

Migrants & Refugees in Greece: Limited political and civic participation. Best practices and the role of Migrants Councils



National Report: Greece

WP2_D2.1_KMOP & Neapolis Sykeon Municipality_Greece

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Executive Summary

The current national report examines the Greek context as far as third-country nationals' (TCN) political and civic participation is considered. Methodologically, a combination of desk and field research has taken place in order to better assess the existing needs, opportunities and obstacles in TCN political participation, and the creation of migrant councils/forums. Along with the desk research, one focus group has taken place in the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykeon, with six (6) TCNs and also an interview phase with five (5) experts working on the issue, to identify TCN needs, ideas and suggestions as far as political and civic participation, integration and policy making is considered. During the desk research, best and promising practices have been examined in order to identify transferable knowledge that can facilitate the project's goal at a European level. The Report comes to an end with specific conclusions and suggestions as far as the creation of a migrant council is concerned in Greece.

Introduction

Political participation of third country nationals (TCNs) can have significant benefits as far as integration, inclusion and representation is concerned ([European Commission, 2020](#)). Both formal and non-formal ways of participation do exist along with various spaces (digital, physical). In the current analysis and for the MVH project an investigation of TCN needs and best practices took place, regarding Greece. To realise this task initially desk research was undertaken in order to examine the existing best or promising practices as far as TCN political participation. Later, the desk research data were enriched by one focus group and interviews. The group were TCNs from the Neapolis – Sykeon Municipality in the region of Thessaloniki, and the interviewees were practitioners and experts working with TCNs from the same region. The former had six (6) participants (two male and four female) from various backgrounds (Albania, Armenia, Russia) and generations. Mean age was 45.5 years and median 47. The latter group had five (5) participants (all female), coming from the municipal authorities, universities and also regional and international organisations located in Thessaloniki. The mean age was 51 years and the median was 54.

Limitations of the current study should consider: the local component regarding the field research, the dynamic character of the issue – as migration is a continuous process and the small sample sizes of the focus group. Regarding the last limitation, given the needs of the project, the sample sizes offered the necessary insights, and for that reason, the reader should take this fact into consideration. The study explored the existing literature for the current needs of TCNs as far as political participation is concerned, but it also complemented this desk research with some focus groups in the region that the project's work concentrates and expert interviews. The study is outlined as follows: first and foremost, the Greek context is investigated, followed by an examination of the political and civic participation of TCNs in the country. After that, the opportunities and the obstacles to the creation of migrant councils or forums are explored before the best, good and most promising practices are looked into. Lastly, the conclusions of the study are presented along with specific recommendations.

