

# IMPEU

## Needs Assessment Report



*Improving Inclusion of EU Mobile Citizens*



# IMPEU

## Improving Inclusion of EU Mobile Citizens

### Needs Assessment Report

Work package	Title
2	Political inclusion policies for EU mobile citizens and civil servants' training needs
Activity	Title
2.2	Defining the obstacles faced by EU mobile citizens when claiming their EU citizenship rights and the training needs of civil servants to enable and facilitate the political participation of mobile EU citizens
Deliverable	Title
D2.2	Needs Assessment Report

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## Introduction

The aim of the project Improving Inclusion of EU Mobile Citizens (IMPEU) is to foster political participation of EU mobile citizens and enhance capacity and knowledge of civil servants and relevant national, regional and local experts on EU citizenship and related political rights.

The first phase of the project will focus on the research into best practices on political inclusion policies across the European Union. The project partners will identify obstacles faced by EU mobile citizens when claiming their EU citizenship rights. Finally, they will also analyse civil servants' training needs related to political participation of EU mobile citizens. This will be done through desk research, online surveys, citizens' dialogues and roundtables gathering representatives of policy-makers.

Based on that, in the second phase, a needs-based training course will be developed for civil servants and relevant national, regional and local experts. The course will be available on an online training platform, while additional material will be also developed for the trainers to administer and facilitate the delivery of the program. Relevant and tailored information on EU citizenship will be also available for citizens, public officials, civil servants and experts through provision of online information toolkits and establishment of Info Kiosks.

The project is funded by Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission and is implemented by:

- Agenzia per lo Sviluppo dell'Empolese Valdelsa (ASEV) - Italy
- Institut za Podgotovka na Slujiteliv Mejdunarodni Organizacii Zdruzhenie (ITPIO) - Bulgaria
- European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) - Belgium
- Astiki Mh Kersoskopiki Etareia Helping Hand (HELPING HAND) - Greece
- Dimos Vrillission (MUVRI) - Greece
- Magenta Consultoria Projects SI (MAGENTA) – Spain

The project started in December 2018 and will end in November 2020.

## The purpose of the training needs assessment

A training needs assessment can be defined as a way to determine the gap between what an employee - a civil servant in our case - must be able to do or know and what he or she knows and is able to do. Before training is considered, a careful needs-analysis is required in order to develop a systematic understanding of where training is needed, what needs to be taught or trained, who will be trained, and how the training will be measured. Such a needs assessment should also enable an explanation on why the training activities should be done, and also show that training is, in fact, the best solution for the performance problem or the development need.

The aim of the training needs assessment is to establish:

- the actual needs;
- the ways they can be addressed;
- the feasibility of the training;



- the priorities of the training program.

In the context of the IMPEU project, accurate needs assessment will help us to:

- analyse the level of knowledge of EU citizens' rights among civil servants;
- identify major subjects which have to be addressed in the training;
- adapt the training modules and materials to the actual needs;
- outline the learning outcomes of a training programme for civil servants working with EU mobile citizens;
- analyse civil servants' willingness and readiness to take part in the online training.

## IMPEU training needs assessment methods

The following methods were used in order to gather and subsequently analyse the information related to the training needs of civil servants.

### Surveys

Two surveys were envisaged in the framework of the IMPEU project. The first survey run in February 2019 and analysed the obstacles to freedom of movement and political participation faced by mobile EU citizens in Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy and Greece. The questionnaire looked also into mobile EU citizens' experience with civil servants in their host Member States in order to examine civil servants' knowledge of EU rights. Each country partner surveyed at least 5 EU mobile citizens'. Based on the initial findings, in March, all the partners conducted the survey with civil servants. Each country partner contacted and surveyed at least 20 of them. Both surveys were conducted online and during the face-to-face meetings.

The results of the IMPEU surveys were complemented by the outcomes of the ECAS' crowdsourcing conducted in the framework of the FAIR EU project<sup>1</sup>. The crowdsourcing exercise, launched in August 2018, aimed at analysing the obstacles to freedom of movement and political participation faced by mobile EU citizens. It managed to gather the opinion of more than 350 mobile EU citizens. Given that the goals of both the IMPEU and the FAIR EU project coincide to a great extent, the responses from mobile EU citizens residing in Belgium, Spain, Italy and Greece were taken into account, as they can help to improve the accuracy of in the need-assessment analysis. No response from mobile EU citizen residing in Bulgaria was received.

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<sup>1</sup> The FAIR EU (Fostering Awareness, Inclusion and Recognition of EU Mobile Citizens' Political Rights) project aims to foster the successful inclusion of EU mobile citizens in their host EU country's civic and political life through the provision of a holistic approach to tackling obstacles they face when exercising their rights. The project was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). More information is available here: <https://faireu.ecas.org/>. More information on crowdsourcing is available here: <https://crowdsourcing.ecas.org/fair-eu>



## Design Meetings

### 1. Citizens' dialogues

The first round of citizens' dialogues took place in February 2019 in all the partner countries except for Greece, which held the meeting in April. Each citizens' dialogue gathered around 7-10 participants selected without preferences for gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion etc. The main goal of the dialogues was to discuss the obstacles faced by mobile EU citizens to their free movement and their political participation in host Member States. They also provided an interesting insight into EU mobile citizens' experience with civil servants. The organisation of the dialogues was based on a detailed methodology which was provided to all partners in January 2019.

### 2. IMPEU roundtables

The first round of IMPEU roundtables took place in between February and April in all the partner countries. The participants were selected without preferences for gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion etc. The roundtables offered an opportunity to:

- discuss civil servants' training needs
- evaluate gaps in civil servants' knowledge of EU citizenship
- assess civil servants' willingness to participate in the training

The organisation of the IMPEU roundtables was based on a detailed methodology which was provided to all partners in January 2019.

## Desk research

In addition to the two surveys and the roundtables, the partners conducted a desk research and analysed whether a similar training needs assessment has ever been conducted and what types of training are available for civil servants in their respective Member States.



