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I. Introduction

Civil society engagement is particularly important in times of migration flows, pandemics and increasing populist threats to democracy. It can help to involve people, actively engage them, and promote joint activities.

“Civil society engagement describes individual actions, which are characterised by voluntariness, the absence of personal material gain and an orientation towards the common good.”¹ Engagement can also strengthen/increase democratic participation.

With amounting populist threats to democracy, it is highly important that participation in social decision-making is perceived and done by groups of the society as broad as possible. Protest movements which are not participating constructively in the political dialogue but are increasingly radicalised while damaging social institutions and making rational and political discourse difficult are finally weakening democratic societies in Europe. Therefore, the question arises how the broad society can be particularly fostered to be willing/wishing to participate and engage in these societal processes.

To answer this question, firstly data will be presented that shows whether certain groups are over- or underrepresented. Subsequent the question of what motivation underlies the commitment will be explored. It will then be asked which demographic characteristics can be attributed to the underrepresented groups, to conclude with the question of what societies can do to enable better and more equal participation in societal decision-making.

¹ <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/zahlen-und-fakten/datenreport-2021/politische-und-gesellschaftliche-partizipation/330245/zivilgesellschaftliches-engagement/>, translation by author.

II. Key Findings from Desk Research

a. Motivation for civil society engagement

To develop measures aiming to increase the share of certain groups in civil society engagement, it is necessary to make a few preliminary considerations. The starting point is an inventory of the demographic composition of committed citizens. In 2013, the renowned polling institute Allensbach presented a study financed by the German government, which showed, among other things:

*"Citizens, who are volunteering or participate in civil social activities usually have various motives for their commitment. In the foreground is the joy of working for others. 95 percent of those active are mentioning this joy. Large majorities of the volunteers are also motivated by the desire to help others (86 per cent) or to work for specific causes or groups (82 per cent). A lot of them become active because they have a feeling they are needed (82 per cent), that they are making a difference with their work (83 per cent) or that they are making life in their place of residence more attractive (70 per cent). (...) Together with these altruistic drives the vast majority also has self-involved motives. Especially common are the expectations of meeting people and cultivating contacts during volunteering (82 per cent), experiencing a change from everyday life (67 per cent) and pursuing one's own interests and inclinations (75 per cent). Last but not least, the search for a meaningful task (65 per cent) motivated many of those active to participate."*²

According to surveys, the share of people who are involved in associations and similar institutions has tripled in Germany since the 1950s, from 8% to around 25% of the population. In addition, in recent decades there has been an increasingly selective involvement in the context of specific experiences,

² https://www.ifd-allensbach.de/fileadmin/studien/Engagement_Motive_Bericht.pdf, translation by author.

such as the recent influx of refugees in 2015 or the current support for war refugees from Ukraine, which is supported by society as a whole.

It seems like civil society engagement is a relatively stable personality trait because most of the people questioned have different forms of engagement in different phases of life but still a comparatively constant intensity of engagement. The first conclusion we can draw from this finding is that it makes sense to start efforts to engage in society with young people, because at this age identity-shaping developments are most likely to take place.

The most frequent mentioned obstacle to engagement is a lack of time, especially in the transition from education to work and family. This also leads to the conclusion that it is helpful to offer different forms of engagement, possibly of a digital nature (digital engagement).

b. Demographic characteristics of the engagement

The following seems to apply to Germany:

- there are more committed people in Western Germany than in Eastern Germany,
- men are more committed than women,
- higher income and education go hand in hand with greater commitment,
- membership in a religious community is conducive to engagement,
- as well as living in rural areas
- and with children.³

³ Cf. Bericht zur Lage und zu den Perspektiven des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements in Deutschland, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/93402/a3639daa8a64f1a80352b78ac104a0fe/buergerchaftliches-engagement-bericht-wzb-pdf-data.pdf>.

The intrinsic motivation for social commitment is increased by pronounced altruistic inclinations, a view beyond one's own nose and interest in social issues, the desire for a meaningful profession and the realisation of one's own interests and desires. This motivation is curbed by people for whom material prosperity and hedonistic goals in life are important.

