



EUMARGINS
On the Margins of the European Community

**On the Margins of the European Community:
Young Adults with Immigration Background in Seven European Countries**

POLICY BRIEF no. 6:

Political inclusion and participation

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Executive summary

EUMARGIN's fifth policy brief looks at the different forms of political participation of immigrants and seeks to understand the reasons that explain the low political participation of immigrants. This policy brief looks at the factors which influence participation and political inclusion of young immigrants and draws comparison and highlights differences among seven European countries.

In the first part, the policy brief explains what political participation is and why it is important to pay attention to the different forms of involvement in the political milieu, and why one should look beyond citizenship and mere voting in the elections as one of the basic forms of political participation. The second half of the policy brief elaborates the differences between EUMARGINS countries and offers substantive policy recommendations.

Introduction

For the stability and sustainability of political systems, modern democracies require constant input from all parts of society, irrespective of whether the input comes from majority population or groups with an ethnic minority background. The inclusion of all these groups into the political processes is not only important for the health of the political system *per se*, but also important in terms of socio-political integration in general, i.e. for the individual's identification with the host society. One can find many different aspects which influence political participation of young people – individual as well as structural level factors –, the aspects which will be briefly described in the following section of the policy brief. The main argument here is that all these factors apply both to the majority population as well as to immigrant and ethnic minority populations. However, the effect of these factors on the end result, this means, on their active participation and inclusion, can be quite different. For example, sometimes external factors (e.g. group identity, status of citizenship, perception of discrimination and so forth) influence minorities more than the majority population can.

One should therefore ask why it is so important to pay special attention to the political participation and political inclusion, especially of immigrants? Throughout the EUMARGINS project, we have seen that social exclusion or marginalisation of immigrants can not only be witnessed in the public discourses (EUMARGINS Policy Brief no 1), in the labour market (EUMARGINS Policy Brief no 3) or in the school system (EUMARGINS Policy Brief no 4), but it is also visible in all spheres of political life. This has been indicated firstly in our transnational comparison of seven countries (see Fangen et al., 2010) as well as observed by the empirical data collected from the respondents in our interviews.

One should also bear in mind that social exclusion or marginalisation is particularly important with regard to youth, since learning the habit of active participation and active citizenship, or being *politicised* in a positive sense of the word, usually takes place during the period of transition from youth to adulthood.

Mike Geddes (1995: 8) defines political exclusion as being isolated from the «mainstream» of political life and from decisions about one's own life taken by others. Political inclusion is related to whether one experiences the *political system as representative for oneself* (Fangen, 2009: 102-3). For young people of immigrant background it might for example be seen as decisive that some of the politicians themselves are of immigrant background or that what politicians say is experienced as relevant. Political inclusion also has to do with *participating in politics oneself* through voting or having a voice in the public sphere (ibid.). Since citizenship laws limit who is allowed to participate politically, *citizenship* is also an important aspect of political inclusion, as Janie Percy-Smith (2000: 149) underlines. Political inclusion also has to do with *the experience of being heard by* authorities, such as social welfare offices, public care institutions and schools (Fangen, 2009).

There are many facets and consequences of political exclusion and passivity. The worst case scenarios may come into being when there exists a general inability to voice the needs or wishes of the immigrants and by the immigrants. This kind of situation can possibly breed political radicalism and religious fanaticism, which in turn may create a serious threat to democratic polities (Bauböck, 2007: 12). For these reasons, promotion of civic and political activism of immigrants and ethnic minority population in general is important, as the inclusion of these groups into the political and democratic decision-making processes supports their tighter integration with the host society. This approach has also been strongly emphasised in the "*Common Agenda for Integration*" by the European Commission (2005), as well as in the "*Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level*" of the Council of Europe (1992).

Point of departure

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) brings out the European normative standard of the best practice illustrating political participation of immigrants through the following ideal-typical case (MIPEX, 2011):

"A migrant has opportunities to participate in public life which conform to Europe's highest democratic principles. The state guarantees her political liberties to form an association, even a political one, to join political parties, and thus participate in civil society. As a legal resident, she can vote and stand for local elections, just like EU-nationals. She can also vote at the regional level. At local, regional, and national levels, migrants or migrant associations independently elect representatives to structural

consultative bodies that discuss the policies that most affect them. The state implements policies that actively inform her of her political rights and offer migrant associations funding or in-kind support under the same conditions as other associations”

Taking this normative standard as a point of departure, this policy brief pays closer attention to the participation of immigrants in politics and in civil society, and by doing that seeks to also outline some of the factors which may limit political participation, inclusion and representation of immigrants, in seven European countries: Norway, Sweden, Estonia, UK, France, Italy and Spain.

Comparison between seven European countries

Local context matters when looking at the patterns of participation and inclusion in every country. In this section we will provide a brief portrait of each of the contexts and their current policy on political participation, helping us put our analysis into better perspective.

Spain

In Spain, immigrants, unless naturalised after 10 years of continued and legal residence, do not have the right to vote making them more prone to be viewed merely as objects of policies, not political agents (Feixa et al., 2010: 31). As for Hispano-Americans and other nationalities linked historically to Spain this is reduced to two years of continued and legal residence. This is evidenced by Jade, a 19 year old young immigrant born in Melilla (a Spanish enclave in North Africa) and living in Spain since she was five. She astutely observes that immigrants can seek employment, yet are excluded from basic civil rights such as voting, *“...I can work but I cannot vote. I cannot vote here for two more years here in the country and that is too many years, huh?”* Foreigners coming from the EU and countries that have signed reciprocity agreements are allowed to participate in local elections, but not national elections (ibid.).

There are social groups demanding a more constructive discourse on immigrant policies, as well as introducing the right to vote. Unfortunately, this often does not translate into mainstream politics since traditional political parties are under pressure to retain power and those who are seen to favour immigrant rights are often at risk of losing elections (ibid.). This is not to say that immigrant discourse does not exist, but the tendency is to focus on immigration rather than addressing the rights and needs of immigrants. Also, efforts to promote voting rights of immigrants by political parties are at present also hindered by the complexities involved in the reforms of the electoral regime that would be required and the relevant constitutional constraints. (ibid.).