## Country analysis

### ITALY

#### [Survey for EU mobile citizens](#)

The questionnaire for mobile EU citizens was filled in by 5 respondents, among which:

- 3 Romanian citizens
- 1 Polish citizen
- 1 Bulgarian citizen

In addition, 12 mobile EU citizens residing in Italy filled in the ECAS' crowdsourcing survey, thus providing additional information on the obstacles they faced.

80% of the respondents of the IMPEU survey declared that they have never encountered any problems when trying to enter in Italy neither had they encountered any problems when requesting residence documents. The results of the crowdsourcing exercise are less optimistic and indicate that 33% of respondents residing in Italy encountered problems when requesting residence documents. Other problems mentioned by the citizens on the crowdsourcing platform include:

- Difficulties to access job market
- Discrimination and xenophobia
- Obtaining citizenship due to lack of information about the required documents.

Citizens were also asked to indicate whether they believe that Italian civil servants have a sufficient knowledge of EU citizens' rights. There is no conclusive answer as the responses vary significantly (Figure 1).

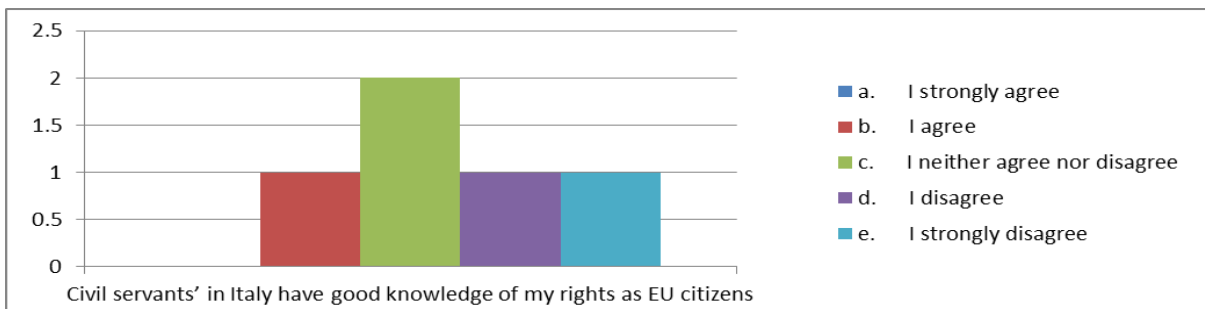


Figure 1: Citizens' opinion about civil servants' knowledge of EU rights

60% of the respondents have never participated neither in the local nor in the European elections in Italy. Nevertheless, they don't feel politically excluded, but would like to be more politically active. Citizens who participated in the crowdsourcing exercise provided more in-depth information on the reasons that prevented them from participating in the elections in Italy. In particular, they explained that they lacked correct or clear information on the procedures and they found administrative procedures too cumbersome.

Four out of five IMPEU respondents declare that they have never faced hostile approach from public administration in Italy. It should be underlined that no one of the respondents would contact public authorities in case of any question/doubt regarding their rights as EU citizens. All of them would rather look



for help in other ways (two of them online, other two would ask other EU mobile citizens). At the same time, all of them agree that local authorities of the host country should be responsible for providing information to EU citizens about their EU rights.

They also believe that civil servants should be trained on the following issues:

- Residence rights
- Right to vote and stand as candidate in the EU and local elections
- Entry rights

Survey for civil servants

The questionnaire was filled in by the civil servants who work for the municipalities of:

- Empoli
- Certaldo
- Montespertoli
- Fucecchio

The respondents have long work experience with mobile EU citizens: from 2 up to 11 years. The majority of them (14 out of 20) encounter mobile EU citizens in their work at least once a week. The following figure shows the self-assessment of the knowledge of EU citizens’ rights by the civil servants.

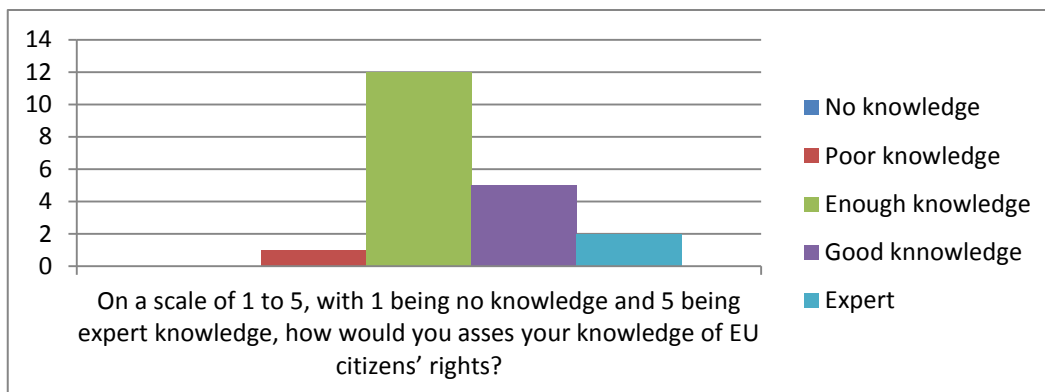


Figure 2 : Civil servants’ knowledge of EU rights

If approached by an EU mobile citizen with a particularly difficult question related to his/her rights, the majority of the respondents would ask a colleague for advice. 60% of the respondents have never participated in a specific training on EU citizenship and associated rights. However, they are willing to learn more and 50% of them would like to participate in an online training on EU citizenship if it was available for free and organised in a flexible manner.

The respondents would like to develop their knowledge of the following topics:

- Right to vote and stand as candidate in the EU and local elections
- Residence rights
- Entry rights





Other suggested topics include: right to free movement and right to equal treatment of third –country family members of EU citizens.

75% of the respondents declare that their municipalities usually try to improve political participation of mobile EU citizens by organizing or actively participating in dedicated campaigns, and that political participation is a priority, given the EU and local elections in 2019.

### Citizens dialogues

The first citizen dialogue in Italy took place on 22 February 2019 in Empoli and gathered six mobile EU citizens from Ireland, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland.

The participants discussed the obstacles to the rights to free movement and political participation. While no particular challenges were identified in case of the former, the latter seems to be undermined by the following obstacles:

- lack of interest in the political life among EU mobile citizens;
- lack of automatic registration and the requirement to register at least 90 days before the elections (40 days in case of local elections);
- lack of information campaigns – few of mobile citizen are informed and aware of the obligation to register.

