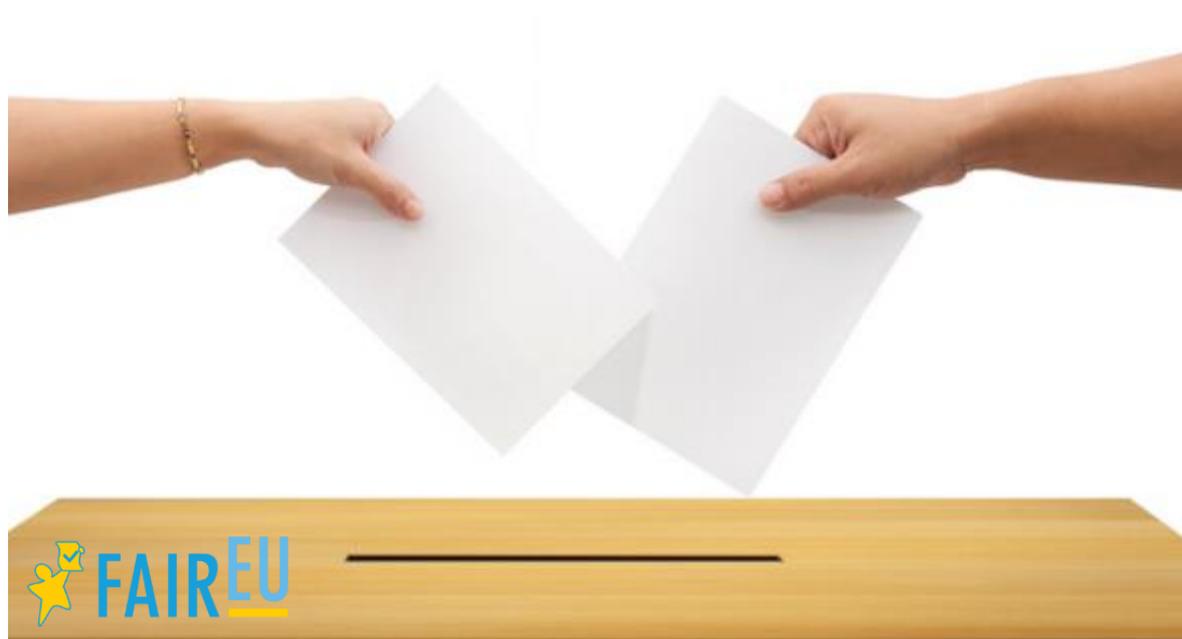


RESULTS OF THE CROWDSOURCING EXERCISE: OBSTACLES TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MOBILE EU CITIZENS



Crowdsourcing Report

ECAS Brussels, June 2019

Results of the Crowdsourcing Exercise: Obstacles to Freedom of Movement and Political Participation of Mobile EU Citizens

Authors: Marrit Westerweel, Anna Zaremba

This publication has been produced in the framework of the FAIR EU project. 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.



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



Table of contents

Introduction	4
Objectives of the consultation and chosen method	4
Crowdsourcing rules.....	5
Crowdsourcing - Phase 1.....	5
Who replied to the consultation?.....	5
Findings of the consultation	8
Are you familiar with the term "Citizen of the European Union" and the rights it entitles?	8
Are you planning to participate in the next European Parliament elections in May 2019?	8
Previous participation in the local and EU elections.....	9
Obstacles to freedom of movement	9
The link between the obstacles to freedom of movement and political participation of mobile EU citizens.....	10
Sense of belonging and political participation.....	11
Political participation as a way to defend mobile EU citizens' interests.....	11
The role of expat-friendly information campaigns	12
Participation in non-electoral political and/ or civic activities	13
Analysis of the 1 st phase	14
Crowdsourcing – Phase 2	15
Who replied to the consultation?.....	15
Ways to improve the registration process	17
Improving information provision.....	18
Successful campaigns targeting mobile EU citizens.....	19
Involvement in various non-electoral political and/or civic activities.....	19
Analysis of the 2 nd phase	20
Conclusions and recommendations	21

Introduction

On 10 September 2018, ECAS launched the crowdsourcing exercise to collect data and information on the obstacles EU mobile citizens encounter when moving to or residing in another Member State, and when engaging in political participation in the host countries.

The crowdsourcing consisted of two surveys, with the first one taking place between September 2018 and February 2019, and the second one between March and June 2019. The public consultation was accessible via the FAIR EU platform (<https://crowdsourcing.ecas.org/fair-eu>)

The consultation was one of the activities undertaken within the FAIR EU (Fostering Awareness, Inclusion and Recognition of EU Mobile Citizens' Political Rights) project. This project is funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission and is implemented by ECAS as the lead partner in consortium with:

- European University Institute (EUI),
- Malmö University (MU),
- Migration Policy Group (MPG),
- The European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA),
- Maastricht University (UM).

FAIR EU 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.

Objectives of the consultation and chosen method

There are around 17 million EU citizens residing in an EU country other than their own (Eurostat 2017). The rights derived from EU citizenship have always been subject to unequal levels of implementation in EU Member States. However, in the context of recent challenges - financial and economic crises, rise of populist parties and political developments such as Brexit - the pressure to limit the rights of EU mobile citizens has increased even more.

The deterioration with regard to the implementation of the fundamental right of freedom of movement of EU mobile citizens has been also reflected in the number of cases and problems identified by the EC advice services. Your Europe Advice (YEA)¹ enquiries have increased by 15% in the period 2012 – 2018 (from 16,761 in 2012 to 19,194 in 2018). In 2018, for the first time, “entry procedures” featured as the first most problematic issue EU-wide, followed by enquires related to social security and residence procedures.

Obstacles related to entry procedures are particularly burdensome for third-country family members of EU mobile citizens, who often face delays, excessive administrative requirements for receiving visa or residence documents and visa denial on invalid grounds.

One of the aims of the FAIR EU project was to analyse how the obstacles experienced by mobile EU citizens influence their propensity to participate in political life of their host Member States. This approach is based on the assumption that free movement and political rights of EU mobile citizens are

¹ [Your Europe Advice](#) is an EU advice service for the public, provided by the legal experts from the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) operating under contract with the European Commission. It consists of a team of 65 independent lawyers who cover all EU official languages and are familiar with EU law and national laws in all EU countries. YEA provides free and personalised advice within a week, clarifies the European law that applies to specific cases and explains to citizens how they can exercise their EU rights.

closely related, and the effective exercise of the political and civic rights is dependent on successful implementation of the EU rights related to free movement.

Therefore, crowdsourcing was one of the tools chosen by the ECAS to analyse the obstacles EU mobile citizens experience when moving to or living in another Member State, and when being politically active, as well as the link between the obstacles experienced and political participation.

Crowdsourcing rules

In order to participate in the exercise, mobile EU citizens were asked to create an online account on the platform website (<https://crowdsourcing.ecas.org/fair-eu>) in order to avoid multiple contributions from the same person. All responses were treated anonymously.

The crowdsourcing consisted of two surveys, organised in two separate stages, so that citizens could choose whether to participate in one or both surveys.

