

Research report

Discussion topics for the Open2Vote.eu platform



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**Funded by
the European Union**

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1. The scope of the report

This report has been carried out in the framework of work package 2 (WP2) focused on research activities in the MobileCIT project "Inclusive Europe for mobile EU citizens" and responds to the deliverable D2.1.

The objectives of WP2 were to understand the needs and challenges faced by EU mobile citizens when engaging on EU-level issues. The expected reach of participants was 80 people.

The specific aim with the research and consultations was to:

- Select the most salient questions to place on the online platform Open2Vote.eu
- Understand the usability of the platform among different socio-demographic target groups (e.g. women/men, young/old)

The selected discussion topics were published on the Open2Vote.eu platform on the 29th of October 2023. On the Open2Vote-platform, mobile EU citizens have the possibility to learn about their rights and opportunities, as well as express their opinions on important EU topics through voting. The issues proposed by citizens and their votes (for or against) on the issues were conveyed to EU policy makers and to other related stakeholders.



2. Challenges faced by mobile EU citizens: A synthesis of previous findings

This section gives a brief overview of previous findings on the challenges faced by mobile EU citizens, which were considered relevant to the project objectives.

The 2020 EU Citizenship Report

The 2020 EU Citizenship Report, which set out priorities and actions to empower EU citizens, outlined several key issues that concern European citizens (European Commission 2020).¹ The project team considered the main themes below – emphasised by the EC and where the EC is planning interventions to be relevant for mobile EU citizens.²

Strengthening the democratic participation of citizens

Challenges:

- Complicated voting registration procedures for mobile EU citizens;
- Organisational arrangements of elections that do not take the specific needs of people with disabilities sufficiently into account (around 800,000 Europeans face barriers, such as limited accessibility of premises and ballots or insufficient accessible information on candidates and debates);
- The lack of information at a national level about EU citizenship rights.

Issues prioritised by the EU:

- Update of EU rules on voting rights of mobile EU citizens in municipal and European elections;
- Information to citizens when voting in municipal and European elections: A dedicated shared resource to support EU citizens in exercising their electoral rights, as well as providing additional avenues for them to report hurdles and incidents affecting their political participation. The report emphasised that these should be made available to both EU citizens (including mobile EU citizens) and relevant authorities by autumn 2023.

Facilitating free movement and simplifying daily life

Challenges: insufficient digital options for administrative procedures and tax regimes for frontier workers.

¹ European Commission (2020). 2020 EU Citizenship Report.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2395

² These areas were selected by the author from the 2020 EU Citizenship Report Factsheet (do note that the EC also outlines other areas of intervention for EU citizens in the report):
https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/eu_citizenship_report_2020_-_factsheet_en.pdf



Measures proposed:

- Update EU guidelines on free movement taking into account measures introduced due to public health concerns as well as the diversity of families ("rainbow families");³
- Promote the inclusion of cross-border e-government and e-business solutions into newly issued ID cards;
- Improve the situation of taxpayers with cross-border activities, including frontier workers.⁴ In the field of taxation, there are no EU-level rules on the definition of frontier workers, the division of taxation rights between Member States or the tax rules to be applied;
- Protect the rights of EU citizens residing in the UK, in line with the withdrawal agreement;⁵
- Support the development of journey planners involving several modes of transport (i.e. planners to search for and book multimodal transport connections);
- Protecting and promoting EU citizenship:
 - Propose new equality and anti-discrimination measures;
 - Foster the sense of European identity among young people through the ERASMUS+ programme, the [European Solidarity Corps](#) and the Jean Monnet Actions.
- Protecting EU citizens in times of crises:
 - Continue building a strong European Health Union and implement together with the Member States the EU strategy for COVID-19 vaccines;
 - Review EU rules on consular protection in order to improve the EU's and Member States' capacity to protect European citizens in times of crisis, for example, by allowing them to organise repatriation flights and issue emergency travel documents.

