Council of the European Union

Brussels, 11 June 2025
(OR. en)

10146/25

AG 84
INST 168
PE 34

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	6 June 2025
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	COM(2025) 287 final
Subject:	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS - Report on the 2024 elections to the European Parliament

Delegations will find attached document COM(2025) 287 final.

Encl.: COM(2025) 287 final

EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 6.6.2025
COM(2025) 287 final

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

Report on the 2024 elections to the European Parliament

{SWD(2025) 147 final}

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections are at the core of democracy and the elections to the European Parliament are among the world's largest democratic exercises. They should follow the highest democratic standards.

Between 6 and 9 June 2024, European citizens directly elected 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from around 18 400 candidates[1]. In casting their vote, they help to build a shared European identity, bound together by our rich and varied cultural tapestry. People with disparate cultures, complex histories and differing perspectives all came together at the same time to articulate their wish for an entire EU of 27 countries. Of nearly 360 million eligible voters, approximately 180 million votes were cast across the EU[2].

The turnout (50.74%) closely mirrored that of the 2019 elections, demonstrating the continued vibrancy of our democracy. When EU citizens exercise their electoral rights, it ensures that their voice is heard and gives them the opportunity to shape the political agenda. Europeans are very much aware of the importance of these elections[3], and trust in European parliamentary democracy is at an unprecedented high[4].

The 2024 elections were organised amidst major transformations being faced by democracies in the EU and beyond. Election campaigns have moved significantly to the online sphere with social media playing an increasingly important role. As highlighted in the Commission's European Democracy Action Plan[5], this has brought new opportunities for direct interactions between political actors and voters. It can encourage democratic engagement and is also particularly effective in terms of involving young people in the democratic life. At the same time, the prevalence of campaigning online has also resulted in the need to mitigate specific risks. There is a higher need to address challenges such as those posed by cyber-threats, foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), disinformation or by the misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, than before. In this context, citizens show a high level of concern about various forms of interference in elections, including through disinformation (78%), cyber attacks (72%) or the covert influence of foreign countries (70%)[6].

The main responsibilities regarding elections are for the Member States. It is their competence and responsibility to lay down the specific conditions for the conduct and organisation of elections, in accordance with their national legislation, international obligations and applicable EU law, and their authorities and courts have primary responsibility for exercising oversight and ensuring compliance with the relevant rules. For elections to the European Parliament, certain common principles and procedures are set out in EU law, including the 1976 Electoral Act[7] and the rules enabling mobile EU citizens to exercise their right to vote and stand in the elections to the European Parliament in their country of residence.

EU action in support of free and fair elections offers important added value. Since 2019, as part of a broader effort to promote and strengthen democracy, the EU has reinforced its support to Member States in this field.

---

[1] As reported by the Civil Society Organisation and Election Observer Network Election-Watch.EU.

[2] Eurostat, Persons eligible to vote in the 2024 European Parliament elections by category of voters, last updated 2 August 2024. Related metadata: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/demo_popep_esms.htm.

[3] EP Spring 2024 Survey: Use your vote - Countdown to the European elections: More than 26 000 respondents in all EU Member States. Findings of this survey suggest that EU citizens are very much aware of the importance of the elections in the current geopolitical context, with more than eight in ten (81%) agreeing that it makes voting even more important.

[4] EU Post-electoral survey 2024. Findings of this survey show that trust in European parliamentary democracy is particularly high at the beginning of the tenth EP parliamentary term: 42% of the citizens hold a positive image of the European Parliament - the highest result recorded since the question was first asked.

[5] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European democracy action plan, COM/2020/790 final, 3 December 2020.

[6] 2023 Eurobarometer on citizenship and democracy. For more details see Staff Working Document.

[7] Act concerning the election of the representatives of the Assembly by direct universal suffrage, *OJ L 218, 8.10.1976*.

Initiatives such as those under the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan, the 2021 package of measures to reinforce democracy and protect the integrity of elections in the EU[8], and the 2023 Defence of Democracy package[9] provide new tools to reinforce the resilience of democracies and elections in the EU.

As part of this work, the December 2023 Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections (hereafter, 'the 2023 Recommendation on elections')[10], provides an important blueprint to support the preparations for and conduct of elections. It is addressed to Member States, European and national political parties, political foundations, and campaign organisations in the context of preparation for elections in the EU, including the 2024 elections to the European Parliament.

The EU toolbox also includes several legislative and regulatory measures which are relevant in the electoral context, including the Digital Services Act (DSA)[11] and its Guidelines on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes[12], the Regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising[13] and the Artificial Intelligence Act[14].

Preparations for the 2024 elections to the European Parliament saw unprecedented cooperation between the Member States, EU institutions and stakeholders. On 24 April 2024, the Belgian Presidency of the Council activated the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements in information-sharing mode in relation to foreign interference in the 2024 European elections[15], which aided the exchange of information among Member States and EU institutions.

The European Cooperation Network on Elections[16] (ECNE), a network supported by the Commission and consisting of national contact points appointed by Member States, held a wide range of thematic sessions on free, fair and resilient elections, sharing best practices and information, with the participation of the European Parliament. Cooperation between ECNE and other EU networks took place, as well as engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including elections observers. In addition, a wide range of initiatives and cooperation structures were activated with new ones being set up to tackle threats such as FIMI, disinformation, cybersecurity threats or other issues affecting the integrity of elections. This includes for example the ad hoc Working Group in the European Board of Digital Services under the DSA, or the dedicated Taskforce of the European Digital Media Observatory, as well as the Expert group on electoral matters[17].

---

[8] European Commission, *European Democracy: Commission sets out new laws on political advertising, electoral rights and party funding*, 25 November 2021.

[9] European Commission, *Defence of Democracy – Commission proposes to shed light on covert foreign influence*, 12 December 2023.

[10] Commission Recommendation (EU) 2023/2829 of 12 December 2023 on inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the Union and enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, presented as part of the Defence of Democracy Package, *OJ L, 2023/2829, 20.12.2023*.

[11] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), *OJ L 277, 27.10.2022.*

[12] European Commission, *Guidelines for providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes*, 26 April 2024.

[13] Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2024 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, *OJ L, 2024/900, 20.3.2024.*

[14] Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act), *OJ L, 2024/1689, 12.7.2024*.

[15] Council of the European Union, *Foreign interference: Presidency reinforces exchange of information ahead of the June 2024 European elections*, 24 April 2024.

[16] European Commission, European cooperation network on elections website.

[17] Register of Commission Expert Groups and other Similar Entities, Expert group on electoral matters - Right to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections for the EP and in municipal elections (E00617).

The European Parliament actively supported the smooth conduct of the 2024 elections, with a communication strategy aimed at supporting and complementing Member States actions and providing a European perspective to the elections. The European Parliament also took specific measures to combat disinformation, taking an approach focusing on proactive communication, resilience-building, situational awareness and rapid response, ensuring a secure information environment for all EU citizens.

In its Conclusions on democratic resilience and safeguarding electoral processes from all forms of foreign interference[18], the Council invited the Commission to thoroughly analyse the lessons to be learned from the 2024 elections to the European Parliament[19]. In June 2024, the Council also approved Council Conclusions on enhancing and protecting free, open and informed democratic debate[20].

The measures taken by each EU institution and the Member States, as well as the unprecedented cooperation between them, helped to ensure that the elections ran smoothly overall, without any major incidents, despite challenges such as an increase in EU-related disinformation[21] or the detection of various cases of FIMI activity[22].

This report reviews the conduct of the 2024 elections[23]. It is based on a wide variety of sources, including Commission surveys[24] returned by Member States and European and national political parties, a call for evidence[25], direct feedback from citizens and reports from election observers and civil society organisations. Detailed findings and an overview of sources are set out in the accompanying Staff Working Document.

2. PARTICIPATION IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2.1. Turnout

In the June 2024 elections to the European Parliament, the overall turnout remained stable at 50.74%, confirming the positive trend of the 2019 elections[26]. There were however substantial differences between Member States, ranging from 89.01% in Belgium[27] to 21.35% in Croatia. Turnout increased in 15 Member States[28], with double-digit increases on the 2019 figures in Cyprus, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia, and significant increases in countries where turnout was previously low, such as Czechia, the Netherlands and

[18] Council of the European Union, *Democratic resilience: Council approves conclusions on safeguarding electoral processes from foreign interference*, 21 May 2024.
[19] The Council also invited the Commission to 'present comprehensive feedback to the Council on the effectiveness of the relevant mechanisms, networks, tools and measures, and report on any issues and gaps identified in the available tools so that they can be rectified'.
[20] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on enhancing and protecting free, open and informed democratic debate*, 14 June 2024.
[21] European Digital Media Observatory, *EDMO Task Force on EU elections 2024*, 26 July 2024.
[22] EEAS, 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, Exposing the architecture of FIMI operations, March 2025.
[23] An initial assessment of known interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament was already presented by Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Věra Jourová, in October 2024.
[24] The Commission received responses to specific surveys from 25 Member States, 6 European Political Parties and almost 60 national political parties.
[25] The call for evidence was online from 6 November to 4 December 2024.
[26] In 2019, turnout amounted to 50.66% of eligible voters.
[27] In Belgium, voting is compulsory. Voting is also compulsory in Bulgaria, Greece and Luxembourg. More information on possible reasons explaining higher or lower turnout can be found in the Staff Working Document.
[28] In the 2024 European Parliament elections turnout increased in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Ireland, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia compared to the previous elections in 2019. In Estonia, turnout remained stable.

Portugal. Meanwhile, turnout fell in 11 Member States[29], including by double digits in Greece, Spain and Lithuania. There were also significant decreases in Denmark, Italy, Poland and Croatia.

