



European Economic and Social Committee

Consulting immigrants to improve national policies

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1. Introduction

The European Economic and Social Committee commissioned the Migration Policy Group (MPG) to assess the state of national consultative bodies on integration. This paper sets out the European definitions, cooperation, and standards on consultative bodies of foreign residents. These standards are met in several national systems of consultation in both newer and older countries of immigration. The paper proceeds to describe the strengths and best practices of these national consultative bodies. It also presents local or regional bodies with different approaches in decentralized or federal countries. Its findings will hopefully contribute to the work of the European Integration Forum. It can inform future discussions and initiatives for better and more informed integration policies and for the greater political participation of immigrants across Europe.

The methodology combines desk research (see further reading list), comparative quantitative indicators, and a qualitative stakeholder questionnaire. MPG tapped into its expertise comparing national integration policies and its past projects involving international researchers and national experts. MPG has worked on this topic for the Council of Europe, European Commission (*Handbooks on Integration*), and the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (*Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights*). This paper draws on the indicators from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (2004, 2007, forthcoming).

What is MIPEX? Seven policy strands (February 2011)

Labour market mobility
Family reunion
Education
Political participation
Long-term residence
Access to nationality
Anti-discrimination

Specifically, the paper analyses the first results from political participation strand's dimension on consultative bodies. The same questions are asked at national level, regional level, and at local level in two cities with largest immigrant population.

MIPEX indicators on consultative bodies

Structural vs. ad hoc consultation of foreign residents

Election vs. appointment of members

Leadership of body

Institutionalisation (rights of initiative and response)

Representativeness (ex. nationality, gender)

The indicators were answered and anonymously peer reviewed by two national legal scholars/practitioners. They also provided references to legal texts and further contextual information. Based on these results, MPG sent out a targeted questionnaire to selected national—and, where relevant, local and regional—consultative bodies. This follow-up examined in greater depth the legal framework, administrative structure, funding, and recent practices in countries with strong consultative bodies. Responses were received for Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Ireland (Dublin), Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Spain.

2. Definition: What is a consultative body of foreign residents?

This paper uses the legal definition of a consultative body of foreign residents provided by the Council of Europe in its 1992 Convention and Explanatory Report *on the participation of foreigners in public life at the local level (n. 144)*. This definition can apply to national and regional as well as local level. Three types of bodies qualify:

- 1. Participation by representatives of foreign residents in an advisory capacity in the deliberations of local authority committees;*
- 2. Consultative committees with mixed membership comprising members of local authority committees and representatives of foreign residents;*
- 3. Consultative councils with purely foreign membership.*

These bodies should be present wherever a 'significant number' of foreigners are part of the population.

3. European standards and cooperation

The 1992 Council of Europe Convention is the most relevant and extensive standard for the consultation of foreigners:

Chapter A (obligatory for all signatory states): freedom of speech, assembly, association and the right to be involved in local public inquiries, planning procedures, and consultation procedures

Chapter B (opt-out option at moment of signature): obligation to encourage and facilitate local consultative bodies of foreign residents

Chapter C (opt-out option at moment of signature): granting right to vote at local level after max. five years (granting right to stand as candidates up to discretion of signatory states)

Consultation is presented in Chapter B as one mechanism of many that promotes their political participation. Foreign residents who live in these states should not face legal or any type of obstacle to setting up consultative bodies with authorities. Moreover, the state should encourage and facilitate their creation across the country. They can also impose precise duties on authorities to do so.

The Convention has been signed by few Council of Europe Member States, with fewer are signing over time (see Annex). Most that did already met its minimum standards. As such, ratification did not oblige countries to create consultative bodies. Instead, it secured their continued implementation in the future through an international legal obligation. It has nevertheless inspired and guided improvements even in countries that have not signed. For example, Greece used the Convention in its Law 3852/2010 creating local migrant integration councils of permanently residing migrants. The Convention therefore remains the point of reference for immigrant consultative bodies in Europe.

