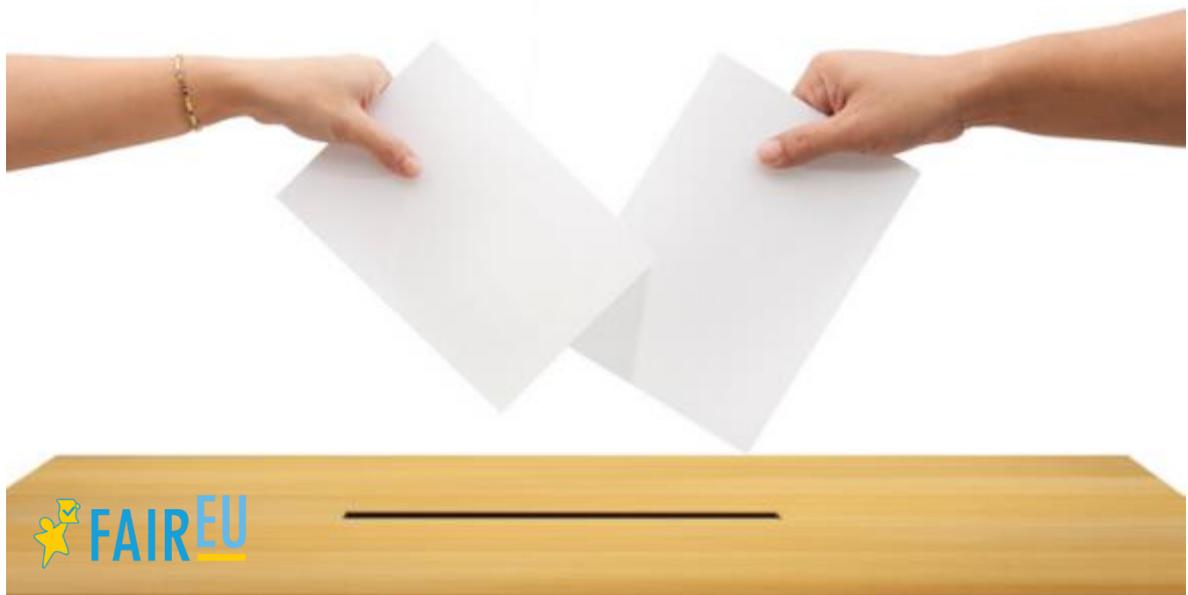


OBSTACLES TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MOBILE EU CITIZENS



**Report from the
Focus Group in
Paris**

ECAS Brussels, February 2019

Co-funded by the Rights,
Equality and Citizenship (REC)
Programme of the European Union





Report from the FAIR EU Focus Group in Paris (EN)

24 January 2019

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FAIR EU was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The content of this report represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Discussion.....	4
Obstacles to the exercise of free movement rights of EU mobile citizens in France	4
Obstacles to the exercise of political rights of EU mobile citizens in France.....	5
Examples of good practices to facilitate political participation of EU mobile citizens in France	5
Conclusions	6

Introduction

FAIR EU (Fostering Awareness Inclusion and Recognition) 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. Within this framework a focus group was organised in Paris, France, on 24 January 2019.

The aim of the focus group was to identify and analyse the links between obstacles to free movement and the exercise of political rights of EU mobile citizens in France.

The following people participated in the focus group:

Participants: Sofia Fernandes (Researcher at the Jacques Delors Institute), André Duramois (INCLUDE Project Manager, Citizen Participation Department of the City of Paris), Domitille Simon (Volunteer at Young Europeans - France), Monica Radu (Events manager at the Maison de l'Europe in Paris), Maité de Santiago (Participatory Democracy Representative at the City of Vincennes),

Absents: Miene Mathon (Erasmus + developer), Filipa Pereira (trainee at the Consulate of Portugal), Daniel Cornalba (elected in the municipal council of Etang la Ville)

Moderator: Jérôme Quéré (Europe Direct Information Centre Manager at the Maison de l'Europe in Paris and Erasmus developer)

Observer: Anna Zaremba (EU Rights Coordinator at ECAS)

Discussion

Jérôme Quéré presented the project and a study on the freedom of movement of European citizens published by the Jacques Delors Institute and freely available, and then gave Anna Zaremba the floor to present the ECAS association.

After a round table for the presentations, the participants (including the facilitator) presented, for nearly an hour, the various obstacles to the exercise of their rights that Europeans can meet in their host country. These testimonies came from both their professional experiences and their private career. Almost all the participants were non-French Europeans (Portuguese, Spanish, Danish, Romanian) working in France. Then they presented their proposals to overcome these obstacles.

Obstacles to the exercise of free movement rights of EU mobile citizens in France

There is a lack of information in general about the rights of EU citizens. There is little awareness of the European Union at school, which means that, as adults, people do not have the reflex to think of themselves as Europeans and therefore do not think about their rights, including the right to vote. Even if they know about their rights, they do not know how to take the steps. Many mobile EU citizens turn to their consulate upon arrival in the host country. These do not necessarily have the information or explanatory brochures.

There are administrative procedures that are too complex and discouraging. One participant mentioned a case of a Spaniard who in order to receive his unemployment benefits in France, she had to come back multiple times. She eventually gave up and never received the allowances she was entitled to.

Some procedures can be very long and daunting. Once citizens reach the end of the process, they do not want to get involved in other administrative procedures to have other rights recognised. People are discouraged even if other rights can be more easily reached. Some complain about discrimination and long waiting periods. Do European states have an interest in facilitating the process and informing European citizens of their rights in their territory? Is there bad faith in some public administrations?

