



Module Content Outline

Module: Key principles of Democracy & Civic Engagement

PART A

Overall Summary of the Module:

The module wishes to help learners deepen their knowledge and understanding of the key values and ideals upon which democracies are built on, try to follow and promote. It presents the key parameters that constitute a democratic state, political culture of Democracy and highlights the importance of civic engagement, the participation of citizens in social and public affairs, introducing formats and forms participation it can take place. It also talks about the positive effect participation can have in migrants' bid to integrate into their host community and most importantly, in making their disagreements, views and cases heard and taken into consideration. This module is the equivalent of 0,5 European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) credits and corresponds to level 2 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

PART B

Objectives and Expected Outcomes

1. Understand the fundamental principles of a democratic society
2. Learn more about the culture that governs Western liberal democracies and the rights, opportunities it grants them
3. Assess the importance of civic engagement and participation in the democratic system
4. Identify the several forms and diverse formats civic engagement can occur
5. Realize the, direct and indirect, contribution civic participation can have to their integration and personal circumstances

PART C (The entire module approximately 1500 words)

Units in the Module:

Unit 1: Key values & Principles of Democracy

Unit 2: Civic Participation and its importance

Unit 3: Participation & its effect on migrant integration



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Unit 1: Key values & Principles of Democracy

C1. Overview:

This unit provides a concise introduction to the key principles and values of democracy allowing to better understand the key features upon which Democratic states operate.

C2. Learning Outcomes

Recognize the distinction between 'direct' and 'representative' democracy
Realize what do we mean by the term democracy
Understand the key principles upon which democracy is built
Grasp the importance of civic participation in the democratic system

C3. Content

Introduction

"Democracy is not so much a form of government as a set of principles" -Woodrow Wilson

Democracy derives from the Greek words δῆμος - *demos* "people" and κράτος - *kratos* "power", essentially meaning that "the people hold power", being a political system that allows citizens to govern themselves. As Abraham Lincoln famously stated, it is the "government of the people by the people for the people."

The idea of democracy dates back to Ancient Athens with the introduction of a form of governance, now described as 'Direct Democracy', that gave all citizens a say and a direct involvement, through 'Ekklesia tou Dimou', in the decision making process of the city-state. Though they share similar ideals and a wish for citizen participation in the governance of a state, in present-day democracies, defined as Indirect or Representative or Liberal Democracies, citizens elect their representatives – leaders to take decisions and govern on their behalf. It is important to note that currently, the majority of states in the world are (in various forms and to a varying degree and success) representative democracies.

Key Principles of a Democracy

Democracy is the collection of principles upon which the ideal that People are the ultimate authority and source of legitimacy of government is built on. These present



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the fundamentals and the basis on which Democratic states are built and are often being measured. These key principles and ideals are:

➤ **Respect for Human Rights**

Democracies actively respect and promote the rights of all human beings, locally and abroad, as these have been laid down in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) that the United Nations General Assembly has announced "as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations." (United Nations: un.org). It is also important to highlight that the respect for human rights should be ensured in any decision or action taken by a democratic state even when the majority of citizens disagree.

➤ **Regular and Fair Elections**

The legitimacy of a government comes from the electorate which gives its consent (approval) to be governed via fair elections that take place in regular intervals and allow citizens to vote or stand for election freely and without any form of intimidation or fear. Elections give citizens the opportunity to have a say and determine who will govern them selecting their officials and government as well as hold them accountable. They are the ultimate form of expression of the public's will and it is through them that Citizen use their power of choice.

➤ **Freedom of Expression & Association**

Safeguarding the right of individuals to express and share their beliefs and ideas as well as the ability to come together and collectively express, promote, pursue, and defend their collective or shared ideas are cornerstones of democratic societies. They are the basis to safeguard and promote the enjoyment of other rights within a state and are at the heart of a healthy democracy.

➤ **Separation of powers**

The democratic political system divides the state into three branches – the legislative, the executive and the judicial branch – giving each one the capacity to fulfil different tasks. These branches are separated so each is in charge of different tasks and can check the exercise of powers by the others, ensuring that no one can become so powerful so to control the system/state completely. By separating their powers it ensures that a system of checks and balances is in place to protect the state from any abuse of power. (Civics Academy)

Essentially, democracy is a political system based on citizen participation and their involvement in the political process. Consequently, civic participation and the 'civil society' are considered as products and essential parameters of a democratic



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institutions. They are key principals of a democratic state and essential for it to remain functioning, safeguarding the rights and liberties of its citizens and all individuals residing within it (Maria Eremenko: 2011).

