

Seeking a partner? The state and migrant umbrella organisations in integration policy

Summary

Many migrant organisations have joined forces across Germany at regional and federal level to establish umbrella organisations in order to frame common interests (along with other potential functions), to effectively represent those interests in the wider world and to position themselves vis-à-vis the political and administrative level as a point of contact regarding equal participation issues. Politicians also emphasise that migrant umbrella organisations are a key partner when it comes to shaping Germany as an immigration society. And yet, there are many knowledge gaps when it comes to the relationship between the state and migrant umbrella organisations. This Policy Brief thus seeks to summarise what we know so far and what research still needs to be done in this area.

The Policy Brief investigates what distinguishes migrant umbrella organisations from other interest groups, how this field is organised in terms of structure and content, and which factors influence the migrant umbrella organisations' relationships with state actors. The current state of research was reviewed and online research conducted in order to gain an initial overview of which migrant umbrella organisations are active at the federal level. In a first step, a good 60 migrant umbrella organisations were identified, and around half subsequently categorised as migrant umbrella organisations as defined in the paper (see chapter 2) and with a focus on the federal level. The categorisation of some organisations still needs to be validated, though, as not all the information needed for a proper determination is available online. The around 30 migrant umbrella organisations were then compared, for example, in terms of their history and the reason for their establishment, their programmatic goals, the main focus of their activities and membership structure. This stocktaking reveals the following:

Overall, migrant umbrella organisations belong to the broad spectrum of non-commercial interest groups. The majority of them focuses on social and social-policy issues. Nevertheless, migrant umbrella organisations do not form a homogeneous (new) type of interest group, but are very diverse in terms of content and structure and as regards the services they offer members and how they represent their interests. Migrant umbrella organisations can, for example, be differentiated based on the following characteristics:

- **Types of interests represented and structure type:** Besides those umbrella organisations which seek to network as many migrant organisations as possible in a particular region, there are those at every political level (federal, state, local) which are more specialised and have an additional thematic focus and/or target group focus, communalities as regards origin, culture, language area or religious influence. Often, several of these criteria overlap (e.g. a specialist organisation with common features as regards origin), meaning that the interests represented by migrant umbrella organisations reflect the same level of ongoing differentiation as is also evident in other areas.
- **Representativeness:** Some of the migrant umbrella organisations primarily represent their members' material or general ideational interests. Others, by contrast, regard themselves more as social policy advocates of the interests of third parties or non-members, usually specific user groups in their member organisations.

- **Addressees and strategies of interest advocacy:** Not all migrant umbrella organisations first and foremost seek to gain an influence on concrete political decision-making processes. Rather, in some cases, their lobbying work focuses on the public discourse or other interest groups. It is, therefore, not possible to ascertain how established a particular migrant umbrella organisation already is solely on the basis of whether it is regularly involved in the political bodies relevant to decision-making. Since they all pursue different interests, it is likewise not always possible to apply the same model when assessing a migrant umbrella organisation's relationship with the state. As a result, there are still knowledge deficits as regards the question of how mutual agendas and expectations regarding activities on the part of politics and migrant umbrella organisations fit together and to what extent the migrant umbrella organisations' demands as regards their involvement in decision-making are met in their day-to-day work of representing their member organisations' interests.