

Political participation of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg

Obstacles and Recommendations

ECAS Brussels, June 2023

Welcome

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Obstacles and Recommendations

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-REPORT-

June 2023

European Citizenship Accelerator (EURECA) Project

Work Package	Title
2	European Citizenship Rights
Activity	Title
2.2	Voting Rights Focus groups in Luxembourg and Spain
Milestone	Title
MS6	Voting Rights focus groups in two Member States

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1. Introduction

The aim of the European Citizen Accelerator (EURECA) project is to strengthen European citizenship and identity through citizen engagement, support the post-COVID-19 restoration of freedom of movement in the EU, and foster EU mobile citizens' rights, including their voting rights in their host countries.

As part of the EURECA project, ECAS is organising focus groups with NGOs, political parties, EU mobile citizens and public administrations in the Member States where local elections will take place in 2023 (Spain and Luxembourg).

The goal of these focus groups is to acquire a better insight into the challenges EU mobile citizens face regarding their electoral rights, how their participation in elections can be improved, and to define solutions and recommendations. In addition, these focus groups contribute to creating new synergies and fostering interaction between different stakeholders.

This report provides information acquired during the focus group in Luxembourg, which took place online (Webex) on Wednesday, 10 May 2023, between 10:00 and 12:00. The following participants attended:

- One participant from ASTI - Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés, Luxembourg;
- Two participants from SOLVIT Luxembourg.

This report describes the main points mentioned by participants during the discussion on the voting rights of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg. Furthermore, it describes the methodology, followed by the main recommendations and the conclusion.

2. Methodology

An invitation for the focus group was sent to 90 stakeholders: municipalities, political parties, EU mobile citizens, academics, expat associations, and civil society organisations.

ECAS has performed a very thorough mapping of all NGOs, policymakers and any other relevant stakeholders located in Luxembourg who could benefit from the outcomes of the debate. Potential participants have been contacted in advance and provided with the agenda of the focus group, as attached below in the Annex.

The focus group consisted of two separate sessions: the first on the obstacles experienced by EU mobile citizens regarding their political participation in Luxembourg, followed by a discussion on solutions to improve political participation.

After a short presentation of ECAS, Claire Morot-Sir, the focus group moderator, started with the introduction and a tour-de-table.

During the first session, the main obstacles to the political participation of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg were discussed. The following questions were raised:

- What are the main obstacles EU mobile citizens face regarding their political participation in Luxembourg?
- Do you think EU mobile citizens are aware of their right to vote?
- In which ways does the language barrier represent an obstacle to EU mobile citizens' political participation?
- Do the mandatory vote (once registered in the electoral roll) and the absence of e-vote and proxy options deter EU mobile citizens from exercising their voting rights?
- In which way does the requirement of 6 months of residence in a given municipality to stand for elections affect the political participation of EU mobile citizens?

The second session covered recommendations and good practices. The following discussion points were used:

- Discussion on the proposals of the European Parliament¹ and the European Commission² on revising electoral rights;
- Good practices aimed at improving political participation of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg.

The presented discussion points were developed after undertaking a literature review to define the context, formulate the questions for the focus group's participants and identify initial good practices to serve as inspiration for the participants. The following section presents the results of the literature review.

¹ [MEPs begin revising rules on EU elections, calling for pan-European constituency | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

² [European Democracy: Commission sets out new rules \(europa.eu\)](#)

3. Voting rights of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg

According to Article 22 (1) of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, all EU citizens have the right to vote and stand as candidates in the municipal and European Parliament elections in the country they reside in, regardless of them being nationals of that country.

In 2022, Luxembourg reported the highest percentage of non-native born residents among all EU Member States. According to Eurostat³: 58.2% of 15- to 74-year-olds living in Luxembourg are foreign-born. Of those, more than 3 out of 4 on average were born in another EU member state.

Directive 93/109/EC⁴ on the right for EU citizens to vote and to stand as a candidate in their country of residence of which they are not nationals, allows municipalities with more than 20% of EU foreign nationals to establish some additional requirements (e.g., duration of residence) for voting at the municipal elections. As reported by participants, Luxembourg initially required a period of residence of at least 10 years for EU mobile citizens to vote. More recently, this requirement was reduced to 5 years and was finally abolished last year, thanks to advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns from civil society organisations (e.g., ASTI - Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés, CLAE Asbl - Comité de Liaison des Associations d'Etrangers, CEFIS - Centre d'étude et de formation interculturelles et sociales). Regardless of this change, and despite the push in the past few months to encourage people to register for the elections through public campaigns (i.e., *je peux voter*⁵), only 20% of the foreign population registered to the electoral roll.

