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Rights & Representation: What Young Europeans in London know and think about their rights and politics in the UK

Research report for the3million and the Greater London Authority (GLA)
Young Europeans Citizens' Led Engagement Programme

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May 2020

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Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the grant from the Greater London Authority (GLA) Citizens' Led Engagement Programme. Most importantly, this funding enabled 13 young Europeans to do paid work experience with the3million as peer researchers in the summer of 2019 and receive research skills training. I am grateful for the support from Hannah Goulding, Rhiannon Watson and Elisabeth Pop from City Hall who offered feedback at various stages of the research.

This research is original because it is about young Europeans and conducted by young Europeans themselves. My thanks go to my team who organised and conducted the focus groups – Asia, Anaïs, Veronica, Jan, Dasha, David, Blanka, Valentin, Maria, Polina, Ilona and Alexandra. I am grateful for working with Ioana, our young European video researcher, who interviewed young Europeans and local politicians for a short documentary capturing many of the key findings in this research. Special thanks to Veronica who assisted with data analysis and Ilona and Anaïs who are also volunteering time for the dissemination of this project.

I thank all the young Europeans who participated in the focus groups or spoke to the peer researchers more informally through unrecorded conversations. I am also grateful to the local London councillors who found time to add their valuable local-level insight to this research.

I wish to thank the team at the3million who have been supportive of this project and enabled me to manage it alongside the other work I do as Chair of Young Europeans. I wish to mention Nicolas Hatton, Katia Widlak, Kuba Jablonowski, Monique Hawkins and Maike Bohn who have offered advice on various stages of this research.

Research collaboration

the3million

the3million is the largest grassroots organisation campaigning for the rights of EU citizens in the UK. the3million has been engaged in a range of activities, including lobbying in the UK and the EU, litigation, media and outreach work. the3million has been recognised as one of the top changemakers in the Big Issue Top 100 Changemakers 2020 for its work on campaigning for Europeans' rights in the UK. Young Europeans is a research project managed by Alexandra Bulat within the3million, looking more specifically at the concerns and issues for Europeans in the 16-30-year-old age group who have less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. This work has benefitted from the support of the GLA Citizens' Led Engagement Programme.

Twitter: @the3million

Hashtags: #YoungEuropeans #RightsAndRepresentation

Read more about the3million at: www.the3million.org.uk

Greater London Authority (GLA)

The Young Europeans Citizens' Led Engagement Programme was funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA). This programme funds various organisations aiming to strengthen connections and engagement with communities whose voice and influence on public policy is underrepresented. The programme aims to improve insights into communities who do not currently have a voice at City Hall, to identify and develop community leaders within community groups and support capacity building within these groups. The Citizens' Led Engagement Programme was created to generate valuable insight to inform policy and practice and engage communities with the work of the GLA.

Twitter: @MayorofLondon

Hashtag: #CitizensLedEngagement

Read more about the Citizens' Led Engagement Programme at:
www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/funding/citizen-led-engagement-programme

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Sources of support for EU/EEA/Swiss citizens & non-EU family members

Speaking and reading about topics such as the EU Settlement Scheme, citizenship and politics more broadly can be sensitive and difficult for many EU/EEA/Swiss citizens and their non-EU/EEA/Swiss family members. This report mentions some personal experiences raised in the focus groups by young Europeans, including challenges in applying to the EU Settlement Scheme and other potentially sensitive topics.

If you need emotional support, call the Samaritans on 116 123. If you are under 25 years old, The Mix provides essential support via phone or chat through their website. You can reach them on 0808 808 4994 or at www.themix.org.uk.

One of the key themes in this report is the confusion many young Europeans experience regarding their immigration status after Brexit. If you feel similarly about this issue, there are many sources of support that may be able to help you, including the following:

For general information about the EU Settlement Scheme, go to the Government website: <https://www.gov.uk/eusettledstatus>

There are some organisations that could help you if you struggle with your application, such as:

Settled: <https://settled.org.uk/>

Here for Good: <https://www.hereforgoodlaw.org/>

Seraphus: <http://www.seraphus.co.uk/>

The **EU Londoners Hub** is an excellent source of support, with information translated in European languages:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/eu-londoners-hub>

The **EU Settlement Guide** is particularly aimed at young people:

<https://www.settlementguide.co.uk/>

Executive summary

This research looks at what do young Europeans in London know about the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and British citizenship. It asks to what extent they are involved in politics in the UK and what do they know about how they can get engaged in their communities. Thus, the recommendations based on the findings of this research are on outreach and policy regarding the EU Settlement Scheme and access to British citizenship, as well as political engagement.

This report is based on a qualitative thematic analysis of 20 focus groups (4 to 7 participants each) conducted between June and September 2019 with young Europeans in London and short questionnaires completed by the focus group participants. To contextualise these findings, the report also draws on interviews with London local councillors and the young European peer researchers involved in this project.

Sample characteristics (focus groups)

- 20 focus groups with young Europeans, age range 17-30, with a mean age of 25;
- 11 nationality groups who have less involvement with City Hall: Danish, Romanian, Belgian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Dutch, Greek, Latvian, Slovak (EU), Swiss (non-EEA, but same citizens' rights as EEA nationals in the UK) and Albanian (non-EU/EEA);
- Focus on young Europeans in pre-university education, in lower paid work and those with caring responsibilities;
- Participants have lived in the UK from two weeks to 21 years, with a mean of 6 years.

Key findings

General

- The majority do not think they are well informed about their rights in the UK.
- The vast majority of participants get information about their rights in the UK through media, social media and 'word of mouth' through friends and family. A small minority access information through national or local government sources.
- Terms such as 'settled status' and 'citizenship' are often confused and conflated.
- The majority of participants see 'citizens' rights' broadly as workers' rights. Their main concerns regarding Brexit are economic.
- The participants in this sample are highly mobile: they did not only move to the UK, but the majority often move from one area of the UK to another or from one London borough to another, some several times a year. In some cases, their mobility impacts their ability to prove continuous residence for settled status or citizenship. This also affects their political engagement, as they find it difficult to participate locally with limited time, resources and a highly mobile lifestyle.

Specific

EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)

- Participants' experiences range from successfully applying to the EUSS to hearing about the EUSS for the first time during the focus groups.
- At the time of the research, the majority of eligible participants had not applied to the EUSS.
- The vast majority were aware of the EUSS, but several commented that they will apply when they are more certain about the direction of Brexit or their own future plans.
- There was some confusion regarding the requirements of the EUSS and the rights of those with pre-settled, as compared to settled status. Some conflated 'settled status' with 'citizenship' or with 'permanent residence' under EEA rules.
- Those who already applied to the EUSS found it straightforward, with the exception of a few having issues scanning their ID documents (and having to post the physical ID document to the Home Office) or having to provide additional evidence despite studying and/or working for 5 continuous years in the UK.

Access to British citizenship

- Most participants would consider naturalisation as British citizens at some point in the future, with a few already making plans to apply.
- As in the case of the EUSS, there is low awareness, confusion and conflation of the requirements for this process and the rights attached to citizenship.
- Every participant who considers citizenship does so for pragmatic reasons. These range from having more security over one's rights (coupled with low trust in the EUSS in some cases), being granted additional rights (e.g. full voting rights) or gaining financial advantages in the future.
- The main barriers to applying for citizenship are the application fee and the fact some European countries do not allow or have restrictions on dual nationality for their citizens.
- Participants' concerns about the citizenship process reflect their wish to protect their rights to mobility. The participants who consider applying for citizenship do so on the assumption they will be able to hold dual citizenship and therefore, their EU/EEA state nationality, which preserves their freedom of movement. Conversely, those who assume they cannot hold dual citizenship state this as the main (and usually only) reason for not considering naturalising as British.

Political engagement

- The vast majority of participants do not feel young Europeans' voices are represented in the UK.
- Participants feel unrepresented both as young people and as migrants, two identities which intersect.
- There are mixed views on whether young non-British Europeans' voices should be officially represented: while some believe that the right of political representation should be linked to residency, others associate it with citizenship.
- The vast majority are not involved in UK politics. Although many amongst those who have the right to vote in local elections are registered, the majority do not vote. Some were unaware they have local election voting rights.
- Most participants are unaware of the role of local government and think that local elections are

not important, compared to the national elections they cannot vote in. Several participants feel excluded from decisions affecting them directly, such as UK general elections and referendums, and they mention how they would vote in national elections if they had this right.

- Participants tend to differentiate between ‘traditional’ ways to involve in politics, such as voting in elections, and less ‘traditional’ ways, such as signing petitions or discussing politics on social media, which are more engaging for them.
- There is a sense amongst participants that engagement is low because migrant communities are not well organised and there are very few or no community leaders of whom they are aware.
- The lack of or low engagement in politics is explained by participants in reference to their socio-economic situations. They usually mention having insufficient free time when working long hours and limited possibilities to engage locally when living in short-term rented accommodation and frequently changing address.
- Access to information is unequal and depends on which borough participants live in and whether they have other opportunities to get information, such as through schools or employers.