On the relationship between ethnic minorities, associations and socio-cultural integration there exists a high degree of ignorance among people who belong to ethnic minorities regarding the few associations that try to channel their interests. Among the factors that explain why associations that do exist have difficulties in achieving their aims, we find the following: a lack of interest from people who are supposed to reflect themselves in these associations, a lack of time to dedicate to associative activities, lack of resources and the fact that they are not regarded as valid actors by other institutions (Feixa et al., 2010: 38). Statistics show that only a small number of young people are involved in youth associations, and this is also the case with young foreigners. On the other hand, this does not include informal modalities of young social behaviours such as gangs or groups that gather around specific interests (like music or artistic creativity) (ibid.).

When we compare young immigrants to their Spanish peers (49 per cent), a higher rate of young non-Spaniards (53 per cent) are not 'interested in politics at all' (Romani et al., 2011: 150). This illustrates that young immigrants and young people, in general, are starting to distance themselves from the traditional types of political participation and are more active in the unconventional forms of engagement as well as the building of informal social networks. What there is no doubt about is the weight of informal participation among native youth as well as migrants, for example the "Movimiento 15-M," a series of ongoing peaceful demonstrations that started in 2011. The origin can be traced to social networks and True Democracy NOW (Democracia Real YA) among other civilian digital platforms and associations. The protestors include youth from all ethnic backgrounds and walks of life that demand radical changes in Spanish politics, since they do not consider themselves to be represented by any traditional party.

The United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom full political rights is only secured if an immigrant becomes a citizen and this requires a minimum of five years of legal stay (Fangen and Mohn 2010b: 249). The control of immigration divides people who pass through the UK borders into two categories: those who have 'right of abode' in the UK and who can live, work and move in and out of the country as they wish, and those who require permission in order to enter and remain in the UK. Those who seek to settle in Britain and achieve status of 'indefinite leave to remain' which ensures the right to live in Britain indefinitely have to pass a test that is a pathway to citizenship (Back and Sinha, 2010: 60). While full social and political rights, including access to social welfare, are only secured if an immigrant becomes a UK citizen, people with an 'indefinite leave to remain' in Britain are entitled to vote. Those from the EU irrespective of immigration status may vote in local elections, but not national elections.

Despite the vulnerabilities produced through the structural position of young migrants our study has also shown how young people draw on culturally diverse and complex social networks to make London a hospitable home. Mardoche did not face the same immigration uncertainties as others mentioned previously but faced many different difficulties. Born in Khinshasa, Congo, Mardoche migrated to London as a refugee at the age of 8. He is now 18. Mardoche does not remember much about the immigration process as he was young then but he does have UK citizen status now.

By dint of his own efforts, friends, community and youth workers he was able to rebuild his life and make a home in London. He feels attached to people from a whole range of backgrounds and has created diverse social networks through the use of youth and social services as well as commitment to his community youth club. This illustrates how immigration status and welfare support can help young migrants achieve a measure of social inclusion even in the most difficult of circumstances. Sometimes the most marginalized young migrants, asylum seekers who are prohibited from working legally that are most committed to bridging social divide through voluntary work, neighbourliness and fostering community cohesion (Sinha and Back, 2011).

For many, immigration status plays an important role in determining the opportunities and the political and social rights of immigrants, whereas undocumented young migrants and unsuccessful asylum seekers are in the most marginalised position (Back and Sinha, 2010: 57). After the so-called "death" of multiculturalism in large part linked to the London bombings in 2005, one can observe a shift in political agenda concerned with community cohesion and the social inclusion of minorities (Back and Sinha, 2010: 73). We can see that this is emerging into a situation where minority communities are being positioned differently within a new hierarchy of belonging, although not uncommon in our other national contexts as well (Back and Sinha, 2012).

The case of Juan de la Cruz clearly illustrates this hierarchy in social relations. He is a 26 year old young man from the Philippines residing in the UK as a student participating in the 'Earn While You Learn' programme. He describes not having any white friends at college or work and ascribes this to the hierarchal order that places foreigners that are not EU citizens in an inferior position, along with stereotypes held towards people with South Asian origins (Fangen et al., 2011: 164).

Estonia

Estonia is still coping with its past with a large proportion of its population (approximately 35 per cent) being immigrants or ethnic minorities (Kallas and Kaldur, 2010: 84), deriving from the occupation and Soviet era immigration into the country. The participation rate in different organisations or associations is higher among ethnic Estonians. One of the hurdles against participation and integration of immigrants into society is the issue of non-citizenship or statelessness, as well as low levels of interaction between the majority and immigrant populations - partly due to the legacy

of the segregated bilingual educational system (Estonian-language and Russian-language schools). Those minorities with Estonian citizenship enjoy the same political and social rights as ethnic Estonians. Minorities with undetermined citizenship are not afforded the same rights and tend to feel excluded. Young Russian-speaking persons tend to feel a greater sense of discrimination and exclusion, their social networks and interest in politics is weaker and their trust towards institutions is lower than found among their ethnic Estonian counterparts (Kallas and Kaldur, 2010: 105).

This situation is illustrated by the case of Oxana (Strömpl, 2011), who was born in Ukraine, and came to Estonia six years ago. She is usually understood as being Russian, which she accepts, since most of her relatives were Russian. The dilemma of her ethnic identity is reflected when it comes to the question of politics. During the riots among Russian youth in Estonia in 2007, she discovered that her sympathy lay with the Estonian side of the conflict:

“Estonians who know me they know that I am Ukrainian, because I tell to everyone that I am Ukrainian and run with their flag. And I invite my course mates to our Ukrainian actions. They not think I am Russian. But those Russians with whom I communicate, by the way, I have much less friends among Estonians than among Russians, but they think I am their own. For example, when there were those actions in April 2007 in Tallinn, then my friend told me about them and about the reaction of the police, etc. but I kept silence, I didn’t like this talk, but I also didn’t argue with her, because she is Russian and feels as a Russian. Then she offered me a situation: if there will be a fighting between Estonian and Russian, you will be on the Russians side? But I am not sure. Not knowing the reasons of fighting, I’ll be probably on the Estonian side.”

