

Mid-term Review of the Europe for Citizens Programme

Summary of the findings of ECAS' survey

Background to this survey:

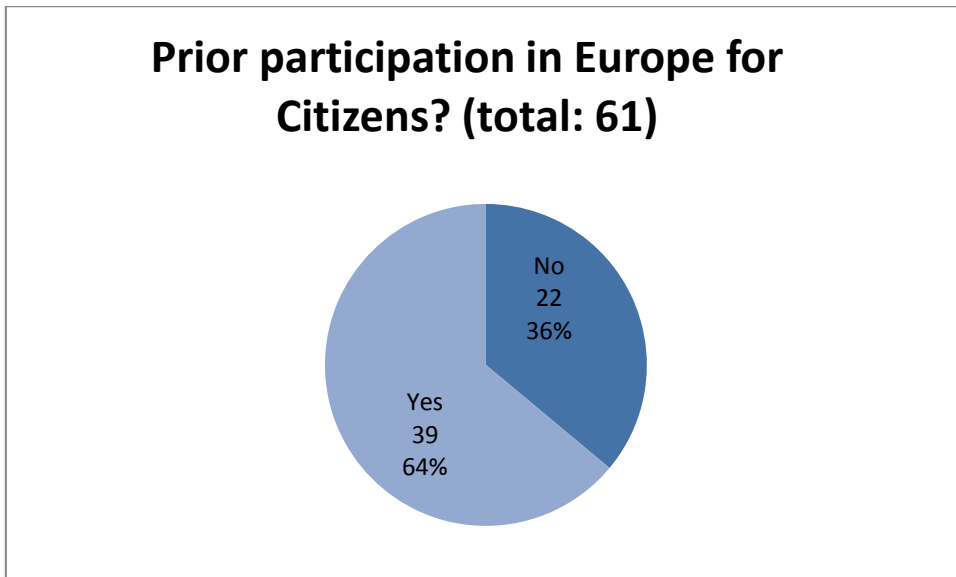
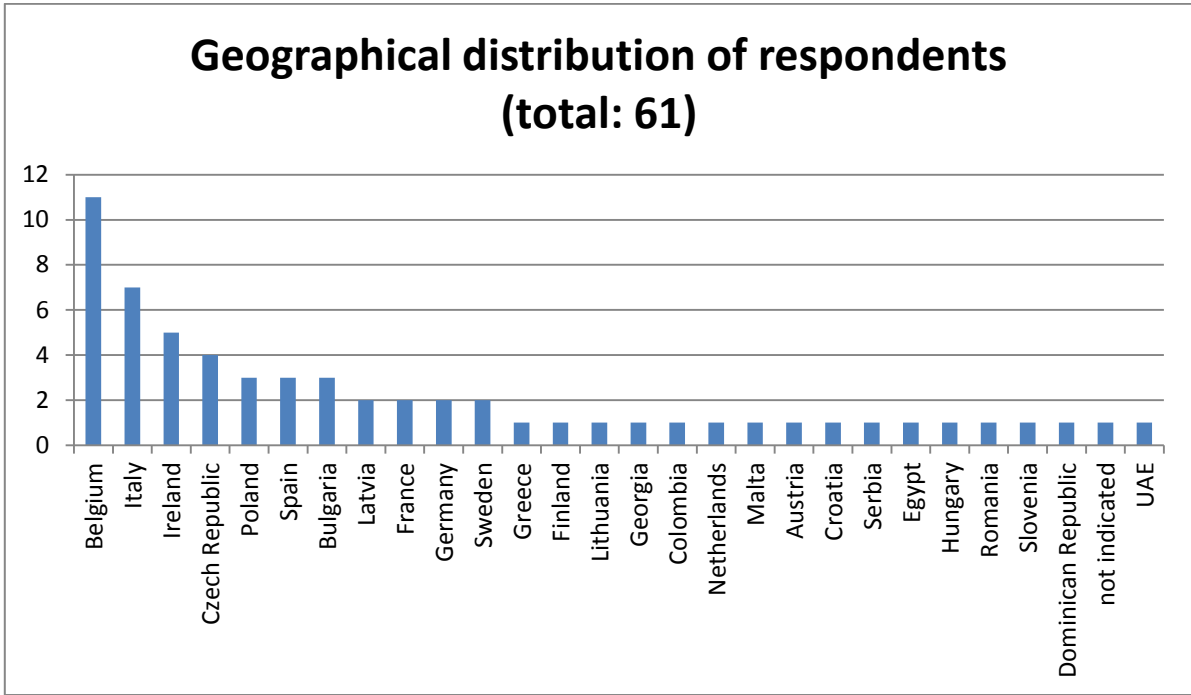
The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) launched an internal consultation among its members, partners and networks in early July 2016 on the Europe for Citizens programme, in order to contribute to the ongoing review of the programme, which should be completed by the end of 2017. The survey was launched after a meeting with the rapporteur of the Europe for Citizens report at the European Parliament, who was interested in knowing the views of actual beneficiaries of the Programme.

