

# Migrant Voices Heard

**Migrant's Consultive  
Mechanisms in the EU**  
A Best Practice Guide



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## About the Project

Migrant Voices Heard promotes refugee and migrant participation in the design and implementation of integration and related policies at the local, regional, and national levels in seven EU countries: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Romania. It supports the setting up and/or strengthening of migrant councils, at local and regional level and promotes the exchange of experiences between NGOs, migrant-led organisations and local and regional authorities about the political participation of migrants on local and regional level.

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*We are existing, our voices should be taken into account.<sup>1</sup>*



## Introduction

Millions of people with migrant backgrounds living in the European Union don't have the right to vote. Around 34 million EU inhabitants (around 8 % of the population) were born outside the EU; 10% of young people (15-34 years) born in the EU have at least one parent that is born outside an EU country (EC 2020). Thus, depending on the number of third country nationals and the national legal framework on suffrage and citizenship - **a significant percentage of the population does not have the opportunity to fully participate politically**. In Austria, for example, over 17% of inhabitants are not allowed to vote in national elections (Statistik Austria 2021), in Vienna the percentage is about 30% (Integrationsmonitor 2020). This does not "only" constitute a **limitation of their rights**, but also a **democracy deficit** in general.

Of course, political rights include more than suffrage, such as the possibility to participate in demonstrations, strikes, petitions and referendums; it further means having a space to discuss political issues and freely express political views, having the freedom to form associations and participate in a union and the right to work in public service; as well as being able to use arts and (social) media to express views and demands; it further requires having access to information, language skills, etc.

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<sup>1</sup>Young Algerian woman (March 16th, 2022). Personal interview. France.

One special form of political participation for TCNs are **migrants’ advisory/consultative bodies**. They can be a meaningful mechanism to bring the concerns of migrant communities to politics and were introduced in some regions or municipalities to “*compensate for the absence of formal means of political participation for the general population of resident non-citizens*” (IDEA 2018).

“*The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration. Allowing immigrants a voice in the formulation of policies that directly affect them may result in policy that better serves immigrants and enhances their sense of belonging. Wherever possible, immigrants should become involved in all facets of the democratic process. Ways of stimulating this participation and generating mutual understanding could be reached by structured dialogue between immigrant groups and governments. Wherever possible, immigrants could even be involved in elections, the right to vote and joining political parties. When unequal forms of membership and levels of engagement persist for longer than is either reasonable or necessary, divisions or differences can become deeply rooted. This requires urgent attention by all Member States (FRA 2017).*”

This best practice guide introduces **the concept and forms of migrants’ consultative bodies**, the **legal framework** and **country backgrounds** regarding such consultative mechanisms, shows **best practice examples** and provides support in the foundation of such advisory bodies through a **collection of recommendations and success factors**. It is the result of research in seven EU countries - Austria, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Romania – in the frame of the EU project **Migrant Voices Heard**. National research on the political participation and rights of third country nationals has been conducted in the above listed countries, including interviews and focus group discussions with migrants, experts, politicians and public servants.

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*We are a mouthpiece for migrants. Migrant associations voice their demands and issues and we bring them to politics.<sup>2</sup>*



## Migrants' Consultative Bodies

A migrant council / consultative body is an instrument for political participation and representation of persons with migrant backgrounds. Such body functions as an advisory board of the local government regarding inclusion and peaceful co-existence and ideally contributes to shaping a broad spectrum of policies that (directly or indirectly) affect migrants' lives. In most cases it is a platform particularly for non-citizens that are not entitled to vote in regular (local) elections. Yet, it has to be pointed out that the establishment of a migrant council “can never be a substitute for the right to vote” (ECCAR 2017).

Different forms of consultative bodies exist and can be distinguished by:

- **The form of organisation:** the consultative body could be a stable board or council that has a long-term existence, is institutionalized and is embedded in the municipal politics providing advise towards the city/region on issues that affect migrants on a regular basis.

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<sup>2</sup> Eyawo Godswill, Executive Director of the Migrants Advisory Council Graz. (July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Personal interview. Austria.

Whereas, another form is the citizens/migrants forum, that rather works on concrete, pre-selected topics, develops measures addressing a specific challenge, and is usually a short-term participation process (see ECCAR 2017).

- **The process of (s)election:** members can be elected (e.g. by third country nationals) or selected (e.g. by local authorities), sometimes a combined process is chosen.
- **The composition of the council:** council members can only either represent those migrants, that are not allowed to vote in local elections, or be composed out of migrants and persons with migrant backgrounds that already have the citizenship of the respective EU country. Integration experts, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders, as well as politicians and civil servants can also be council members.

Unfortunately, generally speaking, *“most bodies are not strong or independent enough to create meaningful opportunities for immigrants to affect policy change. They tend to be weak, government-led, sometimes government-appointed, and too poorly funded to engage migrants and represent their diverse interests”* (MIPEX 2020). Nevertheless, a number of well-functioning, sustainable, effective councils exist, which will be introduced in the chapter **“Selected Best Practice Examples of Migrants’ Consultative Bodies”**.

Also, a solid **legal framework on European and International level** exists, that calls for the commitment of (local) authorities to guarantee more political participation of foreign residents. It will be summarized in the following chapter.





*We as the city government are not only responsible for those who can vote in elections, but also for those who can't.<sup>3</sup>*



## International and European Legal Framework

A number of international/EU legal documents call for a stronger involvement of migrants into political life and more specifically for consultative bodies (at least on a local level), but seem to be rather unknown or ignored.

The **Council of Europe's 1992 Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level** is one the most relevant legal documents concerning the political participation of third country nationals and migrants' advisory/consultative bodies. The Convention promotes the freedom of speech, assembly, association and the right to be involved in local public inquiries, planning procedures and consultation procedures; the obligation to encourage and facilitate local consultative bodies of foreign residents; and the right to vote at the local level after a maximum of five years' residence (including the possibility to run for public office, at the discretion of signatory states). Article 5 of the Convention states that signing states should *"encourage and facilitate the establishment of consultative bodies or the making of other appropriate institutional arrangements for the representation of foreign residents by local authorities in*

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Krotzer, Integration Councilor of the City of Graz. (November 14th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz, Austria.