The participants of the citizens' dialogue believe that civil servants are adequately prepared and have sufficient knowledge as regards usual every-day issues. However, mobile EU citizens seem to struggle to find a competent and knowledgeable civil servant in case of more complicated or elaborated issues.

### IMPEU roundtables

The roundtable for civil servants and mobile EU citizens took place on 27 of February in Empoli. Seven participants joined the meeting, among which 2 local decision-makers and 5 civil servants.

The discussion with the civil servants was based on the results of the previous meeting that involved EU mobile citizens. According to the participants' opinion, the European and municipal elections are an important occasion in which they can "test" to which extent they are able to involve mobile EU citizens in the political life in Italy.

The municipalities explained that they usually carry extensive information campaigns regarding the registration procedures in the months preceding EU and local elections, but despite that, the percentage of mobile EU citizens who register on the roll remains very low. For example, in Certaldo, out of 409 adult citizens with EU citizenship, only 6% and 9% signed up for the European and local elections respectively.

Among the reasons behind low political inclusion, the participants mentioned the lack of interest among mobile EU citizens, the lack of automatic registration and limited information campaigns. They also believe that many mobile EU citizens lack economic resources to make politics a priority. However, in their opinion, the low political involvement should be also analyzed in the context of the whole population, not only foreign citizens, which seem to be politically and electorally disaffected.

A lack of understanding of the administrative procedures and limited knowledge of the Italian language were mentioned among the problems civil servants encounter when dealing with EU mobile citizens.



The participants believe that a periodical training for public officials who are in contact with the EU mobile citizens would be beneficial as it would help to ensure that the information they have is complete and up-to-date.



## SPAIN

### Survey for mobile EU citizens

Twelve mobile EU citizens from Bulgaria, Croatia, France (5), Poland (2), Portugal, Romania and the UK responded to the online survey. In addition, 21 mobile EU citizens residing in Spain filled in the ECAS' crowdsourcing survey, thus providing additional information on the obstacles they encounter in Spain.

Based on the information received, it seems that residence process is not particularly problematic for mobile EU citizens residing in Spain, as only 25% of the IMPEU respondents said that they faced issues when requesting residence documents. Similarly, only 24% of citizens who replied to the ECAS crowdsourcing questionnaire had encountered problems in the residence application process. At the same time, however, more than a half of respondents who replied to the IMPEU survey said that they were not satisfied with the registration process. Other problems mentioned by the citizens include:

- problems with validating foreign university degrees;
- discrimination in contact with police officers;
- difference in treatment between foreigners and nationals as regards payment of taxes;
- lack of recognition of foreign ID documents.

As regards political participation, 25% of respondents do not feel included in the political life of Spain, while for 42% of them it is difficult to say. At the same time, it seems that there is a low willingness among EU migrants to be more politically active (67% is against).

In total, 83% and 66.7% of respondents have never participated in the local and the European elections respectively. This trend is also confirmed by the result of the crowdsourcing exercise, where only 43% voted in the local elections and 33% participated in the EU elections in Spain.

As regards the EU elections in May 2019, 25% of the IMPEU respondents said they wouldn't participate. The crowdsourcing results seems to be more encouraging, as only 1 person said he/she wouldn't vote, while 67% said they were planning to participate either in their host or home country (others were not sure).

Majority of the respondents (58%) are neutral about the civil servants' knowledge about EU rights, neither agreeing nor disagreeing about them having sufficient knowledge. However, 67% of the respondents stated that they had faced a hostile approach from public administration.

When in doubt regarding their rights, EU mobile citizens in Spain would search for the answer online (83%) rather than address public authorities. However, at the same time, they believe that local authorities should be responsible for providing information to EU citizens about their rights.

They believe that civil servants should be trained on:

- residence rights;
- entry rights;



- the right of EU citizens to vote and stand as a candidate in elections.

### Survey for civil servants

The following offices in the municipalities of Gijón and Oviedo were invited to participate in the survey: the Police and Civil Guard offices, the Health Services and the Social Services in the Principality of Asturias, the Office of Information to Immigrants in Oviedo and Gijón, the International and European Affairs office in Gijón, the Foreigners Office in Oviedo, the Active Inclusion Network in Gijón, the International Office of the University of Oviedo and the International and European Projects Office. In total, 21 responses were received.

The respondents have different experience with the subject of EU citizenship ranging from 7 months to 23 years. They encounter EU citizens on a regular basis, some every day (19%), every week (24%), once a month (38%) or a few times a year (14%).

More than 50% of civil servants who participated in the survey self-assessed their knowledge of EU citizenship rights as intermediate, while 33% indicated their knowledge is quite low. In case EU mobile citizens approach them with a question related to their right to free movement and political participation, most of them would use their own knowledge or look for information online (62%), while only 14% would ask their supervisor or would refer the citizen to the European information office or another official office.

Most respondents (71%) stated that they have never participated in any training about EU citizenship. Also, most of them (76%) stated that their municipality did not offer any additional training for civil servants before the last EU elections, while 19% were not sure.

Most respondents (76%) stated that their municipality or work centre has never organised or actively participated in a campaign aimed at improving political participation of mobile EU citizens. What is more, enhanced political participation of EU mobile citizens is also not a priority in their office.

Eighty-six percent of respondents would like to learn more about European citizenship, while three respondents indicated that they have enough knowledge or that it is not a priority for them. More than half of the respondents are willing to take part in a training course, however 38% are not convinced about participating, either because that they already have enough information, they do not like online courses (they'd rather carry out a face-to-face training course) or because they would do it only if they got permission to do it during work hours.

The major areas of know-how related to EU citizenship which need to be developed in their offices are as follows: residence rights (45%), entry rights (34%), and voting rights (17%).

