



Research Report

From Policy to Practice: How Political Participation Frameworks Shape New Europeans' Political Engagement

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1. Executive summary

This report examines the relationship between national political participation policies and migrants' political participation outcomes across 22 EU Member States. It combines the Political Participation Policy Index with administrative and survey-based indicators to assess how policies are associated with naturalisation, electoral participation, non-electoral engagement, and political attitudes among migrants.

The analysis shows a consistent and meaningful association between more inclusive political participation policies and several key outcomes. Countries that score higher on the Political Participation Policy Index tend to have higher naturalisation rates, particularly among non-EU citizens. The association is strongest where citizenship regimes are more accessible and predictable, suggesting that favourable policies granting political and civil rights through citizenship remain a powerful incentive for migrants to naturalise.

More inclusive policy environments are also positively associated with higher levels of institutional trust and political efficacy among migrants. Migrants living in countries with stronger participation frameworks are more likely to trust political institutions and to believe that the political system allows them to exert influence. These findings underline the importance of policies not only in enabling formal participation, but also in shaping perceptions of political relevance, agency, and responsiveness.

The relationship between political participation policies and electoral participation is more mixed. While policies encouraging voting are strongly associated with higher migrant voter turnout, the extension of voting rights and favourable citizenship policies alone do not consistently translate into higher electoral participation. This suggests that formal rights must be complemented by active outreach, civic education, and mobilisation efforts to be effective.

For non-electoral participation, the analysis finds positive associations between inclusive policy frameworks and activities such as signing petitions and participation in political parties or pressure groups. Policies that support migrant-led civil society, protect civic freedoms, and enable collective engagement appear particularly relevant for fostering non-electoral forms of participation. Protest participation, however, is influenced by a wider range of contextual factors and shows weaker associations with policy frameworks alone.

Importantly, the report also highlights significant data gaps in the measurement of migrant political participation, particularly in administrative data. Comparable, disaggregated information on voting behaviour, institutional representation, and non-electoral participation is available only for a small number of countries and election

types. As a result, survey data, while indispensable, remain the primary source for comparative analysis, despite known limitations related to sample size and underrepresentation. These data constraints should be taken into account when interpreting the findings and reinforce the need for improved data collection practices.

Overall, the findings indicate that political participation policies matter for migrants' political engagement and attitudes, but their effects are not automatic. Inclusive rights frameworks are most effective when combined with supportive institutional practices, civic education, and meaningful opportunities for representation.

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1. Introduction

Political participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance, shaping the legitimacy, responsiveness, and inclusiveness of political systems. For migrants, participation in political life is not only a matter of democratic rights, but also a key dimension of social and political integration, influencing their sense of belonging, trust in institutions, and perceived ability to shape collective decisions. Across the European Union, however, migrants' opportunities to participate politically remain highly uneven, structured by national citizenship regimes, electoral rules, civic freedoms, and the broader institutional context governing participation.

While a growing body of research highlights the importance of institutional and policy contexts in shaping migrants' political engagement, comparative empirical evidence remains limited. This is due not only to differences in national political participation frameworks, but also to persistent data gaps and inconsistencies in how migrant political participation is measured across countries. Administrative data on political participation, particularly voting behaviour, institutional representation, and non-electoral engagement disaggregated by migrant background, are unevenly collected, often inaccessible, and rarely harmonised across EU Member States. In many countries, data on migrant background are classified as sensitive, reflecting historical, political, and ethical concerns, which further constrains systematic monitoring and comparison.

Against this backdrop, this report examines the relationship between national political participation policies and migrants' political participation outcomes across the European Union. Using the Political Participation Policy Index developed by the Migration Policy Group as a comprehensive measure of national policy frameworks, the analysis explores how differences in policies relate to a broad range of outcomes, including naturalisation rates, electoral and non-electoral participation, and attitudes towards politics such as trust, political efficacy, agency, and sense of belonging. Drawing on data from Eurostat and the European Social Survey, the report provides a comparative, descriptive assessment of whether and how more inclusive policy environments are reflected in higher levels of migrant political engagement and more positive political attitudes.

2. The link between policy and outcomes

Political participation is generally understood as the set of actions through which individuals seek to influence or support government and political processes (Hunger, 2017). Political participation can happen at different governance levels and can take different forms and can range from voting and expressing political preferences to involvement in parties and elected office, participation in unions, and other forms of

collective political action and participation in public life (Doomernik, Kraler and Reichel, 2010). While various factors influence the likelihood of migrant engagement in politics, including group-level characteristics and social networks, policy frameworks also strongly shape their attitudes and behaviour. Policies that enable migrants' political participation strengthen their capacity to shape decisions affecting their daily lives, enhancing their sense of agency and engagement, and contributing to a stronger feeling of belonging in their country of residence (Yavçan, Yılmaz and Gorgerino, 2024). Political institutions, established practices and the specific opportunities for participation they provide shape how and how much migrants can take part in the political life (Zani and Barrett, 2012). This policy impact can take various forms and hence the Political Participation Policy Index may contribute to explore these relationships which is the focus of this report.

A key aspect of the political context for understanding migrants' political mobilization is the citizenship and residence rules that either include them in, or exclude them from, the national community (Cinalli and Giugni, 2011). One example of this is Sweden, where the decision to grant foreign citizens the right to vote in municipal and provincial elections in 1976 was intended to strengthen their political influence and interest, and to foster a greater sense of belonging (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2011). Another evidence from Switzerland suggests that non-citizen rights and inclusive electoral rules, increase political participation of voters with an immigrant background by changing how politically relevant their group feels. When non-citizens gain formal recognition as members of the political community, issues related to immigrant representation become more visible in local politics. This increased salience strengthens feelings of belonging and political relevance among citizens with an immigrant background, which in turn raises their motivation to vote and participate (Kayran and Nadler, 2021). At the same time, inclusive electoral rules may also affect non-electoral forms of political participation. The existence of local voting rights for non-citizens can also be associated with lower protest participation, implying that when institutionalised electoral channels are available, protest becomes less necessary as a form of political voice (Tardivo, 2025).

The acquisition of citizenship as well constitutes an important aspect of political integration, as it provides the formal legal basis for political participation, including electoral participation and the exercise of voting rights (Yavçan, Sinem Yılmaz and Gorgerino, 2024). Because many forms of political participation are restricted to citizens, increasing attention has been directed toward the effect of naturalisation on immigrants' political engagement. Several studies find a positive association between acquiring citizenship and immigrants' participation in political life. Despite citizenship allowing individuals to engage in conventional forms of political participation, such as voting or running for office, it also appears to be positively related to unconventional forms of participation (Hunger, 2017). Some findings also suggest that rather than allowing for political participation, naturalisation increases participation levels for

migrants who were already engaged in politics before their naturalisation (OSCE, 2017). Another study suggests the link between citizenship and electoral participation may be partly shaped by differences in civic interest: more civically interested individuals are more motivated to apply for citizenship and to vote. The study also indicates that naturalisation is more strongly associated with higher turnout than simply being granted voting rights (Bevelander et al., 2024).

Hunger argues it is not only the acquisition of citizenship that matters, but also the citizenship regime (Hunger, 2017). In particular, more inclusive citizenship regimes promote higher levels of political participation even among migrants who have not yet been naturalised. A more inclusive regime therefore, shapes migrants' perception of inclusivity/feeling welcome in the society, which in turn fosters different forms of political engagement, beside the conventional ones (Hunger, 2017). Similarly, more inclusive voting rights for foreign residents are linked to a larger share of non-EU citizens having the right to vote at the local level, thereby expanding concrete opportunities for political participation even without formal naturalisation (OSCE, 2017). Non-electoral political participation tends to be higher in countries with more liberal and democratic regimes, and it is also higher among migrants who come from similarly open political contexts. Migrants with higher socio-economic status also tend to mobilise and engage more, partly because they have easier access to political information. The institutional and policy context, including citizenship regimes, electoral rules, legal framework governing public action, also affects and shapes migrants' opportunities and incentives for political engagement (Ventila and Martiniello, 2021).

Policies and funding contexts can also greatly influence the protection and empowerment of migrant-led civil society. Public funding and institutionalisation of civil society can improve the inclusion of migrants in policymaking processes and strengthen their advocacy. However, funding commitment may also restrict participation through depoliticisation, encouraging service-oriented activities and discouraging critical or contentious action. This is particularly true when funding is short-term and competitive (Lang and Badenhop, 2025). Nevertheless, migrant-led civil society and networks remain important spaces of empowerment. These associations empower through social networks, economic empowerment, and legal support. They also provide avenues through which migrants can respond and advocate against social injustice, restrictive state policies, or insecurity (Castillo Rueda, 2025).

Perceptions and attitudes also matter for political engagement. When individuals feel a strong sense of belonging to their country and communities, they tend to be more politically and civically engaged (Zani and Barrett, 2012). Policies can shape how migrants understand their place in society. Inclusive policies and institutional contexts can signal that migrants are recognised members of the political community. This, in turn, strengthens feelings of belonging, membership and inclusion, which are

fundamental for political integration and subsequent participation: individuals who perceive themselves as belonging in a society are more likely to develop political interest and to engage politically. Members of racialised and ethnic groups may also construct their own notions of belonging in response to exclusionary contexts, which indicate how policies and broader context influence how migrant

Perceptions do not only relate to sense of belonging but also to other aspects such as trust, political efficacy and agency. According to the OECD, individuals' perception that they can influence what the state does, shapes their trust in public institutions. This perception, and thus institutional trust, is also affected by the measures and initiatives in place that enable civic and political engagement (OECD, 2024). Existing research also shows that higher levels of institutional trust among migrants are associated with greater political engagement, ranging from participation in voluntary organisations to more formal modes of political involvement (Huddleston, 2017; Giugni and Grasso, 2020). Taken together, these insights suggest that policies and institutional practices expanding opportunities for participation are likely to shape migrants' perceptions of influence and, in turn, their trust in institutions. Granting voting rights for instance, is not only about providing the legal ability to vote, but also about encouraging individuals' willingness to participate in the electoral process (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2011). When countries guarantee civic freedoms and rights and maintain an open civic space, they strengthen governance and democracy by encouraging people to participate and to develop a stronger sense of political agency (OECD, n.d.). Political agency, or the perceived ability to participate in politics is closely connected to political agency, both of which are fundamental components of political integration and participation (OECD, 2024; Anduiza and Martín, 2016). Political efficacy refers both to the perception that one's own participation can influence political outcomes and to the perception that the political system is responsive to individuals' concerns and interests. Political institutions play a key role in promoting these feelings, since democratic systems rely on individuals' participation. While political efficacy and sense of agency can encourage migrant political participation, the relationship also works the other way around with political participation strengthening political agency and efficacy (Anduiza and Martín, 2016).

However, it is important to note that lower levels of political participation may reflect a broader trend that extends beyond migrants and cannot be attributed solely to policies aimed at fostering their engagement. Research shows that declining participation, and particularly voter turnout, is a general trend across democracies affecting all citizens, and is not limited to migrants. This suggests a structural rather than group-specific cause to declining political engagement. Factors contributing to this decline include the increasing complexity of political system and generational shifts, where newer generations appear less engaged than older ones. These generational shifts reflect broader changes in political norms and attitudes where younger generations are socialized in contexts producing weaker norms of civil duty and a lower sense of

political efficacy. At the same time, participation is declining despite the presence of factors, such as rising education levels, that would normally be expected to increase political engagement (Kostelka and Blais, 2021).

Focusing exclusively on migrants risks overlooking the fact that under-representation of minority groups in political parties is not primarily driven by a lack of interest or engagement. More broadly, existing political systems tend to reproduce social inequalities, meaning that disparities in representation cannot be understood solely in terms of differences in participation (Bird, 2004b). Evidence shows that minorities do run for office, but they are less likely to get elected. This suggests that the issue may lie in unequal electoral outcomes rather than unequal willingness or possibility to participate, making this more a problem of representation than participation. Moreover, unequal political outcomes may also be shaped by voter behaviour, as evidence suggests that voters tend to evaluate candidates more positively when they share their ethnic background, thereby disadvantaging minority candidates (Bird, 2012; Bird, 2004).

Migrants' comparatively lower political involvement in their host countries may be partly explained by their continued political participation in their countries of origin. Indeed, evidence suggests that migrants' political participation in host countries is partly shaped by pre-migration political socialisation, with individuals originating from democratic contexts generally exhibiting higher levels of institutional trust and engagement than those from more authoritarian settings (Just & Anderson, 2015; Dinesen, 2013). However, these effects are not static, as exposure to host-country institutions and social environments contributes to gradual processes of political (re)socialisation, leading to a convergence of participation patterns over time (Röder & Mühlau, 2012; Heath et al., 2013). In addition, research highlights that host-country factors, including institutional opportunity structures, inclusion policies, and access to mobilisation networks, play a key role in shaping outcomes, potentially reinforcing or mitigating origin-country effects (Morales & Giugni, 2011b).