The first one was composed mainly of multiple-choice questions, but a few were left open, allowing the respondents to elaborate on their answers and provide additional explanation. In the second consultation, participants were presented with open questions based on the results of the first survey.

The surveys were available in 24 EU languages and the participants could also reply in their chosen language.

Crowdsourcing - Phase 1

Who replied to the consultation?

In total, 351 citizens filled in the questionnaire. Around 60% of them were women (215) and almost 40% were men (136).

Table 1: Respondents – Gender distribution

Gender	% of respondents N=351	Number of respondents
Women	61.3%	215
Men	38.7%	136
Other	0	0
Total	100%	351

21.9% of the respondents were between 0 and 25 years old, 47.3% fell in the age category 26-40, 24.8% were between 41 and 60 years old and 6% were 61 or older.

Table 2: Respondents – Age distribution

Age	% of respondents N=351	Number of respondents
0-25	21.9%	77
26-40	47.3%	166

41-60	24.8%	87
60>	6%	21
Total	100%	351

Respondents from 23 European Member States filled in the questionnaire. The highest responsiveness came from Italian citizens (102 people), followed by Brits (78 persons) and Poles (21).

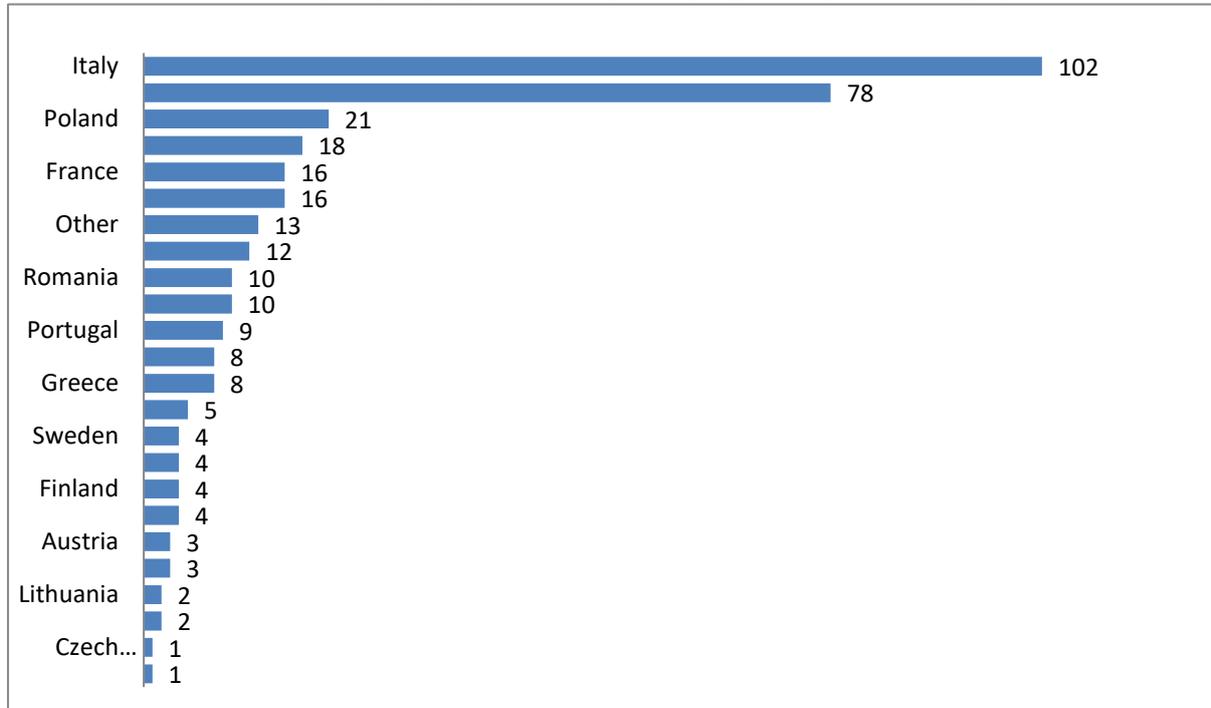


Figure 1: Home country of respondents

Most respondents indicated that they are currently residing in Belgium (94), with the United Kingdom (48) and the Netherlands (41) respectively being the number two and three. Around 44 percent of the respondents have lived five years or longer in their residence country, while approximately 46 percent longer than three months there, but less than five years. A small percentage has been living less than three months in their host country.

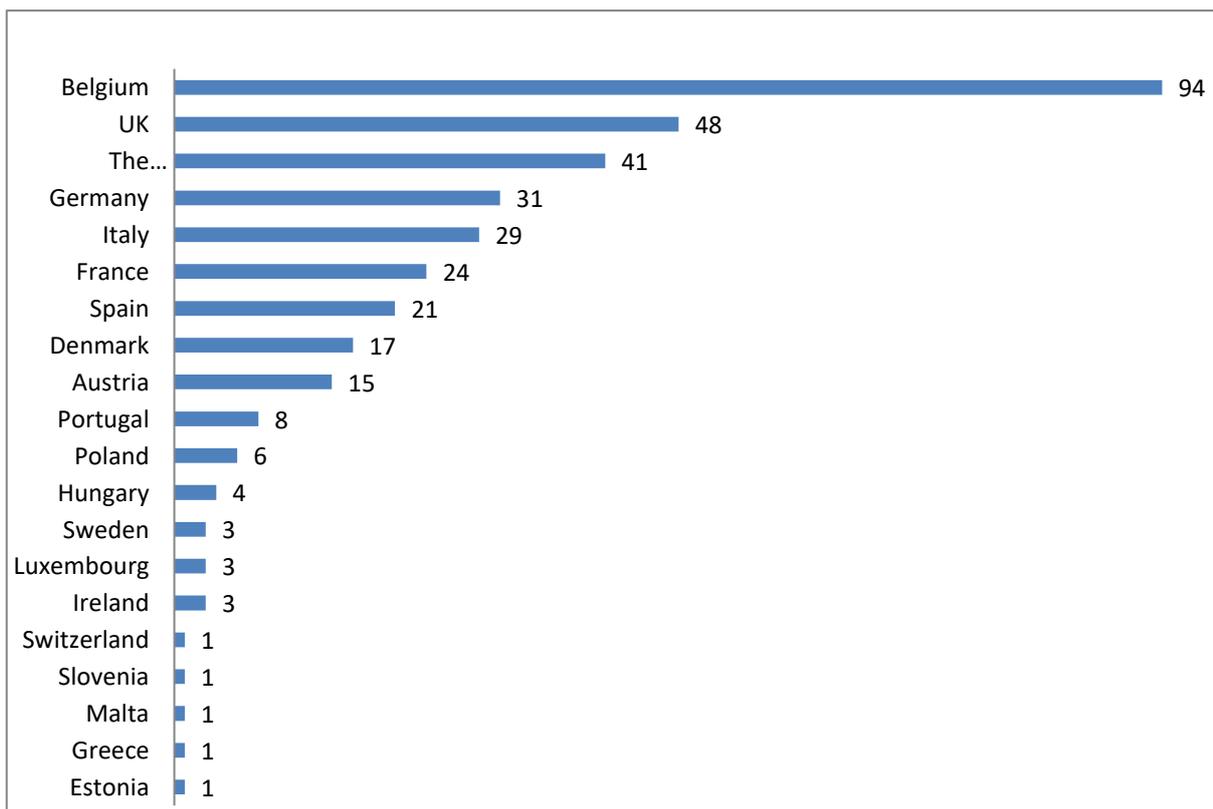


Figure 2: Residence country of respondents

Table 3: Respondents – Time of residing

Time	% of respondents	Number of respondents
N=351		
<3 months	10%	35
3 months> but <than 5 years	45.9%	161
5 years>	44.2%	155
Total	100%	351

Close to half of the respondents indicated themselves as employees, around 15% said they were students and over 14% stated they were self-employed. Six percent of the respondents categorised themselves as unemployed and five percent said they were pensioners. Around ten percent indicated themselves as other (e.g. housewife, intern, parental leave).