There is an assumption that young Europeans in London are ‘easy to reach’ as a group. They tend to be digitally literate, speak good English, work or study (or both) and follow media and social media. This qualitative research shows the wide variety of experiences of people with similar demographic characteristics.

Although this qualitative research is not generalisable, its nuanced findings call for a more comprehensive understanding of young Europeans’ experiences in the UK. The research uncovers some concerning aspects regarding awareness on citizens’ rights and political engagement that should be studied in more detail in larger-scale research in the future.

Policy implications

EU Settlement Scheme

- It is concerning that some participants did not know about the EUSS or thought they did not have to apply for status. It is clear that more outreach is needed, even for the groups that are assumed to be easily reachable. The Government must ensure that sufficient funding will be provided to civil society organisations and local authorities to inform EU, EEA & Swiss citizens and their non-EU family members about the EUSS and provide support to those needing it.
- The findings show unequal access to information that depends on the participants’ demographics, existing community links and also on where they live in London. There needs to be more consistent and equal support at the local level in London.
- Many participants are concerned about checks on their right to work or checks at the border, with some commenting on the lack of physical proof of status. Physical proof of pre-settled and settled status would restore some trust in the system and reduce discrimination in the future.

Access to British citizenship

- The application fee is the main barrier for participants who want to naturalise as British citizens. The cost of citizenship needs to be revisited and be more aligned to what it actually costs to process and have more flexible methods of payment.
- The second most important barrier for some young Europeans who want to apply for British citizenship is the inability to hold dual citizenship or the strict restrictions on dual citizenship in

some European countries. There should be discussions at the European level on how to have easier access to dual citizenship, particularly for those who made the UK their home before Brexit who find themselves in an unprecedented situation.

- There is a need for more information on the rights attached to British citizenship. It is concerning that British citizenship is often conflated with settled status by some participants.

Political engagement

- It is crucial to have more awareness of voting rights amongst young Europeans. Especially in the post-Brexit context, it is important to preserve local election voting rights for EU citizens and inform EU citizens about those rights.
- Many participants feel that national-level elections are more important than local-level elections and that they would be involved if they could vote in national elections and referendums. There is a need for more research on how linking voting rights to residency rather than citizenship could enable engagement and social integration for migrants.
- There is very little awareness of the role of local government, hence many participants are sceptical that their vote or involvement would make any impact at the local level. There should be more efforts to inform communities about the influence and impact of local government decision-making on everyday life.
- Young Europeans are more likely to get involved when they see people like them in politics. Most feel underrepresented or unrepresented. There should be a review on the representation of European communities in local government and engagement on how migrant communities can inform local government about their issues more effectively.
- Many young Europeans are highly mobile, both internationally and internally within the UK. There should be serious engagement on how to best work with this group of people at the local level, given that their 'local communities' change frequently.
- Most participants do not engage in politics as they lack the time and resources. This raises questions about the accessibility of some forms of political involvement for people in less privileged socio-economic circumstances.

A research project about young Europeans, by young Europeans

Citizens from other European countries tend to arrive in the UK when young, usually for work or study. Many choose to make the UK their home. 3.4 million EU citizens are estimated to be living in the UK. With a few exceptions, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and their non-EU family members have to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme before the deadline on 30 June 2021. As of February 2020, over 3 million applications were made to the EU Settlement Scheme. The keyword is 'estimate' – there is no exact number of EU citizens in the UK, therefore we cannot know how many EU citizens exactly still have to apply. This is reflected in the fact that, according to these estimates, more than 100% of several national groups already applied to the scheme.

The discussion around the EU Settlement Scheme, and migration in general, overwhelmingly focusses on numbers. Behind each application number is a person with a unique migration story. This report aims to capture some of these personal stories. The final section of this report, 'Case Studies', shows the diversity of experiences and views with one case from each of the 11 nationalities represented in this research. The report includes many quotes from the focus groups to enable young Europeans to speak in their own voices directly to the readers.

This research was funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Citizens' Led Engagement Programme and managed by Alexandra Bulat at the3million, the largest organisation campaigning on EU citizens' rights in the UK. The core aim of this project is to hear from groups who are underrepresented in policymaking. City Hall identified that they have relatively little engagement with communities who arrived in London from the following 11 European countries: Albania, Denmark, Romania, Switzerland, Belgium, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, The Netherlands and Slovakia. These countries are either from Central and Eastern Europe, some with large communities in the UK (e.g. Romania) or are smaller Western European countries who have relatively small migrant populations in the UK. In addition to including these less represented nationalities, this project also focusses on less represented socio-economic groups. The participants are in pre-university education, lower-paid work or have caring responsibilities (or a combination of two, or all three). This research included 16-30-year olds in the category of 'young Europeans'. All participants live in London.

The project has two main research questions:

1. *What are young Europeans' main concerns regarding their rights in the UK? (with a detailed discussion about the EU Settlement Scheme and access to British citizenship)*
2. *How can young Europeans become more engaged in their communities and have a voice in policymaking?*

The research project outputs consist of this research report based on qualitative focus group analysis and a short film documenting young Europeans' views and local politicians' responses.

The findings of this research complement the results from the recently published Settled Status Survey Report,¹ written by Prof Tanja Bueltmann in collaboration with the3million. It adds the perspective of a demographic group that is less represented in the survey, namely under 30-year olds, predominantly from Central and Eastern European backgrounds. This research also adds value through its peer research methodology – from the focus group guide design to data analysis, this research about young Europeans is conducted by young Europeans themselves.

Focus Groups – Peer Research

The Young Europeans Citizens' Led Engagement Programme ran between March 2019 and March 2020. The research was based on peer research and co-creation from the project design stage to dissemination. Before narrowing down the scope of this research, some exploratory focus groups were conducted in London early on, involving young Europeans and youth organisation representatives. The findings from these exploratory focus groups shaped the direction of this research.

¹ Experiences and Impact of the EU Settlement Scheme: www.t3m.org.uk/SettledStatusSurvey

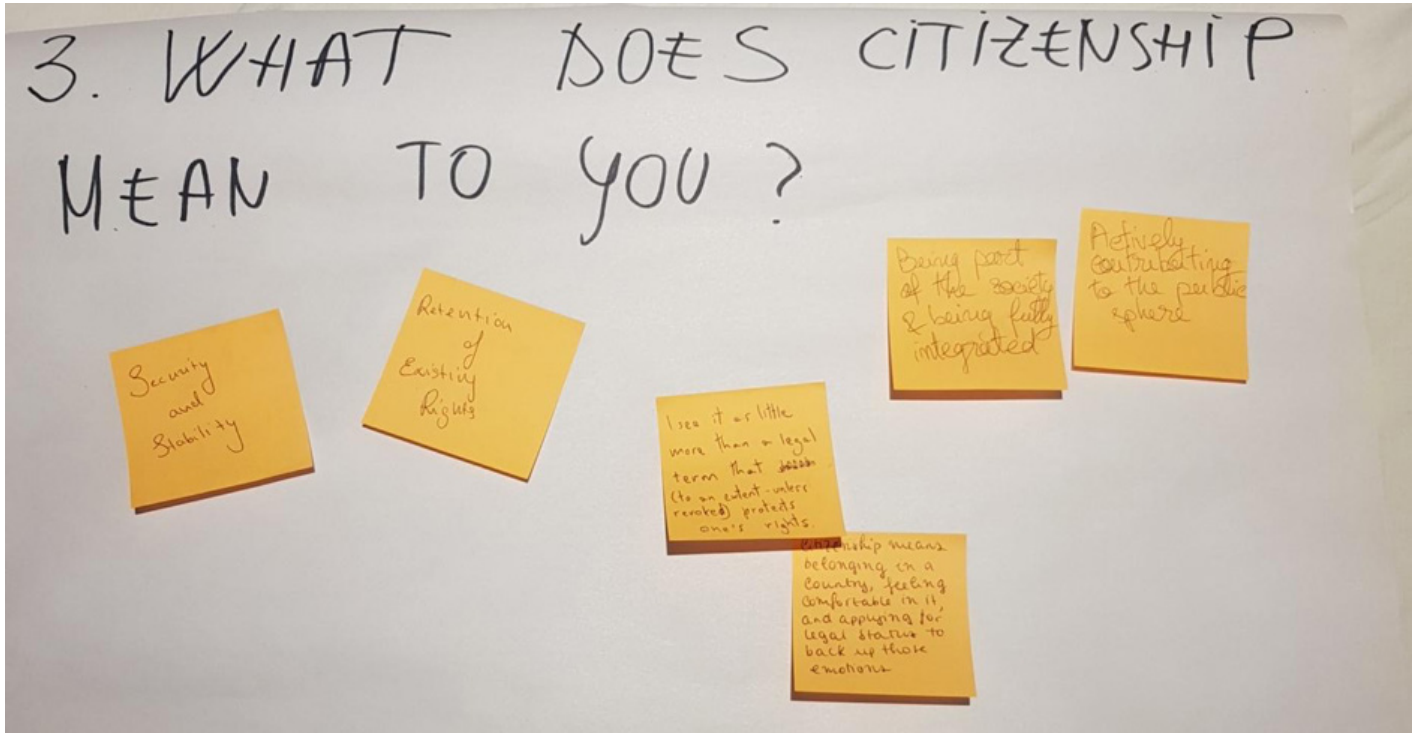


Photo 1: 'What does citizenship mean to you?': responses from an exploratory focus group