The sharp division between *us* and *them* along the Russian and Estonian division causes troubles for those young people of Russian origin who want to just be accepted as part of Estonian society, and this sharp division might also be the main reason why many young people of ethnic minority background in Estonia choose not to involve themselves in politics.

Norway

In Norway, only immigrants with Norwegian citizenship can vote in the Parliamentary elections, but immigrants who have lived in Norway for three years continuously are entitled to vote in local elections. All political parties that are part of the parliamentary have representatives with immigrant background. In the Labour Party more than half of the representatives in Oslo during the local election in 2011 were from ethnic minority background (including both immigrants and descendants).

Young adult immigrants and descendants choose various ways of acting out the role of a Norwegian citizen (Fangen, 2007, Fangen and Mohn, 2010b: 153). Some engage in Norwegian political parties, others engage in political organizations specifically directed towards their own ethnic group, and others again choose to focus on the situation in their country of origin (Fangen, 2008: 161). Several sources show that

immigrants with non-Western backgrounds have had on average 20–30 per cent lower electoral participation than the rest of the population during the last decade (Aalandslid, 2006, Rogstad, 2007: 39, Fangen and Mohn 2010a: 156-7).

Also many of the young immigrants we have interviewed for the EUMARGINS project participate in party politics. Some of them do, however, experience that even though their participation is wanted by the parties in order to display their multicultural representation, their voices are not necessarily heard, as seen in the case of Mustafa, a 21-year-old law student with a Kurdish Turkish background. He states that his father was ‘partly into politics’ in Turkey before emigrating. Mustafa himself has been politically active in two different youth parties. He was also placed on one of the party’s electoral lists of candidates as they wanted a minority representative. He was primarily a part of the youth socialist party, but says he has been on many sides. He says he has read racist books and agreed with them. For Mustafa, strategic considerations and the wish to be politically active in the future made him ignore the humiliating aspect of being used as simply a name on a list of candidates (Fangen, 2009: 104). To participate in the rules of the game as a strategy for inclusion does not avoid one feeling excluded:

“Last year I was in Young Liberals and I was part of the city council. [...] They did not call me because they liked me so well; they said that right to my face. They just wanted my name on the list, because it sounded foreign. [...] When they called me and said: «yes, your name, it sounds different, and we want it on the list», I just said «all right». I mean it is fine. Why not? I had nothing to lose. [...]. I will improve my standing within the party by having been on the list. That was what I was thinking, that it could give me an advantage, better than nothing, they think of me as different. It was the opportunities I was thinking of”.

The political participation of this young man is signed by the difference that the *us* and *them* boundary delimits. However in this case, the Liberal party uses “difference” to sell an image that suits their interests, and Mustafa, conscious of the limits of his “integration”, sees it as an opportunity to situate himself in the host society (Romani, et al., 2011: 151).

Statistics from the elections in 2001 and 2005 illustrate that Norwegians with a minority background, generally speaking, have a lower turnout than the overall population. In 2005, 53 per cent of the minority population voted, whereas the total turnout was 77.4 per cent. Young adults have a lower turnout among both ethnic Norwegians and those with a minority background. However, whereas the lowest turnout is the youngest in the population (ages 18-21) in the total population, the lowest turnout within the minority sample is among those aged 22-25 (Statistics Norway, 2009). Here the turnout was as low as 29 per cent in 2001 and 36 per cent in 2005.

But there are some interesting exceptions among immigrant groups, for instance, that young Norwegian-Somalis are as politically interested and active (measured by voting behavior) as young adults of no immigrant background (Fangen, 2007: 430).

Young adult immigrants and descendants choose various ways of acting out the role of a citizen. Some engage in Norwegian political parties, others engage in political organizations specifically directed towards their own ethnic group and others choose to focus on the situation in their country of origin (Fangen and Mohn 2010a: 157). In general, there is a low degree of influence on Norwegian society among non-Western immigrants and descendants. This is reflected in their low rates of voting, their low rates of participation in the voluntary sector, and the lack of 'bridging' capital associated with the work of immigrant organizations.

Often political participation, or lack thereof, can be linked to where one feels at home. For example, Kamran, a 23 year old who immigrated from Iran when he was one year old, would vote in elections in Iran, but not in Norway. He says that he has come to Norway as a guest and has to follow their rules. Kamran explains why he chooses not to participate politically:

"I feel that (since) I have come to Norway, I must follow their rules. They can do whatever they want. They follow their rules anyway. That's how I think."

Overall, we see that young adult descendants are less isolated from the population with a Norwegian background than their immigrant parents were and after having lived in the country for a while, most young immigrants have built up social networks, both with other immigrants and with Norwegians (Fangen and Mohn, 2010a: 156). However, the political participation of non-Western immigrants as a whole is low, as are their rates of attempts to influence political decisions informally (Fangen and Mohn, 2010a: 157).

Sweden

Sweden has been defined as one of the most liberal citizenship regimes in Europe, since the required duration of stay is only five years, and there is neither a requirement of language fluency nor requirements of knowledge of the Swedish society (Fangen et al., 2010, Midtbøen, 2008). According to the European Social Survey 2003, which included and compared 21 countries, young people in Sweden are very interested and involved in politics (Hammarén, 2010: 221). Young people born abroad do not necessarily feel more alienated from politics than do young people born in Sweden (ibid.). However, when comparing the foreign born with native Swedes (with two native Swedish parents), there is a difference in election turnout (67 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively) (Integrationsverket, 2006, Hammarén, 2010: 222). Furthermore, young people with a Swedish background are more likely to be involved and active in an association and in political activities than those with an immigrant background (Hammarén, 2010: 222). For young migrants, taking part in Swedish organisations

might be a way to feel more Swedish, as was the case with Amon (Herz, 2011). Through a social worker, he got in touch with the Swedish Scouts:

“Yes now I perceive it in a Swedish way, when I began with Scouts, which are Swedish Scouts. Those are real Swedes. I mean there is no difference in being able to socialize with a Swedish person. [...] The second thing was the Scouts; that was when I started working with Swedish Scouts, with real Swedish people who have been Scouts for a long time, since they were kids.”

By participating in the Scouts, Amon received specialized training. He became deeply interested in the Scout activities and he describes his relationship with this association as “something that woke him up.” He recognizes the importance of the Scout activities in ensuring that children do not get involved in crime. Based on his extensive motivation and training, he was given greater responsibilities within the organization and now works there.