*whose area there is a significant number of foreign residents”* (CoE 1992a). However, the Convention is only ratified by nine countries (Albania, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden) (CoE 2023).

The **European Urban Charter (1992)** reinforces the 1992 Convention and calls “local authorities (to) ensure effective participation by immigrants in local, political life” and “local machinery (to) also ensure adequate access by immigrant communities to public enquiry and public consultation procedures” (CoE 1992b). Further, the **European Urban Charter II (2008)** demands “the right to vote and to stand in elections for urban local assemblies (...) for migrants, who contribute in many different ways to the life of the community” (CoE 2008).

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe** specifically addresses migrant consultative bodies in **Resolution 141 (CoE 2002)** being “*convinced that democratic principles make it necessary not to exclude from local public life foreign residents who are lawfully and permanently settled in the territories of European states, irrespective of their country of origin, since there can be no genuine local democracy without the full participation of all the locality’s inhabitants*”.

The **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (OHCHR 1966/1976) as well as the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families** (OHCHR 1990/2003) and the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** (OHCHR 1965/1969) guarantee all migrants, including undocumented migrants, access to civic and political rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as trade union membership. However, international standards also allow states to impose restrictions on electoral rights, either with regard to elections in migrants’ country of origin or in their receiving country, e.g. Article 25 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights restricts the right to vote and stand for elections of citizens. Also, the **European Convention on Human Rights** (ECHR 1950/1953) reinforces the right to freedom of assembly and association, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom of expression, but permits certain restrictions on the “political activities of aliens”.

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*The existence of a migrants' council means that collectively, no matter in which country, we are much more than each community separately and that is where the power lies.<sup>4</sup>*



## Country Overview

The following chapter provides a brief overview of migrants' suffrage and the existence of migrants' consultative mechanisms in the EU, particularly in Austria, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Romania.

Since 1992 with the Treaty of Maastricht (EP 1992/1993), EU citizens living in another Member State have the right to vote and stand as candidates in local and European Parliament elections in their country of residence. A number of European countries have extended active and passive electoral rights to non-EU citizens, including Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia and Sweden. Several more states grant voting rights to migrants from selected countries, usually on the principle of reciprocity (such as Portugal and Spain). The required duration of residence to be entitled to vote in local elections varies from three months (Ireland) to five years (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands). Belgium, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia have granted

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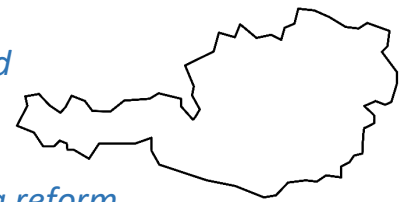
<sup>4</sup> Albanian woman. Second generation TCN. (August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Focus group. Greece.

migrants the right to vote but not the right to run in elections. Member States that exclude third-country nationals from voting in local elections are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland and Romania. The issue has been debated in recent years in some of those countries but would require constitutional changes (compare Groenendijk 2014).

Consultative bodies are operating at the local or regional level in several EU member states, such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain.

## Austria

*“This whole debate about the citizenship process and voting rights is extremely frustrating. We have had this discussion for several decades already. Frankly, there will not be a reform any time soon.”<sup>5</sup>*



According to the Austrian constitution regulating the suffrage, only Austrian citizens above 16 years of age are allowed to vote in elections for the Federal Presidential elections, National Council and State elections as well as referendums. EU citizens are granted the right to vote in Municipal Council elections, while TCNs are not allowed to participate in any elections (The Republic of Austria 2022). The country has one of the most restrictive citizenship laws in the EU (MIPEX 2020) – According to the law (RIS 1985/2022), citizenship may only be granted to a “foreigner”, if the person has resided lawfully and *without interruption* in the country for *at least ten years*. Additionally, they need to prove a regular relatively high income.

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX 2020) labels Austria’s access to nationality as well as migrants’ political participation as “unfavorable”, criticizing Austria that it goes “only halfway towards

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<sup>5</sup> Edith Glanzer, head of the Green Club Graz. (June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022). Focus group discussion. Austria.

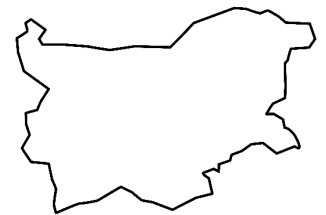
granting immigrants with basic rights and equal opportunities”. Furthermore, MIPEX claims that the country does “not provide immigrants with a secure future in the country”. “

Policies [...] encourage the public to see immigrants as foreigners and not fully as equals and neighbors” (ibid.). It further states, that “*Austria continues to experience unfavorable policies towards their political participation as they still have no voting rights, few local consultative bodies and weak support for immigrant organizations*” (ibid.).

Despite the restrictive policies, some effective migrants’ consultative bodies on a municipal level, namely the **Migrants’ Advisory Council of Graz** (described in the Best Practices chapter), the **Advisory Council on Immigration and Integration of Linz** and the **Integration Platform of Salzburg**.

## Bulgaria

“ *The procedure for obtaining of status is very long; it is not clear if you will be allowed to stay in the country or not; you are waiting for years for something obscure. And you lose years of your life here.*”<sup>6</sup>



Non-EU citizens do not have the right to vote in Bulgaria or participate in political parties no matter how long they have been living in the country. Bulgarian citizenship can be obtained after a 5-year legal residence in the country, the process is reported to be very complicated, long and arbitrary. MIPEX describes the political participation of migrants as “critically unfavorable”, stating that “*political participation is still missing from Bulgaria’s integration strategy and remains a challenge for migrants in Bulgaria. Non-EU residents do not have the local right to vote or stand in elections, excluding them from the democratic process. Consultative bodies to inform and improve the policies that affect migrants daily are not yet part of integration governance at local and national levels in Bulgaria*” (MIPEX 2020).

