



Results of the Public Consultation on EU Citizenship Rights 2020

FACTSHEET

15 December 2020

The Commission held a public consultation on EU citizenship rights between July and October 2020, which together with the Eurobarometer on EU Citizenship and Democracy, informs the 2020 Citizenship Report. The consultation received 343 responses from 26 EU Member States and the UK.¹ In addition, 23 position papers were submitted by stakeholders, predominantly from civil society. As such, the results summarised below cannot be generalised to the EU population but serve rather to gain in-depth insights. All contributions were analysed to shed light on how EU citizenship rights are understood, exercised and experienced on the ground. This factsheet highlights the core findings, which can be explored further in the Report on the 2020 Public Consultation on EU Citizenship Rights.

Exercising EU citizenship rights

In order to exercise rights, citizens need to know of their existence. Over 60%, 167 respondents, thought that not enough is being done to inform EU citizens about their EU citizenship rights. Some information websites, such as 'Europa', are well-known, but overall respondents thought that there were too many individual websites and consolidation was needed.

More than 75%, 202 respondents, would find it helpful if they could contact a dedicated authority at national level to support them in exercising their EU citizenship rights.

When asked what limits citizens' access to their European citizenship rights, respondents referred to the digital divide, a lack of websites with streamlined information and insufficient civic education in schools across the EU.

Civil Society Europe suggests that information "should be available at schools, work and work-related agencies, in health-care, travel agencies, and through associations that provide services to citizens, or where education, recreation and sports activities are done, etc. in order to reach out to a maximum of people where they are".

The right to move freely within the EU

The right to move freely is among the key underpinning principles of the EU Single Market. Every EU citizen travelling to another EU country exercises this fundamental EU citizenship right.

Most respondents reported that their main reasons for travel within the EU were holidays, followed by working and visiting friends and family.

43 respondents reported to have experienced some form of discrimination when exercising the right to free movement.

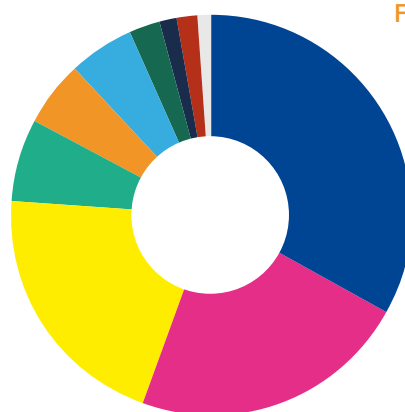


Figure 1 – Purpose of travelling in the EU
(total number of respondents; multiple answers possible)

Source: EU Survey, Public consultation on EU Citizenship Rights 2020. Note: Number of observations: 240

¹ The UK responses were analysed separately.

The right to reside in another Member State

“I wish I had had exact information on how long I can reside [in the country] without registering, where to register, and especially more clear information regarding health access.”

Quote from an EU citizen

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respondents say they had faced some form of discrimination based on their nationality when residing in another Member State.

Subject to certain conditions, EU citizens have the right to reside in an EU Member State other than their country of nationality. Half of the respondents have in the past resided in another EU country for longer than three months.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they have lived in another Member State for work and for education/training and volunteering.

Prior to moving to another Member State, personal contacts, online information and help desks in the country of departure were considered to be the most common and helpful sources of information.

EU citizens often wish they had been better informed before the move about matters such as social benefits, health insurance and registration of residence. Figure 2 lists the support measures that mobile EU citizens believe would be very helpful.

28 say they had faced some form of discrimination based on their nationality when residing in another Member State. This included interactions with banks, authorities and landlords who respondents thought treated them differently from nationals of that country.

Figure 2 – Support measures and their usefulness for moving into another EU country (number of respondents who answered either “Very helpful” or “Quite helpful”)

Support measures	Found “very helpful” or “quite helpful” by respondents who:	
	Have lived in another EU country for at least three months in the past (135 respondents)	Have not lived in another EU country for at least three months in the past (136 respondents)
1. A welcome session organised at local or community level	99	108
2. Roundtables, workshops on specific tasks and skills	94	111
3. Social events with locals or other mobile EU citizens to share experiences	103	98
4. An online platform for receiving and exchanging information	118	120
5. A national website explaining rights of mobile EU citizens in a national context	111	114
6. An EU-wide online identification system for eGovernment purposes	103	102
7. Language courses	117	115
8. Other	12	10

Source: EU Survey, Public consultation on EU Citizenship Rights 2020.