A study from 2001 showed that young people with a Swedish background were active participants (as opposed to passive members) in associations (29 per cent) to a larger degree than those with an immigrant background (14 per cent) (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2007, Hammarén, 2010: 222). However, Amon breaks with this picture. It seems that by being atypical in this sense, he gets a higher feeling of being included.

The number of foreign-born individuals nominated and elected to the Swedish Parliament is increasing (Hammarén, 2010: 222). Yet the proportion is generally higher among those who are nominated than among those who are actually elected. The proportion of foreign-born members of parliament doubled between 1998 and 2002. In 2002, 10 per cent of those nominated were foreign-born, and 90 per cent were native Swedes (ibid.).

In sum, young people born abroad do not necessarily feel more excluded from politics than young people born in Sweden. However, when comparing the foreign-born with native Swedes, there is a major difference in election turnout. Furthermore, young people with a Swedish background are more likely to be involved and active in an association and in political activities than those with an immigrant background (ibid.).

Italy

In terms of participation in Italy, young adult immigrants face a double edged sword of disadvantage: firstly, as foreigners they are excluded from formal participation and secondly, all individuals who are not Italian citizens must detach themselves from their parents’ residence permit and apply for an individual one, fulfilling all the criteria necessary at the age of 18. This situation forces young individuals to seek a job rather than entering further education (Alzetta et al., 2010: 127).

Italy lacks specific policies useful to promote the socio-political participation of immigrants, and particularly young immigrants. Such gaps are usually filled by

organized social groups and associations, often managed by immigrant groups themselves (Alzetta et al., 2010: 126). This determines opportunities for some specific immigrant groups or individuals to take an active part in Italian social and political life by creating an extended social network (Alzetta et al., 2010: 126-127).

It is clear that social networks and NGOs are the basis for immigrant participation in Italy, since formal access into political life is not open to immigrants. This was the case with Mahmoud, who was born in Morocco and immigrated to Genoa in Italy at the age of 11. Because his father wanted him to start earning money to support the family at the age of 14, Mahmoud moved to live on his own at the age of 15 in order to be able to pursue school. Instead of becoming isolated, Mahmoud has struggled hard to integrate, and in this way he has both Italian and Moroccan friends and has become an active member of *Nuovi Profili* Association that collects Italian and non-Italian origin youths to work together to improve socio-cultural integration of “diverse” people in Italian society (Alzetta, 2011). In the end he considers himself very strong and lucky at the same time. While talking about his life he points out and stresses two main things:

“First of all I did it all on my own because what I got from my family since I have arrive in Italy is 20 euro and that is it!... secondly I am very lucky as well as by best Moroccan friend with whom I was at high school left studies, went to drug dealing and ended up in jail for a 6 years sentence...maybe I might have ended up similarly...who knows...!”

For those young immigrants not involved in such associations, many often feel an *us* and *them* mentality exists and for some it is an insurmountable barrier to cross.

For instance, Edrin, a 25 year old male, in response to the question of participating expresses his frustration, *“...it would be ok if Italian society were not so discriminatory and racist. The point is the fact that I am no one here and I have to keep in mind always that my rights are not the same as yours...”* It is evident that he feels like he is a victim of racism and discrimination and has no interest in being involved in any form of participation in Italian society (Romani et al., 2011: 152).

Specific socio-cultural and economic conditions make transition to adulthood a quite complicated and delayed social process in Italy in comparison to other European countries (Alzetta, 2010: 133-4). From this perspective, young immigrants are more likely to be exposed to deprivation due to a lack of any kind of freedom and choice (Dal Lago, 1999). In some cases, difficult economic conditions and emulation of Italians’ consumption habits push young adult immigrants into adulthood far before their Italian counterparts. Any non-Italian resident in Italy must apply for an individual permit at the age of 18. This stipulation has made many young adult immigrants force themselves into the labour market in order to fulfill the basic requirements for permit eligibility, now set by the 2002 Bossi/Fini law in terms of economic self-sufficiency and full employment conditions (Alzetta, 2010: 134). This difficult situation also contributes to young migrants’ feeling alienated and excluded from political participation.

France

Similar to most other European countries, access to political rights in France is tied to the process of citizenship acquisition. Immigrants can vote and be voted only when they become French. However, the second generation immigrants automatically become French when they reach 18 years old (Ferry et al., 2010: 188).

While the French state grants formal rights through universalistic pronouncement of republicanism or imperialism, the rules of nationality and the discourses of assimilation weakens access to social rights (Fangen et al., 2010: 254). The assimilationist approach in France is related to the fact that immigration is considered permanent and immigrants' otherness as temporary (Malmberg-Heimonen and Julkunen, 2006: 576). Immigrants' otherness will ultimately be ignored or discouraged.

In France, a law prohibits racial discrimination by forbidding taking into account of 'ethnic' features. However, this law has not prevented young migrants and descendants from feeling alienated and discriminated against, something which was clearly demonstrated by the 2005 riots which occurred simultaneously in many French cities. These riots can also be seen as an informal form of political participation. This way of demanding the right to have a voice illustrates the fact that young people with immigrant background in France face more difficult inclusion patterns than the majority population (Fangen, 2010: 145). One of the main problems is being trapped within the working-class suburbs, while youngsters are getting to start favouring temporary participation, liable to switch from one activity to another (Ferry et al., 2010).

Although many of the rioters in 2005 constituted the second generation, there are also many descendants who feel socially included. Hervé (a 24 year old) was born in France, while his parents were Moroccan (Ferry et al., 2011). He is active in local politics. He has gradually become interested in politics, largely due to the influence of his relatives to convince him of the importance as well as the knowledge that since he is a French citizen there is no doubt regarding his capacity for political action.

"Gradually, I have been attracted by actuality. That is developed a political conscience more important than I had before. So, there are my parents who talked to me you must be citizen etc. you must vote etc. In 2002, I asked my friends for having going vote, they told no. This policy conscience, it has been developed since that. So it was an evil for a good. There was this affair about the Haut du Lièvre's renovation, I have gone to see the municipal elected people, it was deep in the municipal campaign. I have taken my card during one year".

