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The role of diasporas and migrants in developing social cohesion and democratic engagement

Report[1]
Committee on Migration, International Protection and Economic Co-operation
Rapporteur: Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS, United Kingdom, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 16095, Reference 4852 of 31 January 2025.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Diasporas are inherent, valuable parts of European societies. When properly supported, empowered and integrated, diasporas actively contribute to economic development, help build more cohesive societies and foster democratic engagement. They also play a crucial role in the integration of newly arrived migrants, acting as bridge-builders between communities, institutions and countries.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly has consistently reaffirmed the importance of addressing diaspora issues, most notably in Resolution 2388 (2021) "For a European policy on diasporas", which called for the development and implementation of comprehensive diaspora engagement policies across Europe. This is a commitment which must be refreshed regularly in order to focus on the needs of rising generations.

3. In particular, young people within diaspora communities are particularly well placed to contribute to social cohesion and democratic engagement. As multilingual, multicultural Europeans, young diaspora members have a great potential for innovation, renewal of democratic life and inter-cultural mediation.

4. The Assembly also highlights the importance of organised diaspora groups, including faith-based communities. These communities, often extending their reach beyond their spiritual and religious activities, function as multidimensional hubs providing language courses, social services, legal guidance and psychosocial care while fostering networks of trust, solidarity and belonging for newly arrived migrants and established communities alike.

5. Diaspora members often face structural obstacles that hamper their full contribution to their host societies.

6. The Assembly recognises that the development of the full potential of diasporas requires their proper integration as active partners in society. Integration must be understood as a reciprocal and structural process requiring both openness and active participation from local communities and diasporic groups.

7. The Assembly commends the Council of Europe and its member States for the plethora of State-led programmes and policies that have been established throughout Europe to support and integrate diaspora communities, particularly the good practices developed through the Intercultural Cities Programme. The Assembly stresses the distinct advantage for all such programmes and policies to be co-created and co-owned with the communities who are meant to benefit from them. This means engaging both local communities and diaspora representatives in the design, implementation and evaluation of such initiatives not only as beneficiaries, but also as partners.

8. The Assembly recalls the need, as stated in the Reykjavik Declaration, adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (16-17 May 2023), to ensure a full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life for all without discrimination. This should include diasporas. It also welcomes the Secretary General's initiative for a New Democratic Pact for Europe. This recognises the need to protect democracy by advancing equality, combating all forms of discrimination and ensuring the full participation and representation of marginalised groups, including diasporic groups, in democratic life. The future and legitimacy of European democracy depend on involving everyone, including diasporas and migrants, in democratic processes. In that regard, a special effort is needed to bridge the gap between elected representatives and diaspora members.

9. Stressing the importance of meaningfully involving diasporas in policy making affecting them, and recalling Resolution 2388 (2021), the Assembly invites member States of the Council of Europe to:

9.1. systematically consult diaspora groups in the planning and development of programmes and policies which concern them and ensure that their contributions are not only heard, but acted upon;

9.2. involve diaspora members and organisations in the implementation of such programmes and policies not only as beneficiaries, but also as equal partners;

9.3. ensure that the perspectives of diaspora groups are heard and acted upon in the monitoring and evaluation of such programmes and policies.

10. Without prejudice to the restrictions on political rights for foreigners permitted under the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and taking into account Resolution 2525 (2024) "The theme of migration and asylum in election campaigns and its consequences on the reception of migrants and their

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 11 September 2026.

rights", the Assembly believes that it is crucial to promote the political participation of diaspora members (including their formal participation) in order to preserve European democratic representativity and legitimacy. To this end, the Assembly invites member States to:

10.1. ratify, if they have not already done so, the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level (ETS No. 144) and align national electoral legislation accordingly;

10.2. promote the political participation of diaspora members and empower those eligible to vote and stand for election;

10.3. explore the feasibility of expanding the right of certain categories of diaspora members to vote and to stand for office in national elections.

11. Recognising that political engagement goes beyond standing for office and voting in elections, the Assembly believes that it is necessary to engage diasporas in decision making through other participative and deliberative mechanisms so that they can fully participate in public life. The Assembly therefore recommends that member States:

11.1. provide civic education and democratic literacy training to diaspora members as part of integration policies and programmes;

11.2. develop mentorship programmes linking young people, including diaspora members, with elected representatives in order to bring diaspora youth closer to politics and to allow elected officials to understand and take into account their perspective;

11.3. promote properly funded and representative foreigners' consultative councils at both local and national levels, with the purpose of establishing a structured dialogue between authorities and diaspora groups;

11.4. provide stable, structural funding to diaspora-based organisations so that they can meaningfully engage in long-term policy-making processes.

