

Beyond the Invitation: Redefining Participation for Young People with Migration Backgrounds in Local Democracy

Field Practice, Empirical Evaluation & Lessons from the Resilient Cities Programme (2023–2025)

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Context & Structural Problem: The Participation Disconnect

(OBSERVED SYMPTOMS)

- Exclusion from formal & informal decision-making: voting rights limitations & barriers to exercising social/civic rights [8].
- Rare engagement in public consultations, forums, and municipal governance structures [8].
- Perspectives absent on issues directly affecting them: service access, rights, and local spatial planning [8].
- Civic role undervalued: residents viewed primarily as passive service recipients rather than civic actors [8, 9, 26].

(INSTITUTIONAL CAUSES)

- Rigid institutional cultures resistant to organizational flexibility and diverse community engagement [9].
- Under-prepared personnel: staff & local actors lack capacity, tools, or training for inclusive co-design [9, 15].
- Disconnected departments & administrative silos leading to opaque procedures across municipal services [2, 70].
 - Persistent stereotypes that prevent migrant residents from being recognized as full civic actors [9, 19].
 - Absence of multilingual institutional pathways and accessible communication standards [2, 70].

SYSTEMIC: MISSING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PARTICIPATION

Report Finding: Local participation frameworks are not designed to be inclusive by design or responsive to the lived realities of residents navigating complex administrative and social landscapes, failing to foster belonging and civic legitimacy [9].

Strategic Paradigm Shift

TRADITIONAL DEFICIT MODEL

Service Delivery & Compliance Lens

- Treats young migrants exclusively as 'vulnerable groups' or passive service recipients [19, 26].
 - Focuses strictly on integration compliance and basic needs fulfillment rather than civic agency [19].
 - Evaluates success through static consultation surveys without shared decision-making power [8, 70].
 - Forces non-standard youth trajectories into rigid, pre-existing administrative categories [8, 9].
- Risk: Reinforces tokenism, paternalism, and persistent institutional exclusion [9, 19].

CIVIC AGENCY PARADIGM PLACE Network Co-Creation Model

- Positions lived experience and multilingual leadership as essential expertise for democratic renewal [19].
- Repositions migrant youth as proactive civic actors driving local public problem-solving [10, 19].
- Implements shared transformation: builds resident capacity while equipping local actors to share civic space [10, 17].
- Establishes relational trust, accessible French, and co-designed policy micro-experiments [6, 20].
- Outcome: Sustained civic engagement grounded in mutual recognition and systemic adaptation [7, 8].

Operational Methodology: Dual-Track Capacity Building

TRACK 1: MIGRANT RESIDENTS

- Peer Facilitation [41]
- Understanding public institutions & municipal competencies [1, 41].
- Navigating access to rights, social services, and administrative procedures [1, 41].
- Community problem-solving & collaborative analysis [1, 41].
- Communication, public advocacy storytelling & self-advocacy [33, 41].
- Fundamentals of collective action & peer network building [1, 41].

TRACK 2: LOCAL ACTORS & MUNICIPAL STAFF

- Applied Case Studies & Peer Exchange [44]
- Awareness of unconscious bias, systemic exclusion & structural discrimination [1, 44].
- Collaborative decision-making & equity frameworks [1, 44].
- Participatory facilitation & co-design tools (reverse brainstorming, personas) [34, 44].
- Practical tools for sharing civic space with diverse communities [15, 44].

Co-Creation in Practice: Collaborative Policy Labs & Micro-Experiments

LYON MICRO-EXPERIMENTS

- Volunteer Interpretation System: Prototyped multilingual reception support at 9th arrondissement town hall [57, 62].
- Inclusive Cultural Programming: Co-designed exhibitions & narrative events with Musée Gadagne, Lyon [57, 63].
- Civic & Political Inclusion: Tested non-EU resident engagement in local 'Université Citoyenne' [58, 64, 77].

CLERMONT-FERRAND MICRO-EXPERIMENTS

- Multilingual Welcome Guide Feedback: Launched community campaign & survey to simplify city guide using FALC standards [50, 58].
- Language & Employment 'Café-Rencontre': Connected low-level French speakers with employers offering workplace language support [50].
- Peer Mentorship Pilot: Paired newly arrived residents with local guides via WhatsApp for service orientation [50, 60].

- 1. Access to Services & Information • 2. Language Learning Pathways
- 3. Cultural Participation • 4. Political & Civic Inclusion [2, 47, 48]



Key Findings: Grounded Evaluation from the Resilient Cities Programme

1. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS ARE REAL AND DEEPLY ENTRENCHED

- Evaluation Evidence: Disconnected departments, opaque bureaucratic procedures, and a systemic lack of multilingual access across municipal services.
- Institutional Reflection Quote: "I see the changes we need, but my department isn't ready to shift how we work."

2. CONFIDENCE AND LEADERSHIP GROW WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRULY HEARD

- Measured Impact Metrics: 85% of migrant participants felt more confident speaking in public; 90% felt better equipped to help others navigate services; 94% would recommend training.
- Resident Empowerment Quote: "I realised I have a role to play, not only for myself, but for others like me."

3. INSTITUTIONS CAN REFLECT AND ADAPT, BUT IT TAKES SUSTAINED WORK

- Utility & Inclusivity Data: 88% of local actors found training directly relevant; 90% evaluated Policy Labs as genuinely inclusive & respectful; cities using co-created recommendations to guide change.
- Institutional Adaptation Quote: "Inclusion means rethinking roles, not just technical fixes."

Measured Participant & Institutional Impact

85%

Public Speaking Confidence

Migrant participants
reporting greater
confidence speaking in
public forums.

90%

Peer Assistance Agency

Migrant participants
feeling better equipped
to help others navigate
local services.

88%

Training Relevance

Local actors & municipal
staff finding dual-track
training directly
applicable.

90%

Lab Inclusivity Rating

Overall participants
rating Policy Labs as
genuinely inclusive,
respectful & transparent.

"This was not a consultation. It was a process where we were really part of the decisions." — A migrant participant

From Field Prototyping to Institutional Continuity

CO-AUTHORED POLICY BRIEFS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shared Recommendations: Policy Lab outcomes compiled into formal Policy Briefs co-authored by migrant residents & local actors in Lyon and Clermont-Ferrand.
- Delivered to Authorities: Shared directly with municipal executive teams, CTAs, and regional civil society partners as reference points for ongoing policy reform.
- Collaborative Monitoring: Follow-up phase planned to support shared monitoring and track long-term institutional adoption across public systems.

CONCRETE MUNICIPAL ADAPTATIONS IN PROGRESS

- Clermont-Ferrand Welcome Guide: Municipal revision of city welcome booklet incorporating plain language & multi-language digital dissemination.
- Lyon Interpretation Protocol: Intention to formalize volunteer-based interpretation system tested in 9th arrondissement town hall reception desk.
- Institutional Representation: Advancing preparations for standing international resident councils in Lyon.

Lessons Learned: Four Pillars for Inclusive Local Democracy

1. MULTILINGUAL ACCESS

Institutionalize multilingual pathways & plain language communication across all municipal entry points.

2. INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE

Break down administrative silos between social affairs, youth, integration & civic participation divisions.

3. PERMANENT POLICY LABS

Transition from periodic consultation surveys to continuous, co-designed policy prototyping.

4. YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Invest in youth leadership, recognizing lived experience as vital democratic capital.



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