Table 4: Respondents – Employment status

Employment status	% of respondents	Number of respondents
N=351		
Employee	49%	172
Self-employed	14.2%	50
Unemployed	6%	21

Student	15.4%	54
Pensioner	5.1%	18
Other	10.3%	36
Total	100%	351

Findings of the consultation

Are you familiar with the term "Citizen of the European Union" and the rights it entitles?

A vast majority of the respondents stated they are familiar with the term 'Citizen of the European Union' and the rights this entitles. While the citizens were not asked to provide any proof of their knowledge, one would assume it should also include the awareness of voting rights, which constitute an important element of EU citizenship. This is unfortunately not true, as the results below indicate.

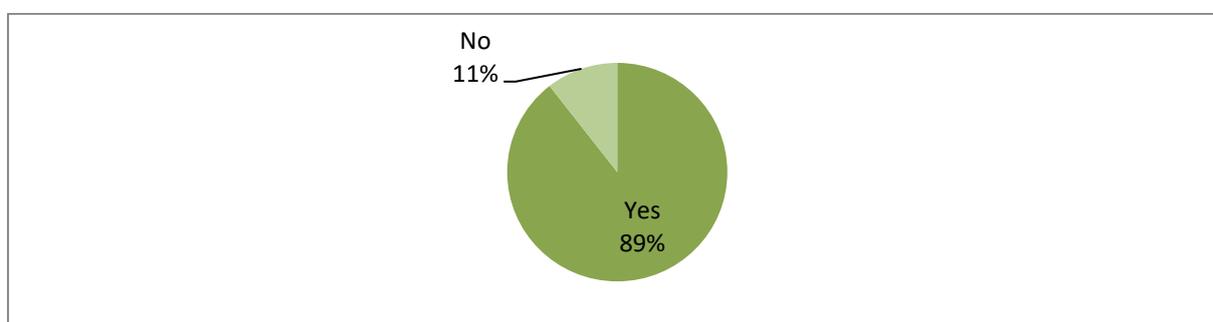


Figure 3: Mobile EU citizens' knowledge of EU citizenship

Are you planning to participate in the next European Parliament elections in May 2019?

Over three quarters of the respondents said they would vote in the upcoming elections to the European Parliament in May 2019, either in their host country (65.2%) or in their home country (34.8%). A small percentage (6%) stated they would not vote and around nineteen percent were undecided.

Most of the respondents who said they were not going to vote indicated Brexit as the main reason. At the moment of the consultation, Brexit was planned to happen before May 2019, so many citizens were not sure whether they would be allowed to vote.

Three respondents mentioned that they were not eligible, one was not interested, one cited the lack of sufficient knowledge and one person was not able to register on time.

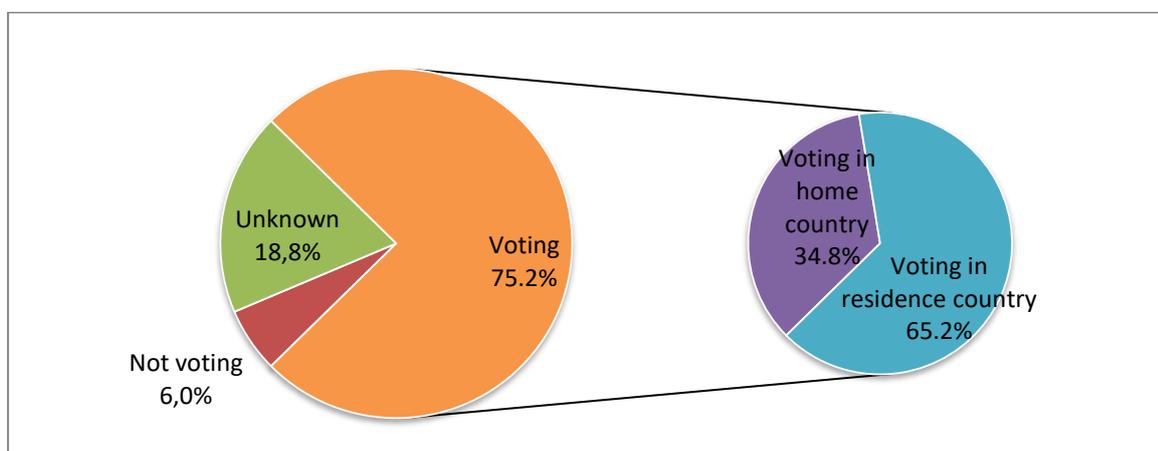


Figure 4: Voting in the upcoming EP elections

Previous participation in the local and EU elections

Respondents were also asked if they have participated previously in the local and/or EU elections in their host Member State. According to the results, 32% and 43% of respondents voted in the European and local elections accordingly.

When asked why they chose not to participate in the elections to the European Parliament, 23.3% said they participated in the elections in their home country. Almost 30% said they were not aware of their right to participate. It is important to recall that nearly 90% of the respondents said that they were aware of their rights related to the EU citizenship. However, at the same time, they do not know that they are entitled to voting in the EU elections in their host country.

Other reasons mentioned include: a missed registration deadline (13.6%), difficulties in the registration process (4.3%), lack of interest in politics. One person stated they did not believe their vote would have an impact on the election results.

As regards the reasons behind the lack of political participation in the local elections, more than a quarter of respondents mentioned, once again, that they were not aware about their right to vote. Others explained that they did not have enough knowledge of the local political system (22.5%) and some missed the registration deadline (13.4%).

Respondents were also asked whether they had been refused the registration for local elections or the EP elections by local authorities. Almost 87% did not experience any problems in this regard, 4% percent stated they did not have the nationality of the country where they were residing, 1.4% did not have a permanent residence and one person did not have their national ID document recognised.

Obstacles to freedom of movement

Respondents were asked whether they encountered any obstacles to their right to free movement in their host country. In total 405 replies were given, as multiple answers were allowed. Around 62% of the respondents stated that they did not face any obstacles. However, those who did mentioned that the problems were mainly related to requesting residence documents (16.2% of the participants), accessing the job market (14.8% of the respondents), requesting permanent residence documents (6.8% of the contributors) and trying to enter the host country (6% of the respondents).

Around 10% of participants also ticked off the box 'other' with varied elaborations, e.g. health insurance, xenophobia/ discrimination/ racism, opening a bank account or obtaining official documents. Apart from the answers under 'other', the specific nature of the problems is not known, but through focus groups organised by ECAS in the framework of the FAIR EU, the lack of knowledge of EU rights among civil servants were named as an attributing factor.