Following this standard-setting, policymakers and practitioners have discussed how to implement immigrant consultative bodies in European exchanges of best practice and technical cooperation. The Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities repeatedly called for their creation (ex. Resolution 141 and Recommendation 115 2002) and commissioned a Handbook on implementation (Gsir and Martiniello 2004). The Handbook specifically recommended:

Objectives: *clearly defined, prioritised, funded, and regularly assessed*

Composition: *open-ended and differentiated membership, equal representation from migrants and local communities, wide representativeness of migrant members*

Selection: *Election by migrant residents or associations, rather than nomination by authorities*

Activities: *consultation and promotion of civic and political participation*

Functioning: *right to be informed and consulted, initiate consultation, receive a response, and receive necessary financial and human resources*

The European Union began working on immigrant consultative bodies when the Ministers responsible for integration agreed the 11 'Common Basic Principles' in 2004:

Common Basic Principle 7: *Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.*

...

Common Basic Principle 9: *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.*

To explain Common Basic Principle 9, the Council called for all Member States to give urgent attention to political participation, especially unequal levels of engagement and membership. Structured dialogue between immigrant groups and governments is presented as one way to stimulate this participation as well as mutual understanding. They also have received clear and consistent support from the EP since 1996 as well as from EU consultative bodies like the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. EU institutions could take another step to promote Common Basic Principle 9 by encouraging Member States to ratify the 1992 Council of Europe Convention.

The European Commission's 2005 Agenda on Integration suggested the creation of advisory platforms of third-country nationals as one way to implement this principle with national and EU policies and funding. Indeed, the European Integration Fund can be used to finance dialogue platforms and consultative bodies. The second edition of the EU Handbook on Integration highlighted conclusions and best practices for these bodies (see Annex). European Website on Integration has also started collecting practices (ex. Strasbourg, Berlin, Piacenza).

The European Integration Forum, launched in April 2009, could become a key mechanism to promote greater opportunities for immigrant consultation at national and EU level. Participants at the launch suggested that it work on topics like political participation, capacity building and access to EU funding for immigrant organisations, and the elaboration of guidelines for the creation of consultative bodies at national level. The Forum also provides an incentive for Member States to create consultative bodies of immigrants who could represent their country as participants at the EU-level Forum.

4. Overview: Few immigrants consulted to improve national policies

Immigrants, as long as they remain foreigners, generally cannot inform and improve the national policies that affect their daily lives. Most authorities who design policies ‘for’ them are not directly informed by them, nor able to be accountable to them. On one end of the MIPEx scale, a few EU Member States grant all residents, whatever their nationality, the same political liberties, local and regional voting rights, access to funding for civic participation, and consultative bodies of diverse residents. On the other end of the scale, many more restrict opportunities to nationals and EU citizens. There, third-country nationals have little to no political opportunities, even to form political associations or join political parties. This paper finds that most EU Member States have yet to establish structural consultative bodies of foreign residents at any level of governance. Several national advisory bodies do not qualify as immigrant consultative bodies. They are entirely composed of experts and mainstream organisations that may work with immigrants, but cannot speak for them.

National governments consult with their foreign residents in 10 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Switzerland. Only frameworks for consultation exist in Germany and Italy. This paper finds that most countries have a national system of consultation. Governments at different levels consult foreign residents in similar ways, often on the basis of a common model. The exceptions are Austria, France, and Greece, which have legal framework and bodies at local but not (yet) national level.

More consultative bodies are emerging in newer immigration countries. The oldest national bodies (in the Benelux countries and the Nordics) date back to the 1970s and 1980s. Several of these earlier official bodies have disappeared, as in Estonia and Sweden. Some new immigration countries have renewed interest in consultative bodies (GR, IE, IT, ES, PT). These bodies tend to be part of government’s first attempts at a comprehensive integration strategy. Their introduction is influenced by European discussions of ‘best practice’ and standards like the Council of Europe Convention and Common Basic Principles.

