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

**EU Citizenship Report 2020
Empowering citizens and protecting their rights**

1. Introduction

Alongside peace, EU citizenship is one of the most significant achievements of the European project and is unique in the world. EU citizenship rights, including free movement, political and democratic rights and the right for EU citizens to benefit from consular protection by other Member States when not represented abroad, have had a transformative impact on Europe. There are now over 13.3 million Europeans¹ who enjoy their right to reside in another EU country.

The Commission reports on the application of the EU citizenship provisions every 3 years² and proposes new priorities for the next 3 years. Since the last EU Citizenship Report in 2017, there have been significant challenges in exercising EU citizenship rights, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there have also been many positive developments. For example, 9 out of 10 European citizens are now familiar with the term 'citizen of the European Union' - the highest number on record³. Furthermore, turnout in the last European elections was at its highest in two decades⁴, largely driven by young and first-time voters. The gender gap in voting and in the composition of the European Parliament has decreased further. Support for free movement is at its highest in 12 years⁵.

Since the last Citizenship Report, Europe has seen the emergence of powerful social movements on issues such as climate change, economy and taxation, racism and equality. These movements often combined street protests with online activism, successfully overcoming geographical and linguistic borders to create pan-European, and even global, synergies. If ever there was a doubt that European citizens were losing their taste for political engagement, the recent years have shown that they are keener than ever to make their voices heard, and to shape the society they live in.

Recent challenges have also been many and complex. The COVID-19 crisis shows how much Europeans have come to rely on free movement and depend on it for economic and personal reasons. In the first half of 2020 thousands of Europeans were stranded abroad due to travel restrictions imposed following the COVID-19 outbreak, which resulted in an unprecedented coordinated effort of the EU and its Member States that brought more than 600 000 citizens home safely. While Europe rose to the challenge of rescuing its citizens abroad, there were questions about whether the pooling of EU resources in third countries should be more streamlined, and whether assistance to citizens should be made more flexible. During the pandemic, as well as during the European elections and beyond, Europeans were targeted

¹ Eurostat database migr_pop1ctz.

² For 2017 report see https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=51132

³ Flash Eurobarometer 485, see:

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2260>

⁴ See the report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, COM(2020) 252 final.

⁵ Flash Eurobarometer 485

with online disinformation, jeopardising the basic requirement for their democratic participation in public life and their informed choices.

Overshadowed by the impact of new technologies and the global health emergency, many everyday practical administrative and legal burdens continue to affect the lives of EU citizens. They range from complicated voting registration procedures for mobile EU citizens, to insufficient digital options for administrative procedures and tax regimes for frontier workers. In addition, the Brexit referendum that led to the UK's departure from the EU has had an impact on the lives of close to 3.7 million EU citizens⁶ who made their home in the UK and millions of UK citizens who lost their status of EU citizens.

The Citizenship Report is strongly linked to the Commission's six headline ambitions for Europe⁷, particularly the new push for European democracy and bringing citizens closer to the EU. It should be seen in combination with and as complementing other initiatives, such as the new Strategy for strengthening the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights⁸ and, in particular, the European Democracy Action Plan⁹. The actions and priorities set out in this report directly focus on empowering the citizen, thereby complementing the European action plan on democracy, which addresses key challenges to our democracies and encompasses policy areas with a broad societal impact¹⁰.

The proposed priorities are based on dedicated consultations¹¹, including a public consultation on EU citizenship rights and a Flash Eurobarometer survey on EU citizenship and democracy¹², and on research, including the work of the Network of Academics on EU Citizenship Rights. In defining its priorities, the Commission has also drawn directly on the numerous letters it has received from citizens who regularly write to explain the problems and issues they encounter when exercising their rights in their day-to-day lives.

⁶ Eurostat database migr_pop1ctz.

⁷ These are mentioned in the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024: A European Green Deal, An economy that works for people, A Europe fit for the digital age, Promoting our European way of life, A stronger Europe in the world and A new push for European democracy.

⁸ COM(2020) 711.

⁹ COM(2020) 790

¹⁰ The scope of the Citizenship Report also goes beyond democratic rights of EU citizens and covers other EU citizenship rights enshrined in the Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Apparent links exist also with the recently adopted "New Consumer Agenda", which addresses consumers' immediate needs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and presents a vision for EU consumer policy for the next five years. The Agenda puts forward a holistic approach to consumer policies aiming to protect and empower EU citizens as consumers by safeguarding their right under the green transition and digital transformation of our society.

¹¹ Including with Member State experts in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections and the expert group on free movement in September 2020. A specific consultation meeting was held in September 2020 with beneficiaries of the 'rights, equality and citizenship' programme and the 'Europe for citizens' programme.

¹² Flash Eurobarometer 485 "EU Citizenship and Democracy", conducted in the 27 EU member States between 27 February and 6 March 2020.

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2260>

The 2020 Citizenship Report is composed of two separate documents: this Report and the Report under Article 25 TFEU¹³ presenting the Court of Justice jurisprudence in the area of citizenship rights.

The Report takes stock of the progress made on EU citizenship since the 2017 report and proposes new priorities and actions to bring real benefits to EU citizens ensuring they can enjoy their citizenship rights in practice, particularly in a cross-border context. It sets out a number of concrete actions and priorities around the four main themes:

- Strengthening democratic participation, citizens' empowerment and fostering inclusion of citizens in the EU;
- Facilitating the exercise of free movement and simplifying daily life;
- Protecting and promoting EU citizenship;
- Protecting EU citizens in Europe and abroad, including in times of crisis/emergency.

2. Strengthening democratic participation, citizens' empowerment and fostering inclusion of citizens in the EU

2.1. Effective exercise of voting rights

Voting and standing for election is the basis of a democratic society. The 2019 European Parliament elections saw the highest turnout of the last two decades. The increase in **turnout** was driven by young and first-time voters. Women also participated in greater numbers, and the voting gender gap narrowed from 4% in 2014 to 3% in 2019. The number of women elected to the Parliament increased from 37% to 39.4%. Data on the electoral participation of other underrepresented groups remains limited, as few Member States collect it¹⁴.

However, **underrepresented categories of voters** face additional challenges. For people with a minority racial or ethnic background, it can be more difficult than for the rest of the population to feature on candidate lists, registering for elections or performing other electoral procedures. For instance, social and economic vulnerabilities of many Roma people are often exploited during election processes¹⁵ through vote buying and vote manipulation, direct

¹³ COM(2020) 731

¹⁴ Data about turnout to national elections suggest that a number of citizens may face additional challenges to vote. Among people with the nationality of the country in which they live, close to 60 % of those born in the reporting country to immigrant parents report that they voted in the most recent national parliamentary elections in their country of residence, across the EU. This is almost 10 percentage points lower than among their peers with parents born in the reporting country, and 5 points below turnout among those who arrived as children and then acquired the citizenship of the reporting country. However, it is 10 points higher than among those with nationality of the reporting country who arrived after the age of 15. For further details, please see OECD-EU (2018), *Settling in 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*.

¹⁵ See Roma Civil Monitor: Synthesis report on implementation of national Roma integration strategies in Bulgaria, Czech Republic Hungary, Romania and Slovakia (March 2018), pp. 12-13 and p. 28; Roma Civil

pressure or threats. Successful inclusion of Roma depends on whether their right to vote and be voted for is adequately exercised. Therefore, Member States should put more effort into raising election awareness in order to increase the participation of Roma and other disadvantaged groups - ensure that they can make free and informed choices in elections and encourage their political representation¹⁶.

