are fewer structures for inclusion in policy making for groups which operate in informal structures and for non-organised individuals.

Most of the discussants felt that more opportunities for exchange with decision makers should be given to non-organised migrants. The participants in the focus group saw the following methods as useful to raise motivation for political participation:

- Informal meetings to raise awareness for political issues in the neighbourhood, at cooking events, in meetings with policy makers who themselves have migratory backgrounds
- Advocating for stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws but also empowerment and support to speak up against discrimination and racism

- Facilitated interaction with civil administration and the acquisition of documents by offering information, forms, and services in multiple languages
- Using different digital platforms, social media or communication services such as WhatsApp to reach more people
- Flexible and asynchronous political education, offering training for political language and rhetorics
- Especially participation opportunities for women should be offered during times when they are not occupied with childcare

For the inclusion of migrants in policymaking the legal basis was considered important. The participants regarded the Berliner Gesetz zur Förderung der Partizipation in der Migrationsgesellschaft (PartMigG) (Law for the promotion of Participation in the Migration Society) as a good example, which was developed in collaboration with different migrant organisations and the State Advisory Council for Participation. Many migrant representatives wished to see similar approaches to policymaking as for the development of the PartMigG in other political fields that concern them. More informal, small meetings or roundtable discussions to develop specific solutions to urgent problems were deemed helpful for mutual exchange and the development of inclusive policies. Ideas for the creation of such meetings were as follows:

- Inclusive participatory processes for the development of laws and policies which concern migrants, seeing integration as a cross-sectional task, involving migrant representatives to counsel on topics such as housing, education, labour and so on.
- Contact migrant organisations for input on policies with enough time for them to prepare
- Create more small meetings and group discussions with different representatives of authorities on different topics
- The integration offices should make their ombudsman's function more widely known among the migrant population and motivate migrants more to approach them when feeling excluded from participation in policy development.
- Enable people who cannot speak the German language fluently to participate in public meetings by offering translation services

In all focus groups, the discussants shared the opinion that advisory councils, despite being the most established structural way of migrant participation in Berlin, have almost no viability in the greater migrant society. This also leads to the observation that most migrants do not know which topics are discussed in the migrant advisory councils and in which way they represent their demands, particularly in regard to TCNs. A gap in the communication between the councils and the migrant population of the districts was described by most of the members of the focus groups. In order to make the councils more widely known and to motivate more individual, non-organised migrant representatives to become active in migrant advisory councils, different measures were suggested:

- Advisory councils should be able to do their own press and communication work (e.g., press releases, website, and social media sites).
- Councils should have the possibility to hold meetings without politicians present, facilitating the exchange between council members for those with language barriers.
- For increased visibility and trust, migrant advisory councils should organise public events with different migrant communities and groups in the municipality.
- The different councils on district and state levels should commit to regular communication to enable strategic collaboration for common concerns of migrants across districts.
- Either the municipalities or external experts should offer rhetorical and other training (e.g., advocacy, networking, or on administrative work and procedures) for the members of advisory councils, enabling them to keep up with the rhetorical skills of policy-makers and for professional counsel on policies.
- Regarding the structural inclusion of migrant organisations in the development of policies on integration and migration, a common view was that only limited funding opportunities are available for committee and advocacy work, complicating political work and a strong impact on policy making. Another commonly shared impression was that the consultation of migrant organisations needs to be appreciated more and viewed as an integral part of decision-making.

When it comes to the cooperation between administration and migrant organisations, the discussants felt that this work should be reimbursed with appropriate project funds or financial means specifically for consultation services. The suggestions made were:

- Creating new structural and long-term funding for migrant organisations
- Creating more employment opportunities within the administration for people with a migratory background
- Compensate the consultation of migrant organisations and individual migrant representatives with professional fees

**Voice** “Knowing how the law deals with activism and political activities is very important, especially to know the consequences and all the rights and duties is of utmost importance.”

**Human Rights Activist**

**Voice** In the conceptualisation of policies, the representatives of civil society should be involved. It should not be the case that decisions are already made and organisations only get the chance to make a few suggestions on the policies already finalised by the administration.