The Open Cities for EU Citizens project (OPENCIT)

The findings from the previous report made in the framework of the project [Open Cities for EU Citizens](#) (OPENCIT) in 2021 also shed some light on issues that are salient for mobile EU citizens.⁶ In particular, the association Swedes Worldwide (SVIV), interviewed by the OPENCIT project team in the course of the project, stressed that their members are mostly interested in practical and logistical issues at the EU level (e.g. driving licence renewal, e-prescriptions and access to vaccines in another EU country), and not so much into broader or generic questions, such as climate change. Swedes abroad are also interested in practical issues related to elections such as getting clear and

³ One issue is related to the fact that, due to differences in legal rules across Member States, family ties may not be given relevance when rainbow families (i.e. families where at least one member is LGBTIQ) exercise their right of free movement.

⁴ Note: The Commission announced in its Tax Action Plan of July 2020 that it would launch in 2021 an initiative on EU taxpayers' rights and to simplify tax obligations for EU citizens.

⁵ The UK's departure from the EU has had an impact on the lives of close to 3.7 million EU citizens, who made their home in the UK and millions of UK citizens who lost their status as EU citizens. Source: (European Commission 2020).

⁶ Open Cities for EU Citizens (OPENCIT): A feasibility study. Author: Alina Östling. Contributing author: Visvaldis Valtenbergs. November 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HNOny_hkDb3-J7rBkLgqX3HaYIXvbjwvZcyRGWZgoU/edit#heading=h.8kfspbg850r1



correct voter information, receiving their voting cards in time, as well easier voting process from abroad (e.g. by introducing e-voting to avoid travelling to (distant) consulates to cast votes), and be given alternatives to advance voting, where many feel they miss out in getting informed by the last phases of the election debate.

In the course of the OPENCIT-project, questions raised on the popular "[Debating Europe](#)" website⁷ were also examined. The analysis found that some of the most commented issues were:

- Whether English should be the only official language of the EU (circa 3,300 comments);
- What it means to be "European" (circa 1,900 comments);
- Whether same-sex marriage should be legalised across Europe (circa 1,700 comments).

3. Summary of the issues emerging from the MobileCIT consultations

This section summarises the findings about the challenges and issues from the consultations that took place during the MobileCit project (see Section 4 for further details on the consultations). These are listed below according to several thematic areas.

3.1. Political participation of mobile EU citizens

Challenges:

- Complicated voting registration procedures in EP/local elections for mobile EU citizens;
- Lack of timely information about voter registration;
- People with disabilities have limited accessibility to premises/ballots and information on candidates/debates;
- The lack of information about EU citizenship rights at the national level;
- Postal voting issues: (e.g. glue on voting envelopes, postal office speed of delivery);
- Challenges of voting in the European Parliament elections from third countries (where there are no diplomatic or consular representations of the specific country, and where postal voting often carries significant practical difficulties i.e. for voter registration, postal delays etc.).

Potential platform questions:

- To facilitate voting in EU and local elections for mobile EU citizens, the EU should:
 - Promote knowledge exchange and good practices in this field of online voting in European Parliament elections (e.g. France and Estonia have experience of online voting).
 - Set common minimum standards for postal services across the Member States.
 - With a view to the EP elections in 2024, have a dedicated information campaign and a call centre for questions related to voting by mobile EU citizens.

⁷ The representatives of Debating Europe were interviewed in the framework of the OPENCIT project. See the [Open Cities for EU Citizens](#)-report for further details.



- Any EU citizen in any third country outside the EU should be able to cast his/her vote for the European Parliament in any of the consular representations of the Member States which acts as a polling station for its own citizens (sharing and pooling of electoral functions outside the EU) and/or in the EU delegation.