Persons with **disabilities** continue to be underrepresented in elections when exercising both their right to vote and to be elected. They face diverse barriers, such as limited accessibility of premises and ballots or insufficient accessible information on candidates and debates. An estimated 800 000 EU citizens from 16 Member States may have been deprived of the right to participate in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament¹⁷ because their national rules and organisational arrangements do not take their specific needs sufficiently into account. The Commission will work with Member States and the European Parliament to guarantee political rights of persons with disabilities on equal basis with others¹⁸ and in particular to ensure that this right is enjoyed in the next European Parliament elections.

Many Member States took specific measures to improve the **participation of women** in the EU elections¹⁹. These included linking the allocation of public funding for political parties to promoting the political participation of women²⁰, quota systems for candidate lists²¹ and introducing a general obligation for political parties to have gender-balanced lists of candidates²². There are still many challenges to address, however. Online hate speech and cyber violence against women in politics increasingly creates barriers to women's political participation by, for instance, discouraging female candidates from running for office²³.

With a view to the next European Parliament elections, the Commission will organise a **high level event** bringing together various authorities to address the challenges related to electoral processes as well as empowering citizens to participate as voters and candidates in the democratic process.

Monitor: A synthesis of civil society's reports on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies in the European Union (March 2020), p. 23.

¹⁶ The new Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation was adopted on 7 October 2020: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package_en

¹⁷ 2019 report of the European Economic and Social Committee 'Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in EP elections'.

¹⁸ EU and all Member States are parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Consequently, in agreement with the Article 29 on Participation in political and public life, States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others.

¹⁹ Data on women's representation in the various levels of political decision-making in the Member States is published in the gender statistics database of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/browse/wmidm/wmidm_pol

²⁰ Ireland

²¹ Examples: BE, ES, SI, FR, PT, SI.

²² Romania.

²³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2018: Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe:

<http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/WomenFFViolence/2018/20181016-WomenParliamentIssues-EN.pdf>

Within the **European Cooperation Network on Elections** the Commission has helped EU countries exchange best practices that help different groups of citizens participate in elections, and it will continue to do so²⁴. It will also continue to help promote best practices within the network, in line with the highest European standards for free and fair elections, including the standards recommended by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe²⁵.

In 2021, the Commission will organise workshops for the European Cooperation Network on Elections on: (i) improving the accessibility of European elections; (ii) practices in remote voting and specifically electronic voting (e-voting) or online tools that can facilitate electronic democratic participation while addressing security and confidentiality concerns²⁶; and (iii) developing indicators, e.g. on the democratic participation of specific groups. Further encouraging the **European dimension in elections to the European Parliament** strengthens the link between individuals and European institutions, and hence the democratic legitimacy of European decision making. It also helps political accountability. To be able to hold politicians to account, people need to see a clear link between candidates' national campaigns and programmes, European policies and the political parties with which they are affiliated. During the 2019 elections, Europe and European issues such as 'values', 'economics', 'social' and the 'environment' were prominent in the materials used during the campaign²⁷. A number of political parties provided voters with information about their European affiliations and several parties took steps to raise awareness of the European dimension of the elections through their campaign materials and websites. Two political parties were directly present in several Member States and campaigned on a pan-European programme²⁸. One Member of the European Parliament was elected from such a party in Germany²⁹. When asked about this topic in the 2020 Eurobarometer³⁰ survey, more than 4 in 10 respondents (43%) believed it likely that having lists of candidates with nationals of other EU countries would make them more inclined to vote in the next European Parliament elections.

²⁴ The European Cooperation Network on Elections was set up in January 2019 to help Member States share expertise and best practices, including on threats, gaps and enforcement. See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/eu-citizenship/electoral-rights/european-cooperation-network-elections_en

²⁵ For more information visit:

https://www.venice.coe.int/WebForms/pages/?p=01_Elections_and_Referendums&lang=EN

²⁶ The open public consultation for this report showed a majority support for postal voting, while many respondents consider that the risks of online voting still outweigh the benefits.

²⁷ Based on over 11 000 electoral materials, including posters, television commercials, social media posts and printed announcements made by 418 political parties or candidates, as well as 193 official Facebook accounts, the European Elections Monitoring Centre identified the most common issues raised in election campaigns as 'Europe' (15% of all topics), followed by 'values', 'economics', 'social' and the 'environment'. See Johansson, Bengt and Novelli, Edoardo, '2019 European elections campaign – Images, topics, media in the 28 Member States', 9 July 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

²⁸ Report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, COM(2020) 252 final.

²⁹ For Volt Deutschland. DiEM25 was unsuccessful in the European Parliamentary elections, but it also had candidates in national elections in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Austria, Poland and Portugal, and has members in the Danish, Greek, Polish and Portuguese legislatures.

³⁰ Flash Eurobarometer 485.

A growing group of citizens entitled to vote and stand as candidates in European Parliament elections are **‘mobile’ EU citizens**: citizens who have moved to live, work or study in another Member State³¹. It is estimated that, in 2019, of the over 17 million mobile EU citizens in the EU, almost 15 million³² were eligible to vote (over 3% of the total EU voting population) in the 2019 European Parliament elections. However, a relatively low number³³ of them exercised their rights.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) in the recent Eurobarometer³⁴ survey considered it likely that being able to contact a **helpdesk** that provides citizens with information on European Parliament elections and voting procedures would make them more inclined to vote in the next European Parliament elections. More than 60% of those who responded to the open public consultation for this report thought that not enough is being done to inform citizens about their EU citizenship rights, and the lack of information at national level was the most often mentioned barrier (22%). The Commission will explore, in close cooperation with the Parliament, the possibility of creating a dedicated shared resource to support EU citizens in exercising their electoral rights, as well as providing additional avenues for them to report hurdles and incidents affecting their political participation. This should be made available to both EU citizens (including mobile EU citizens) and relevant authorities by autumn 2023.

Mobile EU citizens also have the right to vote and stand as candidates in **municipal elections** and **European Parliament elections** in their Member State of residence. Yet, their turnout is frequently lower than that of citizens who are nationals of the country. This is partly due to complicated registration processes³⁵ and insufficient voting options³⁶. The Commission intends to update the relevant directives³⁷ to strengthen mobile citizens’ ability to exercise their electoral rights. This would involve updating, clarifying and strengthening the rules in order to ensure that they support the broad and inclusive participation of mobile EU citizens. Areas to be covered include the provision of targeted information to mobile EU citizens³⁸ - including on the deadlines, the implications and durability of voter registrations, the exchange of information on the registration of mobile EU citizen voters and candidates in European elections, and the necessary adjustments following Brexit.

³¹ The Commission supported Member States in implementing the specific provisions of EU law related to the electoral rights of mobile EU citizens within the Expert Group on Electoral Matters. Exchanges covered the applicable formalities, including the relevant deadlines for registration, and practices to support participation.

³² Eurostat database migr_pop1ctz.

³³ Data received from the Member States show that the registration of mobile EU citizens in their countries of residence remains low across the EU, although the numbers vary greatly between Member States (as does the availability of relevant data): from 0.1% in Croatia and 0.2% in Latvia to 17% in Spain and 24% in Malta. For more information, see staff working document COM(2020) 252 final.

³⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 485.

³⁵ Deadlines to register to vote for the European Parliament elections can, for example, vary between Member States, making it more difficult for mobile EU citizens to register in time.

³⁶ This can include administrative letters being sent late and cumbersome postal voting procedures.

³⁷ Council Directive 94/80/EC and Directive 93/109/EC.

³⁸ This information will be made available via the Your Europe portal and national portals participating in the single digital gateway, as required by Regulation 2018/1724 (Cf. Annex I, D.3).

Several EU Member States³⁹ deprive their nationals who permanently reside in other countries of the right to vote in national parliamentary elections. These **disenfranchised** citizens often face exclusion from political life in both their country of origin and their country of residence. In its 2014 recommendation⁴⁰, the Commission urged Member States to allow their nationals to apply to remain registered on the electoral roll and therefore retain their right to vote. It will continue to monitor the situation and calls for the Member States concerned to abolish these disenfranchisement rules.

EU citizenship rights do not grant mobile EU citizens the right to vote in **national elections** in their Member State of residence, even though they are active members of society and are affected by national policies. According to the Flash Eurobarometer 485 survey, more than 6 in 10 Europeans (63%) consider that it is justified for EU citizens living in an EU country that is not their country of origin to acquire the right to vote in national elections and referenda in their country of residence. The open public consultation for this report revealed similar support for granting mobile EU citizens the right to vote in national elections of their Member State of residence⁴¹. In March 2020, a European Citizens' Initiative on this subject was registered⁴². The Commission will explore this topic further with the Member States.

Election observation is a good way to engage citizens with the electoral process, and to improve public trust in free and fair elections. Election monitoring by citizens can go beyond observing the voting and counting of ballots and include the application of electoral rules online, which can greatly help the work of the national authorities responsible for electoral matters. Building on existing successful practices, the Commission intends to fund projects that foster independent election observation, including by citizens, with guidelines or good practices discussed within the European Cooperation Network on Elections.

³⁹ Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Ireland and Malta.

⁴⁰ Commission Recommendation 2014/53/EU.

⁴¹ The respondents believed voters should be allowed to choose between the two countries or to vote in both the country of origin and of residence in equal proportions. For many, the length of residency is the appropriate criteria for deciding whether to grant foreign nationals the right to vote in national elections.

⁴² On 4 March 2020, the European Commission agreed on admissibility and registered a European Citizens' Initiative entitled 'Voters without borders, full political rights for EU citizens'. The organisers call for 'reforms to strengthen the existing rights of EU citizens to vote and stand in European and municipal elections in their country of residence and new legislation to extend them to regional, national elections and referenda'.

Action 1 – In 2021, the Commission will update the directives on voting rights of mobile EU citizens in municipal and European elections, to facilitate the provision of information to citizens and improve the exchange of relevant information among Member States, including to prevent double voting.

Action 2 – The Commission will explore the possibility of creating a dedicated shared resource to support EU citizens in exercising their electoral rights. The Commission will continue to work with the Member States through the European Cooperation Network on Elections to facilitate and improve the ability of EU citizens to exercise their voting rights including by supporting the exchange of best practices and mutual assistance to ensure free and fair elections.

Action 3 – The Commission will fund projects on independent election observation, including monitoring by citizens.

2.2. Empowering citizens' participation in the democratic process

Increasing citizens' involvement at all stages of the democratic process is key for our European democracy. Many new initiatives to involve citizens in the decision-making process⁴³ are emerging. There is for example a surge of interest in **deliberative democracy** across the EU⁴⁴, and this needs to be recognised and encouraged. Increasing the transparency of policy- and decision-making and involving citizens in deliberations on the complex questions faced by the European institutions is central to democratic legitimacy. It is also relevant to citizens' confidence in and connection to EU institutions.

A major pan-European deliberative democracy exercise, the upcoming **Conference on the Future of Europe** will create a new public forum for an open, inclusive, transparent and structured debate with citizens around a number of key priorities and challenges. It will feature from the start a ground-breaking **multilingual digital platform** that will make the Conference accessible to citizens from all walks of life, and from all corners of the Union. Citizens will be empowered to put forward ideas and proposals, or to organise local debates. Thanks to real-time translation in all EU languages, citizens from different Member States will be able to follow the debates, offering the prospect of genuinely transnational debates about the future of Europe. The improvements to the lead candidate system for the European

⁴³ Initiatives included citizen assemblies (like the ones held in Wallonia to involve people in drawing up policy recommendations on recognising 'fake news'). Citizen assemblies are deliberative bodies used in a number of Member States to enable people to contribute to policy making. A notable example is Ireland, where they are commonly used to develop options for referenda.

⁴⁴ In a recent report, the OECD described the depth and spread of inspiring deliberative democracy initiatives, including in the EU, where thousands of randomly selected citizens took part in more participatory governance styles of democracy. ('Catching the Deliberative Wave': <https://www.oecd.org/gov/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions-339306da-en.htm>).

Parliament elections, as well as how to address the issue of transnational lists could be discussed at the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

Complementing other actions proposed under the European Democracy Action Plan, the Citizenship Report takes a citizen-centric approach and focuses on actions and initiatives that directly empower the citizens and protect their rights. Innovative and user-centred techniques that are suitable for different ages and needs should be used to support deliberative and representative democratic participation. Policies that raise awareness and **increase public involvement in decision making** at European level should benefit all citizens. This is crucial for ensuring that European citizens are confident that their voice is heard and that voting matters. Empowered citizens should have the tools, the channels and the skills to make their voices heard in the public arena so they can contribute directly to shaping public policies at all levels. The Commission will explore innovative ways to consult citizens and gather their feedback on new EU legislation.

The Commission is already testing participatory and deliberative processes, for example in designing and implementing cohesion policy projects⁴⁵ and in identifying the possible priorities for the five EU missions that will be an integral part of Horizon Europe, the next framework programme for research and innovation (covering cancer, climate adaptation, greener and smarter cities, healthy soils, and healthy oceans and waters)⁴⁶. It will continue to fund **research and innovation projects** that aim to develop deliberative and participatory democracies through experimentation and explore the practices, challenges and impacts of deliberative democracy processes at different geographical scales and in different social groups⁴⁷. The Commission will also fund innovation projects that increase capacity or offer hands-on support to engage European citizens in the transitions that are part of the European Green Deal, through both deliberation and participation⁴⁸, and other areas⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/04/22-04-2020-deadlines-reminder-boost-citizen-engagement-in-the-implementation-of-cohesion-policy

⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme/missions-horizon-europe_en. The Commission will announce the final selected missions at the end of 2020. Once missions launched, European citizens will continue to be engaged in all phases of their implementation.

⁴⁷ In particular, Horizon 2020 will provide almost EUR 12 million to four multi-stakeholder consortia, which will run research and experimentation activities on: (i) democratising territorial cohesion (experimenting with deliberative citizen engagement and participatory budgeting in European regional and urban policies), (ii) cities as arenas of political innovation in the strengthening of deliberative and participatory democracy, (iii) inclusive science and European democracies, and (iv) developing participatory spaces using a multilingual, dynamic deliberative approach. Its successor programme, Horizon Europe, has already identified the creation of a 'more resilient, inclusive and democratic European society' as one of its key strategic orientations and the first work programmes will therefore continue to fund research in these areas.