In May 2019, a team of 12 young European peer researchers (and one researcher focussing on the short documentary) were recruited to organise and facilitate focus groups with the 11 national groups identified by City Hall as having less influence on policymaking. The team were trained in focus group methodology, including practical training on dealing with sensitive or difficult situations during focus group research. They were also briefed on the EU Settlement Scheme and read materials from the EU Londoners' Hub. The focus group topic guide and short additional questionnaire (see Appendix) was developed with the peer researchers during the training and with follow-up feedback from City Hall policy teams.



Photo 2: Peer researchers Asia, Anaïs, David & Alexandra discussing focus group strategy

The Young Europeans team conducted, translated and transcribed 20 audio recorded focus groups between June and September 2019, each between 1-1.5 hours long. Table 1 shows the total number of participants per nationality target group and Table 2 lists all the focus groups. Participants' age range is 17-30, with a mean of 25. The time spent in the UK ranges from as little as two weeks for an EU citizen who recently moved to London, to 21 years for another participant who arrived in the UK as a toddler with their parents. The mean for the years spent in the UK is close to 6 years. There are about a third more participants identifying as female than male in the sample. As this focus group research was primarily interested in young Europeans in pre-university education, lower paid work and/or with caring responsibilities, the vast majority have an individual annual income of below £25,000, with about half in the sample with less than £15,000 a year. About a third had dependants, usually small children, but also relatives in a few cases.

Table 1: Number of participants per target nationality group

Country of origin	Total number of participants
Albania	10
Belgium	5
Bulgaria	10
Denmark	4
Hungary	6
Greece	5
Latvia	8
Romania	20
Switzerland	5
The Netherlands	7
Slovakia	10

Table 2: Focus groups

Focus group	Number of participants	Category
Albanian FG1	5	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Albanian FG2	4	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Belgian & Swiss FG1	5	Lower paid workers & college students
Belgian & Swiss FG2	5	Lower paid workers & college students
Bulgarian FG1	5	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Bulgarian FG2	5	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Danish FG	4	Lower paid workers & college students
Dutch FG1	4	Lower paid workers & college students
Dutch FG2	4	Lower paid workers & college students
Greek FG	5	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Hungarian FG1	4*	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Hungarian FG2	5**	Lower paid workers & college students
Latvian FG1	4	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Latvian FG2	4	Lower paid workers, caring responsibilities & college students
Romanian FG1	5***	College students
Romanian FG2	4	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Romanian FG3	7	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Romanian FG4	5	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Slovak FG1	6	Lower paid workers & caring responsibilities
Slovak FG2	4	Lower paid workers

Total participants included in the analysis: 90

* 2 participants were excluded from the analysis as they were over 30 years old

** 1 participant was excluded from the analysis as they were over 30 years old

*** 1 participant was excluded from the analysis as they were not a citizen of the 11 selected groups

The focus groups are conducted by young Europeans who are part of the communities they research and thus there were different styles of focus group facilitation and the transcripts vary in style and length. However, peer research brought a number of important advantages. Having focus groups where the facilitator shares some key demographic characteristics can make participants more comfortable to express their views and speak about their personal circumstances. The focus groups look like conversations amongst fellow young Europeans. Some peer researchers reported that some participants saw these focus groups about citizens' rights and political engagement as their first or amongst the very few opportunities they had to learn about their rights and engage in political discussions in the UK. For many participants, the focus groups were a place where they learnt something new about their rights and status post-Brexit.

The peer research methodology was combined with reflective practice throughout the fieldwork process. The peer researchers explored their own experiences as young migrants while listening to and engaging with the experiences of their focus group participants. They thought about how these experiences shape their research and their own attitudes on the topics approached in this study. The team of peer researchers was supported throughout the process. They offered feedback at various stages about their experiences, and three of them were interviewed more formally at the end of the project for the film.

Like many participants, the peer researchers found doing the research as a community engagement activity in itself. All experienced the same key challenge – recruiting participants as quickly as they expected. They found that many young Europeans in London in our target groups were happy to have informal chats, but less likely to agree to participate in a focus group. Most were put off when they heard the word 'politics' mentioned by the peer researchers, saying they are not involved or interested. For instance, Ilona, our Albanian team member, told me she had more success finding participants when asking people to speak 'about their life in London', rather than mentioning political engagement straight away.

These experiences reported by the peer researchers reflect the main findings in this study – relatively low political engagement and low awareness of citizens' rights. The focus on lower paid workers was also challenging for organising the focus groups, as most of the young Europeans worked long hours on irregular shift patterns, which did not enable them to plan attending a focus group more than a day in advance or have enough free time for such an activity in the first place. Approaching participants where they work, such as Maria conducting a focus group in a café with Bulgarian staff, or Blanka going to a construction site to speak to Hungarian workers, proved to be a much more effective recruitment method. Although they worked with various nationalities from Europe, the reflections of peer researchers have been very similar and identified the same main themes, which are detailed in the findings section.

In their own words - Peer Researchers

Anaïs (peer researcher, Swiss and Belgian focus groups):

The most surprising was that in groups that were having the same characteristics of people, some were very informed, some were not informed. And they were coming from the same background, so sometimes you were trying to understand why would they receive that information that other people are not receiving?

David (peer researcher, Dutch focus groups):

One of the things that surprised me, which I tried to not look surprised at it, is that one of the people today [September 2019] didn't know about the Settlement Scheme. And it's been out there for many, many months. So, this highlights how there is a problem with information reach and it's going to be very important to solve that.

Alexandra (peer researcher, Romanian focus groups):

The most surprising thing that I found out from the focus groups was that a lot of Romanians don't actually know about settlement, how they should apply and what kind of things this settlement will bring for them. At the same time, they were not really interested in Brexit or politicians and politics.

Focus Groups – Detailed Findings

Settlement and citizenship

All focus groups started by asking participants a deliberately broad question – how do they feel about their rights in the UK? Almost invariably for Central and Eastern European participants, but also common in the other focus groups, this discussion is about rights at work. In the majority of participants' accounts, citizens' rights are workers' rights. Their concerns about their future and the impact of Brexit are primarily economic. George (Greek FG) tells us: 'my biggest beef with Brexit is that I'll earn less money'. For Arthurs (Latvian FG2), 'London is accepting. But it is a working city. People come here to work or to open a business. The political rights are secondary, they do not really matter much.'

The vast majority of participants feel they have the same rights as their British friends and colleagues, like Alina (Romanian FG2) puts it: 'You can have a life here, you can have a normal life like everyone that lives here, we are all equals'. However, some fear that their rights could be diminished in the future. Some participants speak about xenophobic attitudes they encountered or uncomfortable questions that make them feel unwelcome: 'To be honest, it is tiring to be asked "where are you from?" because I already feel like they tagged me and like this I feel like I have no more rights' (Romanian FG3).

The most worrying aspect of the citizens' rights discussions is how participants confuse and conflate different types of status that a migrant can have or apply for. Most seem unaware about the differences between pre-settled status and settled status and a few even equate settled status with British citizenship. A couple even thought they would have to apply for visas in the future. A few with pre-settled status were also unaware that one has to apply again through the scheme before their pre-settled status expires. This reflects the issue of unequal access to information.

My parents want me to apply and I'm not exactly sure, but I'm assuming it will make my life easier... here in the UK. It might allow me to... get visa... I think, I'm not sure. Or British passport, I'm not sure. (Romanian FG1)

Yes, and then it gets changed automatically. You get settled. It's all automatic, because they keep an eye on you, through your taxes et cetera, they totally keep an eye on you. And then after the fifth year here... so not on your fifth but sixth year because you will have five full years here then you can apply for permanent citizenship. (Bulgarian FG2)

The EU Settlement Scheme

The focus groups were conducted between June and September 2019, therefore between 3 and 7 months since the EU Settlement Scheme was open to the public in March 2019. However, there is no difference between the earlier and later focus groups – while some participants in June and September are well-informed, there are participants who found out what the Settlement Scheme is in the focus groups in both June and September. At the time they participated in the focus groups, the majority who were eligible hadn't yet applied to the EU Settlement Scheme. Of those who applied, there were roughly equal numbers of pre-settled and settled status outcomes. This research project itself was a means by which some participants were informed about their

post-Brexit status for the first time.