Table 5: Encountering problems

Problems	% of responses N=405	% of respondents N=351	Number of answers
Trying to enter the host country	5.2%	6%	21
Requesting residence documents	14.1%	16.2%	57

Requesting permanent residence documents	5.9%	6.8%	24
Accessing the job market	12.8%	14.8%	52
Not encountered any obstacles	53.6%	61.8%	217
Other	8.4%	9.7%	34
Total	100%	N/A	405

The link between the obstacles to freedom of movement and political participation of mobile EU citizens

As explained previously, one of the objectives of the crowdsourcing exercise was to analyse the link between the obstacles experienced by mobile EU citizens and their political participation. This has been also analysed throughout the focus groups that were organised in Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Greece and Portugal. According to the results of these meetings and our desk research², the rights to free movement and political participation are related, and the effective exercise of political and civic rights may be dependent on the proper implementation of the EU rights related to free movement.

In particular, obstacles experienced by EU citizens and their family members, and negative experience with local authorities may have a negative influence on citizens' propensity to participate in the local elections.

We asked also mobile EU citizens whether they believe that problems they encounter in their host countries may contribute to their decisions not to participate in the local elections and not to engage in the local political life in their host country. As shown below, 76% of the respondents agreed with this hypothesis.

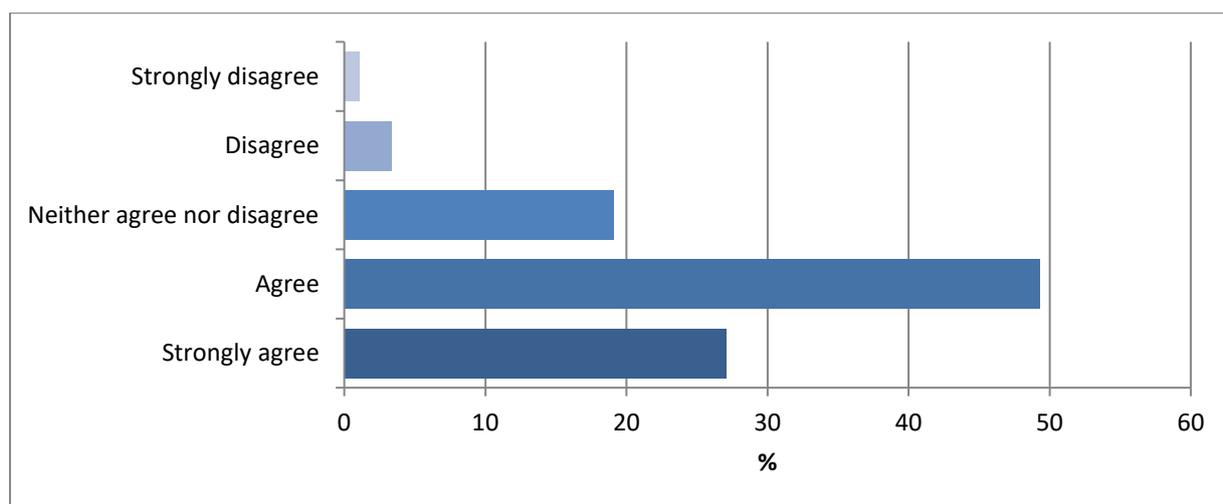


Figure 5 Do you agree that obstacles/problems encountered by EU citizens in host countries may contribute to their decisions not to participate in the local elections in their host country?

² ECAS, *Synthesis report on the obstacles to freedom of movement and their impact on the political participation of mobile EU citizens*, available [here](#) (accessed on 1 June 2019)

Sense of belonging and political participation

ECAS has also analysed whether a sense of belonging to the host community can influence mobile EU citizens' decision to participate in the local political life. How do we understand the sense of belonging? It is the feeling of being connected and accepted within the community or the country. It can be influenced by various factors, including the length of the stay, employment opportunities, family relations, etc.

The majority of the respondents either agreed (44.7%) or strongly agreed (37%) that these two issues may be linked. Only a small percentage of the respondents disagreed (2.3%) or strongly disagreed (0.3%).

This result can be particularly relevant for those mobile EU citizens who stay in the host country for a limited period of time, e.g. Erasmus students, who may not have enough time to develop their attachment to the country and as a result they may feel less inclined to get politically active.

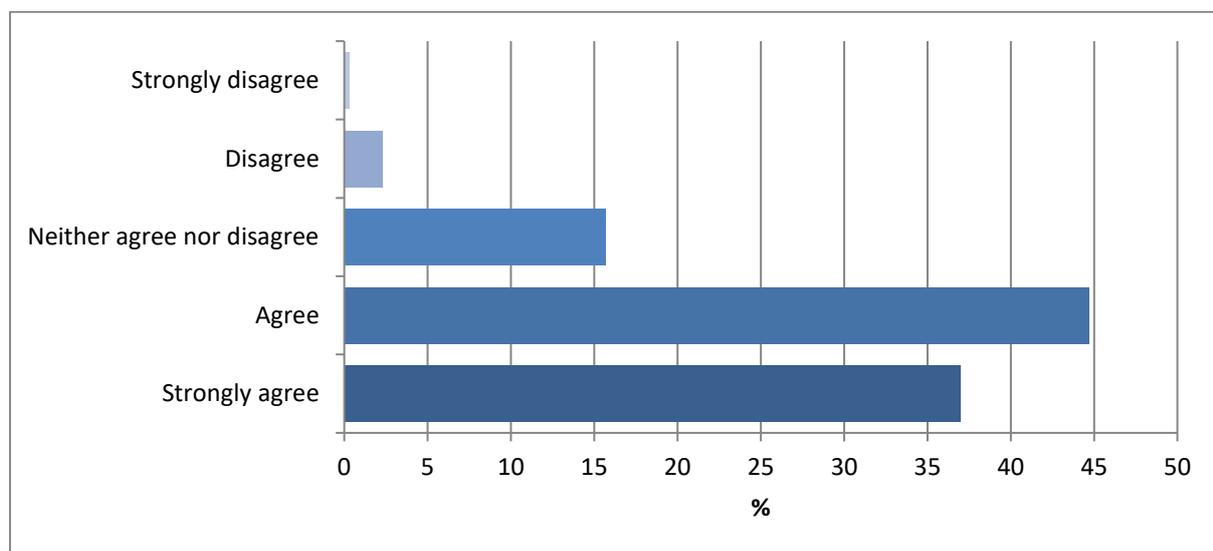


Figure 6 Mobile EU Citizens who feel that they belong in their host country are more likely to participate in local elections

Political participation as a way to defend mobile EU citizens' interests

The voter turnout in local and EU elections in many Member States is often lower than in national or regional elections. They are also often perceived as less important and attract less attention from media.

At the same time, however, we should remember that local authorities are the closest to citizens of all levels of government, thus their decisions can influence people's lives directly. Given that mobile EU citizens are not allowed to vote in the national elections or referendums, it should be in their interest to make their voice heard at least by participating in the local elections. This is especially true in countries, where municipalities have significant responsibilities for education, waste management, etc.