The consultation prepared by ECAS consisted of a series of questions aimed at identifying the pitfalls and weaknesses of the programme, whilst also highlighting its strengths and potential. At the closing date, the survey had received a total of 61 responses from different organisations across Europe. The main findings are summarised below. We hope that these suggestions will be taken into account and will feed into the ongoing discussions concerning the future of the Europe for Citizens programme, as well as with regard to the revision of the Multi-annual Financial Framework and the EU budget for 2017.

Profile of respondents:

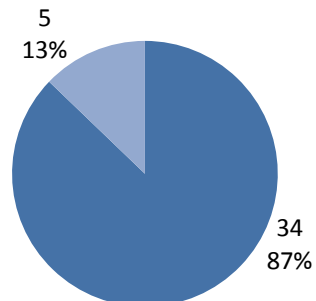
- In total, **61 responses** have been collected from 27 countries (of which 54 are from EU countries, one from a non-indicated country, and 6 from non-EU countries. Of the latter only 1 currently participates in the funding programme, i.e. Serbia)
- The countries where most respondents came from are: Belgium, Italy, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Poland and Spain
- **64% of respondents have previously participated in the Europe for Citizens** programme, while 36% have never done so
- Of those who have participated in the programme previously, a majority did so as **partners of a project** (87%), while only 13% were involved as participants
- At least 7 respondents out of the 39 who have participated in the programme have also been beneficiaries of operating grants (i.e. receivers of structural support)
- As for the 36% who have never participated in Europe for Citizens, the main reasons for their non-participation are: 1) **lack of awareness of this programme**, and 2) **lack of sufficient human resources** to deal with the administrative burden. Other reasons are the **difficulties in finding partners** in other countries and the **low success rate** of the programme (**for some strands between 4 and 5%*). Another reason mentioned is the low funding available

- Of those who have participated in the programme, a **majority chose the Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation Strand (72%)**, and in particular the Civil Society Projects Measure, while 28% participated via the Remembrance Strand.



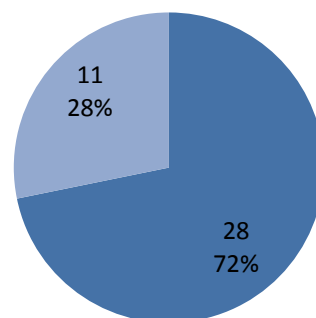
Prior participation in Europe for Citizens? (total: 39)

■ Involved as a partner ■ involved as a participant



Distribution by Strand (total: 39)

■ Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation Strand
■ Remembrance Strand