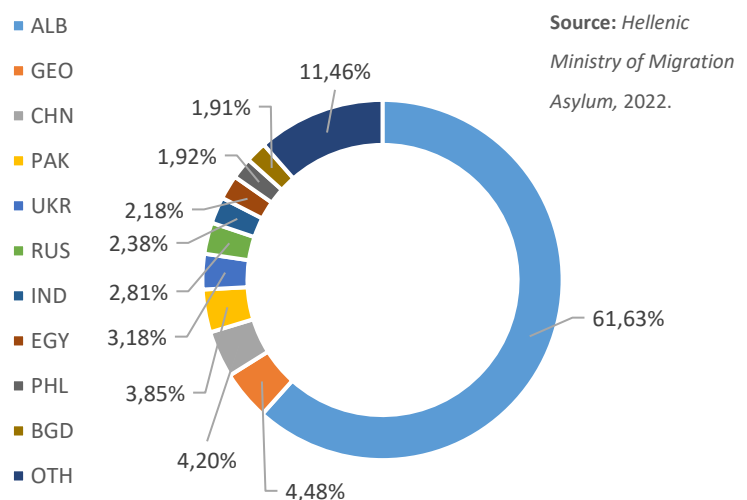
Understanding the Greek context

Migration and refugee matters have always been complex phenomena in Greece. Until the first half of the 20th century, Greece was traditionally a country of emigration to overseas countries and, in the post-war period, to the countries of Western Europe. In the late 1980s, Greece was transformed from a country of origin into a host country. The main reason has been the collapse of the existing socialist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. Initial migratory flows in the late 1980s, came mainly from the neighbouring Balkan states and the countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The dissolution of the USSR led to a proportion of the Greek minority population in the various republics migrating back to Greece due to the political and economic instability that ensued ([Voutira 2004: 538](#)). The next period that saw a dramatic increase in refugee and migratory flows was 2015 – 2016, when more than 1.000.000 refugees arrived in the country ([UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 2022](#)).

Currently, third-country nationals (TCNs) in Greece come from both migratory and refugee backgrounds.

As of May 2022, the figure for legal migrants and refugees residing in Greece was 910.523. In the category of legal migrants, 216.763 concerned EU citizens and Greek diaspora members ("Omogenis") and the rest included those coming from other countries (635.287). The respective figure for refugees was 58.473 ([Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum May 2022 Report, 2022](#)). In total, for the aforementioned period, there were 910.523 TCNs in Greece.

Graph 1: Third-country nationals (non-EU) with residence permits (N=635.287)



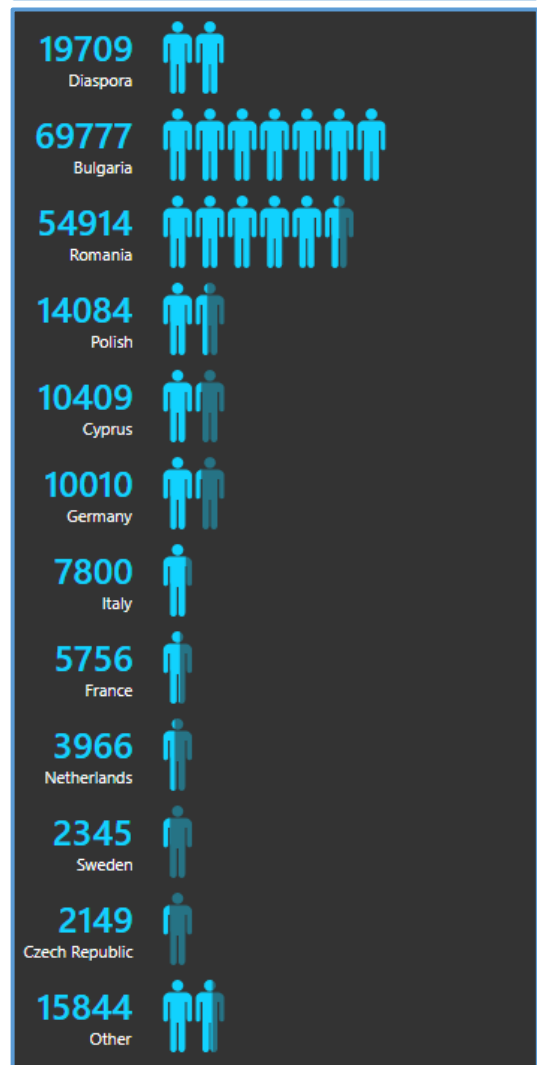
In terms of nationality breakdown (**Graph 1**), according to the Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum, the largest group of non-EU migrants comes from Albania (391.538), while the following groups come from Georgia (28.437), China (26.685), Pakistan (24.443) Ukraine (20.209), Russia (17.871), India (15.145), Egypt (13.827), Philippines (13.827) and Bangladesh (12.121). Other nationalities compose around 11% of the total migrant figure and include migrants from countries such as Jordan, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Lebanon (72.820).

Continuing the breakdown of TCNs (**Graph 2**), Bulgaria is the largest national group originating from the EU in Greece. The country is followed by Romania, Poland, Cyprus and Germany. Except for those coming from the Greek diaspora, the rest originate from Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the Czech Republic.