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<sup>6</sup> Afghan woman. (23.5.2022) Personal interview. Bulgaria.

The first of its kind **Bulgaria Refugee Advisory Board** was created by UNHCR at the national level in 2020 but some of the interviewed experts talked about the difficulties of sustaining it. Internal disagreements between the members led to its fast disempowerment and internal decay. The council still exists on paper but its efficiency is very low.

No state-supported good practices for encouraging the political or civic participation of migrants were identified. The few existing practices that encourage the political and/or civic participation of migrants were initiated by local or international NGOs. Self-organizing of migrants has been identified but unfortunately has not resulted in many sustainable civic associations. In fact, the **Council of Refugee Women** has been identified as the only successful migrant-led organization in Bulgaria. Further, the **Mission Wings Foundation** is a very active NGO in providing support and pushing for the rights of refugees and the main actor in the plan to realize a migrants consultative mechanism in cooperation with the municipality of Stara Zagora.

## France

In France, formal political participation of TCN's is almost non-existent. The ability to vote in any election is linked to nationality. The MIPEX (2020) concludes *"Slightly below average for Western Europe, newcomers and foreign citizens in France are not regularly informed and consulted by authorities in order to effectively access their political rights and contribute to public life. France is also one of the few major destination countries without the political will to extend local voting rights."*



“*The question of political participation was always a problem in France.*”

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<sup>7</sup> Saïda Choug, Groupe SOS Solidarites (14.11.2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

The only official form of political participation is the establishment by municipalities of extra-municipal commissions, associated municipal councils or consultative councils of foreigners. Examples are the **Villeurbanne Citizens' Assembly** (L'Assemblée Citoyenne), which was created by the municipality and aims to integrate all inhabitants into the democratic life of the municipality or the **Migrants' Council of Nantes**. The 80 French and TCN's volunteer participants deal with subjects ranging from citizenship to inclusion, through participation to the evaluation of public policies. This Assembly can be called upon by the city's elected representatives or can itself take up subjects of its choice. It gives its opinion, summarizes the views of the inhabitants, and implements actions, particularly thanks to the participatory budget, which allows citizens to allocate part of their local authority's budget to the area of their choice (City of Villeurbanne 2022). Since 2018, at the national level, thanks to the Inter-ministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees (DIAIR 2022), refugees have been able to be heard and consulted through the "Academy for Refugees", which, through a selection process gives the opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes concerning asylum. The government has implemented this initiative with the UNHCR and the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri). The aim of the Academy is to train people to speak out and to introduce them to various institutions and associations. Winners have the opportunity to join decision-making bodies (boards of directors, project selection juries, etc.).

## Greece

In Greece, TCNs do not have the right to vote at elections at any level (European, national, regional/local). The existing gaps in Greek legislation regarding the political participation of TCNs are also visible in the MIPEX (2020) that ranks the country's political participation at the lowest rank ("critically unfavourable").



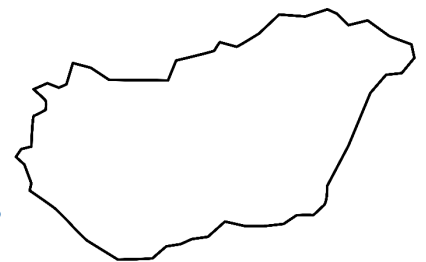
“We must feel that in front of the law we and a native will be treated equally.”<sup>8</sup>”

The index mentions for this specific indicator that “Greece is becoming one of the most politically exclusive democracies in the developed world, excluding foreign citizens from the democratic process.” (MIPEX 2020). It also adds that immigrants don’t get adequately informed on political opportunities, are not consulted regularly and do not have the right to vote in local elections (ibid.)

Despite the restrictive situation in the country, Migrant Integration Councils (MICs) were established for the first time in 2010 and reformed in 2018 to “**Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs)**” (Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Civic Participation 2021). One MRIC ought to be established in each Greek Municipality and to operate by the City Council's decision as an advisory body of the Municipality for the strengthening of migrants' and refugees' integration in the local community (Hellenic Ministry of Interior 2021). The duties of the MRICs include the investigation of the problems faced by TCNs living in the region, communication with public/municipal authorities, the submission of suggestions to the City Council, problem-solving efforts via consultation, and the organisation of awareness-raising events (Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Civic Participation 2021).

## Hungary

“I came to Hungary in 2014, there were a lot of integration programs back then, such as help with housing or finding a job. I came from camp life, I had nothing to stay, so I used these programs. Now there are no programs anymore. Nothing.”<sup>9</sup>”



<sup>8</sup> Albanian woman. Second generation TCN. (August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Focus group. Greece.

<sup>9</sup> Refugee from Syria and NGO representative. (18 May 2022). Personal interview. Hungary.



According to the MIPEX (2020), political participation is one of the weakest areas of migrant integration in most Central European countries, including Hungary. *“Immigrants are denied the opportunity to participate in public life in Hungary, as foreign citizens have a limited right to vote, and they receive no support by policy makers”*. Only Hungarian citizens hold the right to vote in national elections, which also includes Hungarian nationals who have never lived in the country’s territory (e.g., Hungarians living in neighboring countries) and only Hungarian citizens can be founders and office holders of political parties and associations (Hungarian Party Law 1989). Immigrants holding a residence or immigration permit do hold the right to vote in local elections (Fundamental Law of Hungary 2011). In the last five years, the Hungarian government has drastically modified the legislation and political environment around refugees and immigration gradually phasing out all targeted support offered to beneficiaries of international protection (Gerő 2021). NGOs still provide support for immigrants and refugees, but have difficulties in acquiring sufficient funds. They often focus on providing services (e.g. Hungarian language courses, educational activities, support with finding schools/doctors, etc.).