⁴⁸ This is done in particular via the 'Green Deal call', which mobilises EUR 1 billion for research and innovation projects that respond to the climate crisis and help protect Europe's unique ecosystems and biodiversity. Next to the thematic areas reflecting the key work streams of the European Green Deal, a cross-cutting strand will address citizen empowerment by mobilising funding for three key topics: (i) European capacity for citizen deliberation and participation for the Green Deal, (ii) behavioural, social and cultural change for the Green Deal, and (iii) enabling citizens to act on climate change and environmental protection through education, citizen science, observation initiatives and civic involvement.

⁴⁹ Citizens are also consumers who have been significantly challenged by the pandemic in their daily lives, including as regards the availability and accessibility of products and services and travelling within, and to and

Moreover, the European Union aims to further encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe⁵⁰. The promotion of inclusive participatory democracy is also one of the guiding principles of the **European Union's Youth Strategy (2019-2027)**⁵¹ which aims to support the involvement of young people in Europe in shaping society and politics. The three core areas of the EU Youth strategy are *Engage, Connect and Empower*. *Engage* stands for youth participation and the EU's resolve to encourage democratic participation of all young people, mainly through the **EU Youth Dialogue**⁵², a structured youth participation tool and one of the biggest citizens' participation tools in the EU that contributes to bringing young people's ideas to the table. It is an excellent example of a bottom-up mobilisation of voices successfully reaching policy-makers. 2020 marks the tenth anniversary of the EU Youth Dialogue⁵³.

The **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)** is an important part of EU citizenship rights and a powerful instrument for participatory democracy in the EU. It allows one million citizens residing in one quarter of the Member States to ask the Commission to submit a proposal for a legal act that implements the EU treaties⁵⁴. As of January 2020, there are new rules that make the ECI more user-friendly and accessible so that it can help increase the participation of European citizens in the EU's democratic process. On 15 July 2020, the European Parliament and the Council adopted temporary measures to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ECI. The rules have been modified to allow for an extension of the collection periods of citizens' initiatives affected by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been accompanied by a massive wave of **false or misleading information**, including attempts by people and groups from outside the EU to influence EU citizens and debates. By requiring greater accountability for online platforms, the Commission is continuing its work to support an information environment in which citizens can develop well-informed opinions on public affairs. On COVID-19 related disinformation, the Commission has set up a monitoring and reporting programme as a follow up to the June 2020 COVID-19 Joint Communication⁵⁵. Signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation have been reporting monthly on the actions taken to limit the spread of COVID-19 disinformation on their services. In addition, consumer scams, such as offering

from the EU. The "New Consumer Agenda" is based on the participation of consumers in the implementation of its actions, which will be ensured, among others, by strengthening consumer organisations, which represent consumers' interest, and advice and support them. This is particularly important for some categories of citizens who are more vulnerable because of social circumstances or particular characteristics, such as their age, gender, health, digital literacy or financial situation.

⁵⁰ Article 165(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

⁵¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL&from=EN>

⁵² https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/euyouthdialogue_en

⁵³ The EU Youth Dialogue resulted in the adoption of the European Youth Goals that represent young people's vision for Europe and are paramount of our ambition to seriously consider input from younger generations and to integrate a longer-term perspective in policymaking, encouraging dialogue, and increasing transparency and accountability about our policy choices.

⁵⁴ So far, 75 initiatives have been registered, of which six have completed all stages of the procedure and have been successfully submitted to the Commission (source: https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/home_en).

⁵⁵ Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative "Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right", 10 June 2020, JOIN (2020) 8 final

unnecessary, ineffective and potentially dangerous protective products, have surged as a particular element of disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁶. Initiatives provided in the Joint Communication⁵⁷ and the new Consumer Agenda⁵⁸ address these issues. The European Democracy Action Plan and the Digital Services Act are addressing the challenges posed for our societies by online disinformation.

Participation in learning activities can contribute to empowering citizens' participation in democratic processes. This is recalled in the **European Skills Agenda**⁵⁹, which promotes skills for life because “democratic societies depend on active citizens who can discern information from various sources, identify disinformation, take informed decisions, are resilient and act responsibly”. With this view, the Commission will support the development of quality and inclusive adult learning, in line with the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Digital technologies are transforming democratic decision-making in the EU, as well as the way public authorities interact with citizens. Online tools can facilitate interaction and democratic participation in current times, when circumstances have forced many people to change their working habits and the way they interact with each other⁶⁰. At the same time, digital engagement is limited by people's technical skills.

One of the Commission's key priorities is ‘A Europe fit for the digital age’ and improving the digital skills⁶¹ of both young people and adults. This is the focus of the updated **digital education action plan**⁶² that runs from 2021 to 2027. Relevant actions include reinforcing efforts to foster digital literacy and promote the development of common guidelines to tackle disinformation through education and training, and supporting the development of a better understanding of artificial intelligence and data among all citizens and systematic integration of digital literacy into formal and informal education projects. The Commission is also committed to addressing **the impact of ageing** in all policy areas in order to help societies

⁵⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation_en

⁵⁷ Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative “Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right”, 10 June 2020, JOIN (2020) 8 final.

⁵⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council “New Consumer Agenda – Strengthening consumer resilience for sustainable recovery”, 13.11.2020, COM(2020) 696 final. In line with the initiatives under the new Consumer Agenda, the Commission will support the development of online investigation capacities of national consumer protection authorities and facilitate the cooperation between the Consumer Protection Cooperation network and other enforcement networks and stakeholders to tackle consumer scams, unfair marketing practices and fraud.

⁵⁹ COM (2020) 274 final of 1 July 2020.

⁶⁰ During the 2020 European Week of Regions and Cities, the Commission hosted a session on ‘No lockdown for e-democracy’ featuring best practices of selected EU funded projects and exploring the potential of digital technologies to empower citizens to take part in the European democratic debate.

⁶¹ Equipping people with the skills needed for the digital transition is a major focus of the European Skills Agenda, which envisages a number of actions in coordination with the Digital Strategy, the Industrial and SME Strategies and the European Education Area.

⁶² The plan has two strategic priorities: (i) fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem in Europe (ii) and enhancing the digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. See https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/deap-communication-sept2020_en.pdf

and economies adapt to demographic changes⁶³. It will outline specific actions to encourage the active participation of citizens in all stages of life, from young to old⁶⁴, with a potential additional focus on children's participation in EU political and democratic life.

Mobile EU citizens settling in another Member State need **support** to ease their inclusion in the host society. Some mobile EU citizens may be in a precarious situation, such as rough sleepers, or may come from a minority background and may be entitled to additional support. Currently, support is often made available to third-country nationals and mobile EU citizens as a specific group often lack sufficient support. There are, of course, exceptions to this and a growing number of local government and civil society projects are trying to fill this gap. In addition, every year, the Commission supports awareness-raising actions on EU citizenship rights and the inclusion of mobile EU citizens through its dedicated funding in the area of EU citizenship.