There were various reasons why people who hadn't applied yet didn't do so. This reflects the need for serious engagement with the fact that informing every single eligible resident before the deadline is extremely unlikely, thus measures need to be put in place to ensure no one is left undocumented or unlawful after the deadline. Some of the main reasons given in the focus groups by those who hadn't applied at the time of the research are deeply concerning.

- **I'm unaware I can apply**

Yeah, I heard about this before, I think it's great. I will apply but I think it's not opened yet. (Belgian & Swiss FG1)

- **I don't have to apply unless I am sure I want to remain in the UK long term**

No, I did not. I guess it is primarily for people, who plan to stay in the UK. I know that something like this exists, Facebook is full of it, but I do not plan to use it. (Slovak FG2)

- **I don't have to apply if I work**

Yeah, I heard something but, is affecting more people with, from what I know, I don't know where I read or I saw on TV, I didn't go too much onto this subject because it does not affect me. Yeah, I think is just going to affect people with benefits and they are going to make it a bit stricter. (Romanian FG2)

- **I think I already have settled status (when I have no status or I have EEA PR)**

They have just started with this settled status but for us... as we are quite a long time here, we already have the settled status. (Slovak FG1)

- **I'll wait to see what happens with Brexit or wait until the very last minute**

I'm gonna cross that bridge when I get to it. For me it's not because I don't wanna apply, it's just that I'm not in a rush and I saw that the deadline is December 2020 the earliest so I'm just pushing it. I think they will have a lot of applications in December. (Dutch FG1)

- **I do not understand why I have to apply to stay in my home**

[after she finds out about EUSS from the focus group facilitator] I may apply then, but I hate admin and I feel like we don't know what's going to happen, so I may just go with the flow. It's like, for now, everything has been fine, and I don't see why I would have to register my will to live in a country I am already living in. (Belgian & Swiss FG1)

- **I'll apply only if my family/friends/neighbours apply**

It depends on my mother because I am here with my mother and sister... if she decides to apply then yes, if she doesn't want to then... to me it doesn't matter. I am above those things. I don't really care if I will be here or if I won't. (Bulgarian FG1)

- **I cannot apply as I do not have an ID or I do not find other necessary documents**

I didn't apply because I don't have my ID either, so that is, that was the reason. If I would have had my ID, probably I would have applied, but now that I got my ID, I am planning to apply very soon. (Romanian FG2)

Those who applied to the EU Settlement Scheme spoke at length about their experiences. Overall, they describe the process positively (especially when compared to other Home Office applications some of them experienced in the past e.g. Romanians needing work permits before 2014). Some emphasise the technical or logistical difficulties (e.g. the ID check app not working, having to send their passport to the Home Office) they encountered or their surprise when finding out they had to provide additional evidence. There was also a sense that some their lived experiences did not match their expectations of the scheme portrayed as easy and straightforward in the media.

My experience was very, very stressful. I both applied through the phone and with an appointment with my council, which is in Islington. And the amount of time that I had to wait in-between the steps was atrocious, and I had to prove myself in various ways that I never thought I had to before, because my National Insurance number did not prove that I've been here since 2011. (Dutch FG1)

Honestly, I was a bit stressed because first time, even though you don't apply through the application, same, you have to apply online, you have to take a selfie, to take a picture after your passport, to put everything there and after you have to send your passport. Ok, I have got back the passport after 3 weeks, but it took time, around 2 months until I got an answer, even though there was written it takes between 9 to 21 working days, if I remember and of course, I have called them. After I have insisted, after 2 months, they sent me the answer. I don't think it's normal, as I have a friend that applied and after 3 weeks, they got their answer and everything. They were telling me they are very busy, ok, but they don't have a number to do this in order? (Romanian FG3)

There were a couple of cases where participants were given pre-settled status despite living in the UK for longer than 5 years and they seemed unaware they could have submitted additional evidence:

Yeah it was pretty easy indeed, but they still have some issues with the system because why should I get pre-settled status if I live here since 2011 and they know this because once I worked since 2011 until now I should be in their system? (Romanian FG4)

Those with settled status still have some concerns. Settled status does not automatically reassure everyone or make them feel safe or welcomed: *I have applied for settled status and I took it and I still don't feel safe. (Romanian FG3)*

More specific concerns have been raised as well, in particular the lack of physical documents and fears of discrimination in employment and when renting accommodation. Sterre (Dutch FG1) tells the group that she will print some documents next time she goes on holiday as she is concerned about border checks:

Kinda thinking, just take a copy of a payslip and a copy of my National Insurance number with me just in case they ask, cause I don't have a physical document that actually says that we've got pre-settled or settled status so we can still prove that we're actually living and working here. (Dutch FG1)

Others who had a more straightforward process applying for their status are still worried about those who they think will not have such an easy time as them, such as non-EU family members, the elderly or people with limited digital skills:

For young people, I think it is easy because everything is digital, you can just download the app and you know, follow the instructions, but I am worried about the older generation, for instance, or people who are not good with computers or I don't know, how they are going to handle it, it won't be easy for them to follow the instructions with downloading the app and this and that, so for them it might be complicated. (Romanian FG3)

Access to British citizenship

All focus groups were asked to speak about their views on British citizenship, whether they would consider applying (for those who were non-UK citizens) and to comment on any barriers that may prevent young Europeans to apply, as well as reasons to apply. Out of the 90 focus group participants, 8 had British citizenship and were mostly young Europeans who arrived in the UK with their parents as toddlers or while in primary school. A few have two non-UK nationalities, such as Belgian and French, or Albanian and Greek. The small minority who already applied successfully for British citizenship had mixed views on the process.

The citizenship one was very complicated when I did it. And from the government's side, it seemed like they didn't want to help, but they wanted to actually make me fail. (Hungarian FG1)

It was not very difficult, just a usual way of applying for something. Yes, the fee is quite high, as much as I remember now it was around 1400 pounds. But, on the other hand, it's their [the British] right to ask for it, they do offer a lot in return for this kind of money. [...] I only wish I had applied and obtained the passport earlier, it wasn't some extraordinary task, could have been done earlier. (Latvian FG1)

Reasons to apply for British citizenship

Most participants who do not have British citizenship would like to apply once they can satisfy the requirements. A few do not plan to live in the UK long-term and therefore do not think this is an option for them. Apart from one participant who comments that he will not consider becoming British because he does not 'feel British', identity was barely a part of the debate. The vast majority who thought naturalising as British is a good idea did so for pragmatic reasons.

Some thought this would offer them more rights (e.g. voting in national elections) while others thought that their current rights can be preserved in a more secure way through citizenship.

For those who lived in the UK longer term and have not applied, the 2016 referendum result made them think more seriously about this option: 'Before Brexit, we never had to. And we could be here for 15 years and never thought about it' (Danish FG1). Alina's (Romanian FG2) justification for considering British citizenship resonates with many participants: 'I think it is better to have it than not to have it, let's put it that way.' British citizenship is a good offer 'depending on how much you would gain from it' (Belgian & Swiss FG1). Citizenship is portrayed as a 'life investment' (Belgian & Swiss FG2), which, like a life insurance, is useful 'just in case' (Danish FG). It is more useful for some migrants than others. This is reflected when comparing the focus groups with Romanians and Bulgarians for instance, with the focus groups with Belgian and Swiss young people. The 'value' attributed to British citizenship depends on how it compares with the rights the current passport offers.

It gives you a lot more options. But if you're from Belgium or Switzerland or the US, I don't think it's, yeah, it doesn't bring you anything. It doesn't open you more borders or whatever. (Belgian & Swiss FG1)

Barriers to apply for British citizenship

The pragmatic, economic narrative of applying for British citizenship is reflected in the top two reasons for which participants may not consider applying, as well as the barriers identified by those who are certain they will apply in the future. The first key barrier is the cost of applying for British citizenship, with many participants commenting on the application fee and how paying over £1,000 (in addition to other costs, such as the Life in the UK and English language tests) is unaffordable for many young Europeans. Some speak about the need to reduce the fee and others suggest having payment plans, which would make them more likely to apply.

