

WeWorld: in Italy, people with a migratory background are excluded from the public discussion and feel distrust towards the institutions

*That is what emerged in the study conducted by the NGO as part of the European project SHAPE.*

Milan, 1 August 2022 - People and communities with migratory backgrounds are not involved in the public discussion and strongly distrust the Italian institutions. That was highlighted by the research conducted by WeWorld – an organisation committed for 50 years to guaranteeing the rights of women, girls and children in 27 countries around the world, including Italy – as part of the new project SHAPE (SHaring Actions for the Participation and Empowerment of migrant communities and Local Authorities) co-funded by the European Fund AMIF (Transnational Actions on Asylum, Migration and Integration).

Today, there are 5 million foreign citizens in Italy and 1.25 million Italian citizens with a migratory background (who have obtained Italian citizenship).

WeWorld, in collaboration with the Institute for Social Research (IRS), collected the opinions of several people and communities with migratory backgrounds on their experiences of participation in public and political discussion. The study points out that citizens of foreign origin feel neither adequately represented nor involved in public decisions, especially those relevant to them. One of the most compelling issues is citizenship (in 2020, only 131,803 people obtained Italian citizenship, compared to a foreign population residing in Italy of about 5 million) and, related to this, the right to vote. All this only increases the lack of trust in Italian institutions, as revealed by the WeeWorld study.

However, being able to express one's demands and being listened to and recognised would help formulate better integration policies, more attentive and responsive to actual needs. Said more effective policies would help to counter the risk of social exclusion affecting 42% of non-EU citizens and severe material deprivation affecting 15% of them.

"We have to put people with a migratory background in a position to participate in the life of the community they belong to, involving them in the public debate and decision-making processes," explains Elena Caneva, coordinator of WeWorld's Study Centre. "These people have been living in Italy for many years or were born here. They actively participate in the economic and social life of the country and would like to feel part of it, expressing



their demands through direct dialogue and confrontation (and not mediated, as often happens) with the institutions.

Therefore, the study highlights a problem of trust in Italian institutions. Most of the interviewees said they are afraid to access local services and do not believe that their needs can be adequately met (for example, they prefer to return to their countries for health reasons).

In this scenario, the SHAPE project was born to foster the participation of migrant communities in democratic processes and the design and implementation of integration policies at the local, national and community levels.

This European project takes place in 3 different border states - namely: Italy, Hungary and Croatia, where public opinion appears to be particularly bad towards migrants - and in 2 other leading states in terms of migrants' participation in the democratic process, Germany and Portugal.

On July the 21st, the Consortium partners presented the results of their country analyses during the webinar "SHAPE The Society We Want," demonstrating how crucial migrant communities' participation and involvement in democratic life are. In all five project countries, the research was conducted with a common methodology. The latter was provided by the Institute for Social Research (IRS), an internationally recognized research company responsible for setting up a common framework for qualitative research. That will be the basis upon which capacity-building activities for people and communities with migratory backgrounds will be built.

Indeed, people and communities with migratory backgrounds were heard through focus groups, and their needs were collected regarding five issues central to leading a fulfilling life: housing, education, health, employment, and adopting a gender mainstreaming approach.

- The desk analysis conducted by WeWorld – based on data available in the literature – highlights some issues: Although there have been attempts in the past to create national consultative mechanisms aimed at encouraging migrants' participation in public affairs, the effects have been negligible.



- Conventional political participation – strictly understood as the possibility to vote and run for elections – is linked to obtaining citizenship.
- It is in the trade union structure that migrants have found their main channel for intermediary political participation and, above all, political mobilisation. 1 in 2 migrant workers are members of a trade union association. The figure stops at 34% (1 in 3) for Italian workers (IDOS, 2020). But this is not enough.
- People with a migratory background experience civic participation mainly at the local level, where they feel their primary needs are assessed more closely. It is precisely in the less conventional forms of political and civic participation that migrants and people with a migratory background are active the most.
- In Italy, people with a migratory background cannot express themselves regarding politics, and above all, they lack a space to claim their needs and requirements. Mostly, their demands are brought forward by civil society stakeholders (NGOs, cooperatives and so on). In this scenario, the Third Sector in this context is filling a political void.
- In 2020, 931 associations and private organisations were listed in the migrant association register working for citizens with a migration background in Italy: social cooperatives, schools, universities, research centres, private companies, healthcare facilities, religious bodies, etc.
- A Ministry of Labour database compiled voluntarily by associations currently has 1,149 registered associations. Most of the associations are multi-national, but the data also suggest that long-standing communities, which have created networks over time, are more involved in associations and are more likely to participate in civil society.