3.2. "Red Tape"

Challenges:

- Insufficient digital options for administrative procedures and tax regimes, especially for frontier workers;
- Promote the inclusion of cross-border e-government and e-business solutions into newly issued ID cards;
- Renewal of driving licences and passports in the EU and in third countries;
- Improve the situation of taxpayers with cross-border activities, including frontier workers;⁸ In the field of taxation, there are no EU-level rules on the definition of frontier workers, the division of taxation rights between Member States or the tax rules to be applied. The bilateral agreements between Luxembourg and bordering countries could serve as a source of inspiration for an EU-wide set of minimum conditions.
- Regarding the right to receive a pension while living abroad:
 - Harmonisation of regulations across Member states;
 - More information is needed about the process and which institutions to approach.
- The inheritance law is complicated, especially if a person has several nationalities;
- It is not clear whether civil service in EU institutions or in the host country's national administration is counted towards public service experience for applying to positions in another EU country's public administration. This limits the mobility of civil servants.
- Limited practical information for mobile EU citizens who have newly arrived in an EU country or who are moving back to their home country (e.g. about how to get an ID, register a company, rent an apartment, register for a school etc.);
- Taxation of remittances to relatives beyond 2nd degree (for instance, to a nephew to fund college, or to a cousin for paying medical fees);
- Charity to non-profit organisations through taxation is limited to the national level. (This would fit well into the forthcoming EC proposals on civic space and democracy);
- There should be common European rules about cross-border teleworking, including regarding tax and social coverage – currently, the rules are different to people working in Luxembourg depending on whether they live in Germany, Belgium or France – sometimes within a space of a few kilometres only.

Potential platform questions:

- EU should develop policy to address issues of double taxation (also double taxation of pensions);
- EU should harmonise different taxation and insurance systems in place in the Member States;

⁸ Note: The Commission announced in its Tax Action Plan of July 2020 that it would launch in 2021 an initiative on EU taxpayers' rights and to simplify tax obligations for EU citizens.



- The EU should introduce EU-level agreements on social insurance with countries where many EU citizens reside;
- The EU should facilitate the exchange of information between social insurance agencies across Europe;
- The EU should facilitate the renewal of passports.
- The EU should facilitate driving licences in the EU and in third countries;⁹
- The EU¹⁰ should make sure that the forthcoming digital driving licence should allow renewal from any member state;
- The simplification and harmonisation of the national inheritance laws should be examined at the EU level;
- The EU should provide dedicated funding for civil society organisations, including diaspora organisations and other organisations with links to expatriate communities of EU citizens, to develop and maintain a resource with practical information for mobile EU citizens;
- The EU should facilitate the mobility of EU civil servants among member states by promoting recognition of service;
- Taxation of remittances within the EU single market should be eliminated.
- Charity to non-profit organisations through taxation should be allowed across EU countries;
- There should be a dedicated virtual "Europe Direct" centre for mobile EU citizens, specialised in the question of their rights and challenges and driving tailored information campaigns on this.

3.3. Free movement: entry, travel and residence barriers

Challenges:

- Update EU guidelines on free movement taking into account measures introduced due to public health concerns as well as the diversity of families ("rainbow families");¹¹

⁹ As regards driver licences, the rules for obtaining them are defined by the Member States. Once received the renewal is mostly just a formality - and they all follow the same layout anyway; but there is a directive and a decision by the European Court of Justice saying this can only be done in the country of "permanent residence" - not sure why should this be the case (for many expats, they prefer handling this in their country of origin for practical reasons - language barrier, habit, intention of return; not to talk about circular migrants or digital nomads).

¹⁰ We note that the European Commission is proposing establishing digital driver licences across the EU. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1145

¹¹ One issue is related to the fact that, due to differences in legal rules across Member States, family ties may not be given relevance when rainbow families (i.e. families where at least one member is LGBTIQ) exercise their right of free movement.



- Protect the rights of EU citizens residing in the UK, in line with the withdrawal agreement;¹²
- Support the development of journey planners involving several modes of transport (i.e. planners to search for and book multimodal transport connections) across countries.

Potential platform questions:

- The EU should support the development of digital journey planners involving several modes of transport across EU countries;
- The EU guidelines on free movement should be updated taking into account the diversity of families ("rainbow families");
- The EU should review its rules so EU consulates can organise repatriation flights and issue emergency travel documents.