Three months before the elections, the European Parliament's spring 2024 Eurobarometer survey[30] had found that 60% of Europeans expressed an interest in the 2024 elections. This represented an increase of +11 percentage points compared to the survey of spring 2019, ahead of the previous elections to the European Parliament. Europeans also indicated they were very much aware of the importance of the elections in the ongoing geopolitical context. However, this overall increased interest in the elections to the European Parliament was not reflected in a significantly higher turnout compared to 2019.

The European Parliament's post-election survey[31] showed that the main topics eventually motivating EU citizens to vote were rising prices and the cost of living (42%), followed by the general economic situation (41%). Voting also seems to have become a democratic habit for many, while non-participation may be explained by reasons related to political engagement (such as a lack of trust or dissatisfaction with politics). Socio-economic conditions and level of education also continue to influence turnout[32].

2.2. Informing about the elections, engaging with and communicating to citizens, and supporting electoral rights

Informing citizens and engaging with them as regards the European dimension of the elections, their electoral rights and the applicable electoral process empowers them to make informed electoral choices. National authorities, the European Parliament and the Commission, other EU institutions, bodies and agencies, as well as other stakeholders including civil society organisations, took a wide range of initiatives to inform, engage and communicate ahead of the 2024 elections.

The European Parliament's campaign sought to provide a European perspective to the elections and showing democracy in action. The main and final phase of the campaign centred on the call for action: 'Use your vote, or others will decide for you'. The dedicated 'one-stop-shop' website for the 2024 elections[33] (EE24 website) provided comprehensive information covering organisation and voting processes in the Member States. It was organised in close cooperation with the Commission.

The Commission also approached the 2024 elections as a communication priority. Recognising the shared interest in a resilient democracy and the common responsibility for the EU's democratic legitimacy, it complemented and supported the European Parliament's communication efforts as part of a joint interinstitutional effort.

The Commission communicated with impact both on the proactive and the defensive side. Extensive communication on the concrete results and benefits of its work for citizens during the previous mandate supported awareness of what was at stake. The Commission complemented these efforts by providing factual information to citizens about the elections, their electoral rights and the importance of voting. In this context, it activated its networks and different groups of multipliers and helped to grow the European Parliament's 'together.eu for democracy'-community. Young and first-time voters were an important target audience for EU-level activities, as were 'mobile EU citizens' (EU citizens who have moved to another Member State to work, live or study). The Commission also supported and amplified the European Parliament's 'Use your vote'-campaign through all its channels. Communication activities of the Commission also focused on preventing and tackling FIMI, including disinformation, as explained further in Section 4.2.

[29] In the 2024 European Parliament elections turnout decreased in Denmark, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Finland and Sweden compared to the previous elections in 2019.
[30] EP Spring 2024 Survey: Use your vote - Countdown to the European elections: More than 26 000 respondents in all EU Member States.
[31] EU Post-electoral survey 2024.
[32] EU Post-electoral survey 2024; see also Staff Working Document for more details.
[33] European Parliament, *European Elections 6-9 June 2024*, last accessed 12 March 2025.

Examples of specific communication activities ahead of the elections[34]

- The 'one-stop-shop' EE24 website included practical information, campaigning materials and a dedicated helpline from the Commission's Europe Direct Contact Centre ('EDCC') coordinated closely with the EP's AskEP service (see Section 5.1 for more on the helpline).
- The campaign's hero video[35] made by the European Parliament gained over 3.7 million impressions and 100 000 interactions across all social media platforms on the Commission's central accounts.
- The campaign also featured unprecedented cooperation with Member States via the European Cooperation Network on Elections, which reviewed and verified the information on electoral procedures disseminated through EU channels. In this way, voters could easily obtain reliable information in support of their electoral rights.
- The Commission complemented the broad 'Use your vote' campaign with a targeted information campaign for mobile EU citizens living in another EU Member State or the United Kingdom. This campaign was run by the Commission and the European Parliament and achieved a total cumulative reach of 24 million across two waves.
- Various groups of multipliers were activated such as influencers and content creators, generating 41 000 engagements with an estimated reach of 3 million people. The Commission also organised an event with influencers during its dedicated campaign targeting EU mobile citizens.
- Commission Representations' communication actions generated a total reach of 213.5 million citizens, excluding social media.
- Commission Services, including the Representations, and Commission networks organised 4 319 events with around 3.5 million participants. The Europe Direct network alone contributed with 3 185 events and 955 500 participants.
- The dissemination of information was supported through the 'Guide to EU citizenship'[36].

The Commission used available funding to support national authorities and civil society organisations in implementing projects to encourage EU citizens to get involved in the democratic process, including under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. Between 2021 and 2024, two CERV strands allocated EUR 26.5 million to finance 46 projects aimed at encouraging European citizens to get involved in the democratic process and promoting and enhancing the exercise of EU citizenship rights.

The Member States also engaged in communication activities. In response to the survey launched by the Commission, most Member States reported having engaged in numerous awareness raising activities, by carrying out broad communication strategies, developing communication kits or programmes of public engagement, or supporting citizens' participation by providing helplines[37].

The engagement of Member States and cooperation among and with the EU institutions was crucial for the impact of the communication campaign. The 2024 campaign was a cohesive, pan-European effort, promoting the importance of democracy and voting. An unprecedented degree of cooperation was observed, under the lead of the European Parliament, with a total of 4 487 institutional partners involved in promoting the elections (including European, national and regional organisations). These partnerships made it possible to carry out joint digital campaigns and shared public information initiatives, and to take a coordinated approach to voter mobilisation efforts.

[34] See also Staff Working Document.
[35] European Parliament, *Use your vote or other will decide for you campaign*, last accessed 18 February 2025.
[36] European Commission, *Guide to EU citizenship*, 06 December 2023. 8 Member States explicitly reported having used the Guide in their national communication efforts.
[37] For more details see Staff Working Document.

2.3. Participation of specific groups: young people, women, persons with disabilities, mobile EU citizens and other groups

The inclusion of all groups is an essential element of healthy democracies. Every citizen should have real opportunities to choose their elected representatives. In general, the 2024 elections remained stable in terms of the inclusiveness of electoral participation and elected candidates.

The 2023 Recommendation on elections calls on Member States to take measures in support of broad turnout, including by providing the necessary information to citizens. The Recommendation provides that it is necessary for Member States and political parties to support the participation in elections, as voters and as candidates, of all groups of citizens, taking into account their specific needs and challenges.

Young people

Overall, the participation of young people did not improve in 2024 compared to 2019. In most Member States, citizens can vote in the elections to the European Parliament from the age of 18. The 2024 elections saw more Member States lowering the voting age and allowing citizens to vote from 16 years old (Belgium, Germany, Malta and Austria)[38]. One country (Greece) gives citizens the right to vote from 17 years old[39]. There are also differences in the minimum age to stand as a candidate[40].

In the lead-up to the 2024 elections, Member States made specific efforts to increase young people's participation, both as voters and candidates. 15 of the 25 Member States that replied to the Commission survey indicated that they had placed a specific emphasis on young people or first-time voters when it came to promoting easy access to the exercise of electoral rights[41].

Political parties also took measures to support turnout by young people. Of almost 60 national political parties that replied to the survey, around 57% explicitly reported that they had addressed first-time and young voters[42]. Young people were also a specific target audience of the interinstitutional communication campaigns.

Despite these efforts, and despite the fact that prior to the elections more than 6 in 10 (64%) young EU citizens (15-30) had expressed their intention to vote[43], only 36% of those aged 15-24 (if eligible) and 46% of those aged 25-39 actually voted in the 2024 elections. This represents a decrease of 6 percentage points since 2019, partially offsetting the 14 percentage points increase between 2014 and 2019.

Age remains a determining factor in turnout, with older people still more likely to vote than young people. According to the February 2025 Youth survey[44], the most common reasons for young people not having voted in the 2024 elections were other commitments (16%) and not having enough information to make a choice (16%), followed by not finding any relatable candidate or political party that represented their views (15%) and a general distrust or dissatisfaction with politicians and politics (15%). Age also determines *when* EU

[38] In the 2019 European Parliament elections, this was not yet the case for Belgium and Germany.
[39] Cyprus also approved a bill conferring voting rights to 17-year-olds in January 2025, which will apply as of the next national parliamentary elections in May 2026.
[40] Most Member States requiring candidates to be 18 years old. In some other countries it is 21 (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia), 23 (Romania) or 25 (Greece and Italy). See also Briefing by the Parliament on the 2024 European elections, including an overview of the legal framework for the elections, February 2024.
[41] Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Greece, France, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland.
[42] For example by creating music and video content that appealed to young audiences, organising special events and targeted campaigns, and partnering with influencers.
[43] Eurobarometer, *Youth and democracy*, May 2024.
[44] Eurobarometer, *Youth survey 2024*, February 2025.

citizens decide to vote, with young voters more often deciding only a few weeks or even days before the elections whether they will vote or not[45].

In terms of representation (elected candidates) young people (under the age of 40) hold only 19.17% of the seats in the new European Parliament with 138 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), which is also a decrease compared to 2019 when they held 21% of the seats.

Women

The participation of women as voters in the 2024 European elections fell slightly compared to the elections in 2019 (by one percentage point). While female representation in the European Parliament has more than doubled since the first direct elections in 1979, in 2024 the share of women decreased by 0.9 percentage points, compared to the 2019 elections[46]. This is the first time that the representation of women in the European Parliament has fallen. Women make up only 38.5 % of all MEPs. Furthermore, there remain major differences between Member States in terms of elected female MEPs[47].

Responses to the Commission survey from Member States and political parties also revealed significant variations in efforts to promote gender equality in the conduct of the 2024 elections across Member States. Currently, 11 Member States have laid down quotas in their national legislation and some go further by alternating women and men on candidate lists ('zipped lists')[48].