C.4 Key Words

Democracy, Direct Democracy, Human Rights, Civil Liberties, Checks and Balances, Civic participation, Elections, Freedom of Expression and Association

PART D

Further Reading

So, What is Democracy Anyway? | Peter Emerson | TEDxVienna - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjCJhSuLdok>

What are the key features of a democracy? - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi-getj3JX8>

The Concepts and Fundamental Principles of Democracy - http://www.civiced.org/pdfs/books/ElementsOfDemocracy/Elements_Subsection3.pdf

Democracy: A short introduction - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6jgWxkbR7A>

Civics Academy - <https://www.civicsacademy.co.za/>

CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY - https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=56a283ae-50ff-0c9b-7179-954d05e0aa19&groupId=252038



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Unit Completion

- In democratic states the majority holds absolute power and can take any decision it wishes. **True/False**
Answer: False
Explanation: Democratic states have structures and procedures in place that put a 'check' to government and the majority's decisions in order to ensure that the rights of all citizens and the democracy itself are protected
- Media being free to investigate and report on the actions and work of a government is a key pillar of a democratic state. **True/False**
Answer: True
Explanation: Freedom of the media is vital because it monitors and checks the actions and decisions of the government and helps to keep citizens informed about current affairs
- In democracies, the head of a state can introduce legislation on its own.
True/False
Answer: False
Explanation: Democracies have a set of rules and institutions that are in place to make sure that no person or body possess absolute power and can do as they please, potentially against the interests of the people
- Modern democracies are operating on a direct or representative system?
Direct/Representative
Answer: Representative
Explanation: Modern democracies are representative, with people having the right to elect individuals in positions of power, placing them in charge of the day-to-day decision making on their behalf
- Citizens, in democracies, have the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association at all levels, in particular in political, trade union and civic matters. **True/False**
Answer: True
Explanation: Freedom of assembly and association are seen as essential to ensure that people can gather and meet publicly and privately to voice their opinions or grievances and support causes that matter to them



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PART F

- Visit the website ourworldindata.org and its page on Democracy: <https://ourworldindata.org/democracy#all-charts-preview> and explore the information it provides about the country you are from and the state you are currently residing in. Think about and examine the different concepts presented by this module and how do they appear in the world we are living today.
- On a piece of paper note down the key concepts of democracy as they were presented by this Unit. Then, on a scale of 1 (not at all) and 5 (Greatly) note down to what extent are the country you are from and the country you are currently living in cover them. Discuss your findings with friends and explore how democratic do you consider them, what should the improve and whether you could contribute to that.

Unit 2: Civic Participation and its forms

C1.Overview:

This unit provides an understanding of the term 'civic engagement' conceiving its importance for a democratic state and citizens alike.

C2. Learning Outcomes

- Become aware of the importance of civic participation in the democratic system
- Conceive the diversified meaning and application of the term 'civic participation'
- Understand that participation in democracies is multifaceted and it is not confined to elections
- Identify the variety of ways they can become active and have influence in their host society even if they do not hold political rights
- Further explore the terms civil society, civil society organizations, active citizenship and civic engagement



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C3. Content

Introduction

“The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.” – Alexis de Tocqueville

Democracy, as a political system that wishes to give citizens the right to govern themselves, depends on a polity (society) that believes that its engagement matters (Knobloch: 2019). It is thus essential for a democracy to allow its citizens to participate and influence its decision-making processes and developments.

Participation in political processes and the decision-making processes lies at the very heart of democracy, and it is recognized as a right that needs to be secured for all individuals, non-governmental organizations and civil society in general. Civic participation is considered as an essential parameter for the effective functioning of a state and to strengthen the credibility of its democratic institutions. As the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe notes, “encouraging member States to draw on the views, information and expertise provided through participation and to develop a culture of effective participation based on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law” (COE:2017).

Forms of Civic Participation

Civic participation is the engagement of individuals, NGOs and civil society at large in decision-making processes and social affairs. It thus involves individuals taking an active stance on issues and developments at a local, national and international level. Most importantly, it should not be understood as just the engagement with political processes. Instead, it involves multiple forms of participation and ways an individual becomes active in social and political affairs.

As Democracy provides individuals multiple ways they can get actively involved in public affairs, it would be too narrow to focus only on the electoral rights citizens hold and the structured forms of engagement, i.e. voting. It is important to understand civic participation as any form of action –either individually or as part of a group- active citizens, and indeed migrants, take to further their beliefs and interests, express themselves and engage social and political affairs. Political engagement should be understood as a multidimensional process that also recognizes other channels and forms of participation, not just participation in electoral processes (IOM: 2015).