3. Current evidence landscape and data gaps

Migrants' political participation encompasses multiple dimensions, including electoral and non-electoral engagement, institutional representation, and broader attitudes towards politics and society. Political participation outcomes can be measured using a wide variety of data sources, ranging from administrative records collected by national and international statistical offices, to self-reported information collected through surveys.

Research on migrant political participation tends to focus on institutional and contextual factors shaping different levels of migrant engagement in the political process. This partly reflects the types of data that are most readily available: information on laws, institutions, and political frameworks is systematically collected and comparable across contexts (Morales and Giugni, 2011). The ideal dataset for studying the political engagement of migrants should meet several criteria:

- Cross-country comparability
- Oversampling of small migrant groups/ethnic minorities
- Clearly defined target population
- Drawn from population register
- Accounts for a variety of electoral and non-electoral participation
- Large sample size.

3.1 Administrative data

However, despite notable improvements in the quality of migrant-related data in the last two decades, there remains a lack of harmonisation of data collection and access across Europe. Differences in administrative systems make it more challenging to merge and compare registry-based information. For example, Germany has a more decentralised system as compared to the Netherlands, even though both countries use the same definition of migrant (Andreß & Careja, 2018). While Scandinavian countries maintain highly comprehensive registered data that include migrants, these datasets often lack information to non-electoral participation or other subjective indicators. This makes it difficult to have a multidimensional and cross-country analysis of migrant integration.

There also no standard definition of 'migrant' in both registrars and surveys. Some datasets categorise 'migrant' according to country of birth, others do parents' country of birth, citizenship, or length of stay (Anderson & Blinder, 2024). According to Patrick Simon (2013), only 19 out of 41 countries collect data on citizenship and place of birth, among who 6 define according to parents' place of birth. Others rely on alternative indicators such as ethnicity, nationality, religious denomination, or language spoken at home.

This gap in availability of data on migrant origins in Europe is partly the result of migrant background data being classified as sensitive and partly rooted in historical or political beliefs. Collecting data on ethnicity has been viewed as either unnecessary or inaccurate in analysing the population of a state. Census data implemented during the 19th century were closely tied to nation-building projects and sought to invent the nation of cultural homogeneity by trying to unify categories of ethnicity. Furthermore, the use of census and population registrars to identify, target, and persecute specific social, ethnic, and religious groups had devastating consequences in World War 2. As a result, many European countries remain wary of collecting data on social group membership (Simon, 2013).

To address this inconsistency, some measures such as the Political Participation Policy Index further disaggregates migrants according to several categories: third-country nationals (TCNs), EU mobile citizens, refugees, asylum seekers, second-generation migrants, and undocumented persons (Yavçan et al., 2024). However, this distinction is rare in most large-scale, cross-national datasets and is not consistently applied across countries. Quantitative evidence on non-electoral political participation is scarce in administrative records, especially regarding migrant representation, and dataset sizes decrease sharply when disaggregated by migrant background.

Good data practices: The Scandinavian case

Scandinavian countries are some of the few countries that maintain strong data practices on migrant populations. Population registers in these countries provide effective tools to conduct research due to their accessibility, systematic data collection, and diverse categorisation of migrants.

Data is collected in a highly systematic and integrated manner. They encompass most of the legal migrant population, and are maintained over a long period of time, allowing for longitudinal analysis. Furthermore, while it is a challenge for many European countries to develop identical, nationwide population registries, some Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Sweden have employed the use of 'personal identification number' systems that link individuals throughout all national registries (Careja & Bevelander, 2018). For some countries, this level of integration is

not feasible due to decentralised municipal registers (as in Germany) or reluctance to centralized identification systems due to historical, political, or ethical concerns (as in France) (Andreß & Careja, 2018).

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Scandinavian data registers also recognise heterogeneity in migrant populations, through subcategorisation of migration. For example, Finland disaggregates data by EU mobile citizens, third country nationals, and nationals of Iceland and Norway, as well as by Finnish or foreign background and language. Sweden disaggregates according to country of birth and citizenship, while Denmark distinguishes between persons of Danish origin, immigrants from western and non-western countries, and their descendants. This level of detail allows for more nuanced analysis of first- and second-generation migrants, third-country nationals and EU mobile citizens.

However, some important limitations persist. Scandinavian countries have not escaped the pitfalls associated with registry-based data. For example, they do not collect attitudinal or subjective data, such as values, or perceptions towards democratic institutions or voting, which are essential for understanding political participation. Furthermore, they also run the risk of over and under coverage. Over coverage is particularly common among mobile populations, particularly EU mobile citizens, due to weak incentives to deregister residency. Under coverage may also occur, though incentives to register are generally stronger (Andreß & Careja, 2018).

3.2 Survey data

While preferable due to their objective measurement of actual outcomes, the aforesaid challenges limit the use of administrative data in comparative research on migrant participation. Surveys, on the other hand, are more consistent in capturing the diverse ways in which people engage in non-electoral participation, though high-quality large-scale surveys often remain relatively rare and their results reflect subjective reporting. Still, surveys generally provide a more comprehensive range, many incorporating measures on non-electoral modes of participation, and demographic variables that allow disaggregation by migrant background (to some extent).

Good data practices: The European Social Survey

The European Social Survey (ESS) is one of the most comprehensive datasets on the attitudes and beliefs of diverse populations living across Europe. Conducted every two years since 2001, it allows for cross-national comparisons of over 30 European countries. The ESS focuses on social conditions, attitudes, and beliefs related to a wide range of social issues and has become a cornerstone of European social science research. The ESS is particularly well suited to study migrant political participation due to its cross-country comparability, large samples, and detailed migration-related variables (such as country of birth, length of residency, and citizenship). It also effectively captures a range of political participation channels, including voting, protesting, social media advocacy, and political confidence. This allows for the study of both conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation.

While the ESS is useful for all the above-mentioned reasons, the ESS should nonetheless be critically assessed in order to understand just how useful it is for migrant representation. Importantly, it is not an immigrant focused survey and therefore runs the risk of under sampling minority groups, including migrants. Despite these limitations, ESS remains one of the most comprehensive datasets to measure the social attitudes of migrants, due to its large-scale cross-country comparability. To address the concern of under sampling, Tardivo (2025) found that the ESS strongly correlated with Eurostat statistics on the foreign-born population, when studying immigrant political participation across Europe.

3.3 Naturalisation rate

The acquisition of citizenship is an important component of political integration, as it provides the legal basis for electoral participation and the exercise of voting rights (Yavçan, Yılmaz and Gorgerino, 2024). For this reason, it is relevant to include naturalisation rates among the variables studied. Considering observed naturalisation rates is useful to assess whether more enabling policy environments for political

participation are reflected in naturalisation outcomes. The Eurostat database provides data on naturalisation rates for the period 2014–2023 for 32 European countries, of which 27 are EU Member States. Within naturalisation rates, Eurostat distinguishes between three categories: foreigners who acquired citizenship, non-EU citizens who acquired citizenship, and EU citizens who acquired citizenship.

3.4 Electoral participation

The most common measure of electoral participation is voter turnout, as voting is generally the most widespread form of political participation in a democracy (Huddleston, 2017). However, even though voting is often treated as the main indicator of political behaviour, relying too heavily on turnout can be misleading in the context of migrants’ political integration, as it does not always reflect their political participation and may not even be the most common form of participation for some migrant groups (Morales and Giugni, 2011).

Official administrative data on voting turnout disaggregated by migrant background is limited. As a result, most research on migrant turnout relies on self-reported voting behaviour rather than official turnout statistics. At the EU level, there is no centralised source of administrative data on voting turnout or registration broken down by migration status, citizenship, or migration background. The availability of administrative data on the voting behaviour of individuals with a migrant background varies across European countries and years. The country-level information reported below includes only administrative data available from 2023 onwards.

Country	Type of data	Type of election	Categorisation of migrant
Finland	Turnout	European parliament elections 2024	Finnish and foreign background, and area (national statistics institute). Citizens of other EU Member States, citizens of Iceland and Norway and citizens of other countries. (Ministry of Justice)
		Municipal elections 2025	Finnish and foreign background, and area. (national statistics institute). Citizens of other EU Member States, citizens of Iceland and Norway and citizens of other countries. (Ministry of Justice)

		Presidential elections 2024	Finnish and foreign background, and area
		Parliamentary elections 2023	Finnish and foreign background, and area
		County election 2025	Citizens of other EU Member States, citizens of Iceland and Norway and citizens of other countries
Sweden	Voting turnout	European parliament elections 2024	Country of birth (born in Sweden or born abroad)
Belgium	Entitled to vote	Communal elections 2024	Belgian, EU, and non-EU citizens
	European parliament elections 2024	Presidential election 2024	EU voters disaggregated by nationality
Luxembourg	Registered voters	Communal elections 2023	Luxembourgish and non-Luxembourgish registered voters
	European parliament elections 2024	County election 2025	Luxembourgish and non-Luxembourgish registered voters
Portugal	Registered voters	N/A 2025	National citizens, EU citizens who are not Portuguese nationals and other foreign citizens

		N/A 2024	National citizens, EU citizens who are not Portuguese nationals and other foreign citizens
Spain	Registered voters	Municipal and regional elections (2023)	Spanish citizens living in Spain, Spanish citizens living abroad and foreign citizens resident
		European parliament elections 2024	Spanish citizens living in Spain, Spanish citizens living abroad and foreign citizens resident
Denmark		European parliament elections 2024	Danish origin, immigrants – Western countries, immigrants – non-Western countries, descendants – Western countries, descendants – non-Western countries
		Danish parliament	Danish origin, immigrants – Western countries, immigrants – non-Western countries, descendants – Western countries, descendants – non-Western countries
		Referendums	Danish origin, immigrants – Western countries, immigrants – non-Western countries, descendants – Western countries, descendants – non-Western countries

Greece and Estonia also provide some earlier administrative information on the participation of non-national residents in local and European elections, although these data are considerably older than the other country sources described above. Estonia publishes voter turnout for local council elections from 1993 to 2017, disaggregated by Estonian citizens, EU citizens, and non-EU foreigners. Greece publishes turnout data for municipal elections (1998–2010) and for European Parliament elections (2004 and 2009), with figures for EU citizens further broken down by country of citizenship.

The collection and reporting of official administrative data on voting-behaviour varies considerably across national contexts. Although some countries collect and publish administrative information on turnout or voter registration disaggregated by migration background or citizenship, these data cannot be combined into a single comparative source due to differences in availability, reference years, and the way population groups are defined and categorised. Derek S. Hutcheson developed a database drawing on official sources to document the electoral registration and turnout of mobile EU citizens in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections and, for each EU Member State, the most recent municipal election held before 1 January 2019 in which mobile EU citizens had the right to vote under Directive 94/80/EC. While this database provides highly relevant and valuable official information on mobile EU citizens' electoral participation, this research focuses on more recent data (Hutcheson, 2020).

Contrastingly, surveys allow for large scale collection of data and tend to include migrant background. For example, the OECD provides data on voter participation as the share of eligible voters reporting to cast their ballot in the most recent parliamentary election in their country of residence, for 19 EU Member States. Participation rates are presented separately for native-born individuals, foreign-born individuals, and within the foreign-born population, settled migrants (10 years or more in the country) and recent arrivals (less than 10 years). However, 2020 is the latest year available. Furthermore, the World Values Survey (WVS) also provides information on political interest and political participation, and in particular includes a question on respondents' voting frequency. The most recent WVS wave covers 2017–2022 and includes data for 66 countries and territories. However, both sources do not have up to date information regarding voting behaviour of migrants and therefore will not be used in this report.

However, the European Social Survey (ESS) includes several questions on political interest and participation. For voting behaviour specifically, respondents are asked whether they voted in the most recent national election. The survey also captures migration background by collecting information on citizenship status, whether the respondent was born in the country, and their country of birth. Data is available for 22 EU Member States and was collected as part of the latest available European Social Survey round (ESS Round 11, fieldwork 2023-2024).

3.5 Institutional representation

In our research, we find that a limited number of countries document the migrant background of candidates or the elected in elections on official registrars. This is in Finland, Sweden, and Luxembourg.