Furthermore, international research and literature finds a strong association between **cultural participation and democracy**. Societies are said to be more open and tolerant, better functioning, economically stronger and with higher democratic security where people have easy access to a wide range of cultural activities and where participation rates in these activities are high. In this context, the Commission is preparing to launch, in early 2021, an independent study “The importance of citizens’ participation in culture for civic engagement and democracy – policy lessons from international research”. It will summarise existing knowledge and evidence on this topic, will distil key policy lessons and will highlight examples of successful actions from several EU Member States. The study will support the Commission in the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and of the Council’s 2019-2022 Work Plan for Culture.

⁶³ In June 2020, the Commission adopted a Report on the Impact of Demographic Change, which presents the drivers for demographic change and their impact across Europe.

⁶⁴ In the Commission’s report on European Parliament 2019 elections COM(2020) 252 final, it was announced that a specific focus of the Commission to support inclusive and equal participation for the 2024 elections will be on younger and older people, women, mobile EU citizens and people with disabilities.

Action 4 - The Commission will support the active participation of citizens in the democratic process, and will take innovative approaches to involving them in the legislative process to ensure that EU laws are fit-for-purpose and align with EU values. It will lead by example by funding projects that support European citizens' engagement, via the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, deliberation and participation in the Horizon Europe programme and in the European Green Deal transitions.

Action 5 – The Commission will fund specific local actions that aim to support the inclusion of EU citizens in EU society via the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme.

Action 6 – The Commission will raise EU-wide awareness about the importance of participation in culture for society and democracy through targeted actions including funding.

3. Facilitating the exercise of free movement and simplifying daily life

3.1. Improved legal certainty when exercising free movement rights

The **freedom of movement**⁶⁵, which allows any EU citizen to live, work or study in any Member State, is EU citizens' most cherished right. In a Eurobarometer survey, more than 8 in 10 respondents (84%) thought that the free movement of EU citizens within the EU brings overall benefits to the economy of their country⁶⁶. It is estimated that around 13.3 million EU citizens have exercised their right and moved to another Member State. Moving abroad can entail a number of legal and administrative challenges⁶⁷ and the Commission has supported both Member States and EU citizens by issuing guidelines⁶⁸ on the issues identified as problematic during transposition or when applying the free movement rules in practice.

Since the last Citizenship Report, a number of new problematic issues have been identified and the European Court of Justice has delivered **important judgments** further clarifying the

⁶⁵ This right is conferred directly on every EU citizen by Article 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and is enshrined in Article 45 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Article 21(1) TFEU stipulates that every citizen of the EU has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, subject to the limitations and conditions set out in the Treaties and by the measures adopted to give them effect. The respective limitations and conditions are to be found in Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States amending Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 and repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC, OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 77 (hereinafter also referred to as the "Free Movement Directive"). Moreover Article 45 TFEU confers on every EU citizen the right to take up employment in any Member State and reside there for that purpose.

⁶⁶ This is an increase of 17 percentage points since 2012.

⁶⁷ The open public consultation for this report revealed that while overall citizens moving abroad feel well informed, they encounter administrative problems when living abroad. In a number of cases, they wish they were better informed prior to their move in matters such as taxes, social benefits, or health insurance.

⁶⁸ COM (2009) 313 final.

right to free movement of EU citizens and their family members. One issue was related to the fact that, due to differences in legal rules across Member States, family ties may not be given relevance when rainbow families (i.e. families where at least one member is LGBTIQ) exercise their right of free movement.

In its judgment in the *Coman case*, the Court of Justice held that, as regards the exercise of free movement rights, the term ‘spouse’ of an EU citizen in the Free Movement Directive also applies to a person of the same sex as the EU citizen to whom he or she is married⁶⁹. In another instance, non-EU family members holding a (permanent) residence card were not always able to benefit from the visa exemption when travelling from their host Member State to another Member State. The Court of Justice clarified in two judgments their right to benefit from such exemption⁷⁰. On minors covered by the Free Movement Directive⁷¹, the Court of Justice found that the concept of a ‘direct descendant’ of an EU citizen used in the Free Movement Directive should be understood as including both the biological and the adopted child of an EU citizen.

The Commission intends to review the **2009 guidelines on free movement**⁷² in order to improve legal certainty for EU citizens exercising their free movement rights, and to ensure a more effective and uniform application of the free movement legislation across the EU⁷³. The reviewed guidelines should reflect the diversity of families and therefore help all families - including rainbow families – exercise their right to free movement. They should provide updated guidance for all interested parties, in particular EU citizens, and support the work of national authorities dealing with citizens’ rights, as well as courts and legal practitioners.

When updating the guidelines, the Commission intends to address the application of **restrictive measures on free movement**, specifically those that are due to public health concerns. The COVID-19 outbreak has presented a number of unique challenges to free movement across the EU, with many Member States having imposed travel restrictions as a health precaution⁷⁴.

In March 2020, the Commission adopted dedicated guidelines concerning the exercise of free movement of workers⁷⁵. To help gradually lift travel restrictions and coordinate the actions of individual Member States, in May 2020 the Commission presented a package of measures,

⁶⁹ Judgment of 5 June 2018, *Coman and Others*, C-673/16, EU:C:2018:385.

⁷⁰ Judgment of 18 December 2014, *McCarthy and Others*, C- 202/13, EU:C:2014:2450 and judgment of 18 June 2020, *Ryanair Designated Activity Company*, C-754/18, EU:C:2020:478.

⁷¹ Judgment of 26 March 2019, *SM (Child placed under Algerian kafala)*, C-129/18, EU:C:2019:248.

⁷² COM (2009) 313 final

⁷³ Member States are assisted in applying free movement legislation correctly by the SOLVIT network, which works at a national level to address problems of compliance with EU law. See Commission Recommendation of 17.9.2013 on the principles governing SOLVIT, C(2013) 5869 final.

⁷⁴ In line with the free movement legislation, restrictions to free movement should comply with proportionality and non-discrimination requirements.

⁷⁵ Communication from the Commission Guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers during COVI-19 outbreak 2020/C 102 I/03

including a common approach to restoring free movement⁷⁶, as well as a set of guidelines and recommendations for tourists, travellers and businesses, and criteria for restoring tourism⁷⁷. The flexible approach presented was based on epidemiological criteria, the application of containment measures, and economic and social distancing considerations. On 4 September 2020, the Commission presented a proposal for a Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was adopted by the Council on 13 October 2020. The Recommendation⁷⁸ aims to ensure that any measures taken by Member States to restrict free movement due to COVID-19 are **proportionate, non-discriminatory, well-coordinated and clearly communicated** at EU level.

The Commission also launched ‘**Re-open EU**’⁷⁹, a web platform with essential information in all EU languages for a safe relaunch of free movement and tourism across Europe. It includes real-time information on borders, travel restrictions, public health and safety measures, as well as other practical information for travellers.

As indicated in its New Pact on Migration and Asylum⁸⁰, the Commission will adopt a **Strategy on the future of Schengen**, which reinforces the Schengen Borders Code⁸¹ and the Schengen evaluation mechanism, and establish a Schengen Forum to foster concrete cooperation and ways to deepen Schengen through a programme of support and cooperation to help end internal border controls. A first meeting of the Schengen Forum took place on 30 November 2020.