As a result, though they often do not hold voting rights, migrants have multiple forms of participation in the decision making processes of their host society available to them. Indicatively these include:



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- Membership, support or involvement in the work and actions of civil society organisations (e.g. NGOs or Charities) that act as vehicles through which citizens can aggregate and further their interests and voice their preferences
- Membership in political parties (provided they are allowed to by their country of residence and the parties themselves)
- Enrollment to Trade Unions and Professional Bodies
- Participation in consultative bodies
- Taking part in protests and grassroots initiatives
- Sending letters to elected officials and state authorities
- Blogging, drafting articles and actively using social media to express ones' views on social and political affairs

As it was mentioned above, democracy is a system that highlights citizen involvement and participation in decision making processes. Thus, it is widely accepted that higher and more diverse participation of citizens has a positive effect on the quality of democratic institutions and their workings in a state. Moreover, participation benefits active citizens too on a personal level, as it gives them an influence in decision making as well as the opportunity to develop his/her skills and virtues (Michels:2011).

C.4 Key Words

- Civic Participation, Civil Society, Active Citizenship, CSOs, NGOs, Engagement

PART D

Further Reading

Civic Participation (Video by WEF) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sfl35O6WtXE>

Young people, the Internet and civic participation | Shakuntala Banaji - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejtdq58dBW4>

Council of Europe (2017) Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making - https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016807509dd

Knobloch (2019) 'Improving access to information and restoring the public's faith in democracy through deliberative institutions' -



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<https://www.democraticaudit.com/2019/07/19/improving-access-to-information-and-restoring-the-publics-faith-in-democracy-through-deliberative-institutions/>

Russell J Dalton (2017) '[Is citizen participation actually good for democracy?](http://www.democraticaudit.com/2017/08/22/is-citizen-participation-actually-good-for-democracy/)' - <http://www.democraticaudit.com/2017/08/22/is-citizen-participation-actually-good-for-democracy/>

Michels (2011) 'Innovations in democratic governance: how does citizen participation contribute to a better democracy?' - <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0020852311399851>

PART E

Unit Completion

- Citizens are only in position to influence the decisions of a state through and during elections. **True/False**
Answer: False
Explanation: Citizens can actively participate in the political affairs of their country and influence decisions and actions by multiple ways e.g. by participating in demonstrations, signing petitions etc.
- In the absence of political rights, migrants do not have a voice in their host country. **True/False**
Answer: False
Explanation: Though they may face multiple limitations, migrants still have a voice in a democratic society and can try to make it heard by being active in other forms of civic participation
- The term 'civic participation' only involves actions taking place at a national level. **True/False**
Answer: False
Explanation: Civic participation is any form of active engagement and can take place either at a national level or at a local level – even by being active in the affairs of ones' neighborhood e.g. cleaning the park
- Civic engagement refers to any action citizens take to voice their opinions and influence change on social and political affairs. **True/False**
Answer: True
Explanation: Any way an individual becomes active in social and political affairs is considered as a form of civic engagement

PART F

Suggest 2 Activities to test and/or reflect on the information presented by this module



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- Watch the World Economic Forum's video on 'Civic Participation': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfI35O6WtXE> and then think about and note down the ways you can become active and have an influence through the internet and social media
- Watch this Tedx talk on Public Engagement and Participation in the 21st Century: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Qa4RN_D7Hs and think about the approaches and methods that can be used for public engagement through the internet.

Unit 3: Participation & Migrant integration

C1. Overview:

This unit wishes to walk learners through the benefits migrants can reap by becoming actively engaged in social and political affairs in their host communities.

C2. Learning Outcomes

- Recognize the positive effect participation can have for migrants and their host society alike
- Identify the ways civic participation contributes to migrant integration
- Understand the potential civic participation generates for migrants

C3. Content

Introduction

"Participation has been described as the opposite process of social exclusion, highlighting that notions of citizenship, participation, inclusion and belonging are inextricably linked" Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014)



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Active involvement and engagement in the affairs of their host country's affairs and society can play an important role in migrants' integration allowing them to become real actors in affairs and developments that affect them or are taking place. In that regard, they are given the chance to have a say and influence in issues that affect them, instead of remaining passive observers of developments and/or beneficiaries of support from local organizations and individuals. Moreover, participation is a mean for them to actively contribute to achieving progress for them with them and to have a say over their lives (Geoff Gilbert: 2018).