Other areas that would like to be developed by civil servants include: employment rights, access to social

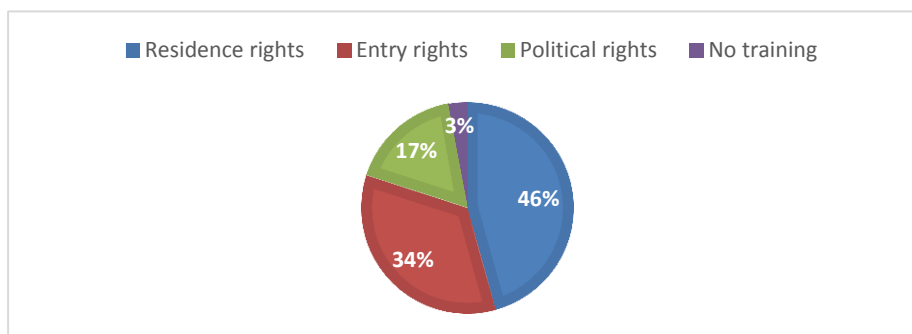


Figure 3: Areas of EU rights which Spanish civil servants would like to develop



security and other general information.

### Citizens dialogues

Two meetings with EU mobile citizens were organised in Spain gathering eight participants in total. Due to the fact that Oviedo is the capital city of the Principality of Asturias and Gijón is the most populated city in the region, with a distance of 25km between the two, it was decided to have two separate meetings to facilitate the attendance.

The participants were generally positive about their experience in Spain and did not have any major problems when entering the country or requesting residence documents. However, they complained about the waiting period and the requests for unnecessary documents for the residence purposes or for finding accommodation.

Most participants have never participated in either local or European elections due to the fact that they were not informed about this possibility. Half of them said they were not interested in the political participation in the host state, while the other half said they would vote if they had sufficient knowledge and information.

All the participants except for one said they didn't feel politically included due to the fact that political parties do not take them into consideration in their activities and outreach. When discussing non-electoral political and/or civic activities, almost all citizens participated in various activities run by civil society organisations, such as: immigration associations, SOS racism, Médecins Sans Frontières and Psychologists beyond Borders.

They all believe that political participation of foreigners could be improved through expat-friendly information campaigns and information tools, such as official websites offering detailed information, online videos, specific campaigns for different target groups, television short programmes or adds, radio programmes or spots, advertising panels or flyers sent at home. Similarly, the registration on the electoral lists by mobile EU citizens could be enhanced by informing mobile EU citizen about the possibility to vote in the moment they approach the municipality for the first time and on the later stage through explanatory letters, flyers, advertisements.

The participants were generally satisfied with civil servants' knowledge about EU citizenship, although they believe there is room for improvement, in particular as regards the language skills.

### IMPEU roundtables

As in case of the citizens' dialogues, two separate meetings for civil servants were organised in Gijón (6 March 2019) and Oviedo (8 March 2019), gathering in total eight participants (six civil servants and two local decision-makers).

The participants mentioned the following issues as key obstacles to freedom of movement: limited knowledge of Spanish, problems with family reunification, lack of recognition of foreign diplomats, lack of knowledge about administrative procedures, difficulties in accessing healthcare, burdensome bureaucracy.

As regards the low political involvement of mobile EU citizens, the following issues were mentioned: lack of interest and lack of political knowledge among mobile EU citizens, difficulties in the registration process, lack of encouragement from local and EU institutions. Finally, they believe that mobile citizens do not



consider political participation as a priority, as they have other issues to worry about: accommodation, employment, health etc. The participants explained that their administrations do not prioritize political participation of mobile EU citizens, confirming thereby the results of the survey for civil servants.

Most of the participants have participated at least once in training courses related to European institutions and EU matters. The civil servants would be willing to participate in a specific training as policies and information is in constant development and change. They would also like to learn about legislation, the European Parliament, labour rights and the impact of European citizenship in each country.



## BULGARIA

### Survey for mobile EU citizens

Eight mobile EU citizens from Italy (3), Greece (4) and Germany (1) participated in the survey. These participants have never faced any significant obstacles to their free movement except for the communication problems as a result of the language barrier.

Participants underlined that the problems they faced in relation to their political participation are caused by the lack of information and the lack of communication between mobile citizens and the public authorities.

The respondents have never participated in either local or European elections in Bulgaria. They also don't feel politically included.

### Survey for civil servants

Eights civil servants and experts from the following municipalities and offices participated in the survey: Sofia municipality, Pernik municipality, Central Election Commission.

Most of the respondents assessed their knowledge of EU citizenship rights as intermediate. They usually encounter mobile EU citizens once or twice a year.

All the respondents answered that there should be more trainings available for civil servants, in particular providing information on the European legislative framework and the elections. They would like the training to touch upon practical issues and be delivered in a flexible manner.

The respondents would like to learn more about the EU citizenship and to systematically improve their knowledge, skills and competences, but, as they explained, the training is not always the priority in the management and the "learning culture" and pro-innovation approach is not well developed in their organizations.

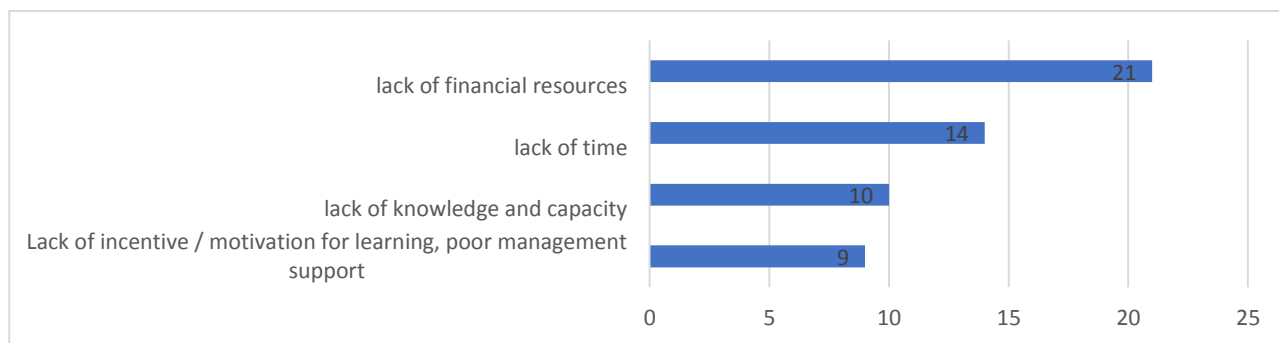


Figure 4: Obstacles for trainings



### Citizens' dialogues

The citizen's dialogue was held on 27 February 2019 in the Institute for Postgraduate Studies at the University for National and World Economy (UNWE). Eight mobile EU citizens from Greece, Italy and Germany participated in the meeting.