3.4. Protecting and promoting EU citizenship

Challenges:

- Dual citizenship or multiple citizenship rights: Currently, there is no EU policy in the field, but the question has been raised at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). EU citizens in some countries (e.g. Lithuania, the Netherlands) that lose their national citizenship for some reason, also lose their EU citizenship and the related rights;
- Diaspora organisations do not have proper recognition at the EU level. They are serving the interests of national groups but also have relevant EU and EU citizenship rights-dimensions that should be recognised;
- Diaspora media is struggling in several EU countries with limited funding.

Potential platform questions:

- The EU should introduce a policy on dual and multiple citizenships that allow people to keep their European citizenship and rights even if they lose their national citizenship in an EU country;
- Diaspora organisations should get official recognition and support at the EU level since they also play an important role in promoting EU citizenship rights;
- To support mobile EU citizens in maintaining language and cultural connections with their home countries, the EU should provide funding to diaspora media outlets and platforms;
- EU shall coordinate knowledge transfer about the reach of different types of diasporas across MS.

3.5. Access to healthcare

Challenges:

- Access to reimbursable health care (e.g. emergency and maternity care);

¹² The UK's departure from the EU has had an impact on the lives of close to 3.7 million EU citizens, who made their home in the UK and millions of UK citizens who lost their status as EU citizens. Source: (European Commission 2020).



- Access to prescriptions in other EU countries. (*Nota bene*: Work is ongoing on this issue at the EU level: see Electronic cross-border health services: https://health.ec.europa.eu/ehealth-digital-health-and-care/electronic-cross-border-health-services_en);
- When moving from country to country during the Covid pandemic, it was difficult (in some countries) to get national health services to recognise the first Covid vaccine that was done in another EU country and to continue vaccination in another country;
- Difficult to carry out organ donation across countries from a legal perspective.

Potential platform questions:

- The EU should facilitate organ donation across EU countries;
- The EU should facilitate recognition of vaccinations across EU countries.

3.6. Education

Challenges:

- Recognition of academic and professional qualifications (university and secondary school level, and transfer of credentials for certain professions);
- Difficult to carry out exams abroad for children that have parallel schooling (many children of EU citizens working (and living) abroad are schooled both in their country of residency and in their home country);
- In maintaining language and connection with home countries (lack of mother tongue education for mobile EU citizens' children in host country schools, in particular for smaller communities of EU nationals);
- Access to TV broadcasts in the mother tongue due to geoblocking of protected content, in particular for children, but also cultural content.

Potential platform questions:

- The EU should facilitate recognition of academic and professional qualifications;
- The EU should facilitate the carrying out of exams for children who have parallel schooling;
- The EU should update the EU directive (77/486/EEC) to enable language and connection of children living abroad with home countries.

3.7. Access to justice

Challenges:

- Persons with double European nationality, should not be subject to double military duty. The person should have a choice of which country's obligations to comply with (also if one of the countries does not have mandatory military service, this should be legitimate as a choice);
- In case of disputes about child custody, the parent of the host country is much more protected than the parent who would like to return to the country of origin together with the child;



- Civil unions and marriage of LGBT couples in some countries are not recognised in other EU countries;

Potential platform questions:

- Persons with double European nationality should not be subject to double military duty but be able to choose which country's obligations to comply with;
- The EU should ensure that there is early and high-quality legal aid to the party to the proceedings who is not a national of the country of the jurisdiction in cases where parents would like to return to the country of origin together with their children within the EU (issue of equal standing with the remaining parent);
- The EU should facilitate recognition of civil unions of all types and marriages of (rainbow) families within the EU.

4. Description of the MobileCIT consultative events

4.1. The consultation at the ECIT Annual Conference

Mode: in situ (at the Brussels Press Club, 95 Rue Froissard, Brussels) and online

Date: 29 November 2022

Number of conference participants: 28

Number of conference participants that participated in the consultation: 28

Link to the conference page: <https://ecit-foundation.eu/annual-conference-2022/>

Link to the video recording of the conference panels:

<https://www.linkedin.com/events/7003266945844142080/comments/>

This 7th Annual Conference on European Citizenship was organised by the ECIT Foundation and brought together civil society activists, academics and policymakers. The conference discussed the demand, first made by the ECIT Foundation, and now taken up by both the European Parliament and the citizen-led Conference on the Future of Europe, for a Statute on European Citizenship. During the event, MobileCIT held a consultation about key issues for mobile EU citizens. The survey consultation was introduced in the [video of the conference](#) (see minute 3:59) and was distributed in paper and online formats. 16 persons filled in the survey on paper, and 12 persons did the online survey. The survey template is available on file.