Apart from that, creating and facilitating opportunities for migrants to become actively involved in local affairs is equally beneficial for the host community as it contributes to a stronger, more socially cohesive society that celebrates inclusion, equity and diversity (CMY:2014). Most importantly, allowing migrants to participate as active citizens in the community they live in, even if they do not possess political rights, essentially materializes the principles and ideals Democracy stands for.

Integration through Participation

As presented in Unit 2 of the present Module, civic participation is a multifaceted process. One that is not limited to voting and participation in the institutionalized ('formal') forms of political engagement in a democratic state. Therefore, though they often do not hold political rights, migrants are afforded multiple tools and ways they can become engaged in the social and political affairs of their host communities.

“By making their voices heard, taking an interest in how society works, and participating in the decisions that shape its future, immigrants show that they are an integral part of their new country – the very objective of integration.” (OECD:2015, 201) Additionally, developing the tools for migrants to become engaged in social processes and developments in their host community is considered a highly effective way of avoiding their marginalization and contributes to their integration.

Ways Civic Participation contributes to migrant Integration

➤ Voice & Influence

Engagement and active participation provide migrants with the tools and means to make their voices heard and defend what they perceive as their interests. Consequently, though they may not possess the right to vote in their country of residence, they can try to present and promote their realities and opinions in a bid to exert influence on the agenda, policies and the decisions of political and government institutions



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➤ **Knowledge & Understanding of the host community**

Participation and the involvement-interaction with local affairs, stakeholders and members of the host communities that it entails, plays an instrumental role in guiding, encouraging and helping migrants understand and conceive local socio-political norms as well as to attain a better idea of the realities of their host community. A process that is hugely beneficial for them in their path to integration (CMY:2014)

➤ **Empowerment**

Being active and included in local discussions, decision making processes and actions at grassroots-level enables and empowers migrants, in conjunction with the host communities, to assess their own needs and put forward appropriate responses (UNHCR 2018)

➤ **Networking - Association**

Civic Engagement serves as a mean for migrants to interact and build bridges with the local community in pursuit of common causes. This helps them to network and associate themselves with members of the host society forging closer, stronger and reciprocal links and communication with them.

C.4 Key Words

Civic Participation, Engagement, empowerment, networking, influence, civil society, integration

PART D

Further Reading

OECD: Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015 -

<http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration-2015.pdf>

OECD: Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2018 - <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Main-Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration.pdf>



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Active Citizenship, Participation & Belonging -
https://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CMY%20Active%20Citizenship_0.pdf

Three reasons to increase political participation of immigrants -
<https://rosanjose.iom.int/SITE/en/blog/three-reasons-increase-political-participation-immigrants?page=43>

Refugee participation seen as key to comprehensive response -
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/6/5943fe0a4/refugee-participation-key-comprehensive-response.html>

Political participation of refugees in their country of nationality -
<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/globalconsult/5beb28964/38-political-participation-refugees-country-nationality.html>

[Political and social participation of immigrants through consultative bodies](#)

Active Citizenship: Enhancing Political Participation of Migrant Youth -
<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/?action=media.download&uuid=125C7305-987E-476F-ECE5B0D1EC1FF5F0>

Integration of Migrants - Political Participation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-aZAdUEI4c>

PART E

Unit Completion

- Lack of political rights means that immigrants cannot be active in local affairs.
True/False
Answer: False
Explanation: There are multiple ways for migrants to be active in local affairs. They can for example volunteer in charity causes, become members of organizations or stage demonstrations to put forward their concerns
- The best path for migrants to promote their rights and interests is staying passive and by avoiding any interaction with local stakeholders. **True/False**
Answer: False
Explanation: Migrant should explore ways to make themselves visible and heard if they wish for their problems, concerns and opinions to be taken into consideration



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- Being active and engaging local affairs and stakeholders can help immigrants better understand local realities and challenges. **True/False**

Answer: True

Explanation: Participation does not only help migrants put forward their own opinions but it also helps them interact with the host society allowing them to better understand local customs and values and integrate

- Participation can help migrants network and associate themselves with other likeminded individuals. **True/False**

Answer: True

Explanation: Through their participation in actions, events and organizations migrants have the opportunity to get to know and build relationships with individuals with whom they share common opinions and interests.

PART F

- On a piece of paper note down events, workshops and actions you have participated in during your stay in your country of residence. Next to each of these occasions note down the names of the people you have met, the things you learn and what do you feel you have gained through that experience. Please also note whether that experience encouraged you to participate in more action. After you finish this exercise what can you observe and how do you feel about the effect of your participation?



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