Practices by Member States promoting women's participation included the organization of specific events and political debates on the topic, linking public funding to the promotion of political participation by women, and awareness raising campaigns. Political parties reported having taken a variety of measures to support gender equality, such as encouraging gender balance on electoral lists and in governing bodies. At the same time, data collection, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms vary greatly across Member States.

At the same time, the Commission's Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men raised concerns on specific challenges women encountered, such as an unequal distribution of TV media space between male and female candidates in specific Member States.

In the run-up to the elections, a rise in online gender-based disinformation about female EU leaders and candidates was observed. Such challenges can force women out of the political sphere altogether, impacting democracy and women's participation in the political arena[49] (more information on violence against candidates can be found in Section 4.7).

Persons with disabilities

More than 100 million people in the EU have some form of a disability[50]. Some improvements in their participation in the EU elections were observed.

Following up on the Commission's 2021-2030 Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[51] and the 2023 Recommendation on elections, a wide range of measures have been taken to foster participation in elections by persons with disabilities. This is all the more important as an accessible voting environment can improve everyone's voting experience, and therefore ultimately benefits the whole of society.

---

[45] Eurobarometer, *EU post-electoral survey 2024*, October 2024.

[46] Following the 2019 elections, women represented 39.4% of members of the European Parliament. This figure corresponds with the gender balance of MEPs after the redistribution of seats post-Brexit (2020).

[47] The share of elected female MEPs ranges from 62% in Sweden to 0% in Cyprus, with an EU average of 39%.

[48] Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland and Slovenia.

[49] Global Disinformation Index, *Gendered Disinformation in the European Parliamentary Elections*, June 10 2024.

[50] Council of the European Union, *Disability in the EU: facts and figures*, last updated 18 February 2025.

[51] Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030*, COM(2021) 101 final, 3 March 2021.

Most Member States took specific measures to support participation in elections by persons with disabilities[52]. These include providing voters with specific tools such as magnifiers, large printouts of the ballot or candidate lists, tactile markings, audio information or ballots containing information in Braille format. Member States also provided accessible election information or specific training for polling staff on election accessibility. These efforts, among others, were supported by dedicated discussion and close cooperation with the European Cooperation Network on Elections[53], and at the October 2023 High-Level Event on elections[54]. On 6 December 2023, the Commission published the Guide on good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities[55]. 20 of the 25 Member States that responded to the Commission's survey explicitly stated they had made use of this guide. The EE24 website also placed an emphasis on accessibility.

Election observers reported that participation by persons with disabilities improved in 2024, thanks to alternative voting measures, better polling station accessibility and ballot readability for example[56]. However, they noted that it still varies between Member States. Certain barriers to political participation for persons with disabilities remain, including due to a lack of or insufficient accessibility[57]. Furthermore, persons with disabilities are still underrepresented as MEPs[58].

Mobile EU citizens

Mobile EU citizens (EU citizens who have moved to another Member State to work, live or study) have the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament in their Member State of residence under the same conditions as nationals of that Member State, in line with EU law[59].

Member States took multiple measures to promote the electoral rights of mobile EU citizens (who account for 14 million people[60]), including targeted information campaigns[61] using a variety of languages, and in certain cases developing specific leaflets or digital supports, or partnering with specialised organisations. Mobile EU citizens were also a specific target audience of the interinstitutional communication campaigns at EU level.

However, despite these efforts, turnout among mobile EU citizens appears to have remained lower than that of nationals, although the availability of relevant data varies greatly between Member States. Data received from Member States shows that the registration of mobile EU citizens in the Member States of residence

[52] A wide range of national good practices is highlighted in the Staff Working Document.
[53] Meetings of 16 January, 29 March and 27 September 2023.
[54] European Commission, *High-level event on Elections*, 23 October 2023.
[55] European Commission, *Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process*, 06 December 2023.
[56] See Staff Working Document.
[57] The Recommendation on elections called on Member States to support the electoral participation of persons with disabilities, both as voters and candidates, and prevent and remove the barriers they encounter when participating in elections, including the blanket removal of electoral rights of persons with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities without individual assessment and possibility of judicial review.
[58] While official figures are not available, it is estimated that there are three MEPs with disabilities in the new Parliament compared to seven in the previous Parliament, as indicated by the Vice-Chair of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee Katrin Langensiepen.
[59] This right, enshrined in Article 22(2) TFEU and Article 39(1) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, is given effect in Council Directive 93/109/EC of 6 December 1993 laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for citizens of the Union residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals, OJ L 329, 30.12.1993, p. 34–38. Mobile EU citizens may vote on the lists of their countries of origin in line with applicable national law (e.g. postal voting, voting at consular posts etc.).
[60] On 1 January 2024 there were 13.974.500 mobile EU citizens. EU population diversity by citizenship and country of birth - Statistics Explained.
[61] 20 Member States (Bulgaria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden) conducted targeted information campaigns to increase awareness of electoral rights and obligations among mobile EU citizens.

remains low across the EU from 0.28% of registrations in Latvia to 22.03% in France. There are also positive signs, however. For example, in Luxembourg, despite the proportion of mobile EU citizens registering to vote in the elections only being around 17.82% for 2024, this is the highest number ever recorded in Luxembourg. This figure has consistently increased since 1994, when it was just 7.4%. Most Member States do not collect data on the turnout of mobile EU citizens who registered to vote. Where data are available, turnout of mobile EU citizens ranges from one third to two thirds of those who had registered.

On the basis of the data available, 135 mobile EU citizens exercised their right to stand as a candidate in the elections. This is roughly consistent with the figures of 168 candidates in 2019 and 170 in 2014 as mobile EU citizens continue to represent approximately 1% of the total number of candidates that stood in the elections[62]. Two such MEPs were elected[63].

Other groups

Certain Member States reported about measures they have taken to foster electoral inclusion and representation of specific other groups[64]. Some civil society organisations have reported on challenges faced by such groups, including on the basis of demographic background or geographical location, such as people with a minority racial or ethnic background[65]. For example, while there is no official data, civil society organisations report that of the eight known Roma candidates (the largest ethnic minority in Europe) in the 2024 elections, none of them were elected[66].

2.4. Key findings and follow-up measures

The overall turnout and trends observed for various specific groups show the importance of continuing efforts to promote a high participation. There should be continued efforts to engage all citizens in European democracy, and to encourage democratic participation, including by supporting effective information campaigns, leveraging civil society initiatives and simplifying procedures. All relevant stakeholders, including national authorities, political parties, EU institutions and other actors including civil society organisations should contribute to the achievement of these objectives.

Measures should be taken to ensure that the high and increased interest in elections, and the fact that most citizens believe their voice counts in the EU[67] is reflected in a **higher turnout**. The substantial differences in turnout between Member States (ranging from 89.01% to 21.35%) should be addressed, focusing efforts on countries with a persistently low turnout.

As regards **communication to support electoral rights**, Member States should continue their efforts. A high level of collaboration between institutions, Member States, and other stakeholders will remain essential to driving effective information campaigns, promoting good practices, and enhancing citizens engagement and understanding of the electoral process.

As regards **participation by specific groups**, the relevant measures of the 2023 Recommendation on elections should be followed up further by Member States and political parties.

[62] A notable change compared to 2019 is the reduction in the number of Member States where mobile EU citizens stood as candidates, decreasing from 21 Member States in 2019 to 15 in 2024.
[63] This appears consistent compared to 2019, when 3 MEPs were elected in France and 2 in the United Kingdom.
[64] See Staff Working Document.
[65] The EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025 points out the Commission's intention to work with European political parties, the European Cooperation Network on Elections and civil society to improve participation of groups susceptible to marginalisation, such as people with a racial or ethnic background. The 2023 Recommendation on elections further indicates that "*it is necessary to support the participation in elections, as voters and as candidates, of all groups of citizens, taking into account their specific needs and the challenges they are confronted with*". See further in Staff Working Document.
[66] See Staff Working Document.
[67] As shown in the European Parliament's Spring 2024 Eurobarometer.

For **young people** in particular, support to exercise their electoral rights, both as voters and candidates, should be reinforced. Education, digital and media literacy and critical thinking should be promoted to further empower young people and encourage them to engage in European democracy and trust that exercising their electoral rights will ensure that their voice is heard. As outlined in the Union of Skills Communication[68] and the Preparedness Union Strategy[69], building skills for life is vital to ensuring democratic resilience. Based on a review of the Digital Education Action Plan, the Commission will present a 2030 Roadmap on the future of digital education and skills to promote equal access to digital education for all[70].

Accessible and diverse voting options are also important to support turnout of young citizens. Member States, political parties and other entities including schools, universities, youth associations and civil society organisations, could also further promote youth-friendly policies and procedures, and provide training and resources for young candidates.

The best possible use should be made of EU instruments aimed at enhancing youth citizens' democratic engagement. A new preparedness priority will be created under EU youth programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+, to promote preparedness, resilience, participation in democratic life and civic engagement.

As announced in the Political Guidelines of the President of the Commission for 2024-2029[71], a Presidents' Youth Advisory Board will be set up. All Commissioners have already organised a first edition of the annual Youth Policy Dialogues within the first 100 days of their mandate. For example, the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, Commissioner McGrath, has already met with young people specifically to discuss how democratic participation of young people, including in elections, could be improved[72].

As regards **women**, more needs to be done to achieve gender equality in politics, at both EU and national level. Women need to be further empowered to participate in political life. Women's full participation in all aspects of the political process is essential to building strong, representative and resilient democracies. Women need to be better protected against threats (including online) targeting them, which can limit their participation as candidates. Political parties have a central role to play in achieving this objective and should increase their efforts. More generally, further supporting measures at national level should be planned. At EU level, the Commission has recently presented a Roadmap for Women's Rights[73] which will help frame the work on a new Gender Equality Strategy, updating action on all issues affecting women, including their participation in politics. Support to improve safety of candidates and elected representatives should be enhanced (see Section 4.7 and 4.8).