12. The Assembly should spearhead the efforts of the Council of Europe to support the existing work of the Advisory Council on Youth on this matter. Given the potential of diaspora representatives to enrich political debate and inform decision making in matters affecting them, the Assembly should consider:

12.1. conducting at least one exchange of views at committee or sub-committee or network level with representatives of migrant or diaspora groups in the preparation of each report concerning their integration or their political, social and cultural rights;

12.2. developing a mentorship programme linking young diaspora members with Assembly members in order to bring the Assembly closer to young diaspora members and to get Assembly members in touch with their perspective.

13. Finally, the Assembly calls on its own members, in their capacity as both national lawmakers and members of the Assembly, to act at European and domestic levels to promote the relevant Council of Europe instruments, standards and expertise, as well as to align national legislation and practice with the recommendations set out in this resolution.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Lord Leslie Griffiths, rapporteur[3]

1. Introduction

> *"I am a Dutch national. Yet my identity is constantly defined by others. In the United Kingdom, I am Dutch. In the Netherlands, I am Afghan because of my heritage. In Afghanistan, I am European. Across most of Europe, I am often seen simply as a person of colour"*[4]

1. Europe is undergoing rapid social and demographic change, marked by growing diversity, new patterns of migration, and increasing numbers of people who identify as both "from here" and "from elsewhere." Simultaneously, the persistent challenges of exclusion and discrimination threaten both our social fabric and our democratic institutions.

2. When properly supported and empowered, diasporas are a valuable asset for any member State to address these challenges. Diasporas actively contribute to economic development, help build more cohesive societies and foster democratic engagement. They also play a crucial role in the integration of newly arrived migrants. Among them, young diaspora members, in particular, possess immense potential. They are often multilingual, multicultural, deeply European and natural bridges between their countries of origin and their host societies.

3. This matter is of particular significance to me. I have, for more than half a century, worked seriously with ("with" and not "for") a swathe of diasporic groups (people from South Korea, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Fiji, Haiti and many smaller groups, too). I felt the need to give serious attention to the lives and prospects of those who have already found their place (however tenuously) in their host society.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has long acknowledged the role of diasporas as agents of integration and policy change. The resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly, together with the previous work of the Sub-Committee on Diasporas and Integration, demonstrate the attention that parliamentarians have paid to this issue.

5. The Council of Europe and its member States have developed and implemented a multitude of programmes and policies intended to address these challenges and ensure that diasporas can develop their full potential. Yet, despite these relative successes, the meaningful engagement with diaspora communities at all governance levels too often remains insufficient or fragmented, falling short of building genuine co-ownership of our shared European future and sometimes falling into tokenism. The lack of consultation and engagement of local communities in these projects also risks alienating them and creating a backlash.

6. Funding cuts, shrinking civic space and restrictive policies seriously undermine diasporas' capacity to develop their full potential. These shortcomings jeopardise social cohesion and the representative legitimacy of our democratic systems. There is thus a vital political need to refocus attention on diasporas not as mere objects of policy or as programme beneficiaries but as subjects and partners.

7. First of all, this report identifies and promotes good practices among a wide range of both State-led and civil society diaspora programmes and policies being implemented across Europe and turns them into concrete recommendations for political action. Special attention is dedicated to the meaningful engagement with diasporic communities, involving the people concerned in the design, implementation and evaluation of the policies affecting them to avoid tokenism and improving their effectiveness and sustainability.

8. Second, this report expands the scope of previous Assembly texts by looking beyond the fields of integration and economic growth, highlighting the role of diasporas in strengthening our democracies, in line with the New Democratic Pact.

9. Third, the report pays special attention into the contributions and specific challenges of diaspora youth and faith-based diaspora groups to social cohesion and democratic engagement.

10. And last but not least, this report contributes to building a fact-based positive counter-narrative to the often-toxic current discussions about immigration by acknowledging the potential of diasporas to encourage shared growth, but also challenge stereotypes and foster pathways toward a more cohesive and progressive Europe.

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3. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
4. Written contribution by Omid Hotak, member of the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and board member at the European Forum for Youth with Lived Migration Experiences (VOICIFY), 23 July 2026.

11. To achieve this, I relied on a combination of desk research, direct engagements, and a fact-finding mission. My starting point was the extensive mapping of existing diaspora-related policies and practices across Europe, conducted in co-operation with the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). Beyond these documents, I actively sought to hear the voices of diaspora members through a series of exchanges of views, including an especially insightful session with young diaspora pupils in London.