Brexit has had a significant impact on those EU citizens - around 3.7 million⁸² - who, as a result of exercising their free movement rights when the UK was still a member of the EU, currently live in the UK⁸³. The Commission remains committed to protecting their rights. The **Withdrawal Agreement** guarantees these citizens and their family members broadly the same rights as they have now: they can continue to live, study, work and travel between their host country and the UK or the EU-27. The same applies to any EU citizen who moves to the UK before the end of the transition period⁸⁴. The Commission will help EU citizens in the UK to have full knowledge of their rights and will make sure to raise any potential implementation issues with the UK authorities. Part Two of the Withdrawal Agreement also

⁷⁶ Communication from the Commission: Towards a phased and coordinated approach for restoring freedom of movement and lifting internal border controls - COVID-19 2020/C 169/03.

⁷⁷ Communication from the Commission: EU guidance for the progressive resumption of tourism services and for health protocols in hospitality establishments - COVID-19 2020/C 169/01.

⁷⁸ Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, OJ L 337, 14.10.2020, p. 32.

⁷⁹ <https://reopen.europa.eu>

⁸⁰ COM(2020)609 of 23.9.2020

⁸¹ Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code), OJ L 77, 23.3.2016, p. 1.

⁸² Eurostat database migr_pop1ctz.

⁸³ And that an estimated 1 million UK nationals live within the EU-27 (source: First joint report on the implementation of residence rights under part two of the Withdrawal Agreement).

⁸⁴ The same applies to any UK national who moves to an EU Member State during the transition period.

protects the rights of the over 1 million UK nationals, who since 1 February 2020 are no longer EU citizens but still live in EU countries, safeguarding their right to live, work or study in their host country. It provides for residence rights, rights of entry and exit, right to work, the recognition of professional qualifications, and social security coordination. The correct implementation of the citizens' rights part of the Withdrawal Agreement, including on disadvantaged groups, is a top priority for the Commission. All citizens should have all the necessary information to be able to exercise their rights.

Action 7 – In 2022, the Commission will improve legal certainty for EU citizens exercising their free movement rights and for national administrations by updating the 2009 EU guidelines on free movement. The updated guidelines will take into account the diversity of families (rainbow families), the application of specific measures, such as those introduced due to public health concerns, as well as the relevant judgments by the Court of Justice.

Action 8 – In line with the Withdrawal Agreement, the Commission will continue to support the protection of the rights of EU citizens who as a result of exercising their right to free movement while the UK was still a member of the EU, were resident in the UK before the end of the transition period.

3.2. Simplifying cross-border work and travel

In 2019, the EU introduced tighter security for **identity cards and residence documents** issued to EU citizens⁸⁵. The new cards will facilitate the daily lives of mobile EU citizens and their family members, frontier workers, students, tourists and other travellers. The new rules, which will become applicable on 2 August 2021, will improve the security of ID and residence cards across the EU by introducing minimum standards both for the information contained in them and for security features common to all Member States that issue such documents⁸⁶. The Commission will explore ways to encourage the use of digital tools and innovations that make use of the capabilities offered by ID cards issued according to the new rules for e-government and e-business services.

The **simplification of administrative procedures and formalities** is critical for citizens moving from one Member State to another. This is particularly relevant for public documents such as birth certificates, proof of nationality or extracts from criminal records that were established abroad and need to be translated and legalised to be accepted by a public

⁸⁵ Regulation (EU) 2019/1157 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on strengthening the security of identity cards of Union citizens and of residence documents issued to Union citizens and their family members exercising their right of free movement, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 67.

⁸⁶ The new rules include strong data protection safeguards to ensure the information collected does not fall into the wrong hands. In particular, national authorities will have to ensure the security of the contactless chip and the data stored in it, so that it cannot be hacked or accessed without permission.

authority. The Public Documents Regulation⁸⁷ became fully applicable on 16 February 2019, and makes it easier for citizens to exercise their right to freedom of movement within the EU. The Commission closely monitors the correct implementation of these new rules and actively supports Member States in overcoming the problems reported by citizens and authorities.

EU citizens are entitled to move freely between EU Member States for work reasons without suffering discrimination in terms of employment conditions - including remuneration. **Frontier workers** are people who work in one EU Member State but live in another. In 2019, this term applied to 2 million⁸⁸ of the 220 million employed people aged 20-64 in the EU, equivalent to nearly 1 % of the total EU workforce. In the field of taxation, there are no EU-level rules on the definition of frontier workers, the division of taxation rights between Member States or the tax rules to be applied. Neighbouring Member States with many citizens crossing borders to work often include special rules for frontier workers in their bilateral double taxation conventions. Such rules often apply to citizens living and working in a narrow zone along the border. Since these rules reflect the special situation between two Member States and are the result of negotiations between them, they vary from one double taxation convention to another. Income earned by a frontier worker may be taxed in one or both of the Member States concerned, depending on the tax arrangements⁸⁹. The Commission intends to issue recommendations to improve the situation of taxpayers with cross-border activities, including frontier workers. The Commission announced in its Tax Action Plan of July 2020⁹⁰ that it would launch in 2021 an initiative on EU taxpayers' rights and to simplify tax obligations for EU citizens.

Travelling between Member States can sometimes involve using several modes of transport ('multimodality'). **Multimodal journey planners**⁹¹ provide European travellers with comprehensive door-to-door information so they can make well-informed travel decisions tailored to their needs. They seamlessly integrate information on different modes of transport,

⁸⁷ Regulation (EU) 2016/1191 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 on promoting the free movement of citizens by simplifying the requirements for presenting certain public documents in the European Union and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012, OJ L 200, 26.7.2016, p. 1–136. The Regulation alleviates most of the problems met by European citizens when submitting certain public documents issued in another Member State. In particular, public authorities cannot request an apostille on a public document or its certified copy anymore. In addition, some public documents do not need to be translated anymore, as long as they are presented with a multilingual standard form, which is available to the Member State authorities on the e-Justice portal.

⁸⁸ In 2019, the largest number of cross-border workers among the Member States were for those living in Poland and working in Germany (122 000 people), France and Luxembourg (93 000), Hungary and Austria (56 000), Germany and Luxembourg (54 000) and France and Belgium (50 000). Most cross-border workers worked in construction, manufacturing or in healthcare-related jobs.

See for more <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/eumove/bloc-2c.html?lang=en>

⁸⁹ It is established case law that under bilateral agreements to prevent double taxation, Member States are at liberty to determine the connecting factors for allocating powers of taxation between themselves. They must, however, exercise such power of taxation consistently with EU law. This also means that there are no rules that guarantee frontier workers the right to the most favourable of the tax regimes of the Member States involved.

⁹⁰ COM(2020) 312

⁹¹ A multimodal journey planner (JP) is an IT system able to propose a set of one or more transport services answering at least the question "How can I go from location A to location B at a given departure/arrival date and time and under which conditions". The most common point of access to such a journey planner is via a specific web service. (European Commission study "Towards a European Multi-Modal Journey Planner", 2011)

especially rail and local public transport and lead to a more efficient transport system. This will significantly benefit citizens, as it is not always easy to get accurate information on cross-border transport and connections. It should also make it possible for people to choose the modes of transport that are the least harmful for the environment. The Commission will increase its support for services that help people in the EU search for and book multimodal transport connections.

Action 9 – The Commission will work with Member States to promote the inclusions of cross-border e-government and e-business solutions into newly issued ID cards.

Action 10 – The Commission will launch in 2021 an initiative on EU taxpayers’ rights and to simplify tax obligations for EU citizens.

Action 11 - The Commission will launch an initiative to support further the development of multimodal journey planners, as well as digital services facilitating the booking and payment of the different mobility offers.