Continued efforts to facilitate the exercise of **electoral rights by mobile EU citizens** are also important, including the need for Member States to carry out more targeted information campaigns in multiple languages and ensure simplified registration processes. Finding an agreement on the recast of the Directive on voting rights of mobile EU citizens (currently being discussed at interinstitutional level, see Section 5.1) is essential to providing a more robust framework to support the exercise of these citizens' electoral rights.

---

[68] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The Union of Skills, COM(2025)90 final, 5 March 2025.

[69] Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Preparedness Union Strategy, JOIN(2025)130 final, 26 March 2025.

[70] An initiative on AI in education and training will also lay down an AI literacy framework and support the integration of AI in the provision of in education and training. Teachers will have access to resources and professional development opportunities on the European School Education Platform.

[71] Ursula von der Leyen, *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029*, 18 July 2024.

[72] Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Michael McGrath on democratic empowerment, 10 March 2025.

[73] European Commission, *The EU Roadmap for Women's rights*, 7 March 2025.

Finally, all actors should continue to take active measures to meet the specific needs of **certain groups, including persons with disabilities**. The Commission is preparing a progress report to assess the implementation of the 2021-2030 Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including on the possible gaps and barriers that remain for persons with disabilities and, if deemed necessary, will propose new actions. The Commission will also, among others, continue to work on the full implementation of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participation.

3. COOPERATION IN SUPPORT OF FREE, FAIR AND RESILIENT ELECTIONS

3.1. The role of the European Cooperation Network on Elections and other cooperation efforts

Supporting free fair and resilient elections requires a whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach.

Unprecedented cooperation took place to support the resilience of the 2024 elections. The specific measures taken to coordinate responses to FIMI and disinformation, but also on cyberattacks, the malicious use of AI and other threats are discussed in more detail in Section 4.1.

The Commission has actively supported Member States' authorities by organising regular meetings of the European Cooperation Network on Elections since early 2019. ECNE consists of national contact points appointed by Member States to represent their national networks on elections and serve as a liaison point between national and European levels of coordination. The Network has organised more than 25 meetings since 2019.

The 2023 Recommendation on elections calls on Member States to strengthen cooperation on election-related matters in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections. The Recommendation also refers to cooperation of this Network with other relevant European networks.

ECNE discussions were held in close cooperation with other structures such as the Rapid Alert System[74], in relation to FIMI, and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) in relation to the issues within its remit[75]. The European Data Protection Board also participated in some meetings on issues related to the application of EU data protection law in the electoral context.

Interactions were also fostered with international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In the lead-up to the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, the work of the European Cooperation Network on Elections intensified. In October 2023, the Commission organized a High-Level Event on Elections with the membership of the Network. In November 2023, the Network took part in a joint tabletop exercise on cybersecurity of elections (see Section 4.5).

In addition to regular meetings, in the run-up to the elections eight thematic sessions were organised in the framework of the Network, including on inclusive participation and communication, countering disinformation and ensuring cybersecurity, the smooth organisation of voting for different groups of voters, and candidate safety[76].

[74] The Rapid Alert System is set up among the EU institutions and Member States to facilitate the sharing of insights related to disinformation campaigns and to coordinate responses. It consists of a dedicated digital platform and a network of 28 national contact points.

[75] A new independent European Board for Media Services, composed of representatives from the national media authorities or bodies and assisted by a Commission secretariat, was set up and became operational in February 2025. The Board replaces the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) that was established under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.

[76] The Staff Working Document contains a detailed overview of meetings held.

Cooperation between Member States' authorities was facilitated among others through a collaborative space, a mapping of the roles and responsibilities of different EU networks and bodies that support the organisation of free, fair and resilient elections to the European Parliament and contact lists to support operational exchanges during elections.

3.2. Key findings and follow-up measures

Inclusive and resilient elections cannot be achieved by any one stakeholder acting alone. While elections to the European Parliament are organised at national level, a growing set of EU common references on free, fair and resilient elections, based on EU Treaties, EU law, soft law, best practices and cooperation frameworks is gradually emerging. These common references address the digital field and inclusive democratic participation. They also go beyond that, supporting preparedness.

Reinforced mutual support and cooperation among Member States is now well established, centred on specific cooperation structures such as the European Cooperation Network on Elections which acts as a focal point, and drawing on the EU structures to promote information security and tackle disinformation and information manipulation, cooperating with other institutions and entities including the European Parliament.

The result has been that challenges have been addressed more rapidly and in a more coordinated manner, contributing to collective electoral resilience in the EU. Enhanced cooperation for the EU elections can also have a positive spill-over effect on national elections.

To effectively tackle an increasing number of evolving challenges, there is a need to further build on and strengthen this cooperation. The Commission will continue to foster a common approach in support of free, fair and resilient elections, gradually moving towards enhanced preparedness, operational cooperation and capacity-building.

4. PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY AND RESILIENCE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

4.1. Preparedness, monitoring and response

Leading up to the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, the Commission and other EU institutions launched several key actions to strengthen the EU's preparedness and ability to respond to challenges to the integrity of the electoral process, in close collaboration and coordination with Member States and different entities, such as the media, fact-checkers and civil society organisations. This effort allowed those involved to share insights, exchange experiences and best practices and coordinate responses to FIMI and disinformation, as well as cyberattacks, the inappropriate use of AI and other threats.

The 2023 Recommendation on elections includes different recommendations on protecting the integrity and resilience of the electoral process. For example, it encourages Member States to take measures to protect the information environment around elections and ensure that voters receive correct information. It recommends building resilience and developing public awareness, media literacy and critical thinking to address information manipulation, interference and disinformation related to elections. It also calls on Member States to develop training to relevant authorities and to facilitate cooperation among relevant stakeholders to tackle the information manipulation risks. It also encourages European and national political parties to consider making their political advertising available with information about the identity of the political party which sponsors it and where applicable, meaningful information about the targeting of the advertising and on the use of AI systems. The Recommendation also encourages Member States to take several measures to protect the election-related infrastructure and ensure resilience against cyber and other hybrid threats.

On 24 April 2024, the Belgian Presidency of the EU activated the **Integrated Political Crisis Response** (IPCR) arrangements in information-sharing mode in relation to foreign interference in the 2024 elections to the European Parliament[77]. Under the coordination of the Commission, this facilitated the exchange of

[77] Council of the European Union, *Foreign interference: Presidency reinforces exchange of information ahead of the June 2024 European elections*, 24 April 2024.

information among Member States and EU institutions. Monitoring and response were also ensured through the Commission's Network against Disinformation (NaD).

The Vice-President of the Commission responsible for values and transparency visited several Member States to support preparedness for the 2024 elections as part of a Democracy Tour[78].

Member States had continued to come together in the framework of the **European Cooperation Network on Elections** to discuss practical solutions to a wide range of threats. One of the operational tools that the Commission has made available to support Member States' authorities in building their capacity to detect and react appropriately to threats in the context of elections is the **joint election resilience mechanism**[79]. That mechanism supports exchanges among Member State experts, which several Member States used in the run-up to the elections[80].

The **European Parliament** also stepped up its activities in this area and strengthened networks both internally and with other EU institutions, Member State authorities and external partners. For example, in December 2023, the European Parliament hosted an elections-themed meeting of the Rapid Alert System, with the European Cooperation Network on Elections and the Council Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats ('ERCHT'). The EE24 website included a section dedicated to integrity, providing practical tips.

In the context of the implementation of **Digital Services Act** (DSA), specific actions were taken to support election preparedness[81]. In this regard, the Commission issued guidelines on recommended risk mitigation measures providers of very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs) should take to mitigate systemic risks related to elections[82]. As a follow-up to these guidelines, the Commission organised a stress test in the form of a tabletop exercise to prepare providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs, civil society organisations, Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs) from the Member States, and other stakeholders for information manipulation scenarios, and exercise coordinated responses within the framework of the DSA.

At the time of the elections to the European Parliament, the Commission had also initiated proceedings under the DSA against Meta and X for matters related to platforms manipulation, coordinated inauthentic behaviour and deceptive advertisements used to disseminate disinformation campaigns[83]. The Commission also sent several Requests for Information (RFIs) to designated providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs about election risk mitigation measures and disinformation[84].

During the first meeting of the **European Board for Digital Services** (EBDS) on 19 February 2024, an 'Ad Hoc Working Group on Elections' was established, with the aim of gathering expertise of Digital Services

[78] After the elections, the Vice-President presented an initial assessment of known interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament which was presented to the European Cooperation Network on Elections.

[79] European Commission, *European cooperation network on elections*, last accessed 18 February 2025.

[80] See Staff Working Document for more details.

[81] A report dedicated to the 2024 elections has been prepared by the European Board of Digital Services Coordinators listing the action taken under the framework of the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Code of Practice and by EDMO. *European Board for Digital Services publishes post-election report on the EU elections*, 29 July 2024.

[82] European Commission, *Guidelines for providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes*, 26 April 2024.

[83] European Commission, Vera Jourova Memo, *Known information interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament*, October 2024.

[84] Supervision of the designated very large online platforms and search engines under DSA | Shaping Europe's digital future.

Coordinators and competent authorities on electoral issues at the national level falling within the scope of the DSA, and to engage in dialogue and learn of country- and context-specific challenges[85].

The **Code of Practice on Disinformation,** the first worldwide industry-led framework in the digital field and source of industry best practices to limit the spread of online disinformation, also played a key role in supporting preparedness for the elections. Under the Code, online platforms signatories (Meta, TikTok, Google and Microsoft) made a series of commitments to tackle disinformation including in the context of elections. Signatories have implemented a series of actions to ensure preparedness during the electoral period, including enhanced cooperation with other civil society and factcheckers signatories.

Building on the Code's commitments, the signatories also implemented a **Rapid Response System** (RRS)[86], which enabled non-platform signatories to swiftly report time-sensitive content, accounts, or trends that they deemed to present threats to the integrity of the electoral process and discuss them with the platforms in light of their respective policies.