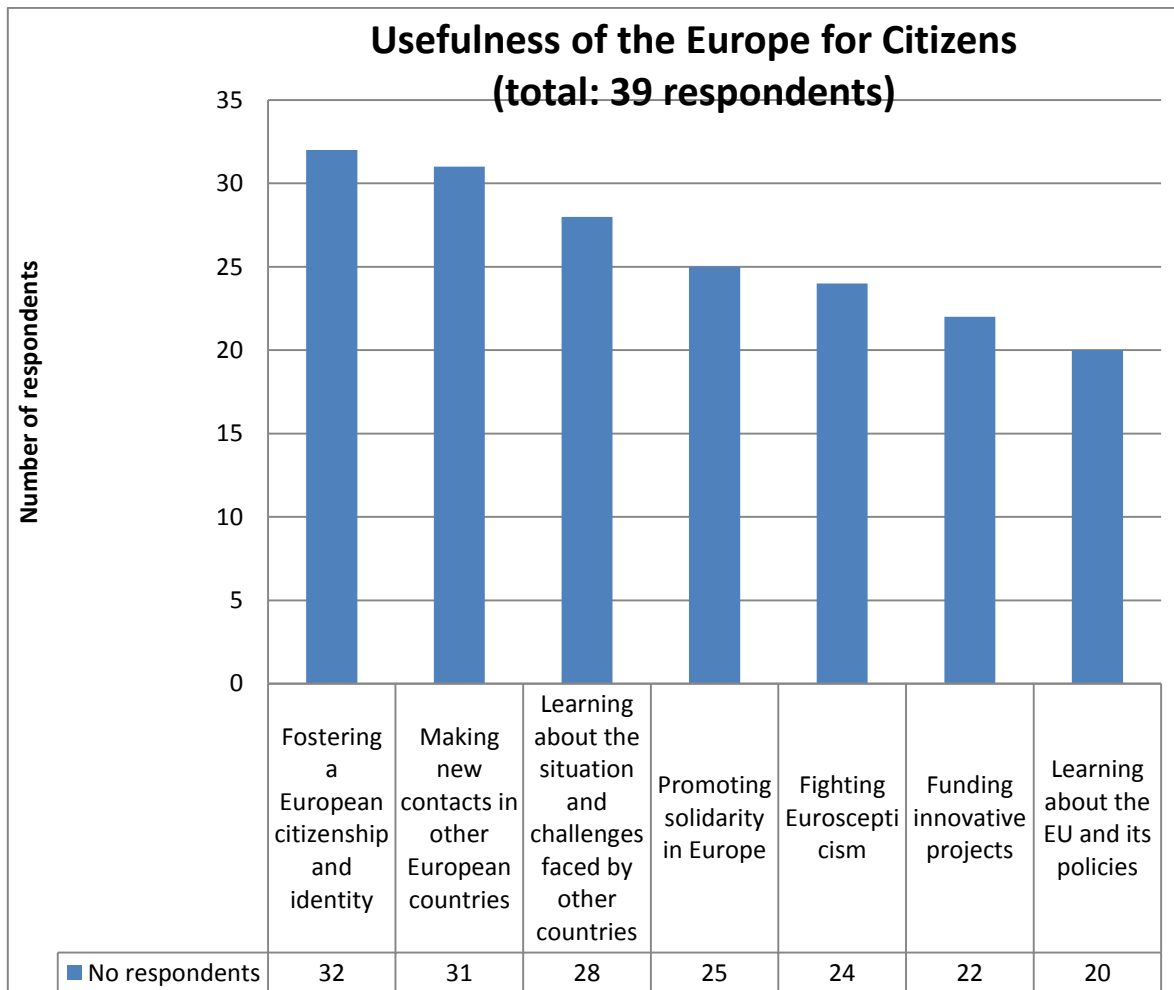
Programme's achievements:

- Out of the **7 proposed achievements¹** of the Europe for Citizens programme, a majority of respondents agreed, in this order, that **it fosters a European citizenship and identity**, in line with the objectives of the programme, that **it contributes to making new contacts in other EU countries**, and that **it raises awareness about the situation and challenges faced by other countries**. There is less support for the programme's

¹ Only respondents who had indicated that they had previously participated in this Programme were able to reply to that question. Respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

contribution to raising awareness about the EU's policies and to fighting Euroscepticism or funding innovative projects.