Hungary has not established an integration strategy and the political participation of third-country nationals is not a high priority, neither for the national, nor for local governments. Thus, it currently lacks consultative committees on integration methods, migrant integration programs, and any self-standing integration policy. There are no consultative mechanisms of migrants active in the country.

Despite the strong anti-immigration and anti-refugee rhetoric perpetuated by the government, some small initiatives by civil society aiming at promoting the political participation of TCN were identified, such as the Budapest Migration Forum. The forum has been organized between 2017-2018 by the Subjective Values Foundation - in cooperation with the Municipality of Budapest and constituted “a series of discussions aiming to facilitate and support political participation of third-country nationals” (MMIA 2016) involving the Mayor’s Office, representatives of international organizations (UNHCR, IOM) and local NGOs active in the field of migrant integration as well as third-country nationals residing in Budapest. A centralized action to address the results did not take place.

## Italy

“It’s hard to take part in public life for immigrants. There are two parallel worlds. The immigrants’ world has a lot to say to the Italian politics, but has no right to vote.”<sup>10</sup>



Italy is one of the few European nations that have adhered to the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, but it ratified it with the exclusion of chapter C, thus not accepting the extension of suffrage to foreigners at the local level. Yet, a number of Italian municipalities extended electoral rights to non-EU citizens, such as Naples or Turin.

The MIPEX (2020) states that “migrants in Italy continue to face obstacles to their political participation, as they are neither allowed to vote nor supported to be politically engaged. In addition, they are consulted only through weak consultative bodies across Italy”. It is further reported that migrants face highly discretionary and bureaucratic procedures for becoming a citizen (ibid.).

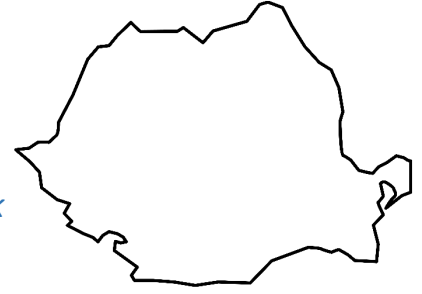
Throughout Italy, councils for the social integration of foreign citizens exist, which can be activated at the regional, municipal or inter-municipal level, as well as the Deputy Immigration Councilor. But, these councils seem to be very fragmented, dynamic and strongly conditioned by the willingness of the local administration to make use of these bodies.

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<sup>10</sup> Tatsiana Pumpuleva, chairperson of the Belarus association. (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022). Personal interview. Italy.

## Romania

“*The greatest challenges being a migrant in Romania were the lack of knowledge concerning the rights of refugees, the lack of training for employees, the language and Covid 19.*”<sup>11</sup>



According to the Romanian Constitution, the right to vote and to be elected is reserved only for Romanian citizens. Holders of the right of long-term residence, benefit from equal treatment with Romanian citizens regarding the freedom of association, affiliation and membership of a trade union or professional organization.

In the MIPEX 2020 political participation of migrants in Romania is ranked as “unfavorable”, the report is highlighting that *“Romanian policies create major impediments to immigrants’ integration in terms of political participation, the lack of political rights for immigrants and support for immigrant leaders continues to prevent the political integration of immigrants. Additionally, immigrants are not structurally consulted in order to inform and improve the policies that affect them daily”. [...] Major obstacles emerge for immigrants in political participation and access to nationality”* (MIPEX 2020).

Consultative bodies for migrants are absent in Romania. Except for projects implemented by civil society, there are no standing consultative groups or bodies designed for migrants’ consultations. Nevertheless, there are and have been in the last few years, active organizations in the field of migration and integration which are implementing projects aiming to enhance the consultation, representation or participation of migrants, both political and civic. One of which is the League for the Defense of Human Rights – LADO that conducted consultations with the aim of enhancing the participation of migrants or the capacity of other organizations and institutions to ensure migrants participation. In 2013, LADO was the initiator of the national network of mediators. The mediators conduct dialogue and communication on needs and solutions between migrant communities, public institutions or relevant local stakeholders.

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<sup>11</sup> Migrant from Jordan. (April 11th, 2022). Personal interview. Romania.



*It is important to have a migrant council because the situation of migrants in Europe is not as good as it should be.<sup>12</sup>*



## Selected Best Practices of Migrants' Consultative Bodies



### AUSTRIA: Migrant Advisory Council Graz

The Migrants' Advisory Council Graz is a **political representation of the interests of third country nationals in Graz** (10% of the total population of Graz). The council consists of nine members (non-EU citizens) **elected by non-EU migrants** living in Graz. Members are elected through a direct and secret ballot that takes place on the same day as the regular municipal elections and serve for the same legislative period of five years. The council members work on a voluntary basis and convene regularly. The Migrants' Advisory Council (formerly Foreigner Advisory Council) was **established in 1995**. A **policy resolution of the Municipal Council of Graz** guarantees a **legal basis and the council's sustainability** beyond political changes in the city government.

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Rajakovics, former spokesperson of the Mayor of Graz during the founding years of the Migration Council. (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

### Objectives of the Board:

- Preserve and protect the interests of migrants
- Advise the city council and administration through suggestions, recommendations, opinions and to report on the state and well-being of immigrants in Graz
- Promote a better cohabitation among all inhabitants of Graz
- Inform and advise associations and communities about its activities
- Organize seminars, events and workshops on such themes as culture, politics, education, social issues and sports
- Networking and cooperating with the Graz municipal authorities, institutions and NGOs

### Successes:

*“The step from having a migrant advisory board to having an integration office in the city was a milestone.”<sup>13</sup>* Over the 28 years of existence, the council achieved greater visibility of migrants in the city, the installation of an Integration Council at the City Government (2005) and a budget which is dedicated to migrants’ interests are main successes of the work of the council. Also, the council had a profound role in advocating for the foundation of the Anti-Discrimination-Office and for improvements in the housing sector, such as opening community housing to migrants.