Country	Type of data	Type of election	Categorisation of migrant
Finland	Candidates and Elected	County elections 2025	Foreign background, Finnish or Sami Speaker, Swedish speakers, Foreign-language speakers, language unknown.
	Candidates and Elected	Municipal elections 2025	Foreign background, Finnish or Sami Speaker, Swedish speakers, Foreign-language speakers, language unknown
	Candidates and Elected	Parliamentary Election 2023	Foreign background, Finnish or Sami Speaker, Swedish speakers, Foreign-language speakers, language unknown
Sweden	Nominated, elected, not elected	European Parliament elections 2024	Born in Sweden, foreign born
Luxembourg	Candidates	Municipal elections 2023	Luxembourgish and non-Luxembourgish
		European Parliament elections 2024	Luxembourgish and non-Luxembourgish

As a result, quantitative or large-scale studies on the political participation of people with migrant backgrounds remain limited, particularly in the area of institutional representation. Academic research has demonstrated there is a significant representation gap between migrants and non-migrants. At the moment, representation gap is mainly studied on a national basis. Geese (2022) demonstrate how an increase in descriptive representation of people with immigrant backgrounds in

legislative bodies of 11 Western democracies reduced the turnout gap between migrants and natives, indicating a positive effect of descriptive representation on migrant electoral engagement. However, there is a consistent deficiency in representation of people with migrant background across Europe. A comparative study of 5 European countries (Netherlands, Switzerland, UK, Germany, and Spain) shows how despite a gradual increase in the share of immigrant-origin MPs in European national parliaments from 2012 to 2021, however, there is still a consistent underrepresentation of immigrant-origin populations in all parliaments (Bergmann et al., 2025).

3.6 Non-electoral political participation

Participation in political parties, trade unions, and advocacy groups are rarely categorised according to migrant background. The existing research on participation in political organisations/networks remains largely qualitative and comparative. For example, Eggert and Pilati conduct a comparative organisational analysis on how migrant networks and political opportunity structures shape migrant political engagement across five European cities. They find that multicultural contexts foster greater political participation while assimilationist contexts can reproduce political marginalisation (Eggert & Pilati, 2014). Similarly, another comparative study investigates how funding contexts influence the opportunities of migrant civil society organisation across four cities in France and Germany. The authors find that funding can have a dual effect depending on local and institutional contexts: it may empower organisations by facilitating access to policymaking, but may also constrain political action (Lang & Badenhop, 2025). While these studies provide valuable insight into the factors shaping migrant networks, civil society, and political engagement, such research is rarely conducted using large-scale, cross-national, quantitative data.

Nonetheless, the ESS can bridge the limitations discussed above by including variables that focus on an individual's engagement in political organisations or political networks. For example, questions such as "Donated to or participated in political party or pressure group" or "Able to take active role in a political group" provide a very effective means of capturing non-electoral forms of political participation at the individual level.

3.7 Attitudes towards politics and the political system: identity, sense of belonging, trust, and political efficacy

When studying political participation, other variables are taken into consideration that capture how individuals relate to the political system beyond observable engagement behaviour. Behavioural measures are often complemented with attitudinal and relational dimensions that are closely associated with patterns of engagement.

Sense of belonging to a society or country is often discussed in research on political participation, as it is closely connected to civic and community involvement and to

measures supporting civic and political empowerment. Voting as a form of political participation is often linked to perception of political legitimacy and can strengthen individuals' sense of belonging, which is in turn associated with broader processes of political integration (Doomernik, Kraler and Reichel, 2010). At the same time, individuals who feel more attached to their community and society often appear more willing to engage actively in public matters (Zani and Barrett, 2012). A migrant's strong sense of belonging also seems to strengthen their sense of entitlement to the same rights and duties as locals, which can potentially translate into electoral turnout among migrants (Scuzzarello, 2015).

Subjective institutional trust is also considered an indicator of immigrants' political integration, particularly in terms of their political attitudes and orientation towards the political system. Like sense of belonging, the association between trust and political participation works in two directions. On the one hand, the more migrants trust institutions, the more likely they are to be politically active, from involvement in voluntary associations to more formal political engagement (Huddleston, 2017; Giugni and Grasso, 2020). On the other hand, institutional trust could also be interpreted as a political participation outcome because it is shaped by migrants' experiences with the laws, policies and practices that structure their opportunities to take part in political life. The degree of trust individuals have in institutions is closely linked to their sense of political agency, or their perceived ability to participate in politics, independently of their actual participation (OECD, 2024).

While institutional trust concerns how migrants view political institutions and their ability to access them, a related dimension is how effective they consider their own participation to be. Another relevant variable to consider in political participation is the perceived effectiveness of participation, that is, whether individuals perceive that their political and civic action is impactful. This concept is also known as political efficacy and is closely associated with individuals' willingness to take part in the political life (Zani and Barrett, 2012). Political engagement is therefore associated with individuals' expectations that their participation will achieve the desired results, although the direction of this relationship is not necessarily one-directional (Thorkelson, 2016).

These concepts capture how migrants perceive their place in society, their relationship to institutions and the effectiveness of their own participation. As such, they are typically examined using individual-level survey data.

The European Social Survey (ESS) includes indicators for sense of belonging, institutional trust and political efficacy which are primarily located within two themes: "Well-being, exclusion, religion, discrimination, identity" and "Politics". In the first theme, sense of belonging is captured by questions that assess individuals' perceived identification with the broader community, their emotional attachment to the country and Europe.. Institutional trust is captured in the "Politics" theme through survey

questions on trust in representative political institutions (such as national parliaments, political parties and politicians), as well as in the legal system and the police. Political efficacy is also covered in the “Politics” theme. It is addressed through questions on whether the political system allows people to influence politics and have a say in what the government does, as well as questions about respondents’ confidence in their ability to participate in politics, whether they find politics too complicated, how easy they think it is to take part, and whether they feel able to take an active role in a group involved with political issues.

4. The Political Participation Policy Index and the methodology

Policies are developed by governments with the expectation to lead to real-world impact in society, beyond simple outputs, which is why their assessment on societal outcomes is fundamental. With the Political Participation Policy Index, a comparative tool for assessing national models of newcomers’ political participation across the EU developed by the Migration Policy Group (MPG), this link can now be thoroughly and comparatively explored on a variety of participation outcomes. This index, which is the main independent variable of this assessment, builds on MPG’s experience with integration policy indices and on established theoretical frameworks such as Martiniello (2005)’s three political participation dimensions adopting a broad understanding of political participation that goes beyond electoral processes to include collective and unconventional forms of engagement at national and local levels. Grounded in European and international normative standards on migrant integration and human rights, the Index provides evidence-based indicators to evaluate integration policies, support mutual learning, and strengthen political participation of migrant groups. To reflect the complexity of newcomers’ political participation, the index identifies eight key dimensions, each measured through a dedicated set of indicators linking policies, practices, and outcomes.

- **Existence of a National Strategy to Increase Political Participation:** Evaluates the existence and quality of national strategies addressing migrant civic and political participation, including actions, budgets and evaluation frameworks.
- **Full Political and Civil Rights Through Citizenship:** Assesses how citizenship enables broader political participation and evaluates access, requirements and policies encouraging naturalisation.
- **Right to Vote in Elections for Foreign Citizens:** Examines electoral participation rights for third-country nationals and EU mobile citizens, emphasising disparities across member states.

- **Encouragement to Vote:** Measures member states' efforts to promote electoral participation among migrants, including outreach campaigns and voter registration simplifications.
- **Promotion of Representation in Political Life:** Focuses on migrants' rights to stand for elections and participate in political parties, evaluating their inclusion in democratic processes.
- **Representation of Migrant-Led Civil Society:** Highlights the support and political influence granted to migrant-led organizations and consultative bodies.
- **Enabling collective civic engagement:** Assesses policies that allow migrants to join trade unions and associations and to participate in protests and petitions.
- **Civic Education for a Diversifying Society:** Evaluates the presence of civic education in schools and state-supported initiatives promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity.

To explore the Index's association with migrants' political participation outcomes, we are guided by a definition of migrants, as individuals born outside their country of residence, regardless of whether they hold citizenship in that country. To align the analysis with the Political Participation Index, all outcome measures were constructed at the country level by aggregating individual-level observations into country means and proportions in the case of survey data and country averages in the case of administrative data (such as naturalisation rates). These political participation outcomes are captured through the following dimensions and variables:

- **Naturalisation:** naturalisation rates, calculated as the share of foreign citizens who have acquired citizenship.
- **Electoral participation:** reported voter turnout, calculated as the proportion of individuals having voted in the last national election.
- **Non-electoral participation:**
 - Donated to or participated in a political party or pressure group in the last 12 months, calculated as a proportion at the country level.
 - Signed a petition in the last 12 months, calculated as a proportion at the country level.
 - Taken part in a public demonstration in the last 12 months, calculated as a proportion at the country level.
- **Attitudes towards politics and the political system:**
 - Institutional trust, measured through an additive index combining trust in the national parliament, political parties, politicians, the police, and the legal system. For each country, institutional trust is measured as the country-level mean of this index, which ranges from 0 ("no trust at all") to 10 ("complete trust").
 - Sense of belonging, measured by the emotional attachment to the country of residence. It is calculated as the country-level mean, and takes a value from 0, "not emotionally attached at all", to 10, "very emotionally attached".

- Political efficacy, measured by how much the respondent perceives that the political system allows to have an influence on politics. It is measured as the country-level mean, and can take a value from 1, “not at all”, to 5, “a great deal”.
- Political agency, measured as the respondent’s confidence their own ability to participate in politics. It is once again measured as the country-level mean and takes a value from 1, “not at all confident” to 5, “completely confident”.

For all variables used, responses corresponding to “I don’t know”, “Refusal”, or “No answer” were treated as missing values and excluded from the analysis.

The association between the Political Participation Index and migrants’ political participation outcomes is examined using a set of scatterplots, plotting countries’ index scores against each outcome indicator to provide a consistent descriptive comparison across dimensions. The scatterplots were generated with R-studio based on Pearson’s R correlation coefficients drawn on data on 22 EU Member states. The ESS dataset provides data on 22 EU Member States, four fewer than those included in the Political Participation Index. These four countries, Denmark, Luxembourg, Czechia, and Romania, are included in the index but not available in the ESS data and are therefore excluded from the analysis.

Naturalisation rates are retrieved from the Eurostat database (2023), while all other variables are drawn from the ESS. The following section provides an analysis of the associations between political participation policies and migrants’ political participation outcomes as shown in the scatterplots.

5. Analysis

5.1 Naturalisation rate

As mentioned, the Political Participation Index is composed of several dimensions and indicators, reporting a specific score for each. When a political participation outcome closely matched a particular dimension or indicator, the correlation was computed using that relevant dimension or indicator rather than the overall index score. Here, we compute correlations between naturalisation rates and both the overall Political Participation Policy Index score and the Full Political and Civil Rights Through Citizenship dimension score.

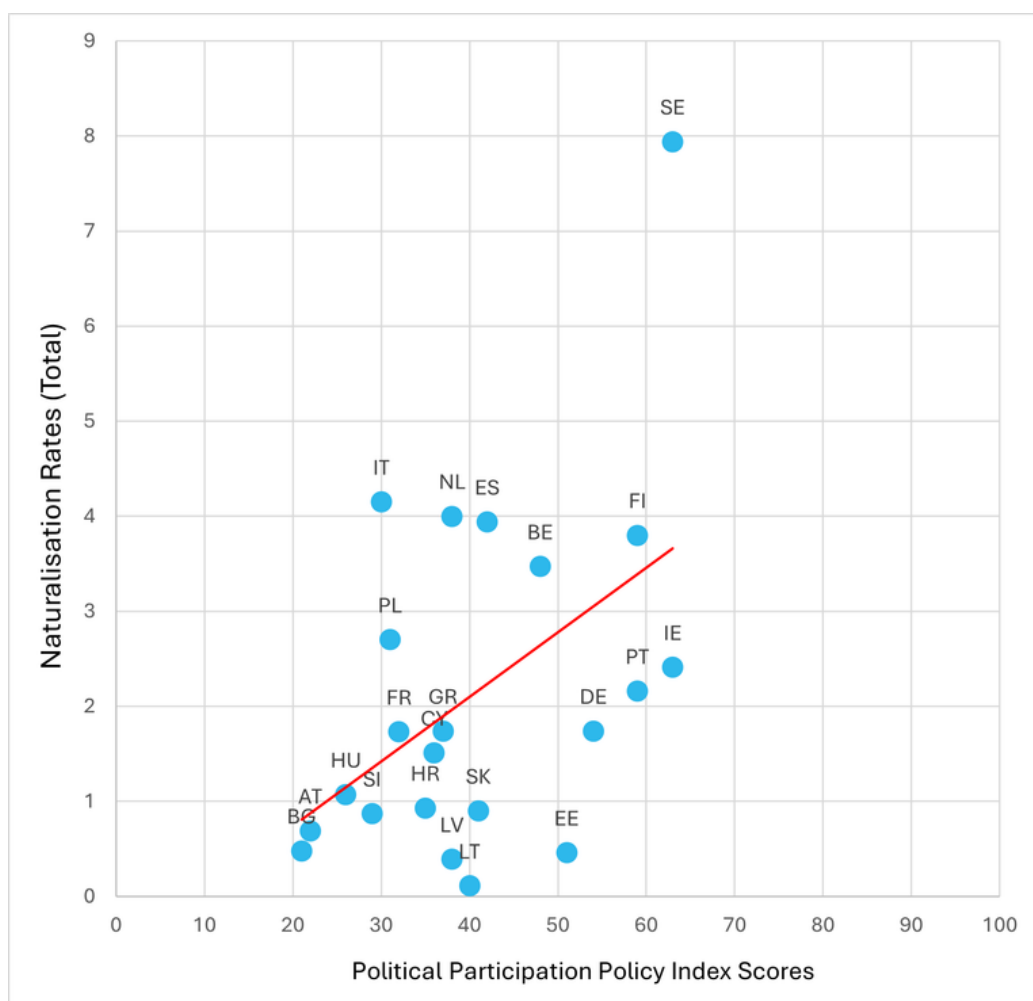


Figure 1: A Scatterplot Indicating the Relationships between the Political Participation Policy Index Score and Naturalisation Rates (total: Foreign citizens)

This scatter plot demonstrates a positive correlation between policies that promote political participation among non-citizens and naturalisation rates, $r(20) = .47$, $p = .026$. Naturalisation is the primary channel through which full political and civil rights are granted to migrants. The positive correlation between migrant political rights policies including requirements for citizenship and naturalisation can be explained through multiple factors.