Therefore, the respondents were asked whether they agree that political participation of mobile EU citizens would allow them to better defend their interests in the host countries. Nearly half (49.6%) of the respondents agreed, while 35.9% strongly agreed that they can make their voice better heard if they participate in the local elections. Around 11% neither agreed nor disagreed and a small percentage disagreed (2.8%).

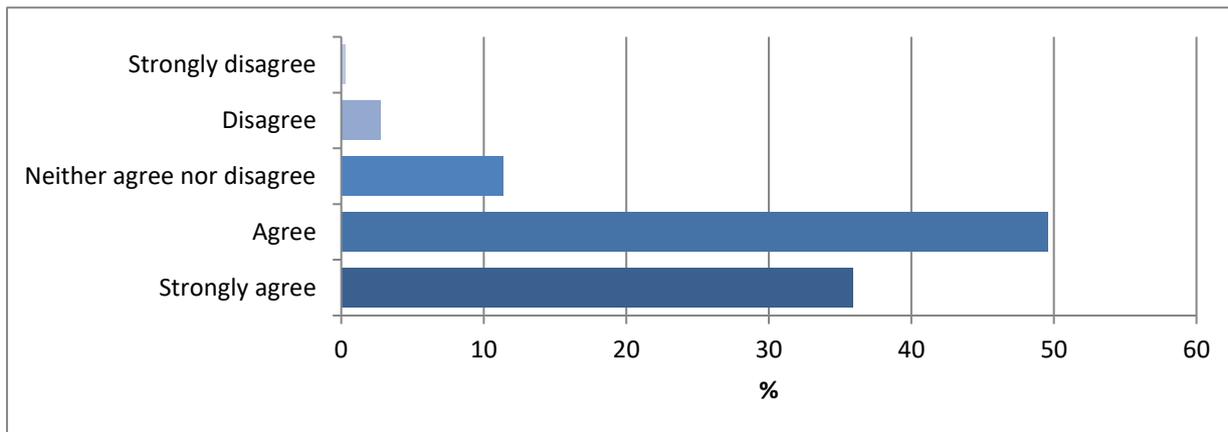


Figure 7: Political participation of mobile EU citizens would allow them to better defend their interests in their host country

At the same time, however, for the majority of respondents, participation in the in local elections does not constitute a significant indicator of their involvement in the political and social life of their host countries. Knowledge of the local language and of culture is regarded as the most important (39%), followed by the involvement in the issues that are relevant to the local community (27.6%) (e.g. signing petitions, neighbours' councils) and understanding local politics (16.2%). Voting in the municipal elections ends on the last place with 5.1%, after participating in the labour market (12%).

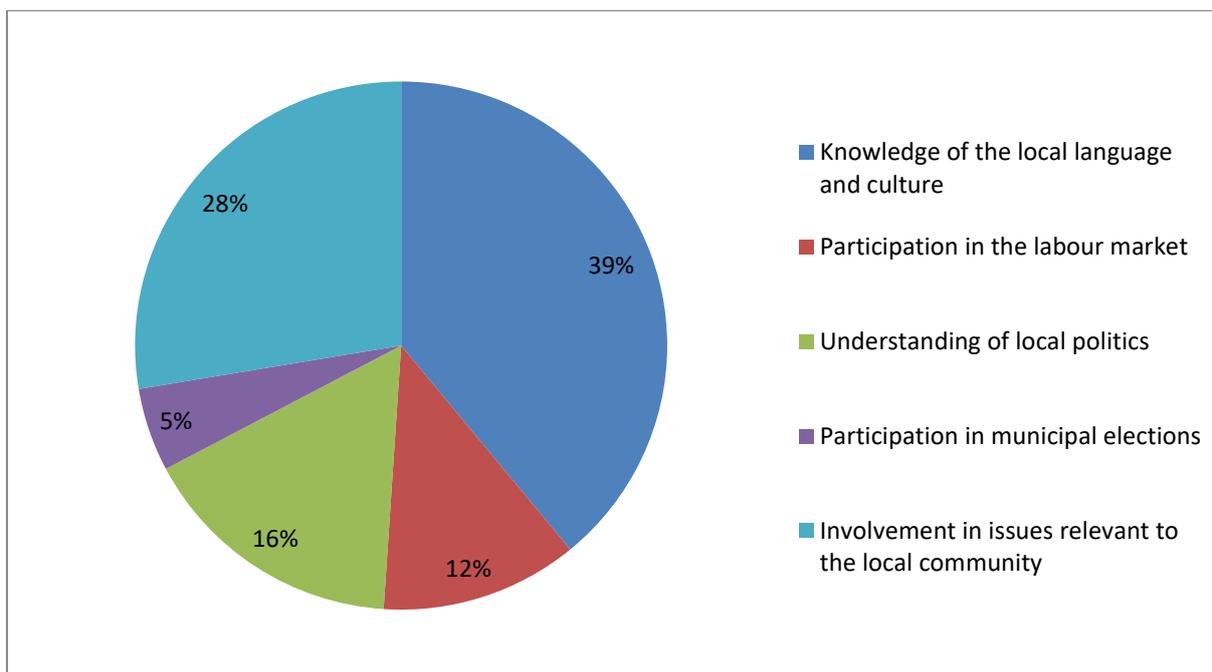


Figure 8 Most important indicators of EU citizens' involvement in the political and social life of their host countries

The role of expat-friendly information campaigns

The respondents were also asked whether they believe that expat-friendly information campaigns would increase political participation of EU citizens in their host countries. Almost 90% of citizens agree with this statement, around 12% neither agreed nor disagreed and 1.4% disagreed. No respondent ticked off strongly disagree. Several examples of expats-friendly information campaigns were identified by ECAS and include:

- VoteBrussels campaign for the local elections in Belgium³
- Project INCLUDE run by Paris municipality in cooperation with the European Civic Forum and the Young Europeans-France⁴
- Project APPROach run by the European Association for Local Democracy in cooperation with several European municipalities⁵

Examples mentioned above have also been proven successful. For instance, as a result of the VoteBrussels campaign, the voter registration rates for non-Belgians doubled in five months (25.000 new voters).⁶