The last elections took place in 2021, which did not only bring a 180-degree change in the municipal government from a conservative-right wing coalition to a communist-green-social democratic coalition, but also created changes in the Migrants’ Advisory Council. The new council is therefore much more inclusive representing **different communities and fostering gender equality**. The strategy of the newly elected council is to focus on the empowerment of migrant women, demand a higher budget, work on visibility/raise awareness among migrants, to have an international team and be a connecting hub working beyond ethnic boundaries, to strengthen the relationships between communities.

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Rajakovics, former spokesperson of the Mayor of Graz during the founding years of the Migration Council. (November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

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The bylaws of the council provide a certain **political influence** by guaranteeing “the right to submit written statements and proposals on matters concerning the interests of migrants in Graz to the organisations of the City of Graz”, further they need to be consulted prior to the passing of resolutions and decisions that particularly affect the migrant population, receiving the agenda of meetings of the municipal council, being involved in the planning of initiatives and projects that affect migrants, advise the city regarding new laws and regulations affecting the interests of migrants. It has to submit an annual report to the municipal council on the situation of migrants in the municipality and has to hold information events at least once a year for its voters (MAC Graz 2003).

### **Challenges and Demands:**

One of the main challenges is the **low budget**, all chair members work voluntarily, basically no budget exists for campaigning during the election period or for other awareness raising activities. Although the existence of the council is granted by the municipal resolution, *“one of the weaknesses of the council is its dependence on politics. Only if there is political will, the council can work well.”<sup>14</sup>*

Additionally, the **low voter-turnout** at the last elections, with approx. 4.5% raises the question of how representative and well-known the council is. One explanation is that the power of the council was suppressed over the last years by the previous government and migrants’ lost trust that the council holds any power. The new city government put the peaceful co-existence of all inhabitants and the cooperation with the Migrants’ Council as a top priority. A new integration policy has been developed in close consultation with the council. Another difficulty of the council is **reaching all migrants**. Due to data protection, it can only reach migrants who are organized in associations. However, a lot of migrants are not organized in associations and the question remains how to reach and involve them.

*“Another dilemma is that once migrants become citizens they are no longer allowed to act as council members. Sometimes, the most active and most experienced members are not allowed to participate anymore.”<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Jakša Buljubašić, former chair of the Migrants Advisory Council Graz. (June 2nd, 2022). Focus group. Austria.

<sup>15</sup> Eyawo Godswill, Executive Director of the Migrants Advisory Council Graz. (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

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## FRANCE: The CNCE of Nantes

The Council was created in 2003 by the city of Nantes to fight against discrimination and promote the integration and citizenship of all TCN's.

### Objectives:

- To give all foreigners living in Nantes the chance to give their opinion
- To allow them to exercise their citizenship locally
- To offer the possibility of participating in the construction of public policies and public services in Nantes (City of Nante, no date)

The CNCE's organisation allows for **effective collaboration and direct dialogue with the municipality**. The CNCE operates in the form of a workshop: it is a working group that allows everyone to reflect on a specific subject, the workshop then produces a citizen's opinion which is then transmitted to the municipal authority. The latter gives its response considering the council's opinion. Moreover, the functioning of this council is intended to be a real mutual aid: the city services work together with the associations and the inhabitants: this method allows the service providers to hear the concerns and ideas of the CNCE, and vice versa the CNCE to get to know the different plans and projects carried out at the political level. To illustrate this, the CNCE has carried out several actions: **"Welcome: the guide to welcoming foreign residents"**. It is a real mapping of the city's services, created, commented, and reassessed by the TCN's. In 2020, the CNCE mainly supported the creation of training to raise awareness of the city's agents on migration issues and the deconstruction of stereotypes. During fall 2020, 40 trainees took part in training courses. At the suggestion of the participants, other subjects were added to the programme, including the right to asylum and people's vulnerabilities (CNCE 2020).

The CNCE operates in a **stable political environment and constant political support** that is attentive to the needs of TCN's, allowing this dynamic to continue and to have enough weight and means to have a real impact on the city of Nantes and its region. The CNCE is part of a series of initiatives grouped under the term **"Citizen Dialogue"**. The city's approach is based on an emphasis on participatory democracy, ~~placing the individual at the very heart of the political process. The CNCE favours individual participation~~

of people, not linking their participation to groups but really basing it on the desire of each person to work for a better integration of foreigners. **How does this work for the CNCE?** The process is based on a mandate that specifies the questions proposed to participants in this process. This mandate formalises the elected representative's expectations of the citizens, describes the terms of their participation and makes it possible to be transparent about the objectives of the process and the impact that their involvement in this reflection may have on public policies. The participants then draw up an opinion. These citizen initiatives are reinforced by the existence of a real traceability of the final political decision: participants have a right of follow-up allowing them to ensure the exact implementation of the political commitments made after the work provided on the different themes.

The **sustainability** of the CNCE is guaranteed by the municipality. Indeed, the political support allows the CNCE to carry out its missions, the annual plenary session takes place in the town hall. In addition, the CNCE organises meetings with associations and inhabitants in cultural places, allowing for enriching and free collaborative work. It is important to remember that the Council is independent of the political will of elected officials and was set up to give a voice to TCN's in Nantes on issues that concern them directly. The procedures for joining the CNCE are managed by the Equality Mission and not by politicians. Joining the CNCE is as simple as signing up and taking part in workshops on the different subjects of the moment. **It also challenges the behaviour of elected officials, aims to give a new impetus to the creation of public policies** (Moreau 2015).