The participants voted and ranked the importance of the ten challenges, listed in Table 1 below, which were identified during the research phase of the project, jointly with all the consortium partners. The top issues that emerged were challenges to political representation, access to justice and equal treatment in the workplace (see the top3-issues in Table 1).

Table 1. Results from the ECIT annual conference consultation

Rank	Issue
1	Lack of adequate political representation of mobile EU citizens



2	Lack of accessible, quick and effective measures to guarantee enforcement of European rights and access to justice
3	Exploitation and lack of equal treatment in the workplace, on nationality or other grounds
4	"Red Tape" (e.g. administrative burdens and delays, difficulties opening a bank account, tax questions)
5	Barriers to entry and residence
6	Challenges in accessing portable rights to access social security and social services
7	Challenges in accessing reimbursable health care (e.g. emergency and maternity care)
8	Problems of brain drain in countries of origin
9	Difficulties in getting recognition of academic and professional qualifications
10	Pensions and long-term care

Please note that we could not collect demographic information about the survey participants due to the format of the event format and the data collection mode.

4.2. The Europeans Throughout The World (ETTW) member consultation

Mode: online

Date: 20 Jan 2023

Number of participants: 16.

Type of participants: ETTW member organisations

This workshop aimed to understand the needs and challenges faced by EU mobile citizens when engaging in EU-level issues. The objective of the consultation was to identify issues that are important for the mobile citizens the participating ETTW-affiliated organisations are representing. Criteria used to select issues:

- (1) Issues that can be solved at the EU level (not national/local),
- (2) Preferably problems shared by more than one EU country,
- (3) Possible to vote on the Open2Vote platform (for/against).

Key issues identified during the consultation meeting are presented below.

Dual citizenship or multiple citizenship rights

- Currently, there is no EU policy in the field. Passing legislation on this at the EU level is important. The question has been raised at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).
- When you lose your national citizenship for some reason, you also lose your EU citizenship. For example, this is an issue for Lithuanians who cannot hold dual/multiple citizenship and



for Dutch citizens (e.g. a recent case in the Netherlands regarding a Dutch author living in the US has raised a lot of attention).

Facilitate voting in local/European elections

- Improve voter information: In some countries, there are considerable barriers to voting in local and EP elections from abroad (e.g. only 1% of Belgian ex-pats voted in the 2019 elections, many did not manage to vote due to lack of timely information about voter registration).
- Online voting: Perhaps the EU could promote the exchange of experiences and good practices in the field (e.g. the French have used online voting in elections).
- Problems with postal voting: The Swedish voters abroad had issues with glue on voting envelopes that are not working properly in humid climates. The postal office's speed of delivery has been a problem for Lithuanian citizens who want to vote from abroad. The EU should set standards for postal services in the Member states.

Taxation

Double taxation (also that of pensions). The question of the combination of different taxation and insurance systems merits EU policy.

Pensions

The right to receive a pension while living abroad: more information is needed about the process and which institutions to approach. Also, the EU could introduce EU-level agreements with some countries (e.g. Swedes and other EU citizens who have difficulties in accessing social insurance in Thailand. Most EU countries do not have any pension or other social insurance agreements with Thailand, which makes access to insurance for EU citizens very expensive.

Education

- Parallel schooling: Many children of EU citizens working (and living) abroad are schooled both in their country of residency and in their home country (e.g. Latvian children have difficulties doing exams where physical presence is needed). EU-wide policy would be welcome here.
- Maintaining language and connection with home countries: The EU has a limited mandate in this area but there is an old [EU directive \(77/486/EEC\)](#) on the education of the children of migrant workers. This Directive should be updated and modernised
- Diplomas not being recognised, both at the university and secondary school level (EP is raising this as a representative of the Latvian association for professionals abroad): Multilateral agreements are in place (e.g. the Baltic countries recognise Benelux diplomas) but this should be an EU level question. Initiatives at the level of public administration are needed, especially for certain professions where it is difficult to transfer credentials.

Diaspora organisations

Diaspora organisations do not have proper recognition on the EU level. They are serving the interests of national groups but also have relevant EU and EU citizenship rights – a dimension that should be recognised.

Identification renewal



Swedish citizens have difficulties in renewing their driving licences in the EU and third countries. This is especially relevant for UN workers, and people employed by e.g. doctors without borders who need a driving licence for their work.

E-prescriptions

It is difficult to get access to prescriptions in other EU countries. Work is ongoing on this issue at the EU level: see Electronic cross-border health services: https://health.ec.europa.eu/ehealth-digital-health-and-care/electronic-cross-border-health-services_en).

Diaspora media

Diaspora media is struggling in several EU countries. For example, Latvia has a big diaspora but little national funding for building online media platforms for (and reaching out to) Latvians abroad. The EU could provide funding and coordinate the transfer of learning about reaching out to EU diasporas.

4.3. The Swedes Worldwide (SVIV) network consultation

Mode: online

Date: 30 Jan. 2023

Number of participants: 3 (out of 15 registered)

Type of participants: Members of SVIV and people that are in the SVIV network. The invitation to the consultation was done through the SVIV regular newsletter and its social media channels. This is the socio-demographic profile of the participants (data collected through the registration form for the event):

- 2 women and 1 man.
- Age: 65-74 (1 person) 75+ (2 persons)
- Educational level: 2 have studied at the university ("studier vid högskola/universitet") and 1 with post-secondary education ("eftergymnasial utbildning, ej högskola/universitet").
- Residents in Germany (2) and France (1).

Issues raised during the consultation:

Driving licence renewal

The regulations are unclear, and more information is required for citizens who live abroad and need to renew their driving licence.

Passport renewal

It is expensive to renew a passport abroad and often involves travelling to the capital where embassies are based. The embassy could tour around consulates of a country a few times a year to allow passport renewal.

Dual/Swedish citizenship

- The access to dual/Swedish citizenship should be simplified.



- Swedish citizens that were born and live abroad can in some cases lose their Swedish citizenship when they turn 22 if they cannot show affinity with Sweden.¹³ Showing affinity can be complicated and involve a lot of paperwork. Moreover, 22 years is quite early to take such a decision and responsibility. SVIV has raised the issue with a Swedish parliamentarian and published a proposal on how to solve this issue.¹⁴

Simplify inheritance law

Inheritance law is complicated, especially if a person has several nationalities. The simplification and harmonisation of the national laws should be examined at the EU level.

The "guarantee pension" (*garantipensionen*)

The Swedish "guarantee pension" (*garantipensionen*) is a basic protection in the general pension aimed at those who have had little or no work income during their life. Following an EU ruling in 2017, the guaranteed pension is classified as a minimum benefit. A minimum benefit is only paid to people who are resident in the country that grants the benefit. The fact that pensioners living abroad have been able to retain the right to the guaranteed pension is because Sweden has leaned back against a temporary law that has now expired.¹⁵

Close to 58,000 Swedish pensioners residing within the EU/EEA are now affected and for many of them, a move back to Sweden is not an option due to social, financial or health reasons. SVIV has raised the question with a Swedish parliamentarian and published a proposal on how to solve this issue.¹⁶

Taxes on pensions

Swedish pensioners who have moved abroad often pay taxes both in Sweden and abroad (e.g. income tax of 25% to Sweden, and municipal and property taxes in an EU country) but have limited opportunities to take part in the Swedish social insurance system. They also miss out on tax reductions in the country of residency (e.g. on donations and household-related services). SVIV (after discussions with Swedish expats) has raised this issue with the relevant parliamentary committee and published an article on the subject,¹⁷ as well as proposed an alternative (national) solution in the resolution "Reduction of the SINK tax", which was drawn up by the Parliament of the Swedes Abroad.¹⁸