Lastly, among the refugees (N=58.473), the three largest groups come from Syria (21.080), Afghanistan (15.361) and Iraq (5.549). The rest of the nationalities include the Palestinian National Authority (4.218), Somalia (2.617), and Other (9.648).

Regarding regional distribution, most TCNs reside in the region of Attica (41%). The next largest groups of TCNs live in Macedonia/Thrace region (18%), followed by Peloponnese, Western Greece and the Ionian region (12%) and Thessaly – Central Greece (10%). Smaller groups of TCNs reside in the Aegean (7%), Crete (7%), and Epirus West Macedonia (3%). The aforementioned data indicate that the spatial distribution of migrants largely follows the trend of accumulation in large urban centres (Athens, Thessaloniki). The presence of migrants in rural areas has been significant due to the need for agricultural production but is gradually decreasing. While efforts are being made to disperse

Graph 2: Third-country nationals (EU and Diaspora) (N=216.763)



beneficiaries of international protection throughout Greece, many people on the move continue to live on the Northern Aegean islands ([Lampadaridi: 2021, 31](#)).

Migration Policy constitutes a critical and integral element that is inextricably linked to the overall development strategy of the country, shaping society, the economy and social cohesion. From 1998 to 2007, migrants' legalisations were used as a measure by the Greek state to decompress and regulate migrant populations (Presidential Decree 358/97, Presidential Decree 359/97 Law 2910/2001, Law 3386/2005 and Law 3536/2007). In 2014, the migration legislation was codified with the Code of Migration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014). However, the Greek legislative system regarding people on the move was particularly limited until 2016, when the state was forced to address a massive influx of refugee and migrant population for the first time in its modern history. Since then, Greece has made efforts to modify the existing domestic laws based on the European Directives, aiming to develop a uniform migration system in the countries of the European Union ([Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum, 2022](#)). Today the Greek state provides rich legislation regarding migration which is divided into six distinctive units: i) Legal Migration Service Legislation, ii) Reception and Identification Service Legislation, iii) Social Integration Legislation, iv) Asylum Seekers Protection Legislation, v) Asylum Service Legislation, and vi) Legislation of Appeals Authority (Ibid.). During the focus group and the interviews, a recurrent theme was the complicated and perplexing legal situation concerning residence permits. This complexity along with the heavy economic burden those permits entail frustrates TCNs and further enhances their feelings of insecurity.

Important institutions that promote migrants' integration are the Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) which were established by Law 4368/2016 and function as branches of Community Centers in Municipalities since 2017. Up to today, eleven MICs are active in ten Greek Municipalities, which have provided their services to 49.170 beneficiaries. Among their primary duties, MICs aim to promote volunteerism and to support beneficiaries of international protection, asylum applicants' and TCNs' participation in groups, associations, and intercultural organisations.

However, civil society organisations (CSOs) are the ones which have taken the reins in lobbying for the political rights of migrants in Greece. In this regard, a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

works toward promoting human rights. International organisations such as the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#), the [International Organization for Migration](#), the [Danish Refugee Council](#), the [International Rescue Committee](#) and [HIAS](#) are particularly active in Greece, providing legal support to migrants and refugees, among their other services. Likewise, local NGOs, such as [SolidarityNow](#), the [Greek Council for Refugees](#) (GCR), [Generation 2.0. for Rights, Equality & Diversity](#), [Praksis](#), [ARSIS](#), [HumanRights360](#), and [Humanitarian Initiative Bridges](#), work as links between the migrant populations and the Greek state, by securing their legal status and by providing information, mediation and advocacy services.

Political and civic participation of TCNs in Greece

Based on the qualitative research conducted, experts with theoretical and empirical knowledge defined political participation as *"to have the right to vote and be elected, and to have the possibility of representing one's interests and values"* (Interview M.V. civil servant, August 2022). All the experts assessed the right to vote and get voted as the *"pinnacle of participation in political life"*. Nonetheless, other ways of participation were mentioned, such as *"participation in political and/or trade unions, organisations, civil society organisations etc."* (Ibid.).