**Representative of the  
Berlin Senate Administration**

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## Appendix Interviews

- Personal interview (9 May 2022, Berlin) with a woman of Arabic origin (citizen representative to the assembly of a Berlin district)
- Personal interview (11 May 2022, online) with a man from Eastern Europe (representative of the migrants' advisory council in a city in Eastern Germany and of the Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat (BZI) (Federal Immigration and Integration Council))
- Personal interview (18 May 2022, Berlin) with a woman of Asian/ Middle Eastern origin
- Personal interview (18 May 2022, Berlin) with a man of African descent (member of a migrant advisory council in a federal state in Eastern Germany)
- Personal interview (19 May 2022, Berlin) with a man of African descent
- Personal interview (19 May 2022, online) with a woman of African descent
- Personal interview (23 May 2022, Berlin) with a woman from Eastern Europe (member of the participation and integration council of a district in Berlin)
- Personal interview (23 May 2022, online) with a woman of African descent
- Personal interview (23 May 2022, Berlin) with a man of Middle Eastern background
- Personal interview (27 May 2022, Berlin) with a woman from South America

## Focus Groups

- Focus Group 1 (9 June 2022): 1 female representative of a migrant organisation for Peru who is also a citizen representative to a district assembly in Berlin; 1 male representative of a migrant organisation for the civil rights and participation of the Turkish community; 1 male representative of a migrant organisation representing the Russian-speaking communities (former Soviet Union countries); 1 male representative of a migrant organisation representing the African community; 1 representative of the municipality Mitte of Berlin (the Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin is a partner to the EMVI project)
- Focus Group 2 (16 June 2022): 1 female representative of the broader migrant community; 1 female representative from a non-migrant organisation which works in the field of citizen participation; 1 male representative of a migrant organisation of the Afghan community; 1 female representative of the Berlin Senate administration in the field of integration and participation
- Focus Group 3 (21 June 2022): 1 female representative working in empowerment and health education for migrant women; 1 female representative of a German-wide umbrella association of migrant organisations working in the field of women's participation and rights; 1 female representative with a Turkish background who works in a counselling centre for Turkish women in a welfare association; 1 female activist with a Somali background who works in the field of women's rights; 1 female representative of the municipality Mitte of Berlin (The Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin is a partner to the EMVI project.)

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In the context of the project

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Voice “Unless we get proper structural funding, I think we will never address structural issues.”

Women's  
Rights Expert

The EMVI project aims to investigate, through research activities conducted in each partner country (Austria, Greece, Germany, Italy and Slovenia), the political integration process of migrants and the characteristics of their political participation. For that reason, a research report was drafted in each partner country using a multi-method approach, including desk research and qualitative analysis based on interviews and focus groups. The national reports focus on migrants/people with a migratory background in the broadest sense, meaning people with refugee status (international or subsidiary protection, humanitarian status) as well as third-country nationals (TCNs) of the European Union and their descendants, including people of different ethnic origin, religion, age, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Based on that process, all five national pieces of research provide a basis for exploring existing arrangements and structures and developing new ways for migrants' political participation in consultative and decision-making processes concerning the design and implementation of migration and integration policies. Investigating the situation in each of the partner countries to this project, the main goal was to understand how migrants are politically involved and empowered and how their needs are met, and their voices heard, including their rights to participate in civil society and politics such as the freedom of association, the right to assemble, the right to petition, and the right to vote. The focus on women was particularly important. Based on the findings of the national reports, crucial recommendations were developed, and good practices exposed to encourage better inclusion of migrants, especially women, into the political processes in the countries. moveGLOBAL, as the implementing organisation of the EMVI project in Berlin, prepared this research report to evaluate the participation and integration structures in Germany.

We thank all those who participated in the interviews and focus groups for the development of this report.

**Voice** “I think political participation needs a political basis. Basis of ‘I have a flat, school and kindergarten for my children and I have health insurance.’ Only then I can put my energy into political participation.”

Representative  
of a Berlin-based migrant organisation,  
Focus Group EMVI