The following chart⁴ shows an overview of the results of the survey:

Lifegoals of the people who are civically engaged				
- excerpt from the statements -	civically engaged people		non-engaged people	
This is important for me and desirable	altogether	with official or permanent assignment	altogether	with interests for engagement
	%	%	%	%
Good all-round education	62	63	52	60
Having a profession that fulfils me, that I enjoy	61	64	52	64
My hobbies, my interests	42	45	38	35
Good food and drink	35	34	43	39
Taking responsibilities	42	49	35	43
Being there for others, helping others	42	43	34	42
Being with friends a lot	41	42	35	44
Always learning new things	37	40	31	40
Being free, not having to take too many considerations into account	21	17	25	20
To be able to afford a lot	19	17	26	15
Taking part in cultural life	20	23	15	21
Active participation in political life	10	12	4	7

Basis: Germany, population age 16 and older

⁴ Allensbacher Archiv (2013), IfD-Umfrage 11012.

If Maslow's pyramid of needs is considered, this research suggests that interest in social engagement goes hand in hand with reaching a higher level in this pyramid.⁵ In particular, the provision of social contacts and the feeling of belonging can be an important contribution to intrinsic motivation. The second decisive element is the feeling of pleasure in performing the commitments which plays an important role for practically all respondents. In the vast majority of cases, friends and family members provided the first access to engagement. Material incentives play a subordinate role. The predominant motives are therefore the joy of involvement, the need to do something for others, the interest in a certain topic (for example the environment or nature), the feeling of self-efficacy and contact with others.

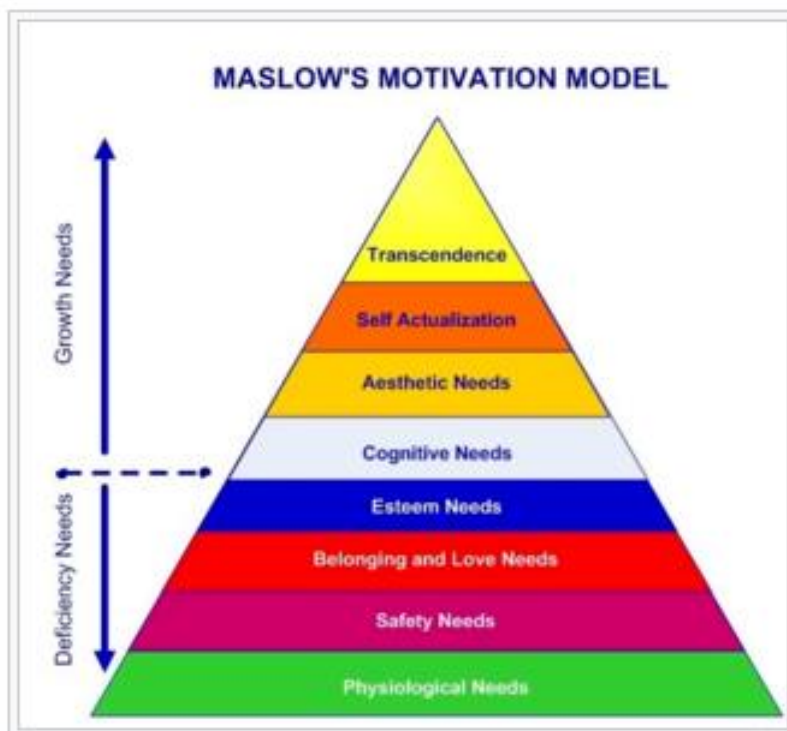


Figure 2: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs

c. Demographic characteristics of underrepresented groups

The share of people with a migration background in forms of social engagement is difficult to determine reliably, as certain migrant

⁵ <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>, A Theory of Human Motivation A. H. Maslow (1943), originally Published in Psychological Review, 50, 370-396.

organisations such as cultural associations are not covered by most surveys for linguistic reasons. A study from back in 2004, the so-called Volunteer Survey, concludes that the rate of engagement among migrants is only about half that of the rest of the population.⁶ However, it is assumed that the reason for this low level of participation is on the one hand organisational weaknesses (see above) and on the other hand rather an expression of a potentially lower level of education in these groups. It also fits in with this that the rate of involvement decreases with the decreasing requirements for an activity and the household income. In comparison to the same study made again in 2019, the tendency continues with 27% percent of people with migration background being engaged and 44,4 % of people without migration background.⁷

In this respect the results of the research on the topic of willingness to engage under demographic aspects correspond to the extensive research on willingness to participate in international youth work (<https://www.zugangsstudie.de/>), which examines barriers to participation for youth from marginalised groups through the question "Why not?".