Countries that have an inclusive or integrative model for migrants may have both lower barriers to naturalisation and extended political rights for migrants. For example, countries like Finland, Ireland, and Sweden score very highly on the dimension of granting full political and civil rights through citizenship on the PPP Index due to low or no language and economic requirements, low or no application fees, and predictable processes that are in place. Correspondingly, these countries also demonstrate relatively high levels of naturalisation as a direct result of these liberal policies.

Another reason may relate to political culture. Where civic belonging is defined through citizenship and voting, broader political inclusion of migrants can motivate them to obtain citizenship. Migrants are more likely to naturalise when there is political gain as well as symbolic gain (belonging/trust/security). Finally, we may also consider that countries that grant broader political rights also implement more civic education for migrants, which may further incentivise naturalisation.

The figure also illustrates that most EU member states lie close to the correlation line, indicating how policies as measured by the political participation index closely relate to naturalisation outcomes everywhere.

To have a better understanding of the role specific naturalisation policies may have played, the citizenship dimension has been disentangled from the overall index and a similar relationship with naturalisation rates were explored both for foreign citizens and EU and non-EU immigrants separately.

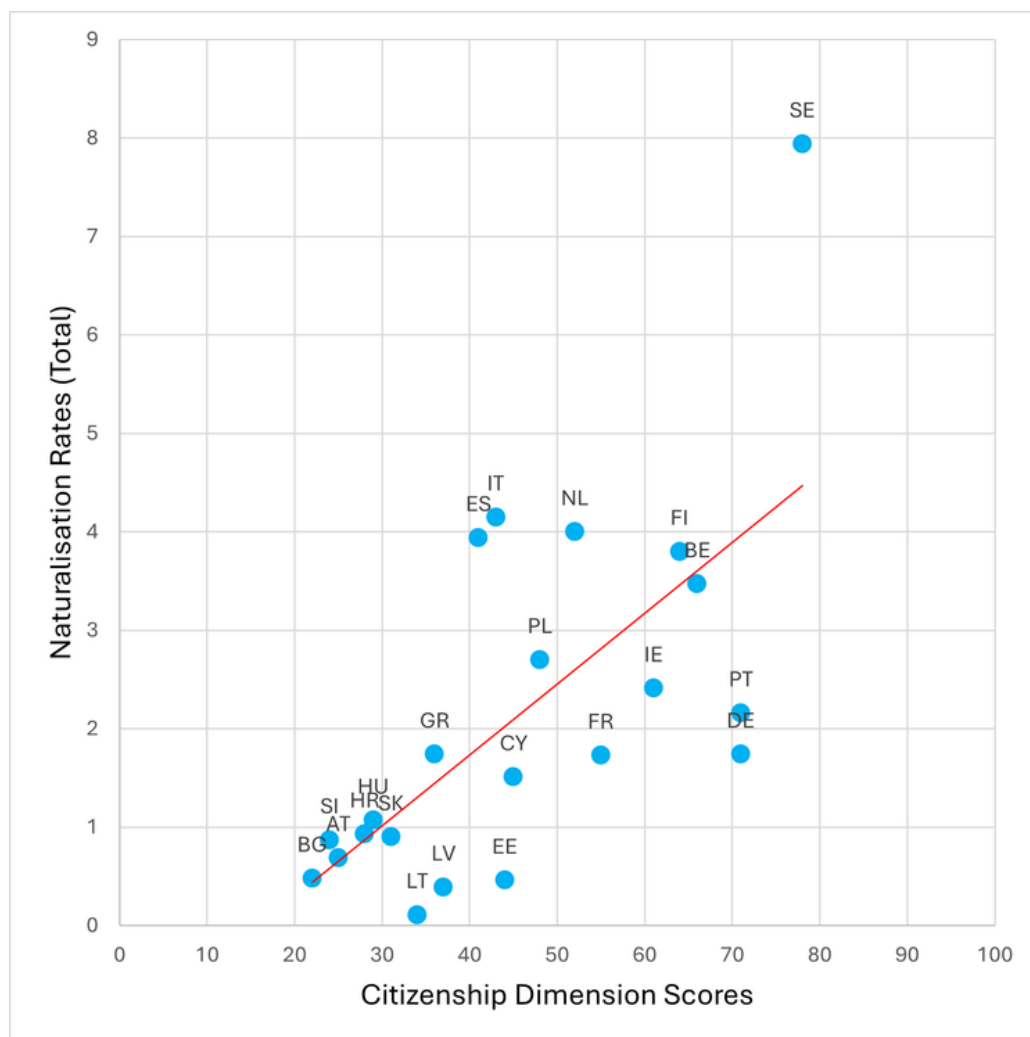


Figure 2: A Scatterplot Indicating the Relationship between the Citizenship Dimension Score and Naturalisation Rates (Total: Non-EU Citizens)

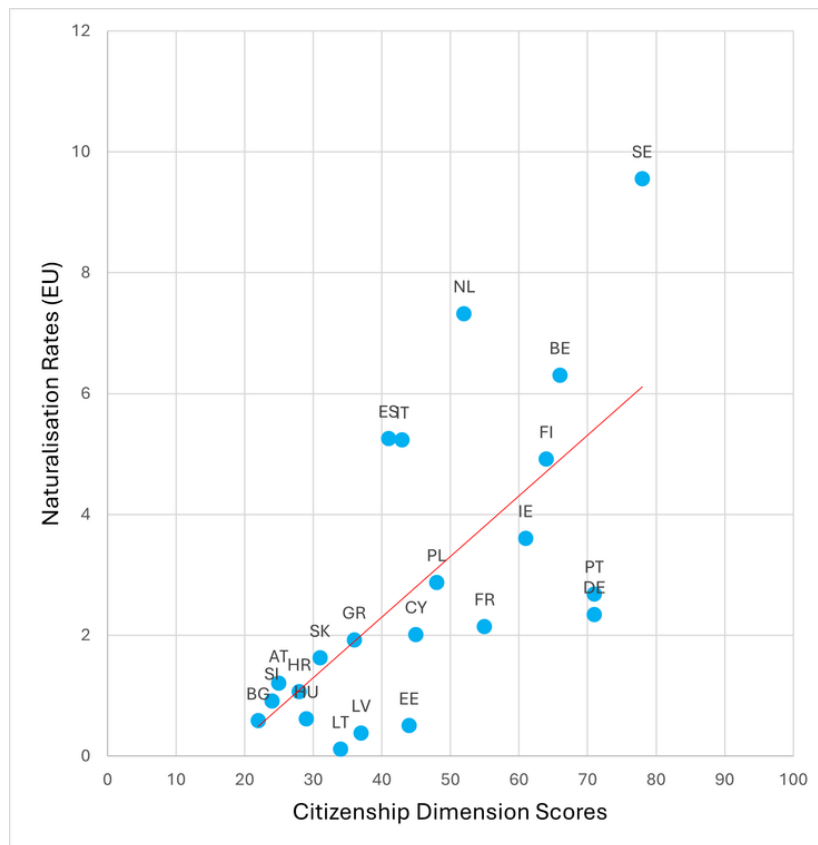


Figure 3: A Scatterplot Indicating the Relationships between the Citizenship Dimension Score and Naturalisation Rates (Total: EU Citizens)

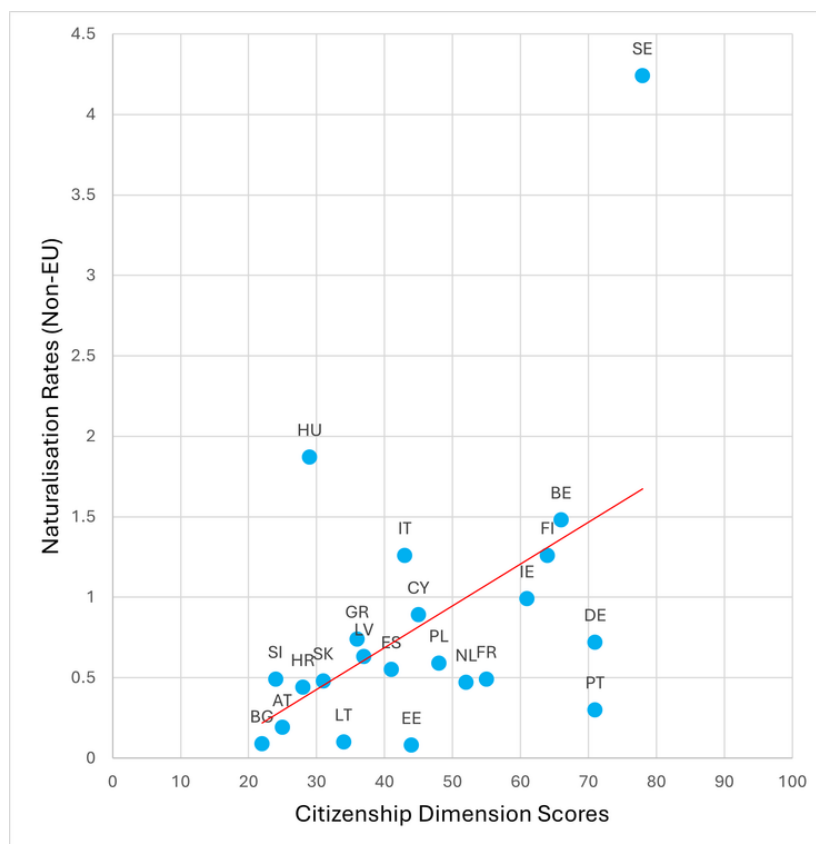


Figure 4: A Scatterplot Indicating the Relationships between the Citizenship Dimension Score and Naturalisation Rates (Total: Non-EU Citizens)

When correlating naturalisation rates for foreign citizens overall with the PPP Index dimension “Full Political and Civic Rights through Citizenship”, the graph exhibits an even stronger correlation as expected, $r(20) = .67$, $p = .000$. This supports the hypothesis that countries that have more favourable policies in granting political rights through citizenship would experience higher rates of naturalisation. Notably, this relationship is stronger for non-EU citizens than EU citizens. This may imply that favourable citizenship policies that provide effective pathways to political and civic rights provide a stronger incentive for non-EU citizens to naturalise, than EU mobile citizens.

The graphs in this section indicate that policies favourable to migrant political participation can be a strong incentive for migrants to acquire citizenship. More specifically, policies that secure political and civic rights through naturalisation remain a strong incentive for migrants to acquire citizenship of the host country. The level of incentivisation appears to vary between non-EU national and EU nationals, possibly being stronger for this non-EU migrants. Evidently, this relationship is also strongest for the member states closer to the correlation line indicating the policies as measured by this dimension account for the majority of cross-country variation.

5.2 Attitudes

Political participation can't be understood through observable behaviour alone. Analyses therefore often also consider attitudinal and relational factors, how individuals view and connect to the political system. In the following graphs, we use ESS data to understand the strength of the relationship between the variables of political trust, sense of belonging, political efficacy, political agency, and the Political Participation Policy Index.

5.2.1 Political Trust Index and PPP Index score

Institutional trust is often used as an indicator of immigrants' political integration because it reflects their attitudes and orientation towards the political system. Higher trust is associated with greater political engagement, from involvement in associations to more formal participation (Huddleston, 2017; Giugni & Grasso, 2020). Trust can be seen as an outcome shaped by migrants' experiences with laws, policies, and practices that structure their opportunities to participate. Institutional trust is also linked to perceived political agency, belief in one's ability to influence government, which is itself influenced by policies and initiatives that enable civic and political engagement (OECD, 2024). Taken together, this suggests that expanding participation opportunities can strengthen migrants' sense of influence and, in turn, their trust in institutions.