It also happens that wrong information is given by the competent administrative services. When some citizens approach appropriate administrative services to exercise their rights, administrative officers may not know what the exact steps to follow are. A participant mentioned a CROUS agent who did not know that Romania was a member of the EU in 2010 or Pôle Emploi International (international job centre service) agents who do not know about the Erasmus jobseekers' scholarship or EURES.

On the website of the Ministry of European Affairs, it is wrongly noted that one has to be French to be able to vote in the European elections. A public officer of Paris sent a Belgian to the prefecture for registration while it is up to public officers of Paris to take care of it. A home university asks a Romanian to have at least 3000 € on her account to benefit from Erasmus + mobility. It took three years for a Romanian woman to obtain a social security number because she was asked for a residence permit, whereas it was not necessary.

Public officers must inform and apply European Union law, yet very few of them are trained or sensitized to this. Only those who have personal mobility experience or have relatives in mobility are better informed.

There are also more complex life situations. The mobility of European citizens remains low in general, but some have worked in several European countries. This will certainly increase in the future. The calculation of their pension rights will be very complex.

When citizens seek information to convince host public officers of the merits of their requests, they often need to have a good level of English and the language of the host country because information is not translated into the 24 official languages.

When citizens look online for information about the European Union and their rights, they often find many confusing websites. Too much information makes understanding difficult, e.g. there are many websites on Erasmus opportunities (Ministry, two Erasmus agencies, Erasmus generation, the European Solidarity Corps, CIDJ, etc.). It would be best to have one or a few website, common for each Member State, which would include all the relevant information on EU citizens' rights.

There is also discouragement and feeling of exclusion based on negative experiences. The procedures have been simplified over the past 10 years, but citizens do not necessarily know it and do not want to start again the process of which they have negative memories. When mobile EU citizens do not succeed in obtaining the rights to which they are entitled (access to job markets, social benefits, healthcare), they get discouraged and do not want to get involved in local political life.

Obstacles to the exercise of political rights of EU mobile citizens in France

The cities have the data on Europeans and non-Europeans registered on the electoral lists. The city of Paris has researched and found that out of 100,000 European residents declared in Paris (and not all European residents) only 13 to 14% were registered on the electoral lists, against an average of 23% in France. Cities do not have information on how many EU citizens residing on their territory vote for the European elections in their country of origin.

The city of Paris has found that Greeks and Belgians are more likely than other EU mobile citizens to register on the electoral lists. In their country of origin voting is compulsory. Citizens coming from the founding countries of the European Union are also more likely to register on the electoral lists. Why is that? As long-term citizens of the EU, they are more aware of their rights. Participants agreed that participation is also linked to socio-economic status and people with higher income tend to register more on the electoral lists.

In many EU countries, campaigns are often focused only on the national issues. Therefore, mobile Europeans may feel less concerned.

Examples of good practices to facilitate political participation of EU mobile citizens in France

Various organisations and associations have a capacity to contribute to better integration of mobile EU citizens to local community, so they should be supported at local level. Their members are also more likely to vote in municipal elections.

An example of the Vincennes commune was given. In Vincennes a one-stop shop has been created with an aim to provide citizens with the right information and address them to appropriate services. Similar services should be created in other cities in order to facilitate everyday life of citizens and reduce administrative obstacles.

Paris is currently implementing the [INCLUDE](#) project together with the Young Europeans (co-funded by the EU). The aim of this project is to promote European citizenship to all - French and other European citizens - and it has a particular focus on spreading information on the rights of European citizens who reside in Paris. The organisation of Young Europeans runs various educational and fun activities on the rights of European citizens in events during festivals, community forums, flea markets, etc. The public is often more receptive to information and learning if it didn't expect it. The city and the organisation complement each other to realize this project. The city can deliver access to events and municipal premises while Young Europeans have volunteers that can be deployed in the field and have necessary skills. The city has created a Parisian Council of Europeans. It is an advisory council open to any EU citizen who has strong link with Paris. The 61 members of the Paris Council of Europeans enlighten the municipality in its decisions concerning subjects such as European and international associations, the reception of European foreigners, tourism, the international relations of the City of Paris and any other subject that they would find relevant.

The city of Paris is also involved in the APPROACH project which will produce information toolkit in several languages on how know how to register on the electoral lists, have allowances, enrol his children in school, etc. Some of the municipal officials will be also trained and informed on the rights of EU citizens.

Conclusions

There is not one single solution or one actor that can solve all issues raised. The importance is to work in a network: local authorities, consulates, organisations, Europe Direct Information Centre, European institutions.

According to the group, there should be a common knowledge base on the rights of mobile European citizens that should be promoted in schools, media, and universities and among civil servants.

Following the example in Vincennes, European funding should be available to increase the number of one-stop shops in city halls. Participants also suggested that a single contact point should be created within the European Labour Authority. The aim of this body will be to fight against abuses and fraud related to free movement of workers and to provide information to citizens and businesses moving within the European Union.

A network of multipliers on the rights of European citizens should also be created. All the information provided by the EU institutions and other organisations should be accessible in the 24 official languages.

Accesses to European funds for cities should be facilitated to develop projects such as INCLUDE, APPROACH or the One-Stop Shop. Unfortunately smaller cities often lack capacities to apply for these funds.

Universities/ schools should be encouraged to cooperate with specialized Erasmus organisations to inform students about their rights and about European citizenship.

Practical brochures on the rights of EU citizens and procedures to follow should be developed and available for EU citizens in various places, e.g. consulates, municipalities, welcome desks, etc.

Civil servants should be trained on a regular basis and it is recommended to appoint a specialised civil servant dedicated to EU rights.