The results of this study can largely be transferred to the question to be examined here:

"Interested young people can be found in all parts of society. But especially so-called disadvantaged young people do not perceive themselves as a target group of international youth exchanges and their environment does not take participation for granted either. Many of them believe that they have to fulfil certain requirements to participate and that the offers are very expensive. But this is not true. There are many international formats for which no previous education is needed and often financial support. Many of the professionals interviewed in the study are also convinced that especially

⁶ DZA (2004), Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey (FWS), <https://www.dza.de/forschung/fws>.

⁷ Julia Simonson et al (ed.) (2019), Freiwilliges Engagement in Deutschland, Der Deutsche Freiwilligensurvey 2019, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-658-35317-9.pdf>.

*so-called disadvantaged young people do not participate in international formats because their participation is very prerequisite-laden. Moreover, international work is described by professionals as a "luxury activity" because it must be managed by them in addition their regular work and they have to apply for their own funding. According to researchers, special formats and programmes for international youth exchange lead to an increased perception of disadvantages instead of overcoming them."*⁸

III. Research Results I: Good Practices

a. Good Practice 1: Erasmus+ Project 'Promise'



This Erasmus+ funded project⁹ dealt with improving the integration of refugees and migrants. The starting point of the project was the consideration that supportive measures are particularly effective when they are implemented at the local and municipal level through planned cooperation between different actors. By looking at this situation from a European perspective, it became clear that the perception of migrants must be an essential part of a successful concept. We have identified countries (for example Ireland) where most migrants are well-educated immigrants working in the IT sector; problems with recognition of qualifications or employment below skill level do not exist here. As Ireland accepts

⁸ https://www.zugangsstudie.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/EXP_br_zqs2_RZ_web.pdf, translation by the author.

⁹ Website: <https://kultur-life.de/projekte/promise>

comparatively few low-skilled refugees, this may not change. In other countries, for example France, the situation is quite different. Here, many migrants are at least also economic refugees, although in many cases they are also victim of persecution. These migrants predominantly belong to the precariat, and accordingly the perception of migration in France is characterised by low wages, precarious employment, and social marginalisation. In this respect, an essential starting point for successful integration is the improvement of the host society's willingness to integrate, which essentially includes a reduction of prejudices. A society that treats marginalised groups with derogatory prejudices can hardly expect members of these groups to take responsibility for this society despite the perceived rejection. In addition, this project identified a whole series of concrete areas in which offers must be created to promote integration. These offers take place in the areas of

- employment and education,
- social life and culture,
- health and family.

An important finding of the project is that actions are only promising if they can be integrated into a larger integration package.

For our Start Point Project this means that networking with other projects and providers will be an essential prerequisite for the project's success.

b. Good Practice 2: ZBBS eV



<https://partnerschaft-fuer-demokratie-kiel.de/aktuelles/>

A good example of such a partnership is the cooperation of the ZBBS association¹⁰ with the initiative “Partnership for Democracy”.

The ZBBS is a first point of contact for migrants in Kiel, offering the support in various areas. This includes language courses, but also support in dealing with authorities, finding a flat, applying for social benefits, contact with doctors and much more. This association therefore primarily serves to support migrants in the areas of life mentioned above in the Promise project. Based on this very practical help in coping with the challenges of daily life in a foreign country, the ZBBS cooperates, for example, with the “Partnership for Democracy”, which encourages and promotes projects that serve cultural and social participation. For example, intercultural festivals, lectures, concerts or political, democratic campaigns can be promoted. This could currently include campaigns to increase the willingness of migrants to be vaccinated or, as far as the electoral laws allow, to increase voter turnout.

These partnerships are formed nationwide in Germany and are funded from the federal budget.