- Other achievements of the programme, proposed by the respondents, are the fact that **the programme fosters tolerance, mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue**, that it allows people to meet one another at European level and to debate and plan co-development in the EU, and that it gives civil society a voice in debates about the European project.



Programme priorities for 2014-2020:

Respondents were asked to rank, according to importance, the priorities of the programme that are fixed until 2020², namely:

Under the Remembrance Strand:

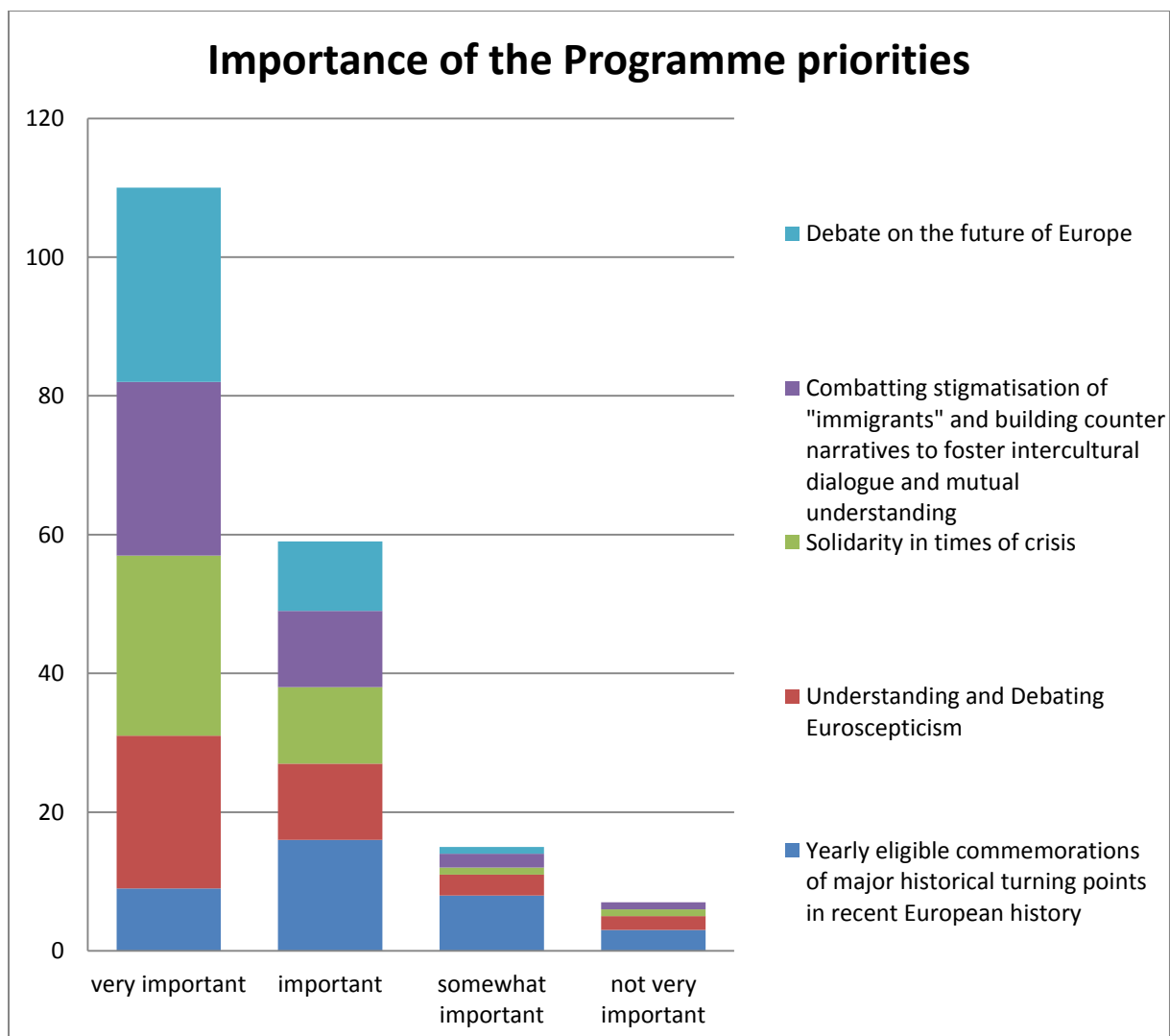
² Again, only respondents who had indicated a prior participation in the Programme were allowed to reply to this question.