12. A fact-finding mission to Sweden offered another crucial perspective, allowing me to engage with faith communities, government officials, local civil society, and academics. Additionally, dialogue with diaspora youth representatives from the Council of Europe Joint Council on Youth (CCJ) enriched the process with viewpoints from those most affected by the policies discussed.

13. In a previous Assembly report "For a European policy on diasporas" (Doc. 15250), the rapporteur defined diaspora as "a group of people originated from the same country residing abroad and keeping strong cultural, economic and social links with their country of origin". While this definition remains broadly valid, this report proposes to expand it into "a group of people originating from the same country, residing in a third country and keeping strong cultural, linguistic, family, economic and social links with their country of origin" to reflect the importance of language and extended family ties within diasporic groups. Yet, it is important to point out that the term "originating" in this definition should be understood in a very broad sense of provenance, which may be distant and go back several generations. Many members of diasporas are born in their "host" country and hold citizenship of that country, and yet they retain links to their country "of origin" even if they may have never resided there. This report will use the words "diaspora" or "diasporic" in this broad sense without further explanation.

2. Diasporas as actors of social cohesion

"[We] need people daring to cross the bridge, but also people awaiting them on the other side"[5]

14. This statement by a young British person of migrant background reflects how social cohesion requires both an effort from the newcomer and a welcoming from the host. Our Assembly has consistently emphasised that the integration of diasporas is a central condition for social cohesion, framing it as a reciprocal and structural process requiring both inclusion and active participation.[6]

15. According to the International Organization for Migration, social cohesion is about the "bonds tying a community together through trust and common social norms. While these bonds can be undermined by disparities in wealth and income, poverty, or intercommunal, ethnic or racial tensions, the impact of migration, and especially of diversity, on social cohesion has been increasingly questioned".[7]

16. The UN Development Programme distinguishes between horizontal social cohesion, which refers to the trust and relationships among individuals from diverse identities and social groups or affiliations, and vertical social cohesion which concerns the quality of the relationship between the State and its citizens.[8]

17. Diaspora groups have a great potential to create trust-based bonds, contributing to both horizontal and vertical social cohesion. First, very often they are the first ones "waiting for them at the other side": they play a key role in welcoming and integrating newly arrived migrants into their host society, helping them to navigate their host country administratively and socially. Alongside and beyond this, organised diasporic groups provide reliable interlocutors that act as a bridge between their communities and host country institutions.

18. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers has recognised the role of diasporas in enhancing social cohesion, through the integration of "persons of immigrant background"[9] and their involvement in co-development programmes.[10]

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5. PACE Migration Committee exchange of views with pupils from Central Foundation Schools of London (borough of Islington and borough of Tower Hamlets), 20 October 2025.
6. Resolution 2502 (2023) "Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved".
7. International Organization for Migration, "World Migration Report 2020", 2019.
8. UNDP, "Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual framing and programming implications", 2020.
9. Final Declaration of the Council of Europe 8th Conference of Ministers responsible for migration affairs, 4-5 September 2008.
10. Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)1 on intercultural Integration; Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration.

19. Furthermore, the Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) views diasporas as a strategic diversity advantage for international co-operation, economic development, cultural exchange, and narrative transformation. Across ICC tools, themes, and city practices, diaspora actors appear as co-designers, economic partners, cultural mediators, and international connectors. This report acknowledges the contribution of the programme to the integration of diasporic groups and other migrants, but also as a source of information to identify best practices at the local level.

20. Meaningful social cohesion requires sustained investment in community-led initiatives that bring together young people with lived experience, practitioners and legal experts. As an example, the implementation of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood[11] has demonstrated the value of this approach, ensuring that policy is informed by both professional expertise and lived experience. It also showed that social cohesion cannot be achieved by focusing solely on supporting diaspora communities; it requires investment in educating wider society, challenging prejudice and discrimination, and creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue between people from different backgrounds.

2.1. National Action Plans and other State-led initiatives

21. Our Assembly has called for member States to take concrete action at national, regional and international levels to promote diaspora engagement policies and create a positive environment for the fulfilment of their potential.[12] This has materialised through the development and implementation of national action plans and strategies, which provide political direction, concrete initiatives and funding.

22. Traditionally, State-led integration efforts focused on delineating responsibilities among government agencies in a top-down approach. The overview of State-led initiatives conducted in the outline report[13] identified the risk that imposing models or systems on people can alienate them and create unnecessary tension in the host community. “Top-down” projects, often devised in committees or parliaments or even by NGOs are not always “owned” by the communities who are supposed to benefit from them.

23. For all these initiatives to work fully, affected communities need to be entirely involved at every stage: from planning to implementation and all the way to monitoring and evaluation. And talking about affected communities here refers to both diasporic groups, newly arrived migrants as well as the local non-diasporic local population. The intended beneficiaries of these policies must be consulted and listened to, so that they can develop “ownership” of such plans, programmes and policies.