Political trust, as mentioned in the methodology, is derived from the ESS, and is measured through an additive index combining the variables of trust in the national parliament, political parties, politicians, the police, and the legal system.

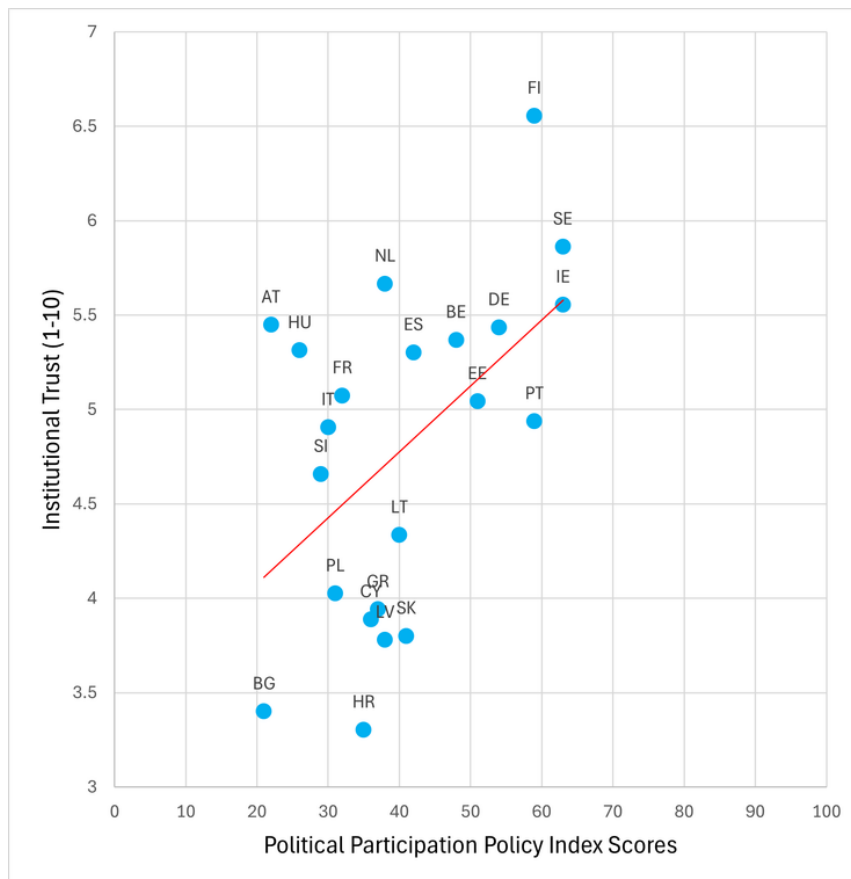


Figure 5: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between the Political Participation Policy Index Score and Political Trust

The graph illustrates that higher levels of trust towards political institutions and systems among migrants is positively associated with countries that have more favourable policies supporting migrant political participation, $r(20) = .51$, $p = .002$. The strong link is evident with countries like Denmark, Portugal, Estonia, Sweden and Ireland, which exhibit higher political trust among migrants. They generally perform exceptionally well in indicators such as civic education, representation of migrant-led civil society, and promotion of representation in political life, which may contribute to building greater trust among migrants.

Political trust among migrants can be influenced by multiple factors, such as representation, institutionalised involvement of civil society, or civic education. However, trust can also be influenced by factors beyond policy, such as current political discourse, media usage, political culture/history, and migrant demographics. Nevertheless, besides these, policies surrounding migrant participation seem to be reflected in an acknowledgement by migrants and support welcoming atmosphere resulting in higher institutional trust among migrant population, evident from this preliminary analysis.

5.2.2 Perceived political efficacy and PPP Index score

When countries protect civic rights and maintain an open civic space, they can strengthen democracy by encouraging participation and fostering political agency (OECD, n.d.). Political agency is closely linked to political efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to influence effectively the political system and therefore in the responsiveness of the political system, and is central to political integration (OECD, 2024; Anduiza & Martín, 2016). Because democratic systems depend on citizen involvement, political institutions play an important role in shaping these perceptions.

This subsection analyses the scatterplot that shows the relationship between the overall Political Participation Policy Index and perceived political efficacy. The measure of political efficacy is derived from the variable in the ESS that measures how much the respondent perceives that the political system allows them to have influence on politics.

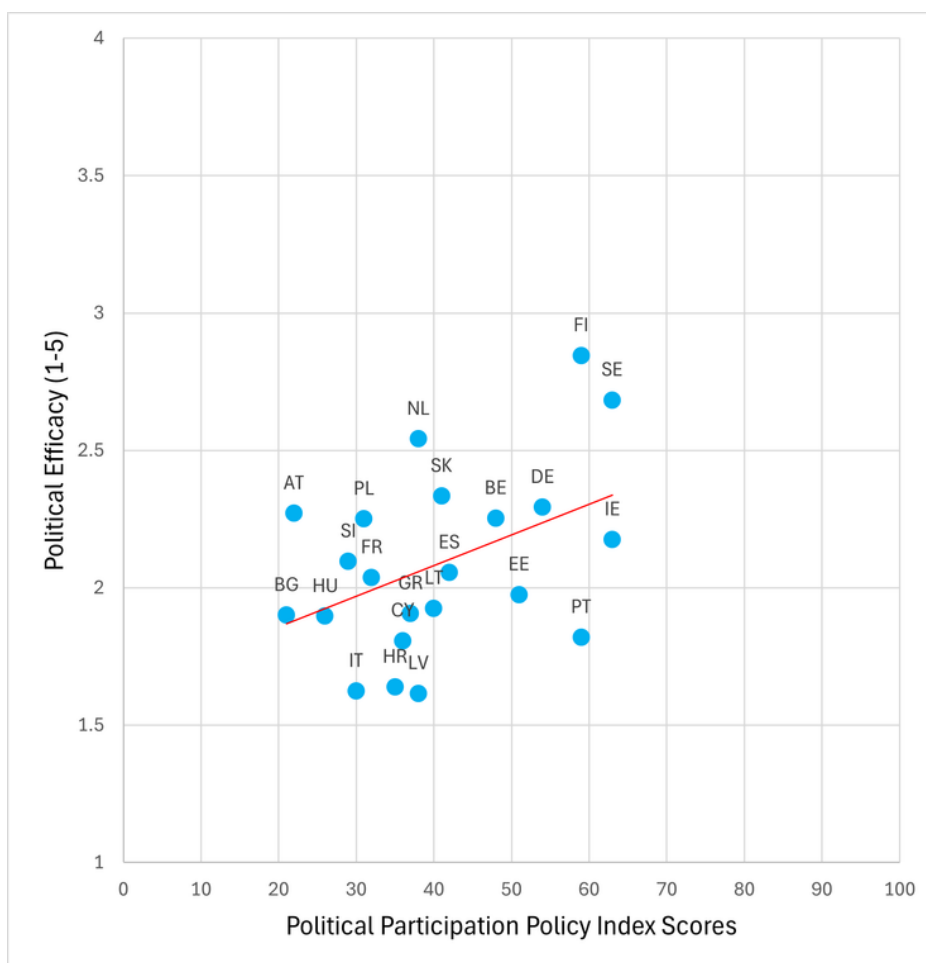


Figure 6: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between the Political Participation Policy Index

5.2.3 Political efficacy across Europe and PPP Index score

The scatterplot demonstrates a positive correlation between countries that have more favourable political participation policies for migrants and the extent to which migrants feel they have influence in the political system, $r(20) = .43$, $p = .04$. However, the range of the political efficacy variable is very low, as only 3 countries have scored above 2.5. This would indicate a systemic perception across Europe that migrants have limited influence over politics in the host country.

Migrants would feel they have more influence over politics when they have the opportunity to engage with political decisions through electoral or non-electoral channels. Notably, this could reflect on their political behaviour such as voting, representation of migrant-led civil society, and collective civic engagement. While this would also involve the dimension of 'collective civic engagement', many countries already score very highly on this issue, as this is an area in which legislation is less controversial.

Countries like Bulgaria, France, and Hungary however have limited policies that protect the right to vote for non-citizens in elections and also limited representation of migrant-led civil society. Correspondingly, these countries also demonstrate relatively low levels of belief among migrants that they have influence over their respective political systems. This is because non-electoral and electoral channels of engagement remain restricted from migrants and migrant-led civil society in these countries.

Contrastingly, countries like Sweden, Ireland, and Finland either score highly in the indicator on 'right to vote in elections for foreign citizens', or highly on the 'representation of migrant-led civil society'. On average, migrants in these countries tend to feel like they have more influence over political systems and outcomes.

Notably, Portugal remains an outlier in this regard. Despite the high score on the political participation policy index, migrants still feel that they have limited influence over politics in the country. This is striking given Portugal's strong performance in supporting representation of migrant-led civil society, as well as enabling civic engagement, and civic education. However, Portugal's approach to migrant political participation remains heavily limited by its restriction of the right to vote for non-citizens. This may indicate that electoral participation continues to be one of the most significant ways through which individuals perceive themselves as contributing to political life, at least in the context of Portugal.

Austria also remains an outlier in an opposing way. Despite having low score on the Political Participation Index, migrants in Austria report stronger beliefs that they are able to influence politics in the country. This likely indicates that there are valued avenues of political engagement that are not entirely captured by the Political Participation Policy Index.

5.2.4 Sense of belonging and PPP Index score

Sense of belonging is closely linked to civic and community engagement. Voting can both reflect perceptions of political legitimacy and strengthen belonging, which supports broader processes of political integration (Doomernik, Kraler & Reichel, 2010). Individuals who feel more attached to their community and society tend to be more willing to engage in public life (Zani & Barrett, 2012). For migrants, a strong sense of belonging can also increase feelings of entitlement to the same rights and duties as locals, potentially translating into higher electoral turnout (Scuzzarello, 2015). Policies and institutional contexts shape these dynamics with inclusive frameworks more likely to signal recognition and strengthen belonging and inclusion compared to exclusionary contexts (Ocampo, 2018).

The scatterplot below illustrates the relationship between the overall score of the Political Participation Policy Index and sense of belonging. The latter is derived from the variable in the ESS that measures emotional attachment to the country of residence on a 10 point scale, with 0 being “not emotionally attached at all”, and 10 being “very emotionally attached”.

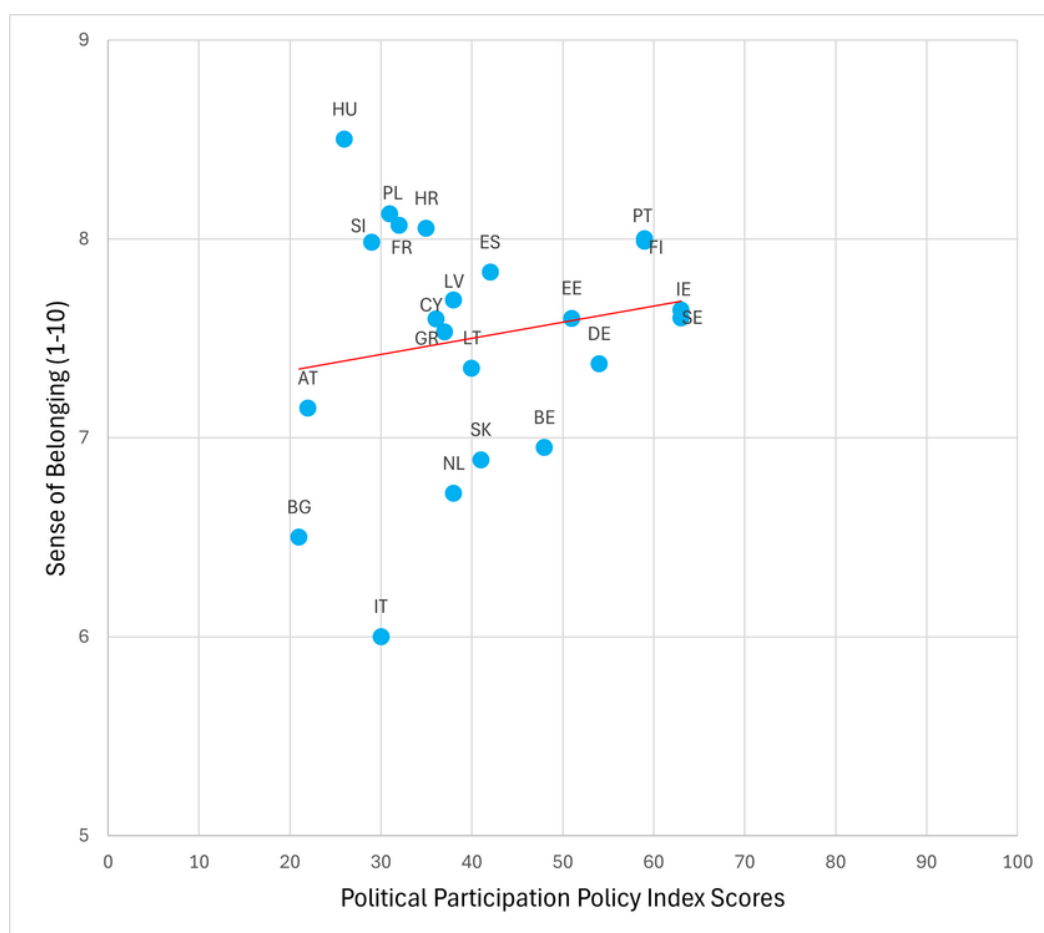


Figure 7: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between the Political Participation Policy Index Score and Sense of Belonging Across Europe

This graph shows that there is a positive but weak correlation between political participation policies and a sense of belonging, $r(20) = .17$, $p = .443$. That would imply that while policies can be an influential factor, it is not the only factor that shapes sense of belonging among migrants. This correlation appears to be statistically insignificant, but this might be due to the small sample size analysed. The graph also demonstrates that migrants generally feel a relatively strong sense of emotional attachment to the country, regardless of the state of political participation policy, with values ranging from 6 to 8.5.