¹³ <https://www.swedenabroad.se/sv/om-utlandet-f%C3%B6r-svenska-medborgare/hj%C3%A4lp-till-svenskar-utomlands/svenskt-och-dubbelt-medborgarskap/om-svenskt-medborgarskap/>

¹⁴ <https://www.sviv.se/blog/2023/01/ardalan-shekarabi-om-garantipensionen-och-svenskt-medborgarskap-efter-22-ar/>

¹⁵ <https://www.sviv.se/blog/2023/01/ardalan-shekarabi-om-garantipensionen-och-svenskt-medborgarskap-efter-22-ar/>

¹⁶ <https://www.sviv.se/blog/2023/01/ardalan-shekarabi-om-garantipensionen-och-svenskt-medborgarskap-efter-22-ar/>

¹⁷ <https://www.sviv.se/blog/2021/02/dagens-sink-skatt-retar-manga-utlandssvenskar/>

¹⁸ https://www.sviv.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Resolution_Sankning-av-SINK-skatten.pdf



4.4. Consultation with EU expat associations in Brussels

Mode: online

Date: 1 Feb. 2023

Number of participants: 9

Type of participants: expat associations representing EU citizens in Brussels. The invitation to the consultation was done through the project partners ETTW and ECIT.

Issues raised during the consultation:

The need for practical information for mobile EU citizens who are newly arrived in an EU country or who are moving back to their home country, (e.g. about how to get an ID, register a company, rent an apartment, register for a school etc.). The local administrations in Brussels are not always up-to-date on the changing Member State and EU policies. It can also be difficult for expats to find information on the EU websites or online (especially for people with lower educational levels). The EU could provide funding for civil society to provide and maintain a resource with practical information for mobile EU citizens. The organisation Rombel representing Romanian expats in Belgium already has a project concept on how to create an online guide/portal for European expats.¹⁹

The lack of targeted engagement channels on EU issues for mobile EU citizens in Brussels. The Open2Vote.eu portal could be a way to voice and collect feedback, as well as proposals, to EU or national institutions from mobile citizens.

Facilitate voting in EP and local elections through online voting given that it can be cumbersome for mobile citizens to travel to embassies or consulates to vote (and the turnout of mobile citizens in these elections is generally low).

4.5. Consultation with Latvian expats in Luxembourg

Mode: in situ in Luxembourg

Date: 9th December 2023

Number of participants:

The consultation was done with the support of the project partner ETTW.

Issues raised during the consultation by cluster:

Language and education

- Difficult to fully access TV broadcasts in the mother tongue due to geoblocking of protected content – in particular for children, but also for cultural content;

¹⁹ Dorin Flesteriu (RomBel) and ETTW (undated). "EUP-Ex – European Portal. for Expatriates: Piloting the on-line EU expat's guide". PPT.



- Would like that the mother tongue (another EU language) could be taught to kids at host country schools as an elective;

Political representation

- There is no Latvian embassy in Luxembourg, therefore the possibility to vote for national and/or European elections depends on whether there is a group of active citizens who would set up a polling station or by post, which is unreliable; e-voting would be very useful;
- the different timelines and rules for voter registration across Europe make it difficult to fully comprehend and remember those regarding EP elections;

Health

- When moving countries during Covid-19, it was not easy to get national health services to recognise the first Covid-19 vaccine done in another EU country and to continue vaccination in another country;
- Would like to be able to indicate legally that organ donation should go to a recipient in Latvia.

Administration and IDs

- Would like to renew the driver's licence in either the country of origin or the host country, by one's free choice;
- It is not clear whether civil service in EU institutions or the host country's national administration is counted towards public service experience for applying to positions in another EU country's public administration – therefore this limits the mobility of civil servants.

Taxation

- Many are sending remittances back to Latvia; unhappy that they are taxed for the receiver if sent to relatives beyond 2nd degree (for instance, to a nephew to fund college, or to a cousin for paying medical fees);
- Germany allows a part of one's tax to be transmitted to a selected non-profit organisation – it would be great that this could also go to a non-profit from another EU country (the person's country of origin rather than the host country);
- There should be common European rules about cross-border teleworking, including regarding tax and social coverage – currently, the rules are different to people working in Luxembourg depending on whether they live in Germany, Belgium or France – sometimes within a space of a few kilometres only.