The obstacles to free movement encountered by the participants are mainly a result of the communication problems, as many public officers have rather limited knowledge of English. Other problems mentioned are related to the requirement to provide certain documents for residence purposes in a very limited timeframe and extensive bureaucracy in the state administration.

As regards political participation, the citizens believe that information on the procedures, deadlines and required documents is not sufficient. If available, it is usually provided only in Bulgarian, making it difficult for mobile EU citizens to understand and participate in the elections.

### IMPEU roundtables

The roundtable for civil servants was held on 28 February 2019 in the Institute for Postgraduate Studies, gathering 8 participants: 2 from Oborishte Municipality (Sofia), 3 from Pernik Municipality, 2 from Central Election Commission and 1 from the Institute.

The participants have never faced any particular problems when dealing with EU mobile citizens but they would appreciate additional training on EU citizenship and on how to communicate effectively with mobile EU citizens.

The civil servants believe that the lack of political involvement of mobile EU citizens is related to their lack of willingness to get involved in the local political life and limited information availability. In their opinion, other information channels (more innovative) should be used to attract attention of mobile EU citizens. On the other hand, the two representatives of the Central Election Commission believe that the information is sufficient but could be furtherly improved by translating it to English.

## GREECE

### Survey for EU mobile citizens

The survey was filled by 7 respondents coming from Germany, Cyprus, Spain and Poland. Majority of them have never experienced any problems to their right to entry, but more than a half of the respondents faced issues throughout the residence registration process. This has been also confirmed by a citizen who replied to the ECAS' crowdsourcing exercise.

The respondents have rather neutral opinion regarding Greek civil servants' knowledge of EU citizens' rights and only two of them have had particularly bad experience in this regard.

Four out of seven respondents participated in the local and the European elections, and the majority of them find the registration process on the electoral roll quite easy. Five of them are going to vote in the upcoming European elections in May 2019 and in the local elections on Greece. At the same time, only half of them feel politically included. The respondents indicated language barrier as the key obstacle to their political participation in Greece.



EU mobile citizens believe that it should be the responsibility of local and national authorities to provide information to EU mobile citizens on their rights and obligations. Thus, in their opinion, civil servants should be trained on:

- residence rights;
- entry rights;
- the right to vote and stand as a candidate.

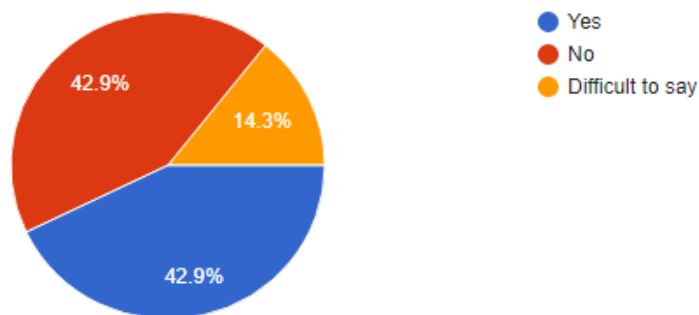


Figure 5: Do you feel politically included in Greece?

### Survey for civil servants

The survey was sent to civil servants working at the Municipality of Vrilissia and Eydap of Vrilissia. Twenty-four people provided their responses.

The respondents have a varied experience with mobile EU citizens: 29.2% of the respondents meet them once or twice a year, 25% every few months and another 25% encounters them each week. The majority of the respondents believe to have insufficient or limited knowledge of EU citizens' rights (16 respondents), only 3 of them believe to have good or expert knowledge in this field. This, together with the fact that 87% of the respondents have never participated in training on EU citizenship, confirm that there is a need for additional training in this area. Indeed, almost all respondents expressed their willingness to participate in such a training.

The major areas of know-how related to EU citizenship which the respondents would like to develop include:

- residence rights;
- voting rights;
- entry rights.

Around 79% of the surveyed civil servants are not aware if their municipality has ever organized or actively participated in a campaign aimed at improving political participation of mobile EU citizens. It also seems that political participation of mobile EU citizens is not a priority in their office/administration, even considering the EU elections in May 2019.





### Citizens' dialogues

The first IMPEU design meeting with the EU mobile citizens in Greece took place on 16 of April 2019, in Vrilissia, at the premises of Municipality of Vrilissia (Mayor's Office). In total 7 participants (EU mobile citizens and Greek nationals) and 3 policy makers from the Municipality of Vrilissia attended the meeting.

The participants have never experienced any major problems when entering Greece or requesting residence documents, but they pointed out that extensive bureaucracy and requests for unnecessary documents for residence purposes were quite burdensome. They usually have a good cooperation with civil servants and were welcomed in a friendly manner, although one participant faced problems as a result of the language barrier.

Most participants voted in the local and European elections despite the fact that they have not been properly informed about their political rights and have found it difficult to get information from the civil authorities. The older participants pointed out that there isn't any information provided on TV or radio about the dates or procedures to register on the electoral roll. There also seems to be a confusion regarding the registration process, as half of the participants stated that it is really complicated, whereas the others find it rather easy.

### IMPEU roundtables

The IMPEU roundtable in Greece took place on 16 April 2019 in Vrilissia, at the premises of Municipality of Vrilissia (Mayor's Office). In total 15 persons attended the meeting, among which 5 local decision-makers and 10 civil servants. The discussion with the civil servants was based on the results of the previous design meeting that involved EU mobile citizens.

The participants believe that the most persistent obstacle to freedom of movement is related to the lengthy administrative procedures, which may be discouraging for mobile EU citizens. Civil servants often lack the necessary knowledge or do not have sufficiently clear information, as the documents prepared by the Ministry tend to be ambiguous. They are often required to look for the necessary information on their own, as no toolkits are available for a quick use.