¹⁰ Website: <https://www.zbbs-sh.de/>

However, the networking is not limited to the connection of these two institutions but involves a wide variety of initiatives through the specific funding of external partners. A good example of this is the cooperation with the sewing Workshop "Zauberwerk":

<https://partnerschaft-fuer-demokratie-kiel.de/projekte-2020/>

In cooperation between these three initiatives, the sewing workshop, which especially supports refugee women living in collective accommodation, has made cloth scarves and other products for senior citizens in the region suffering from dementia. The support of one marginalised group (seniors with dementia) by another (refugee mothers) is an act of social participation that mutually changes the view of the other group. In this project, it was found that the target group of refugee mothers was not reached by conventional integration programmes (among other things because these programmes do not offer sufficient childcare). However, the practical activity of sewing, with which the mothers are largely familiar, made it possible to teach German in a way that was oriented towards these tasks, which at the same time increased the participating mothers' sense of social engagement and the self-efficacy that goes with it. Many of the mothers were thus introduced to forms of social engagement in Germany for the first time. However, this is only possible through the cooperation with an institution like the ZBBS, which already has initial supportive contact with members of the target group, through the promotion of the project and the commitment of the volunteers involved in the sewing workshop on site.

This is a good example of how local integration can succeed and how elements of social participation can be included at the same time through appropriate measures.

c. Good Practice 3: ZEIK



The multi-award-winning “Centre for Empowerment and Intercultural Creativity”¹¹ emerged from a group of volunteer pilots for refugees in 2014. Among other participants, the certainty quickly grew that practical integration work must go hand in hand with commitment to democracy and tolerance as well as social responsibility. The particular strength of this project is that it was directly initiated by committed members of the target group. However, this project is also not possible without extensive funding, from institutional as well as private sponsors. Like the sewing workshop, practical life assistance is an indispensable entry element for the migrants. Here, too, it is important that the question of social participation is always seen in connection with concrete goals. One such programme is a course that aims to teach digital empowerment for women. Here, the aim is to teach migrant women initial skills in using computers to subsequently enable them to carry out practical tasks for coping with everyday life digitally, but also to impart skills in the area of critical media use on the other. The latter task is of particular importance and topicality because especially people who do not have a good command of German often inform themselves about current political events on the internet. If at the same

¹¹ Website: <https://www.zeik-kiel.de/>

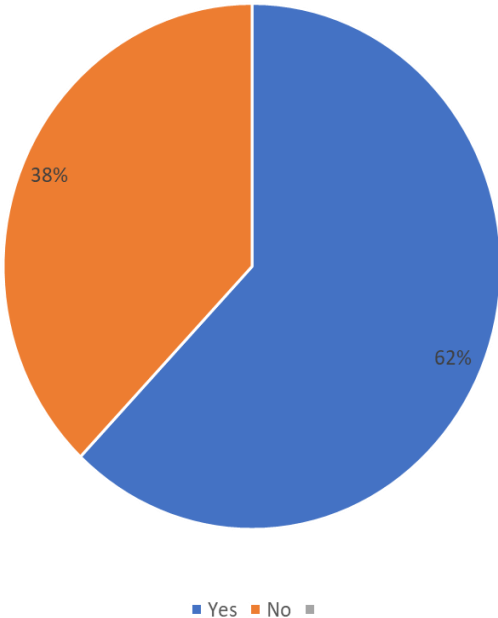
time they do not have the ability to distinguish serious from dubious sources, they easily become victims of conspiracy theories or other socially harmful influences.

The essential prerequisites for the success of this project are that it emerges from members of the target group, that it links to solutions for coping with everyday life and, finally, that it receives institutional support, which gives this project a certain permanence.

IV. Research Results II: Survey with Stakeholders

In addition to a desk research approach, a survey was issued to gather findings from stake holders, from civil representatives as well as from people from the target group itself. Some of the findings are prepared below:

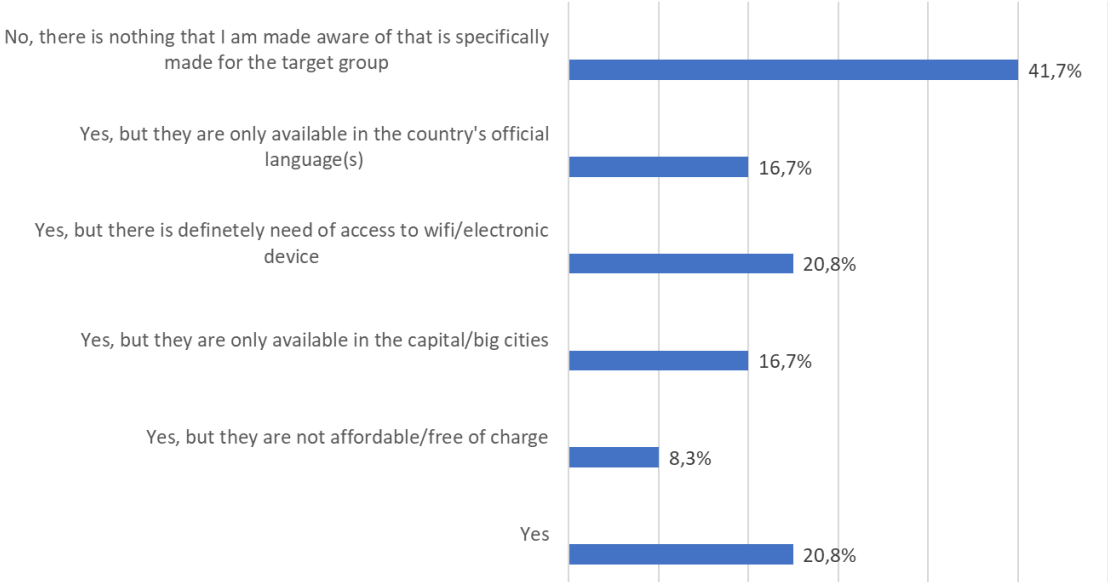
Do you think the Target Group has access to civic and social participation in your country?



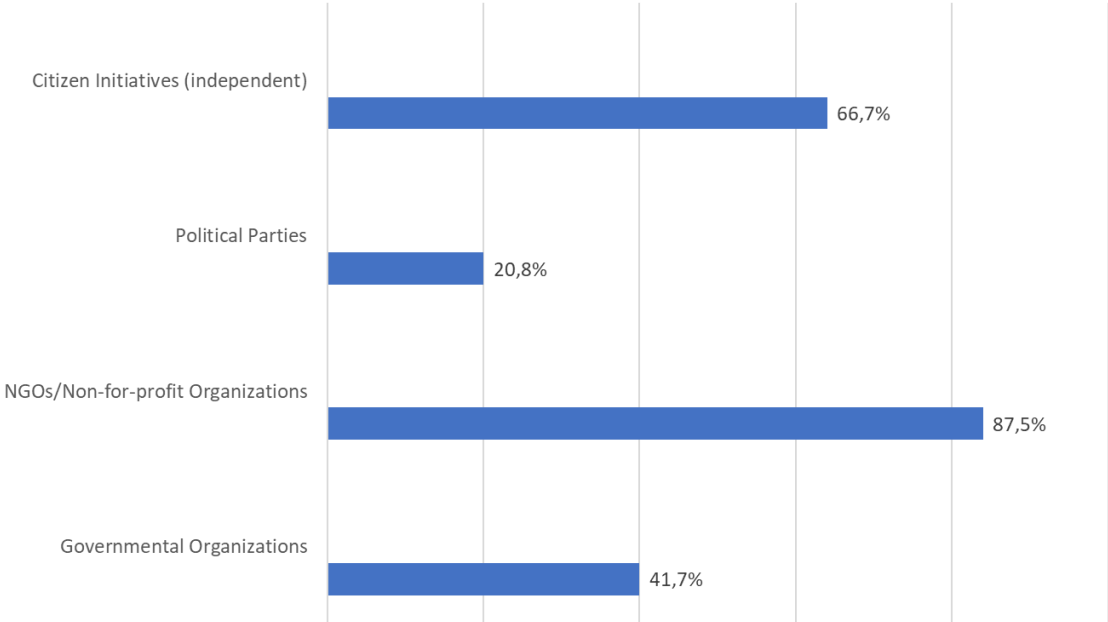
The responses show that access to civic and social participations is partly possible, but can be certainly broadened when looking at the figures. With the help of the following questions a rough picture can be drawn to see why

this access might be limited even though initiatives and responsible bodies were identified (see below):

Are you aware of any initiatives/good practices of promoting participation of the Target Group in the country’s social and political life? You may choose multiple