Military service

- Latvia has introduced mandatory military service – talks are ongoing on whether this will apply to diaspora youth as well; but if the person has double European nationality, there should not exist a double military duty – the person should have a choice of which country's obligations to comply with (also if one of the countries does not have mandatory military service, this should be legitimate as a choice).

Civil unions and child custody



- In case of disputes about child custody, the parent of the host country is much more protected than the parent who would like to return to the country of origin together with the child (often the mother, also often earning less due to the gender pay gap etc) – within the EU this should not be the case, the parents should have equal standing;
- The civil union concluded by an LGBT couple in Luxembourg is not recognised in Latvia – this should not be up to individual Member States to decide, but a common EU position within the EU to recognise all families and marriages.

4.6. Consultation with Latvian expats online

Mode: Online, zoom

Date: 3 March 2023

Number of participants: 8

A summary of the issues discussed:

Needs of mobile EU citizens:

- Each member state should have a one-stop shop (physical) for mobile EU citizens where they could get practical information when new in the country (e.g. about social services, child allowances, taxes and tax declaration, pension, health services):
 - This one-stop should be a neutral, EU initiative so people are not afraid to ask questions (in case they suspect they have acted erroneously);
 - In addition, efforts should be made to make mobile EU citizens aware of their rights and obligations in their new country of residence.
- European e-Prescriptions and e-Journal systems are a pressing need;
- The EU should introduce a standard registration and recognition of civil unions across Member States;
- Facilitated renewal of IDs and driving licences. Embassies and consulates are far away from where many mobile EU citizens reside. Hence, renewal of IDs and driving licences is presently time-consuming and costly:
 - It would be useful to have the option to go to the police in any EU country to register the stealth of the driving licence/ID, and to get a temporary replacement document (i.e. some kind of a common EU register of IDs);
 - Europeans based in the UK have issues with timely renewal of IDs.
- Information relevant to mobile EU citizens should also be provided in local language information for those with limited language knowledge and educational possibilities. These are groups that are particularly vulnerable to misinformation e.g. on social media;
- School registration documents should be harmonised throughout the EU (e.g. some countries request to have the fiscal/personal code on such documents, while others do not produce such certificates);



- Europeans based in the UK have issues with red tape, e.g. companies have a hard time finding European employees since they do not manage to produce the necessary documentation for employment;
- The EU should support diaspora organisations with funding. These organisations are important for reaching out to local communities with adequate and reliable information about the host country.

4.7. Consultation held at the Conference on Challenges of Votes at 16 for EU Citizens Living in Belgium

Mode: In-situ, at the Brussels Press Club, Belgium

Date: 19 September 2023

Number of participants: 80

Conference report: <https://ecit-foundation.eu/challenges-of-votes-at-16/>

The Conference explored the implications of lowering the voting age to 16 in European elections in Belgium, and its potential to inspire other EU countries to follow suit. The question "Should the voting age for European Parliament elections be lowered to 16 throughout the EU?" was identified during the previous consultations of the MobileCit project. One of the conference sessions focused specifically at discussing and confirming the importance of this topic, as well as understanding its relevance for the Open2Vote-platform.

It was attended by more than 80 participants, half of whom were young voters from Austria, where votes at 16 have already been implemented, and first-time voters in Belgium.

The MobileCit project and the Open Vote platform were presented. The MobileCit team introduced participants to the platform and discussed the concept of lowering the voting age to 16. The debate over whether 16-year-olds should have the right to vote revealed differing perspectives. Those who opposed the idea often cited concerns about the susceptibility of younger individuals to external influences, their perceived lack of mental fortitude and maturity, as well as their limited responsibilities. Critics argued that voting at 16 might not be deemed as a necessary change. However, proponents of the idea pointed out that immaturity could be found across all age groups, and granting voting rights at 16 could serve as a catalyst for young people to become more mature and responsible.