The civil servants believe that EU mobile citizens do not participate in the local political life as they are discouraged by the local bureaucracy and they don't have enough information on the procedures and deadlines. This confirms the opinion presented by the EU mobile citizens during the citizens' dialogues, as discussed above.

The participants would like to gain more knowledge in the field of EU citizenship and the related political rights and they confirmed their interest in the training. They have never been trained on these issues before.

They would like to develop the know-how in the following areas:

- European Institutions and legislation
- European elections
- EU mobile citizens' and their family members' rights.





## BELGIUM

### [Survey for mobile EU citizens](#)

The survey for mobile EU citizens gathered responses from 5 mobile EU citizens residing in Belgium and one resident of Italy. However, when we take into account the responses given by those who participated in the crowdsourcing exercises run by ECAS, we have additional information from 108 mobile EU citizens living currently in Belgium.

When taking into account both groups, we observe that 48% of respondents encountered difficulties when living in Belgium, including when going through the residence registration process, accessing job market, entering the host country or requesting certain administrative documents.

The respondents of the IMPEU survey were also asked whether they believe that civil servants' in Belgium have good knowledge of their rights as EU citizens. Only one person agreed, while the others were either unsure or disagreed. The citizens have had a positive experience with civil servants, as only one of them has faced hostile approach. However, it seems that public administration is not believed to be a good source of information on EU rights, as none of the respondents would address the officials in case of doubt. At the same time, they believe that local authorities should be responsible for providing this kind of information.

Thirty-three percent of respondents, taking into account both IMPEU and the crowdsourcing survey, have never made an attempt to register on the electoral roll, but 74% was planning to participate in the EU elections in May 2019.

In opinion of the IMPEU respondents, civil servants should be better trained on the right to vote and stand as a candidate (5 answers), so to be able to provide better and more accurate information.

### [Survey for civil servants](#)

The survey was translated into French and Dutch in order to target a larger group of civil servants. In total 21 responses were received, all coming from different Belgian municipalities.

The respondents have an extensive experience with mobile EU citizens, ranging from 3 to 27 years. More than 50% of them encounter EU mobile citizens on a daily basis, while the others a few times a week (6) or at least once a year (2).

Majority of them believe to have either intermediate or good knowledge of EU rights. However, 76% have never participated in any training on EU citizenship. Only 5 communes were conducting supplementary training before the EU elections 2019: Leuven, Wemmel, Mechelen, Baarle-Hertog and Ieper.

In case of a difficult question or a doubt regarding the EU rights, the respondents would use their own knowledge (38%), ask a colleague (14%) or contact an appropriate EU institution (9.5%).

Sixty-seven percent of the civil servants would like to learn more about EU citizenship and the EU rights, but only 33% would be willing to participate in an online course, while 28.5% are not sure. Half of the respondents would like to learn about the residence rights, 33% about the right to vote and stand as a candidate, 24% about the entry rights and procedures, while 28.5% believe to already have sufficient knowledge. Some respondents would also like to improve their language skills.



It seems from the responses that an enhanced political participation is a priority in more than a half of the surveyed municipalities and 71% of them have already organised a campaign aiming at improving political inclusion of mobile EU citizens.

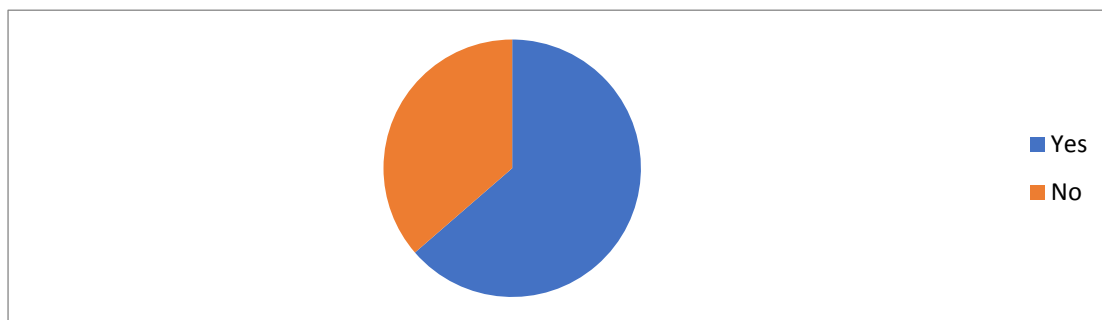


Figure 6: Would you like to know more about EU citizenship?

### Citizens' dialogues

The citizens' dialogue was organised in Brussels on 20 February and gathered 9 participants from Poland, France, Estonia Czech Republic and the Netherlands. A few Belgian citizens also participated due to their knowledge on the topic of political participation and inclusion.

The participants haven't faced any particular problems when entering the country, but they have encountered obstacles in the following situations:

- residence registration;
- access to healthcare;
- recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications.

They have also pointed out that certain processes could be improved if the administrations were less bureaucratic. They believe that civil servants are not always well informed and would need additional training. EU citizens prefer to ask their friends or other mobile citizens rather than public authorities if they have a particular problem or a question regarding their rights.

The participants believe that political inclusion of mobile EU citizen should be enhanced, but the following issues have been identified to be particularly problematic:

- lack of information provision;
- language barriers;
- limited interest in the local political situation among mobile EU citizens and lack of knowledge;
- lack of connection with local authorities;
- confusing and complicated formalities.

### IMPEU roundtables

The meeting was organised on 25 February and gathered 9 participants (4 decision-makers, 3 civil servants and 2 legal experts from the Your Europe Advice service).



The following obstacles to free of movement of mobile EU citizens have been identified:

- verification of residence by the police - this is a practice that many EU citizens find too intrusive;
- delays in making an appointment for the residence;
- language barrier - French and Dutch are the official languages and only some officials speak English or another language;
- little training on EU rights available for civil servants;
- public servants are often overworked and do not have enough time for each question or concern a citizen may have.

As regards the political rights of mobile EU citizens, the following issues were found particularly problematic:

- the obligation to register long before the elections;
- lack of interest in local politics among EU citizens;
- many mobile EU citizens live in their "expatriate worlds" and do not get involved because they do not feel part of the local community;
- lack of possibility to participate in the elections at regional level.

