



## **Young and diverse, but not yet politically engaged? Pathways to greater participation for young people with an immigration history**

### **Summary**

The right to political participation is part of our understanding of democracy: when all residents of a country have the opportunity to actively shape politics, acceptance of political decisions increases. However, young people with an immigration history face various particular obstacles that reduce their chances of political participation, including experiences of discrimination and exclusion. At the same time, some are able to engage effectively in politics. What objective conditions are conducive to this? What motives or impulses are at work on the subjective level?

The study accompanies the practical project YoungUP!, which is carried out by the Federal Immigration and Integration Council BZI (Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat, a nationwide association of municipal integration, migration and foreigners' advisory councils). The project was funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration and at the same time the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism. It identifies and analyses both existing barriers to participation and various conditions for successfully increasing political participation of young people in Germany who are perceived as having a migrant background. The empirical basis is provided, on the one hand, by representative data collected as part of the SVR Integration Barometer 2024. Electoral and non-electoral political participation as well as barriers to participation were analysed among respondents under the age of 36 who are perceived to have a migrant background and, for comparison, among young people without an immigration history. On the other hand, a qualitative study was carried out in which 15 young people with a perceived migrant background were interviewed about their political participation and the obstacles preventing and conditions fostering successful participation.

The quantitative data show that young people who are perceived as having a migrant background are less politically involved (11% are active) than the comparison group without an immigration history (40% are active); their political interest is also less pronounced.

Qualitatively, it can be shown that integration in a peer group with which one is active together can promote political participation. The feeling of being able to change something by being active (self-efficacy) can also be crucial. This is supported by the quantitative data. However, respondents also report frustrations with political engagement and barriers to political participation. The data from the SVR Integration Barometer point to three factors in particular: lack of contacts, lack of representation and fear of discrimination.

Participants in qualitative interviews consider the institutionalised system of political education as having a key responsibility: Schools and non-formal educational institutions have to provide knowledge about political processes, topics and opportunities for participation more strongly in order to promote political participation of young people with an immigration history. In addition, they would like to see more information about access to politics in places where young people with an immigration history congregate, e.g. in disadvantaged neighbourhoods or in schools. According to the study participants, this could, among other things, promote the dialogue between politics and people who are perceived as having a migration background. The visibility of (young) people with an immigration history who are already in parliament should also be increased – they can be important role models. Furthermore, experiences of racism come up in all qualitative interviews. Racist discrimination can prevent young people with a perceived migrant background from actively participating in politics. However, it also shows that experiences of racism can go hand in hand with high levels of political activity among respondents who feel internal self-efficacy. This finding is supported by the quantitative data.

The study derives the following courses of action:

- Political education should take place in all types of schools and from an early age.
- Social work can support this through low-threshold, inclusive political youth work.
- Associations, migrant organisations and other civil society organisations are also called upon to offer more political education.
- Political participation projects, e.g. by political parties or foundations, should be widely and openly advertised.

- Political parties should promote diversity in politics and make role models visible.
- Political parties should make it more attractive to work for the party without becoming a member.
- The right to political participation through youth councils should be strengthened.
- Anti-racist training should be offered to party members, teachers and social workers