In comparison with other countries, it is quite a lot... It is strange that the decision whether you will be a citizen or not is based on the ability to pay some 1000 pounds. For me it is quite unfair and silly. It seems a lot to me. (Slovak FG2)

The second most important barrier is that some participants cannot hold dual citizenship or their right to dual citizenship is restricted. Some who can hold dual citizenship are not aware they could and also speak about this barrier based on their assumption that then cannot be both British and Romanian, for instance. Dutch and Slovak participants, whose countries of origin do not allow dual citizenship, are particularly vocal on this topic. Young Europeans in this sample would not consider applying for British citizenship if this means losing their freedom of movement, the mobility on which their lives have been built.

I wouldn't apply for a British passport because the Dutch one gives more rights, and you can travel to more countries. (Dutch FG2)

The ones that are staying here for a longer time feel like on the fence. We go to Slovakia and we are like "o, we are home", we return to England and we are like "we are home". (Slovak FG1)

Access to information on citizens' rights

Overall, focus group participants thought they are not particularly well informed about their rights in the UK. When discussing citizenship, some point out how it is difficult to find the right information on their own and that information on citizens' rights in general is confusing due to frequent changes.

It's not straightforward at all. The way that it's put together is very difficult to understand, if you go on the website to see how to do it and what to do, and it continuously changes. For example, now, you have to have this resident card, you have to make one, but now that's not valid. (Hungarian FG2)

Access to information was seen as unequal, depending on the network one has and where they live. Some are critical of the information sources they accessed, especially Government websites, and they are also concerned about misinformation circulating on social media. A majority of participants get their information online, via media sites, social media or through 'word of mouth' via family and friends, and less than a quarter access this information through Government websites. Participants underline how many conationals look for information on their rights in their diasporic media or in the media of their country of origin, where such information is often described as sparse, unclear or misleading.

As a whole for the UK, the information itself with specific situations, rights and what is happening is being talked about the most on British TV. On Bulgarian TV there is very little information that is given and that is actually explained clearly. And other than the TV, the other option is newspapers... and most Bulgarians don't read British newspapers. And the third option is social media. And the best option as a whole, when it comes to Bulgarians is that Bulgarian media also informs people here. Because no one here reads newspapers. (Bulgarian FG1)

In their own words - Participants' Recommendations

Kostantina (participant, Greek FG): *It is all general, everyone gets involved in discussions but there is no actual discussion about the rights. And if we ask English people, I am not 100% sure they are actually aware of their rights in their own country. [...] Invite people to open discussions and to different communities, sometimes they organise events and stuff so they can actually invite people, the community to go there.*

Răzvan (participant, Romanian FG3): *Use social media more, I think, hire young people, train them, so they would talk to young people and tell them what they should do exactly.*

Ana (participant, Albanian FG2): *It's not like [there are] a lot of places where you feel you can safely go and talk to someone about it, nationality and all complications you might have with citizenship without fear of deportation or anything like that. If there was more of a safer anonymous space you could go and speak and not do anything about that, you know, if they can give you the information.*

Liga (participant, Latvian FG2): *For example, I like the NHS new website, you can literally find anything there. Similarly, they could do something like that about the EU, Brexit, your rights as well. You speak in and they give you [a] solution. Something like web advice.*

Mihaela (participant, Romanian FG4): *Even when going to the GP you could have a flier there that reminds you about your rights in the UK.*

Political engagement

After discussing citizens' rights, with a focus on the EU Settlement Scheme and access to British citizenship, all participants were asked to speak about the extent to which they feel young Europeans have a voice in the UK and about their own engagement in politics. Overall, participants feel underrepresented or unrepresented as young Europeans in the UK, but there are mixed views on whether this would or should necessarily change. For some, the referendum result in 2016 motivated them to become more politically involved as they realised politics affects them directly, while others remained uninvolved in politics. The main reasons behind low engagement are identified as limited time and resources, which is characteristic of the majority in this sample who live on relatively low incomes and are highly mobile, living in different parts of London within short periods. The participants who have been in the UK for fewer than 5 years tend to be more aware of politics in other EU countries, but there is also low engagement in politics outside the UK.

Elections

Awareness of voting rights

Most of the focus groups debated the issue of voting rights. Out of the 11 national groups, only EU citizens (9 of the 11 nationalities) have the right to vote in local elections in England (and, pre-Brexit, European elections in the UK). Some were not aware they could vote. In this sense, like those who found out about the existence of the EU Settlement Scheme through their participation in these focus groups, some found out they can register to vote through this way. The following exchange from a Romanian focus group is not an isolated occurrence:

Dragoş: *Can I vote? I didn't know that, but I will do my research about it.*

Maria: *I did not vote.*

Ana-Maria: *I registered to vote just because it helps me with my credit score and history in this country, never voted.*

Răzvan: *As I said, I never voted in this country... I never saw a politician to do what he is saying...*

Raluca: *Honestly, no, me neither.*

Daniela: *I haven't.*

Cristina: *No, because I don't feel like engaging. Ok, I am going to vote, but whom should I vote for? I don't know what or whom should I vote for.*

Daniela: *I don't know if voting will help me or us. (Romanian FG3)*

Even when aware of their local election voting rights, few exercised this right to vote. Like Ana-Maria in the Romanian group, some registered to vote believing it will boost their credit score or they thought it can represent proof of living in the UK. Awareness of voting rights also depends on where participants lived or with whom they came in contact on a daily basis. For example, some pointed out that when moving to particular areas where councillors are actively door knocking, they received much more information than when living in student accommodation or areas with less proactive politicians:

To be honest, I was very unaware about all of this when I was living in student halls. But I found that moving to a particular house, people were coming by, like “are you a European citizen? You need to be aware you can register to vote”. (Belgian & Swiss FG2)

I received some mail from what was the council... I think. You can actually vote in the EU election. I had no idea and I was surprised that actually, you know, sending me a letter to let me know. (Belgian & Swiss FG1)

However, receiving information at home does not mean that everyone will become engaged because of it. Some participants consider they have access to sufficient information, but they are still not interested in using their right to vote.

My largest engagement with anything that comes to voting in the UK is that I received in August a leaflet from the Brexit Party which I promptly threw in the garbage and then the next week I received a leaflet from an anti-Brexit party... apparently I fit the demographics for both... I threw it in the garbage as well. (Greek FG)

There is little awareness of how local government operates and what decisions are made at the local level. Take for example this exchange between Anton and Jan, which reflects the views of many other participants:

Anton: *No, because I didn't have much interest in it and the registration somehow passed around me and I didn't know how fast and easy it is to register. And I found out about it after the deadline. On the voting day I was sad about it, but I couldn't do anything. But if I was interested more, I'd know what to do, I was just not too interested.*

Jan: *Why weren't you too interested?*

Anton: *I was not well informed, and I didn't know exactly what my council is and what are their responsibilities and how it can influence my life. I found out too late and I didn't manage to register. (Slovak FG2)*

Reasons for not voting

Most participants in the focus groups are not engaged in exercising their right to vote in local elections and give several explanations as to why they do not feel like voting.

- **Local elections don't matter**

An interesting narrative that emerged through the focus groups is that many participants regard local-level elections as less important and even not important at all, compared to national-level elections, in which they do not have the right to vote. Some participants explain why they do not vote in local elections, while simultaneously mentioning they would vote if they had the right to in national-level elections.

We can't vote in the most important decisions. And if we could have a say in those, I would vote. So, if I was a resident, I would definitely vote. (Hungarian FG2)

This is often coupled with the frustration some participants, especially those who have lived in the UK for over 5 years, and sometimes almost all their life, felt when they could not vote in the 2016 referendum on a decision affecting their lives directly.

The damage is done. Now you come and ask me how we can improve, what we should do, but they didn't ask us about Brexit. (Romanian FG2)

Some participants explicitly mention that they would like to see migrants having a say in all elections which affect them. But there are mixed opinions on how long someone should be resident in the UK to have full rights to vote. A few think that these rights should only be given to British citizens (including naturalised British citizens), while others would like to see those with limited leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain in the UK being given the opportunity to fully participate in elections.

It is tricky because we can't vote for anything, even though we are living here. I think I'd rather have a vote here than in the Netherlands where I'm not living and I can still vote for general elections even though it's barely gonna affect me. (Dutch FG1)

We can send as many postcards as we like, and we can like, protest, and I don't know, but if we get to vote that would just make all the difference, to me it would make all the difference. (Dutch FG2)

- **I don't want to vote for the sake of voting**

When explaining why they do not vote in local elections, one of the common themes is the lack of knowledge about candidates and that people should not vote 'for the sake of voting', but that they should vote when informed about the options they have.

I voted once here, maybe last year... when we had to choose... what was it... who should be the Mayor of London? I have absolutely no clue what I marked to be honest. At the moment I can't remember... (after this experience, she decided not to vote anymore unless she is informed) (Bulgarian FG1)

I had an opportunity to vote in the local elections, but I chose not to. I do not want to be voting for something I do not really know or care about. (Latvian FG1)

- **Voting does not change anything in everyday life**

Most participants who do not vote in local elections believe that very little if anything can be changed by their vote in the UK. Especially in focus groups with East Europeans, these conversations are often linked to how politics works 'back home', where politicians are described as corrupt.