The challenge of political participation in France lies in the ability of political culture and discourse to incorporate ethnic claims. Islam, which is the most recently incorporated religion, has suffered from marginalisation and stigmatisation (Ferry et al., 2010: 195). The state only recognizes individual rights while minority groups and

their collective rights as such are denied. This leads to the marginalisation of the political expression of immigrants wishing to articulate specific ethnic, cultural or religious group interests. Many Muslims who are not EU citizens remain on the periphery, particularly in France, where they do not have the right to vote in local elections even though many are settled long-term residents. Those Muslims who vote in elections also remain less likely than non-Muslims who vote to feel that they can influence decisions (Muslims in Europe, 2009).

What affects political participation and inclusion of immigrants?

Previous studies have shown that in general, immigrants tend to have lower levels of political participation than the majority population (Quintelier, 2009, Odmalm, 2006, this being especially true for the electoral participation. In all our seven selected countries, voting rates of immigrants are significantly lower than of the majority population – in some countries by half (i.e. Estonia) and in some countries even by two-thirds (i.e. Spain). At the same time, immigrant groups may be equally active, or sometimes even slightly more active, for example, in the areas of civic participation or symbolic action (Huddleston, 2009, Bauböck, 2007). It could then be argued that the differences in the rate of actions taken in the different forms of political participation or civic activism, and between immigrants and the majority population, can be seen to depend more on the type of participation.

The difficulty which makes comparing different countries complicated is the fact that the list of factors (independent variables) which influence political participation or political inclusion of immigrants is very extensive, as well as the fact that there exist many forms of participation. On the one hand we can categorize and make a distinction between *conventional* and *unconventional* forms of political participation (Almond, Verba 1989; Inglehart, 1999; Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2005):¹ conventional (*classical*) forms being voting in the elections, organizing and participating in electoral campaigns, contact with politicians, interest towards politics and discussing political issues, being a member of political party or other politically oriented associations; while unconventional forms include taking part of the demonstrations, strikes or protests, boycotting goods or services for the political reasons (a clear example here is the changes in consumer behaviour in some Arab countries after the Danish cartoon controversy), signing petitions, or discussing political topics on blogs or on other social networks of internet and so forth.

Secondly, bearing this kind of differentiation in mind, then there is also a set of more or less directly observable and measurable factors that explain the difference in the forms and rates of political participation. In particular, observed among young

¹ Robert Putnam has also distinguished between (1) *political participation* as an electoral and non-electoral behaviour, and (2) *political attentiveness* as showing interest towards politics and the frequency of discussing the political issues.

immigrants, variables such as socio-economic situation, sense of identification or sense of group-identity, gender, mother tongue, and, most importantly, the status of citizenship are seen to be influencing the participation of young immigrants more than any other factors (Quintelier, 2009). Socio-economic situation may be especially relevant regarding immigrants, since different forms of participation require different amount of individual resources (time, money or skills). For example, interest in politics by reading about politics or listening to the news may be less time and resource-demanding than organising electoral campaigns or participating in organisations. And while immigrants are especially vulnerable by having fewer individual and social resources (Wingens et al., 2011), we can presume that regular political participation or civic engagement is lower in the activities which demand higher amounts of resources.

Thirdly, the forms of political participation and the extent to which immigrants exercise these forms is also very dependent on the overall political system and specific institutional arrangements in a particular context (Odmalm, 2006), i.e. on so called political opportunity structures, which substantially affect the success or failure of an individual's political participation and his or her inclusion. It has been noted that the extent and form of political participation, especially among immigrants, depend largely on the structure of political opportunities (Martiniello, 2005: 6).

Therefore, inclusion or participation in politics can be defined in various ways. For this policy brief, we have chosen four different forms of political inclusion and activism which allows us to draw some conclusions on the political participation of immigrants: interest in politics, being member of political party or organisation, taking part in demonstrations and voting in elections.

Political inclusion and activism of immigrants

Interest in politics or political attentiveness in general has been one of the main factors which influence political participation or inclusion, and this has also been seen to be one of the basic preconditions for the full participation in political life. Yet there is very little comparable information available for the assessment of participation or political inclusion in different European countries, especially when one wishes to draw comparisons between the majority and immigrant populations. However, data from the European Social Survey (ESS 2011) is one of the few valuable resources which offer insight into this issue, and which allows us to compare all seven EUMARGINS countries.

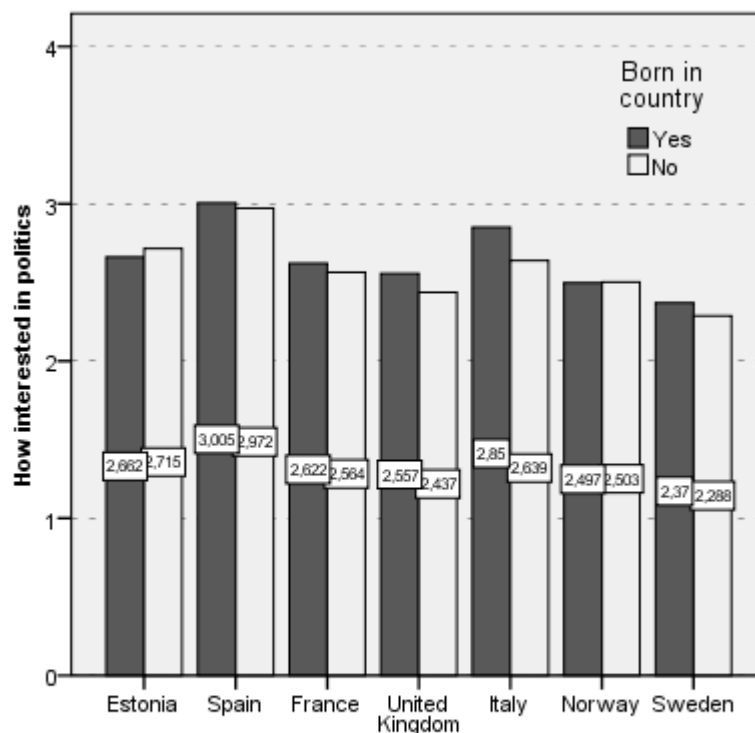
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Interest in politics varies in different countries. In average, when we compare our selected countries, the average political interest of the immigrant populations in

² Data presented in this policy brief is collected from the ESS Rounds 2-4 (2004-2008), with an exception of Italy where the data used is from Rounds 1-3 (2002-2006). For the simplification of the analysis, main variable used to identify immigrants was chosen '*born in country*'.