24. Increasingly, policymakers acknowledge the importance of involving diasporic partners in their integration plans. The Czech Republic’s 2025 National Strategy on Integration of Foreigners in Mutual Respect[14] is a good example of this participative approach implemented in all phases of policy development and implementation. The strategy mandates the operation of 18 regional Integration Centres, which include representatives of migrant organisations, local authorities, schools, and NGOs. Crucially, the national strategy earmarks resources to support “integration activities based on the own initiative of foreigners” and includes the use of intercultural mediators and community interpreters drawn from diaspora backgrounds.

25. Finland has also made significant efforts to engage diasporas within both its legislative and strategic planning frameworks. Under the 2025 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration[15], the State supports the participation of organisations representing migrants in planning, implementation, and evaluation of national and local integration policy. The Tampere Talent Ambassadors programme, for example, employs international professionals who have settled in Tampere to promote the resettlement and professional inclusion of other university graduates who have settled in Tampere. It is therefore the diasporic community itself that helps to integrate newly arrived people.

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11. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood.
12. Resolution 2388 (2021) “For a European policy on diasporas”.
13. AS/Mig(2025)09.
14. Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, “Postup při realizaci aktualizované Koncepce integrace cizinců - Ve vzájemném respektu”, 2025.
15. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, “Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (681/2023)”, 2025.

26. A research project commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers has produced a report on the voices of young immigrants in Iceland, a country which has witnessed significant growth of immigrant communities in its population. Among lessons learned are the importance of inclusion; the value of listening to the voices of young immigrants; collaboration as a catalyst for integration; and the importance of a holistic approach.[16]

27. Other States are adapting similar approaches. In Italy, the city of Reggio Emilia's "DiTutt' intercultural strategy" demonstrates how city-level action plans can create space for diaspora-led associations to participate in priority-setting, implementation, and monitoring of inclusion policies. Across these contexts, a common lesson emerges: durable social cohesion is best promoted when State-led strategies move beyond consultation to tangible, ongoing partnership with diaspora groups.

28. These are all steps in the right direction and must be commended. They acknowledge the need to ensure that policies remain grounded in community experience and benefit from the knowledge, networks, and leadership within diaspora communities. However, caution is needed not to assume that good policies on paper bring meaningful inclusion in practice. If not properly implemented, these policies can become an exercise of formal box-ticking, where consultation does not result in meaningful participation nor equal partnership.

29. Despite the proven benefits of these good practices, some of them are being hindered by funding cuts, which reduce the capacity of diaspora-led organisations to contribute to integration and democratic participation. In Sweden, for example, the Botkyrka Intercultural Centre, which was recognised by the Intercultural Cities Programme as a good practice, has faced drastic budget cuts that have forced it to reduce its activities. If organisations that represent, support and empower diasporas are no longer able to exist, their integration and meaningful democratic participation will be significantly hindered.

2.2. Faith-based initiatives

30. In contemporary Europe, diaspora faith-based groups are vital actors in promoting both social cohesion and democratic engagement. These religious communities – notably churches, mosques, and other faith-based entities – offer far more than spiritual sustenance. They serve as multidimensional hubs that provide practical resources such as language courses, housing support, legal guidance, and psychosocial care, while simultaneously fostering networks of trust, solidarity, and belonging crucial for successful integration.[17]

31. The St. Eugenia Catholic Church in Sweden is a clear example, celebrating mass not only in Swedish but also in English, Ge'ez, Polish, Arabic, and Filipino welcoming a wide range of diasporic groups of all ages. Upon arrival to a new social reality, St Eugenia provides new arrivals with a safe, known place to connect with their own diaspora and gain a sense of community that gradually helps them to integrate into Swedish society.

32. Faith communities act as extended families and networks of solidarity for their members, offering not only spiritual guidance but also practical and emotional support that facilitates integration. This setting provides a stable environment where new arrivals find a sense of belonging in the short term, but this can also lead to challenges with the broader society when they remain too inward-looking. The Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden exemplifies this pattern, providing a strong support network for community members and internal social cohesion but sometimes struggling to fully engage with the broader Swedish society. Nonetheless, State and local partnerships with these faith-based organisations are crucial for leveraging their potential to bridge cultural gaps and strengthen social cohesion for society as a whole[18].