The **European Digital Media Observatory** ('EDMO') which is an independent network of fact-checkers, researchers and media literacy practitioners covering all EU Member States set up a Taskforce dedicated to the 2024 elections to the European Parliament to monitor the European information space during the electoral period[87]. The Task Force played an important role in exposing disinformation during the elections. EDMO issued daily briefs, weekly insights, early warnings and targeted investigations during the electoral period. It also ran a dedicated EU-wide media literacy campaign #BeElectionsSmart, to raise awareness about the risks of disinformation around the 2024 elections.

While most of the provisions of the new **Regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising**[88] will take effect as of 10 October 2025, within the scope of application of this Regulation, Article 3 (definitions) and Article 5 (provision of political advertising services in the Union), paragraph 1 were already applicable during the elections to the European Parliament, ensuring in particular that political advertisement services would not be restricted to a 'European political party' or a political group in the European Parliament, solely on the basis of its place of establishment.

A series of actions were taken by the European External Action Service (EEAS). The **Rapid Alert System**, coordinated by the EEAS, supported cooperation across Member States, including during the elections to the European Parliament. Updates were regularly provided to the European Cooperation Network on Elections, which provides a comprehensive scope for cooperation regarding issues related to electoral processes.

Finally, in 2022 the Council had adopted the Strategic Compass on Security and Defence[89], which features an **EU Hybrid Toolbox** bringing together all the relevant instruments to tackle hybrid threats to elections, including the **FIMI Toolbox**[90].

4.2. Foreign information manipulation and interference and disinformation

The Commission, the Parliament and the EEAS, closely monitored the foreign information manipulation and interference and disinformation threats before and during the elections and coordinated responses, actively

[85] The Ad Hoc Working group has since been integrated into one of the permanent working groups of the EBDS., Working Group 4 – Integrity of the information space. See Working Group 4 of the European Board for Digital Services – Integrity of the information space | Shaping Europe's digital future.

[86] Transparency Center, Code of Practice Signatories implement the Code's commitment for a Rapid Response System ahead of EP elections.

[87] European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), *EDMO Taskforce on 2024 European Elections*.

[88] Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2024 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, *OJ L, 2024/900.*

[89] Council of the EU, *A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade*, 21 March 2022.

[90] EEAS, *Tackling Disinformation, Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference*, 14 November 2024.

intervening to support a fair electoral space. Swift situational awareness updates were ensured through the IPCR.

While there was an increase in the volume of information manipulation around the elections[91], no large-scale disinformation or information manipulation incident or campaign was detected during election days.

As of 8 April 2024, the EDMO Taskforce issued daily and weekly briefs describing the disinformation narratives being spread in the EU, with the inputs of its 14 regional hubs (covering 100% of the EU)[92].

Providers of online platforms reported under the Code of Practice on Disinformation on the measures taken to protect the integrity of electoral processes based on the Code's commitments, and under the DSA's transparency database[93] on the number of content moderation decisions taken.

According to EDMO's estimates, EU-related disinformation increased from 5% in January to 15% in May 2024[94]. The narratives identified as problematic sought to diminish trust in the organisation of the ballots or undermine the credibility of the results, and addressed topics of key social interest (such as Ukraine, climate change or migrants).

The EEAS regularly reported via its EUvsDisinfo website and social media accounts[95] on attempts of election interference by Russia and its proxies. A dedicated series of articles[96] and social media products were published in the months leading up to the elections to analyse, expose and pre-bunk Kremlin/ Russian state-affiliated actors' deceptive narratives as well as tactics, techniques and procedures. The Russian malign activity focused on creating or stimulating splits and division in societies by spreading false information or flooding the information space with inauthentic content. Other tactics include smearing political leaders, sowing distrust and undermining public authorities. This outreach helped raise public awareness including among journalists, academia and civil society[97].

A handful of major Kremlin-linked operations that remained active during the elections period have been exposed by the EEAS in this context. For instance, the Doppelganger campaigns impersonated legitimate media websites and created inauthentic accounts on social media[98]. Overall, 42 incidents linked to Russian FIMI activity were detected[99], which escalated in the weeks leading up to the vote, peaking between 6 and 9 June, and continuing well beyond that. The pattern used was not new: setting up the FIMI infrastructure well in advance, attacks on the democratic process, cyber-enabled interference, a surge in activity just before the vote, and post-election efforts to undermine trust in the results.

Member States also took various measures to protect the information environment around the 2024 elections from foreign information manipulation, interference and disinformation. In response to the Commission survey, 15 Member States reported that they had taken measures to support or facilitate the transmission of swift messages and responses to protect the information environment[100]. 14 Member States reported that they

[91] As confirmed by the activation of the Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements for addressing foreign interference. Council of the European Union, *Foreign interference: Presidency reinforces exchange of information ahead of the June 2024 European elections*, 24 April 2024; see also European Commission, Vera Jourova Memo, *Known information interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament*, October 2024.

[92] European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), *EU election Disinfo Bulletin*.

[93] European Commission, *DSA Transparency Database*.

[94] European Digital Media Observatory, *EDMO Task Force on EU elections 2024*, 26 July 2024.

[95] EUvsDisinfo.

[96] https://euvsdisinfo.eu/european-elections/.

[97] The product material saw a very good pick-up which is in line with the trend of increased growth of users of EUvsDisinfo material (cfr. at least 38 million users reached in 2024 vs. ca. 25 million in 2023).

[98] For more details see Staff Working Document.

[99] EEAS, 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, Exposing the architecture of FIMI operations, March 2025.

[100] Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden.

had provided specific support for independent media and factchecking organisations[101], while 13 developed training for election or other relevant authorities[102].

To support people navigating the information space around the elections, a specific emphasis was placed on measures aimed at improving societal resilience and preparedness. This included support for digital and media literacy and critical thinking.

Specific initiatives taken by the EU institutions to improve societal resilience

- A dedicated joint multi-channel and multi-lingual awareness-raising campaign on risks related to information manipulation and the importance of developing critical thinking was carried out by the Commission and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) and broadcast in the Member States. The campaign video[103] generated 217 million impressions on social media, 7 million YouTube views and reaching 53 radio and TV channels in 17 countries whose population total 330 million.
- The Commission's toolkit on how to spot disinformation[104] was updated, encouraging secondary school teachers to equip their students with the essential skills to navigate the online landscape. A new webpage[105] provided a single access point to all useful information and resources on strategic communication and combating information manipulation.
- The statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat) launched a data and fact checking service for the European elections which facilitated journalists and fact-checkers' access to data and statistics on the EU[106].
- The European Parliament launched a series of videos (in 24 official EU languages) providing information on the techniques used by disinformation actors to deceive people.
- The European Parliament produced a leaflet with 10 tips on how to tackle disinformation.
- The EEAS produced a dedicated series of articles and insights on foreign information manipulation and interference[107].

4.3. Use of AI

The 2024 elections also brought AI increasingly into focus. AI has the potential to enhance efficiency, transparency, inclusiveness, and security in electoral processes. At the same time, it raises concerns about possible misuse, such as disinformation campaigns, election manipulation, and foreign interference, affecting the fairness of the democratic sphere and trust in institutions.

In the weeks before the vote, the amount of fact-checked disinformation containing AI-generated content detected by EDMO remained constant, at around 4% of the overall amount of fact-checked disinformation (5% during the months before)[108].

Civil society, researchers, and fact-checkers uncovered at least 131 instances of undeclared generative AI content during the election campaign, particularly from parties at national level (i.e. five different political

[101] Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden.
[102] Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, France, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden.
[103] https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-256994.
[104] https://learning-corner.learning.europa.eu/learning-materials/spot-and-fight-disinformation_en.
[105] https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strategic-communication-and-tackling-disinformation_en.
[106] Eurostat, *Eurostat launches data and fact-checking service for the European elections*, 10 May 2024.
[107] European Commission, *European elections: EU institutions prepared to counter disinformation*, 05 June 2024.
[108] European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), *Final Report – Outputs and outcomes of a community-wide effort*, 24 July 2024.

parties in France, Belgium, and Italy)[109]. With limited exceptions, highly-manipulative 'deepfakes' were not prominent during the 2024 elections. Instead, AI was used to produce 'shallowfakes', combining out-of-context captions with images of politicians or events, and 'cheapfakes', with rather obvious manipulation of video and image[110].

AI was used to some extent both as a tool for disinformation and FIMI, and within domestic political debate. Findings from civil society organisations highlighted that some political parties used unlabelled generative AI to spread misleading messages[111]. In addition, AI tools were reportedly exploited in foreign influence operations, such as Russian campaigns and deepfake audio targeting European political leaders.

The European Union is leading the way in making AI safer and more trustworthy, while ambitiously addressing the risks posed by its misuse. Important new legislative tools in this regard, including the AI Act[112] and the Regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising were not yet, however, fully in application for the 2024 elections.

At the same time, providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs are already subject to a clear obligation under the DSA to assess and mitigate systemic risks to electoral processes and civic discourse, including when linked to the spread of manipulated content. In this context, the DSA election guidelines therefore also recommended mitigation measures linked to generative AI that providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs should take[113]. In view of the elections, the Commission sent requests for information on generative AI risks to six Very Large Online Platforms and two Very Large Online Search Engines[114].

To support the identification of AI related issues, the EDMO Task Force was assisted by a pool of AI experts to swiftly detect and expose deceptive or misleading AI-generated content.

In addition, the 2023 Recommendation on elections encouraged political parties to adopt campaign pledges and codes of conduct on election integrity, which should encompass in particular the pledge to refrain from manipulative behaviour, in particular producing, using or disseminating falsified, fabricated, doxed or stolen data or material, including deep fakes generated by AI systems. Political parties should also provide information about the use of AI systems in election campaigns. The Recommendation led to a joint Code of Conduct for political parties (see Section 4.6).