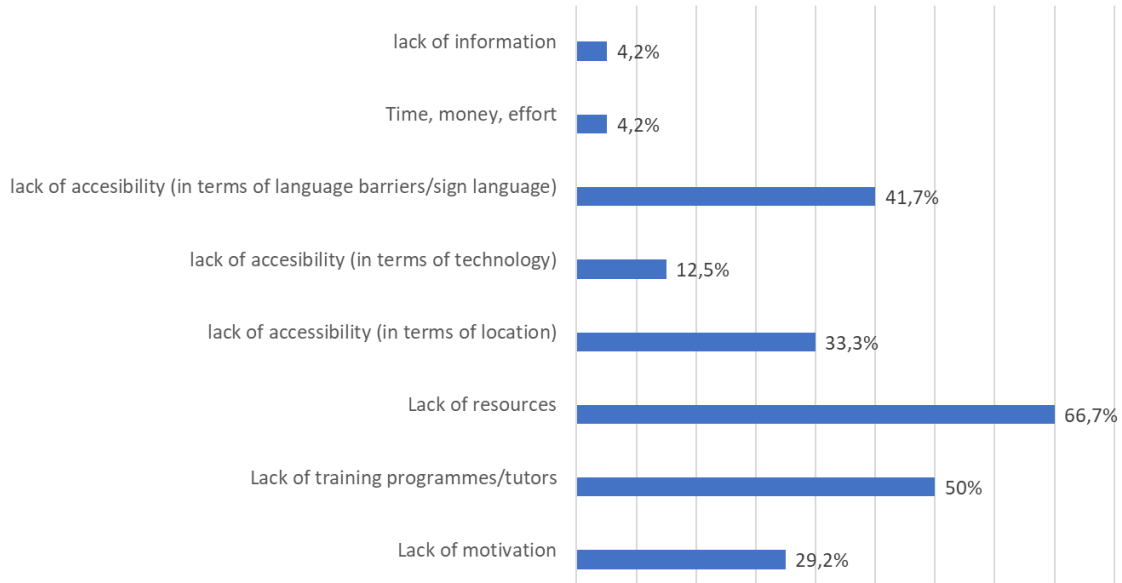


Who would you say are the main bodies responsible for such good practices/initiatives? You may choose multiple answers.



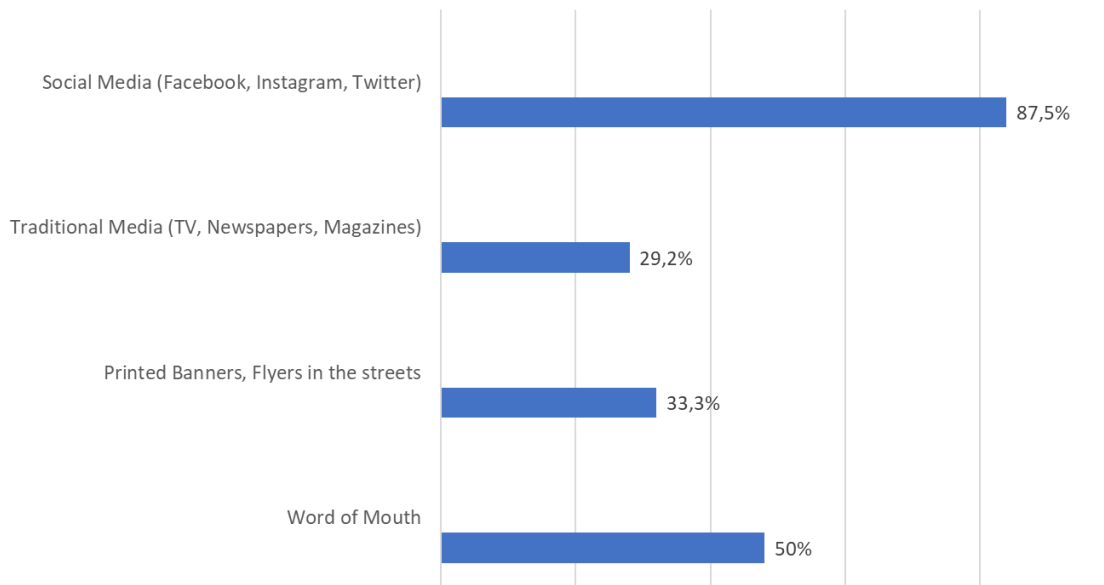
The main obstacles are mostly seen in the following categories which can serve the StartPoint project as points to tackle:

In your opinion, what are the main obstacle(s) to promote knowledge/participation to the Target Group? You may choose multiple answers.