33. Empirical evidence demonstrates that strong religious engagement in itself can transform potential disadvantages associated with minority status, equipping individuals with social capital and resilience that enhance integration outcomes – provided the institutional context is sufficiently inclusive.[19] In Belgium, the

16. Nordic Network for Lifelong Learning. "Voices of Young Immigrants: Inclusion in Education, Work and Society", 2024.
17. Francesco Vigneri (2022) "The role of religious institutions and faith organisations on the integration of migrants in Europe", *LUMSA Social Work LAB Working Papers*, 05. Roma: GEPLI Department, LUMSA University;
Pius Barinaadaa Kii (2026) "Migration, Religion, And Social Integration: How Faith Communities Shape the Experiences of displaced Populations", *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, Vol 12. No.1.
18. Written contribution from Professor Magdalena Nordin, University of Gothenburg: "The Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden – same but different" 6 June 2026.
19. Abbas, T., & Khattab, N. (2025). "Belief, belonging, and borders: mapping faith, identity, and integration across European cities". *Quality & Quantity*, 1-25.

Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), with a strong diasporic element, organises regular international study sessions in partnership with the Council of Europe to train young diasporic Muslim people in democratic engagement, among other skills.

34. Another clear example is provided by the CAFOD - Catholic international development charity, which engages with the African Catholic diaspora in the United Kingdom as active partners in community development and social cohesion. For instance, Ghanaian Catholics in London are particularly active, volunteering in their parishes, cooking traditional meals to support parish priests, fundraising and organising monthly African Masses that provide spaces for cultural expression and community support.[20]

35. The Council of Europe has likewise recognised the important contribution of faith-based communities to social cohesion and democratic life. Through its work on interreligious and interconvictional dialogue, including exchanges organised by the Committee of Ministers, the work of the Conference of INGOs, and initiatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Organisation has created spaces for religious and non-religious actors, public authorities and civil society to foster mutual understanding, tolerance, human rights and democratic participation.

2.3. The role of diaspora youth

"I shouldn't feel like an outsider in a country I was born in."[21]

36. Europe's youth, especially those with diasporic backgrounds are a particularly well-positioned collective to contribute to social cohesion and democratic engagement. Harnessing their energy and insights is an essential condition for social cohesion and the future democratic health of European societies. The Parliamentary Assembly has consistently acknowledged this potential[22] and called for their effective participation in Council of Europe processes[23] and for their full inclusion into host societies.[24]

37. Yet, they sit at the intersection of complex identities, new patterns of mobility, and rapidly shifting social realities. Their lived experience is defined as much by resilience, aspiration, and belonging as by structural discrimination, generational tension, and feelings of alienation. Young people with migrant backgrounds often lose vital legal protections and support once they reach adulthood, resulting in abrupt interruptions to their inclusion and participation in society.

38. One example of these interruptions is the case of Mr Youssef Abo, a young diaspora member based in the Netherlands who had been working and volunteering for years on inclusion, diversity, and gender equality as project developer and facilitator. Due to recent changes in the Dutch asylum policy, Mr Abo has been forced to step back from his activities to focus on securing his administrative status, which is now uncertain.[25] In his own words: "I feel I have no other choice. I hope one day I can return to the work that made me feel I had finally found my place."[26]

39. Other structural barriers were also underscored most clearly during an exchange of views with secondary school students from Central Foundation Schools in London, each representing families with roots as diverse as Albania, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Ghana.[27] These young Europeans spoke eloquently about the ongoing struggle for representation and genuine belonging. Feeling "between two cultures," these students highlighted the need for policies that do not force them to choose between heritage and host society, but rather celebrate and enable the richness of both. As one of them put it: "You need to hear our voices so your policies are rooted in our lived experiences".

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20. Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (2025), "Keeping the Faith Voices of African Diaspora Catholics in England and Wales".
21. PACE Migration Committee exchange of views with pupils from Central Foundation Schools of London (borough of Islington and borough of Tower Hamlets), 20 October 2025.
22. Resolution 2619 (2025) "Youth movements for democracy".
23. Recommendation 2299 (2025) "Youth movements for democracy".
24. Resolution 2639 (2026) "Strengthening democracies with young people: from participation to shared responsibility".
25. Written contribution by Omid Hotak, member of the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and board member at the European Forum for Youth with Lived Migration Experiences (VOICIFY), 23 July 2026.
26. Youssef Abo, Network and Learning Opportunities (NLO) member. LinkedIn Post published on 8 July 2026.
27. PACE Migration Committee Exchange of Views with Pupils from Central Foundation Schools of London (borough of Islington and borough of Tower Hamlets), 20 October 2025.

40. Crucially, the students emphasised the urgent need for representation at every level – including in school councils – and for the creation of safe spaces where young people can participate and deliberate. As one of them put it: "we need policymakers to step up. But You cannot step up without the voices of those [diaspora youth] who should sit at the table." As a concrete proposal, they expressed the need for more events like the exchange of views organised by the committee to address their concerns.