- Yearly eligible commemorations of major historical turning points in recent European history

Under the Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation Strand:

- Understanding and debating Euroscepticism
- Solidarity in times of crisis
- Combatting stigmatisation of "immigrants" and building counter narratives to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding
- Debate on the future of Europe

The graph below shows the relative importance that respondents allocated to the above-listed priorities under each Strand. **Solidarity in times of crisis** and the **debate on the future of Europe**, followed by **combatting the stigmatisation of immigrants stand out as the most important priorities**, according to respondents. Yearly historical commemorations appear less important to the majority of respondents.



In addition, respondents were given the possibility to **add new priorities** they would like to see included in the future. Suggestions included:

- Education for citizens' participation in EU decision-making
- Reducing inequalities and marginalisation in Europe and ensuring the respect of fundamental rights
- Increased support for unity and solidarity within the EU, regardless of times of crisis
- Raising citizens' awareness of the added value of the EU decision-making process
- Projects targeting senior citizens and families
- Combating extremism and populism
- EU labour mobility
- Understanding Europe's colonial past
- Civil society against terrorism
- The contribution of minorities to European heritage
- Re-thinking the values underpinning European integration
- Dealing with Brexit and its domino effect
- Promoting critical thinking
- Sustainable development

Project duration and budget

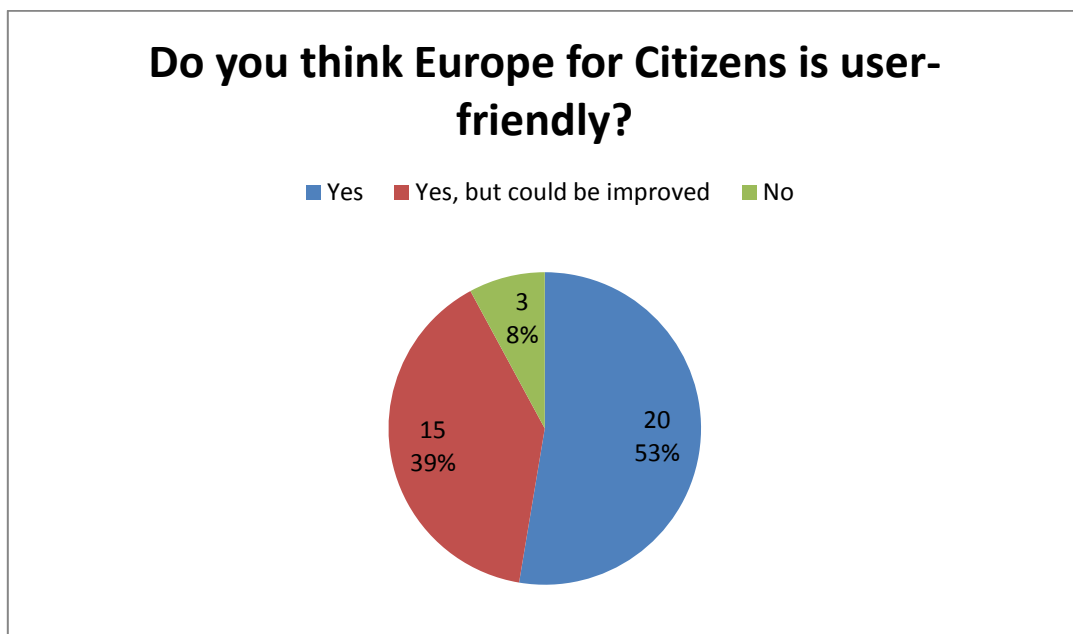
A large majority of respondents believe that the current duration of funded projects is **appropriate** (87%), while about 13% believe it is not appropriate. Those who deem it not appropriate argue that the duration of the projects, limited to 18 months, is not sufficient for developing functional and lasting partnerships, which call for a longer term horizon.

