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# Migration Justice: Delivering on the promise of the Global Compact for Migration

## Paper 4: Meaningful Participation: Centring Migrant Expertise and Experience

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) contains a promise of participatory processes expressed in its emphasis on a people-centred, human rights based and whole-of-society approach to migration policy. Every four years, starting in 2022, the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) will serve as the primary intergovernmental global platform for Member States and other stakeholders to share progress on implementation of the GCM and discuss continuing or new challenges. The IMRF should facilitate meaningful participation by migrants, regardless of migration status, in a way that is ethical, sustainable and safe while leveraging and expanding participatory processes at the local, national and regional level<sup>1</sup>. This paper is directed to people in governments at all levels, the United Nations, diplomatic missions, civil society, and other stakeholder groups with access and convening power around the review and implementation of the GCM.

### Acknowledging Challenges in Delivering Participatory Processes

Meaningful participation is not a simple tick-box exercise, nor is it inherently neutral. Providing participatory policy making processes at all levels, including at the United Nations, requires engagement with the ways power manifests in these decision making structures. This engagement includes considering what power dynamics impact on migrants' engagement including how they are visible in formalised structures and in the way they play out in practice. Engaging with these questions will not remove systemic power imbalances but can help to create processes that challenge them.

Migrants' perspectives and priorities are neither uniform nor static. To avoid tokenism and over-simplification it is important to recognize that migrants are not a monolithic group. No individual migrant or organisation can represent the full diversity of migrants' lived experiences. This reality should inform varied approaches to participation with the aim of meaningful engagement including a broad range of perspectives whilst acknowledging that not everybody is at the table(s).

The principles and enabling actions in this paper are not exhaustive. But are intended to help navigate these challenges and avoid undemocratic participation practices that can reinforce existing power inequalities or cause further harm such as re-victimization or tokenism.

### Key levels for Affected Communities Participation in Policy Processes

Different levels of participation (drawing on Arnstein, Hart and others) can be used in the planning and delivery as processes are developed:

- 1. Nonparticipation:** stakeholders are only on the receiving end of the process, whether it harms or benefits them.
- 2. Contribution:** voluntary or other forms of input to predetermined programmes and projects.
- 3. Information sharing:** stakeholders are informed about their rights, responsibilities and options. Usually it is one directional and not a mutual exchange of information.
- 4. Consultation:** stakeholders are given the opportunity to interact and provide feedback, and may express suggestions and concerns. However, decisions are usually made by others, and stakeholders have no assurance that their input will be used.
- 5. Cooperation and consensus building:** stakeholders negotiate positions and help determine priorities, but the process is directed by others.
- 6. Decision making:** stakeholders have a meaningful role in making decisions on policy, project design and implementation.
- 7. Partnership:** stakeholders work together as equals towards mutual goals.
- 8. Transformation:** transfer of control over decision-making and resources to stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we understand migrant as an umbrella term for people moving outside their country of and as a term that is also inclusive of asylum seekers and refugees where the policy processes are relevant to them.




## Principles and Enabling Actions for Meaningful Participation by Migrants in the IMRF and GCM Implementation at a National and Local Level

Whilst transformation should be the long-term aim, some processes may require stepwise evolution towards that aim. Efforts should be made to deliver the most participatory process possible within the constraints of the IMRF, whilst also advancing towards and advocating for longer term changes in access, process and representation. These principles and enabling actions are intended to move towards meaningful migrant participation:



### PRINCIPLES




**1. Leadership and Agency:** Affected communities are involved in shaping human rights based policy discussions and decision making on issues that impact their lives and are seen as peers and partners, recognising their multiple roles including:

- Migrants as teachers: migrants who see a value in storytelling decide when and how to tell their stories and space is provided for this.
- Migrants as policy influencers: migrants contribute substantive policy critique and proposals in debates and decision-making processes, their views are proactively sought, respected and included.

**2. Safe Space, Brave Space:** Space is created, within official meetings and additional to them, where migrants regardless of status can safely participate and express their views freely and where other participants are open to hearing their views, including criticism.

**3. Diversity, Equity, and Intersectionality:** The broadest possible range of migrant experience is included, with strong emphasis on those most affected and marginalized, according to the context and nature of the policy issue. The impacts of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are addressed through who is engaged with and how.




**4. Sustained and Sustainable:** Participation is treated as an on-going process of benefit to the people who the policies will affect and to policy makers.

**5. Safety and sensitivity to risk:** Potential risks to safety or negative effects for those participating in the policy processes are actively considered and prevented or mitigated.

**6. Transparency:** Throughout the extent of the process, migrants have clear, timely and informed understanding on how their participation will take place and its scope, purpose and potential impact.

### ENABLING ACTIONS:




**a) Initiate and sustain institutional self-reflection:** Institutions reflect on the ways their systems exclude or create barriers to migrant participation. Meaningful participation will not happen as a matter of common practice unless this crucial step is taken.

**b) Support migrants' calls and perspectives:** Those with policy making power intentionally open spaces, reflect on who is at the table(s) and use their influence to incorporate the voices and policy proposals of affected communities.

**c) Finance migrant participation:** Make funding available that covers core costs, travel and other expenses and re-examine funding flows so that migrant participation is fully financed.


**d) Capacity building:** Support for engagement is provided, including clear information, guidance, training, and resources around the policy issues and the systems in which the process occurs. Language interpretation services are provided as needed.



**e) Relationship building:** Take the steps to ensure broad distribution of information and to engage new audiences. Invest time in developing relationships of trust with migrants including through migrant led and migrant serving organisations.

**f) Co-create comprehensive participatory processes:** Migrants are involved from the beginning of the process, including in planning and designing their participation.

**g) Inclusion of diverse opinions:** Invitations to speak or participate in events are not limited to those whose perspectives are easy to hear, align with the perspectives of the organisers or are already in agreement with the outcome of the process.



**h) Voluntary engagement:** Migrants are not coerced into expressing views against their wishes or expressing the views of others and can cease involvement at any stage.

**i) Accountability:** Participants are informed about how their views were interpreted and used. Evaluation and feedback processes are in place to support learning and improvement.