4.4. Data protection

Electoral campaigns are accompanied by personalised messages to voters, relying on the processing of their personal data. The 2024 elections were the second European elections to which the General Data Protection

[109] See Staff Working Document.

[110] European Commission, *Known information interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament*, October 2024.

[111] In the context of domestic political communication, investigations by DFRLab, Alliance4 Europe and AI Forensics collected 131 instances of unlabelled generative-AI content shared by European and national political parties on platforms such as Instagram, X, Facebook, Vkontakte and Telegram.

[112] Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act), *OJ L, 2024/1689, 12.7.2024*.

[113] Communication from the Commission – Commission Guidelines for providers of Very Large Online Platforms and Very Large Online Search Engines on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes pursuant to Article 35(3) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, *OJ C, C/2024/3014, 26.4.2024.*

[114] European Commission, *Commission sends requests for information on generative AI risks to six Very Large Online Platforms and two Very Large Online Search Engines under the Digital Services Act*, 14 March 2024.

Regulation (GDPR)[115] applied. In 2018, the Commission also published specific guidance on the application of EU data protection law in the electoral context, which remained relevant for the 2024 elections[116].

As authorities in charge of oversight and enforcement of the GDPR in the Member States, national data protection authorities (DPAs) reported varying levels of involvement in election-related activities. While some DPAs were involved in the work of national election networks, other DPAs reported limited to no involvement in that work.

Various DPAs took proactive measures to address data protection issues and ensure compliance with data protection rules in the electoral process, for example by issuing recommendations, instructions and guidelines, though engagement with social media platforms was overall limited. Several DPAs conducted investigations on the application of data protection rules in the context of elections based on information on suspected cases of non-compliance reported to them and on complaints submitted under Article 77 GDPR.

4.5. Protecting election-related infrastructure and ensuring cyber resilience

Voter registration databases, e-voting systems and other information systems used to manage electoral operations could be at risk of cyberattack. The physical security of polling stations and counting places, and facilities, assets and systems for the printing, transportation and storage of ballots and other relevant election materials must also be ensured.

The Commission worked with Member State authorities to manage such risks in the 2024 elections, and, with the support of the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and in cooperation with the European Parliament, organised a tabletop exercise on cybersecurity involving the membership of the European Cooperation Network on Elections. The exercise was funded by the Commission through the joint electoral resilience mechanism. It sought to test and support preparedness of Member States against cyberattacks and hybrid threats, including in the framework of information manipulation and disinformation campaigns.

Following up on the 2023 Recommendation on elections and the tabletop exercise, the Network and Information Systems (NIS) Cooperation Group supported by the Commission, ECNE and ENISA updated the Compendium on the Cybersecurity of Election Technology. The Commission also presented a Compendium of e-voting and other information and communication technology practices[117] in December 2023. This Compendium was developed in cooperation with Member States in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, and the Council of Europe. The European Cooperation Network on Elections also frequently discussed cybersecurity risks in its work.

The NIS Cooperation Group, the Computer Security Incident Response Team Network, and the EU Cyber Crisis Liaison Organisation Network also strengthened their cooperation ahead of the elections. Cyber-preparedness exercises were organised and an interinstitutional Cyber Crisis Task Force was set up.

Member States have reportedly taken steps to secure physical and digital election infrastructure. Most Member States carried out or updated risk assessments of the infrastructure and took measures to ensure a high level of security. Almost all Member States reported that they had conducted test crisis managements and contingency plans, and offered support and training to all relevant stakeholders.

Several Member States reported that they had cooperated with private entities to ensure a high level of cybersecurity[118], while a majority noted that the authority responsible for cybersecurity had been involved in

[115] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), *OJ L 119, 4.5.2016*.

[116] *Guidance on the application of Union data protection law in the electoral Context — contribution from the European Commission to the Leaders' meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018*, COM(2018) 638 final, 12 September 2018.

[117] European Commission, *Compendium of e-voting and other ICT practices*, 06 December 2023.

[118] Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden.

their national electoral network. Many Member States also made efforts to increase awareness of the online safety of political parties, candidates and elections officials[119].

Cybersecurity efforts by political parties during the 2024 elections varied greatly. Among all national political parties surveyed, about half reported that they had taken cybersecurity measures of some sort. Of these, almost 30% had adopted more advanced practices such as risk assessments, training, and penetration testing. Among the European political parties surveyed, around 83% implemented advanced cybersecurity measures.

During the electoral period, minor cybersecurity incidents were recorded, mostly in the form of Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks led by pro-Russian hacktivist groups[120].

4.6. Fair campaigning and funding of the election campaign

Fair campaigning

The 2023 Recommendation on elections encouraged European and national political parties and campaign organisations to develop and adhere to voluntary codes of conduct or campaign pledges that support free, fair, and resilient elections. Based on this Recommendation, all European political parties signed a Code of Conduct for the 2024 European Parliament elections at a ceremony hosted by the Commission[121]. The Code was also signed by a limited number of national political parties. The Code of Conduct promotes core values such as transparency, fairness, and truthfulness in communication, while actively countering disinformation and AI-driven manipulation.

National and European political parties demonstrated differing levels of adherence to the Code of Conduct, with some being proactive by introducing additional pledges, conducting post-election reviews, and promoting transparency in campaign financing.

For their part, Member States adopted a variety of approaches to support election integrity and fair campaigning in preparation for the elections. Some Member States reported that they had robust legislative provisions to ensure election integrity, while others relied on integrity pledges and voluntary ethical codes[122].

Funding of the election campaign

The integrity of elections is dependent on many factors, including transparency in party financing, which helps to maintain trust, prevent undue influence, and ensure accountability, particularly regarding donations from third countries or undisclosed sources.

The 2023 Recommendation on elections recommends Member States to address possible gaps related to donations and other funding from third countries, in particular by promoting transparency of donations and other funding and by limiting donations up to a certain amount or prohibiting donations to national political actors, when such donations come from third countries. Political parties should assess risks stemming from donations from third countries and donations potentially linked to criminal activity including corruption, money laundering and organised crime.

The rules and frameworks on political funding are rather diverse among the Member States. Several Member States have adopted or are considering measures to increase transparency and oversight for political party financing, also with a view to supporting democratic accountability and preventing foreign interference[123].

Some Member States have reported that they allow donations from natural persons from third countries, with limits in certain cases, while others allow funding from third countries under specific conditions. Several

[119] Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Slovenia.
[120] European Commission, *Known information interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament*, October 2024.
[121] International Idea, *CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS*, 04 April 2024.
[122] See Staff Working Document.
[123] European Commission, 2024 Rule of Law report, 24 July 2024.

Member States impose thresholds for donations from third countries, while others allow certain narrow exceptions for contributions complying with national rules or from specific entities. Several others have introduced, or are considering, complete bans on funding from third countries.

Rules applying to European political parties and their affiliated foundations are laid down in Regulation (EU) 1141/2014, which is currently under revision, in particular to clarify the funding provisions (see Section 5.2)[124].

4.7. Safety: protection of candidates and elected representatives

Politicians and political candidates can face undue pressures and threats to their security, which has a negative spill-over effect on inclusive democratic representation. Ensuring their safety emerged as a topic of discussion during these elections.

In their replies to the Commission survey, several European and national political parties reported that they were aware of incidents of harassment and violence, both online and offline, with women candidates and minorities being more frequently targeted, proportionately. Around 41% of the national parties surveyed had put in place measures to prevent or combat online violence or threats against candidates.

Reports by electoral observers[125] also highlight alarming incidents of violence, harassment, and intimidation in several Member States. Specific groups, including women, are particularly at risk.

4.8. Key findings and follow-up measures

The 2024 elections took place amidst significant and deep changes in the information ecosystem. The pressure on the electoral process has increased both online and offline, hostile interference and disinformation attempts are becoming stronger, and manipulation methods more diverse and sophisticated.

At the same time, despite the difficult information environment, the absence of major incidents capable of disrupting the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, demonstrates the EU's preparedness for safeguarding electoral processes and ensuring free, fair and resilient elections.

The wide range of preparedness measures, such as the activation of the Integrated Political Crisis Response, the guidelines on elections for providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs, the discussions in the European Cooperation Network on Elections, the various tabletop exercises and the use of the Rapid Response System under the Code of Practice on Disinformation, all contributed to heightened preparedness, easier exchange of information and quick detection and follow-up of incidents. The unprecedented preparedness and cooperation structures, supported by a wide range of communication measures to boost societal resilience, have proven essential to address the risks of foreign information manipulation, interference and disinformation during the elections. Proactive measures by data protection authorities helped to address data protection issues and ensure compliance with data protection rules in the electoral process. A high level of cybersecurity was ensured, and fair campaigning was supported.

Nevertheless, continued vigilance is needed. Threats continue to evolve very quickly, highlighting the need to reinforce efforts and operational capability in terms of situational awareness and response, building on cross-sectoral stakeholder cooperation.

Looking ahead, implementation of relevant national and EU legislation is essential, as well as strong oversight building on collaboration between the various authorities involved in the electoral process.

Exchanges of experiences on elections, including the assessment of incidents and unexpected events affecting the smooth conduct of elections will continue to be important.

In the context of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, the Commission has supported the development of an operational checklist on election integrity and a risk management matrix to serve as

[124] Following the judgement of the General Court of 25 November 2020 in case T-107/19 ACRE v. Parliament.

[125] OSCE/ODIHR, *Special Election Assessment Mission, European Parliament Elections 6-9 June 2024*, 27 November 2024; Election-Watch.EU, *Election Assessment Mission, Final Report, European Parliament Elections 6-9 June 2024*, September 2024.

accessible points of reference for national preparedness. It is also mapping the applicable frameworks regarding equal opportunities for political candidates.