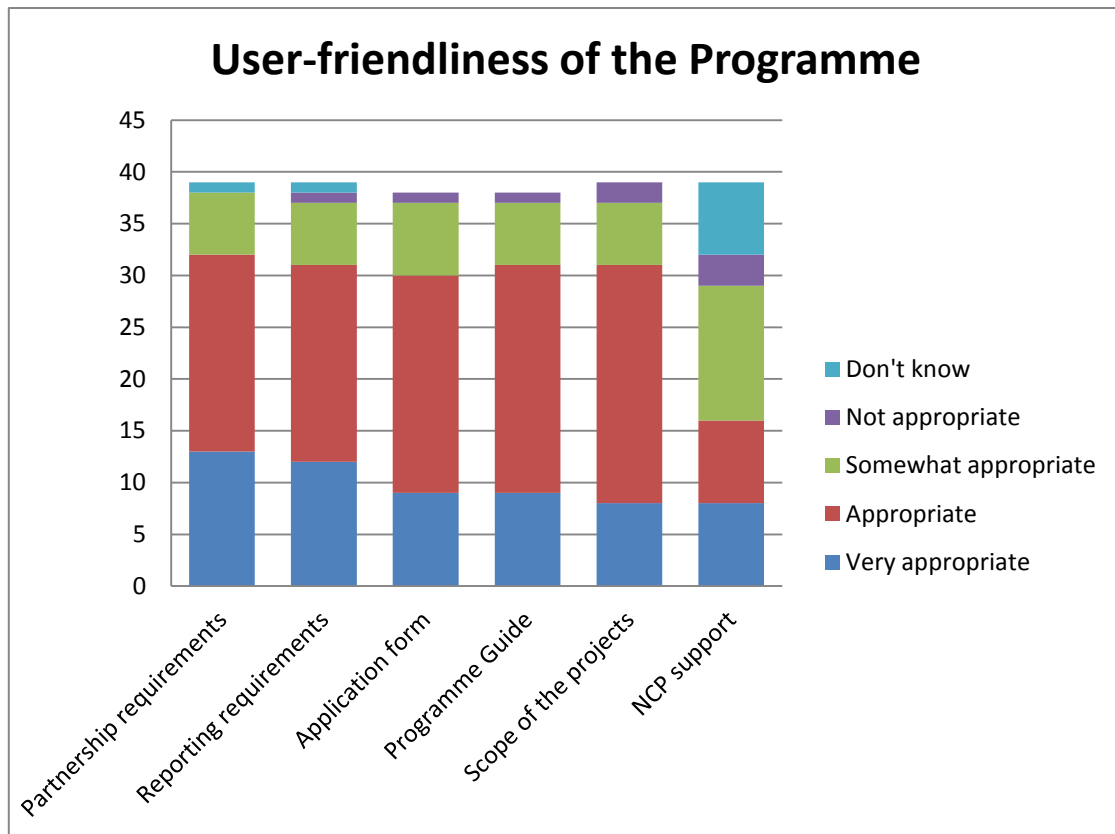
As for the size of the proposed grants under the different strands, a majority of respondents either indicate that funding is "sufficient" or they reply that they "don't know". Some of those who indicate that the current level of funding is not sufficient argue that **limited funding had an impact on the quality of some outputs and deliverables of projects** (i.e. conferences, studies). Others indicate that **funding is not enough to even cover the staff costs of the people involved in projects**, which puts pressure on small organisations in particular. This is all the more so if projects involve big transnational partnerships, in line with the programme's goals, as this adds administrative burdens while further splitting the budget. Some respondents also complain that **the budget does not take into account differences in prices** and staff costs in Western and Eastern Europe, which are not comparable.