41. Beyond individual testimony, the Assembly's engagement with youth advocacy platforms – such as the exchange with #DiasporaVote! and input from youth representatives like Maurizio Cuttin – reveals a new generation determined to move from consultation to co-creation. These platforms urge policymakers and institutions to think with migrants and diasporic communities, to learn from and with them, and most importantly, to intensify action, not just dialogue. Young people with diasporic heritage do not only want to be heard: they are demanding a meaningful partnership in shaping policies, combating discrimination, and securing their place as full and equal partners in the continent's present and future.

42. Within the structures of the Council of Europe, young diasporas are already making valuable, substantive contributions to current debates within our organisation. The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), for example, issued a principled statement reacting to the adoption to the Chișinău Declaration, warning against the increasing politicisation of human rights, the risk of selective protection and calling States to ensure that migration policies do not scapegoat young people, migrants, or refugees.[28]

43. Yet, within our Assembly, engagement with diaspora at large and youth in particular remains piecemeal and not systematic. Given the proven value of their contributions, we should pledge to conduct at least one exchange of views at Committee, Sub-Committee or Network level with representatives of migrant or diaspora groups in the preparation of each report concerning their integration or their political, social and cultural rights.

44. This report insists that the voices of diaspora youth must not just be listened to, but acted upon. Their plea is clear: "papers are not enough". Sustained and tailored investment in youth-led diaspora organisations – including dedicated capacity-building, mentorship, and training programmes – is essential to ensure their continued engagement. More than consultation, these groups must be empowered to take leadership as main applicants and equal partners.

45. The continent's democratic future depends on an active commitment to listen, to consult, and to co-create policies that they can truly own. Social cohesion cannot be secured for the next generation unless young Europeans of all backgrounds are trusted, included, and empowered as architects of that future.

3. Diasporas as actors of democratic engagement

"We are part of Europe – not guests, but active contributors to its democratic and social life.[29]"

46. Social cohesion, cultural diversity and economic development cannot be achieved without a functioning democracy. And a functioning democracy must allow for all its communities to participate, including diasporas. The need to involve diasporas (among other groups) in democratic life was well-established by the Reykjavik Declaration, calling for a full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life "for all", free from discrimination on any grounds.[30] In the Parliamentary Assembly, we also firmly recognise the need to involve diaspora members in policy making, particularly regarding citizenship policies and other issues directly affecting them.[31]

47. The importance of strengthening democratic engagement is currently high on the Council of Europe agenda. The New Democratic pact aims to serve as a collective and inclusive process to reinforce democracy's foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovate its forms to make it tangible for everyone.[32] More specifically, it aims to protect democracy by advancing equality and combat all forms of discrimination and ensuring full participation and representation of marginalised groups in democratic life,[33] which includes diasporic groups.

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28. Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth "statement on the Chișinău Political Declaration and the universality of human rights", 24 June 2026.
29. European Forum for Youth with Lived Migration Experience (VOICIFY), "#PartofEurope Report", December 2021.
30. Council of Europe (2023), "United around our values - Reykjavík declaration », Appendix III Reykjavik Principles of democracy.
31. Resolution 2388 (2021), "For a European Policy on Diasporas".
32. Council of Europe, "Road to the New Democratic Pact", 2025.
33. Ibid.

48. This report frames democratic engagement as civic participation in political decision making, understood by the Committee of Ministers as the engagement of individuals, NGOs and civil society at large in decision-making processes by public authorities. These may include community-based groups,[34] like diasporas. This is a concept closely linked to "active citizenship", which ensures that all individuals (including foreign residents where appropriate) have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and the support to freely express their opinions and influence decision making on matters that affect them.[35]

49. Democratic engagement includes but is not limited to the right to vote and to stand for office. The European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5)[36] allows member States to impose restrictions on these rights for non-nationals, and this means they are not accessible too many diaspora members who are not citizens of their host country. However, there are many other forms of democratic engagement like deliberative and participative democracy that are not necessarily linked to citizenship.

3.1. Voting and standing for office

50. Notwithstanding the aforementioned restrictions, the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level (ETS No. 144) commits signatory States to granting foreign residents the right to vote and to stand for office in local elections.[37] It is crucial for elected representatives to reflect the community they serve, which means ensuring those from a migrant background can vote in and run for election. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has also acknowledged voting in local elections as a powerful tool to integrate migrants.[38] In line with that position, our Assembly supported the idea of granting foreign residents the right to vote and the right to stand in local and regional elections after a residence period of five years or less.[39]

51. There are numerous member States across the Council of Europe that already allow non-citizens to vote and stand for office at the municipal level, including Norway, Denmark, Finland, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland. In Finland, for example, people who reside in a municipality can vote and stand as candidates in local elections after two years of residence regardless of their citizenship. Some civil society initiatives like the Migrant Democracy Project in the United Kingdom advocate for the right to vote to be extended to all residents, regardless of their nationality.

