

Factsheet on the expert brief

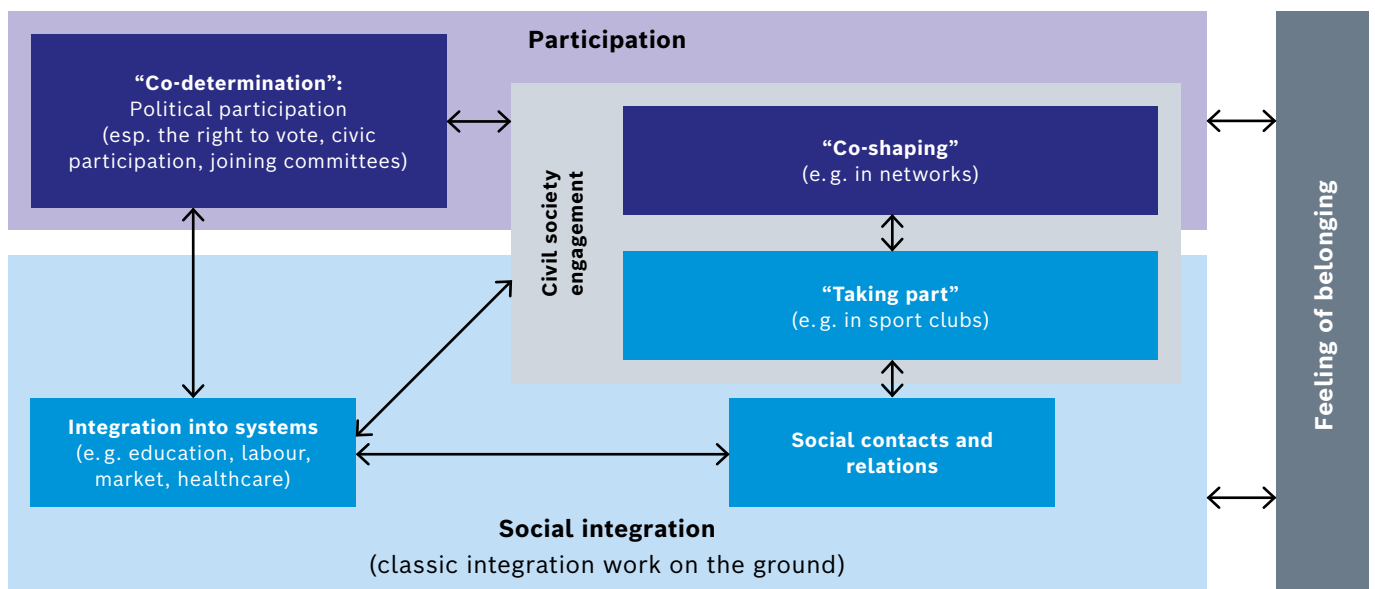
Participation of newly arrived migrants in rural communities

Taking part, co-shaping, co-determination?

Maintaining a democratic society entails the participation of all residents in municipal decision-making processes. Such participation enables people to communicate their needs and concerns to the decision-makers and to help find needs-oriented solutions. People with a migration background, however, are less involved in municipal decision-making processes than the non-migrant population. This expert brief provides an overview of the forms of participation for and of people with a migration background in selected rural areas, and discusses the opportunities they open, their potentials and challenges. The focus thereby is on those forms of participation that are initiated by the municipal administration, are implemented with the participation of the administration or which establish contact with the administration.

The most important findings at a glance

- Municipal administrations in rural areas have various and diverse enablement and activation potentials with regard to participation.
- The many forms of existing measures for promoting social integration can serve as a starting point for enabling greater (political) participation.
- Central challenges in this regard are the exchange between the public administration and migrants, the establishment or strengthening of institutionalised formats of migrant councils and migrant organisations, as well as overcoming cultural prejudice and stereotypes.



Recommendations

Embedding boards and committees in existing structures

Rural areas also stand to benefit from the establishment of migration/integration advisory boards, at least at the district level. When setting up advisory boards, care must be taken to involve the comitology department of the district council. Ideally, an advisory board or committee should have authority to make budgeting decisions.

Identifying and leveraging synergy potentials

Migration/integration advisory boards should also be able to address general social topics in their work. Migrants must be seen as full members of the local community. As such, these advisory boards must also be actively involved in municipal processes that affect migrants as local residents.

Planning dialogues in an inclusive way and enabling actual impact

In order for dialogue formats to also serve as a platform for participation, they must be needs-oriented and inclusive. In addition, the engagement of the members must result in real, visible impact. This can be particularly well achieved if political decision-makers are directly involved in the planning and implementation of dialogue and participatory formats.

Strengthening the self-efficacy of migrants

The dissemination of information to migrant populations can be done in a reliable manner by organising information days on the subject of participation, e.g. in refugee accommodation centres, at migrant organisations or in mosque congregations. Such events can also be a good opportunity for public administration officials to gain both knowledge and access to persons with a migration background in their communities.

Communicating options for participation in a target group-oriented manner

To encourage participation, it is first, on the one hand, necessary to identify the groups of people relevant for a specific process. On the other hand, concrete measures must be developed to promote participation among those groups. Information about the participation process must be made available in those places where the target groups are to be found, or where they come into contact with other persons and institutions. A low-threshold and respectful approach is vital here.

Strengthening the flow of information and minimising the risk of network breakdowns

To ensure participation is not restricted to a few highly motivated individuals, municipal administration and civil society organisations should put a greater focus on the implementation of knowledge management approaches and dissemination of information. In addition, it must be ensured that the more intense participation of an especially motivated few in networks and dialogue formats does not lead to persons or groups who are less visible becoming excluded.

Supporting migrant organisations and informal initiatives as multipliers

Municipal authorities should support the foundation of migrant organisations through, for example, the offering of advisory services and (further) educational offers. In addition, project funds can also be used to promote the networking and mobilisation of migrants. An active involvement of existing initiatives in municipal decision-making processes can strengthen their impact and encourage further organisational development.

Reflecting on pre-conceived notions and promoting intercultural openness

Developing a comprehensive strategy to promote intercultural openness in both public administration and in society is an absolutely necessary step to tapping into the potential of people with a migration background. Such a process can, for example, take the form of diversity training seminars in the field of intercultural communication. To better achieve this, both managers and employees must be involved in the conception of this sort of training at an early stage.