A strong trend cannot be identified towards more consultative bodies across Europe, as one can, for example, for opening voting rights and citizenship. Unlike the newer immigration countries in the South, Central European countries have not yet established consultative bodies, even though they extend voting rights to long-term residents: Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The major problem for consulting immigrants is that bodies come and go in all countries, often dependent on political will. This paper cannot conclude that consultation is improving over time. Just in the past three years, bodies have come (Greece, Swiss cantons) gone (Antwerp, Copenhagen), and restarted (Lisbon, Luxembourg). The older bodies with the greatest powers and independence today have generally proven themselves more sustainable and proactive. Many of the newer bodies are weaker, with government taking the lead. These bodies do not meet when immigrants have something to say, but only when and if government wants to hear it. This can aggravate problems of trust, interest, and professionalism for foreign resident members and government representatives.

National Consultative Bodies (and where also present, local or regional)

* = Similar structures at national and local/regional level

Belgium	Consultative Committee for Foreigners Minorities Forum (Flanders)
Denmark	Council for Ethnic Minorities in Denmark*
Finland `	Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO)*
Germany	Framework for consultation (ex. Integration Summit, Islam Conference) Regional and Local Foreigners' Advisory Council (ex. AGAH in Hesse)*
Ireland	Council on Integration (begun summer 2010) New Communities Partnership Forums (ex. Dublin, Cork, Limerick)
Italy	Legal framework for consultation (Legislative Decree 286/98) Adjunct Councilors to City Council (Rome)
Luxembourg	National Council on Integration*
Netherlands	National Dialogue Structure with minorities
Norway	Contact Committee for Immigrants and Authorities (KIM)*
Portugal	Consultative Council for Immigrant Affairs*
Spain	Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants*
Switzerland	Federal Commission for migration questions*

5. Areas of strength for consultative bodies

Present and future immigrant consultative bodies need structures that provide meaningful opportunities for participants to inform and improve policy. Several national, regional, and local consultative bodies have implemented high European standards to promote full political participation. This section investigates national and—where relevant, regional/local— initiatives meeting these high standards. Findings come from MIPEX scores and expert comments regarding the 12 countries with at least a national consultative body. For additional information on context, this paper relies on the additional targeted questionnaires received from six countries with some best practice elements.

Structural bodies

Half the national consultative systems today are structural. These bodies are likely to have little impact on policy if participants and authorities are not kept to their word to meet regularly. Members must be regularly consulted according to a clear legal framework. Older bodies, if they proved themselves in their first years, tended to become structural over time. They often began as experiments in the 1970s and 1980s, with their formal legal framework dating from around 2000. National governments are much more likely to have a national structural body if such bodies also exist across the country. Indeed, some national bodies are composed of representatives from these bodies, as in Denmark and Norway.

Belgium: The ‘Minderheden Forum’ in Flanders started at the initiative of immigrant federations who wanted to give government one contact point for consultation. Its formal structure was officially recognised in the 1998 Minorities Decree, with activities starting in 2000. It serves as an independent ‘participation organisation’ and official representative to the Flemish Government. This independence is guaranteed in any cooperation agreement or contract. Since then, the Forum functions as an independent NGO of 17 federations and 1500 grassroots organisations.

Denmark: Formal requirements in the 1999 Integration Act were useful for setting up local ‘Integration Councils’, all of which have immigrant populations of a certain size. Since these Councils are no longer obligatory, the number has dropped across Denmark.

Germany: 400 *Ausländerbeiräte* (local foreigners’ councils) exist across the country. In North-Rhine Westphalia, they are obligatory in communities with more than 5,000 foreign residents.

Luxembourg: National consultative bodies go back to 1975. Each of the three successive advisory bodies had clear legal mandates. The next will be enforced in 2010.

Netherlands: The National Dialogue Structure with minorities was introduced in 1985 and formally regulated by law in 1997.

Spain: The National Forum was introduced as part of Spain’s basic governance structure on integration in the pivotal 1994 Plan for Social Integration of Immigrants. Royal Decree 3/2006 later defined the body as an organ for consultation, information and advice on integration under the Ministry of Labour and Immigration.

Mandates

Most structural bodies have their objectives set out in legal mandates. While a few are limited to integration policy in the strict sense, most can address any policy and thus any ministry that affects immigrants (ex. Belgium, Denmark, Ireland). Their diverse objectives often go beyond promoting immigrants' participation and informing/improving policy. For example:

Belgium: Among the objectives of the Minderheden Forum is to promote an accurate portrayal of minorities in society

Denmark: The National Council for Ethnic Minorities in Denmark has the right to discuss with the Minister for Integration anything in her work, the Council's work, or in public debate.