52. Having the legal right to vote is not equal to making it effective. Empirical studies reveal that turnout among non-citizen immigrants with right to vote is consistently and significantly lower than among native citizens. Factors such as lack of information, unfamiliarity with host-country political institutions, language barriers, and lower levels of social and political capital all contribute to this gap.[40] However, evidence also shows that political participation increases clearly with both length of residence and acquisition of citizenship, and that tailored outreach, civic education, and the opportunity to build local social networks all foster greater electoral participation among migrants over time.[41]

53. Certain projects from civil society aim to overcome these hurdles through training, mentoring and awareness-raising. Through the NGO #DiasporaVote!, for example, local youth ambassadors, members of several diasporas organised events to raise awareness around EU elections among their peers to inform them about their rights and encourage their participation. In the United Kingdom, Voice4Change conducts free, impartial, political literacy workshops in towns and cities across the country under the slogan "Your Voice, Your Democracy", to promote voter registration. In Sweden, the refugee-led Järvaveckan foundation organises a yearly festive-political event to bring together politicians and diaspora members in a non-formal setting to foster their democratic engagement and bring their realities closer to politicians.

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34. Council Of Europe, "Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision-Making", 2017.
35. Committee of Experts on Intercultural Inclusion of Migrants (ADI-INT), "Manual for the design of a training course on intercultural competence Part 1 – The core principles of the Council of Europe intercultural integration model", 2023.
36. European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), Article 16.
37. Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, (ETS No. 144) Articles 3(b), 4 and 6.
38. Resolution 431 (2018) and Recommendation 419 (2018) "Voting rights at local level as an element of successful long-term integration of migrants and IDPs in Europe's municipalities and regions".
39. Resolution 2043 (2015) "Democratic participation for migrant diasporas"; Resolution 2525 (2024) "The theme of migration and asylum in election campaigns and its consequences on the reception of migrants and their rights".
40. Hutcheson, D.S. and Bevelander, P. (2026), 'The electoral participation of immigrants in a globalised world' in Handbook on Migration and Public Policy, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp.233-251.
41. Pieter Bevelander & Derek S. Hutcheson (2022) Voting Behavior of Immigrants and Their Children in Sweden, Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 20:3, 427-443.

54. Some innovative programmes enhance democratic participation of diasporas by getting them to work directly with lawmakers. The EU-wide project "Work with your MEP" selects a limited number of diaspora youth, provides them with training and connects each one of them with one member of the European Parliament, with whom they will work closely for a year to co-create a shared action plan with clear goals and timelines. Ireland has a similar programme through the Migrant-Councillor Internship Scheme, a mentoring programme that pairs local councillors with migrants who want to learn about Irish politics and get involved in their local communities.

55. These kinds of schemes are a particularly promising practice that should be replicated, providing diaspora youth with a meaningful way to engage politically but also getting local politicians closer to the realities of young diaspora members. To start preaching by example, our Assembly should consider the development of its own mentorship programme linking young diaspora members with Assembly members.

3.2. Consultative mechanisms

56. Democracy is more than just voting and standing for office. Beyond the formal channels of political participation, it is necessary to engage diasporas in decision making through other mechanisms so that they can fully participate in public life. The Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level (ETS No. 144) mandates efforts to involve them in local decision making and consultations.[42] Both the Committee of Ministers[43] and our own Parliamentary Assembly[44] have encouraged the use of participative and deliberative mechanisms to ensure proper intercultural integration.

57. Migrant consultative councils are one of such mechanisms, which intend to create a structured dialogue between public authorities and diasporic groups. In Lisbon, the Municipal Council for Interculturality and Citizenship brings together migrant associations and city officials in a formal advisory body. Through regular consultations on issues such as housing, employment, and social inclusion, migrant representatives can influence policy agendas while fostering mutual understanding and long-term civic engagement.

58. Finland has also established several of these Councils in cities like Turku and Tampere, with bodies representing diasporic perspectives in the city's decision-making processes. In Sweden, the municipality of Örebro established the Interreligious and Intercultural Council, a consultative body that engages with diasporas with a special emphasis on interfaith dialogue and co-operation. In Poland, the municipality of Gdansk Immigrants' Council advises the mayor and other local authorities on issues and policies related to migrant and refugee inclusion.

