



## Diverse activities – broad networks – partial integration? Migrants' organisations as a creative force in society

### Summary

According to our estimates, between 12,400 and 14,300 formalised migrants' organisations (MOs) are currently active in Germany. They are an important part of the civil-society landscape. MOs are more likely to be found in towns and cities, especially in big cities, than organisations of non-migrants. The main objective of the two-year research project conducted by the Research Unit of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (SVR), the results of which are presented here, was to paint as precise a picture as possible of the diversity of the MO landscape in Germany in terms of their fields of activity and membership structures as well as the functions they fulfil. To that end the SVR Research Unit first identified all the MOs in four German federal states and then invited them to take part in a standardised survey. A total of 764 MOs took part; 17 qualitative interviews with representatives of the participating MOs were also conducted.<sup>1</sup>

The overwhelming majority of the MOs is primarily active in their own town/city or community (more than 60%); they tend to be small, with no more than 100 members (58.1%). The MO landscape is growing dynamically. Half of those organisations which are currently active was established after 2004, a quarter after 2012. The "younger" organisations differ from the "well-established" ones in terms of their activities and the composition of their membership.

MOs first and foremost promote the participation of people with a migration background<sup>2</sup> in regard to various aspects of social life, for example providing social services (such as advice on childcare), or in the field of education, promoting intercultural exchange and cultural education, or by supporting refugees.

The study also provides new insights as to how these organisations see themselves. It shows that the label "migrants' organisation" is by no means dated, with most organisations (still) using this term to refer to themselves. At the same time, though, nearly all of them include other terms, such as "cultural",

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<sup>1</sup> The study's methodology report, which contains a detailed description of the method used, has been published separately (see SVR Research Unit, 2020) and can be downloaded (in German) at: [www.svr-migration.de/publikationen](http://www.svr-migration.de/publikationen).

<sup>2</sup> The term "people with a migration background/history/biography" refers to people who themselves or whose parents or grandparents came to Germany as migrants; no account is taken of nationality.



“educational” or “youth”, in their name. Based on their own understanding of themselves, MOs can, from an explorative and empirical perspective, be divided into three main groups: multi-functional organisations which focus on participation; organisations which focus on cultural heritage; and organisations which represent political interests.

Women not only make up the overwhelming part of the membership but often also take on leadership roles. Today’s MOs have more paid staff to support their volunteers than was the case when previous studies were done. This above all applies to some classic areas of social work, as well as to anti-racism work and promoting participation. The staffing situation in the field of children’s and youth work is not so good. Migrants’ online communities (MOCs), which provide low-threshold support as well as self-help and advisory services, are staffed exclusively by volunteers.

MOs tend not to work in isolation, however, and are part of diverse networks. Migrants’ umbrella organisations and their member organisations regard the main purpose of a network as passing on information and strengthening their own position within the network.

MOs actively and successfully seek out funding: half of the MOs interviewed had filed 10 or more funding applications in the past five years, two thirds of which were granted. The chances of MOs being allocated funding increase considerably if they can provide proof that they employ paid staff and if their activities relate directly to integration. Policy-makers have long recognised that MOs are key partners. There are various funding formats at both federal and federal state level in Germany which also or primarily support MOs when it comes to establishing their infrastructure and their level of professionalisation.

What conclusions can be drawn as regards the current situation of MOs in Germany, their activities and funding needs which will be of benefit to policy-makers and authorities, as well as to the MOs themselves? The study provides some initial leads: Politics should support MOs in getting rid of structural shortcomings but should avoid giving MOs any special treatment. It is useful, in the context of such mainstreaming, to meet their needs in a targeted manner, for example through structural funding or capacity-building. Another key aspect is promoting intercultural opening in specialist education, social or youth departments, for instance. It is in these areas that MOs receive less funding, although this work is just as relevant to society and integration alike. Intercultural opening is to make it easier for MOs to gain access both to specialist funding and to specialist organisations and committees. MOs should play a more active part in specialist structures in which they already offer numerous services, for example on account of their membership in relevant specialist umbrella organisations. Synergies between those MOs which work online and those which work offline should be put to better use, for example by means of providing hybrid advisory services.



Nevertheless, MOs still have specific needs of which special account should be taken. That is why it would make sense to expand programmes which promote integration to include adjacent fields. Furthermore, more opportunities should be created for providing less professionalised MOs with immaterial support, both on a selective and on a permanent basis. Moreover, cooperation based on trust between MOs and administrative authorities can be strengthened through regular information sharing, transparency as regards funding allocation and having designated contact persons.