In terms of formal participation, considered as the right to vote and get elected, Greece lags behind, as TCNs do not have the right to vote at elections at any level (European, national, regional/local). This stands true beside the fact that Greece has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1970, in which the political rights of TCNs are guaranteed ([UN Human Rights, International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 1965](#)). In this context, the Greek authorities have also not signed the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, guaranteeing the rights to free expression, assembly association, voting, and creation of local consultative bodies, among others ([Council of Europe, 2022](#)). In the latest law regarding the election of the municipal and regional authorities (Law 4804/2021), the rights to vote and to stand for election are provided only to Greek and EU citizens, excluding TCNs from the aforementioned democratic processes (interestingly, TCNs had the right to vote and to stand for the local elections, from

2010 to 2014, when Law 4244/2014 recanted these rights, a "tradition" being applied up today). For the TCNs in the qualitative research, not having the right to vote meant that their voices were not heard *"since we don't have the right to vote, no one cares about our opinion"*.

The existing gaps in Greek legislation regarding the political participation of TCNs are also visible in the Migrant Integration Policy Index – MIPEX. More specifically, for 2019, the indicator capturing political participation in the country has been in the lowest rank (Critically unfavourable). The index mentions for this specific indicator that *"Greece is becoming one of the most politically exclusive democracies in the developed world, excluding foreign citizens from the democratic process."* It also adds that immigrants do not get adequately informed on political opportunities, are not consulted regularly and do not have the right to vote in local elections ([Migrant Policy Integration Index, 2020](#)). This reality comes in stark contrast with the opinion the experts had on the matter. Based on the interviews with experts in Greece, political participation of TCNs is crucial so that *"they themselves are involved in decision-making, that they represent their own communities so that they too can be included"* (Interview A.T. social scientist, August 2022). Moreover, it was also noted that reduced political participation *"limits both their interest in the public and reduces their social footprint in the country"* (Interview M.V. civil servant, August 2022). According to one of the interviewees, this situation leads some TCNs to get informed mainly about the political life in their origin country via satellite TV instead of investing their attention and interest in Greece (Interview Z.H. civil servant, August 2020).

One of the mechanisms that would, in a way, facilitate political and civic participation to a degree is that of the Migrant Integration Councils. In Greece, Migrant Integration Councils (MICs) were established for the first time with Article 78 of Law 3852/2010. In 2018, Article 79 of Law 4555/2018 replaced the previous legislation and added the dimension of the refugee population in MICs' operation, and renamed the former MICs to "Migration and Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs)" ([Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Civic Participation, 2021](#)). According to the official website of the Ministry of Interior, one MRIC ought to be established in each Greek Municipality and to operate by the City Council's decision as an advisory body of the Municipality for the strengthening of migrants' and refugees' integration in the local community ([Hellenic Ministry of Interior, 2021](#)). Each MRIC consists of five to eleven members

appointed by the relevant City Council (city councillors, representatives of relevant CSOs, and representatives selected by TCNs residing permanently in the Municipality). The duties of the MRICs include the investigation of the problems faced by TCNs living in the region, communication with public/municipal authorities, the submission of suggestions to the City Council, problem-solving efforts via consultation, and the organisation of awareness-raising events ([Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Civic Participation, 2021](#)).

Concerning the creation of unions and associations in Greece, it is a given right for Greek citizens, and even though not explicitly mentioned for TCNs, the right is indirectly derived from the Greek Constitution. More specifically, Article 12 of the Greek Constitution guarantees that Greek citizens have the right to form unions and non-profit associations without mentioning TCNs. On the other hand, articles 5 and 25 of the Constitution declare the right to political and civic participation in terms of individual rights (including the right to associate) to all those residing in Greece, including TCNs ([Hellenic Parliament, 2019](#)).