59. In Italy, Bologna's "Council of Foreign and Stateless Citizens of the Province" and the "Neighbourhood Councils of Foreign Citizens" act as consultative bodies allowing diaspora representatives to express their voice and concerns. Up in Germany, district-level "Integrationsbeiräte" are often elected by migrant residents and consulted on a wide range of policy areas, including education, urban development, and anti-discrimination measures. In a rare example of national level consultative mechanism, the Azerbaijani Migrant Council provides an avenue for diasporas and migrants to participate in the migration management of the country.

60. Refugee-led consultative structures represent an important complementary mechanism to migrant councils, as they ensure that refugees themselves can directly inform policies that affect them while materially supporting each other. In Belgium, UNHCR-supported "Umbrella Refugee Committees" are articulated around diasporic groups, with 10 Committees representing different nationalities. The Committees are providing a shelter and support refugees and asylum-seekers in their integration process and elect a common President, who represents them in discussions with local authorities.

61. Within our own organisation, the Council of Europe's youth co-management system demonstrates the value of structured and continuous participation. Through the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), young people work alongside government representatives to shape youth policy and contribute expertise across thematic portfolios through an established, permanent mechanism. Beyond its youth-centred nature, the CJJ structure is a good example of co-management that could be applied to institutions working with diaspora groups.

62. All these consultative and advisory mechanisms have great potential to engage diasporas in democratic processes. However, their effectiveness is frequently constrained by structural limitations: their advisory nature, lack of decision-making power, and dependence on political will can reduce them to symbolic or

42. Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, (ETS No. 144) Articles 3(b), 4 and 6.
43. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 "Multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration".
44. Resolution 2552 (2024) "Strengthening democracy through participatory and deliberative processes".

"tokenistic" forms of participation. Diaspora voices are heard in some places, and this is good. But without genuine co-design, adequate resources, and clear channels into decision making, such mechanisms risk becoming performative inclusion rather than meaningful democratic engagement.

4. Conclusions

63. Diasporas are not only beneficiaries of integration policies but essential actors in strengthening both social cohesion and democratic engagement, acting as bridges between communities, institutions and countries. Their meaningful participation must go beyond formal political rights and include a wide range of mechanisms – from consultative bodies and civic initiatives to education, culture and faith-based engagement.

64. This report has showcased numerous examples of State-led frameworks, local participatory models and civil society initiatives that empower diasporas to contribute actively to social cohesion and democratic engagement. These activities must be recognised and commended.

65. At the same time, the report has identified certain shortcomings, notably, the risk of tokenistic participation, and the limitations of top-down approaches that fail to ensure community ownership. Other structural barriers such as discrimination, lack of information, and insufficient recognition of second-generation migrants and precarious administrative status further hinder effective democratic engagement. State-led programmes must ensure that their beneficiaries can sense ownership through meaningful participation and consultation.

66. Against this background, several promising practices emerge. Innovative programmes such as "Work with your MEP" and similar mentoring schemes demonstrate how direct co-operation between diaspora youth and policymakers can foster meaningful political engagement and mutual understanding. The development of a similar programme within the Parliamentary Assembly should be explored.

67. The extension of the right to vote and stand in local elections for non-citizens, already implemented in several member States, is also identified as a crucial lever for strengthening democratic inclusion and ensuring that institutions reflect the diversity of the societies they serve. The right to vote and stand for office, as well as other forms of innovative democratic engagement, make this report relevant for the New Democratic Pact, and it is therefore necessary to engage with the Special Committee on the Pact to share these new ideas.

68. Exchanges of views between diasporic groups and the Committee on Migration, International Protection and Economic Co-operation have proven to be extremely enriching for both members and diasporas, so similar engagements should be conducted as often as possible. The Assembly should systematise these exchanges by committing to conduct at least one exchange of views at Committee or Sub-Committee or Network level with representatives of migrant or diaspora groups in the preparation of each report concerning their integration or their political, social and cultural rights.

69. More broadly, the work of diaspora organisations – including faith-based ones – illustrates their role as mediators, service providers and drivers of social cohesion. Among them, diaspora faith-based communities, are key actors to provide practical support, build trust networks and facilitate access to civic participation. To ensure that these organisations can develop their full potential, sustainable structural funding is essential.

70. I want to finish my report with a call to action to my fellow Assembly members to work with their diasporas at national level, to include them in decision making and to make sure that Council of Europe best practices and standards are implemented not only on paper, but also effectively and meaningfully on the ground.

71. Allow me to end this report by, once again, quoting Paolo Freire, who noted that "we will organise our capacity to learn and teach so much better for being subjects and not simply objects of the process we are engaged in".