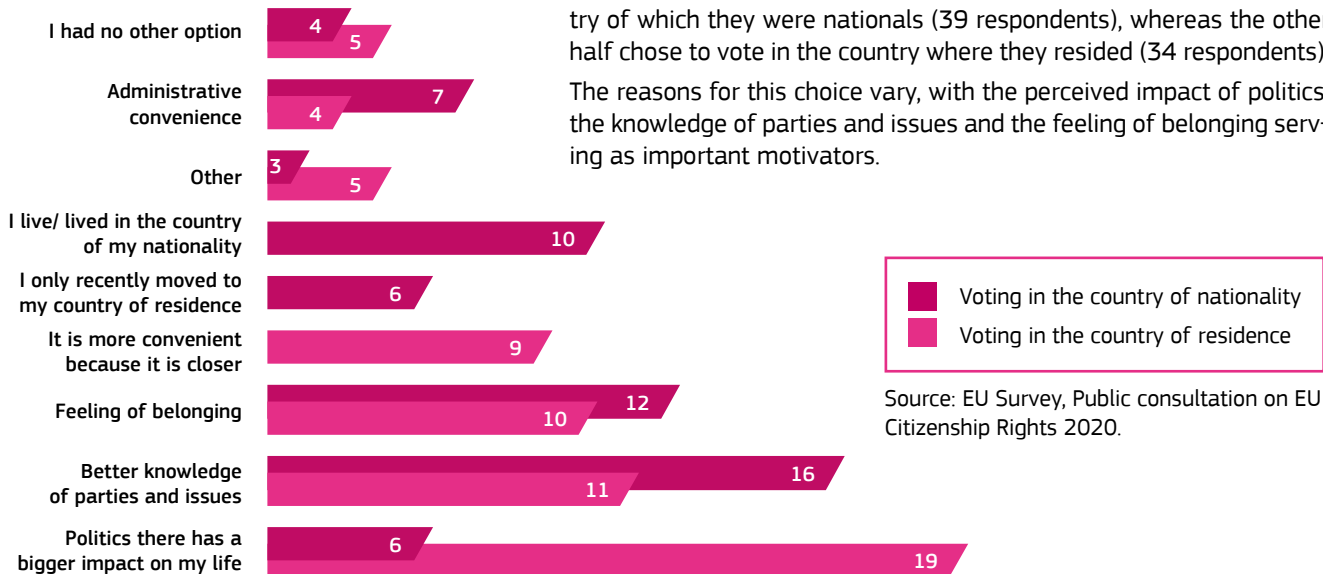
Additionally, respondents highlighted the potential for:

- An EU-wide online identification system for eGovernment purposes
- Country-level websites explaining their rights

The right to vote and stand as a candidate

Mobile EU citizens have the right to vote and stand as a candidate in European parliamentary elections in their country of residence under the same conditions as nationals. Mobile EU citizens can also vote and stand as candidates in local elections in the Member State they reside.

Figure 3 – Reasons for voting in the country of residence vs. in the country of citizenship
(number of respondents)



85% of the respondents voted in the last European parliamentary elections in 2019. Almost 70% of them lived in their country of origin and one third lived in another EU Member State. Of those living in another Member State, almost half voted for candidates in the country of which they were nationals (39 respondents), whereas the other half chose to vote in the country where they resided (34 respondents).

The reasons for this choice vary, with the perceived impact of politics, the knowledge of parties and issues and the feeling of belonging serving as important motivators.

Electronic or online voting was seen as convenient and easier to access for citizens abroad. However, potential fraud, manipulation of votes and cyberattacks were among the respondents' main concerns (selected by 173 and 161 respondents). For 120 (46% of respondents), these concerns outweigh the benefits of electronic or online voting, whilst 86 felt the opposite.

More than half of the respondents supported postal voting. For those who did not support, fears included fraud and manipulation and lack of trust in the correct functioning of the postal services. There are differences across the Member States, with higher levels of approval in countries where postal voting is already exercised at every level of the electoral system.