Online platforms providing services in the EU should abide by relevant legislation support a fair EU democratic space including in terms of equal opportunities for candidates. Other actors, including civil society, elections observers and the media also play a key role in support of a fair democratic space.

Tools such as those provided by the DSA have shown their added value in the context of the 2024 elections to the European Parliament to ensure that systemic risks to civic discourse and electoral processes on very large online platforms and search engines were adequately addressed and mitigated. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation and take action within the framework of its responsibility under the DSA where warranted. Since the integration of the voluntary Code of Practice on Disinformation into the regulatory framework of the DSA in February 2025, the Commission may rely on the Code as a benchmark for measures that platforms can apply to address systemic risks related to disinformation.

Once the AI Act is fully implemented[126], deepfakes will have to be clearly labelled and all AI-generated content marked, allowing social media users to easily detect such content. General-purpose AI models posing systemic risks will also have to be subject to measures to address and mitigate risks to democracies and elections. Certain unacceptable manipulative AI practices are prohibited (for instance subliminal message generation) under the AI Act. High-risk AI systems – including those intended to influence the outcome of an election or referendum – will have to meet stringent requirements before they are placed on the market and will be subject to regular assessments.

The full application of the new Regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising as of October 2025 will further enrich the toolbox, while fully respecting freedom of expression, by providing common transparency standards and framing the targeting and delivering of political advertising. This Regulation, which was not yet fully applicable during the 2024 elections, provides for EU common standards addressing certain problematic practices in the dissemination of political advertising in the EU, contributing to a fair democratic debate. The Regulation will also impose specific requirements in the context of targeting and ad-delivery techniques involving personal data, including when using AI. The Commission is supporting the upcoming full entry into application of the Regulation by preparing guidance and implementing acts on labels and notices. National authorities will need to have the necessary resources to adequately supervise compliance with this Regulation.

Furthermore, supporting robust data protection compliance while addressing emerging challenges, such as the processing of personal data in the context of social media and AI, will also remain essential to safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process.

It is important to remain alert to the risk of cyberattacks, making use of increasingly refined technology. More should also be done at the level of national political parties, such as increasing preparedness, awareness, coordination and support to address the disparities in cybersecurity protective measures, and to ensure consistent protection that covers election-related infrastructure at both EU and national level.

The signature of the Code of Conduct by European Political Parties was a positive step forward in terms of supporting fair campaigning, and further commitment and adherence to codes and pledges by political parties, including national parties, would help to enhance campaign integrity, including by making party financing more transparent. An agreement as regards the revision of Regulation (EU) 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations, currently pending with the co-legislators, will also contribute to address risks related to funding.

[126] The AI Act entered into force on 1 August 2024 and will be fully applicable 2 years later on 2 August 2026, with some exceptions: prohibitions and AI literacy obligations entered into application from 2 February 2025, the governance rules and the obligations for general-purpose AI models become applicable on 2 August 2025, and the rules for high-risk AI systems - embedded into regulated products - have an extended transition period until 2 August 2027.

There is a need to foster a positive and secure environment, to enable political candidates and those elected to exercise their political responsibilities, without fear. Improved data gathering with a view to better understanding the increased threats to candidates and elected representatives would be helpful. The Commission is committed to work to better protect the safety of political candidates and elected representatives in the context of the preparation of the European Democracy Shield.

A further strengthening of the operational frameworks on electoral integrity, fostering cooperation among Member States on this topic, enhancing alignment and consistency between measures taken in other fields, and engaging the whole of society, will also be important in terms of building 'comprehensive preparedness' for the EU as a whole, as highlighted among others in the Niinistö report[127].

5. THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION AND THE EXERCISE OF EU ELECTORAL RIGHTS

5.1. The European dimension

The outcome of elections to the European Parliament has direct implications for citizens. It has an impact for instance on how policies are shaped and what laws are passed at European level and implemented across the EU. Citizens need to know what is at stake at European level if they are to make informed choices. However, the political debate and campaign for the 2024 elections in the Member States remained dominated by national and local issues, with the link to the European level being less well discussed and understood.

The European Parliament actively promoted the European dimension of the elections by organising an election night, providing the media with real-time updates on turnout and the composition of the Parliament.

Promoting the European dimension of the elections strengthens the link between citizens and the European institutions and therefore the democratic legitimacy of European decision-making.

Regulation (EU) 1141/2014 establishes a specific legal, financial and regulatory system for European political parties and European political foundations. In 2021 the Commission proposed a recast of this Regulation with amendments to clarify the funding provisions, facilitate European political parties' interactions with their national member parties and across borders, increase transparency, in particular in relation to political advertisements and donations, cut excessive administrative burden and increase the financial viability of European political parties and foundations. This proposal remains under negotiation.

The 2023 Recommendation on elections encourages Member States to take measures to enhance the European nature of the elections to the European Parliament, including to help European political parties and political groups of the European Parliament conduct their campaigns. It calls on Member States to enable the announcement of candidates and the start of campaigning in elections to the European Parliament at least 6 weeks prior to the election day. It encourages giving information to the public on affiliations between national political parties and European political parties before and during the elections. The Recommendation also encourages national political parties to make publicly known before the start of the electoral campaign, which European political party they are affiliated with.

Member States apply a range of timeframes for the announcement of candidates and campaigning timelines for the European Parliament elections. For example, in Germany, Portugal, and Sweden, campaigning can begin more than nine months before election day, offering extended periods for political engagement. In Finland, campaigning starts between six and nine months before the elections, while in countries such as Belgium, Czechia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Slovakia, campaigns typically begin three to six months ahead. In

[127] European Commission, *'Strengthening Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness: Report by Special Adviser Niinistö'*, 30 October 2024.

the majority of countries, the announcement of candidates and the start of campaigning was only permitted within three months of the elections.

Several Member States have taken steps to enhance transparency regarding affiliations between national and European political parties. For instance, Italy facilitates public access to this information through its Central Directorate for Electoral Services, publishing detailed instructions referencing EU rules and ensuring that affiliations are indicated on ballots. Similarly, Lithuania highlights these affiliations on ballots and encourages public awareness efforts. In many other countries, the relevant authorities rely on institutional websites to disseminate details.

National political parties are gradually introducing more transparency regarding their affiliations to European political parties. In the Commission survey, many parties across all political spectrums reported that they had publicly declared their European political party affiliations before the start of the European electoral campaign. Some also invited prominent European political figures to dedicated congresses and training sessions on the elections that were aimed at boosting voter turnout.

5.2. Monitoring and enforcement of EU electoral rights and electoral law

The elections to the European Parliament are unique. The Member States, each with their national campaigns, national lists and distinctive rules and traditions, contribute to a collective result, with elected MEPs representing all EU citizens.

Certain common principles and procedures are set out in EU law, including the 1976 Electoral Act and the rules enabling mobile EU citizens to exercise their right to vote and stand in the elections to the European Parliament in their country of residence.

Electoral Act

In 2015, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the reform of the EU's electoral law, suggesting certain targeted amendments to enhance the democratic dimension of the European elections and the legitimacy of the EU's decision-making process. On 7 June 2018, the Council approved a draft decision amending the Electoral Act (Council Decision 2018/994). Ratification of this decision has advanced but is not yet concluded.

On 3 May 2022 the European Parliament adopted its proposal for a new Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, aimed at repealing the existing Electoral Act[128]. It proposes a comprehensive reform and extension of the electoral rules laid down at EU level for the organisation of the elections to the European Parliament, including a European constituency to allow for the election of an additional 28 MEPs from EU-wide lists (in addition to the national lists)[129]. Discussions on this proposal did not progress in the Council.

Although the Commission does not have a formal role in the process, it has committed to supporting the European Parliament in securing an agreement on this proposal.

Electoral rights

[128] European Parliament legislative resolution of 3 May 2022 on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that Decision (2020/2220(INL) – 2022/0902(APP)).

[129] The proposal also includes provisions on common campaigning rules, administrative deadlines, a single election day on 9 May, common voting and candidacy periods, compulsory access to postal voting and support for other methods, provisions to strengthen the participation of citizens with disabilities and to promote gender equality in the candidates standing for elections.

The 2021 package of measures to reinforce democracy and protect the integrity of elections, adopted by the Commission, included two legislative proposals to recast the Directives on the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament and municipal elections for EU citizens residing in a Member State other than their country of origin[130]. These initiatives aim to update, clarify and strengthen the existing rules in order to address the difficulties faced by mobile EU citizens, and to ensure broad and inclusive participation in elections to the European Parliament, support mobile EU citizens in the exercise of their rights and protect the integrity of elections.

The European Parliament adopted its opinions on these proposals on 14 February 2023. The discussions in the Council have progressed significantly on both files[131]. An agreement in Council was found in April 2024 on the Directive on European Parliament elections and the text is currently with the European Parliament for a consultation process[132].

Prevention of multiple voting

By means of technical updates, the Commission improved the crypto tool and the secure platform for data encryption of mobile EU citizen voters and candidates, supporting exchanges between Member States aiming at preventing multiple voting. In the context of the Expert Group on electoral matters[133], it also organised testing and provided updated guidelines on the crypto tool and secure platform to support Member States in the efficient use of these tools. This facilitated secure data exchange between Member States in order to prevent multiple voting and double candidacies, among mobile EU citizens.

On this basis, between January and June 2024, Member States encrypted more than 1 600 voters and candidates list files and exchanged data on around 1 million voters and 135 candidates. This exchange resulted in the identification of over 300 000 multiple registrations of citizens.

Reports by electoral observers such as OSCE/OIDHR highlight the substantial efforts by the Commission and Member States to curb multiple voting, stating that the practice of multiple voting does not appear to be widespread. At the same time, observers recommend strengthening the data exchange process to enhance the overall effectiveness of the prevention of multiple voting.

