

IMPEU

Policy recommendations report on political inclusion policies for EU mobile citizens



Improving Inclusion of EU Mobile Citizens



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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
D2.4	Policy recommendations report on political inclusion policies for EU mobile citizens

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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 Organizaciji 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 finish in November 2020.

The aim of the Policy Recommendations

EU citizenship gives every EU citizen the right to vote and stand as candidate in elections to the European Parliament and in municipal elections in their Member State of residence, under the same conditions as nationals of that State. This right is enshrined in Article 22 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and is also a fundamental right laid down by Article 40 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It has been further specified in Directives 93/109/EC (on elections to European Parliament) and 94/80/EC (on municipal elections).

While the number of EU citizens of voting age has been steadily increasing in the EU, many citizens are not aware of their electoral rights and experience challenges when they want to participate in elections. A public consultation carried out by the European Commission found that 21% of respondents experienced difficulties in trying to vote in EP or local elections whilst living in another EU country, 51% of them said they encountered difficulties related to registering on the electoral roll and 47% said they had insufficient



or unclear information on how to vote¹. As a result of these challenges and due to low awareness, political participation of mobile EU citizens remains limited.

In response to this situation, the following recommendations have been prepared with an aim to enhance electoral inclusiveness, equality, integrity and participation of mobile EU citizens. They follow the empirical and desk research conducted by the IMPEU partner organisations between January and April 2019. In this period of time, the following activities were undertaken in order to examine the obstacles to political participation and freedom of movement faced by mobile EU citizens, and analyse civil servants' knowledge of the EU rights:

- Online surveys with mobile EU citizens (38 responses)
- Online surveys with civil servants (94 responses)
- Design meetings: one citizen's dialogue and one IMPEU roundtable for civil servants and local decision-makers in each participating country (41 participants in citizens' dialogues and 47 participants in IMPEU roundtables)

During the surveys and the meetings, the participants and the respondents provided interesting insights on the obstacles they have been facing to their political rights and suggested many valuable recommendations on eligibility, electoral registration, voting methods, information outreach, and the political environment across Member States.

In order to provide more feedback from mobile EU citizens, this analysis has been complemented with the results of the crowdsourcing exercise (350 responses), which was implemented by the European Citizen Action Service, one of the IMPEU's partners, between 2018 and 2019 in the framework of the FAIR EU project², co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). Given that the IMPEU's and the FAIR EU's objectives closely align, as both of them aim at enhancing political participation and inclusion of mobile EU citizens, it was possible to rely on some of the results in order to strengthen the analysis.

This document summarizes the recommendations made by the stakeholders by the type of the obstacle (voter registration, communication and outreach to mobile EU citizens, political environment and knowledge of EU rights). Those are followed by a few examples of best practices which successfully applied some of the recommendations.

Recommendations

Communication and outreach

Citizens who participated in the IMPEU dialogues have frequently pointed out the lack of communication and outreach as one of the key obstacles to their political participation. As a result of that, many stakeholders have never been informed about their right to participate in the local and EU elections or have been wrongly informed that they were not eligible to participate. More than 25% of mobile EU citizens, who replied to the ECAS crowdsourcing questionnaire, stated they were not aware of their right to vote.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/factsheet-public-consultation-2015_en.pdf (accessed on 24/05/2019)

² More information on the FAIR EU is available here: <https://faireu.ecas.org/>. The FAIR EU crowdsourcing website is available here: <https://crowdsourcing.ecas.org/fair-eu>



➡ *Several IMPEU stakeholders recommended that more information should be provided at both the local and national levels. National authorities are well-placed to coordinate systematic outreach, while local authorities are closer to and have easier access to citizens.*

➡ *They have also emphasized that the diplomatic services of Member States should be responsible for communicating on the local and EU elections, especially since many of them, e.g. Italy, Spain, keep track of their citizens living abroad. Therefore, consulates and embassies should more actively inform nationals abroad about their voting rights.*

➡ *In order to enhance the outreach, the communications activities should be carried out not only by public authorities but also by civil society organisations. This would facilitate the tasks-, investment- and burden-sharing.*

The IMPEU stakeholders also emphasized that there is no interest in outreaching to mobile EU citizens among the local political parties, even in those municipalities in which foreigners constitute a large part of the electoral group (e.g. in Etterbeek, one of the Brussels communes, mobile EU citizens constitute 36.7% of the overall population³).