In Luxembourg, voting is mandatory⁶ for all voters registered on the electoral roll, regardless of their nationality. EU mobile citizens have the right to vote in municipal elections without losing the right to vote in the municipality of their home country.⁷ They can register to vote in municipal elections in Luxembourg by applying to be registered to the electoral list either online or at their municipal administration⁸.

³ [Foreign-born people and their descendants - main characteristics - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [EUR-Lex - 31993L0109 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ <https://jepeuxvoter.lu/en/>

⁶ [Municipal elections - Your Europe \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ Article 1(2) Directive 93/109/EC: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31993L0109>

⁸ [Registration on the electoral rolls for the communal elections — Citizens — Guichet.lu - Administrative Guide - Luxembourg \(public.lu\)](#)

In terms of the registration process for the elections, municipalities are well aware of the voting rights of EU mobile citizens, and there do not seem to be specific obstacles for them to be enrolled. To increase awareness and participation, some civil society organisations proposed to introduce the systematic option of registering to the electoral roll in the registration procedure for residence; however, this proposal for amending relevant legislation was rejected.

According to participants, the main obstacles to electoral participation seem to be related to the mandatory vote, as well as language issues. The three official languages of Luxembourg are French, German and Luxembourgish, but few foreigners and EU mobile citizens can speak the latter. This linguistic obstacle does not relate to administrative procedures for the exercise of voting rights, but rather to the comprehension of political messages, as politicians mostly use Luxembourgish in their daily communications.

Regarding the entitlement for EU citizens to stand as a candidate for municipal elections, the same requirements as for Luxembourgish nationals apply to all foreign nationals; in order to be eligible, candidates must have resided legally for at least 6 months in the municipality.

4. Obstacles to political participation of EU mobile citizens

After providing a general overview of the reasons why participation of EU mobile citizens in municipal elections is still relatively limited, participants discussed in detail the actual obstacles that tend to discourage the exercise of political rights by those citizens.

All participants pointed out that the fact that **voting becomes mandatory** when residents subscribe to the electoral roll is a major obstacle which often deters EU mobile citizens to participate in the elections. In Luxembourg, no proxy or e-vote is possible; the only alternative to vote in presence is to vote in advance by postal mail. According to one of the attendees, however, this does not necessarily constitute a barrier, while the mandatory vote discourages foreign citizens from registering to the lists. In their view, familiarising those citizens with their voting rights and obligations by introducing a systematic option for subscribing to the electoral roll when registering as residents at the municipality could be a solution to increasing awareness and participation in elections.

Language was also identified as a major obstacle by all participants. Although this is usually not a barrier for the procedures of registration to the electoral roll and the exercise of the vote - as relevant information is often provided in multiple languages spoken by foreign citizens – it is an obstacle to political participation as it often prevents the understanding of the messages and positions of the different politicians and political parties. Even though the official communications are given in the three national languages, politicians mainly communicate through the national media in Luxembourgish, which is spoken only by a small percentage of foreign citizens. Moreover, leaflets and promotional materials of political parties or candidates are often only in Luxembourgish. This leads to the fact that EU mobile citizens often do not feel connected with the national and local governments and do not know the manifestos of the political parties or the candidates standing for municipal elections.

One of the attendees highlighted that the national campaign to encourage people to subscribe to the electoral roll and vote at municipal elections was carried out in multiple languages, including those most spoken by foreign citizens in Luxembourg. Nevertheless, the campaign had a limited impact as it was not broad enough, and had limited funding. Additionally, they pointed out that there are contradictory messages regarding the integration of foreigners in the Luxembourgish society; for instance, in the Luxembourgish constitution, which was recently reformed, the principle of equality towards the law is attributed only to Luxembourgish citizens, to which the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe recommended to broaden this formulation in order to ensure its application to all citizens.⁹

⁹ §§32-34 of the LUXEMBOURG OPINION ON THE PROPOSED REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 118th Plenary Session (Venice, 15-16 March 2019): [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2019\)003-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2019)003-e).

EU mobile citizens can stand as candidates for municipal elections under the same requirements as Luxembourgish citizens, which was perceived positively by all participants.