The remaining challenges in terms of preventing double voting are mainly linked to the differences in national laws and procedures, especially regarding electoral rolls deadlines, which has an impact on the period of the data exchange[134].

As part of their efforts to provide mobile EU citizens with information, Member States reported having raised awareness regarding the prohibition of multiple voting and related sanctions.

---

[130] Proposal for a Council Directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM/2021/732 final; Proposal for a Council Directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM(2021)733 final.

[131] The discussions on the Directive on municipal elections are still ongoing.

[132] The text is subject to a special legislative procedure with unanimity in Council and consultation of the European Parliament.

[133] Register of Commission Expert Groups and other Similar Entities, Expert group on electoral matters - Right to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections for the EP and in municipal elections (E00617).

[134] As Member States usually do not know which of their nationals also have the nationality of another Member State, dual nationals can register in two Member States. The 1976 Electoral Acts prohibits voting more than once. Most Member States have in place sanctions against double voting. Most Member States that replied to the survey launched by the Commission also reported having provided information on the prohibition of multiple voting and the applicable sanctions, in their awareness raising campaigns.

The entry into application of the Council Decision 2018/994 amending the Electoral Law and the adoption of the recast of the Directive 93/109/EC would reinforce the tools available to Member States to address double voting.

Oversight by the Commission and evolution of relevant EU case-law

National competent authorities and courts have the primary responsibility of ensuring compliance with national legislation, EU law and relevant international standards applicable to the conduct and organisation of elections.

As guardian of the Treaties, the Commission took various actions to ensure that EU law was being implemented and to eliminate potential obstacles to the exercise of EU citizens' electoral rights. The Commission is in regular dialogue with Member States and provides support to citizens.

On 13 November 2024, in a case brought by the Commission against Czechia and Poland regarding restrictions on joining domestic political parties for mobile EU citizens[135], the Court of Justice of the EU ruled that if the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in local and European elections is to be exercised effectively, mobile EU citizens must be afforded equal access to the means available to nationals of that Member State for the purpose of exercising that right. Given that membership of a political party contributes significantly to the exercise of the electoral rights conferred by EU law, the Court of Justice of the EU found that Czechia and Poland infringed EU law by denying mobile EU citizens the right to become members of a political party[136].

The Commission received several letters from EU citizens raising specific issues in different Member States including deadlines for candidate registration, voting by dual nationals, available remedies, electoral rights of specific groups or voting from a third country.

Certain difficulties in participation by mobile EU citizens have been reported by Member States and electoral observers:

- returning nationals (citizens who moved back to their country of origin from other Member States) who were not aware of having to take steps to be deleted from the electoral roll of the Member State of previous residence or not able to apply for removal from the electoral roll after a certain deadline;
- citizens who were not aware of their EU citizenship right to vote for candidates of the Member State of residence instead of the Member State of origin;
- citizens who were not aware of the formalities and deadlines for submitting applications to be registered in the electoral roll in the Member State of residence and for postal voting;
- citizens not being aware of their registration status (whether they are in the electoral roll in the Member State of origin or in the Member State of residence);
- language barriers and cumbersome or unclear procedures for registration in Member State of residence.

The Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC) acted as citizens' helpline for the 2024 elections at EU level and answered 2 797 questions related to the elections between September 2023 and June 2024. Approximately 60% of cases related to electoral rights and formalities[137]. Most people contacted the EDCC with questions about practicalities, such as the locations and opening times of polling stations and which documents they should bring. Approximately 20% of cases related to perceived missing information from Member States and perceived obstacles or incidents preventing people from voting on election days[138].

[135] European Commission – Press release, *EU citizens' electoral rights: Commission decides to refer CZECHIA and POLAND to the Court of Justice*, 09 June 2021.
[136] Cases C-808/21 and C-814/21.
[137] For more details see the accompanying Staff Working Document.
[138] For more details see the accompanying Staff Working Document.

5.3. Key findings and follow-up measures

Strengthening the European dimension of the elections to the European Parliament, by enhancing transparency, raising public awareness of affiliations between national and European political parties, and ensuring equal campaign opportunities for all will remain a key objective ahead of the next electoral term.

In this regard, the Commission will continue to support the European Parliament in securing an agreement on its proposal for a new Electoral Act, and will support co-legislators in concluding the negotiations on the revision of Regulation 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations.

Reaching an agreement on the recast of the Directive on electoral rights of mobile EU citizens in elections to the European Parliament is essential to providing a more robust framework to support the exercise of electoral rights by mobile EU citizens, including the prevention of multiple voting. The Directive will provide common templates that Member States may use in their voter and candidate registration procedures. It will contribute to the harmonisation of voter and candidate registration procedures in Member States and increase the likelihood that mobile EU citizens will be accurately identified by their home Member State, consequently ensuring that they do not vote or stand as a candidate twice in the same elections. This is consistent with the specific measures for ensuring easy registration set out in the 2023 Recommendation on elections.

Close cooperation among EU institutions to inform and engage citizens, including by maintaining an elections helpline providing EU citizens with an easy way to contact EU Institutions on their electoral rights, through the Europe Direct Contact Centre (EDCC), is crucial.

The Commission will continue to take measures to ensure that EU law is being implemented and to eliminate potential obstacles to the exercise of EU citizens' electoral rights, including mobile citizens.

6. ELECTION OBSERVATION

The 2023 Recommendation on elections promotes election observation including by citizens as it is an efficient way to engage citizens with the electoral process and improve public trust in elections.

Elections observation supports the integrity of electoral processes. The Commission actively engaged with electoral observers in the context of the follow-up to its 2023 Recommendation on elections, and the invitation addressed to Member States to encourage and facilitate independent election observation. Measures to promote election observation have been discussed in the context of the European Cooperation Network on Elections and election observers took part in various meetings.

In response to the Commission survey, almost 70% of Member States confirmed that they had taken specific steps to facilitate observation of the 2024 elections by citizens and international organisations. Many Member States supported election observation through national frameworks, training programmes, and partnerships with international organisations such as OSCE/ODIHR and with civil society organisations such as Election-Watch.EU.

Approximately 40% of almost 60 national political parties that replied to the Commission's survey reported some form of collaboration with election observers. In this regard, multiple parties reported having cooperated with the OSCE/ODIHR observation work.

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed a special election assessment mission (SEAM) consisting of a core team of seven international experts based in Brussels and 10 regional analysts deployed across EU Member States. The final report issued by OSCE/ODIHR indicates that the elections were genuinely competitive, professionally organised and inclusive. Some areas identified for more attention concerned accessibility for persons with disabilities, inconsistencies in electoral regulations, and the need to address threats and intimidation including towards journalists.

The civil society organisation Election-Watch.EU conducted its second election assessment mission to the European Parliament elections in all 27 EU Member States with 77 election experts and observers and 10 like-minded citizen election observer organisations.

Facilitating access for election observation, including by citizens, should be further supported. The Commission will increase its efforts to support the exchange of best practice on election observation, including in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections.

7. CONCLUSIONS

'*Europe's future in a fractured world will depend on having a strong democracy and on defending the values that give us the freedoms and rights that we cherish*'[139].

Free, fair and resilient elections are at the core of EU democracy and trust in EU institutions. The 2024 elections to the European Parliament saw a stable turnout and a broad range of communication activities to support this. The EU stepped up to the challenge of ensuring the resilience and integrity of the 2024 elections. Thanks to thorough preparedness and strengthened cooperation at all levels, the elections took place without major disruptions. The 2024 elections saw an unprecedented level of cooperation between institutions, Member States and a variety of other stakeholders.

At the same time, the data in this report suggests that further improvements of the inclusiveness of electoral participation and citizens' engagement are needed. Support to a high turnout and inclusive participation in European democracy, including of young people, therefore remains essential. There is also a need to further support efforts to enhance the European dimension of the elections, and best practices in election observation. Efforts to protect the rights of EU citizens and EU values should continue. To achieve these goals, a wide range of actors have an important role to play under a whole-of-society approach. Member States also play a key role as the main responsibilities for the conduct and organisation of elections lie with them.

Since the elections to the European Parliament, developments related to national elections in the EU Member States, in candidate countries and in the European neighbourhood, show the importance of reinforcing situational awareness and other efforts to monitor, detect, analyse and address challenges and threats to electoral processes.

The environment in which challenges and threats to elections are arising is evolving quickly, as are the tactics and techniques used. Disinformation campaigns and other manipulations of information by a variety of hostile actors, from outside and from within the EU, are frequent occurrences, attempting to diminish citizens' motivation to vote, affecting trust in democratic institutions. Manipulative techniques rely on constantly evolving technology, including using artificial intelligence. Opaque funding systems in the new digital ecosystems present a challenge to oversight mechanisms. Traditional frameworks developed to ensure equal opportunities for political parties and candidates in elections (as regards media coverage for example) may not be sufficient to address the realities of new digital ecosystems.

Election resilience at national and EU level is mutually reinforcing. There is a need to further support the integrity of electoral environments, including by addressing gaps in the regulatory environment and providing strong and coordinated oversight by competent authorities. To support such coherent oversight, it would be important to ensure stronger cooperation among the national authorities relevant to electoral processes, including through national election networks.

Enhancing preparedness, risk mitigation and support between Member States is also essential. As the work of the European Cooperation Network on Elections has shown its added value by bringing together contact points of national networks, its work should be fostered, with that network playing its role as a focal point of cooperation on elections in the EU.

[139] Ursula von der Leyen, *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029*, 18 July 2024.

In order to protect free and fair elections, particular attention should be paid to ensuring that elections take place in an environment in which independent and pluralistic media and civil society organisations can play their democratic role. Independent election observation should be further supported.

Building on the European Democracy Action Plan and the Defence of Democracy Package, as well as the lessons learned from the 2024 European elections that are outlined in this report, the Commission will present a strategic framework to further safeguard and strengthen democracy in the EU under the forthcoming European Democracy Shield.