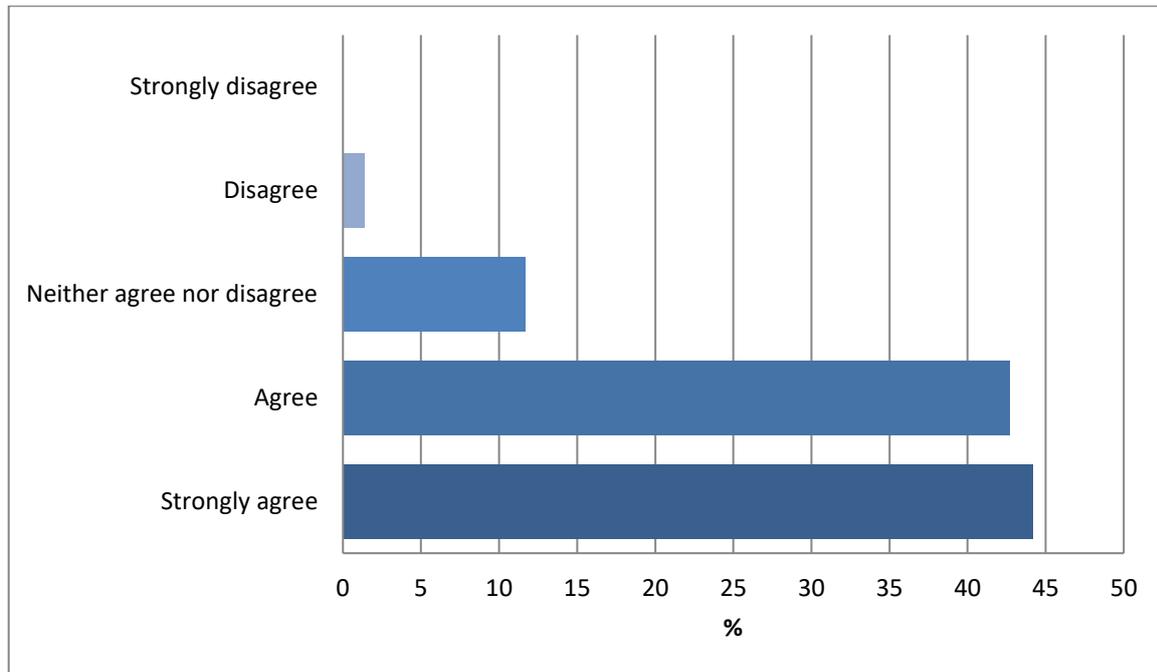


Figure 9 : Expat-friendly information campaigns increase political participation of EU citizens in the host countries

Participation in non-electoral political and/ or civic activities

Participants were also asked whether they have been involved in any non-electoral political and/ or civic activities. The respondents could choose from eight options and also had the opportunity to add other activities. Multiple answers were allowed, which resulted in 1082 replies.

The majority of the respondents (84%) indicated they had been involved in non-electoral political and/ or civic activities. Around 71% of the contributors indicated they have signed petitions and almost half of the participants stated they have had been involved in public demonstrations. The third most cited activity was volunteering (49.3% of the respondents), followed by public meetings (41.6% of the contributors) and membership of a non-political association (19.9% of the participants). Membership of a political association/party (32.5% of the respondents) and public consultations (27.1% of the contributors) were the least named activities.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/VoteBrussels/> (accessed on 10 June 2019)

⁴ <https://www.paris.fr/projetinclude> (accessed on 10 June 2019)

⁵ <https://www.project-approach.eu/#movement> (accessed on 10 June 2019)

⁶ <https://www.migpolgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/VoteBrussels-Evaluation.pdf> (accessed on 10 June 2019)

Table 6: Non-electoral political and/ or civic activities

Activities	% of responses N=1082	% of respondents N=351	Number of answers
Demonstrations	16.2%	49.9%	175
Signing petitions	22.9%	70.6%	248
Public meetings	13.5%	41.6%	146
Volunteering	16%	49.3%	173
Public consultations	8.8%	27.1%	95
Membership of a political association/ party	6.5%	19.9%	70
Membership of a non-political association	10.5%	32.5%	114
I have never participated in non-electoral political and/ or civic activities	5.2%	16%	56
Other	0.5%	1.4%	5
Total	100%	N/A	1082

This result is interesting, especially if we recall that only 43% of the respondents voted in the local elections. It indicates that there may be a preference among mobile EU citizens to get involved in non-electoral activities. This issue is further elaborated below in the analysis of the second phase.

Analysis of the 1st phase

A vast majority of 351 respondents, who filled in the questionnaire, indicated that they were familiar with the term ‘citizen of the European Union’ and the rights it entitles. However, even if political rights are an important part of EU citizenship, only 32% and 43% of our respondents voted in the European and local elections accordingly, and the lack of awareness was quoted as the main reason behind their limited political engagement. At the same time, the majority of the respondents indicated that they get involved in various non-political and civic activities.

Therefore, it would be mistaken to say that mobile EU citizens do not engage at all and do not want to have a say in their host Member States. They however choose activities which are not overburdened with procedures and strict deadlines and which allow them for a higher flexibility.

The majority of respondents said they would vote in the elections to European Parliament in May 2019. It is true that there has been an important increase in the turnout rate in the last elections, as 50% of EU citizens eligible to vote took part in the elections⁷, but it was far from the rate declared by our respondents. It is possible that the crowdsourcing exercise reached mobile EU citizens who are more politically active and more aware than the average EU population.

⁷ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20190523STO52402/elections-2019-highest-turnout-in-20-years>

The citizens were also asked whether the problems they encounter in their host Member State might influence their decision to stay politically inactive. The majority agreed or strongly agreed. This corresponds with the findings from focus groups held in different EU countries, where it emerged that people might prioritise issues like obtaining a residence permit, finding housing, getting job, etc. over participating in the elections. Obstacles to free movement which were the most frequently mentioned include: problems in receiving residence documents for EU citizens or their non-EU family members, difficulties to access job market and discrimination.

Taking into account these results, we can assume that:

- Mobile EU citizens' perceived knowledge of EU rights is lower than actual – 90% indicated that they are familiar with the term 'EU citizenship' and at the same time around 30% of respondents said they were not aware of their right to political participation
- Member States fail to reach mobile EU citizens when it comes to informing them about their voting rights and about benefits that political participation may bring to them
- Obstacles to freedom of movement experienced by EU citizens and their non-EU family members may influence their decisions to stay politically inactive in their host Member State.

Crowdsourcing – Phase 2

Who replied to the consultation?

33 mobile EU citizens (20 women and 13 men) took part in the second part of the crowdsourcing.

Table 7: Respondents – Gender distribution

Gender	% of respondents N=33	Number of respondents
Women	61%	20
Men	39%	13
Other	0	0
Total	100%	33

Out of 33 respondents, 25% was between 0 and 25 years old, 60% fell in the age category 26-40, 15% were between 41 and 60 years old.

Table 8: Respondents – Age distribution

Age	% of respondents N=33	Number of respondents
0-25	25%	5
26-40	60%	12
41-60	15%	3
60>	0%	0
Total	100%	20

The respondents come from the following countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Poland.