However, although the number of foreign and EU mobile citizens standing for the elections has significantly increased since 1992, the number of elected candidates among EU mobile citizens does not reflect this evolution. The language barrier seems to play a key role in this context, given that often the communication among politicians, local authorities, and Luxembourgish nationals is in Luxembourgish. The same attendee also highlighted that, in Luxembourg, citizens can express their vote either for individual candidates or for a party as a whole¹⁰, which often leads to a significant advantage for candidates who are well-known in the respective municipality. This can represent an obstacle for foreigners since parties tend to give more opportunities and key roles to those who are well-known in the territory.

Also, the various Luxembourgish municipalities are very different in terms of the political landscape, and often the connections in the territory represent a key factor for success in elections.

Other attendees commented that in general, EU mobile citizens standing for elections is not as common, as the media tends to report their candidacy as an exceptional fact.

Another issue identified by participants is the **lack of awareness and information on EU citizenship rights**, and of the EU and its political discourse. For instance, the media did not talk much about Europe's day, although Luxembourg hosts the headquarters of many European institutions.

To conclude, one attendee pointed out that EU mobile citizens working in EU institutions and having children attending European schools are often disconnected from the local political landscape.

¹⁰ <https://guichet.public.lu/en/citoyens/citoyennete/elections/elections-legislatives/vote-elections-legislatives.html>.

5. Solutions to increase political participation of EU mobile citizens

The discussion on potential solutions to increase political participation of EU mobile citizens started with an introduction of the current [proposals from the European Parliament](#) and the [European Commission](#).

The European Parliament proposal includes:

- The introduction of postal voting for everyone and the facilitation of access to elections for citizens with disabilities
- The introduction of 2 constituencies for EP elections – one at the national and one at the EU level
- The extension of the possibility to stand for elections to every citizen who is at least 18 years old in all EU Member States (currently there are different age requirements across countries)
- The introduction of quotas or zipped lists to ensure gender equality.

The European Commission proposal foresees the following measures:

- The obligation to inform mobile citizens of their voting rights (e.g., when registering as residents in a new EU country).
- The introduction of mandatory standardised templates for voting at elections with the obligation of using the language most broadly spoken by EU mobile citizens in the respective Member States.

Attendees then exchanged their ideas on the possible solutions that could be adopted to increase EU mobile citizens' participation in both municipal and European elections.

5.1 Registration process for EU mobile citizens

One of the attendees affirmed that the introduction of the systematic request for choosing whether the subscription to the electoral roll when registering for residence at a given municipality could significantly raise awareness of voting rights and participation in municipal elections. This should be accompanied by information on those rights and obligations given by civil servants at the moment of the residence registration for newcomers. Alternatively, an option could be the automatic registration of new residents to the electoral roll, but this solution could be problematic as EU legislation states that automatic registration can apply in countries where there is no mandatory vote¹¹.

¹¹ [Municipal elections - Your Europe \(europa.eu\)](#)

5.2 Civic/political education and information

Participants highlighted the importance of civic and political education and information, both in schools and among adults, as a possible long-term solution. In this context a question regarding the respective roles for the ministry of education and civil society organisations was raised.

One attendee pointed out that democracy matters are often approached very superficially in schools and generally only when elections are close. In general, there is a need for the educational system not to exclusively focus on work-oriented skills and knowledge but also on skills and knowledge that are necessary for democratic citizenship. CSOs, on the other end, should continue to raise awareness on EU citizenship rights.

The same attendee also commented that politicians and political parties should make an extra effort to communicate to foreign citizens using the languages that are mostly used among them and take responsibility to make politics more attractive for citizens.

6. Conclusions

To summarise the outcome of this focus group on electoral participation of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg, here are the main recommendations that were provided by the participants:

- A systematic or automatic registration to the electoral roll for municipal elections should be introduced when newcomers register for residence at the municipality;
- More effort should be put into translating information about the proposals of the various political parties to increase the knowledge of EU mobile citizens on local parties and ideologies;
- Civic education for democratic citizenship should be further developed in schools;
- CSOs, media and public authorities should do their utmost to raise awareness of the European Union and EU citizenship rights.

7. Agenda

Roundtable on the political participation of EU mobile citizens in Luxembourg

Online, 10th May 2023

Time	Activity
10:00-10:10	Welcome and presentation of the agenda
10:10-10:25	Short introduction by the participants
10:25-10:45	Session on the obstacles experienced by mobile EU citizens regarding their political participation in Luxembourg, debate on the additional period of residence requirement specific to Luxembourg
10:45-11:05	Presentations of the outcomes of the first session and discussion
11:05-11:25	Discussion on solutions to improve political participation Focus on proposals from the European Parliament and the European Commission
11:25-11:45	Presentations of the recommendations and discussion
11:45-12:00	Conclusions

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Welcome