➡ *As they have often a direct contact with the voters during the electoral events and gatherings, it is recommended that political parties provide information about the registration and voting procedures in English and conduct bilingual campaigns, so that EU citizens can easily inform themselves about the candidates and their political programmes.*

Some participants of IMPEU meetings pointed out that the requirements and the procedures to register for the electoral roll in their host country were unclear and confusing, thus they had to rely on the information available on expat forums and social media, which can be incorrect or based on fake news.

➡ *The stakeholders suggested that the information should be provided on a regular basis by the local authorities, and more channels and forms of outreach should be used, including traditional media (TV, radio, press) and social media.*

Other tools that were mentioned include:

- infographics,
- mobile apps,
- emails,
- official letters.

The citizens in Bulgaria and Greece mentioned that the language barrier is an important obstacle to their political involvement. The information regarding the registration procedures is usually provided in the native languages, excluding a big proportion of mobile EU citizens, who have not yet mastered the local languages.

➡ *All the official websites of the national electoral commissions and national and local authorities should provide the information regarding the eligibility and the requirements in multiple languages.*

³ http://ibsa.brussels/fichiers/publications/bru19/ibsa_cc_Etterbeek.pdf (accessed on 24/05/2019)



➡ *IMPEU stakeholders emphasized that mobile EU citizens should be provided with more information on electoral rights and voter registration in several languages, with English being the most frequently mentioned. However, a careful needs-analysis should be conducted by the authorities in order to identify most commonly spoken foreign languages in a given Member State.*

Good practices

- [VoteBrussels campaign](#) was conducted by a civil society organisation (MPG) with support of local and regional authorities, and EU institutions. EU mobile citizens were informed about their right to vote in a clear way and had a possibility to register on the electoral roll during the events.
- Regional Brussels Government sent letters to all mobile EU citizens, informing them of the local elections in October 2018 and explaining how to register. Seven out of 19 Brussels municipalities sent similar letters in French, Dutch and German, while Sint-Gilles addressed EU citizens in their mother tongues, and Etterbeek translated the letter to English.
- [Lasse Frimand Jensen](#) is a Danish citizen who ran in 2012 for the first time for the city council of Aalborg. He not only focused on the Danish citizens, but also on the foreigners living in the municipality through a bilingual campaign (English and Danish).

Knowledge of EU citizenship and EU rights

Civil servants present at IMPEU dialogues pointed out that they do not have many opportunities to participate in any additional trainings in order to enhance their knowledge of EU rights or their ability to better communicate with mobile EU citizens. In the majority of the surveyed countries, civil servants believe to have either intermediate or good knowledge, but they would be willing to improve it and learn more about certain aspect of EU citizenship, if the training was provided for free and in a flexible manner.

➡ *Therefore, it is recommended that more training opportunities are available for civil servants who are in direct contact with mobile EU citizens. The training should be provided on a regular basis to ensure that civil servants get the most updated information.*

➡ *Given the limited time availability of civil servants, they should be equipped with a short guide or information toolkit explaining the most important EU rights and related procedures, which they could use on a regular daily basis in order to provide mobile EU citizens with correct and accurate information.*

Several participants of the IMPEU meetings in Brussels pointed out that a more structural approach is necessary in order to improve knowledge of EU rights among citizens. In particular, they pointed out that there is a knowledge gap among young people.



- ➔ They suggested that civic education and education about the functioning of the EU and EU citizens' rights should be compulsory at each level of education.
- ➔ The EU institutions should play a bigger role in informing EU citizens (in different age groups) of their right to political participation. More recurrent and regular campaigns should be conducted.

Good practices

- [The project APProach](#) is a pilot project carried out in several Member States under the auspices of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA). One of the aims of the project is to train civil servants of the participating municipalities. The training consists out of two parts: English lessons and awareness rising regarding the rights of mobile EU citizens.
- In March 2018, the Immigration Council of Ireland launched [Political Internship Scheme](#) aimed at promoting migrant participation in local politics and enhancing their civic education.
- [This time I'm voting](#) is a campaign conducted by the European Parliament in the run-up to the European elections 2019. The idea of the campaign was to engage (young) people in convincing others about the importance of the elections and the need to take responsibility.