Finland: The National Advisory Board on Ethnic Relations (ETNO) promotes activities among immigrants and provides public information to raise awareness. For that, it appoints 'Goodwill Ambassadors,' influential persons working to make Finland more diverse and equal society.

Netherlands: Objectives include to increase support of minorities for the policies that apply to them and to quickly respond to social challenges (ex. entry into Iraq War, murder of Theo van Gogh, 'Fitna' film).

Spain: To develop an annual report on the social situation of immigrants

Funding

The countries that expect national bodies to be proactive and representative also provide funds for consultation and activities to engage and inform immigrant communities. Without this support, members are supposed to represent NGOs and communities but without the contacts. Poor communication between elected members and the electors reduces trust and interest in these bodies and hinders these bodies' abilities to communicate with the public.

Denmark: Though operationally independent, the National Council receives core funding from the Integration Ministry and support for specific meetings, campaigns, conferences. Volunteer representatives are refunded for their expenses and time away from day-jobs.

Ireland: NCP receives core funding from government under National Networks Funding Scheme for 64 national umbrella organisations. NCP operates local forums in Dublin, Cork, and Limerick.

Netherlands: Each of the eight groups in the National Dialogue Structure receives structurally funding in order to inform their communities of government proposals, gather their feedback, and inform them of the outcomes of discussions. The criteria for migrant associations' funding and participation are clearly set out by law.

Portugal: As part of their work to support consultation, GATAI provides space, facilities and technical expertise, participates, assesses and monitors projects, and organises regular meetings with immigrant associations. Between July 2002 and February 2005, 88 requests for financial support were approved to the tune of approximately 962,000 Euros.

Institutional powers

All structural bodies react to government requests for consultation on laws, policies, and proposals as part of their legal obligations. Beyond this, most national bodies, in both new and old countries of immigration, have the formal right to initiative their own reports and recommendations, even when not consulted. Bodies in Norway and Spain then have a right to a response from government. A response can help bodies to better assess their impact and improve their own work.

Denmark: The National Council has no formal role in the legislative process. Rather it contributes to public consultations like any other body. The Integration Minister, or any other political actor, can make a request for its comments or participation in a government working group. The Council's administrative regulation lets it conduct its own investigations in the field and make own-initiative reports. It cannot, however, express an opinion on individual cases.

Netherlands: The National Dialogue Structure is not a parliament of minorities, but a compliment to the national legislative structure. Any disputes between dialogue participants and government are settled by the Dutch Parliament.

Norway: All public authorities are required by law to respond to the recommendations and initiatives of official consultative bodies like the Contact Committee for Immigrants and Authorities (KIM).

Spain: Government requests to the chair that the Forum issue opinions or reports on any drafts affecting social integration. The Forum has the right to prepare reports, plans, programs on request or own initiative and to formulate its own proposals and recommendations. Members participate extensively on reports and resolutions and secure much government consensus around their recommendations.

Composition and elections

The Council of Europe's definition of a consultative body embraces those composed entirely or partly of foreign residents. Bodies composed entirely of foreign residents tend to be independent NGOs or umbrella organisations that are entirely organised and led by residents themselves. 'Foreign residents' may—and sometimes must—include immigrants who have naturalised or been born in the country.

Bodies only partly composed of foreign residents mix democratic and technocratic approaches to consultation. They bring together representatives of different ministries in order to better 'mainstream' integration into different policies. This goal may also be served by an internal inter-ministerial committee. The body may also bring together employers, trade unions, and volunteer organisations serving immigrants. This structure incorporates the country's model for 'social partners' with 'expert' advisors. Such partial bodies serve multiple purposes. Most of the benefits may go to governments, who gain legitimacy for their actions, as well as for mainstream NGOs, who reaffirm their role as experts. Mixed bodies must guarantee that immigrants are not politically marginalised.