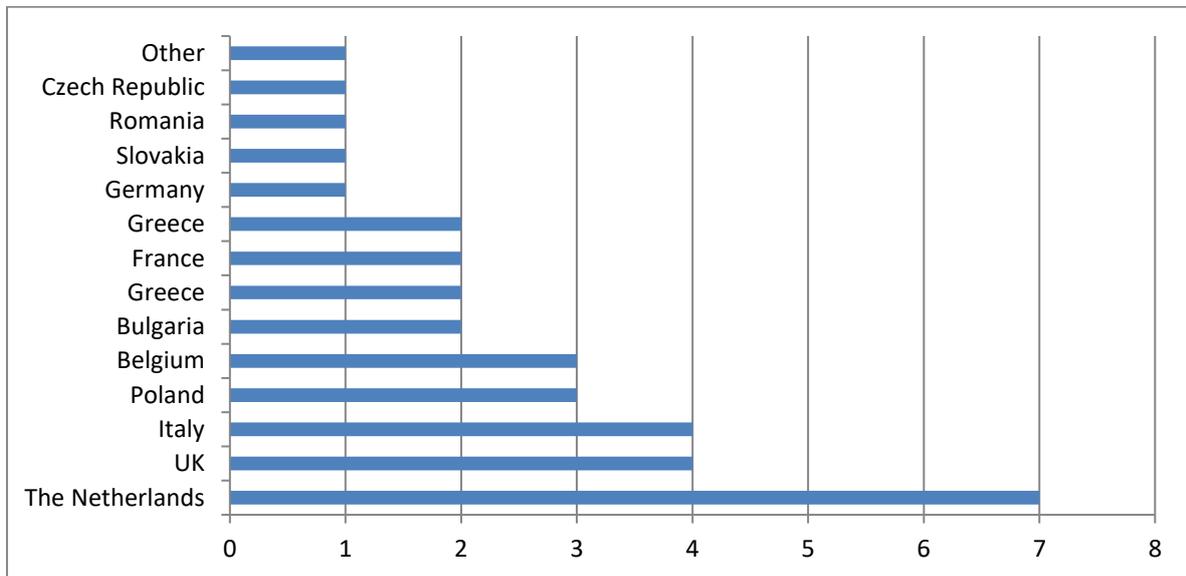


Figure 10: Home country of the respondents

The majority of the participants live in Belgium (18) with other countries being the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Sweden, etc.

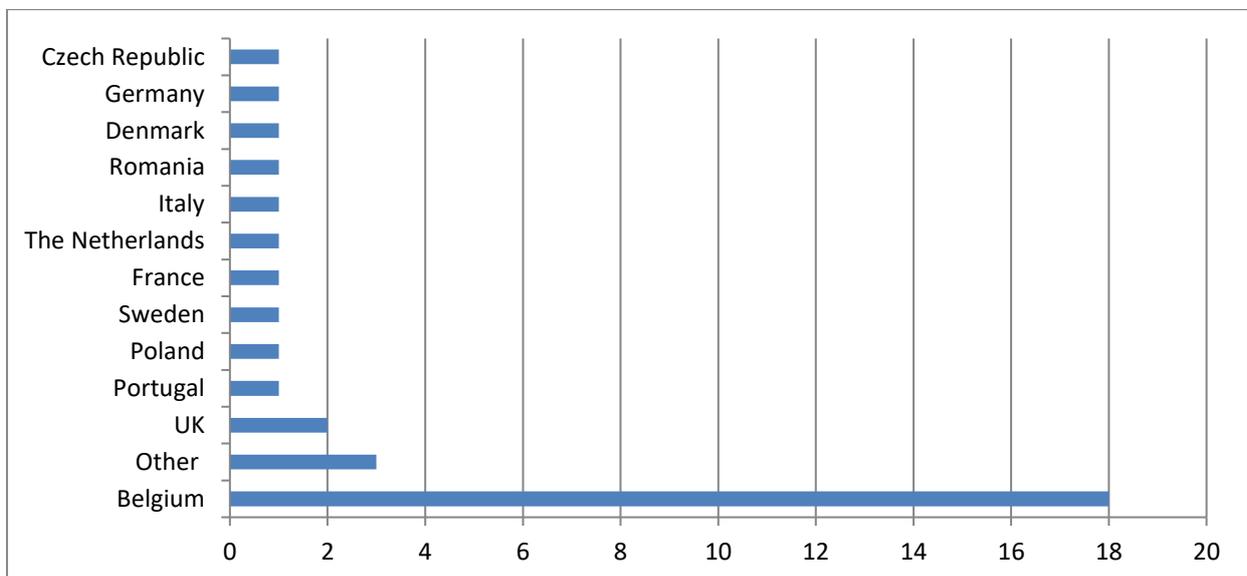


Figure 11: Residence country of the respondents

61% percent of the respondents indicated they are employees, 15% said they are students and 9% are self-employed.

Table 9: Respondents – Employment status

Employment status	% of respondents	Number of respondents
	N=33	
Employee	61%	20
Self-employed	9%	3
Unemployed	3%	1
Student	15%	5
Other	12%	4
Total	100%	33

The aim of the second phase was to gain more detailed information based on the responses given in the first phase, thus the participants were asked to answer several open questions.

Ways to improve the registration process

The first question asked about the ideas to improve the registration process for voting in their host Member State, as 5% percent of the participants in the first stage indicated that this process was complicated and burdensome.

Thirty-three answers were given, with the majority of the respondents (70%) indicating that the registration process can be improved by a pro-active attitude of the authorities. Some of the ideas given by mobile EU citizens include:

- Sending an information email or a letter to EU citizens about the procedure in various languages
- Organisation of workshops to inform citizens,
- Creation of a website on which all the information can be found
- Political parties should more proactively provide information to mobile EU citizens
- Introduction of online or via email registrations for the local and EU elections
- Possibility to fill in and return registration forms in public places as supermarkets and community centres
- Introduction of automatic voter registration for local elections
- Combining residence registration with the registration on the roll

Table 10: Ways to improve the registration process

Category	% of respondents N=33	Number of answers
Registration online	33%	11
Automatic voter registration	6%	2
Fusing voter registration with other registration e.g. residence	6%	2
Other	55%	18
Total	100%	33

Improving information provision

For the second question, respondents were asked how more accurate and clear information on electoral registration procedures could be provided and what tools (either online or offline) could be useful to improve information about mobile EU citizens' political rights.

The following suggestions were given by the respondents:

- infographics,
- (online) tools,
- campaigns,
- a mobile app,
- social media,
- texts,
- emails,
- letters,
- reminders.

In addition, one person indicated that 'clear online information' is needed and another one stated that data should be both available online and offline. One respondent suggested creation of a platform, where mobile EU citizens could report cases when incorrect or misleading information is provided by local authorities or other stakeholders.

Almost half of the contributors mentioned the language as an important barrier and stated that information (on websites, in letters/ emails, leaflets and brochures) should be provided in several languages, especially in English, in addition to the official language(s) of a country.

Around one-third of the participants offered ideas of providing information from different sources. One mentioned companies and universities and other 'live' events, such as debates or shows on national television. Four replies referred to the role of the authorities in the host country, asking them to:

- provide information on a regular basis,
- schedule a physical meeting with newcomers upon arrival,
- helping mobile EU citizens to make the necessary appointments,
- improve knowledge of EU rights among civil servants, e.g. by providing trainings.

Table 11: Ways to improve the provision on information

Category	% of respondents N=33	Number of answers
Online campaigns and information on social media	30%	10
Languages	15%	5
Improving knowledge among civil servants	6%	2
Other	48%	16
Total		33

Successful campaigns targeting mobile EU citizens

Participants were also asked whether they have heard of or participated in any successful campaign targeting mobile EU citizens. This question was answered by 27 respondents.

The majority of the contributors provided a negative response. The campaigns that were mentioned however include:

- Vote Brussels campaign run by MPG in the framework of the FAIR EU
- This time I'm voting organized by the European Parliament
- Campaigns by local political parties in e.g. Lithuania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic
- One participant mentioned that he is developing a platform which could be used for the purpose of campaigning in various countries and for various elections

Table 12: Have you heard of and/or participated/volunteered in any successful campaign targeting mobile EU citizens?