The participants discussed how the political inclusion could be improved and gave the following recommendations:

- regular provision of information on political rights to mobile citizens;
- informing mobile EU citizens about the possibility to register on the electoral lists at the moment they request residence documents;
- cooperation with other organizations (associations, NGOs, consulates) in the provision of information;
- citizenship education in schools;
- creation of common information tools in different languages that can be easily adapted to the needs of each municipality.

The officials agreed that the training on EU legislation and EU rights would be necessary and could help to improve their knowledge, but it is difficult to find time, as civil servants are already overburdened, and there is a lack of funding.



## Training needs

### Freedom of movement

Based on the analysis of the surveys with EU mobile citizens and civil servants, as well as the citizens' dialogues and the IMPEU roundtables, common obstacles to freedom of movement and political participation have been identified.

While the entry and residence procedures go smoothly for the majority of our respondents and participants, some problems affecting their freedom of movement or the principle of non-discrimination were reported.

*At the Foreign Office in Spain, when I applied for the Foreigners' ID, one of the officers did not accept my Portuguese ID as an identification document. The officer forced me to return after three months with my passport. However, according to the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an ID should be recognized as a valid identification document.*

- A Portuguese citizen during the citizens' dialogue in Spain

*I was stopped by police officers who were carrying out a routine check-up and I was treated horribly, while my Spanish friends were treated with a lot more respect. I asked one of the officers why he was treating me like a criminal and his reply was: "because you are Romanian".*

- A Romanian citizen during the citizens' dialogue in Spain

The mobile EU citizens in all surveyed Member States face obstacles to their residence rights, as they are often requested to provide unnecessary documents and face long delays for appointments in their local municipalities. The residence procedures are not always clear and the confusion is enhanced by the extensive bureaucracy, communication problems and language barriers.

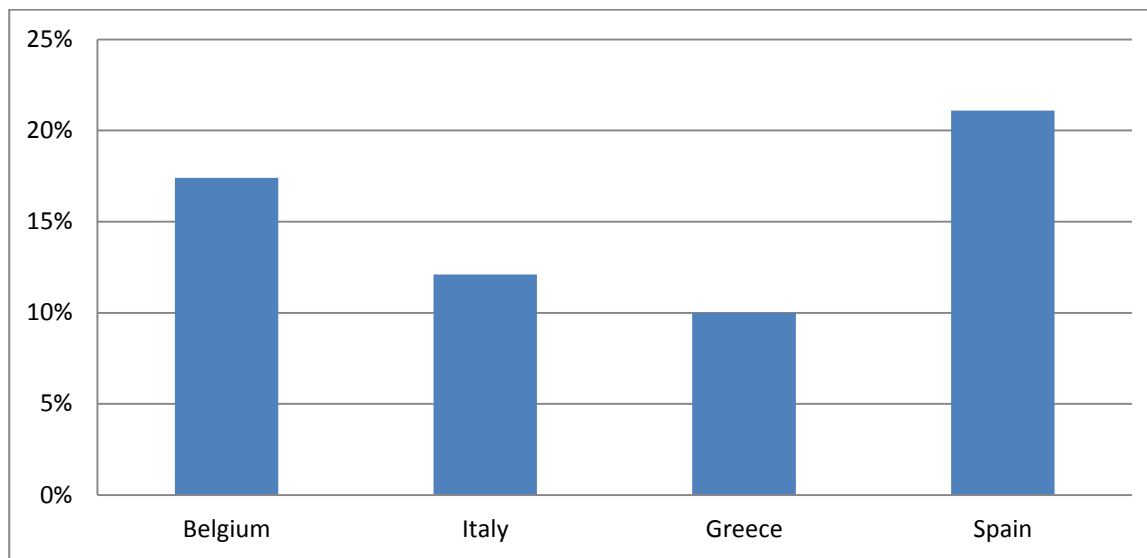
Other reported problems are related to:

- access to healthcare and social benefits;
- recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications;
- discrimination and xenophobia in contact with public institutions;
- non-recognition of foreign ID documents;
- access to the job market.



## Political participation

Political participation among the respondents of the surveys and participants of the meetings is limited, confirming the general negative trend in all EU Member States.



**Figure 4: Percentage of mobile EU citizens registered for the local elections**

**Source:** FAIR EU country reports, available at: <https://faireu.ecas.org/reports>

(data from 2014 for Greece, data from 2017 for Italy, data from 2018 for Belgium and Spain, no data available for Bulgaria)

As regards the obstacles, the respondents explained that there is a general lack of information and communication regarding the electoral procedures, deadlines and eligibility. This issue has been frequently reported by the participants of the citizens’ dialogues in all countries and has been also confirmed by the outcomes of the ECAS’ crowdsourcing exercise. As a result of that, mobile EU citizens tend to expect complicated registration procedures, often based on their previous negative experience with the public administration in their host Member States, and refrain from getting involved. In practice, in many countries, the procedures are quite straightforward and some municipalities, e.g. in Brussels, even accept registration online. Citizens are also not informed about the deadlines for the registrations, which often tend to close well in advance, sometimes as early as 3 months before the actual date of the elections.

There are also various myths around the fact of political participation of mobiles EU citizens, especially in Belgium, where the participation in the elections is compulsory.

*Voting in Belgium is compulsory, so I didn’t want to register, as I am afraid that I will have to vote every single time. If I don’t vote, I risk getting a fine, so this is not encouraging...*

- A Dutch participant of the citizens dialogue in Belgium

The citizens are not aware that they can cancel their registration any time they want, they can ask someone else to vote for them, in case they are not present, and finally nobody has received a fine for non-voting for the last 15 years.

The respondents mentioned also a lack of interest among mobile EU citizens as one of the reasons behind low political participation. As some participants of the Brussels IMPEU roundtable explained, mobile EU citizens tend to stay in their “expatriate bubbles”, meeting only their co-nationals or other expats, often believing that their stay in the host country will be only temporary. Public authorities may find it difficult to



address this particular issue, as it very much depends on personal perceptions and beliefs. However, extensive information and promotion campaigns could be helpful, particularly if they emphasize the importance of getting involved, independently of the length of residence, and benefits it can bring.