Elections or nominations can be organised, according to the Council of Europe Convention. Its explanatory note states that members should either be directly elected by foreign residents or freely nominated by immigrant associations. Half the national bodies under investigation in this paper respect free elections or nominations. Older bodies are more likely to be elected, while governments that recently established bodies tend to interfere with the selection procedure. Interestingly, national governments are less likely to interfere in choosing participants than local governments in their bodies. At national level, members tend to be elected or nominated based on agreed legal criteria.

Belgium: The Minderhedenforum is composed of the 17 legal umbrella organisations of ethnic minorities, representing over 1000 associations. The Forum's general assembly chooses the administrative council, which in turn organises the secretariat, leadership positions, and activities.

Denmark: The National Council is composed of 14 persons with ethnic minority backgrounds representing the locally elected integration councils. Public elections are organised every four years following the municipal election cycle. They are democratically elected to make the case for all ethnic minorities, not just one community, nationality, or gender.

Finland: As a two-way mechanism for dialogue, one of the vice chairs and minimum of 10 members of the 30 members in the national ETNO must represent migrant communities or ethnic minorities. They elected through an open call to candidate immigrant-run NGOs. The body is responsible for covering four geographic areas (east, west, north, south) where regional ETNOs are also organised.

Ireland: Two New Community Partnership (NCPs) members per organisation are invited to attend its Dublin Forum with policymakers. Members also represent each other on consultative and policy committees. The Forum provides a coherent and representative infrastructure staffed and managed by ethnic minorities.

Luxembourg: The previous national body had equal numbers of Luxembourgers (ministries, unions, employers, municipalities) and foreigners (elected by NGOs for each nationality based on its size). The new body will better represent foreigners, including only eight Luxembourgers.

Portugal: The Consultative Council for Immigration Affairs includes unions, employers, ministries, municipalities, regions, and, of course, immigrants' associations. The Technical Support Office for Immigrant Associations (GATAI) works with the Council to make decisions on the recognition of immigrant associations and provide technical support to a network of different immigrant communities. The rationale is that those with the statute of an Immigrant Association are legitimate representatives best placed to partner on cultural activities.

Spain: The Forum aims to be tripartite and balanced: six officials from different national ministries, two from autonomous communities, two from local administrations, ten immigrant associations and ten social support organisations.

Representativeness

Foreign resident members of consultative bodies are supposed to be ‘representative’ of the diversity of foreign residents in the country. Most of the national bodies in this paper adopted at least one criterion, usually nationality and sometimes gender. A few others introduce criterion like generation or expertise. NGO members are often subject to criteria on their mandate, membership, and geographical presence across the country.

Belgium: Minderhedenforum’s 17 umbrella organisations can prove their status through two ways. They either have official recognition from the Flemish government, which guarantees their representativeness and democratic functioning. Or they can apply to join the Forum if meeting the following three criteria: active beyond the local level; sustainable (over the last three years); and an added value for the forum (ex. greater representativeness).

Finland: The law on equality between genders states that all national Advisory Boards has to include both genders among members, a minimum 40% must be women. All representatives on ETNO boards are asked to nominate both genders and give priority to those with migrant/ethnic background.

Ireland: The nascent National Council on Integration is supposed to be representative of all members in four regions of the country. The Minister has expressed her desire for a gender balance and a wide range of nationalities/ethnic groups.

Netherlands: The law on the National Dialogue Structure sets out the criteria for all eight minority organisations: representation of women and second generation; relevant organisations; expertise on key integration issues; each major minority group.

Norway: KIM members are nominated and proposed at regional level by associations, with small adjustments made to arrive at an overall ethnic, age, and gender balance in consultative body. Associations representing all non-EU nationalities are invited to nominate themselves. The responsible minister sets out ethnic and age balance parameters in the letter of invitation. All must propose members (main member and deputy) of both genders, a matter of law for all government bodies in Norway.

Portugal: The National Council must include one representative from each of the immigrant communities of Portuguese-speaking countries designated by recognised federations and associations (Brazilian, Cape Verdean, Guinean, Angola and S. Tome). It must also include one representative from each of the three most numerous other immigrant groups (Chinese; Eastern Europeans and Romanians).