4. Protecting and promoting EU citizenship

4.1. Protecting EU citizenship

EU citizenship and the **rights** granted by it are **anchored in the Treaties**. Holding the nationality of a Member State is the one and only condition for being an EU citizen. Member States, when awarding nationality, must ensure that they do so without undermining the essence, value and integrity of EU citizenship. This integrity is undermined when Member States grant nationality and therefore EU citizenship in return for pre-determined levels of investment without any requirement for a real link between the investor and the country. EU values and principles such as solidarity among Member State nationals are weakened if being part of the European project, the enjoyment of its rights, and participation in its democratic life is subject to a mere economic transaction. These fundamental principles are further threatened by **investor citizenship schemes** which facilitate money laundering, tax evasion, and corruption, as highlighted in the Commission’s reports of January 2019⁹² and July 2019⁹³. On 20 October 2020, the Commission launched infringement procedures against two Member States because of their investor citizenship schemes, also referred to as ‘golden passport’ schemes⁹⁴. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation on investor residence schemes or ‘golden visas’, which pose similar risks.

⁹² COM(2019) 12 final.

⁹³ COM(2019) 370 final and SWD(2019) 650 final.

⁹⁴ For more information see: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1925

Action 12 – The Commission will continue to monitor the risks posed by investor schemes for EU citizenship, including in the context of ongoing infringement procedures, and intervene as necessary.

4.2. Promoting EU citizenship and EU values

EU citizenship is underpinned by common **values**, as expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty⁹⁵, encompassing the respect for democracy, rule of law, equality and fundamental rights. The Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2019 showed that European citizens choose almost the same values as best representing the EU, i.e. democracy, human rights and the rule of law, topped only by peace⁹⁶.

COVID-19 has challenged certain EU values, as it has led to **temporary restrictions on fundamental rights and democratic values**. Questions quickly arose on how elections should be run in these circumstances, how electoral campaigns can fairly take place, how citizens can make their opinions heard and what restrictions, if any, can be put in place. Addressing these issues is particularly important, knowing that in times of crisis the protection of democratic values is of utmost importance and that the circumstances that have led to such measures may well reoccur. The Commission will continue to facilitate Member States exchange best practices on these issues, including regulatory measures, in the European Cooperation Network on Elections. Even without the pandemic, polarisation has increased in Europe in recent years, as it has elsewhere, and European values have been challenged both from outside and inside the EU.

To help promote a genuine **rule of law culture** among the general public, the Commission announced a number of actions in its July 2019 Communication on ‘Strengthening the rule of law within the Union – a blueprint for action’⁹⁷. For example a dedicated public communication campaign on the rule of law. It also published its first annual Rule of Law Report on 30 September 2020⁹⁸, which is at the centre of the new European Rule of Law

⁹⁵ Article 2 reads: ‘The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.’

⁹⁶ In Standard Eurobarometer 92 from autumn 2019, respondents were asked to choose values that they feel best represent the EU. ‘Peace’ stood out as the value best representing the EU (42%), followed by ‘democracy’ (34%) in second place and ‘human rights’ (32%) in third position. ‘The rule of law’ was in fourth place, mentioned by more than one in five respondents (22%).

⁹⁷ COM(2019) 343 final. In particular, the Commission has committed to using all funding possibilities to help civil society and academia strengthen a rule of law culture, for example the future citizens, equality, rights and values programme.

⁹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2020-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en

Mechanism⁹⁹. This will stimulate a permanent discussion on the rule of law, year after year, and help create a rule of law culture in the EU.

Many Europeans see the **Erasmus+ programme** as one of the main achievements¹⁰⁰ of the EU¹⁰¹. Going abroad to study, learn, train and work or to participate in youth and sport activities contributes to strengthening European identity in all its diversity and fosters active citizenships among people of all ages. Erasmus+ encourages youth participation in Europe's democratic life, raising awareness about European common values including fundamental rights and bringing together young people and decision makers at local, national and Union level¹⁰². Jean Monnet actions of Erasmus+ programme foster a sense of European identity and commitment through the development of excellence in European integration studies. The future Erasmus+ will expand Jean Monnet actions from the field of higher education to other fields of education and training.

Citizenship education is designed to promote active citizenship and help young people discover their place in today's complex society. Possible activities include volunteering¹⁰³ with the European Solidarity Corps, taking part in virtual experiences through the Erasmus+ virtual exchange¹⁰⁴ or going abroad and discovering new cultures through Discover EU. In addition, the Council Recommendation on Promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching¹⁰⁵ invites Member States to step up their efforts to promote common values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The Recommendation also calls for more inclusive education systems, better support for educational staff and **teaching about Europe** and its Member States to help increase a sense of belonging to one's school, local community, country and also the European family. The Commission will continue to work on innovative

⁹⁹ This Mechanism aims to trigger a genuine dialogue on the rule of law at both European and national level. It is conceived as a yearly process to prevent problems from emerging or deepening. It will create joint awareness on the situation of the rule of law across the EU, and strengthen inter-institutional cooperation on this topic.

¹⁰⁰ In Standard Eurobarometer 89 from 2018, respondents ranked 'student exchange programmes such as ERASMUS' as the third most positive result of the EU, following 'peace among the Member States of the EU' and 'the free movement of people, goods and services within the EU'.

¹⁰¹ Over the last three decades, more than 10 million people have participated in Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes. More than EUR 1.7 billion have been made available through the programme for learning opportunities abroad, as well as transnational partnerships to develop innovative policy approaches and practices at grass-root level, which prioritise social inclusion, the promotion of common values and intercultural understanding.

¹⁰² Also, the Erasmus+ Youth Participation Activities will as of 2021 support alternative, innovative, smart and digital forms of youth participation and civic engagement, through a wide range of youth-driven participation projects.

¹⁰³ Volunteering is one of the most visible expression of solidarity. By taking part in the European Solidarity Corps, young people help to address identified needs within local communities and contribute to overcoming important societal challenges. Volunteering also enables young people to acquire useful experience, skills and competences for their personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, thereby improving their employability and active citizenship. According to participants reports, 76% of volunteers agree that after having taken part in their volunteering activity, they intend to participate more actively in the social and political life of their community. 87% of volunteers intend to remain engaged and active in the area of solidarity on their return.”

¹⁰⁴ This allows young people in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to engage in meaningful intercultural experiences online.

¹⁰⁵ 2018/C 195/01.

projects that promote young people's citizenship education and experiences, including through the future Erasmus programme (2021-2027).

European values can also apply when conducting economic activities. The **social economy** includes business structures such as cooperatives, mutual societies, non-profit associations, foundations and social enterprises whatever their legal forms. Besides generating millions of jobs, such businesses and organisations are also the engine for social innovation. The sector puts people, solidarity, and democracy at the heart of its work. It provides answers to contemporary problems and fosters the idea of citizenship. This is particularly illustrated by the numerous associations and charities it encompasses, and the acceleration of the volunteering phenomenon in many European countries. The social economy promotes an 'economy that works for the people'. With its action plan for social economy due for adoption in the second half of 2021, the Commission will adopt new measures to improve the enabling environment for social economy and social innovation and thereby foster social inclusion and participation. As such, the Commission will continue to develop its European social economy regions project (ESER) and will organise, with the City of Mannheim, the European Social Economy Summit in May 2021.