Registration procedures

The registration for local legislative elections is not automatic in the majority of the EU Member States. In order to participate, mobile EU citizens have to request to be added to the electoral roll, often several months before the elections and before the official start of the electoral campaign. This issue has been frequently mentioned by mobile EU citizens as one of the key barriers to their political participation.

- ➔ They suggested that the registration for local elections become automatic or quasi automatic, in a sense that mobile EU citizens would have a chance to opt in and consent to be added to the electoral roll in the moment they get their residence documents.
- ➔ The deadlines for registrations should be put closer to the elections in order to allow mobile EU citizens enough time to register
- ➔ The IMPEU stakeholders recommended also introduction of online and email registration in order to facilitate and speed-up the process.



Good practices

- In the run-up to the local elections in Belgium in October 2018, the majority of the Brussels communes accepted registrations by e-mail. It was also possible to fill in the form during the events organised by Vote Brussels and the Brussels Commissioners and the volunteers would deliver them to the local communes.

Political environment

The participants emphasized that public participation should not be limited to the elections, as there are many other ways citizens, both nationals and foreigners, can get involved and have influence on the local political and civic life.

Indeed, IMPEU respondents and participants explained that they get involved in various non-electoral and civic activities, such as volunteering, demonstrations, signing the petitions or participating in public meeting. This trend has been also confirmed by the results of the ECAS crowdsourcing exercise, in which 85% of the respondents said that they participated in similar actions.

➡ *The IMPEU stakeholders suggested that local authorities should promote the involvement of citizens in political and non-political activities in-between the elections.*

➡ *They should encourage mobile EU citizens to participate in the local decision-making, which directly affects their lives, such as participatory budgeting or citizens' councils.*

Local administrations in certain Member State have significant competencies in education, waste management and other areas, and have a high degree of revenue autonomy. However, few mobile EU citizens are aware of that and understand how the local municipality can influence their lives.

➡ *The stakeholders recommended that local authorities and local civil society organisations should inform mobile EU citizens about the competences of local administrations in the host country in multiple languages.*

Good practices

- In 2018, the Paris City Hall launched a [project "INCLUDE"](#), in cooperation with the European Civic Forum and the Young Europeans- France, which aims at promoting the rights of EU citizens and enhancing inclusion of non-national EU citizens in the "Parisian civic life". In December 2018, a European Consultative Council was created. It is composed of 61 mobile EU citizens and works in close cooperation with the elected officials of the City of Paris, to whom it can propose opinions and recommendations



Table 1 : Summary of the recommendations

Communication and outreach
Local and national authorities should conduct regular communication and outreach activities targeting mobile EU citizens. They should use various forms of outreach, including traditional media (TV, radio, press) and social medias.
Diplomatic services of Member States should more actively inform their own citizens living abroad about the voting rights and any upcoming elections.
In order to facilitate the tasks-, investment- and burden-sharing, communications activities should be carried out by public authorities in cooperation with civil society organisations.
Political parties should be more attentive to the needs of mobile EU citizens and should conduct campaigns in multiple languages.
Official websites of the national electoral commissions and national and local authorities should provide the information regarding voting eligibility and procedures in multiple languages.
Knowledge of EU citizenship and EU rights
Local, national and regional authorities should provide more training opportunities to their employees, so that civil servants can provide reliable and accurate information on voting rights to mobile EU citizens.
Civil education and education about the functioning of the EU and EU citizens' rights should be compulsory at each level of school education.
The EU institutions should conduct regular information campaigns on EU citizens' rights.
Registration procedures
Registration for local elections should become automatic or quasi automatic
The deadlines for registrations should be put closer to the elections in order to allow mobile EU citizens enough time to register.
Local/regional/national authorities should introduce online and email registration in order to facilitate and speed-up the process
Political environment
Local authorities should promote the involvement of citizens in political and non-political activities in-between the elections.
Local authorities should encourage mobile EU citizens to participate in the local decision-making, which directly affects their lives, such as participatory budgeting or citizens' councils.