Another factor that came up during the interviews and is also traced in the existing literature is the existence of systemic racism against TCNs ([Archakis, 2018](#); [Papatzani, 2020](#)), which leads them to avoid political and civic participation. Papatzani claims that this racist violence "*transforms immigrants' daily lives in the city at the micro-scale and affects not only their social relationships, strategies and tactics of settlement but also leads to the reconstruction of urban space*" ([Papatzani, 2020, 62](#)). This actuality has led TCNs to avoid protests/demonstrations and political participation in general for fear of being targeted. This fear of stigmatisation was also evident in their endeavours towards obtaining Greek nationality or residence permit.

In short, TCNs in Greece encounter several direct and indirect constraints on their political and civic participation rights. Regarding systemic factors, the central authorities and the Greek legislation offer limited or only theoretical rights to TCNs ([Migrant Policy Integration Index, 2020](#)), and they do not facilitate access to nationality and general integration. Contextually and interconnected to the above-mentioned is the systemic racism existing in the Greek public ([Karamanidou 2016](#)), which has also been institutionalised via far-right political parties being members of the Greek Parliament (previously

"Golden Dawn", "Popular Orthodox Rally", and currently the "Greek Solution" party). Moreover, the difficult socio-economic situation makes political participation hard, as most of the TCNs have to work many hours to make a living. The combination of systemic constraints and the lack of individual incentives encompass the current unfavourable environment for TCN political participation. Those challenges are also part of the reason why the creation of migrant councils/forums could be hindered.

Opportunities and obstacles for the creation of migrant councils/forums in Greece

Understanding the opportunities and the obstacles that entail the creation of migrant councils or forums necessitates the examination of the factors that political participation would affect. In terms of opportunities, improved political/civic coordination and participation via a council or forum would capitalise on the existing civic and political potential of the TCNs in each location. Bringing together TCNs with similar interests would benefit their representation, increase their opportunities (in employment, education etc.), and support information sharing and problem-solving ([Anagnostoy et al., 2016](#)). Moreover, it should be noted that active TCN participation has the potential to benefit the city itself equally. The European Coalition of Cities Against Racism's Toolkit for Equality recognises the different but complementary benefits the creation of migrant councils and migrant citizenship forums has for the society ([European Coalition of Cities Against Racism, n.d.](#)). Specifically, the toolkit mentions the following benefits (Ibid.):

1. Support to local decision-makers through their knowledge and understanding of their own needs,
2. Support by functioning as an intermediary between city authorities and migrant populations,
3. Make TCNs feel more included, especially when they are excluded from voting rights,
4. Maintain accessible and continuous communication channels between cities and TCNs to a) enhance inhabitants' knowledge of the city's political and administrative system, b) enhance the knowledge of local politicians and civil servants concerning its non-voting inhabitants, and c)

increase the inhabitants' understanding of and adherence to the city authorities' decisions and regulations.

All in all, migrant councils/forums have the potential to create TCN communities that are less vulnerable, more resilient, better equipped to withstand shocks, and may lead to a more plural society. Nonetheless, as with all organisational attempts, those councils face specific obstacles and constraints that should be carefully assessed.

Considering the obstacles to the creation of the above-mentioned councils, those can be divided into three categories: systemic, referring to contextual issues (racism, socio-economic and legal situation), organisational (cost of creating and maintaining a group/organisation) and individual (lack of will, skills, varying political cultures). These categories serve only the purpose of simplifying the discussion below and should not be taken as absolute since they are interconnected and interdependent to a significant degree. The first category has been examined in the previous section, so the current section focuses on the rest.

In terms of organisational costs, all associations and initiatives have the following main issue, who will bear the organisational cost and if this cost will be less than the benefit it returns ([Olson, 1989](#)). Those costs may be material and non-material. Material resources can refer to equipment and venue et al. Non-material costs refer to organisational skills being put into use and time consumed. Especially the last aspect is associated with the opportunity cost, which refers to what TCNs as individuals would have to give up to obtain another good (in our case, what would be given up is time or work to obtain better representation and coordination) ([Econlib Guides, n.d.](#)). From the existing desk and qualitative research, Greek TCNs and especially the individuals from the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykeon, have to cope with several of the aforementioned factors.