You get tired of it. You know the outcome; you know why this stuff is all happening. You have no voice, no matter what you do. (Hungarian FG1)

[speaking about local council elections] Well, that's not going to change anything. So, I don't know. I am not as involved as I should be. (Hungarian FG2)

I feel like we do have a voice. But it's not like... you can't really predict whether or not it's gonna be heard by... main bodies... that can actually make a change. (Romanian FG1)

- **Politicians won't listen to migrants' concerns**

Less common, but strong in some focus groups, is an impression that politicians would not listen to young Europeans' concerns because they are not British citizens.

Not long ago I received a letter that we can register to vote and I did do that but I don't think anyone really cares what we [Romanians] got to say. (Romanian FG4)

- **Politicians do not represent my own political views**

Even for those who did vote in local elections once or several times, there is a feeling that the political system in the UK or the available candidates at the local level cannot represent their political views. Some participants speak about misinformation in politics which makes it difficult to make informed choices about candidates.

I think that was almost also a reason that people didn't go to vote because they didn't know what to believe anymore. They didn't know what side to be on because there was just so much information out there and you didn't know what was real and what was not. (Dutch FG1)

[It's] either blue or red. I don't know, I don't really feel like I'm close to one of them but rather having a richer political spectrum. (Belgian & Swiss FG1)

- **I work a lot and don't have time to be informed**

Perhaps the most common reason given for low or no political engagement through voting is the lack of time. Most participants work in lower paid jobs, some have small children and they feel that their schedule does not allow sufficient time to research politics in order to make informed decisions at the ballot box.

I do not know, time is limited, and there are plenty of things to do. But, to be honest, if I really wanted to vote, I would have found out everything about who, where and how to vote. But time is precious, and somehow, I prefer to worry about other things. For example, I would rather participate in beach tidying up activities. But even for this I struggle to find time – I have a job, my child, my studies. (Latvian FG1)

We cannot help in any way or get involved. We just go to work, come home, you know, pay the bills and just carry on with our own life. But if there will be someone to take some initiative and just come and speak to the young people and tell them what could be changed, probably people will get involved. (Romanian FG2)

- **I move a lot**

Participants were also asked to speak about how they involve in their ‘local communities’. Some pointed out that having one ‘local community’ as a reference point is difficult. This is because most participants, usually in lower paid work, move frequently from one London borough to another, depending on their work opportunities. Moreover, the vast majority live in privately rented properties, usually on short-term contracts and house shares, and often have to move even if they would have liked to stay longer in the same property, due to the nature of the short-term rented accommodation market in London.

To be honest, I have not voted since I came, I know I could do, but I didn't feel like I actually knew the people that I would vote for, like these leaflets explaining who each person was and this is because I found it very hard to feel a part of the community, exactly because I was trying to figure out where to live. (Greek FG)

Here [in the UK] I did not vote because I am moving around London a lot. Even if I had voted, I still would not be represented since I would have moved to a different part of city by then. (Latvian FG2)

Some participants point out that it is challenging for local authorities to inform young people who are highly mobile within London (or the UK more broadly) and that emphasis should be placed on employers to communicate to young people about their rights, including voting rights.

On the basic level, more communication is better than less communication. I'd appreciate if the council took more care of me. But because I am a young person, I move a lot, so I do not have the established way of how to communicate or how it works. At home, we always receive a lot of letters, I do not manage to read anything, so I cannot really think of a way how they can contact me. Maybe this is the reason, why other entities such as employers, have an advantage in communicating. My communication is established better with them. (Slovak FG2)

Other forms of political engagement

Focus group participants were also asked to comment on other forms of political involvement, such as signing petitions, attending protests, having political discussions or any others. Some say that it is easier to get involved in less 'traditional' ways. Some signed petitions, especially for environmental causes but also some related to Brexit, and a few attended protests about Brexit and also the environment. However, the same barriers – limited time, resources and frequently moving 'home'-, make this engagement relatively low as well.

I keep an eye on elections and local politics, but I don't really engage, to be honest. The only political act I did was attending the march against Brexit in October last year. It is good to be informed but I don't think I will be interested or involved in the future. (Belgian & Swiss FG2)

Through the internet, for example. And the fact that most of the non-UK teenagers are living in London in a multi, diverse city, where everyone can talk about these things. And London is a well-known city, so it has a lot of power and influence over the whole country I would say. And so... yeah, I would say our voice is... loud and clear. (Romanian FG1)

Individual vs. collective responsibility

Some participants, while recognising relatively low involvement in politics in their young European groups of friends, emphasise that the responsibility to be informed and engaged also falls on the individual.

I agree like if you want to stay here, then you should be aware of what you have to do, like it's not the British government [responsibility] to serve everything on a silver plate. You also have a responsibility to inform yourself, which we – I mean – obviously didn't do. (Belgian & Swiss FG2)

In this context, some participants mention examples of good practice at the local level regarding access to information about politics.

I think there is already quite a lot of information. For example, I live in Lewisham, and they publish a newspaper on a monthly basis where a lot of information is available about local organisations, what the local youth does, where you can get involved. I think if you search yourself and keep your eyes open, there are a lot of opportunities. (Latvian FG2)

Our local MP for example, I have seen him on a bike riding up and down the street. He talks to anyone and everyone. Many will say that this doesn't matter, but I like it. [...] You have a voice, so use it. But our generation and people like you don't care. Everyone has demands and opinions about everything but are not interested. They just know how to talk. You give them a job and they ask how much I will get paid, not what job do I have to do. (Bulgarian FG2)

In their own words - Participants' Recommendations

Catherine (participant, Danish FG1): *Maybe just, you know, like put up posters in [pub] bathrooms and places where a lot of young people go... You know, because that way word gets around.*

Geert (participant, Dutch FG2): *How about like a foreigners' council? Since there are so many of us, how about we get our own representatives that get some sort of say in local and national government?*

Răzvan (participant, Romanian FG3): *People don't want to do things for free, like, you need to offer them some incentive to do it, or at least convince them that it is something good for them, there has to be someone there for them and say "this is good for you", engage them, make them understand this will change their life.*

Ana (participant, Albanian FG2): *No one ever sat me down and ever talked me through how it works [...] so offering things like politics maybe as a GCSE option for anyone who actually is in the school system here.*

George (participant, Greek FG): *What I could suggest as an idea is incentivise the effort. So, for example, I know that I, myself, this spring, received a nice letter from the Mayor of London... with a questionnaire asking me to answer some stuff about my local area, how I like it, things like that... at the end of the questionnaire, I got an Amazon coupon and we were all happy.*

Alina (Romanian FG2): *I haven't heard anyone that will stand up for our Romanian community. Probably we would have all known that if there is someone getting involved and standing up and speaking for us, then we would have surely known and probably would have been more involved if we would have had that person, we would have known more [...] They need to send I think other Romanian people to just make them aware and explain the situation – maybe gatherings, I don't know, anything.*

Perspectives from London local councillors

In the summer of 2019, the filmmaker in the team, Ioana, recorded interviews with seven London local councillors from boroughs hosting some of the largest European migrant resident populations. The councillors spoke about their views on the extent to which young Europeans are involved in their communities and in politics in their boroughs. They also commented on local EU Settlement Scheme outreach, giving examples of good practice and areas of improvement in their local areas.

A key concern was local-level funding for informing EU/EEA/Swiss citizens and their family members about their rights and ensuring that those who need assistance applying for their status can access it locally. Young Europeans were perceived to have low engagement in politics because they cannot vote in all elections and often are unaware that EU citizens can vote in local elections. There was a consensus that councillors can do more to inform EU citizens, such as when door knocking in their local areas or alongside informing residents about other issues. A few spoke extensively about frequently meeting European constituents who are eligible to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme who did not know about it.

The councillors shared examples of good practice in their boroughs, for instance community information sessions, dedicated pages on the council websites with targeted information for European residents and letter writing to registered European residents about the EU Settlement Scheme. It is crucial that the Government provide support to local authorities to inform those who have to apply for status before the deadline in June 2021 and about their rights to vote in local elections.

Another common theme was local-level representation of European citizens. The councillors recognise there is little representation, particularly of East European migrant communities, in local politics and that more initiatives should aim to achieve wider representation of the various European communities in London in local decision and policymaking. But there was also a message from councillors that European communities themselves should be encouraged to get in touch with local politicians so that politicians can get to know their communities better and be able to reflect their needs.