**Representation and Equality:** the CNCE supports its fight by putting forward the slogan "Tous Nantais, Tous Égaux". The Council was initially open to non-EU nationals. In view of the activities, the desire to raise awareness about the living conditions of TCN's the council decided in 2015-2016 to open its door to everyone. The Council is now open to non-EU, EU and French nationals. The only condition is to live in Nantes. The CNCE also has a steering committee made up of 20 volunteer inhabitants of different foreign nationalities, non-EU and European nationals, with a view to ensuring diversity of gender, origin, age and place of residence. the Council is supported by the city's equality mission, which aims to raise awareness on equal treatment and gender equality. This is an institutional support giving visibility to actions decided by the council. This openness to all the public is interesting. We can think that their inclusion in our councils would be useful to help, advise, testify, and fight for more rights.

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The CNCE's approach is based on genuine **awareness-raising**. Indeed, the CNCE is at the heart of its citizens' lives. A real communication is implemented at the city level: on the city's website and its social media platforms. The associative network bridges the gap to give maximum information and invite people to take part. To reach a good audience, mediators are mobilised to go as close as possible to the inhabitants and to show them the usefulness of such citizen mechanisms (City of Nantes 2015).



### GREECE: Greek Forum of Migrants

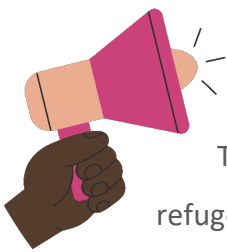
The Greek Forum of Migrants (GFM) is a **network of migrant organisations and communities in Greece**. It was founded in September 2002 and functions as a union – body. Its members today number around 42 communities - organisations. GFM was recognised as a secondary organisation - body in 2008 under No. 991/08 decision of Athens's Court and was registered in the special books by a / a 27301 on 14/4/2008. In December 2016, it was registered in the National Register of Greek and Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations active in matters of international protection, migration and social inclusion of the Ministry of Migration Policy. GFM's mission is to promote migrants' integration by enhancing their individual and collective responsibility and participation through collaboration with institutions, NGOs and society -on a national and European level. GFM's Board of Directors is elected every three years and follows the procedure described: 1. Announcement/notification to the communities – members of the GFM that elections will take place. 2. Required quorum achieved. 3. Electoral Commission's election. 4. Members of the Board of Directors are selected by the Selection Committee.

#### Objectives:

- promoting change in the Greek and European legal framework and policies
  - empowering migrants and their organisations to promote their integration with individual and collective responsibility
  - contributing to the fight against discrimination and racism
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- promoting communication, collaboration and understanding between migrant communities and Greek civil society

The Greek Forum of Migrants implements a wide variety of actions and programmes and, additionally, often publishes reports and gives opinions on legislative and public issues concerning migrant integration; furthermore, it often organises or participates in public debates on relevant topics (Leivaditi et al. 2020).



### GREECE: Greek Forum of Refugees

The Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR) is a non-profit association/union consisting of refugee and migrant communities (first and second generation), individuals and professionals working together to support and empower asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and stateless persons. It was founded in Athens in 2013 to function as a reference body, both for the refugee communities and for the refugees who wish to collectively address and in an organised manner their requests to the state and to the host community. The initiative started from members of the Greek Forum of Migrants, the Somali, the Sudanese and the Afghan community in Greece.

The GFR is active on four levels:

- a. At local level, it participates in the MRICs, working as an advisory body to the Municipalities;
  - b. At national level, it participates in national instruments and networks, such as the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), the National Council against Racism and Intolerance, and the Greek Network for the Right to Shelter and Housing;
  - c. At European level it is a member of the Migrants Experts Group of the European Commission, the European Council of Refugees and Exiles, the European Agency for Fundamental and Human Rights, the European Civic Forum, and the Refugees Ideas for Solutions in Europe network.
  - d. At international level, it is a member of the International Platform of Undocumented Migrants and the International Coalition against Detention.
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Additionally, the GFR entails other initiatives that enhance the TCN skills in advocating for their needs and rights. Within this context, the Self Advocacy Team (SAT) is a group of people with refugee, migrant and second-generation backgrounds working on proposing and implementing ideas for social and political inclusion for refugees and migrants in Greek society. It has been active since the beginning of GFR; however, it has been considered a funded practice since 2019. Its activities revolve around:

- advocating for refugees' and migrants' rights to decision-makers,
- facilitating discussions between refugees, migrants and politicians aiming at reducing the gap between them, and
- implementing programs regarding community empowerment and encouragement in addressing common issues they face in Greek society.

During the post-pandemic period, SAT has been in a constant process of reorganisation. In terms of effectiveness, the GFR constitutes the only association for the collective representation of refugee communities at a national level. It systematically works towards creating conditions of pressure to highlight the need for local-migrants cooperation in Greece. It has established strong synergies with Municipalities in regions with an economy based on agriculture and tourism (Crete, Epirus and Thessaly), helping organisations and businesses to reach and hire workers with a migrant background.

In terms of representation, the GFR promotes diversity in terms of ethnicity, generation, gender, and age groups. Specifically, members are associations from the community of Congo, Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, China, and informal communities (or communities that are in the process of being legalised and represented through members of the GFR) are Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Burundi, Uganda, and Somalia. The Forum represents first- and second-generation migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and in terms of gender equality, 50% of its Board members are women. The younger migrants are less engaged in their communities compared to the older ones and the ones who have been living in Greece for years, leading to less participation in the Forum. In terms of awareness and recognition, the GFR constitutes an outward-looking association, aiming to raise awareness in both locals and people on the move and to change the public narrative on migrants. To do so, the Forum adapts its

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dissemination strategy to target groups' interests by organising sports and cultural activities/events and by intervening in emergencies (e.g., floods, fires, earthquakes) with the provision of humanitarian aid.

In terms of sustainability and political commitment, the initiative meets several setbacks that derive from the general national and European notion of migration. Obstacles to migrants' active participation in political and decision-making processes are: The political instability (referring to politicians, ideology, laws), the lack of a friendly legislative system for migrants' integration and the absence of a legal basis for their political rights, the absence of an ally from the formal institutions, and the unsecured fundamental rights (e.g., housing, wages, residence permits) in combination with the lack of motivation on behalf of people on the move. Taking into account the above challenges, the GFR constitutes a promising practice, with space for further contribution and action once the general political scenery puts in place a holistic integration strategy.