First and foremost, not considering yet again the political and socio-economic constraints, the lack of linguistic fluency along with the lack of specific organisational and advocacy skills would render a possible council initiative hard to function autonomously. Moreover, the naturalisation process's high cost (in money and time) deprioritises active political and civic participation. This financial cost is a heavy

burden for TCNs, especially during the last decade which was marked by various crises. Lastly, coming back to the opportunity cost that encompasses almost all the aforementioned obstacles, some TCNs suggested that working many hours to cover basic everyday needs renders time (especially free time) a rare commodity. In this respect, it was suggested that a small financial compensation would alleviate part of the cost.

TCNs, during the focus group, made clear that they believe and are willing to participate in such initiatives. Some of them already offer aid (free education to children of families in need) on a voluntary basis and participate in some demonstrations/protests that promote their cultural and individual interests (e.g., annual Armenian genocide protest, protest against lockdown etc.). Furthermore, they identified some of their needs, such as better educational opportunities (learning new profession/obtaining new skills), improved information sharing (obtaining vital information concerning their political and legal situation) and better representation at all levels (bringing their problems up to the Greek Parliament). Further considerations concerning the creation of a migrant council, along with its risks in every step, are attached as an Annex to the current report.

Best, good and promising practices in Greece

Mapping the available practices in terms of TCN's political participation in Greece constitutes a challenge itself while their evaluation for determining whether they can be considered best, good or even promising initiatives is even harder. The political and legal framework described in the previous sections along with the rest of the obstacles put in TCN's political participation in Greece have set considerable barriers to the ones who desire to promote the said integrational aspect; and if they do so, these initiatives are hardly considered a "good practice" according to the good practices criteria the consortium partners have agreed upon. These criteria refer to the following:

- a. *Effectiveness*: It describes the degree to which the practice was successful in promoting TCN's political participation in an optimal way, e.g., whether the suggestions it made to the political authorities were integrated.

- b. *Sustainability*: It describes the degree to which the practice can be maintained in the long-term, examining the available resources (personal, financially, infrastructure, etc.), its adaptation to the social requirements of the context where it is implemented, its legal basis and procedures.
- c. *Institutional support*: It describes the degree to which there are regular, formal meetings with the respective political authority, whether the practice participates in committees, make suggestions and demands, etc.
- d. *Representation*: It describes whether the practice represents (or intends to represent) different groups of migrants, such as newly-arrived migrants, migrants that have been living in the city/country for longer; different countries of origin, people with different legal status.
- e. *Diversity and Intersectionality*: They describe whether the practice represents/is used/is accessible for all genders equally, further consider whether the practice has a particular way to attract migrant women to participate, consider the intersection of gender and age, education, income, religion, origin.
- f. *Recognition and Accessibility*: They describe the degree the practice is known among migrants (and also among politicians and all citizens), accessible and actually used by migrants (voters' turnout, participation in events, usage of services etc.) and what is the strategy to get well-known.
- g. *Reproducibility/Transferability*: It describes whether the practice can be transferred and adopted in other contexts.

Taking the aforementioned criteria into consideration, two (2) promising practices were identified, the Greek Forum of Migrants and the Greek Forum of Refugees, providing a starting point and inspiration for future relevant initiatives. The practices are meticulously described below.

1) Greek Forum of Migrants

The Greek Forum of Migrants (GFM) is a network of migrant organisations and communities in Greece. It was founded in September 2002 and functions as a union – body. Its members today number around 42 Communities - Organisations. GFM was recognised as a secondary organisation - body in 2008 under the No. 991/08 decision of Athens's Court and was registered in the special books by a / a 27301 on

14/4/2008. In December 2016, it was registered in the National Register of Greek and Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations active in matters of international protection, migration and social inclusion of the Ministry of Migration Policy. GFM's mission is to promote migrants' integration by enhancing their individual and collective responsibility and participation through collaboration with institutions, NGOs and society - on a national and European level.