In their own words - London Councillors

London Borough of Merton: *A lot of people from different EU countries come to this country with their own politics, they may be on the left, right or somewhere else. In the last few years, a lot of the people I've spoken to have found themselves without a home because their particular party on the left or the right is not speaking for them. As a local politician, you have to step into that space, you have to show people you're willing to help amplify their voice. Not speak for them, but listen to them, be the person that will speak up for all those issues that are affecting their daily lives.*

London Borough of Newham: *We have a very big Eastern European population within Newham, but none of them are represented within the council and I think that is not good enough. When you don't see people who look like you, talk like you, who are part of your community represented in elected positions, you will not want to feel like you belong over there. I think there is a need for any party to make sure that our elected representatives look like the area that they represent.*

London Borough of Hackney: *I think what's really interesting when we think about youth engagement in politics, rather than trying to create a space where people come to us, we need to find out how do we go to spaces that people already go to.*

London Borough of Brent: *Being a councillor in Brent which has such a high number of EU nationals, politically you can't ignore that vote. You have to reach out. We've gone door-to-door, I've had some worrying stories about their situation, the situation is never quite as simple as the government thinks it is.*

London Borough of Tower Hamlets: *I think politicians, lawmakers, people in public life, and myself, have failed collectively to listen to the voices of young people, their concerns, their aspirations. And if we take that moment and that time to listen to them, I believe we can build a much bigger, broader, positive and stronger generation of young people going forward to build our nation to be an example of what every nation wants to be on the global platform.*

Case Studies

It is important to recognise the diversity of experiences when speaking about young Europeans in the UK. There is no 'one size fits all' policy to enable young Europeans to be more aware of their rights or be more involved in their local communities. This section presents 11 case studies from each nationality represented in the focus groups. These case studies draw on what the participants communicated during the focus groups and in the questionnaires they completed.

Sterre

Sterre is Dutch and has been living in the UK for fewer than 5 years. She thinks the current situation regarding her rights in the UK is good. She feels at home in London as she finds it much easier to socialise and meet new friends. She applied to the EU Settlement Scheme a few days before attending the focus group, after delaying her decision for months. It was 'easy in the end', although she had to send her physical passport as the phone app could not scan the chip – 'I have been stressing for nothing for these four months'. She speaks about how she found the rest of the process easy and quick. Sterre found out she had to apply for status through a Dutch Facebook group. She speaks about following a range of discussions on social media about the EU Settlement Scheme and expresses concerns that some other Dutch people, in particular long-term residents, write on social media that they refuse to apply to the scheme. The only thing Sterre worries about regarding her status is the lack of physical documents and how this may impact her life in the future, especially if border controls become stricter. She mentions how she will take copies of her payslips and National Insurance number when travelling 'just in case they ask'. Sterre is not involved in UK politics and follows more closely Dutch politicians, including voting in the European elections a few weeks before the focus group.

Ruben

Ruben is Swiss so his rights are like those of EEA citizens and he cannot vote in local elections. He thinks that as a migrant he should not ask for more rights when the UK has already given him 'so much'. He thinks his rights will stay the same regardless of the outcome of Brexit. The information about his rights comes from a newsletter he subscribed to, distributed by the Swiss embassy and through his university. Ruben applied to the EU Settlement Scheme and found it 'super easy' and encouraged all his friends to apply. He considers applying for British citizenship later but mentions he does not feel British from an identity point of view. He also thinks the application fee is a significant barrier. He only became aware that some Europeans have voting rights after moving out from student accommodation and meeting someone from a political party who was canvassing in the area and knocked on his door. Ruben mentions he would not vote if he was not informed. He speaks about some of his friends who voted for Brexit who are not comfortable expressing their pro-Brexit views in young people's groups and thinks there should generally be a more open discussion in politics.

Agi

Agi is Hungarian and currently attending a college in London. She arrived in the UK as a child when her family moved and has been living in London for almost 10 years. She claims she knows ‘nothing’ about her rights in the UK. She feels at home living in London with her mother, despite hearing other teenagers make some ‘stupid jokes’ about migrants at school. Her mother applied to the EU Settlement Scheme on her behalf. She cannot explain the process, but she knows that her mother needs to find some additional evidence that the Home Office requested. Agi received no information about the EU Settlement Scheme through her school – ‘Mum did it for me, but I still don’t know what it’s about’. Her mother found out about the scheme as she proactively signed up to the Home Office mailing list. Agi speaks about the need for schools to invest more in politics classes and offer more information about citizens’ rights. She recently turned 18 years old and did not register to vote because she is ‘not interested in politics’. She comments on how she is sceptical a vote would change anything. However, after another participant in the focus group mentions an upcoming anti-Brexit protest, Agi expresses her interest to join it, as she is ‘directly affected’.

Julien

Julien is Belgian and arrived in the UK less than a year ago to work in the hospitality industry. He feels he has the same rights in the UK as he does in Belgium. He is not concerned about Brexit and feels that very little will change. He does not think he will apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. He is ‘just trying here’, working in a bar in London and unsure whether he will stay in the UK for a long time. He considers the Settlement Scheme to be for long-term residents or those who are confident they will stay. Julien is not involved in UK politics and he is much more interested in politics in Belgium. He comments on how the electoral system in the UK prevents him from being more involved, because he does not identify with ‘either blue or red’. Julien remarks that in the UK politics is a ‘taboo’ topic in conversations when meeting certain colleagues or friends. He feels he can discuss his political views much more openly in Belgium than he can in the UK. Julien was surprised to receive a letter from the council informing him about a local election as he was unaware that he had the right to vote in local elections as an EU citizen.

Paula

Paula is Latvian and arrived in the UK with her parents as a child, almost 10 years ago. She feels at home in the UK. Her parents naturalised as British citizens and she understands that she will also ‘receive citizenship’ after graduating from college. Paula is confident she does not need to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme because her parents have a British passport. She thinks she has sufficient information about her rights and gives the example of the ability to access student loans. Paula goes to Latvian community events with her family and feels that she can have a voice in this way, although overall, she regards the Latvian community as not being ‘outspoken’. She describes her conationals as unlikely to engage in politics or mobilise until an issue impacts them directly in a severe way. Paula engages in politics in the UK and feels ‘sort of represented’. She speaks about her concerns that Brexit will have a negative economic impact. Paula voted in local elections. Although she considered it, she decided not to engage in any protests or political activities in public because she is afraid of conflict after seeing how some people become violent during protests.

Paula comments that the information about rights and politics in the UK is difficult to access and that there should be more simple ways to inform young people about 'how things work'.

Alina

Alina is Romanian and arrived in the UK for work. She feels that she can finally 'have a life' and that everyone treats her equally in the UK. She heard about the EU Settlement Scheme but seems to be conflating it with citizenship when describing it in the discussion. She speaks about how many of her friends, like her, think that the deadline to apply for the scheme is 'a long way to go' and that most people will apply in the few months or weeks before the deadline. Alina speaks about her preparations to apply for British citizenship. One of her children is born in the UK. She worries about Universal Credit and changes to the welfare system. Alina thinks that young Europeans have a voice as individuals but not as a community. She registered to vote but did not vote because she does not feel informed about politics and will not vote 'just for the sake of voting'. Alina thinks that people get involved in politics only when an issue starts affecting them directly. She describes how it is impossible for her to be involved as a working parent on a low income as there is not enough time for political activities. Alina would like to see Romanians who have more free time than her 'take initiative' and the UK authorities employing Romanians to inform Romanian communities about their rights.

Bogdan

Bogdan is Bulgarian and works in a low paid job. He is convinced that EU citizens have the exact same rights as British people. Bogdan recently downloaded the EU Exit ID Document Check app on this phone and plans to apply in the near future. He expects the process to be easy – 'just put some documents there in the app'. He is aware that if he does not apply, he would be unlawfully resident in the UK and wants to avoid problems at work. Worryingly, he assumes that pre-settled status will be 'automatically changed' to settled status once someone has been in the UK for 5 years. He considers applying for citizenship in the future if he decides to stay in the UK, of which he is not completely certain at the moment. His reason for considering citizenship is because 'it is always better to be here legally'. Bogdan thinks there is enough being done to inform young people and the question is whether young Europeans want to read the information that is made available to them. He voted in the UK local elections but does not follow politics closely.

Maria

Maria is Slovak and has been living in the UK for over 10 years. She has a permanent resident (PR) card, obtained under the EEA system. She is slightly worried about Brexit but thinks her rights will not be changed because it is in the UK's interest not to affect their own citizens living in other EU member states. Her main concern is about how her pension would be paid in the future. Maria spent all her adult life in the UK and does not see Slovakia as her home anymore. She lived one year outside London where she 'felt like an outsider' and contrasts this experience to her positive view of multicultural London. However, she has felt less welcome after the 2016 referendum and worries about speaking in Slovak with her son as she lives in one of the few majority Leave boroughs in London. Maria applied to the EU Settlement Scheme to exchange her PR card.