Spain: Immigrant NGOs applying for the Forum must meet certain objective state criteria: statutory objectives, geographical presence, experience, publicly funded programmes and management capacity. If they represent a specific nationality, the criteria also take into account their relative size in the population across Spain.

Agendas and meetings

Who convenes meetings and set their agenda is just important for meaningful consultation bodies as the election and funding of its members. Weak consultative bodies may divert immigrant associations out of mainstream politics and debate and into marginalised and government-dominated structures. Three national bodies are led by foreign residents (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway) while chairing is shared in Finland and Switzerland. Powers are better shared in bodies that are older, elected, and based on a national structure / umbrella. Governments in newer immigration countries tend to set the agenda. In all countries however, immigrants tend to given the lead at local level bodies, while national ministers want to keep the key leadership role.

Belgium: The Minderheden Forum sets its own agenda and decides the issues it wants to raise with government. Its meetings with government are increasingly regular due to its own initiative and the many consultative bodies and working groups in which members participate. The Forum's growing secretariat helps it to better engage and follow-up on each issue.

Denmark: The National Council members have met four times per year with the minister to discuss Council's work and government initiatives since 1999. The Council sets the formal agenda in advance with time for briefings and discussions. They also schedule ad hoc meetings through their secretariat.

Finland: According to the national ETNO's 2008 statute, Vice Chairpersons are the Secretary of the Ministry of employment and the economy, and a representative for ethnic minorities and immigrant communities.

Luxembourg: In the former national consultative body, the agenda was set by the bureau (president, vice-president, chairs). The chairs were delegates of Ministry of Family, with other ministries represented. This structure was repealed in 2008. Now both the president and vice-president are to be elected by majority vote of the members, who are foreign residents.

Netherlands: By law, the Dialogue Structure must meet at least three times a year. From 2003-2006 it met almost monthly, especially during times of social tension. Both government and minority organisations contribute to the agenda.

Norway: KIM is chaired by an independent person. Since 2002, the chairpersons have been appointed on the basis of long term activity in the immigrant associations. All the ad hoc bodies are chaired by the national authority involved..

Spain: With chairs and members renewed every three years (latest 2010), the Forum had 15 plenary meetings between 2006 and 2010, 24 standing committee meetings, and many others for its four commissions.

6. Conclusions: Countries with robust consultative bodies...

...do more to promote civic participation

Foreign residents can help inform and improve integration policies through dedicated consultative bodies, which are one of several mechanisms for effective civic participation. The Council of Europe Convention and Common Basic Principles present them as one part of a comprehensive integration policy. Just as consultative bodies can improve various integration policies, so too can these policies affect how well these bodies function. Secondary analysis of MIPEX results demonstrate whether there are strong links between different elements of countries' political participation policies. It finds that countries adopting strong consultative bodies are more likely to adopt other mechanisms for political participation. Put differently, countries promoting full participation are more likely to adopt strong consultative bodies.

...support the emergence of immigrant civil society

There is a very strong correlation between consultative bodies and financial support for immigrant associations: whether or not robust consultative bodies are established in a country is linked to whether or not immigrant associations have access to funding at the different levels of governance. One interpretation of these findings could be that governments which fund the creation of immigrant associations are more likely to consult with them. Another could be that the countries which organise consultations are more likely to grant funding to the immigrant associations that participate. In any case, a member of a consultative body may encounter greater problems connecting with local communities when government does not inform them of these opportunities and encourage them to organise.

...grant basic political liberties to all

The few countries that restrict the rights to form an association or join a political party do not establish consultative bodies. This finding shows how a lack of basic political liberties can undermine a country's ability to improve integration policy. Members cannot be representative of foreign residents when this group cannot form associations to represent their interests.