The right to consular protection

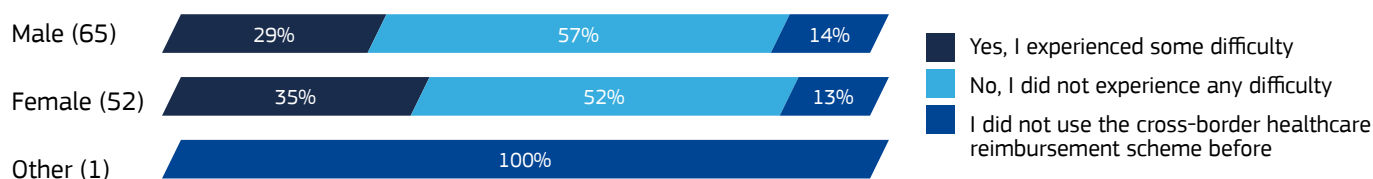
As part of their EU citizenship rights, EU citizens are entitled to seek help from the embassy or consulate of any other EU Member State if they find themselves in a situation where they need assistance outside the EU, with no embassy or consulate from their own Member State effectively in position to help them.

Nearly a quarter of the respondents have travelled to a country outside the EU where their country of nationality does not have an embassy or consulate. Of these 24%, 13% have used their right to consular protection predominantly due to a loss of travel documents. Overall, respondents felt that this support could be further developed and promoted. Respondents indicated that EU delegations should take a more active role in assisting unrepresented EU citizens, especially when it comes to the evacuation and repatriation of EU citizens, the issuance of emergency travel documents, and the support of EU citizens who are victims of a crime or who have been arrested.

Simplifying mobility and life in Europe

Although the Commission will provide citizens with enhanced tools to protect their health through the new EU4Health programme, EU citizens already benefit from several cross-border directives. For example, EU citizens have the right to access healthcare services in any Member State and to be reimbursed for treatment by the insurance in their country of residence. Even though EU citizens often consult medical services abroad, there is a limited experience with cross-border healthcare reimbursement.

Figure 4 - Experience and difficulties when using the cross-border healthcare reimbursement scheme



Source: EU Survey, Public consultation on EU Citizenship Rights 2020. Note: Number of observations: 240

49 respondents have lived in one Member State and worked in another. For just over 25% of them, this resulted in double taxation, while 39% were exempt from taxation in the country of residence. Fulfilling tax obligations was found more cumbersome in the country of residence (57%) than in the country of work (38%). The only respondent who found the whole exercise very easy, indicated that they had hired a tax advisor.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The impact of COVID-19 is widespread, and reactions to safeguard public health, along with the economy have been quick. At the same time, challenges persist. According to the European Citizen Action Service, “mobile EU citizens have experienced unprecedented obstacles as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic”.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, only 73 respondents resided in a Member State other than their country of nationality or had been surprised by the COVID-19 pandemic while travelling to another EU country. Around 50 respondents had no difficulties in accessing information in a language they could understand or about the steps to be taken or about the possibility to travel.

In relation to the measures taken nationally to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, did you experience difficulties in accessing any of the following while in another EU Member State?	Yes, difficulties encountered	No, no difficulties encountered	Not applicable	Don't know	Nr of responses
1. Necessary information about the pandemic and the steps that should be taken in a language you understand	19%	70%	10%	1%	73
2. Necessary information about the border situation in your country of residence or the country you were travelling through in a language you understand	29%	64%	5%	1%	73
3. Repatriation efforts to help get you back home safely	12%	16%	66%	5%	73
4. Necessary documents from your country of nationality (such as renewed ID documents)	16%	26%	52%	5%	73
5. Necessary documents for your country of residence (such as residence documents or visas for family members from outside the EU)	15%	22%	56%	7%	73
6. Specific healthcare support	18%	32%	48%	3%	73
7. Other specific support, such as childcare for key workers	6%	15%	72%	7%	72
8. Other	14%	9%	58%	19%	43

Overall, 184 (70%) felt well informed about the situation and 176 (67%) could find the information they needed on the pandemic through the national and EU institutions, or through the media. However, for 117 respondents (47%) the media did not provide useful information.

Conclusion

EU citizenship, a unique legal status, is one of the most significant achievements of the European project. The practical enjoyment of rights across borders, such as the right to vote, study, work or live in other EU Member States, affects the daily life of all Europeans and the protection and promotion of these rights is key to the Commission's work. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated even more the importance of EU citizenship rights.

This consultation has provided the Commission with valuable insights in its efforts to bring concrete benefits to EU citizens in terms of effectively enjoying their EU citizenship rights.