A general criticism is that while the budget for individual projects (i.e. grants) may be sufficient, **the overall funding available for the programme is negligible in comparison with its importance** and should be significantly increased to live up to its ambition.

User-friendliness of the programme

- A majority of respondents believe that the programme, as it currently is, is user-friendly (53%), 39% think it is user-friendly but it could be improved and 8% think it is not user-friendly
- Overall, respondents seem to be happy about the partnership requirements, the reporting requirements, the Programme Guide and the scope of the projects. The length and content of the application form is also positively assessed. This stands in sharp contrast with the **perceived user-friendliness of the National Contact Points support network**, which only 16 respondents consider either to be “very appropriate” or “appropriate”. The majority of respondents rank them as “somewhat appropriate”, while others consider them “not appropriate” or they simply “don’t know”. It should, however, be noted that **assessments on the usefulness of NCPs vary significantly from one country to another**. Respondents from Germany, Ireland, Austria, the Netherlands or Latvia, for instance, seem to be rather optimistic about this support structure, while respondents from Spain, Italy, France or Belgium are rather negative.





Strengths and weaknesses of the programme

- As strengths of the programme, respondents highlighted the following:
 - **Straightforward, easy-to-fill-in application and low bureaucratic reporting requirements compared to other programmes is positively highlighted by many**
 - Networking and multidisciplinary approach
 - The fact that it supports organisations with an interest in the EU project
 - Its focus on citizens
 - Focus on societal aspects of the EU
 - An opportunity to partner with organisations from all across Europe
 - It is focused on activities rather than on important results – less administrative burden compared to other programmes
 - An opportunity to provide input to policy-makers to ensure policies are in line with citizens' needs
 - Support for intercultural dialogue and for civil dialogue with EU institutions
- Suggestions for improvements include:
 - **Increasing the budget allocated to this programme to ensure that more projects can be funded is one of the top requests.** The lack of resources at the European Commission for this programme is seen by some respondents as proof that the programme is not considered a priority

- Offering participants the opportunity to go deeper into their projects in order to make a real impact, including through follow-up projects
- Providing information about ongoing and past projects
- Training on what is expected from the project evaluators, as well as about reporting documents, as it is a regular practice with other funding programmes such as Horizon 2020
- Giving more prominence to think tanks, the role of which is not sufficiently recognised
- Enhancing the visibility of project outcomes and lessons learned via EU and/or national websites
- Re-thinking the lump sum funding scheme in order to ensure the sustainability and relevance of the funded projects
- More promotional and networking activities among potential applicants and experienced project beneficiaries
- Revising the instalment scheme – some respondents note that it is sometimes hard for small organisations to secure 50% of funds ahead of the start of the project, as this usually demands taking a loan. Maybe a 70%-30% pre- and final financing scheme would avoid these cash flow problems
- Improving communication with EACEA and assistance with the application
- Promoting linkages between the strands of the programme to have less compartmentalisation