Obstacles to political participation	Belgium	Bulgaria	Greece	Italy	Spain
Lack of information and/or communication	x	x	x	x	x
Lack of understanding and language barriers	x	x	x		x
Long bureaucratic procedures	x		x		x
Lack of interest in the local political life among EU mobile citizens	x			x	

Figure 5: Obstacles to political participation in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Spain

Only a small percentage of respondents feel politically included and a half of them would like to be more politically active. However, at the same time, enhanced political participation of mobile EU citizens is not prioritised in the majority of the analysed municipalities, even if some of them organize or have participated in various campaigns aimed at improving political participation of mobile EU citizens, e.g. project APProach in Etterbeek (Belgium).

On the other hand, as ECAS' crowdsourcing exercise proves, EU mobile citizens tend to get involved in various forms of non-political activism, such as volunteering, signing petitions or participating in demonstrations: 85% said that they get involved in various non-electoral political and/or civic activities, as compared to 49% who voted in the local or EU elections in their host Member State. Therefore, it would be mistaken to say that EU mobile citizens lack interest or desire to get involved in the local political life. Yet, the barriers and obstacles they face make their participation difficult.

### Analysis of the training needs

The civil servants who responded to the IMPEU survey have a longstanding experience with mobile EU citizens (from a few months up to even 30 years) and usually meet them on a regular daily or weekly basis.

The civil servants in Belgium, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria believe to have intermediate or good knowledge of the EU citizens' rights, while the respondents from Greece assess it less favourably (16 of them said that it is either none or very limited). At the same time, the majority of the surveyed civil servants have never participated in any training on EU citizenship and associated rights, and usually use internet resources in case of any legal or procedural questions brought up by mobile EU citizens.

Mobile EU citizens are neutral about civil servants' knowledge of EU rights, neither agreeing nor disagreeing about them having sufficient knowledge of European citizenship, or find it difficult to assess the level and the expertise.



The availability and willingness to participate in the training programme differ depending on the surveyed country and ranges from 50 percent in Italy to 91 percent in Greece. It is however important to mention that the reluctance to participate in the training is not always related to the lack of interest, but it is often caused by the lack of time, resources and managerial support.

The civil servants would like to develop their knowledge in the areas summarised in the table below:

<b>IDENTIFIED TRAINING NEEDS (areas of EU rights and other competencies that were identified by the respondents)</b>
<p><b>Free movement and residence rights:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Registration process</li> <li>○ Application for residence documents</li> <li>○ Visa application process and requirements for third-country family members of mobile EU citizens</li> <li>○ The right to free movement for non-EU family members of mobile EU citizens</li> </ul>
<p><b>Political rights of mobile EU citizens:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The right to vote and stand as candidate for local and EU elections</li> <li>○ Registration procedures on the electoral roll</li> <li>○ Electoral rules in different Member States</li> </ul>
<p><b>Employment rights of mobile EU citizens:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Employment mobility between Member States</li> <li>○ The right to equal treatment for third-country family members of mobile EU citizens</li> </ul>
<p><b>Access to health and social benefits for mobile EU citizens</b></p>
<p><b>European institutions and decision-making processes</b></p>
<p><b>Language and communication skills</b></p>



## Availability of training for civil servants

Additional desk research has been conducted in order to analyse whether a similar training on the EU rights has been conducted in the participating countries or whether it is already available for civil servants.

It seems that the majority of the municipalities, public administration institutes or training bodies offer at least some training courses on the functioning of the European Union and the European institutions, including courses on EU policies, state aid, transposition and implementation of EU directives, etc.

They also provide trainings aimed at improving the managerial capabilities and administrative service of the municipalities. Specific soft skills trainings are available for directors of the institutions, for instance in Spain, including courses on leadership and team management, persuasive communication, public presentations, ethics and conflict of interest.

Some countries provided also additional training before the EU elections 2019, e.g. Spanish Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública offered a course on the elections of 2019: “The 2019 European elections: an institutional review of their importance in our daily life”, while in Italy, several organisations offered the courses on the tasks, organization and activities of the electoral service, and the participation of mobile EU citizens.

As analysed above, there are various training opportunities available for civil servants. However, those are usually physical trainings and the attendance is not free of charge, thus the participation of civil servants tends to be limited. Also, given the costs, it is usually possible to train only a selected number of civil servants.

Civil servants in the participating countries usually have access to some courses covering the issues related to the functioning of the European Union. However, it seems that those training programs usually touch open individual aspects, and **no comprehensive (all-inclusive) course on the rights of EU citizens, including both their right to free movement and political participation, has been identified in our research.**

Therefore, the advantage of the IMPEU training course would be the fact that it would cover all relevant aspects of EU citizenship and provide concrete knowledge, based on the information given by mobile EU citizens and civil servants. The training would therefore address concrete training lacks and needs. In addition to that, it would be provided free of charge and online, thus being available any time and place, and for unlimited number of participants.





## Barriers to training and recommendations on how to tackle them

The surveys and the results of the IMPEU roundtables show that there are various barriers that may hinder the participation of civil servants in the training. This section will closely analyse these obstacles and provide several recommendations on how to tackle them and facilitate the take-up of the IMPEU training.

Funding, time commitment and a lack of knowledge about available trainings were cited as the main barriers to the participation. Several civil servants mentioned that being part of a small team often limited them in whether they would be able to participate in any external training (out of their usual work place).

The approach to training depends also on a general culture of learning present in a given public administration. If it is not well developed or lacks support from the hierarchy, then the opportunities for continuous learning will be limited. This problem was reported in particular by the Bulgarian respondents, who pointed out that “the administration is reluctant to introduce innovations and make changes”.

In some surveyed countries, the willingness to participate in the training can be diminished by the temporary character of employment. When a civil servant has been hired for a limited period of time, his/her interest in the development of skills tends to be limited, so does the management’s willingness to invest in the training.

In order to respond to the above-mentioned challenges, the following recommendation should be taken into account in the development of the IMPEU training for civil servants:

