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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Strengthening Citizens' Rights in a Union of Democratic Change

EU Citizenship Report 2017

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a citizenship shared by all Europeans, complementing and not replacing national citizenships, EU citizenship embodies shared rights and values as well as the rich diversity of a Union of different nationalities and languages.

The Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights consolidated the rights, opportunities and safeguards of EU citizenship. These include the freedom to travel, work and study in other EU countries, to participate in European political life and to be protected from discrimination on the basis of nationality.

To gain insight into the state of EU citizenship across the Union, and assess its impact on the everyday lives of European citizens and the need for further action, in 2015 the Commission carried out a dedicated consultation¹ and two surveys on EU citizenship,² including one on electoral rights.³ Events with key stakeholders were also organised, in particular with the European Parliament as well as with the Committee of Regions.⁴ Other feedback was received directly from EU citizens and stakeholders.⁵

Since EU citizenship was first enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty twenty-five years ago, significant progress has been made to ensure the effectiveness of EU citizens' rights in practice. Today, two-thirds of Europeans feel they are citizens of the EU, and even more among the younger generations.⁶

However, continuous efforts are needed to make sure that all EU citizens know their rights and can fully participate in the European democratic process. This is a political priority for the Commission, which has called for a Union of democratic change.⁷ It is also a joint effort, in which Member States, national parliaments and the EU institutions work together to strengthen the trust of Europe's citizens in our common project, for a stronger and better Europe.⁸

¹ Public consultation on EU citizenship, common values, rights and democratic participation launched by the Commission on 14 September 2015 ('2015 Public consultation on EU citizenship'), http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2015_public_consultation_booklet_en.pdf.

² Flash Eurobarometer 430 – European Union Citizenship – October 2015 ('2015 EB on EU citizenship').

³ Flash Eurobarometer 431 – Electoral Rights – November 2015 ('2015 EB on Electoral rights').

⁴ Joint European Parliament and Commission hearing of 15 March 2016 'Union Citizenship in practice: our common values, rights and democratic participation'; see also the conference on EU citizenship and Justice organised by the Luxemburg presidency on 14-15 September 2015 with the support of the Commission, <http://www.eu2015lu.eu/en/agenda/2015/09/14-15-conf-cjue-citoyens/index.html>. See also the conference jointly organised between the Commission and the Committee of the Regions on Citizenship at Oviedo, September 2016: http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=34851.

⁵ This includes complaints and requests for information from civil society organisations as well as citizens, including in the framework of the Your Europe portal which received its 210,000th enquiry in December 2016.

⁶ According to the Standard EB on EU citizenship from Spring 2016 ('2016 Standard EB on EU citizenship'), the sense of European citizenship is at its second highest level since 2010, at 66% overall (67% in Spring 2015), 70% among the under 50s, and 77% among those aged 25 and under.

⁷ Jean-Claude Juncker, A new start for Europe: my agenda for jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change (political guidelines for the next European Commission).

⁸ Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the Union address 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends (Strasbourg, 14 September 2016).

In 2013 the Commission announced twelve new initiatives in six key areas to remove remaining obstacles in the way of citizens' enjoyment of their EU rights.⁹ It has since acted on all of these actions.¹⁰

With this third EU citizenship report, the Commission takes stock of progress in line with its political priorities for jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change. The Report sets out the main initiatives taken since 2014 to promote and strengthen European citizenship, and puts forward concrete proposals to deliver its key priorities for promoting, protecting and strengthening EU citizenship rights.

2. PROMOTING EU CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS AND EU COMMON VALUES

Citizens need to be aware of their rights in order to benefit from them. While some rights are well known and implemented effectively, gaps and misunderstandings remain. The effectiveness of EU citizenship rights depends on this awareness, among citizens, Member State governments and local and regional authorities.

1.1. Making it easier for citizens to know their EU rights

Europeans are more than ever aware of their **status as citizens of the Union**¹¹ and the majority of them now consider they **know their rights as EU citizens**.¹² They also feel **better informed about these rights**, though not necessarily all of them:¹³ for example awareness of the right to consular protection remains low.¹⁴ The proportion of Europeans **wanting to know** more about their rights continues to increase.¹⁵ Moreover, EU citizens may not always be aware that benefitting from the rights stemming from EU citizenship also entails some responsibilities.¹⁶ They may, for example, overlook the significance of their identity and travel documents and of the fact that they should promptly report their loss and theft to reduce the risks of fraud.

Further improving the understanding of EU rights, including the right to free movement and the conditions attached to it, is important for their effective day-to-day implementation.

The Commission will continue its efforts to inform citizens about their EU rights and about what to do if these are not respected.¹⁷ It will also continue to assist the ever-increasing number of EU citizens seeking information on their rights, especially through the Your

⁹ 2013 EU Citizenship Report (COM(2013) 269 final).

¹⁰ See annex to this report for a full account of actions taken since 2013.

¹¹ 87% are aware of the status and 78% know how it is acquired: 2015 EB on EU citizenship.

¹² 2016 Standard EB on EU citizenship.

¹³ 2015 EB on EU citizenship. 42% feel fairly well or very well informed about their rights (up by 6 percentage points since the 2012 EB on EU citizenship).

¹⁴ *Idem*. 72% know that EU citizens have the right, when outside the EU, to seek help from the embassy of any EU country if their country does not have an embassy there. However, 75% incorrectly believe they would have the right to seek such help also when they are staying in another EU country.

¹⁵ 2016 Standard EB on EU citizenship.

¹⁶ Article 20(2) of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

¹⁷ 2015 EB on EU citizenship. 26% of respondents do not feel sufficiently informed about what to do if their rights are not respected. This represents a slight improvement compared to 2012. See also point 11 in the annex.

Europe portal,¹⁸ which currently receives more than 1.4 million visits per month.¹⁹ The e-justice portal,²⁰ an electronic one-stop shop in the area of justice, complements this tool by providing citizens requiring access to the justice system – and judges, lawyers and other justice professionals – with information on justice systems and improving access to justice. The Commission is also improving its Europa website to help people find the information they are looking for quickly and easily.²¹ Efforts to improve accessibility of the Europa website will facilitate the access to this information for persons with disabilities.

In many cases, Member States are best placed to help citizens to exercise EU rights. National authorities or bodies,²² including judges, regional and local authorities, have an essential role to play in informing citizens and improving their awareness of their EU rights, and in ensuring respect for these rights. Member States also cooperate through the SOLVIT network, which works with Commission support to solve the problems that individuals encounter when exercising their EU rights.²³ The upcoming SOLVIT Action plan should enhance the capacity, the visibility and the authority of this network as a problem-solving tool for business and citizens, and as an instrument for feedback. The Commission is also launching an e-learning tool to help front desks that play a key role in enforcing EU citizens' free movement rights, in particular local and regional authorities, understand and correctly apply free movement rules.

Member States moreover have a further specific responsibility to bear in mind that, when granting or removing nationality, they also grant or remove EU citizenship and should therefore respect the principle of sincere cooperation and the limits set out by the Court of Justice.

1.2. Strengthening European common values

Our values, including freedom, democracy and the rule of law, are an integral part of our European way of life.²⁴ Union citizenship also means benefiting from equal treatment and sharing in a system of common values which the Union upholds, including respect for human dignity, equality and human rights, and inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity.²⁵

¹⁸ Sixty 'Your Europe' experts work every day to answer questions and advise in jargon-free terms on personal EU rights in all 24 official EU languages.

¹⁹ Moreover, it is envisaged to tap into the potential of the Your Europe advice database containing 210,000 responses to improve the information currently provided through the Your Europe portal.

²⁰ See <https://e-justice.europa.eu/home.do?action=home>.

²¹ europa.eu receives some 400 million visits every year and is one of the biggest domains in the world. The Digital Transformation project was kicked off in 2013 to give the Europa website a complete overhaul, which is expected to be complete by 2017.

²² e.g., the specialised bodies established under the Workers' Rights Directive (Directive 2014/54/EU on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers, OJ L 128, 30.4.2014, pp. 8–14), which will certainly contribute to raising awareness among Union workers (including jobseekers) and members of their families, private and public employers, public authorities, social partners, NGOs, other stakeholders and people in general about the impact of Union legislation on free movement of workers. These bodies are responsible *inter alia* for providing information on review procedures and other specific assistance to workers and their family members.

²³ SOLVIT is a network of national authorities working together to find informal, out-of-court and free of charge solutions to problems faced by citizens.

²⁴ Jean-Claude Juncker, 2016 state of the Union address. See also: Communication from the Commission supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism (COM(2016) 379 final).

²⁵ Article 2 Treaty on European Union.

EU citizens expect more to be done to promote EU common values.²⁶ They suggested that this should be done in particular through education, mobility of young people and cultural activities. This was also the spirit behind the adoption of the Paris Declaration of March 2015.²⁷

Promoting awareness of EU citizenship and the values attached to it among young Europeans reaching voting age and those acquiring the nationality of a Member State, and in society as a whole, requires a joint effort of all actors concerned at all levels – the Member States, including their local and regional authorities²⁸, EU institutions and civil society.

In its Communication of 14 June 2016 on supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, the Commission announced concrete actions. In particular, the Commission will establish a network to facilitate direct contacts with positive role models in schools, and in youth and sports clubs, to encourage and inspire young people to become active and engaged members of European society. It will further promote the capacity of youth work, youth organisations and networks to act as forces of inclusion by helping young people engage, volunteer and drive positive social change, and in close cooperation with the Member States, will develop a toolkit²⁹ to support youth workers and organisations. It will increase the use of e-Twinning,³⁰ an online platform which promotes collaboration and exchanges between teachers and schools across Europe, and extend it to countries in the EU's neighbourhood.

European values are supported through the Erasmus+ programme, which has already allowed five million people to study, train, volunteer or gain professional experience in a different country, thus contributing to promote active citizenship and solidarity. Since 2015, Erasmus+ has put a special focus on projects supporting social inclusion and preventing radicalisation. More than EUR 400 million have been made available in 2016 through the programme for transnational partnerships to develop innovative policy approaches and practices at grass-root level, which prioritise social inclusion, the promotion of common values and intercultural understanding, and a dedicated EUR 13 million will also help to scale up such actions.

Volunteering is another way of putting EU values into practice. By developing solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance, it contributes to strengthening social cohesion and active citizenship. The European Voluntary Service will be strengthened and action will be taken to promote the award of study credits for volunteering, and the development of curricula that combine academic content with civic engagement through Erasmus+. The European Solidarity Corps, rooted in the core EU values of engagement and solidarity, will build on existing EU youth programmes during its first phase and within its volunteering component,³¹ and mobilise established networks of employment, education and civil society actors across Europe to enable young people to help where it is needed most. It will serve as a connecting factor among young people working on a common solidarity project, thus contributing to developing a stronger European perspective. Young people across the EU will be able to

²⁶ 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship.

²⁷ Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, ST 8965/15.

²⁸ 78% of respondents to the 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship expect local and regional authorities to play a greater role in this context.

²⁹ EU Work Plan for Youth, 2016–2018, OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, pp. 1–15.

³⁰ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/comenius/comenius_etwinning_en.php.

³¹ https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering_en.

participate in a wide range of solidarity activities by supporting a non-governmental organisation (NGO), local authority or private company active in addressing challenging situations across the EU, such as rebuilding communities following natural disasters; addressing social challenges such as social exclusion, poverty, health and demographic challenges; or working on the reception and integration of refugees.³²

The *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme*³³ provides funding to actions that promote awareness and knowledge of the rights deriving from EU citizenship and its underlying values. In 2016 EUR 2.5 million were set aside for fostering successful inclusion and participation of mobile EU citizens in their host country.³⁴ This programme also provides funding to grassroots projects on fostering tolerance and preventing and combating racism and xenophobia, and supports initiatives to create better understanding between communities, including through interreligious and intercultural activities. The *Europe for Citizens programme* provides a unique forum to involve citizens in the EU.³⁵ It will continue to be developed to maximise its impact by strategically funding activities targeting citizens to support the promotion of European citizenship and the values of the Union.³⁶ The programme provides opportunities for debate, reflection and networking thereby promoting civic engagement. Every year, the programme brings together more than 1 million EU citizens in a variety of projects from local to European level, thereby fostering the feeling of being citizen of the EU.

Priorities for 2017–19: Promoting EU citizenship rights and common values

The Commission will:

1. In 2017 and 2018 conduct an **EU-wide information and awareness raising campaign on EU citizenship rights** including on consular protection and electoral rights ahead of the 2019 European elections.³⁷
2. Take action to strengthen the **European Voluntary Service** and promote the benefits and integration of volunteering in education. By 2020, invite the first 100,000 young Europeans to volunteer with the **European Solidarity Corps** which will provide the opportunity to develop new skills and meaningful experiences, to make an important

³² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-3062_en.htm.

³³ Regulation 1381/2013 establishing a Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme for the period 2014 to 2020, OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, pp. 62–72.

³⁴ This amount includes activities on developing, identifying and promoting the exchange and dissemination of best practices implemented across the EU at local/regional/national level to foster the successful inclusion and participation of mobile EU citizens in the host EU country's civic and political life (e.g. through one-stop-shop information services addressed to newcomers, by promoting the participation of EU citizens coming from another Member States in local elections etc.).

³⁵ See study published recently by the European Parliament: European Implementation Assessment, Europe for Citizens Programme (2014–2020), PE 581.418, p. 4.

³⁶ Support is already been given, for example, for networks of towns and civil society projects which give citizens an opportunity to participate concretely in EU policymaking.

³⁷ This includes making it easier for citizens to access relevant information on its Consular Protection website, and raising awareness of the value of European identity and travel documents. This will also build on other EU-funded activities including through the REC programme, to reach out to young people and through different channels, including new media.

contribution to society across the EU, and to gain invaluable experience and acquire valuable skills at the start of their career.³⁸

3. Safeguard the essence of EU citizenship and its inherent values; in 2017/2018 produce a report on **national schemes granting EU citizenship to investors** describing the Commission's action in this area, current national law and practices, and providing some guidance for Member States.

3. PROMOTING AND ENHANCING CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC LIFE OF THE EU

Being a European citizen also means enjoying political rights. Every adult EU citizen has the right to vote in European Parliament elections. Mobile EU citizens have the right to vote in their country of residence, or in their country of origin. This right is not exercised as fully as it could be.³⁹

The functioning of the EU is founded on representative democracy. This requires transparency and an accessible, accountable political culture, supported by an effective electoral system and an informed and engaged electorate.

1.3. Enhancing citizens' engagement in the EU democratic process

Enhancing citizens' engagement in the EU democratic process requires a joint effort of the Member States, including their local and regional authorities, the EU institutions and civil society.

In its 2014 European elections report⁴⁰ the Commission flagged the need, in view of the 2019 elections, to examine the reasons for the persistently low turnout in European elections in some Member States, and to identify ways to address this. Citizens are more likely to engage when they know what policies, programmes and political parties they are voting for. But participation is not just about voting; it is also about playing an active role in the political debate and in the life of political parties and standing for election. It is about engaging with EU institutions and holding them to account.

Citizens' Dialogues and the participation of citizens in European party campaign events and online discussions ahead of the 2014 European Parliament elections showed that there is a demand for more interaction with EU, national and local politicians.⁴¹ Most Europeans also think that turnout at European elections would be higher if voters had better information about the impact that the EU has on their daily lives, and about European parliamentary elections.⁴²

³⁸ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-3062_en.htm.

³⁹ 2015 EB on electoral rights.

⁴⁰ COM(2015) 206 final.

⁴¹ 87% of the participants in these dialogues said they would vote in the European elections (Commission report, Citizens' Dialogues as a contribution to developing a European public space (COM(2014) 173 final).

⁴² 2015 EB on electoral rights.

The Commission will intensify the Citizens' Dialogues and take further action to explain its policies to citizens as highlighted by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in his 2016 State of the Union address.

Encouraging voter turnout in European elections is a shared responsibility. Member States should promote participation in democratic life by better informing citizens of their rights to vote in local and European elections⁴³ and removing barriers for their participation.⁴⁴ In addition, EU citizens, in particular those voting in a country other than their country of nationality, would welcome practices making it easier for them to vote in these elections as non-nationals (e.g. individual letters, online registration on the electoral roll, e-voting).⁴⁵ Such practices will benefit all EU citizens.

In the run up to the 2019 European election, the Commission will organise in 2018 a high-level event on democratic participation with a particular focus on encouraging best practices to increase the participation of young people and vulnerable and underrepresented groups.

1.4. Enhancing transparency – towards a more democratic Union

Building on the Lisbon Treaty, the Commission took steps to enhance the transparency and democracy of the 2014 European parliament elections, including by promoting the lead candidate (*Spitzenkandidaten*) system.⁴⁶

The 2014 European Parliament elections were fundamentally different from previous ones in that they established a clear link between the results of the elections and the choice of European Commission President.

In November 2015 the European Parliament presented a legislative initiative on European Parliament elections⁴⁷ aimed at further enhancing the democratic and transnational dimension of the European elections and the democratic legitimacy of the EU decision-making system, such as introducing the lead candidates principle into EU electoral law and enhancing the visibility of the European political parties.⁴⁸ The reform of the Electoral Act is an opportunity for the Union to become more democratic.

The scope for holding the Commission to democratic account will also be increased by removing the rule requiring Commissioners to step down before running for election in the European elections. On 23 November 2016, the Commission proposed to the European

⁴³ According to the 2015 EB on EU citizenship a majority of respondents correctly identify their electoral rights at European level (67%) and at local level (54%). Even if these figures are higher than in 2007, the level of awareness of these rights has dropped slightly since 2012.

⁴⁴ For underrepresented and/or vulnerable groups such as the disabled. See also the study issued by the EU Agency on fundamental rights in October 2010, on the right to political participation of persons with mental health problems and persons with intellectual disabilities.

⁴⁵ 2015 EB on electoral rights. According to the 2015 Public consultation on EU citizenship, 21% of respondents said they had experienced difficulties in exercising their electoral rights when living in another EU country.

⁴⁶ Commission Recommendation 2013/142/EU on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament OJ L 79 21.3.2013, pp. 29–32; and Towards more democratic European Parliament elections (COM(2014) 196 final)).

⁴⁷ European Parliament Resolution of 11 November 2015 on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union (P8_TA(2015)0395 – 2015/2035(INL)).

⁴⁸ This proposal is currently under discussion in the Council.

Parliament to update the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission accordingly.⁴⁹ Open dialogue with all stakeholders and awareness-raising in the run-up to the European elections will build on the new features of the elections introduced in 2014.

Finally, and also responding to a request by the European Parliament to investigate the use of e-voting,⁵⁰ the Commission will explore how using digital society tools can contribute to democratic debate, and improve the electoral process and democratic participation, including for mobile EU citizens, young people and underrepresented groups.⁵¹

1.5. Access to political information across borders

Respondents to the 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship thought that the lack of cross-border access to political news, in particular to media platforms in other EU countries, and a lack of cross-border coverage of political issues were a problem. This makes it difficult for EU citizens living abroad to follow news from their country of nationality, and for others to get a broader view of the news and political debates.

Free media and access to a plurality of voices in society and in the media are indispensable to a healthy democracy. With its second annual colloquium on fundamental rights focussing on media pluralism and democracy, the Commission brought together key stakeholders to discuss how to foster political debate on crucial issues for democratic societies through a pluralistic media environment. The outcomes will inform the Commission's future actions in this area.⁵²

The internet is the main source of political information for most citizens today, in particular younger generations.⁵³ Europeans are also increasingly using online content services while moving across countries. Delivering on its Digital Single Market Strategy,⁵⁴ the Commission proposed a Regulation to allow citizens to travel within the EU with the digital content they have bought or subscribed to at home.⁵⁵

1.6. Increasing participation of mobile EU citizens in political life

While EU citizens have a right to stand as candidates in local elections in another Member State in which they live under the same conditions as the nationals of that country, certain posts in municipal executive bodies in some EU countries can be filled only by their own nationals. The views of citizens on whether this is appropriate are fairly evenly split, and the Commission will keep the issue under review in its next report on local elections.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-3929_en.htm.

⁵⁰ First Commission interim report on the implementation of pilot projects and preparatory actions (2016).

⁵¹ See <http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/rec/topics/rec-rppi-evot-ag-2016.html>.

⁵² 2016 annual colloquium on fundamental rights.

⁵³ 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship.

⁵⁴ COM(2015) 192 final.

⁵⁵ COM(2015) 627 final.

⁵⁶ Over eight out of ten respondents to the 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship thought that EU citizens from other EU countries should be able to become members of the executive body of a municipality, while respondents to the 2015 EB on electoral rights were split on this point.

Citizens do not acquire the right to vote in national or presidential elections when they move to another EU country.⁵⁷ Moreover, citizens of certain EU countries may currently be deprived of their right to vote in national elections in their home country (disenfranchisement) because they have been living in another EU country for a period.⁵⁸ Citizens should not be disadvantaged as a result of exercising their right to free movement. In 2014 the Commission⁵⁹ invited the Member States concerned to enable their nationals who make use of their free movement rights to retain their right to vote in national elections if they show a continuing interest in the political life of their country. The Commission will continue to monitor developments in the relevant Member States and consider appropriate action to encourage them to look for balanced solutions. It will also explore the possibilities for non-national EU citizens who have exercised their right to free movement to vote in national elections in the country they live in.

Priorities for 2017–19: Promoting and enhancing citizens’ participation in the democratic life of the EU

The Commission will:

1. Intensify **Citizens’ Dialogues** and encourage public debates, to improve public understanding of the impact of the EU on citizens’ daily lives and to encourage an exchange of views with citizens.
2. Report in 2017 on the implementation of **EU law on local elections** to ensure that EU citizens can effectively exercise their voting rights at local level.
3. In 2018, **promote best practices which help citizens vote and stand for EU elections**, including on retaining the right to vote when moving to another Member State and cross-border access to political news, to support turnout and broad democratic participation in the perspective of the 2019 European elections.⁶⁰

4. SIMPLIFYING DAILY LIFE FOR EU CITIZENS

Ever since free movement was first enshrined in the Treaties 60 years ago, it has become much easier to live, work, study and travel abroad in Europe.⁶¹ More than 15 million Europeans reside in another EU country.⁶² Free movement provides EU citizens with

⁵⁷ 64% of respondents to the 2015 EB on EU citizenship felt it justified that citizens should acquire the right to vote in national elections.

⁵⁸ 67% of respondents to the 2015 EB on EU citizenship felt it was unjustified that citizens should lose their right to vote in national elections in their country of origin.

⁵⁹ Recommendation addressing the consequences of disenfranchisement of Union citizens exercising their rights to free movement 2014/53/EU OJ L 32, 1.2.2004, pp. 34–35.

⁶⁰ These best practices will also address e-democracy tools, remote voting arrangements (e.g. e-voting) and cross-border access to political information, and will target improving on low voter turnout.

⁶¹ There is a greater Europeanisation of daily life for a greater proportion of European citizens than is generally assumed. For example, more than 50% of EU citizens ‘communicate regularly by phone, internet, mail or email with family and/or friends abroad’, ‘have visited at least another EU Member State in the last two years’, ‘watch TV in a non-native language’ or feel ‘familiar with at least another EU country’ (EU funded research project EUCROSS).

⁶² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics.

opportunities to travel, study, do business, work and live in other EU countries. Surveys show that EU citizens, especially the young, see free movement as the EU's most positive achievement.⁶³ They see it as beneficial both to them personally and to their countries' economies.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Europeans can still encounter difficulties with moving or living in another EU country.⁶⁵ Some difficulties are legal, others procedural, others technological, but often comparatively little change is needed to make a significant difference.

1.7. Cutting red tape and informing citizens

Respondents to the 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship said the difficulties they had experienced related mostly to lengthy or unclear administrative procedures, lack of sufficient information and difficulties in accessing private services. They also reported difficulties in the communication between public authorities and with the healthcare system.⁶⁶ More work is needed to simplify the exercise of EU citizens' free movement rights.

1.7.1. Informing and assisting EU citizens on the move

Before deciding to move to another EU country (or return to their country after living elsewhere in the EU), most Europeans use the internet to find the information and assistance they need to be able for example to work, study, travel, live or retire in another Member State.⁶⁷ In practice, the information available online is often difficult to find, incomplete, hard to understand, inaccurate, outdated or unavailable, and it does not always correspond to the users' needs. Most Europeans say it would be easier to settle in another EU country and live there if authorities provided information and advice tailored to individual needs through one-stop shop web portals, and if they could deal with administrative formalities online. The new EURES Regulation (EU) 2016/589 already makes it easier to connect jobseekers and employers across borders.⁶⁸ Better cooperation between national authorities would also ease formalities.⁶⁹

⁶³ Autumn 2016 Standard EB on EU citizenship. 'Free movement of people, goods and services within the EU' is at the top of the list of the EU's most positive results for 56% of respondents, ahead of 'peace among Member States of the EU'. Also 81% of Europeans are in favour of the "free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU". Majorities of respondents support free movement in all countries).

⁶⁴ 2015 EB on EU citizenship. 71% agree with the statement that free movement of people within the EU brings overall benefits to the economy of their country. Also, 2015 Public consultation on EU citizenship: the great majority of respondents felt that moving to another EU country brings with it cultural diversity, fosters mutual understanding and brings specific knowledge and skills.

⁶⁵ As shown for example by the complaints received by SOLVIT and Your Europe.

⁶⁶ In 2014, the vast majority of problems faced by citizens who used SOLVIT were issues related to social security, followed by free movement related issues. See http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/solvit/index_en.htm.

⁶⁷ 73% of respondents to the 2015 Public consultation on EU citizenship said the main source of information consulted before moving to another EU country were websites of public authorities, including regional and local authorities, of that country.

⁶⁸ Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of 13 April 2016 on a European network of employment services (EURES), workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets, OJ L 107 22.4.2016, pp. 1–28.

⁶⁹ 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship and 2016 public consultation on the Single Digital Gateway.

In the Digital Single Market Strategy the Commission committed itself to create a user-friendly information system for citizens and business by extending and integrating European and national portals.⁷⁰ The Single Market Strategy also backed the ‘Single Digital Gateway’ which intends to provide online ‘*everything that entrepreneurs and citizens need*’ to do business cross-border and/or to travel to, buy from, work, study or reside in another country in the EU Single Market. The gateway would be based on existing portals, contact points,⁷¹ and assistance and problem-solving networks, with the aim to expand, improve and better link them up to enable citizens and businesses to have an online access to high quality, comprehensive information, effective assistance and problem-solving services and efficient procedures.

A connected Digital Single Market includes further developing and creating seamless, user-friendly and user-centric e-government services for those citizens who want to study, work, live and retire, or set up and run a business anywhere in the EU. The Commission is also exploring the possibility to implement the ‘once-only’ principle, so that citizens and businesses do not have to submit the same information more than once to public administrations.⁷² This would further reduce the administrative burden on citizens.⁷³

1.7.2. Cutting red tape on citizens’ public documents

To get married or obtain a job in another EU country, citizens often need to go through costly and time-consuming formalities. To address this problem, in July 2016 the EU adopted a regulation⁷⁴ to put an end to this red tape and to help citizens move more easily to another EU country. Once EU countries have put all the necessary measures in place,⁷⁵ citizens will be able to present in one Member State public documents (such as birth, marriage or death certificates) issued in another without having to obtain a stamp (the ‘Apostille’) to prove that their documents are authentic. In addition, by making use of multilingual standard forms, which the Commission will finish developing with the Member States in 2017, citizens will not always need to provide translations of their public documents.

1.7.3. Cutting red tape in family law

As the number of international families in the EU increases,⁷⁶ so does the potential for cross-border disputes on family matters. Distress caused by divorce, legal separation or death can be made worse by the often complex family law issues which arise regarding property and parental responsibility. Resolving such issues across borders can be even more complex and makes EU citizens’ lives particularly difficult. Important steps have been taken towards cutting red tape and bringing legal clarity for international families going through difficult

⁷⁰ COM(2015) 0192 final.

⁷¹ Such as Your Europe, Single Points of Contact, Product Contact Points and Contact Points for Construction Products.

⁷² The EU e-Government Action Plan 2016–2020 includes actions piloting the once-only principle (COM(2016)0179 final). See also Regulation (EU) 910/2014 of 23 July 2014 on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market, OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, pp. 73–114.

⁷³ Public administrations only re-use information about the citizens or companies that is in their possession without asking again in 48% of cases.

⁷⁴ Regulation (EU) No 2016/1191 of 6 July 2016 on promoting the free movement of citizens by simplifying the requirements for presenting certain public documents in the European Union, OJ L 200, 26.7.2016, pp. 1–136.

⁷⁵ They have two years and a half to do so from its entry into force on 15 August 2016.

⁷⁶ The estimated number of 16 million international families is rising.

times, and new proposals have been adopted on the protection of children in cross-border family disputes.

Rules on international succession⁷⁷ help international families to determine which court will be competent and which law will apply to their succession, for example when the deceased lived in an EU country which was not his or her country of origin, or had heirs or property in different EU countries. Citizens will benefit from the ‘European Certificate of Succession’, which will enable heirs, legatees, executors of wills and administrators of the estate to prove their status and exercise their rights and powers across the EU. To address remaining gaps for those international couples who have to go through unclear legal situations in case of divorce or death of a partner, a pair of regulations adopted in June 2016⁷⁸ will help international couples – whether married or in a registered partnership – manage their property and share it in case of divorce or death of a partner.⁷⁹

In June 2016, in order to improve the functioning of existing rules on parental responsibility matters such as custody, visiting rights and parental child abduction, the Commission proposed new simplified rules which will directly benefit many families and children.⁸⁰ Once these new rules have been adopted, they will speed up proceedings and minimise distress and uncertainty, taking into account the best interest of the child. As a part of this, the Commission will also continue to support the accession of third States to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction to protect the child from the harmful effects of a parental abduction.

1.8. Simplifying travel, living and working across the EU for citizens

Most Europeans moving to another EU country do so because they want to study or work there.⁸¹ Increasingly many young people in Europe are open to improving their skills and competences by studying, training or volunteering in another EU country, either during their studies or at the beginning of their professional careers. Europeans largely believe that cross-border training, education and volunteering experiences can improve their potential and career prospects.⁸²

⁷⁷ Regulation (EU) No 650/2012 of 4 July 2012 on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions and acceptance and enforcement of authentic instruments in matters of succession and on the creation of a European Certificate of Succession, OJ L 201, 27.7.2012, pp. 107–134.

⁷⁸ Council Regulation (EU) 2016/1103 of 24 June 2016 implementing enhanced cooperation in the area of jurisdiction, applicable law and the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matters of matrimonial property regimes, OJ L 183, 8.7.2016, pp. 1–29; and Council Regulation (EU) 2016/1104 of 24 June 2016 implementing enhanced cooperation in the area of jurisdiction, applicable law and the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matters of the property consequences of registered partnerships, OJ L 183, 8.7.2016, pp. 30–56.

⁷⁹ The Regulations give Member States 30 months to put all necessary measures in place so that international couples can enjoy the benefits of the regulations.

⁸⁰ COM(2016) 411 final.

⁸¹ According to the 2015 public consultation on EU Citizenship, most respondents had moved to another EU country for work related reasons (66%). A similar number of respondents (64%) had moved to another EU country in order to study or volunteer.

⁸² 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship.

1.8.1. Increasing opportunities for students, trainees, teachers and other workers

The work done in 2016 to roll out the New Skills Agenda for Europe with the Members States will promote skills development and matching, and support better recognition of qualifications: this will contribute to removing obstacles for workers, students and trainees in the EU. Public consultations have suggested that Europeans consider that a platform hosting cross-border placements or offers for apprenticeships and trainees would further help young people looking for opportunities beyond (or prior to) employment. The mobility of teachers across borders can benefit learners and teachers alike, who could share good practices with their peers. Another way to benefit learners is to give them the opportunity to attend seminars with staff invited from companies from other countries.⁸³

The ‘School Education Gateway’ is an online platform whose objective is to link teachers and other education practitioners across borders and provide them with opportunities to share and learn about different policies and practices, and to develop themselves as a professional community. The ‘Teacher Academy’ benefits educators by offering tailor-made online courses that provide a vital context for developing pedagogical approaches across Europe. The portal ‘Open Education Europe’ complements this by focusing its content and discussions on the potential of digital technologies and materials to improve teaching and learning. The aim is to provide a space to discuss, learn, share, ask questions and be inspired.

Professional qualifications is another area where modernised rules will increase opportunities for EU citizens.⁸⁴ At least 21% of the labour force in the EU (50 million people) works in a regulated profession.⁸⁵ Over 20,000 persons with a professional qualification from an EU Member State had their professional qualifications recognised in another EU country in 2014. In addition, professionals from five professions⁸⁶ have since January 2016 been able to pursue their professions more freely in other EU countries thanks to the first EU-wide electronic procedure for the recognition of professional qualifications (European Professional Card). The card simplifies professional qualification recognition procedures in other EU countries.

1.8.2. Further simplifying living and travelling in the EU

When citizens who have worked in several EU countries retire and want to know their pension entitlements, or when workers receive pay and benefits in other EU countries, this can involve various public authorities in the same country and across borders, which requires coordination to establish which rules apply to the person concerned. To facilitate coordination and to prevent fraud, the Commission is already working together with the Member States to enable full electronic exchange between **social security** authorities across borders.⁸⁷

Bank accounts are indispensable to all citizens, permitting them to receive their salaries, pensions and allowances, and to pay bills. But some citizens face difficulties, for example for

⁸³ *Idem.*

⁸⁴ Directive 2013/55/EU of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, pp. 132–170.

⁸⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/2015/regulated_professions_20151126.pdf.

⁸⁶ General care nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, real estate agents and mountain guides.

⁸⁷ Within the framework of the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information project on developing an IT system that will enable these exchanges.

students or short-term workers, in opening a bank account in another EU country. Since 18 September 2016 all EU citizens have a right to open a **basic bank account**⁸⁸ even if they do not live in the EU country where the bank is located and irrespective of their financial situation.⁸⁹ Despite significant progress in recent years, further efforts are needed before financial services such as insurance, mortgages and loans, which also play an important role in the everyday lives of EU citizens, can be bought and sold across EU borders without difficulties.⁹⁰ An action plan on retail financial services will be proposed to allow citizens to benefit from better products and more choice regardless of their age, skills and country of residence.

EU law helps citizens receive medical treatment in another EU country and be reimbursed. For patients, EU law means greater choice of healthcare, more information and easier recognition of prescriptions across borders. Citizens' awareness of their rights to choose **healthcare** in another EU country remains low.⁹¹ Less than two in ten citizens feel they are informed about their rights in this area,⁹² so the Commission is working closely with the Member States and their National Contact Points to increase awareness of citizens' right to cross-border healthcare.

Europeans made 214 million cross-border trips to other EU countries in 2014. Many EU citizens **travel** for work or commute between EU countries. EU-wide multimodal travel information would help EU citizens plan for such trips and travel. Currently, a multimodal journey across Europe is complicated and time consuming, especially when compared to taking the car. Planning a door-to-door journey requires a combination of numerous travel information services and travellers are not always able to handle disruptions effectively when they occur. Multimodal travel information should ideally provide travellers with a wide range of travel options and allow them to opt, for example, for the fastest and cheapest route, the most environmentally friendly or the most accessible for persons with reduced mobility, while obtaining compensation in the event of delay.

Citizens in the EU are protected by a whole set of **passenger rights**, whether they travel by air, rail, ship, bus or coach, but for persons with reduced mobility and/or disabilities, it is often more difficult to travel. Most Europeans consider that the EU should help provide or support accessibility of transport infrastructure, such as airports, train stations or bus terminals and that accessibility information should be provided, for example on the companies' websites. A Commission evaluation⁹³ of the existing EU law on rail passengers' rights highlighted specific areas for improvement, and ongoing concerns about both the provisions of the legislation and its application. The Commission is therefore considering options to improve this.

⁸⁸ Directive 2014/92/EU of 23 July 2014 on the comparability of fees related to payment accounts, payment account switching and access to payment accounts with basic features, OJ L 214, 28.8.2014, pp. 214–246.

⁸⁹ Persons with disabilities can also encounter difficulties accessing banking services. The proposal for a European Accessibility Act presented by the Commission in 2015 aims to improve accessibility of products and services by harmonising requirements in the EU (COM(2015) 615 final).

⁹⁰ Green Paper on retail financial services (COM(2015) 630 final).

⁹¹ COM(2015) 421 final.

⁹² And only one in ten is aware that national contact points have been set up to provide information to patients on their rights and on quality and safety issues.

⁹³ COM(2013) 587 final.

Priorities for 2017–19: Simplifying travel, living and working across the EU for citizens

The Commission will:

1. Submit a proposal for setting up a ‘**Single Digital Gateway**’ to give citizens easy, online access to information, assistance and problem-solving services and the possibility to complete online administrative procedures in cross-border situations by linking up relevant EU and national-level content and services in a seamless, user-friendly and user-centric way. Moreover, assess cutting red tape in national administrations by requiring citizens to supply their data only once.
2. Further facilitate and promote **EU-wide multimodal travel** in order to make mobility of EU citizens more efficient and user-friendly, through the specification of EU-wide multimodal travel information services and improvements to the interoperability and compatibility of systems and services.

5. STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND PROMOTING EQUALITY

1.9. Tackling security threats and protecting citizens

Europe faces complex, often cross-border, security threats and the vast majority of Europeans believe more common EU action is needed to address them.⁹⁴ Free movement inside the EU, which is cherished by EU citizens, also requires measures to secure the external borders and to combat and prevent crime. Moreover, the Schengen area has enabled the crossing of internal borders without checks on persons, resulting in easier and more frequent interaction between EU citizens. But the challenge of maintaining security in an open Europe has been put to a huge test in recent years.

1.9.1. Tackling security threats in an area of justice and fundamental rights based on mutual trust

The implementation of the European Agenda on Security,⁹⁵ the establishment of an effective and genuine EU Security Union⁹⁶ and the enhanced protection of the EU external borders can provide an adequate, realistic and tangible answer to the citizens’ security concerns, in full respect of the European values and fundamental rights and freedoms.

The European Commission has already put in place and will propose further initiatives to support the upgrade, modernisation and interoperability of Europe’s security framework (**European Criminal Record Information System (ECRIS)**),⁹⁷ **European Travel**

⁹⁴ Perceptions and expectations, fight against terrorism and radicalisation, special European Parliament Eurobarometer on Europeans in 2016 (June 2016).

⁹⁵ COM(2015) 185 final.

⁹⁶ Delivering on the European Agenda on Security to fight against terrorism and pave the way towards an effective and genuine Security Union (COM(2016) 230 final).

⁹⁷ COM(2016) 7 final.

Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS),⁹⁸ illegal trafficking of firearms, updates to the Schengen Information System (SIS), Passenger Name Recognition (PNR)). At the very core of these initiatives is the security of citizens, through improving trust between relevant actors in the Union, stepping up operational cross-border cooperation between national law enforcement authorities, and enabling the better and smarter exchange and use of information and intelligence at all levels to address the threat of terrorism.

In December 2016, the Commission adopted an **Action Plan on document security**⁹⁹ setting out specific actions to improve the security of travel documents. One of the actions relates to fraud and forgery of **national identity cards** issued by Member States and **residence documents** for EU nationals residing in another Member State and their family members. EU citizens and their family members who live or travel in the EU can indeed encounter difficulties in relation to the use of these documents.¹⁰⁰ There is currently a wide variety of such cards and documents with security levels that vary significantly, which leads to practical difficulties for citizens. Identity cards and residence documents that are more secure and easily recognisable would make it easier for citizens to exercise their EU citizenship rights. Public authorities, including border authorities, and businesses (such as shops, banks, utilities, etc.) would more easily accept such documents. At the same time, it would limit the risk of fraud and forgery. In this perspective, the Commission is currently assessing different policy options, including a possible harmonisation of security features, to help remedy the practical difficulties encountered by citizens and thus facilitate their free movement.¹⁰¹

1.9.2. Protecting EU citizens abroad

Crises and individual emergencies abroad can cause particular risk and distress to citizens who are beyond the immediate reach of their home authorities. The EU right to consular protection¹⁰² is an invaluable additional guarantee for EU citizens finding themselves in need of assistance in a country outside the EU where their home country is not represented. Following a proposal from the Commission in 2011, a Directive was adopted on 20 April 2015¹⁰³ to clarify when and how EU citizens can receive help and how EU countries should coordinate and cooperate among themselves and with the Union to ensure effective protection for unrepresented EU citizens. Member States have until May 2018 to implement these rules. The Commission supports Member States in their efforts to ensure the correct and timely transposition of the Directive. In parallel, it continues to include and negotiate consent clauses in bilateral agreements with a number of third countries to ensure that they agree that represented EU countries give assistance to the unrepresented nationals of other EU countries.

Consular protection includes assistance in case of arrest or detention or in case of a serious accident or illness. But what EU citizens most frequently need help with when outside the EU is when their passport has been stolen, lost, destroyed or is temporarily unavailable. They then

⁹⁸ COM(2016) 731 final.

⁹⁹ COM(2016) 790 final.

¹⁰⁰ 2013 EU citizenship report.

¹⁰¹ Enhancing security in a world of mobility: improved information exchange in the fight against terrorism and stronger external borders (COM(2016) 602 final); and COM(2016) 790 final.

¹⁰² Which is guaranteed by Articles 20(2)(c) and 23(2) TFEU.

¹⁰³ Directive (EU) 2015/637 on the coordination and cooperation measures to facilitate consular protection for unrepresented citizens of the Union in third countries and repealing Decision 95/553/EC, OJ L 106, 24.4.2015, pp. 1–13.

need an emergency travel document to be able to travel home.¹⁰⁴ Existing rules at EU level which established a common format for such emergency travel documents date back to 1996¹⁰⁵ and need to be updated.¹⁰⁶ Some Member States do not use the common format due to security concerns. The Commission will explore possibilities to modernise the **rules on emergency travel documents for unrepresented EU citizens**, including the security features of the EU common format ETD, to guarantee that citizens can effectively exercise their right to consular protection.

EU citizens and their non-EU family members may also find themselves in situations where they are unrepresented and need assistance from the authorities of another EU country when travelling within the EU. These circumstances are not currently covered by the Directive and the Commission will therefore evaluate the situation of **unrepresented EU citizens in distress within the EU** and determine whether any action is needed to ensure their protection.¹⁰⁷

1.10. Protecting all citizens and promoting equality and non-discrimination

1.10.1. Protecting and supporting victims and witnesses

Millions of people in the EU fall victims to crime every year. There is EU legislation in place to ensure that all victims of all crime have basic rights independent of where in the EU the crime or the criminal proceedings take place. EU citizens also now enjoy **better access to justice** as the Parliament and Council have passed legislation on the presumption of innocence, on safeguards for children, and on legal aid in criminal proceedings. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that EU rules, in particular the 2012 Victims' Rights Directive¹⁰⁸ and the 2011 Anti-Trafficking Directive¹⁰⁹ are implemented correctly so that victims can fully rely on their rights in practice.

Regarding violence against women in particular, almost all Europeans (96%) think that domestic violence against women is unacceptable¹¹⁰ but it still occurs widely. The Commission is launching a year of focused actions to further its commitment to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls and to reducing gender inequality.¹¹¹ It aims to

¹⁰⁴ The issuance of emergency travel documents is in practice the most frequent form of assistance given by the Member States to unrepresented EU citizens (more than 60% of all cases).

¹⁰⁵ Decision of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 25.06.1996; OJ L 168 of 6.7.1996, pp. 4–11.

¹⁰⁶ Also in view of the entry into force of Article 23(2) TFEU and Directive 2015/637/EU.

¹⁰⁷ EU rules on consular protection (Articles 20(2)(c) and 23 TFEU and Directive (EU) 2015/637) only apply outside the EU.

¹⁰⁸ Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, OJ L 315, 14.11.2012, pp. 57–73.

¹⁰⁹ Directive 2011/36/EU the European Parliament and the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, OJ L 101, 15.4.2011, pp. 1–11

¹¹⁰ Special Eurobarometer 449 – Gender-based violence – November 2016.

¹¹¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-16-3945_en.htm.

connect all efforts across the EU and engage all stakeholders – Member States, relevant professionals, and NGOs – to collectively combat violence against women. The Commission is also working on the Union’s accession to the Council of Europe Convention on combating and preventing violence against women and domestic violence (the ‘Istanbul Convention’).

1.10.2. Promoting equality and non-discrimination

Despite efforts to eliminate discrimination, there has been a clear increase since 2012 in the number of Europeans who say they have experienced some form of discrimination or harassment.¹¹² To fill the gaps in the protection from discrimination, including on the grounds of age, religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation, and to ensure a level playing field in terms of equality throughout the Union, it is vital to conclude the negotiations on the proposed Horizontal Anti-Discrimination Directive.¹¹³

Thanks to work at all levels, the EU’s policies on **gender equality** have helped change the lives of many European citizens for the better.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, there remains room for improvement in some areas, such as pay. The 2016–2019 Strategic Engagement for gender equality adopted in December 2015 provides a comprehensive view of the efforts of all to strengthen equality between women and men.¹¹⁵ The Commission also gives every year high visibility to the need to address gender inequalities in the European Semester.¹¹⁶ EU funds are also playing a key role. Between 2014 and 2020, it is estimated that approximately EUR 5.85 billion will be spent on measures promoting gender equality.

The Commission committed in its Work Programme for 2017¹¹⁷ to set out its proposal for a Pillar of Social Rights and to present related initiatives, such as to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families.¹¹⁸

Promoting **equality and non-discrimination for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI) people** is another area in which the Commission is committed to act.¹¹⁹ To advance LGBTI equality in Europe, it has put forward a list of actions to be implemented in 2016–2019, across all policy areas relevant for LGBTI people: non-discrimination, education, employment, health, asylum, hate speech/hate crime, enlargement and foreign policy.

¹¹² Special Eurobarometer 437 – Discrimination in the EU in 2015 – October 2015.

¹¹³ COM(2008) 426 final.

¹¹⁴ Europeans feel very strongly about this. 76% think that tackling gender inequality should be a priority – Special Eurobarometer 428 – gender equality - March 2015.

¹¹⁵ SWD(2015) 278 final.

¹¹⁶ The recently adopted Annual Growth Survey put a strong focus on gender employment and pay gaps, and these issues were also very present in the year’s European Semester Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations.

¹¹⁷ COM(2016) 710 final.

¹¹⁸ The employment impact of parenthood continues to affect women far more than men, with many women, especially mothers, employed in jobs below their skill level, or not at all. According to Eurostat statistics, female labour market participation was at 63.5% in 2014, which is 11.5% below the Europe 2020 target for total employment rate of 75% for men and women.

¹¹⁹ The figures on the lack of social acceptance of this group are alarming (65 % of respondents would feel at ease (54 % comfortable, 11 % indifferent) with a gay, lesbian or bisexual person in the highest elected political position; 21 % said they would feel uncomfortable) http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/thematic_factsheet_lgbt_en.pdf.

The Commission is also renewing its call for commitment to improving the economic and social **integration of Roma** in the EU. Within the framework of the Europe 2020 dialogue,¹²⁰ the European Commission stresses that further efforts must be made to achieve Roma inclusion and that European institutions and every Member State have a joint responsibility to achieve this.¹²¹

Little or no accessibility to goods and services for people with disabilities and older people is also seen by a majority of Europeans as a form of discrimination.¹²² In a world that is becoming more digitised every day,¹²³ boosting **connectivity** for all EU citizens is a key priority for the Commission under the 2020 Digital Agenda and Digital Single Market Strategy. It is important that online services for citizens be accompanied by default by safety nets for EU citizens in vulnerable situations.¹²⁴

Priorities for 2017–19: Strengthening security and promoting equality

The Commission will:

1. In the first quarter of 2017 finalise the study on EU policy options to improve the security of EU citizens' **identity cards and residence documents** of EU citizens residing in another Member State and of their non-EU family members.¹²⁵ The Commission will evaluate the next steps, options and their impacts in view of a possible legislative initiative by the end of 2017.
2. In 2017 assess how to modernise the rules on **emergency travel documents for unrepresented EU citizens**, including the security features of the EU common format, to guarantee that citizens can effectively exercise their right to consular protection.
3. Carry out in 2017 a **campaign on violence against women** and actively support the accession of the Union to the **Istanbul Convention** alongside Member States and present proposals to address the challenges of **work-life balance** for working families.
4. Act to improve the social acceptance of **LGBTI people** across the EU by implementing the list of actions to advance LGBTI equality and actively support the conclusion of the negotiations on the proposed horizontal **Anti-Discrimination Directive**.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm.

¹²¹ The Commission's 2016 report assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States sets out its priorities for action in this area, which include taking action to ensure full enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, support Member States' Roma integration efforts and promote participation and dialogue at the European level of all stakeholders.

¹²² Eurobarometer Special report – Discrimination in the EU 2012.

¹²³ <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/eu-egovernment-report-2015-shows-online-public-services-europe-are-smart-could-be-smarter>.

¹²⁴ Future-proofing e-Government for a Digital Single Market, Final insight report: June 2015, p. 65. On the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies see also: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/web-accessibility>.

¹²⁵ COM(2016) 790 final.

¹²⁶ See political guidelines of President Juncker.

6. CONCLUSION

In producing this report, the Commission has drawn on European citizens' experiences and views, as expressed in the wide-ranging consultations that helped shape it, and listened to their needs and the problems they face in their daily lives when exercising their rights as EU citizens. It has developed its 2017–2019 priorities on this basis, in order to further guarantee that citizens will be able fully to enjoy their EU rights and the practical benefits the EU provides.

Civic awareness and democratic participation among Union citizens are crucial, especially ahead of the next European elections. The Commission believes that further steps should be taken to deepen the democratic life of the Union.

The Commission's work on EU citizenship will continue to focus on the key areas that most directly affect European citizens' wellbeing:

- empowering them through information, advice and democratic participation;
- protecting them, securing their equal treatment in the EU and providing them with direct support; and
- simplifying their daily lives by providing them with easy, online access to information, assistance, problem-solving services and online procedures, cutting red tape, protecting them as consumers, workers and students, and removing other barriers to their enjoyment of their rights.

Shaping and delivering this agenda is not a job for the Commission to deliver on its own, but a collective effort for the Union as a whole.

The Commission is fully committed to making EU citizenship a reality on the ground and it will work in partnership with the other EU institutions, the Member States, local and regional authorities, civil society and, most importantly, citizens themselves to bring this about.

ANNEX

Follow up to the 2013 EU Citizenship Report: progress on implementing twelve actions

In its 2013 EU Citizenship Report the Commission set out twelve actions to improve EU citizens' lives and further remove obstacles standing in the way of their enjoyment of their EU rights. This annex presents the main actions taken by the Commission to deliver on its 2013 commitments.

<p><i>Action 1: Revising the Social Security Coordination Regulation to make it easier for citizens to look for a job in another EU country</i></p>
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EU social security coordination rules protect citizens' social security rights when they move to another Member State. For instance, the rules ensure that an individual can only be insured in one country at any one time, that his or her insurance periods can be added up to insurance periods fulfilled in another country and that benefits can be paid in another EU country.

After obtaining the views of the public through two consultations (December 2012 to March 2013 and from July to October 2015), the Commission proposed on 13 December 2016 a revision of the social security coordination regulations¹²⁷ to ensure that these rules continue being fit-for-purpose, clear and fair and contribute to create a deeper, better functioning and fairer European labour market. The revision will enable Member States to better prevent and fight fraud or abuse, while ensuring that free movement of workers is not hampered. In doing so, this initiative serves to facilitate the exercise of the right to free movement of citizens by ensuring social security coordination is efficient and effective.

The revision updates the coordination rules as regards unemployment benefits, long-term care, access to social benefits by economically inactive citizens, and posting of workers. Under the proposal, jobseekers may take their unemployment benefits with them to another Member State for at least 6 months, instead of the current period of 3 months. This will give them a better chance to find work, and help tackle EU-wide unemployment and skill mismatches. This new rule will be combined with a reinforced cooperation mechanism to support jobseekers to search for work, thus increasing the likelihood of their reintegration into the labour market.

¹²⁷ Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems, OJ L 166, 30.4.2004, pp. 1–123 and Regulation (EC) No 987/2009 of 16 September 2009 laying down the procedure for implementing Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems, OJ L 284, 31.10.2009, pp. 1–42; COM (2016)815 final.

Action 2: Helping young EU citizens develop their skills and enter the labour market by developing a quality framework for traineeships

In March 2014 the Council, acting on a proposal from the Commission, adopted a Quality Framework for Traineeships¹²⁸ to enable trainees to acquire high-quality work experience under safe and fair conditions, and to increase their chances of finding a good quality job. The Commission consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including small businesses, in order to ensure that the Framework would be neither too prescriptive nor too burdensome. The Framework increases transparency with regard to traineeship conditions, e.g. by requiring that traineeships be based on a written traineeship agreement. The Commission is monitoring the implementation of the Framework in all Member States.

In addition, to support young EU citizens developing skills and entering the labour market, the Commission launched the ‘Your first EURES job’ website. In its initial phase, ‘Your first EURES job’ aims at improving cross-border mobility for 5,000 people.¹²⁹ This website will help young people aged 18–35 from the European Economic Area in their search for a job, traineeship or apprenticeship in another country. Employers are also able to find well-suited candidates in another EU country for their hard-to-fill vacancies.

Action 3: Working on solutions to remove obstacles faced by EU citizens and their family members who live in an EU country other than their own in relation to identity and residence documents issued by Member States

In late 2015 the Commission launched a comprehensive study on identity cards and residence documents issued by the Member States to their nationals, to mobile EU citizens and to their family members residing on their territory.¹³⁰

On 8 December 2016, the Commission adopted an Action Plan on document security setting out specific actions to improve the security of travel documents, including that of national identity cards issued by Member States and of residence documents for EU nationals residing in another Member State and their family members.¹³¹

Action 4: Promoting best tax practice in cross-border situations and ensuring the correct application of EU law so as to make it easier for European citizens moving or operating across borders to deal with different sets of tax rules

In order to identify what, if any, tax problems EU citizens face when moving or operating across borders, the Commission launched studies to examine Member States’ current cross-

¹²⁸ Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, pp. 1–4.

¹²⁹ <http://euxtra.com/en/2012/05/22/your-first-eures-job/>.

¹³⁰ Study to support the preparation of an impact assessment on EU policy initiatives on residence and identity documents to facilitate the exercise of the right to free movement.

¹³¹ COM(2016)790 final.

border administrative practices¹³² and to examine whether and to what extent taxpayers who operate across borders face higher tax compliance costs than taxpayers who operate within a single Member State.¹³³ In addition, the Commission set up a private sector expert group to examine cross-border personal tax and inheritance tax problems and identify possible solutions. The group published its findings in two reports.¹³⁴ As the main problems in cross-border situations, it highlighted double taxation, administrative complexities of dealing with two or more tax authorities, difficulties in obtaining sufficient information from the different tax authorities involved, and discrimination as the main problems in cross-border situations. The Commission can and will continue to take legal action to tackle problems of tax discrimination. It will promote pragmatic ways to tackle these problems, including by encouraging the use of existing Internal Market problem solving tools such as SOLVIT, by encouraging wider adoption of best cross-border tax practices and by encouraging better cooperation between tax administrations and taxpayers in particular so as to ensure that taxpayers have adequate information on their rights and obligations.

Action 5: Establishing a ‘vehicle information platform’ to facilitate the recognition of roadworthiness certificates, making it easier and safer for citizens to travel to another EU Member State

Directive 2014/45/EU on periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers entered into force on 3 April 2014¹³⁵. In the framework of the ‘Roadworthiness Package’, two other Directives were adopted: Directive 2014/46/EU on the registration documents for vehicles, on the basis of which data of registered vehicles is to be kept in an electronic register and the authorisation to use in road traffic a vehicle constituting an immediate risk to road safety is suspended; and Directive 2014/47/EU on technical roadside inspections of commercial vehicles, which creates risk profiles of the operators, better regulates roadside inspections (also excluding any discrimination on grounds of the nationality of the driver or of the country of registration of the vehicle) and includes roadside checks on the securing of the cargo.

Action 6: Facilitating the mobility of persons with disabilities within the EU by supporting, in 2014, the development of a mutually recognized EU disability card to ensure equal access within the EU to certain specific benefits (mainly in the areas of transport, tourism, culture and leisure).

The employment rate among people with disabilities is low (currently around 48%) and a third of them are at risk of poverty. Also, people with disabilities face practical problems when travelling to another EU country, because for example their disability cards or status are not always recognised. The Commission therefore took forward the European Disability Card project to support mutual recognition of the disability status. In a dedicated study (2010), the

¹³²http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/resources/documents/common/publications/studies/study_cross_border_tax_obstacles_final_report.pdf.

¹³³ http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/resources/documents/common/publications/studies/study_compliance_costs_final_report.pdf.

¹³⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/taxation/individuals/expert_group/index_en.htm.

¹³⁵ Directive 2014/45/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers and repealing Directive 2009/40/EC, OJ L 127, 29.4.2014, pp. 51–128.

Academic Network of European Disability Experts showed the diversity of benefits provided in Member States following different eligibility criteria.

At an initial stage, the Commission made EUR 1.5 million available to Member States and launched a call for projects in 2015 to facilitate the establishment of a mutually recognised European Disability Card and associated benefits.¹³⁶ It is also providing financial support to the fifteen participating Member States and has launched different phases of the card. Eight countries applied for the project and were selected: Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Malta, Slovenia and Romania. The projects started in February 2016 and will last 18 months.

The EU Disability Card, which will have a common design, will ensure an equal access to certain specific benefits, mainly in the areas of culture, leisure, sport and transport. The Card will be mutually recognised between EU countries participating in the system, on a voluntary basis. The Card does not change national eligibility criteria or rules. Member States retain their discretion to decide who is eligible the Card, using the national definition of disability, and to determine the issuing procedure.

Action 7: Proposing a package of legal instruments to further strengthen citizens' procedural rights when they are suspected or accused in criminal proceedings, taking into account the specific situations of children and vulnerable citizens

On 27 November 2013 the Commission adopted a package of five measures to further strengthen procedural safeguards for citizens in criminal proceedings. The three Directives proposed by the Commission were adopted in 2016:

- The Directive on presumption of innocence sets out common standards of this principle and the right to be present at the trial.¹³⁷
- The Directive on special procedural safeguards for children in criminal proceedings will improve considerably the European standards on juvenile justice.¹³⁸
- The Directive on legal aid will ensure that the right of access to a lawyer is an effective right also for those who cannot afford a lawyer in particular in the early stages of proceedings when suspects are questioned by police.¹³⁹

Member State implementation is ongoing.

The Commission also adopted two recommendations on special safeguards for vulnerable suspects in criminal proceedings (2013/C 738/02) and on legal aid in criminal proceedings (2013/C 378/03).

¹³⁶ VP/2015/012 Call for proposals to support national projects on a mutually recognised European Disability Card and associated benefits. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=629>.

¹³⁷ Directive (EU) 2016/343 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on the strengthening of certain aspects of the presumption of innocence and of the right to be present at the trial in criminal proceedings OJ L 65, 11.3.2016, p. 1–11, which entered into force on 31 March 2016.

¹³⁸ Directive (EU) 2016/800 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings OJ L 132, 21.5.2016, p. 1–20, which entered into force on 10 June 2016.

¹³⁹ Directive (EU) 2016/1919 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 October 2016 on legal aid for suspects and accused persons in criminal proceedings and for requested persons in European arrest warrant proceedings, OJ L 297, 4.11.2016, p. 1–8, which entered into force on 24 November 2016.

Action 8: Revising the European Small Claims Procedure to facilitate the settling of disputes regarding purchases in another EU country

In November 2013 the Commission proposed to improve the European Small Claims Procedure in order better to protect and inform EU citizens who are still experiencing problems when shopping online.¹⁴⁰

The new Regulation was adopted end 2015 and will enter into force in July 2017¹⁴¹ extends the scope of the European Small Claims Procedure to claims of a value up to EUR 5000. These and other changes will make the European Small Claims Procedure a faster and cheaper tool for enforcement of consumer rights and for cross-border debt recovery.

Action 9: Developing a model for the online display of key requirements to make the information on digital products clearer and easier to compare and launching a dedicated EU-wide awareness-raising campaign on consumer rights

Via its Consumer Rights Awareness Campaign,¹⁴² the Commission informed citizens of their rights under EU consumer law and where they can get more information, advice or help in case of questions or problems (Your Europe portal,¹⁴³ ECC-Net etc.). The campaign, which ran from spring 2014 to March 2016, aimed to increase consumers' general knowledge of their EU-wide consumer rights. There was a particular focus on the Consumer Rights Directive,¹⁴⁴ the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive,¹⁴⁵ the Unfair Contract Terms Directive¹⁴⁶ and the Consumer Sales and Guarantees Directive.¹⁴⁷

Action 10: Taking actions to ensure that local administrations are given the tools to fully comprehend the free movement rights of EU citizens

The Commission is launching an e-training tool on EU free movement rights. This tool, which has been developed in cooperation with the Member States, will be made available in all EU languages. It will help front desks that play a key role in enforcing EU citizens' free

¹⁴⁰ The 2012 public consultation on EU citizenship highlights that one in four respondents encounter problems when shopping online.

¹⁴¹ Regulation (EU) 2015/2421 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2015 amending Regulation (EC) No 861/2007 establishing a European Small Claims Procedure and Regulation (EC) No 1896/2006 creating a European order for payment procedure has been published in the Official Journal on 24 December 2015, OJ L 341 of 24.12.2015, pp. 1–13.

¹⁴² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/consumer-marketing/events/140317_en.htm.

¹⁴³ http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/consumers/index_en.htm.

¹⁴⁴ Directive 2011/83/EU of 25 October 2011 on consumer rights, OJ L 304, 22.11.2011, pp. 64–88.

¹⁴⁵ Directive 2005/29/EU of 11 May 2005 concerning unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market, OJ L 149, 11.6.2005, pp. 22–35.

¹⁴⁶ Directive 93/13/EEC of 5 April 1993 on unfair terms in consumer contracts, OJ L95, 21.4.1993, pp. 29–34.

¹⁴⁷ Directive 99/44/EC of 25 May 1999 on certain aspects of the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees, OJ L 171, 7.7.1999, pp. 12–16.

movement rights, in particular local administrations, better understand the rights and obligations associated with the EU citizen's rights of free movement and thus improve the practical application of the EU rules. This better application should reduce problems encountered by EU citizens and their families when they go to live in another EU country, related to their rights of residence, social assistance benefits, discrimination, access to education etc.

Local administrations will be able to acquire and test their knowledge concerning the rights and procedures laid down in EU law on free movement, including Directive 2004/38/EC. Member States can add information they consider relevant concerning the national transposition and implementation of the rules.

Action 11: Making it clearer and easier for citizens to know who to turn to for their rights to be redressed by providing user-friendly guidance on the central Europa web site

The Commission launched an online tool¹⁴⁸ on its central Europa website to guide citizens to the most appropriate service to help them solve their problem. This can be either at EU level (EU assistance services or institutions), at national or local level.¹⁴⁹

The new tool is now set up to respond to citizens' concrete needs or questions. For example, citizens can obtain guidance on getting a public authority in another EU country to respect their EU rights, social security rights (including family benefits, urgent healthcare, pensions) and residence rights, on recognition of their professional qualifications, registering their vehicles and exchanging their driving licences. Citizens can also obtain information on their consumer rights,¹⁵⁰ getting help if they are facing discrimination, how to complain about unfair treatment by an EU body, report a breach of EU law by national authorities or obtain consular assistance when outside the EU in a country where their own country has no diplomatic mission.¹⁵¹ In 2015 the webpage had 11,079 visitors, which represented an 86.6% increase from the year before.

The Commission offers already multilingual user-friendly information about the rights of EU citizens¹⁵² and strives to make information on its webpages easier to find and to help citizens better understand what it does. It is currently implementing its Digital Transformation Programme,¹⁵³ which seeks to present relevant information in a user-friendly way.

¹⁴⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/your-rights/help/individuals/>.

¹⁴⁹ One possibility that citizens have for solving problems is through effective mediation or other alternative dispute resolution methods. The Mediation Directive provides an EU framework which allows EU citizens to benefit fully from mediation as a means to have their disputes settled, whether they are of a commercial or a family law nature (Directive 2008/52/EC of 21 May 2008 on certain aspects of mediation in civil and commercial matters, OJ L 136, 24.5.2008, pp. 3–8). In 2016, the Commission adopted a report on the application of this Directive (COM(2016) 542 final).

¹⁵⁰ Buying goods/services in the country where the citizen lives, buying goods/services in another EU country, out of court complaint with a bank, insurance company, investment fund etc., making/receiving payments abroad in the EU or out of court disputes for goods bought online.

¹⁵¹ If e.g. the passport is lost or stolen, in case of serious accident, illness or death or of violent crime, arrest or detention, emergency relief/repatriation.

¹⁵² http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/index_en.htm

¹⁵³ http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/basics/web_rationalisation/index_en.htm. The programme will be gradually implemented by the end of 2017.

Action 12 (1): Promoting EU citizens' awareness of their EU citizenship rights, and in particular their electoral rights, by launching on Europe Day in May 2014 a handbook presenting those EU rights in clear and simple language

In 2014 the Commission issued a handbook '*Did you know? 10 EU rights at a glance*'¹⁵⁴ and a new updated version of its booklet '*Your Europe – Your Rights*' in all EU official languages, to increase citizens' knowledge and awareness of their rights as EU citizens.¹⁵⁵ These publications have been widely distributed, including through Commission Representations and Europe Direct Information Centres. They explain in reader-friendly language some of the EU citizens' specific rights, such as being able to return faulty goods ordered online, benefit from low roaming costs or obtain compensation for cancelled flights. Real-life situations are presented, including participation in European and local elections, citizens making their voice heard and citizens exercising their free movement rights, their right to receive necessary healthcare in any EU country, and their consumer and travel rights. They also explain how to contact the EU in your own language and get information and assistance on your EU rights.

Action 12 (2): Propose constructive ways to enable EU citizens living in another EU country to fully participate in the democratic life of the EU by maintaining their right to vote in national elections in their country of origin

Five Member States (Denmark, Ireland, Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom) currently have rules in place whereby citizens can lose their voting rights in national elections, simply because they have exercised their right to free movement in the EU. While under the EU Treaties Member States are competent to determine who can benefit from the right to vote in national elections, disenfranchisement practices can negatively affect EU free movement rights.

On 29 January 2014, the Commission adopted a Recommendation¹⁵⁶ inviting the Member States in question to enable their nationals who make use of their free movement right to retain their right to vote in national elections, if they demonstrate a continuing interest in the political life of their country, including by applying to remain on the electoral roll. The Commission also recommended that those Member States inform their citizens in a timely and appropriate way about the conditions and practical arrangements for retaining their right to vote in national elections. It continues to monitor the situation in these Member States.

Action 12 (3): Exploring ways of strengthening and developing the European public space

¹⁵⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/10_eu_rights_en.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/your-europe-your-rights-pbKM0214968/>.

¹⁵⁶ Addressing the consequences of disenfranchisement of Union citizens exercising their rights to free movement (COM(2014) 391 final).

The Commission is funding and co-funding the production or dissemination of multimedia (radio, TV, internet, etc.) products through European media – while fully respecting the broadcasters’ editorial independence – in partnership with broadcasters, such as Euronews, in several languages. It is also producing and broadcasting European programmes in six different languages and funding EU-themed magazines.