Norway, Sweden and United Kingdom show the highest rates, whereas the immigrant populations in France, Estonia, Italy and Spain show the lowest rates (see Graph 1). However, the data also illustrates that the differences between the majority and immigrant populations are not significant although in some countries immigrants tend to be slightly more interested in politics. This means that instead of expecting significant gaps between the majority and immigrant populations, we can see relatively similar levels of interest in politics between these two groups.

Graph 1. Interest in politics in seven countries (lower score is better)



1 = Very interested; 2 = Quite interested; 3 = Hardly interested; 4 = Not at all interested

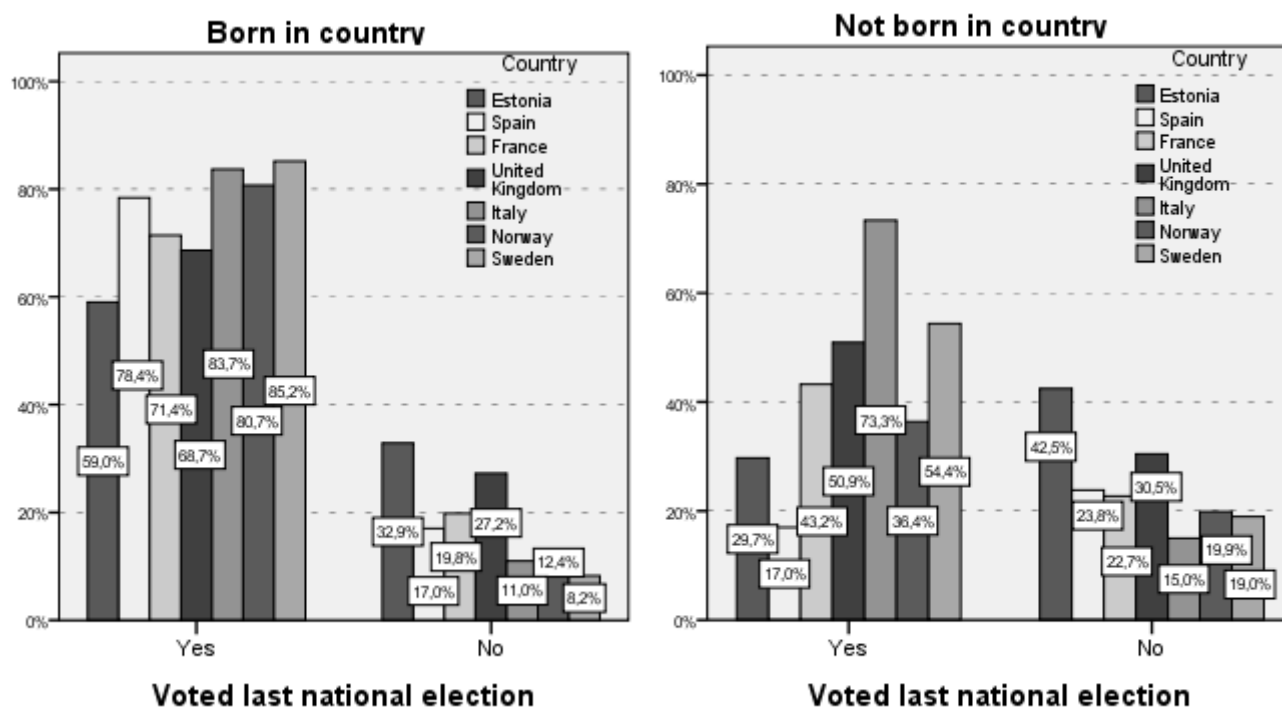
The population in Spain is showing the least interest in politics, both for those born in the country and for those who have immigrated. Other findings support this tendency, where even at the level of young people approximately 50 per cent of young non-immigrants and immigrants in Spain are not interested at all in politics (Romani et al., 2011: 150). Norway and Sweden represent the countries where the political interest is highest – both among non-immigrants and among immigrants. Additionally, Italy is the country with the largest difference in interest in politics between those born in the country and those who have immigrated, while Norway is the country with the least difference.

Interest in politics is admittedly a basic starting point when analysing the political inclusion of immigrants – having a low interest in politics, one could argue, hinders an individual's motivation for mobilising him or herself actively in the political processes, and thus leads to lower levels of participation in the political sphere. Therefore, by taking into account the preposition that interest in politics is somewhat similar among majority population and immigrants in countries under the study, we should also look into how the different forms of "real" participation differ among these groups. Voting in elections gives us a much better indicator for doing so.

Voting in elections has been the main classical indicator for political participation and inclusion (see more for example Dalton, 2004 or Norris, 2005). Electoral behaviour (voting or standing in elections) is a direct way with which immigrants can pursue their political and civic interests, and generally it gives immigrants more representation in the political process as well as legitimisation for the political process. Although voting is usually dependent on the status of citizenship (i.e. non-naturalized immigrants have a limited capability for voting in elections) or on the residency (i.e. in Estonia as well as in several other European countries, for non-citizens, a long-term residency is needed for voting in local elections), it nonetheless indicates the rates of successful political incorporation and integration of immigrants with the society.

From the previous graph we saw that interest in politics among immigrants is not only similar to the majority population, but in one case higher (Estonia). Yet when looking at the voting in elections, one can see significant differences between countries as well as within countries (see Graph 2).

Graph 2. Voting in the elections ('not eligible' to vote excluded)



In every country participating in our project, voting rates of immigrants are significantly lower than the majority population – in some countries by half (i.e. Estonia) and in some countries even by two-thirds (i.e. Spain). Although these numbers do not show the real turnout of participation, it nevertheless indicates that voting rates of immigrants in these selected countries *are* lower than the ones of majority population. However, one should not conclude from this data that immigrants, especially young immigrants, are not at all interested in taking part in the political life. Based on the EUMARGINS interviews, non-participation in elections is not always the sign of indifference towards the political sphere, but more of a conscious choice of not choosing or not supporting the politicians whom they consider antipathetic (Romani et al., 2011).