A number of policies may influence sense of belonging, such as representation of migrants in political life or enabling of collective civic engagement. Countries such as Ireland and Sweden certainly score very highly in this area, which may contribute to a sense of belonging among their migrants.

However, Poland, France, Slovenia, and Croatia score very low on the area of promotion of representation in political life, representation of migrant-led civil society, and lack of state promoted cultural diversity, but nevertheless have migrants with high sense of belonging. Similarly, Hungary remains an outlier in this regard. Therefore, in these countries, sense of belonging extends beyond policies promoting representation or political participation.

There may be a number of context-specific explanations for these variations. For example, Hungary simplifies the naturalisation procedure to people born in other countries who have an ancestral connection to Hungary. This would explain why Hungary remains an outlier in this graph, as people born outside of Hungary may still feel a strong sense of belonging to the country. Demographic makeup on the migrant population in the country may also shape sense of belonging. For example, the majority of migrants in Poland are from neighbouring countries such as Germany, Ukraine, and Belarus. Thus, migrants who are perceived as less distant or more culturally similar may report higher sense of belonging than others. In addition to policies of political participation, there could be other factors affecting the sense of belonging and hence explaining the cross-national differences such as political discourse, perceived discrimination, economic integration, and institutional trust.

5.3 Electoral participation

When it comes to the foundational conventional form of political participation, namely voting, an important mediating variable is citizenship as without which voting in national elections is not possible. Citizenship acquisition is a key aspect of political integration because it provides the formal legal basis for political participation, including voting rights and electoral participation (Yavçan, Yılmaz & Gorgerino, 2024). Studies generally find a positive association between citizenship and participation in

political life, including both conventional activities (such as voting or running for office) and some unconventional forms. More inclusive citizenship regimes are associated with higher political participation even among migrants who have not yet naturalised. By signalling societal inclusivity, such regimes can foster political engagement beyond conventional forms (Hunger, 2017). Therefore, the following figure spotlights the relationship between the participation policy index and national naturalisation rates.

In the scatterplots below, voting turnout is analysed in relation to the dimensions of Full Political and Civil Rights Through Citizenship, the Encouragement to Vote, and the Right to Vote in Elections for Foreign Citizens from the Political Participation Policy Index. Figure 8 illustrates the average of all three dimensions correlated with voter turnout, by country. Figures 9, 10, and 11 correlate the individual dimensions with voter turnout. The measure for voter turnout is derived from the aggregated ESS variable measuring whether the participant voted in the last national election, taken as a country-level aggregate. Voter turnout is measured as a proportion of migrants in a given country who voted in the last election.

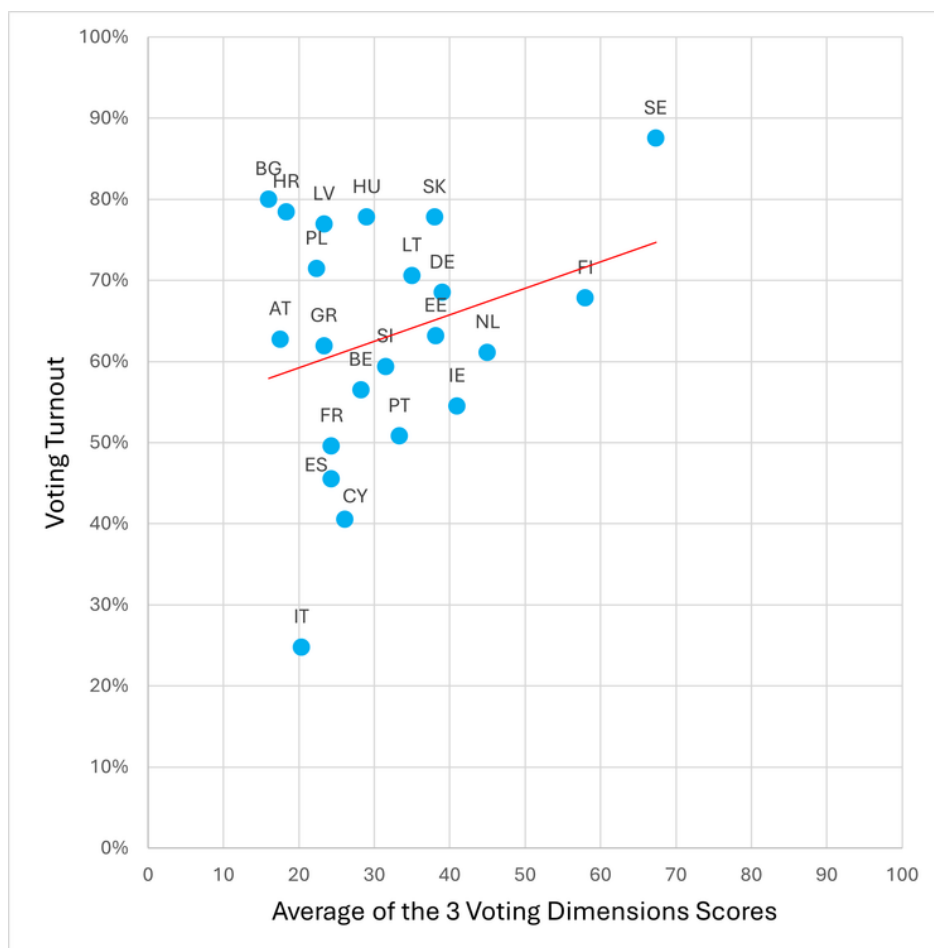


Figure 8: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between the 3 Voting Dimensions and Voter Turnout

The results of this scatterplot demonstrate a positive correlation between policy that targets and encourages voting for citizens and non-citizens alike, and engagement in elections among migrants, $r(20) = .28$, $p = .2$. In this case the correlation computed is statistically insignificant which might again be related to the small sample size of the analysis.

However, from the graph, we can also see that most countries have limited policies in protecting and encouraging electoral engagement among people with migrant background, as only Finland and Sweden score above 50 in the average of these dimensions. All other countries show relatively weak policies in this area. Countries such as France, Spain, and Cyprus score relatively low on the Political Participation Policy Index, reflecting restrictive voting rights for migrants across elections and limited governmental efforts to encourage their electoral participation. These institutional constraints are associated with lower levels of voter turnout among individuals with migrant backgrounds.

By contrast, the Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden display above-average migrant turnout. These countries also score highly on the index, particularly in terms of granting full political and civic rights through citizenship. In Finland and Sweden, migrants are additionally granted voting rights, and all three countries implement targeted initiatives to encourage migrant participation. Taken together, the combination of expanded suffrage and active mobilisation policies appears to be associated with higher levels of migrant voter turnout.

However, there is significant cross-country variation, which implies that other institutional, individual or normative factors which may influence voter turnout. In particular, formal political rights may not directly translate into higher voter engagement among migrants and their impact may be further bolstered by civic education, compulsory voting laws, homogeneity among migrant populations, or the structures of migrant network. Additionally, lower voter turnout may also be explained by governmental corruption, perceived discrimination, structures of migrant networks, or culture of voting. Another explanation may be that countries that have lower population sizes, such as Latvia or Croatia, may naturally have lower overall turnout of migrants, in absolute terms.

The graphs below show the relationship between voter turnout and the individual voting dimensions. Figure 9 illustrates a positive correlation between countries that grant the right to vote for non-nationals and voter turnout, $r(20) = .33$, $p = .13$. The correlation is statistically insignificant, which can be attributed to the small sample size that remains as a result of removing most migrants who cannot vote in national elections from the sample. As expected, countries that grant voting rights to migrants, such as Sweden, are likely to experience higher voter turnout among migrants.

However, anomalies remain, particularly with countries like Bulgaria, Croatia and Latvia, who score relatively low on the voting rights, but show high voter turnout among migrants. This may be due to group specific characteristics, as migrants in these countries may be more integrated and politically motivated, resulting in a small but highly active migrant population. However, this can also be the result of measurement effects, as the population size is small enough in these countries, that the rate of voter turnout would be high regardless of restrictive institutional contexts.

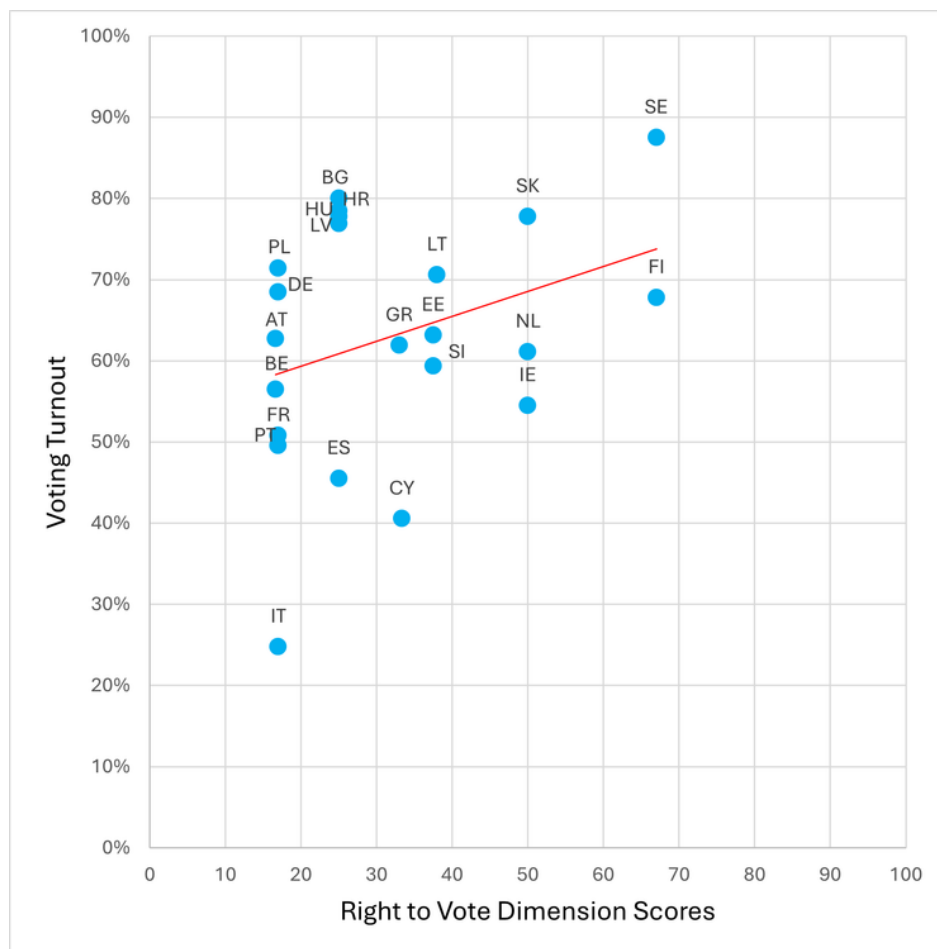


Figure 9: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between the Right to Vote Dimension and Voter Turnout

Figure 10 demonstrates a stronger positive correlation between encouragement to vote and voter turnout among migrants, $r(20) = .5$, $p = .03$. Given the strength of this correlation, this may indicate that encouragement to vote has a more pronounced effect on voter turnout among migrants than other political participation policies. The “Encouragement to Vote” dimension examines a number of factors, including voter registration procedures, promotion of turning out in elections at local, regional, national and EU-level elections and for groups of special concern, including migrant women, migrant LGBTIQ+ and migrant persons with disabilities. While there is an overall positive correlation, Eastern European countries such as Croatia, Latvia, and Bulgaria continue to be an anomaly. This may again be due to group-specific

characteristics of the migrant population or measurement effects, as mentioned earlier.