GFM's Board of Directors is elected once every three years and follows the procedure described:

1. Announcement/notification to the communities – members of the GFM that elections will take place.
2. Required quorum achieved.
3. Electoral Commission's election.
4. Members of the Board of Directors are selected by the Selection Committee

Its main aims are a) promoting change in the Greek and European legal framework and policies, b) empowering migrants and their organisations to promote their integration with individual and collective responsibility, c) contributing to the fight against discrimination and racism, and d) promoting communication, collaboration and understanding between migrant communities and Greek civil society. The Greek Forum of Migrants implements a wide variety of actions and programmes and, additionally, often publishes reports and opinions on legislative and public issues concerning migrant integration; furthermore, it often organises or participates in public debates on relevant topics ([Leivaditi et al., 2020](#)).

2) [Greek Forum of Refugees](#)

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

community. The initiative started from members of the Greek Forum of Migrants, the Somali, the Sudanese and the Afghan community in Greece. The GFR is active in four levels:

- a) At local level, it participates in the MRICs, working as an advisory body to the Municipalities;
- b) At national level, it participates in national instruments and networks, such as the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), the National Council against Racism and Intolerance, and the Greek Network for the Right to Shelter and Housing;
- c) At European and international level, it is member of the Migrants Experts Group of the European Commission, the European Council of Refugees and Exiles, the International Platform of Undocumented Migrants, the European Agency for Fundamental and Human Rights, the European Civic Forum, the International Coalition against Detention, and the Refugees Ideas for Solutions in Europe network.

The Self Advocacy Team (SAT) of the GFR is a group of people with refugee, migrant and second-generation background working on proposing and implementing ideas for social and political inclusion for refugees and migrants in the Greek society. It has been active since the beginning of GFR; however, it has been considered a funded practice since 2019. Its activities revolve around i) advocating for refugees' and migrants' rights to decision-makers, ii) facilitating discussions between refugees, migrants and politicians aiming at reducing the gap between them, and iii) implementing programs regarding community empowerment and encouragement in addressing common issues they face in the Greek society. During the post-pandemic period, SAT is in a constant process of reorganisation.

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

In terms of *representation*, the GFR promotes diversity in terms of ethnicity, generation, gender, and age groups. Specifically, communities - members of the Forum with legal entity and official form are the

community of Congo, Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, China, and informal communities (or communities that are in the process of being legalised and represented through members of the GFR) are Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Burundi, Uganda, and Somalia. The Forum represents the first- and second-generation migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and in terms of gender equality, 50% of its Board members are women. The younger migrants are less engaged in their communities compared to the older ones and the ones who have been living in Greece for years, leading to less participation in the Forum.

In terms of *awareness and recognition*, the GFR constitutes an outward-looking association, aiming to raise awareness in both locals and people on the move and to change the public narrative on migrants. To do so, the Forum adapts its dissemination strategy to target groups' interests by organising sports and cultural activities/events and by intervening in emergencies (e.g., floods, fires, earthquakes) with the provision of humanitarian aid.

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

Conclusions

Active political and civic participation for TCNs has several benefits in terms of representation, protection of their rights, and increased resilience to existing and forthcoming shocks. Nonetheless, it entails some challenges and constraints that need to be initially overcome in order to promote a realistic migrant council/forum in Greece. The systemic, organisational and individual challenges examined in the

current report showcase the need for support for TCNs as far as their initial coordination is considered. Structural or systemic changes would make the endeavour more realistic; nonetheless, they cannot be actively influenced at this stage. However, it should be mentioned that besides the existing challenges, there are possibilities to engage the current dynamics locally for TCN assembly and participation. This, based on the desk and field research, along with KMOPs expertise, necessitates the following:

- Reduce organisational costs/friction by promoting/creating specific tailored guidelines that would aid TCNs in the process of creating and maintaining a forum or a council.
 - o Create at the very initial stages of a clear and precise workplan e.g., following the SMART Goals Methodology.
 - o Create smaller working groups within the council for specific topics/tasks (e.g., culture, sports, fundraising, education etc.).
 - o Include conflict management assistance for the various ethnic group participating in the council (e.g., a cultural mediator, or specific tailored information concerning conflict management in such circumstances – Cultural Shock Method).
 - o Provide legal assistance seminars to clarify rights and obligations.
- Incentivise second-generation migrants to participate in those councils as they have increased understanding of the political, institutional and social nuances of the Greek context and can potentially lead the efforts.
- Support and further promote Greek language courses, as linguistic proficiency and fluence encompass all the necessary stages of assemblage. In the case of the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykeon the existing “[School of the Greek Language](#)” could be further supported.
- Provide a specific, at a municipal level, venue for the organisation to base its meetings.
- Create CSO networks that can work with the municipal authorities to guide and support TCN council/forum creation initiatives.
- Consider incentives to TCN participants (financial and non-financial, e.g., coupons, free admission to cultural events et al.).
- Ensure a gender sensitive approach along with a fair representation of all communities, to avoid issues of favouring the needs of one group instead of the other.

- The Municipality should further promote and support cultural awareness events. Such events could be organised in schools, municipalities, organisations and private institutions and businesses in order to widely disseminate the message of active participation in the political arena.

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Annex

The following Table aims to alarm partner countries for them to mitigate the possible challenges during the setting up of the migrant councils in the next stage (WP3.4) of the MigrantVoicesHeard project.

Elected Migrant Council ([ECCAR, n.d.](#))

Foundation Steps	Risk/Challenge
Step 1 Networking with migrants, migrant associations and local NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different perceptions and views among the working group members; conflicts between migrants and migrant associations
Step 2 Political support	
Step 3 Form a working group with migrants, migrant associations, relevant local NGOs and local politicians, which will hold regular meetings and develop a concept for the migrant council's specific tasks and competencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly arrived migrants generally have little knowledge and experience concerning the political structures in the Municipality and about the rules of procedure • Fluctuation of working group members
Step 4 Take into consideration the relevant legislation and the election regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opponents do not want migrants to have an influence in the city • Politicians and local authorities are sceptical or disapprove of the initiative
Step 5 Develop the Council's Statute (including council's rights and duties, purpose, objective and rules of procedures)	

<p>Step 6 Incorporate the rights and procedures involved in the cooperation between the city council and the migrant council into the city council's laws and/or bylaws.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterargument "<i>the city does not have enough resources</i>" • Counterargument "<i>the city has more urgent tasks and worries</i>"
<p>Step 7 Complete the budgeting for the administrative office and the chairperson.</p>	
<p>Step 8 Lobby and negotiate to achieve acceptance of the initiative and the necessary majority to implement the migrant council.</p>	
<p>Step 9 Ensure the legal basis of the migrant council.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities decide to abolish the migrant council.
<p>Step 10 Instruct the local election authorities: The elections of the migrant council should be connected to the general municipal elections. The local election authority needs to create an electoral register, officially inform the eligible voters about the election, submit the candidate lists and count the votes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all migrants living in a city are officially registered • The migrant council is not known among the migrant communities in the city • Data protection issues impact the creation of an electoral register (in regards to the first election) • Adequate candidates/lists cannot be found
<p>Step 11 Inform the migrant population</p>	
<p>Step 12 Establish an administrative office at an easily accessible location</p>	<p>Finding qualified personnel for the migrant council's administrative office.</p>

Step 13 Elections

- Small voter turnout. Lack of migrants'/communities' incentive to participate, as their requests have not been acknowledged for a long time; People feel that they are wasting their time if they participate
- Criticism that a small voter turnout is a sign that the council lacks legitimacy
- Candidates present strictly ethnic lists