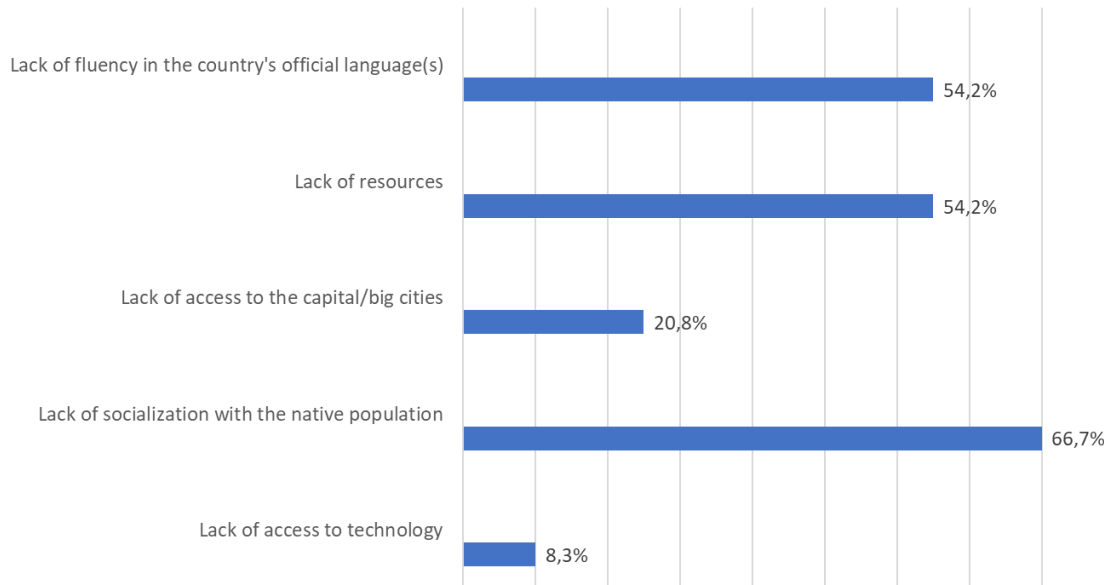


With this regard, the survey dived deeper into the ways of and materials for dissemination of engagement and how to get to know about participation offers/opportunities:

What would you say is the main way(s) that information regarding ways to participate in social and civic life is disseminated in your country? You may choose multiple answers.

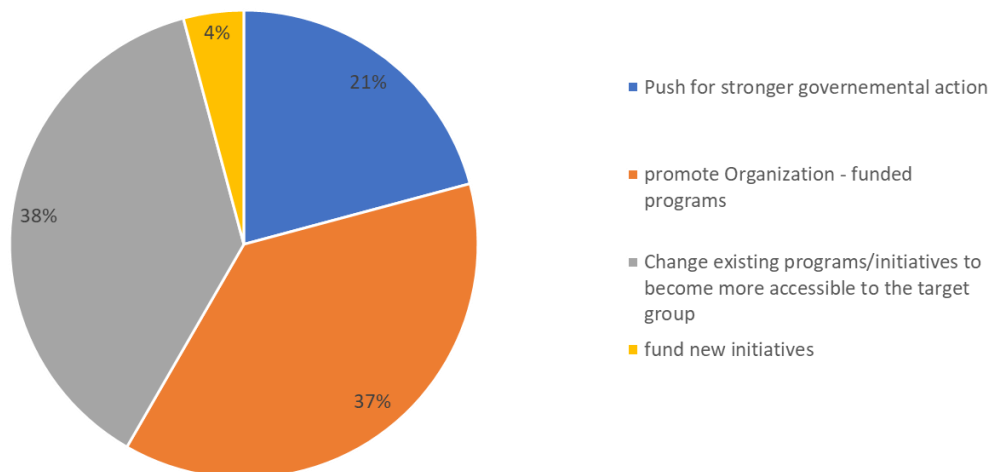


Considering the above ways of dissemination, what are the main obstacle(s) that the Target Group faces in its access to information? You may choose multiple answers.



Within the survey, specific measures to tackle the issue were raised which serve the StartPoint project as valuable input:

If you were responsible for raising awareness among relevant bodies about the existence, nature, and features of the issue of lack of participation of the Target Group to their country's democracy – what would you do?



V. Conclusion and Recommendations

a. Key results of research

The original assumption that certain groups participate less in civil society processes than others, can be confirmed for Germany. The determining factors for this are the level of education, the income, and the interest in self-realization rather than hedonistic motives.

Disadvantaged groups do not feel addressed by the engagement offers, lack of family traditions and the feeling of not being welcome as well as a lack of personal address contribute to this. The findings from the survey further underlines that the ways of addressing as well as the format of information material is not suitable for the target group.