Migrants and minority groups are significantly less likely to participate in elections than their native counterparts, resulting in a significant participation gap across the EU. While EU countries generally score very low on this dimension, such policies remain incredibly consequential in supporting political integration of migrants through political engagement and civic education. Furthermore, campaigns to promote electoral participation of migrants also increases political efficacy and strengthens trust in institutions by making migrants believe that their vote and voice matter in democracy.

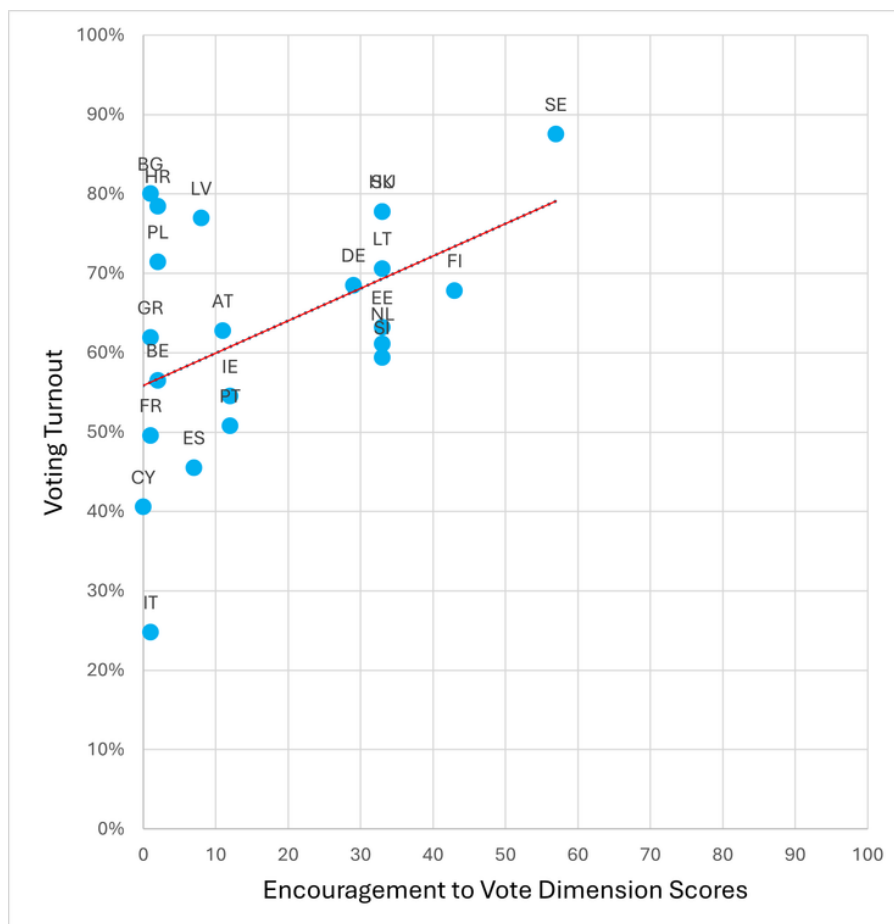


Figure 10: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between the Encouragement to Vote Dimension and Voter Turnout

Figure 11 illustrates the last of the three voting dimensions, which is Full Civic and Political Rights through Citizenship, which shows a slight negative correlation with migrant voter turnout, $r(20) = -.14$, $p = .54$. The relationship however is statistically insignificant, possibly indicating a low sample size. The negative correlation indicates that countries that have more favourable policies for granting rights through citizenship, average voting turnout among migrants may slightly reduce. However, notably there is significant cross-country variation.

One explanation for this unexpected relationship may be the presence of mediating variables. Countries with more favourable policies granting rights through citizenship may not necessarily combine this with strong policies to encourage voting or civic education among migrants. As a result, expanded access to citizenship may not be accompanied by adequate opportunities for political engagement. Weak institutional support for voter engagement with such policies, combined with more inclusive citizenship regimes, may result a higher proportion of migrants with limited political knowledge. This in turn, may produce lower voter turnout among migrants.

Another reason for this relationship may be selection effects of citizenship policies. It may be that countries that have more restrictive citizenship policies may only naturalise migrants who are well-integrated, politically motivated, or similar in characteristics to the host country population. Eastern European countries stand out in this respect too. Despite having restrictive citizenship regimes, migrants and people with migrant background show higher levels voter turnout. This may be the result of group-specific characteristics of the migrants in these countries, such as sharing similar ethnic background, strong political organisation, or previous engagement in similar political systems.

Overall, citizenship policies appear to be only weakly associated with migrant voter turnout, indicating that other variables may have a stronger influence on electoral participation.

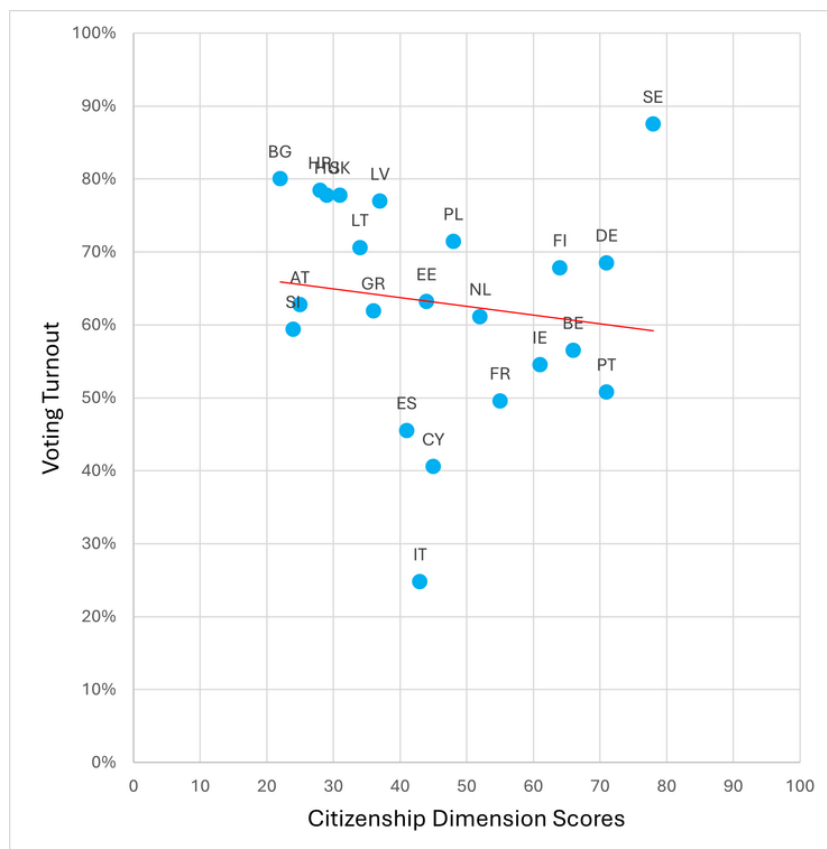


Figure 11: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationships between The Full Political And Civil Rights Through Citizenship Dimension and Voter Turnout

5.4 Non-Electoral Participation

Migrant political participation reaches beyond the confines of the electoral participation. Indeed, political agency is channelled through a range of mechanism. This may include civil society participation, protesting, representation in consultative bodies, social media political activism, strikes, boycotting, or participating in a trade union. Policies can also strongly shape the extent to which migrants engage in non-electoral political participation. For example, where institutionalised forms of political participation exist, such as extension of local voting rights, it is associated with lower levels of protest participation (Mentesoglu Tardivo, 2025). Furthermore, policies can strongly shape the conditions under which civil society thrive or face limitations. For example, Lang and Badenhop (2025) found that funding contexts and the institutionalisation of consultative forms strongly shape civil society engagement.

In this section, we unpack the relationship between political participation policies and non-electoral participation among migrants. The scatterplots below analyse the relationship between the Political Participation Policy Index, or its individual dimensions, and three forms of non-electoral participation: donation or participation in political party or pressure group; signed a petition and participated in a public demonstration. All measures for the non-electoral participation were derived from the ESS.

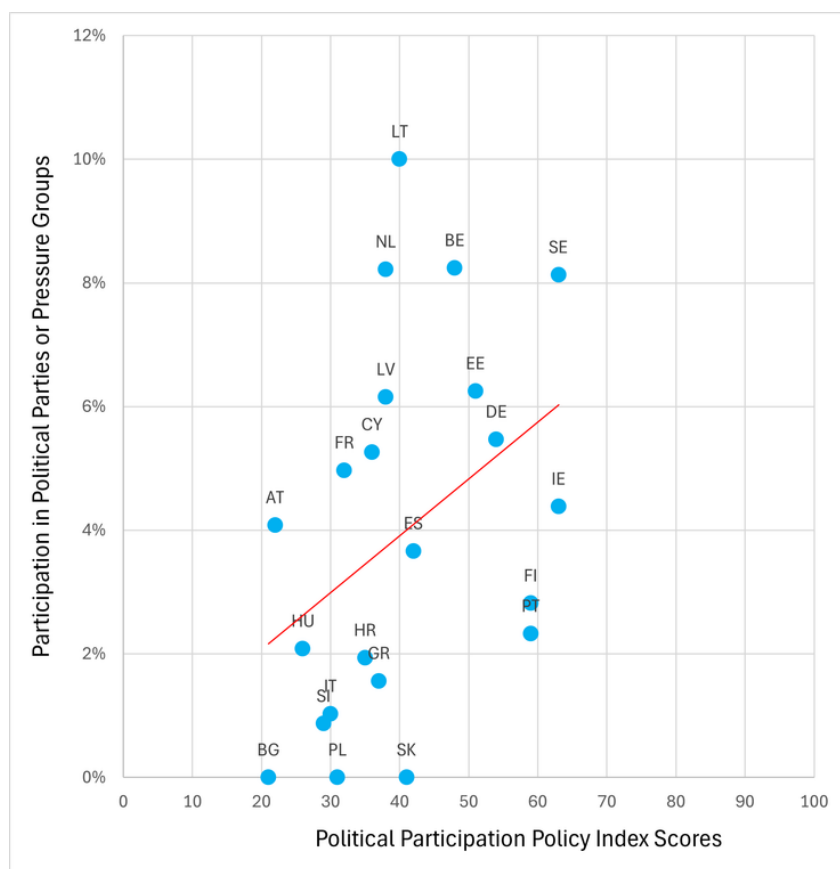


Figure 12: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationship between the Political Participation Policy Index and Participation in Political Parties or Pressure Groups

Figure 12 illustrates the relationship between the overall Political Participation Policy Index score and the proportion of migrants in the country that have donated or participated in a political party or pressure group. It shows that a positive correlation between countries with more favourable political participation policy towards migrants and migrant participation in or donation to political parties and/or pressure groups, $r(20) = .39$, $p = .06$. Furthermore, there is variation between countries, within the range of 0% and 10%. This indicates that overall, the level of migrant participation in political groups remains limited across Europe.

There may be a number of key dimensions that would be influential in shaping participation in political parties or pressure groups, such as representing migrant-led civil society and promoting migrant representation in political life. For example, countries such as Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, and Poland display very limited representation of migrant-led civil society, suggesting a lack of accessible and effective consultative bodies through which migrants can participate meaningfully. In contexts where migrant-led civil society is weak and electoral rights are restricted; migrants are less likely to engage with political parties or organised political groups.

By contrast, countries such as Belgium, Estonia, and Denmark score more highly in dimensions related to the promotion of migrant representation in political life and support for migrant-led civil society. In these cases, migrant representation appears closely linked to higher levels of political engagement, as greater opportunities for participation can encourage involvement in parties and organisations, which in turn may further strengthen representation within institutional and civil society arenas.

Outliers to this relationship are notably Portugal, Finland, and Ireland, who demonstrate relatively high scores in representation of migrants in political life and civil society, as well as the voting dimensions. These opportunities do not directly translate into active involvement of migrants in political groups. Factors such as political culture, lower traditions of grassroots civic engagement, or a cautious approach to politics among migrant communities may reduce involvement in parties or pressure groups. Additionally, temporary political dynamics, such as polarisation or the perceived effectiveness of political institutions, could influence engagement levels.

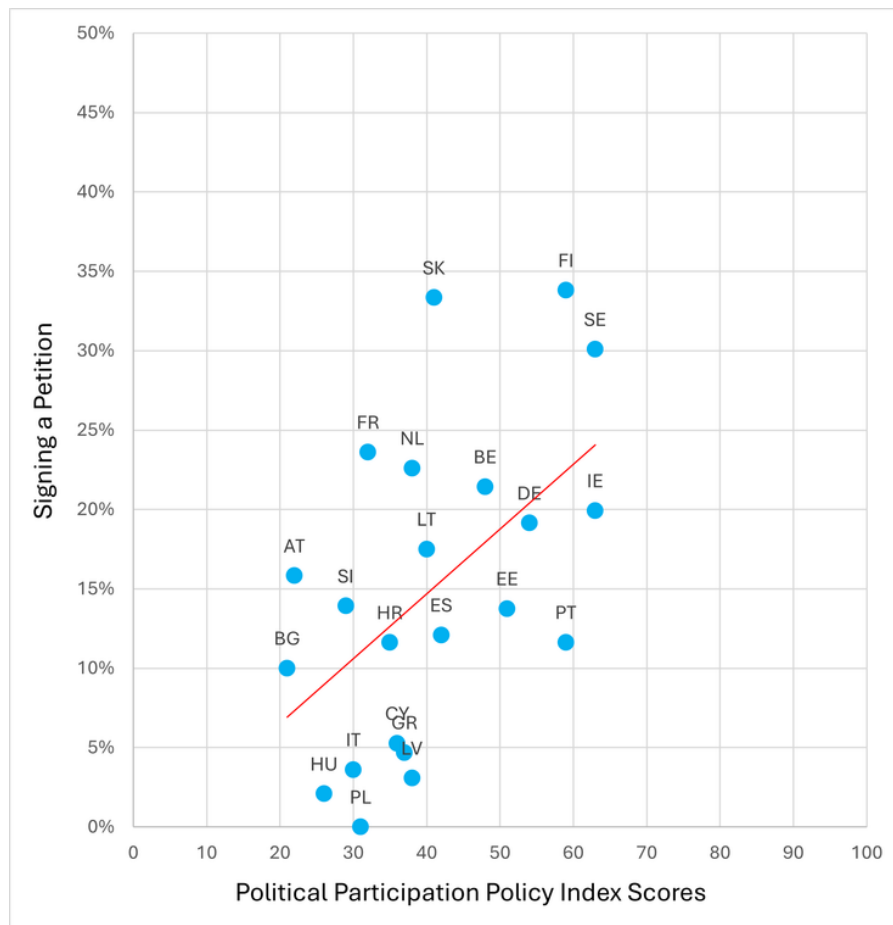


Figure 13: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationship between the Political Participation Policy Index and Signing a Petition

This graph illustrates the relationship between the proportion of migrants (measured as a percentage) who have signed a petition within the last 12 months and the overall Political Participation Policy index score. In countries where there are policies supporting migrant political participation, the self reported frequency of signing a petition is also very high , $r(20) = .52$, $p = .012$. It is also considerable that the proportion of migrants who have signed a petition remains between 0% and 30% across Europe, showing a not-insignificant level of engagement.

This relationship can be explained through several causal mechanisms. For example, promoting policy in civic education enhances motivation and knowledge of non-electoral participation route, exposing migrants to a wider range of issues that they can engage with through petitions proactively. An additional factor may be policies that ensure that political activities can be directly translated into effective change in institutional contexts. These transformation mechanisms would also be very effective in motivating engagement with signing petitions.

While there are some countries in which the proportion of migrants who have signed a petition are low, this does not necessarily imply that political participation among migrants there are low. Rather, there may be other channels through which migrants

channel their political activism. For example, in Portugal and Greece, there is a rich civil society environment through which migrants can engage. In other countries where suffrage is extended to migrants, they may choose to channel their political mobilisation into electoral routes.

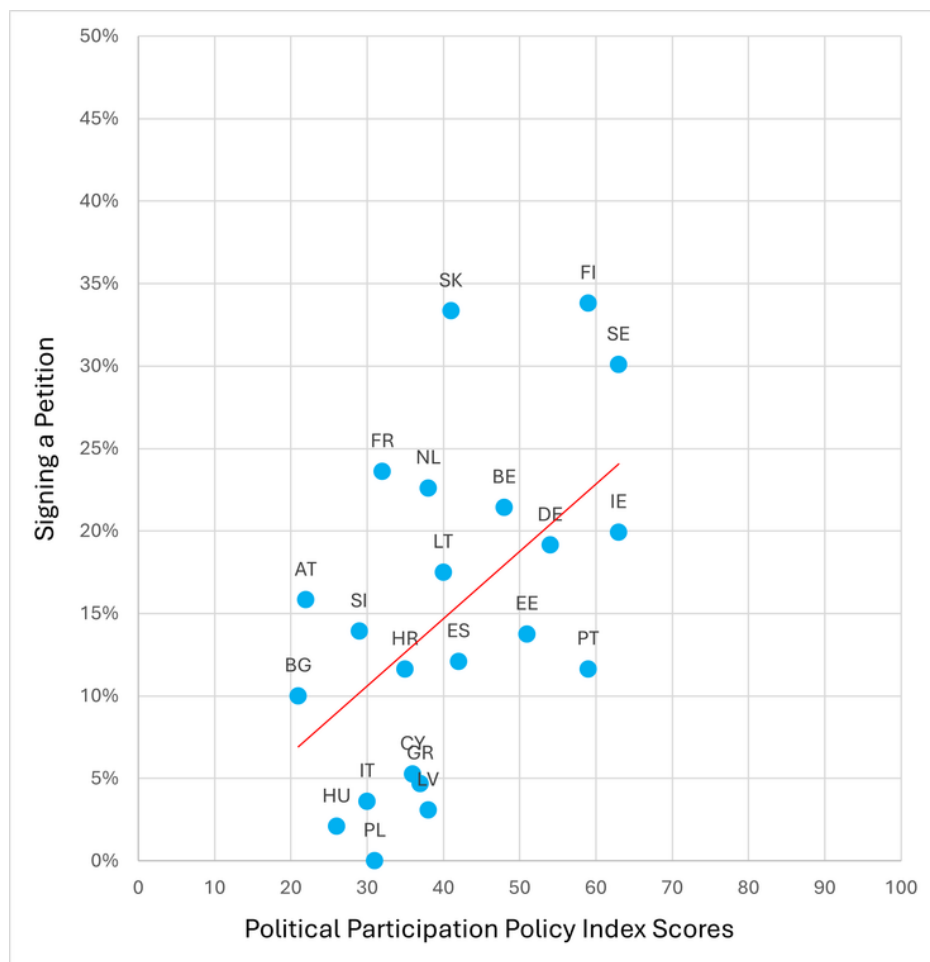


Figure 14: A Scatterplot Showing the Relationship between the Freedom of Expression and Protest Indicator Score and Participation in a Public Demonstration Across European Countries

This graph illustrates the relationship between the specific indicator of Freedom of Expression and Protest and the proportion of migrants who have participated in public demonstrations within the last year. Overall, the graph shows a positive correlation: countries with policies that protect freedom of expression tend to have higher migrant turnout in demonstrations, $r(20) = .27$, $p = .21$. This correlation is not statistically significant which might be due once again to the small sample size.

Notably, countries such as Greece, Denmark, Hungary and Slovenia may have more restrictive policies regarding freedom of expression and protest, which is reflected in relatively lower migrant engagement in public demonstrations. Conversely, countries like Spain, Lithuania, and Belgium have very favourable policies for civic engagement, and accordingly, demonstrate high levels of protest participation among migrants.

However, several countries, including Poland, Cyprus, and Latvia, are exceptions in that, despite of high scores for enabling freedom of expression and protest, they show very low turnout in public demonstrations. This may be because protest participation is influenced by factors beyond formal policies, such as political culture, trust in the effectiveness of demonstrations, population size, and the availability of other forms of civic engagement.

6. Conclusions

This report provides comparative evidence that national political participation policies are closely associated with migrants' political participation outcomes across the European Union. While the analysis remains descriptive and does not establish causal relationships, the findings consistently indicate that more inclusive and enabling policy environments are linked to higher naturalisation rates, stronger institutional trust, greater political efficacy, and higher levels of certain forms of non-electoral engagement.

At the same time, the report underscores that policy evaluation in this field is fundamentally shaped by data availability. Administrative data on migrant political participation remain fragmented, unevenly collected, and largely incomparable across Member States. Information on electoral participation is often limited to eligibility or registration rather than actual turnout, while data on institutional representation and non-electoral participation are scarce. These limitations restrict the ability to monitor progress, identify participation gaps, and assess policy impact over time.

Despite these constraints, the analysis demonstrates that political participation extends well beyond voting. Policies supporting migrant-led civil society, civic education, and collective engagement appear particularly relevant for fostering political agency and trust. However, formal rights - such as access to citizenship or voting - do not automatically translate into participation unless accompanied by active encouragement and accessible participation channels.

Strengthening migrants' political participation therefore requires not only inclusive policy frameworks, but also sustained investment in institutional practices and data systems capable of capturing the full range of participation outcomes. Improving the evidence base is a necessary condition for designing, implementing, and evaluating effective political participation policies in diverse European societies.

Policy recommendations

1. Address administrative data gaps on migrant political participation

To improve evidence-based policymaking, governments should:

- Collect and publish disaggregated data on political participation by migrant background, where legally and ethically feasible,
- Harmonise definitions of “migrant” and related categories across administrative systems,
- Expand administrative data collection beyond eligibility and registration to include participation outcomes, such as turnout and representation,
- Develop safeguards to ensure data protection and prevent misuse of sensitive information.

2. Integrate administrative and survey data through coordinated data strategies

Given current constraints, policymakers should adopt mixed-data approaches by:

- Systematically combining administrative records with high-quality survey data such as the European Social Survey,
- Supporting oversampling of migrant populations in large-scale surveys,
- Encouraging longitudinal data collection to track participation trajectories over time.

3. Develop comprehensive national strategies on migrant political participation

Member States should adopt or strengthen national strategies specifically dedicated to migrant civic and political participation by:

- Clearly defining objectives across electoral and non-electoral participation,
- Allocating dedicated and multi-annual budgets,
- Identifying responsible institutions at national and local levels,
- Including monitoring and evaluation frameworks linked to measurable outcomes.

4. Lower structural and administrative barriers to citizenship acquisition

Given the strong association between inclusive citizenship regimes and higher naturalisation, Member States should:

- Reduce excessive language, income, and residence requirements that disproportionately exclude certain migrant groups,
- Lower application fees and processing costs,
- Shorten waiting periods and improve transparency and predictability of procedures,
- Ensure access to legal and administrative support throughout the naturalisation process.

5. Expand voting rights and align them with meaningful participation opportunities

Member States should, where possible, extend local and regional voting rights to foreign residents and ensure effective participation mechanisms, including:

- Automatic or simplified voter registration for eligible non-citizens,
- Clear and multilingual information on voting rights and procedures,
- Equal access to polling infrastructure and electoral information.

6. Prioritise encouragement to vote as a core participation policy tool

To promote encouragement to vote, Member States should therefore:

- Institutionalise targeted voter outreach campaigns for migrants at all electoral levels,
- Engage local authorities, migrant organisations, and community leaders in mobilisation efforts,
- Design inclusive campaigns addressing groups facing intersecting barriers, such as migrant women, young migrants, and persons with disabilities,
- Ensure that electoral information is accessible, culturally sensitive, and available in multiple languages.

7. Strengthen civic education for a diversifying society

To ensure civic education as a lifelong process, governments should:

- Integrate inclusive civic education into school curricula, reflecting the diversity of contemporary societies,
- Support adult civic education programmes for newly arrived migrants and long-term residents,
- Combine information on rights and institutions with practical knowledge on how to participate politically,
- Partner with civil society actors to deliver community-based civic learning initiatives.

8. Support migrant-led civil society as a pillar of political participation

Policymakers should strengthen the role of migrant-led organisations by:

- Provide stable, multi-year funding rather than short-term and highly competitive grants,
- Ensure funding frameworks do not discourage advocacy, critical engagement, or political expression,
- Facilitate migrant organisations' access to policymaking through consultative bodies and participatory mechanisms,
- Promote capacity-building in leadership, policy advocacy, and organisational sustainability.

9. Protect and expand civic space and collective participation rights

Member States should ensure an open and protected civic by:

- Safeguarding freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly in law and practice,
- Removing administrative or legal barriers that disproportionately restrict migrant participation in protests, unions, and advocacy groups,
- Ensuring that public authorities engage constructively with protest and civic mobilisation rather than discouraging participation.

10. Promote representation of migrants in political and institutional life

To address persistent representation gaps, Member States should:

- Encourage political parties to adopt inclusive recruitment and candidate selection practices,
- Support mentoring, leadership, and training programmes for candidates with migrant backgrounds,
- Remove legal or administrative barriers to standing for election where possible,
- Promote diversity within public administrations and advisory bodies.

11. Embed migrant political participation in broader democratic governance agendas

Policymakers should:

- Mainstream participation objectives into democracy, rule of law, and equality strategies,
- Recognise migrant participation as a driver of democratic legitimacy and resilience,
- Frame political inclusion as an investment in social cohesion and democratic sustainability.

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