Taking this into account, one should therefore bear in mind that countries do not differ only in terms of the rate of participation of immigrants (as seen in the graph above). One should also consider the fact that depending on what issues are hotly debated in a particular election, participation may vary substantially from one election to another. Different immigrant groups or ethnic minorities within a single country may also have different rates of political or civic participation – for example, Turks may show higher turnout than Surinamese and Moroccans (Bauböck, 2007) or Somalis in Norway, compared with other immigrant groups, participate in elections at very high rates (Fangen et al., 2010). Yet this is not specific only to Europe, for example in the United States during the 2008 presidential elections, African-Americans as well as Asians and Latin Americans had a bigger electoral turnout than the whites (Putnam et al., 2008).

The fact that participation rates differ even among immigrant groups in a single country illustrates that immigrants do not always cast "ethnic votes" based on their shared ethnic belonging.³

Civic involvement of immigrants is important for several reasons, both as a tool to represent group interests and as a forum for political and cultural socialization that creates social networks and communities. Putnam's theory of social capital argues that the majority of these organizations generate 'bonding,' integrating immigrant groups internally as opposed to 'bridging' the gap with the society at large (Fangen and Mohn, 2010: 157a).

Studies have shown that the lack of social capital and social trust may be related to the rise of (Muslim) radicalism (Jacobs and Tillie, 2010, but also see Bauböck, 2007). Therefore a strong linking of immigrants with organisations (whether ethnic or non-ethnic associations)⁴ is important for their integration into society. On the other hand, civic and community engagement can also be seen to be one of the first forms of politics which are employed by the immigrants, since newcomers – regardless of their status of citizenship – can always participate in civic activities. For those immigrants who are not afforded full rights to participate in elections, being civically engaged is useful for them to create, express and maintain a collective identity (DeSipio, 2011).⁵ Marlou Schrover and Floris Vermeulen (2005) and Jose Moya (2005: 839) underline that immigrant organizations *by definition* depend on and articulate collective identities (Fangen, 2007: 417). According to them, the principal stimulus for associational activity does not derive from cultural backgrounds of emigrants or the civic habits of their hosts but rather from a more universal source: the migration process itself. This process tends to intensify and sharpen collective identity (ibid.).

This was also visible in some of the EUMARGINS interviews. For Madiha, a 19 year old girl born in Morocco and living in Italy, civic participation is important for her, especially in the form of helping people from her community that are in need of aid and support; it is a way of formalizing and making practical use of cultural belonging that is ethnically oriented:

"There are a lot of families who are in need of help. Because I am working just the afternoon in the travel agency, every morning I have the task to help someone who is in need. I mean to help those who face problems that we had faced when we have just arrived and which I try to resolve. For example, I accompany them to hospitals, to the

³ One important element of political participation is the informal social networks of young immigrants (Romani et al. 2011), especially when it comes to voting.

⁴ Some studies indicate (see Strömblad and Adman 2010) that distinctively ethnic associations may not increase immigrant political engagement more than participation in non-ethnic associations. But what is more important, they also do not deepen political or civic passivity.

⁵ In Norway, Sweden and Estonia young migrants with residence permit but without citizenship are allowed all rights of participation, since the only additional right they get with the citizenship is the right to vote in parliamentary elections (Fangen and Mohn, 2010b: 252-3).

municipality or to schools and I complete applications because most of them ignore about the Italian language or I do the interpreter for them and so on. To sum up I am presenting my assistance to them, especially to women because they don't know exactly where to go for requiring certain services. I advise them always to let their children study because that is what is important here. I usually feel that I did something good in my life and I hope that all will succeed to reach what they dream..."

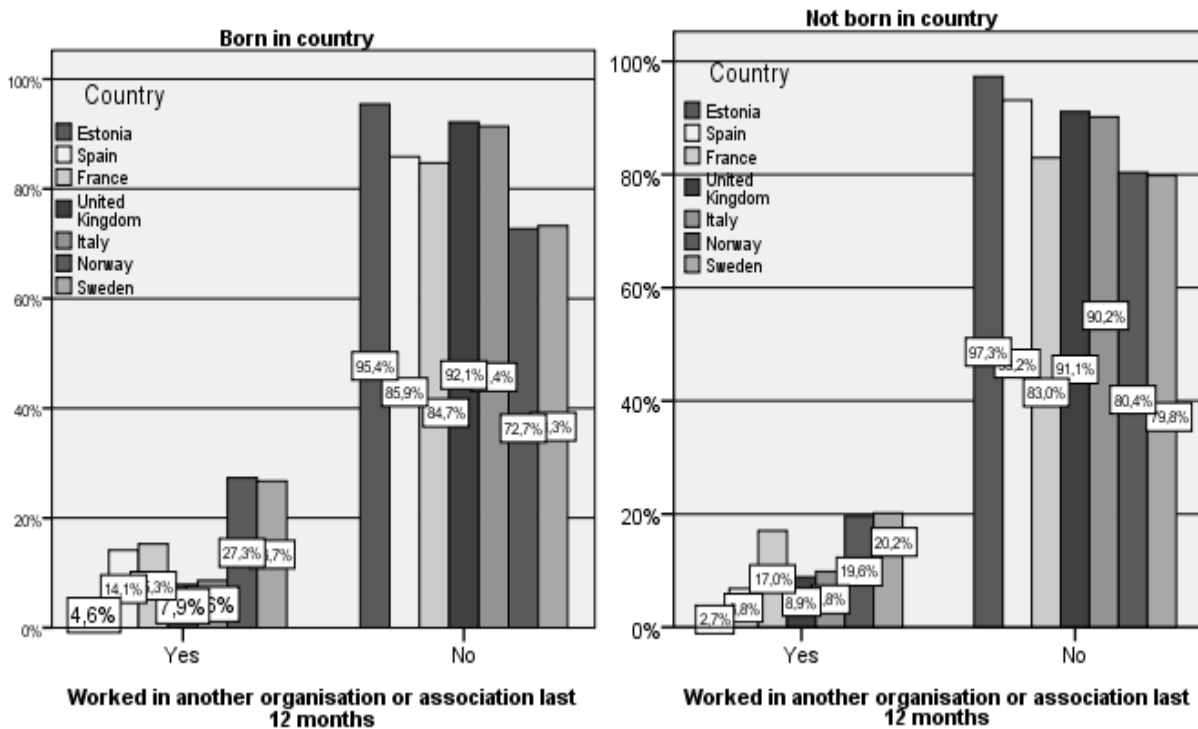
Her belonging to an ethnic community is highly influential in the way she perceived and carried out her role in the public sphere; as she points out, this facilitates her to provide various types of aid to her fellow immigrants, especially females. To some degree she seems to be aware of the limits imposed upon them by their condition in terms of gaining access to and working actively in the society that receives them. She feels fairly free to act and attempt to create new forms of limited participation basically shaped around co-operation within her own ethnic community (Romani et al., 2011: 158-9).