### ITALY: Consulta Immigrati in Campania and Deputy Immigration Councilor in Naples

The Immigrant Council of the City of Naples was established as a body for participation and consultation on issues concerning immigrant communities in the municipal territory, and has a consultative and propositional function. The Council aims to promote the participation of immigrant citizens in the institutions; it encourages participation, discussion and political-institutional, cultural and social exchange; it advocates proposals to improve the quality of life of immigrants, favoring their training, education, information, social and labour integration; and it promotes their fundamental rights. Moreover, the Council formulates proposals to the competent bodies on all matters relating to immigration and expresses, at the request of the Municipal Administration, non-binding opinions on all policy and programming acts relating to immigration. It took office on 25 February 2021, starting its operational course as an "institutional space of self-determination and proposal" of the migrant populations (Comune di Napoli, no date).

The Deputy Immigration Councillor representing non-EU citizens in Naples was elected for the first time in 2018, following the trade union decree of 21 May that called for the election, provided for by the municipal statute and the subsequent regulation issued in 2012 to give a voice to non-EU citizens residing, living and working in the city. The consultations, for the first time in the city's history, allowed non-EU citizens living in the city to vote.

**Further well-established, effective local migrants' councils** exist in the European Union, e.g. in **Germany** in several cities such as e.g. Freiburg, Leibzig and Potsdam.

“ A democracy cannot be in two levels.<sup>16</sup> ”



## Conclusions and Recommendations for the Foundation & Management of a Migrants’ Consultative Mechanism

**Migrants’ advisory councils can be a strong instrument for political participation of migrants.** This research found **best practice examples in Austria, France, Greece and Italy**, which have a profound legal basis, are sustainable, represent a variety of migrant communities, can effectively work on their agenda and play an important role in their city or region in promoting a more peaceful co-habitation of all inhabitants.

While there are a handful of very well-functioning examples, several consultative bodies of migrants were found, that are not able to work effectively as they face structural challenges – such as underfinancing and a lack of a strong legal basis in order to guarantee a sustainable existence.

Our research and exchange between partners and migrants’ consultative bodies, as well as previous research showed that some key factors are relevant to the success and sustainability of migrants’ consultative bodies.

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<sup>16</sup> Kamdem Mou Poh à Hom, former chair of the Migrant Advisory Council Graz (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

The following recommendations are taken from previous studies on the topic, such as the Handbook on **Local consultative bodies for foreign residents** (Gsir / Martiniello 2004), the **ECCAR Toolkit for Equality City Policies Against Racism** (2017) as well as interviews and focus group discussions in seven EU countries and the Migrant Voices Heard Transnational Meeting in Graz in November 2022, where NGOs, researchers, municipalities, associations, and the Migrants Advisory Council of Graz worked on analysing success factors.

### Financial stability and resources



“A board needs money. How much is the decision of politics.”<sup>17</sup>”

In many cases of councils that faded away and were not able to sustain, underfunding was one of the main problems. An appropriate budget based on fair pay as well as the logistical support, human resources and other resources (such as office space) needs to be well negotiated with and allocated by the city / regional government (compare i.e. Gsir / Martiniello 2004).

### Mandate and rights

Migrants' councils should have an official consultative mandate regarding areas that affect the migrant population. Areas that “affect migrants” are by far not only matters of “integration” but include housing, education, work, health, child and elderly care, urban planning, traffic etc.

The rights of a migrants' consultative body should include: To present written statements and suggestions towards the municipality; receive agendas of relevant meetings, protocols, minutes, draft legislation and proposals; to participate in official committees and working bodies.; to speak in the city council; The council's suggestions have to be considered and responded to; and the council has to be

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Rajakovics, former spokesperson of the Mayor of Graz during the founding years of the Migration Council. (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

included meaningfully in the development of initiatives and projects aimed at improving the situation of migrant residents (ECCAR 2017).

## Legal foundation and institutionalization

“ *One very important aspect about the migrant advisory council is that it is established by law.*<sup>18</sup> ”



Literature and experience by very-well functioning consultative bodies shows, that a migrant council and its relationship with governing bodies should be permanently institutionalised and the sustainability of the body granted by e.g. municipal / state resolution. Thus, the existence of the Council is not threatened by a change in government.

## Gender / intersectional equality

In order to guarantee **gender equality** among the council members, actively reach out to women’s organisations and female individuals, offer trainings and counselling on the empowerment and political participation of female community members. A gender analysis of the council or organisational consulting specialized in diversity management might shed light on structures and routines that are gender-insensitive, such as family-unfriendly meeting hours etc.

Further, inter-ethnic groups should be encouraged to run for election as well as smaller communities to get involved, in order to avoid only the largest communities being represented in the council.

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<sup>18</sup> Eyawo Godswill, Executive Director of the Migrants Advisory Council Graz. (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.



## Communication with migrant communities



“In order to effectively advise the government, we need regular contact with all migrant communities.”<sup>19</sup>

An advisory body shall actively seek contact with all migrant communities, particularly also targeting those persons, that are not organized in associations or are not even registered. *“Clear communication about the possibilities and limitations of the council towards the electorate is important to manage expectations, avoid frustration and mobilize voters.”*<sup>20</sup> The establishment of a council administrative office that is easily accessible, low-threshold outreach work and visits at migrant associations helps to make the council known among migrant communities. Further, local authorities together with the consultative body should ensure that reliable and up to date information e.g. on the (s)election, the activities and tasks of the council is available in the **languages of major immigrant communities**.

## Elections

Evidence shows that councils that are elected by migrant residents or associations, rather than nominated by the authorities are more sustainable (Gsir / Martiniello 2004).