Regarding young people, it is often added that the forms of engagement are perceived as not suitable and flexible for young people. Especially forms of engagement such as youth parliaments are often perceived by young people as forms of engagement devised by adults and not adapted to their needs and reality of life, which further reduces the group of possible participants.

b. Excursus: Engagement and Integration

When it comes to increasing the social engagement of marginalised groups, we see two possibilities. Engagement offers must be made more inclusive, the approach must be adapted to the life worlds of young people, and there must be a further opening and cooperation of people from different social, financial backgrounds. In the efforts to integrate migrants, which have been discussed a lot in Germany in recent years, the third of these paths is being followed. The factor for successful integration is considered to be the alignment of migrants with average societal values in terms of education and occupation. This is based on the assumption that social participation finds its expression in the recognition of migrants' life achievements. Measuring this includes, for example, the recognition of educational qualifications obtained abroad. One measure introduced by the OECD for

this purpose is the proportion of migrants who are employed below their actual educational attainment. This measure is a very important indicator of the integration success of a society.¹²

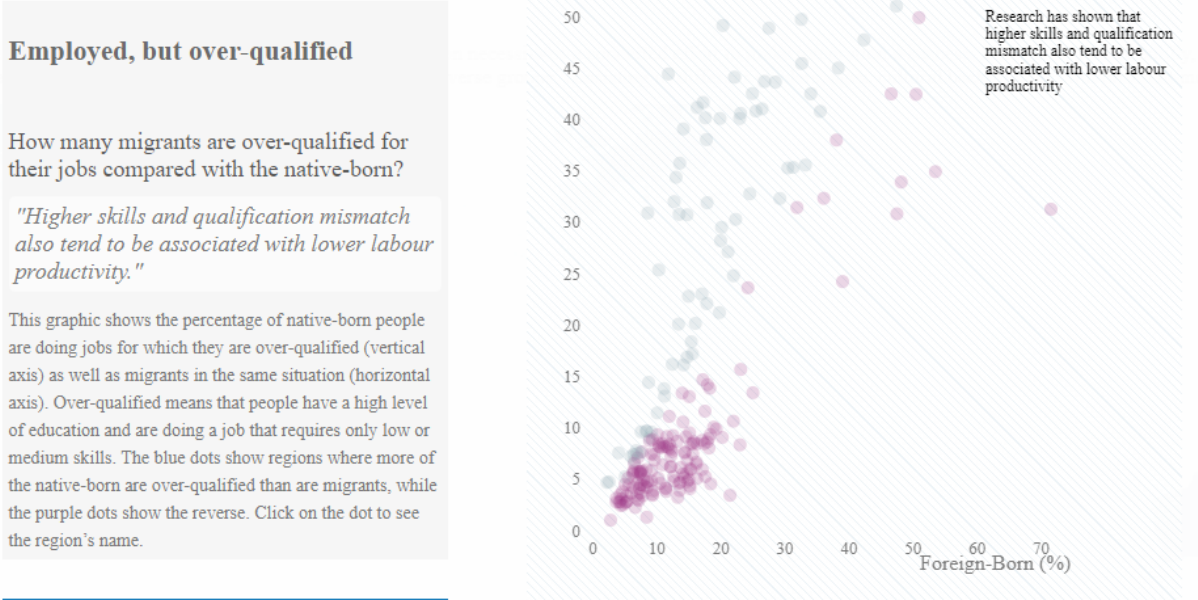


Figure 4: https://gitvfd.github.io/migrants_integration_in_regions/

c. Recommendations for future action

The StartPoint project aims to expand and deepen the political and social involvement of marginalized adults on a local, regional, national, and European level. Therefore, the target group should be adequately addressed, considering the obstacles and needs identified in the preceding analysis. Young adults with disadvantageous background or at risk of societal exclusion should be given the feeling to be wanting to be part of the society and therefore the attractiveness and the meaningfulness of engagement must be fostered. Only when people see the impact of their actions and when they feel truly heard, they will participate and contribute to shaping our society. We need to raise awareness for the need to include a vast range of people to form a stable and future-ready society which can face racism, populism and other destructive currents.

¹² <https://www.oecd.org/publications/indicators-of-immigrant-integration-2015-settling-in-9789264234024-en.htm>