Visibility of the Programme

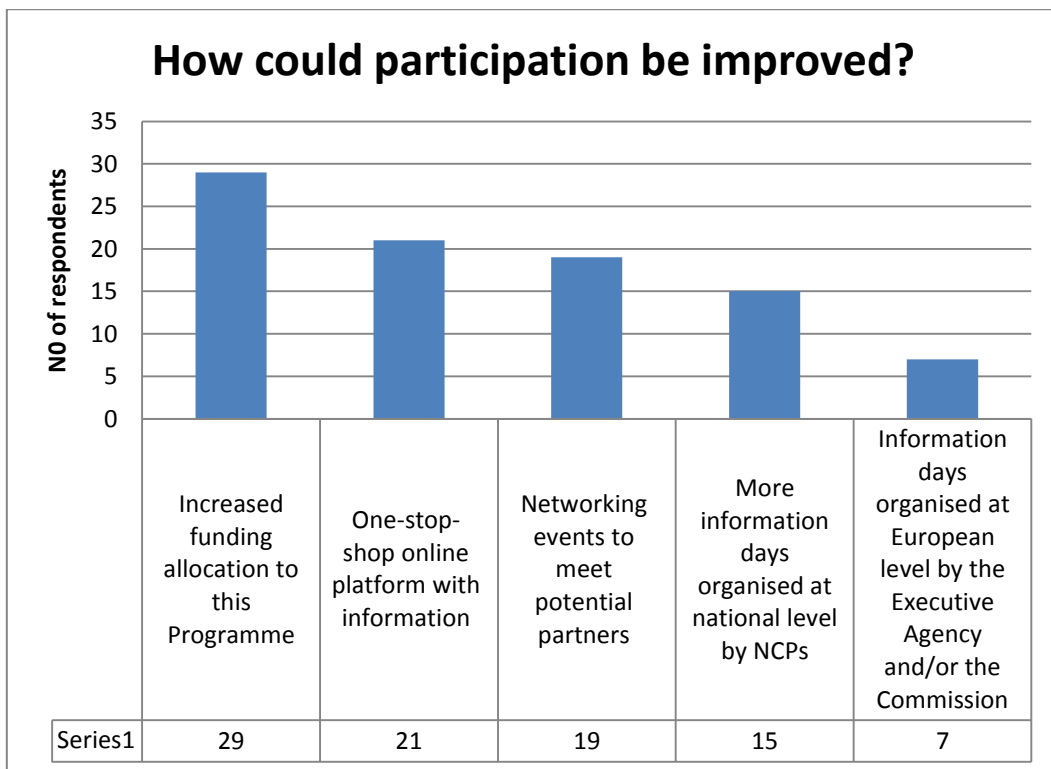
- Respondents were also asked about the usefulness of the new project dissemination platform launched for the programme (<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/europe-for-citizens/projects>). All but 5 respondents found this website useful
- Some respondents added that **highlighting the results of funded projects is a positive thing** and that platforms like this one can be useful to find like-minded organisations and exchange ideas. The mapping of projects is also positively assessed as it offers an overview of funded projects and shows future applicants the areas where action is missing and it **can therefore be a source of inspiration**
- Others argue that this website is **only partially useful to provide the public with a general overview of funded projects**, and that other types of publicity and dissemination are needed. According to some, an excel file does not showcase projects as such, but merely provides data. Another criticism is the fact that **the information about the projects is largely presented in the national language**, which limits its use. They argue that English should be made mandatory

Recommendations to increase participation

- Based on the respondents' replies, an **increased funding allocation to this programme could be a crucial driver to enhance participation**. Respondents argue that the current

limited funding, compared to other programmes, makes funding very competitive and discourages many organisations from applying, in particular under the civil society projects measure

- A **one-stop-shop online platform gathering all the relevant information** concerning the programme and the calls for proposals is also considered important, together with **more networking opportunities to meet partners**
- Few respondents think that information days organised at EU level by the EACEA or the Commission in Brussels would have an impact on participation



Beneficiaries of operating grants

Out of 38 respondents who have participated in the programme, at least 7 indicated they had been beneficiaries of operating grants.

As positive aspects of these structural funding schemes, they highlighted:

- The **independence** they give to beneficiaries, by allowing them to set their own priorities and actions with an EU perspective, instead of simply following the priorities set by the Commission or other donors' short-term interests
- Their support to the **sustainability of organisations** such as think tanks focusing on EU affairs that would otherwise have to significantly limit their remit due to a lack of funding at national level for their activities

- The **flexibility** they offer beneficiaries to be able to react to sudden challenges, events or opportunities with **innovative** and **timely** initiatives
- The opportunity they offer for **long-term and strategic planning**, which allow, in particular, small organisations to develop expertise in a particular field thanks to the predictability and stability of funding.