

Active Citizenship

Issue Briefing

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Definitions

Active Citizenship is an umbrella term for the acquisition and exercise of rights for civic and political participation. As such, it includes citizenship and residence, membership in (political) organisations, voting, running for office, volunteering or participation in political protest.

New Europeans are people with lived migration experiences who have ties that go beyond their current country of residence, thus possessing a dual or plural cultural and linguistic background.



Background

Despite the growing number of *New Europeans* in Europe, their contribution to political life and to society in general is not always visible, encouraged or facilitated.

Immigrants' political **involvement** and membership of political organisations is generally **lower than among natives**. New Europeans are also **less likely to be eligible** for **election** or to be accepted by the electorate. However, there are exceptions and these New European representatives often serve as role models, especially within their own community.

The **gap in electoral turnout between migrants and native residents is**, however, **narrowing over time**, due to higher voting turnout among second generation migrants.

New Europeans are very active in voluntary associations and other social structures such as business associations, thus encouraging their communities to play a bigger role in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their new “home” countries.

Increased political participation and active citizenship among New Europeans should therefore be fostered so as to further their social inclusion as well as increase the acceptance of diversity in Europe.

Despite the turnout between migrants and natives is continuously narrowing, **institutions and civil society need to act on the barriers** that generally stop or discourage New Europeans from taking part in the civil and political life of the society they live in.

Some of the **main difficulties concern language barriers, lack of knowledge** on the **political/social system, distrust in public institutions**, non existence of migrant led organisation and **lack of support for self-organisation, exclusion and** other forms of racism within the host society and **administrative constraints** (lack of citizenship, in the first place).



Including migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background as well as promoting their active participation in consultative and decision-making processes can help empower them and ensure that integration and inclusion policies are more effective and reflect real needs.



Our Actions

If **European democracies** want to remain free, open and cohesive, they **must ensure that all citizens**, regardless of their origins, **find a way towards citizenship**, understand their rights and obligations, and are able to make full use of them.

UNITEE believes that the following areas should be addressed by policy-makers and society:

Integration and Active Citizenship

Countries accepting of diversity score better in terms of active citizenship as integration and active citizenship are a two way process: greater activity in society can further integration and greater integration leads to active citizenship. Taking action on the hurdles that still hinder integration is the first step to improve Active Citizenship in Europe.

Lack of Political Representation

In many countries, people with a migrant background face obstacles to political participation, often as a result of greater exclusion in society. Prejudice and the deliberate penalising of migrants or people with a migrant background represent some of the reasons why New Europeans lack political representation and as a consequence their needs and their voices remain unheard.

Contribution of New Europeans

By creating their own business or having a professional career, New European entrepreneurs and business professionals act as role models, foster economic incorporation, thus enhancing the integration of migrants and active citizenship. New European business associations also play a key role in supporting their members to become more active citizens. These individuals and organisations must be encouraged and supported.

Our Objectives

Furthering the political participation and social activism of all citizens in the EU.

Boosting the economic incorporation of New Europeans as a way to **fight social exclusion** and **increase active citizenship**.

Encouraging the European institutions to embrace diversity in order to be fully representative.

Helping to **raise awareness of New Europeans' potential and positive contribution** to European economic, social, political and cultural life.

Promoting a change of mentality within society towards diversity to achieve full social inclusion.

Fostering a greater involvement of society in the European project.

Encouraging research in the field of active citizenship, especially among New Europeans, in order to gain valuable insights in the needs and problems faced by this group.

Fomenting the joining of networks and associations to support New Europeans and assist them when they exercise their political rights.

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Integration and inclusion of people with a migrant background is a two-way process. We need a whole of society approach that includes migrant and local communities, employers, civil society and all levels of government.

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Our activities

We strongly encourage our members to **exchange ideas and best practices** and to **join forces** in order **to participate** even more to the **social, cultural and institutional life of European cities**.

- Meetings with European decision-makers to promote the role of its members in society and find solutions to deepen their sense of belonging and of European citizenship.
- Use of our communication channels to inform and update stakeholders and civil society on European policies, events and other relevant developments.
- Engagement in debates and dialogues on entrepreneurship by organising and participating in conferences, roundtables and other events (e.g [European Business Summit](#), [European Migration Forum](#)).
- Coordination & participation of EU funded projects that aim at improving New Europeans' inclusion in Europe's society. You can find our projects [here](#).



Project MILE

MILE is two-year project coordinated by UNITEE and co-funded through the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. It involves partners in six European countries: Belgium, Greece, Latvia, Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK.

MILE stands for Migrant Integration through Locally designed Experiences and is about empowering the local community as a whole, including migrant communities.

European initiatives on Active Citizenship

Democracy Action Plan

The European Democracy Action Plan is designed to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU by promoting free and fair elections, strengthening media freedom, and countering disinformation.

Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021 - 2027

In November 2020, the EC revealed its new action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027. This action plan sets out measures to step up action and to bring together actors at all levels in a common endeavour to achieve integration, inclusion and build more cohesive and inclusive societies for all. It sets out 5 goals in the main sectoral areas: inclusive education and training; improved employment opportunities and skills recognition; better access to adequate and affordable housing and health. This document underlines how the responsibility of the integration process rests not with one particular group but rather with many (host communities, institutions, social and economic actors). Thus, the actions proposed are directed on different levels of governance and society.

Expert Group on the views of migrants

The mission of the Expert Group on the views of migrants in the field of migration, asylum and integration is to provide advice and expertise on policies in these fields. Actively involving migrants, including asylum applicants and refugees, in the design and implementation of policies in this field is essential to make them more effective and better tailored to the needs on the ground.

Main EU funds contributing to integration and inclusion

- Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
 - European Regional Development Fund
 - European Social Fund
 - Erasmus +
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