## Lively activity of the council

An active role of the members, particularly an active chairperson, as well as regular meetings of the council members, at least once a month, are key factors of success (ECCAR 2017).

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<sup>19</sup> Eyawo Godswill, Executive Director of the Migrants Advisory Council Graz. (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

<sup>20</sup> Irina Karamarković Irina, Chair of the Migrant Advisory Council Graz. (June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022). Focus group. Austria.

## Well-formulated objectives and by-laws

“ *It is always important to know the content and goal of your organization. (...) What is the real purpose of the board? What will be the budget?*<sup>21</sup> ”



When establishing a migrants' council, objectives need to be clearly defined, prioritized, funded and assessed (compare Gsir / Martiniello 2004). Different perceptions and views among founding members might cause conflict and fragmentation. It might be useful to include persons that can work as mediators from the very beginning (ECCAR 2017). Further, the by-laws should clearly regulate membership, election modalities, decision-making processes within the council, tasks of council members and the administrative staff, etc.

## Alliance with other migrants' councils in the EU and other advisory councils

Consultative bodies provide the possibility for associations in a country to commonly advocate for migrants' rights. Bodies should further join forces at European level in order to learn from each other and lobby together, i.e. for an EU law that regulates electoral rights for non-EU citizens at least at local level. Further, creating networks with other councils of the city, such as the Human Rights Council if existing, helps to bring in proposals or expose grievances together.

## Diverse expertise of the members

Council members are meant to promote mutual understanding among population groups of different origin; they cooperate with associations, institutions, residents and other public integration offices; they must be able to eloquently express views and demands; participate in political committees and meetings; analyse the impact on new regulations on the migrant population. Thus, it helps to have

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<sup>21</sup> Kamdem Mou Poh à Hom, former chair of the Migrant Advisory Council Graz (November 15th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz, Austria.

diverse professional backgrounds among the council members. The ECCAR handbook advises to include “migrants who have been living in the city for a longer time and/or have a good knowledge of the local political landscape” and “NGOs experienced in working with city authorities” (2017). further, to “discuss if migrants who become national citizens can still be eligible to be elected (...) and “experienced politicians can be invited as coaches” (ibid.).

### Involvement in daily political and social life



*It is important to be part of the political daily life.<sup>22</sup>*



Establishing good working relations and networks with relevant political stakeholders, but also other important actors besides political representatives such as schools, companies, neighbourhood councils, trade unions, religious associations, non-governmental organisations as well as public services can also have a positive impact, particularly on the notoriety and number of voters.

### Commitment on highest city/regional level

Councils are successful when “*the city mayor makes cooperation with the advisory council a top-level issue and in addition assigns one employee the responsibility for continuous cooperation with the advisory board*” (ECCAR 2017).

### Intercultural awareness on all levels

Local authorities and administrative staff should receive intercultural training and training on human rights and the rights of migrants and refugees.

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<sup>22</sup> Eyawo Godswill, Executive Director of the Migrants Advisory Council Graz. (November 14th, 2022). Migrant Voices Heard Study Visit in Graz. Austria.

## Links - Migrants' Consultative Councils

Migrants Advisory Council Graz, Austria |

[https://www.graz.at/cms/beitrag/10023588/7771507/Geschaefsstelle\\_des\\_Migrantinnenbeirats.html](https://www.graz.at/cms/beitrag/10023588/7771507/Geschaefsstelle_des_Migrantinnenbeirats.html)

Advisory Council on Immigration and Integration of Linz, Austria |

[https://www.linz.at/integration/integration\\_en\\_68756.php](https://www.linz.at/integration/integration_en_68756.php)

Integration Platform of Salzburg, Austria |

<https://www.salzburg.gv.at/themen/gesellschaft/integration/integrationsplattform-salzburg>

Bulgaria Refugee Advisory Board, Bulgaria | <https://www.unhcr.org/bg/refugee-advisory-board>

Dialogue Citoyen, City of Nantes, France | [https://metropole.nantes.fr/territoire-](https://metropole.nantes.fr/territoire-institutions/projet/ambitions-territoire/egalite/accueillir-et-faciliter-lintegra)

[institutions/projet/ambitions-territoire/egalite/accueillir-et-faciliter-lintegra](https://metropole.nantes.fr/territoire-institutions/projet/ambitions-territoire/egalite/accueillir-et-faciliter-lintegra)

L'Assemblée Citoyenne, City of Villeurbanne, France |

<https://participez.villeurbanne.fr/processes/Assemblee-Citoyenne>

Migration and Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs), Greece | [https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-](https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/symmetochi-sta-koina/)

[policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/symmetochi-sta-koina/](https://migration.gov.gr/en/migration-policy/integration/draseis-koinonikis-entaxis-se-ethniko-epipedo/symmetochi-sta-koina/)

Greek Forum of Migrants, Greece | [https://www.migrant.gr/cgi-](https://www.migrant.gr/cgi-bin/pages/index.pl?arlang=English&type=index)

[bin/pages/index.pl?arlang=English&type=index](https://www.migrant.gr/cgi-bin/pages/index.pl?arlang=English&type=index)

Greek Forum of Refugees, Greece | <https://refugees.gr/?lang=en>

Consulta comunale degli Immigrati, Italy | <https://www.comune.napoli.it/consulta-immigrati>

Migrant\_innenbeirat Freiburg, Germany | <https://migrantenbeirat-freiburg.de>

Migrantenbeirat Leibzig, Germany | [https://www.leipzig.de/buergerservice-und-](https://www.leipzig.de/buergerservice-und-verwaltung/stadtrat/fachbeiraete/migrantenbeirat)

[verwaltung/stadtrat/fachbeiraete/migrantenbeirat](https://www.leipzig.de/buergerservice-und-verwaltung/stadtrat/fachbeiraete/migrantenbeirat)

Migrantenbeirat der Landeshauptstadt Potsada, Germany |

<https://www.potsdam.de/migrantenbeirat-der-landeshauptstadt-potsdam>

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