Answer	% of respondents N=17	Number of respondents
Yes	40%	11
No	60%	16
Total	100%	27

Involvement in various non-electoral political and/or civic activities

In the first phase of the crowdsourcing, 85% of the respondents indicated that they get involved in various non-electoral political and/or civic activities (signing petitions, demonstrations, public meetings, volunteering, etc.). At the same time, only 49% of the participants said to participate in the elections in their host Member State.

As a follow-up, the contributors were asked to share their opinion about the reasons behind this phenomenon. Twenty-eight responses were received. Among others, the contributors pointed out:

- Lower barriers to get involved in non-electoral political and/or civic activities
- Visibility and immediate results of civic action, which attribute to the feeling that one can make a difference
- Disillusion in politics and loss of trust in politicians
- Frequency of the elections: elections give a possibility to have a say only every 5-6 years and that is not enough

Table 13: Involvement in non-electoral political and/or civic activities

	% of respondents N=28	Number of answers
Less formal and better visibility	28%	8
Disillusion in politics	21%	6
Frequency of elections	11%	3
Other	40%	11
Total	N/A	28

Analysis of the 2nd phase

In total, 33 respondents filled in the second survey. In addition to a few closed questions regarding their residence, country of origin, age, etc., they were asked to answer the four open questions on:

1. improving the electoral registration process,
2. ways to provide more accurate and clear information on electoral registration procedures and useful tools (online and offline) that can improve the information about mobile EU citizens' political rights,
3. examples of successful campaigns targeting mobile EU citizens in the EU and,
4. reasons explaining why mobile EU citizens engage in non-electoral and civic activities rather than in voting.

The majority of the contributors emphasized a need for a more pro-active attitude of the authorities when it comes to improving the registration process. This remark was also given from the participants of focus groups that were held by ECAS in six European cities in 2018 and 2019. According to the respondents, in countries where this issue is relevant, governments should make the registration procedure easier and more visible. This way, more mobile EU citizens can be attracted and encouraged to participate in the elections.

As an example, respondents suggested that municipalities could send information letters to all citizens. While this is a first step, the pro-activeness from the authorities remains limited. In Brussels, in case of the last local elections in 2018, there was a difference between municipalities which only sent letters and those which decided to do more. In the latter case, the increase in the number of new registered citizens was noted.⁸ To make mobile EU citizens aware of the voting procedures, more (online and

⁸ <https://www.bruzz.be/brussel-kiest/brussel-kiest-2018/voter-registration-needs-become-quasi-automatic-2018-08-29> (accessed on 29 April 2019)

offline) information campaigns are needed. Relying on only social media is not enough, people also need to be reached during events and other occasions.

Campaigns can be organised by (local) governments, NGOs or in cooperation between the two. As a follow-up, the authorities could, for instance, send a text message or email to citizens with a reminder to register before the deadline expires.

Many respondents pointed out at registration online as a way to improve participation of mobile EU citizens. Others (15%) suggested automatic registration of citizens for the local elections.

Contributors point also at disillusion in politics and lack of trust in political parties and politicians as a reason why mobile EU citizens choose non-political and civic activities rather than voting. This is probably not a case only for mobile EU citizens, as we can see generally that people are more interested in alternative political and civic activities. This phenomenon needs to be addressed by local and national authorities, which should both educate their citizens about the importance of political engagement and offer them other participatory tools, which they could use in-between the elections.

The language barrier was quoted several times by the respondents. While the voting procedure itself is usually available only in the local language(s), local authorities should at least provide information prior to the elections in English and other most commonly spoken languages in a given Member State.

Conclusions and recommendations

The crowdsourcing managed to mobilise 384 mobile EU citizens. While the results cannot be treated as representative for the whole population of mobile EU citizens, they provide an important insight into the obstacles and problems EU mobile citizens face in their host Member States. They also complement all the other activities and research undertaken in the framework of the FAIR EU project.

In particular, a detailed country-by-country analysis of 28 Member States undertaken by the European University Institute⁹ identified obstacles related to: eligibility, voter registration, voting methods, outreach and information, and political environment. These issues, in particular complicated voter registration methods and the lack of information, have been also pointed out by our respondents.

In the framework of the FAIR EU, six focus groups were organized between October 2018 and January 2019 in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Ireland and Greece. Their main aim was to analyse the link between free movement and political rights of EU mobile citizens. Stakeholders invited to the meetings confirmed that the effective exercise of political and civic rights may be dependent on successful implementation of the EU rights related to free movement. In particular, obstacles experienced by EU citizens and their family members, and negative experience with local authorities may have a negative influence on citizens' propensity to participate in the local elections. This has been also validated by our respondents - 76% agreed with this hypothesis.

The results of the crowdsourcing exercise show that:

- ❖ The level of knowledge of political rights among mobile EU citizens is limited.
- ❖ The extent to which EU citizens are provided with information regarding voting rights and procedures varies from Member State to Member State. Despite certain efforts, the information does not always reach the citizens.
- ❖ Campaigns of political parties aimed at mobile EU citizens are limited.

⁹ <https://faireu.ecas.org/reports/> (accessed on 10 June 2019)

- ❖ Mobile EU citizens do not always know where and how to find information regarding their political rights.
- ❖ Registering for the elections (in Member States where this is applicable) causes problems. Mobile EU citizens are not always aware of such a procedure and/or they do not know how, when and where to register.
- ❖ Language barriers complicate political participation of mobile EU citizens when they are only informed about the elections, registration procedure, political parties etc. in the national language(s) of the host country.
- ❖ Mobile EU citizens seem to engage more in non-electoral political and/ or civic activities than electoral ones. Disillusion in politics is named as a potential reason.

Taking into account the above-mentioned findings, the following recommendations should be taken into account in order to increase political participation of mobile EU citizens:

- ❖ Local and national authorities should make the necessary steps in order to increase awareness of EU rights among their native and foreign EU citizens. This includes information campaigns but also introduction of civic education at schools.
- ❖ Introduction of automatic voter registration in local elections across Europe should be envisaged by the national authorities. If this is not feasible for some reasons, e.g. compulsory voting in Belgium, EU mobile citizens should have the opportunity to register on the electoral roll the first time they approach public authorities, e.g. during the residence application process.
- ❖ The information regarding political rights of EU mobile citizens should be provided on regular basis and in multiple languages. This should be done by the use of multiple tools: traditional and social media, information material, public campaigns, meetings with mobile EU citizens, etc.
- ❖ Introduction of online registration for local and EU elections. This could be especially true for the Member States, where EU mobile citizens experienced problems (delays, excessive requirements) with public authorities. EU mobile citizens who had negative experience will probably refrain from contacting or visiting public authorities unless really necessary.
- ❖ Appropriate measures should be undertaken by the EU institutions and national authorities to overcome the obstacles to freedom of movement faced by mobile EU citizens and their non-EU family members
- ❖ Involvement of mobile EU citizens in local decision-making, which directly affects their lives, should also be promoted in-between the elections.