At first, she was ‘positively surprised’ reading about the process, but then experienced a series of difficulties with the technology and she had to send her physical ID to the Home Office. Maria thinks she has no voice at the national level as she cannot vote in national elections. She agrees that voting rights should be linked to citizenship in principle but also thinks that long-term residents should be able to have a stronger voice. Maria avoids speaking about UK politics as she often feels it is not her right to do so as she is not a British citizen. She does not think that authorities can do much about young people’s involvement as it is up to individuals to get engaged as much or as little as they wish.

Sean

Sean is from Denmark and has been living in the UK for less than 5 years. He feels insecure about his rights in the future. He mentions his parents are even more worried than he is, advising him to stockpile essentials before Brexit day. He thinks that he can apply for ‘permanent residency’ after 5 years in the UK. Sean conflates settled status with citizenship. He suggests that students need to wait a further 5 years to qualify for settled status after their studies, as they need to be working for 5 years continuously. He describes having to first apply for settled status then for permanent residency. There is a lot of confusion and misinformation that Sean appears to have received. Sean is consistently advised by friends to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme, but he has not done it yet. He is also misinformed about citizenship, for instance he thinks one needs to be in the UK for over 7 years to become British. His mother is originally from Iran and they feel less ‘judged’ when in London, which he describes as a more tolerant and diverse place. He comments how Danes do not usually experience language barriers in the UK because they watch US television programmes in Denmark. Sean knows about what local councillors do because one lives next door to him. However, he does not feel he has a voice in politics, although he describes how he makes changes that he is proud of in his workplace. He does not vote in local elections, but is confident he would be involved in politics once he becomes British and can vote in the ‘big elections’, which he considers to be much more important.

Kostantina

Kostantina arrived in the UK from Greece 2 years ago, ‘not long enough to feel at home’ in London. She currently works in a charity and worked in schools before. She comments on how as someone with a postgraduate qualification working in a ‘highly skilled’ job she is still on a low income and unable to afford renting anything more than a room in a house share in London. In this context, she explains how salaries are low in many sectors in the UK, but that Brexit is unlikely to make the situation worse. Kostantina agrees with Brexit and speaks about the EU’s impact on Greece. She applied to the EU Settlement Scheme and received pre-settled status, describing the process as easy. Kostantina comments that there needs to be more awareness of rights for all people, as sometimes not even British citizens know their rights. She thinks there should be more information locally and better organised informative websites. She speaks about the language barriers some migrants have in accessing quality information. Kostantina does not receive letters from the council - she ‘moves a lot’. She did not vote as she does not feel at home in the UK and because she did not have enough information about the various candidates. She believes political education is an individual responsibility, but there could be more organised discussions that could facilitate that. She thinks young people are not involved because they simply do not have the time.

Vilior

Vilior has dual citizenship – Albanian and Greek. He is not concerned about Brexit. Vilior cannot say he feels at home in London, but he feels ‘comfortable’. He speaks about his difficulties when first arriving in the UK on a student visa and how he had to find a sponsorship to stay. Vilior struggled to get part-time work while on the student visa as employers were reluctant to do the paperwork for his part-time, short-term jobs. Later on, he applied for Greek citizenship and used it to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. He thinks the process is easy and accessible for EU citizens, but that it is more difficult for non-EU family members, like other Albanians who are applying to the EUSS as family members. Vilior describes his personal positive experience applying to the EUSS, which only took him 10 minutes. He was informed about the scheme via the media and his friends, but he points out that other friends did not know about it. He plans to apply for British citizenship, as he thinks it will secure his rights further. For Vilior, a British passport is ‘something safer for my future’. He compares the cost of UK citizenship with the much cheaper Greek citizenship he applied for in the past. Vilior thinks that the citizenship application fee is a barrier for many, and it should be at least halved. He never voted in the UK after gaining the right to vote in local elections as a Greek citizen and is not interested in politics.

Appendix

Focus group consent form

Focus Group Participant Informed Consent Form

Title of research project: Young Europeans Citizens Led Engagement Programme

Thank you for participating in this research project. This project is funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Citizens' Led Engagement Programme and it is managed by the3million. The aim of the project is to listen to young European Londoners' views on settled status, citizenship and political engagement.

It is important each participant gives informed consent, so your anonymised responses can be included in the analysis.

Please tick next to each statement below accordingly:

Statement	X
I understand the purpose of this research and had the opportunity to ask questions if anything was unclear for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that withdrawing from participating will have no negative repercussions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my responses will be anonymised and treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the audio recording of the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the processing of my anonymised responses for research purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to notes being taken for research purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant:		Name of researcher:	
Signature:		Signature:	
Date:		Date:	

If you have any questions about the project or wish to receive the research report, please contact the Project Manager, alexandra.bulat@the3million.org.uk.

Thank you!

Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this focus group on citizens' rights and political participation. This questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous. By completing this questionnaire, you consent to the data being used to contextualise the focus group findings for the Young Europeans Citizens' Led Engagement Programme managed by the3million. The data will inform a research report and policy recommendations for the GLA.

1. Nationality:
- If you have more than one (e.g. Romanian and French), please mention all that apply.
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. What's your individual annual income (before tax)?
 - Less than £5,000
 - £5,000-£15,000
 - £15,000-£25,000
 - £25,000-£50,000
 - More than £50,000
5. How long have you been living in the UK?
6. Do you have any dependants? (e.g. children, parents, etc.)
7. Are you registered to vote in the UK? YES / NO
8. Have you already applied to the EU Settlement Scheme? If yes, do you have 'pre-settled status' or 'settled status'.....
9. Do you already have a British passport?

If you answered No to Question 9:

10. How likely are you to apply for British citizenship?
 - I already have a clear plan
 - I'm thinking about it
 - I'm not sure
 - I don't think so
 - I would never do this

Why?

.....

11. How informed do you think you are about your rights in the UK in the context of Brexit?
 - I know everything
 - I know some things
 - I'm confused
 - I don't know anything about this topic

12. From where do you get your information about Brexit and your rights?

Focus group topic guide

This is the focus group topic guide used by the peer researchers, co-developed with their input.

A. Citizens' rights

(~5 mins) **How do you feel about your rights in the UK?**

Potential follow-ups: Do you feel at home living in this area? What makes you feel/not feel at home? Has anything changed for you after the 2016 referendum? Etc.

(~15 mins) **Are you aware of the EU Settlement Scheme for EU/EEA/Swiss citizens and their non-EU family members?**

Did you apply?

For settled or pre-settled status?

Can you describe your experience applying?

What are your views on applying for British citizenship?

Did you personally apply/plan to apply?

If yes, ask how they found it, what barriers they encountered etc.

Ask about the reasons one would choose to apply or not to apply for naturalisation.

(~10 mins) **What could local Government do to make young people more informed about their rights in the UK?**

Prompt for specifics, examples. Can interpret this more broadly about the local level – civil society, engaging with different community groups, but also in terms of actual policy recommendations.

Is there anything you would like to add about your rights in the UK that we haven't covered so far?

If not, move onto part 2 – political engagement.

Stimulus material questions

1. Naturalisation form: Whatever your views on applying for citizenship, let's take 5 minutes and imagine you are applying for this on your own. As you go through it, think about what the most difficult parts for you would be and why, and then we can have a chat together.

2. You have a table in front of you with the cost of British citizenship if you were to apply now. What do you think about the cost? What would be an appropriate fee?

3. Take a few minutes and read this leaflet/material on settled status. What do you think about it?

B. Political engagement

(~5mins) **Would you say young Europeans/[nationality] like you have a voice in the UK?**

Do you feel your views are represented locally/nationally/at European level?

(~10 mins) **In what ways have you engaged with politics in the UK so far?**

Voting? Local elections/EU elections/Mayoral elections etc.

Referendum campaigning?

Political parties?

Activism/protests/petitions etc.

In the local community?

Others?

Have you been more or less engaged since the 2016 referendum?

If not involved at all, why not? Why not interested in UK politics etc.

Are you more engaged in politics in your country of birth or in the UK?

(~10 mins) ***What could local Government do to encourage young people to be more actively involved in the communities they live in?***

Prompt for specifics, examples. Can interpret this more broadly about the local level – civil society, engaging with different community groups, but also in terms of actual policy recommendations.

Is there anything you would like to add about your political engagement in the UK that we haven't covered so far?

*Prompts you could use regardless of question:

- Does everyone agree/disagree with what has just been said?
- Does anyone have a different experience/view on this issue?
- Does anyone have more examples on?
- There are usually mixed opinions on this topic, does anyone feel different about it?
- Does anyone who hasn't yet spoken on this have any views?
- Would you like to add anything on this issue?

#RightsAndRepresentation