...open voting rights and citizenship

Consultative bodies are often dismissed as poor replacement for civic participation in mainstream politics. Countries with full voting rights (all can participate at local/regional) also have strong and independent consultative bodies. Similarly, a tradeoff is often presented in debates between opening political opportunities to foreigners vs. opening clearer paths to citizenship. The argument is that countries with inclusive access to nationality do not need to extend voting rights or bodies. In fact, the two are very much related. Countries that encourage immigrants to become active in local political life and improve national integration policy also encourage them to become full national citizens. Looking deeper, the countries that grant greater political opportunities are specifically those that grant naturalisation after a few years and some form of *jus soli* citizenship (citizenship entitlement for foreigners' children or grandchildren born in the country). For instance, recently Greece not only reformed its nationality law, but also created migrant integration councils and extended the local right to vote and stand in elections. Countries that establish consultative bodies are also working to promote immigrants' participation in all areas of civic and political life.

Further reading

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Annex 1**Council of Europe Convention*****Excerpts from Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level***

Strasbourg, 5.II.1992

Chapter B – Consultative bodies to represent foreign residents at local level**Article 5**

1. Each Party undertakes, subject to the provisions of Article 9, paragraph 1:
- a. to ensure that there are no legal or other obstacles to prevent local authorities in whose area there is a significant number of foreign residents from setting up consultative bodies or making other appropriate institutional arrangements designed:
 - i. to form a link between themselves and such residents,
 - ii. to provide a forum for the discussion and formulation of the opinions, wishes and concerns of foreign residents on matters which particularly affect them in relation to local public life, including the activities and responsibilities of the local authority concerned, and
 - iii. to foster their general integration into the life of the community;
 - b. to encourage and facilitate the establishment of such consultative bodies or the making of other appropriate institutional arrangements for the representation of foreign residents by local authorities in whose area there is a significant number of foreign residents.
2. Each Party shall ensure that representatives of foreign residents participating in the consultative bodies or other institutional arrangements referred to in paragraph 1 can be elected by the foreign residents in the local authority area or appointed by individual associations of foreign residents.

Opening for signature**Entry into force**

Place: Strasbourg Date : 5/2/1992 Conditions: 4 Ratifications. Date : 1/5/1997

Status as of: 14/6/2009

States	Signature	Ratification	Entry into force
Albania	9/6/2004	19/7/2005	1/11/2005
Cyprus		15/11/1996	
Czech Republic		7/6/2000	
Denmark	5/2/1992	6/4/2000	1/8/2000
Finland	26/8/1997	12/1/2001	1/5/2001
Iceland	11/2/2004	11/2/2004	1/6/2004
Italy	5/2/1992	26/5/1994	1/5/1997
Lithuania		12/2/2008	
Netherlands	30/11/1994	28/1/1997	1/5/1997
Norway	9/8/1993	9/8/1993	1/5/1997
Slovenia		23/11/2006	
Sweden	5/2/1992	12/2/1993	1/5/1997
United Kingdom		5/2/1992	

Total number of signatures not followed by ratifications: 5

Total number of ratifications/accessions: 8

Annex 2

Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners, second edition

Excerpts from Chapter 2: Civic participation

Brussels, 2007

Conclusions

1. Strategies responding to immigrants' special needs and circumstances and capitalising on their skills enhance their sense of belonging and participation in society. Public and private organisations should base these strategies on equality and anti-discrimination. Ideally they are tailor-made, flexible and subject to regular evaluation.

...

4. Best practices demonstrate that mainstream organisations which work closely with experts or specialist organisations greatly improve the accessibility of their services to immigrants.

...

8. Governments should provide support for inter-religious dialogue by facilitating the establishment of dialogue platforms and contributing resources where appropriate.

9. Participation in political processes is one of the most important elements of active citizenship. Political participation of immigrants provides opportunities for integration and should be supported in its different forms, including acquisition of nationality, local electoral rights and consultative structures.

10. The representativeness and democratic legitimation of policies is enhanced by extending formal political rights to immigrants. Where formal rights exist, they need to be put into practice with commitment from all sides including political parties.

...

12. Consultative bodies at the local and national level have a potential to stimulate political participation by immigrants and to improve integration policies by communicating the views of immigrant representatives to governmental and other stakeholders. Ideally their work is proactive and their members are supported in producing high quality contributions.

13. Flexibility in the composition of consultative bodies will best serve the purpose of consultation, keeping in mind that representativeness can be achieved in different ways. Allowing observers or non-voting members to take part in sessions can increase transparency and trust in consultative structures.

