

Between marginalization and participation: The role of young migrant women in contemporary European society

Migrations are a central aspect of contemporary Europe, with millions of people crossing the continent's borders every year in search of a better life, refuge, or growth opportunities. These migrations are not just statistics, but personal stories, including those of a frequently invisible group: young migrant women. Although they represent a significant portion of the migrant population, these young women face unique challenges when it comes to actively participating in the political and civil life of the countries that host them.

The challenges of political participation

Youth participation in democratic processes is an increasingly relevant issue in Europe, and while there is a growing disillusionment with traditional politics, this phenomenon is even more pronounced among young migrants. According to Eurostat data, young people of migrant origin, especially those from non-European countries, continue to face significant barriers in accessing civil and political rights, including the right to vote and the ability to participate in political parties. These obstacles are often related to factors such as citizenship, migrant or refugee status, and social exclusion, all of which heavily limit their ability to influence decision-making processes at local, national, and European levels.

Alternative forms of participation: activism and volunteering

Despite these challenges, many young migrants engage in alternative forms of civic participation, such as volunteering and activism, which do not require direct involvement in formal political institutions. These forms of civic engagement, often not recognized as traditional forms of participation, show that a lack of political involvement is not due to disinterest, but rather to a system that fails to include all social groups. A report from the Council of Europe highlighted how young migrants, despite being unable to access official political channels, are very active locally, participating in volunteer projects, social movements, and community initiatives. These alternative spaces allow them to make their voices heard and contribute to social change, all while staying outside of traditional political processes.

Young migrant women and their specific challenges

Young migrant women, in particular, represent a vulnerable segment of the migrant population, despite being one of the most prominent components of migration flows into Europe. However, their voices are often ignored, both in decision-making processes and in public debates. According to the UN, migrant women have a unique potential to promote intercultural dialogue, due to their experiences of cultural crossing and the common challenges they face in their migration journey. However, despite this potential, young migrant women are frequently excluded from political participation processes because of:

- **Lack of political representation:** In many European countries, political rights are closely tied to citizenship, thereby excluding young migrants from participating in elections and other democratic mechanisms.
- **Structural discrimination:** Institutional and legal barriers prevent young migrants from accessing positions of power, further limiting their influence on political decisions.
- **Gender and cultural prejudices:** Discriminatory stereotypes based on gender and culture continue to limit the participation opportunities for migrant women, perpetuating a narrow and marginalizing view of their role in society.

The VOC Project: An opportunity for change

In this context, initiatives such as the VOC (Voices of Change) project provide a concrete example of how political participation for young migrant women can be promoted. VOC aims to create a space for young migrant women to actively participate in shaping public policies that affect them. The project is working on the creation of a European Advisory Body for Young Migrants, which will allow them to share their experiences, contribute to migration policies, and interact directly with European institutions.

The strength of VOC also lies in the collaboration between young migrants and local youth, fostering intercultural dialogue and social inclusion. This environment of mutual learning leads to greater understanding between communities, helping young migrants to develop practical and leadership skills. These skills are crucial not only for their social and professional integration but also for their future as active and informed European citizens.