But also among descendants participation in immigrant or community organisations might open up the possibility of inclusion and feed the feeling of belonging. Hervé (Ferry et al., 2011), who we have seen before taking part in local political activities, speaks of his participation in neighbourhood associations and shows us that commitment can exist in the neighbourhood's youth (Romani et al., 2011: 157-8).

"I am also in the associative network, I am vice president of the MJC (cultural house for youths) and treasurer in a little association called JFC that searches for convergence points between popular neighbourhoods from Nancy, Haut du Lièvre and Haussonville. It began very early. I accompany my uncles, even if I have passed through other associations, I have spent most of time here. I might say that the permanent organizer was my uncle, I have participated in a project's conduct for holidays in the Cap d'Agde; since the last year, I have decided to take an active part in the association".

Graph 3 shows the civic involvement of immigrants and majority population in seven countries participating in our project in the form of participation in non-political organisations.

Graph 3. Civic involvement (participation in non-political organisations)



Again we can see that in different countries general participation in civic society organisations is higher than in others (Norway and in Sweden being the best examples), and that immigrants are somewhat more excluded in this field of associational life - in general they have lower (Estonia and Spain), or somewhat equal (Italy, Sweden, Norway) rates of civic involvement compared with the majority population. However, we can also see similarities with the voting in elections (Graph 2), where the differences between the immigrant and majority group are not significant. In the EUMARGINS interviews, many examples can be taken where young immigrants are very eager to work for their own community, as was the case of Madiha in Italy, Hervé in France or Mohsen in Sweden (see more Romani et al., 2011). They all participate in associations in their own community, whether with political implications (Mohsen) or by providing social assistance (Madiha). In this sense, they are all contributing to their societies and by doing that, increasing their social inclusion.

We should also point out that in a single country some groups may engage more than others in different civic activities – for example, according to the British Citizenship Survey, around 40 per cent of mixed race, Bangladeshi, and white groups are involved in some form of civic participation, while only about 20 per cent of certain African and Chinese groups do so. This is also in line with the argument in Norway, as also written before, when comparing with other immigrant groups, Somalis participate in organisations at very high rates (Fangen, 2007).

We can conclude that aiming to increase political and civic participation must be seen in the context of broader sense of social inclusion. Exclusion from the labour market usually results in the exclusion from the political sphere and vice versa.

Key policy recommendations

Based on this comparison between the EUMARGINS countries, we can make the following set of general recommendations concerning the political participation of young immigrants:

- *Non-voting of young immigrants in elections does not always indicate their detachment from the political sphere.* It is evident that many young immigrants and descendants do not feel that party politics speaks for them. Even though the young people of immigrant background might be interested in politics, many of them choose not to vote. In order to avoid this, parties should be conscious to include representatives with ethnic minority background and also investigate what kind of political issues on the agenda would make the parties' politics more attractive and interesting to young people of immigrant background.
- *Young people with residence permit should be allowed to vote in local elections.* In Estonia, Sweden and Norway this is already the case, but in many countries, this is not an available opportunity. Regarding the strict access to citizenship in countries such as Italy, this is a major obstacle against the political participation of young immigrants.
- *Greater political involvement of political parties in cultural, religious and social activities and events whereby they target a specific group of immigrants.* This would enable a deeper interaction and understanding of and between the majority and specific immigrant populations, resulting in a greater parity between the two populations and thus enabling an increase in the interest of the immigrant participation in a particular political party.
- *Create political meeting points for young migrants together with politicians.* Young migrants can thus learn more about the stance of the different political parties and the political parties can learn more what issues are important for young migrants.
- *Providing platforms or arenas for open dialogue among young people from a range of backgrounds and inviting the media to attend.* This would enable the immigrant population to convey their concerns to a wider public audience thereby reducing existing stereotypes of particular immigrant groups that are prevalent in society. For instance, since 2009, the lawyer and politician Abid Raja, a well-known

spokesperson in Norway on minority issues, has organised dialogue meetings for young people of mixed background at the House of Literature, a place to hold public meetings and seminars organised by a range of different organisations, discussing a broad variety of topics. This initiative provides these groups with an arena and thereby helps their voices to be heard.

- *The habit of being active must be promoted already earlier in the educational system.* For young immigrants, learning the habit of active participation and active citizenship takes usually place during the period of transition from youth to adulthood. It should be understood that political participation is not only voting in the elections, but also bridging communities together. In order to accomplish this, schools should teach civic education classes to students and include community engagement projects to increase the interest of youth to bring about change in their own communities. Mobilising young people to create social and political change in their lives and communities is key to ensuring their involvement.
- *Political parties should recruit young immigrants in their campaigns.* Giving young immigrants the opportunity to involve themselves in the political process reminds them that things will never change unless they get involved and make change themselves by participating. Explain to them how important their involvement is as volunteers or even as staff members in the party. To recruit young immigrants, political parties could employ door-to-door outreach, especially by their peers, creating a personal touch ensures that young people feel that they count.

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New scientific knowledge produced by EUMARGINS will be published in the form of journal articles, reports, policy briefs and a final book. For the dissemination of policy recommendations, policy workshops will be organised in each participating country at the final stage of the project. An international scientific conference on the research findings will be organised in cooperation with the EU in 2011.



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