In its political guidelines, the Commission underlined the importance of **tackling inequality** in the EU. The EU can only reach its full potential if it uses all of its talent and diversity. The fact that people in the EU continue to face discrimination weakens the EU's social cohesion, deprives the economy of its full potential, and is a direct challenge to fundamental rights and EU values. In line with the commitment of President von der Leyen to build a 'Union of Equality', the Commission adopted the **2020-2025 EU gender equality strategy**¹⁰⁶, EU anti-racism action plan¹⁰⁷ and strategic frameworks on LGBTIQ¹⁰⁸ and Roma¹⁰⁹. The Commission Work Programme for 2021 includes further initiatives in this area, such as: Proposal to prevent and combat gender-based violence and domestic violence, Initiative to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech, Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities and Communication on the EU strategy on combating antisemitism.

¹⁰⁶ COM(2020) 152 final

¹⁰⁷ A Union of Equality : EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/a_union_of_equality_eu_action_plan_against_racism_2020_-_2025_en.pdf. One of the actions announced include that the Commission will organise a workshop on elections to exchange and foster best practices on inclusive democracy with the aim of candidate lists that reflect the diversity of our societies. This workshop is planned for 2022 to inform the next European parliamentary elections in 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Union of Equality: LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025.

¹⁰⁹ The EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation sets out a comprehensive three-pillar approach for 2020 to 2030: This approach complements the social and economic inclusion of marginalized Roma with promoting equality and fostering participation. It thus aims to give all Roma the opportunity to realise their full potential and engage in political, social, economic and cultural life.

Action 13 – The Commission will propose new equality and anti-discrimination measures, as announced in the strategic documents.

Action 14 – The Commission will support young Europeans’ sense of European identity through the ERASMUS+ programme, the European Solidarity Corps Programme and the Jean Monnet Actions.

Action 15 – The Commission will continue to monitor the impact of restrictive measures, specifically those put in place during crises, on EU citizenship rights, free and fair elections and a fair democratic debate until such measures are lifted and will continue to facilitate Member States exchange best practices on these issues in the European Cooperation Network on Elections.

5. Protecting EU citizens in Europe and abroad, including in times of crisis/emergency

5.1 Solidarity in action for citizens in the EU

The **COVID-19 pandemic** and its consequences has highlighted the value of solidarity between Member States, as well as individual members of society. The pandemic has affected Europeans in different ways, depending on their social status, gender, the sector they work in, whether they are considered essential or non-essential workers, and most seriously - in terms of its health impact - depending on their age and underlying conditions. The pandemic has also highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities in our society¹¹⁰. The European response has been multifaceted, involving the EU and national governments, industry, civil society and citizens active within their communities¹¹¹.

To protect lives and livelihoods, and to secure a lasting and prosperous recovery, the Commission has proposed **NextGenerationEU** – a recovery programme of EUR 750 billion, as well as targeted reinforcements to the 2021-2027 EU budget. The Commission is committed to keeping equality at the heart of the recovery, to ensure sustainable and long-term stability.

The European public expects the EU to respond more effectively to health crises in the future. As part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and recognising that new COVID-19 vaccines could provide a contribution to exiting from the pandemic, the Commission has

¹¹⁰ For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionately negative impact on marginalised and rights-deprived Roma communities. The EU Roma Strategic Framework includes specific guidance for Member States to ensure that future strategies better prepare them to face similar crises. The lessons learned from the pandemic also inform the selection of headline targets of the new framework (e.g. in the area of housing and essential services), as well as the measures suggested in the draft Council Recommendation (e.g. support for digital inclusion and distance education for Roma children).

¹¹¹ For more information see: Coronavirus: European solidarity in action, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/coronavirus-european-solidarity-action_en

developed an ambitious **EU strategy for COVID-19 vaccines**¹¹², adopted in June 2020, to secure access to such vaccines via Advance Purchase Agreements with leading producers of COVID-19 vaccines. It also supports Member States in preparing for the successful deployment and sufficient uptake of COVID-19 vaccines once available¹¹³. The Commission is also building a strong **European Health Union**, which will better protect citizens' health, equip the EU and its Member States to better prevent and address future pandemics, and improve the resilience of Europe's health systems. To this end, the Commission adopted, on 11 November 2020, a proposal for a regulation on serious cross-border threats to health¹¹⁴ to further protect the health of Europeans and collectively respond to cross-border health crises, together with proposals to extend the mandates of the European Medicines Agency¹¹⁵ and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control¹¹⁶.

The Commission has also proposed a new EU health programme - **EU4Health**, which will support actions to protect citizens in the Union from serious cross-border threats to health, to improve the availability in the Union of medicines, medical devices and other crisis relevant products, contribute to their affordability, support innovation and to strengthen health systems and the healthcare workforce, including through the digital transformation.

From the start of the von der Leyen Commission, fully implementing the **European Pillar of Social Rights** has been a political priority. Ensuring that all workers in the EU earn a decent living is essential for the recovery, as well as for building fair and resilient economies, and minimum wages have an important role to play in this. Minimum wages are relevant both in countries relying solely on collectively agreed wage floors and in those with a statutory minimum wage. The Commission proposal¹¹⁷ was adopted on 28 October 2020. The European Pillar of Social Rights will be the compass of Europe's recovery and the best tool to ensure that no one is left behind. The Commission has announced¹¹⁸ that it will put forward an ambitious action plan to ensure full implementation of the Pillar. The action plan will contribute to socio-economic recovery and resilience in the medium and long-term, with a view to enhance social fairness of the digital and green transitions.

¹¹² COM/2020/245 final.

¹¹³ Moreover, the upcoming pharmaceutical strategy for Europe tackles important issues that have preoccupied patients and health systems for decades, for example the accessibility and affordability of medicines, the sustainability of health systems, and shortages of medicines. It foresees an evaluation of the current system to enable digitization and innovation, especially for unmet needs and foresees actions promoting the global competitiveness of EU industry. It will contribute to a crisis-resistant system that ensures access to safe, high-quality and efficacious medicines under all circumstances.

¹¹⁴ COM (2020) 727 final.

¹¹⁵ COM (2020) 725 final.

¹¹⁶ COM (2020) 726 final.

¹¹⁷ COM(2020) 682 final.

¹¹⁸ Communication of 14 January 2020 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: '*A strong social Europe for just transitions*', COM(2020) 14 final. This initiative has been confirmed in the Commission Work Programme 2021.

The crisis has also negatively impacted the lives of young people, which can in part be alleviated by the **Youth Guarantee**¹¹⁹. Launched at the peak of the previous youth employment crisis in 2013, the Youth Guarantee has had a significant transformative effect in many Member States. Since its launch, over 24 million young people have been offered employment, or continued education, a traineeship or an apprenticeship as a stepping stone towards a future career. In its 2020 youth employment support package¹²⁰, the Commission proposed further measures to support young people in the labour market, including by strengthening the Youth Guarantee and extending its outreach to disadvantaged young people across the EU¹²¹.

Action 16 – The Commission will implement the EU strategy for COVID-19 vaccines together with the Member States, giving all citizens quick, equitable and affordable access to these vaccines. The Commission will continue its work on building a strong European Health Union, in which Member States prepare and respond together to health crises, medical supplies are available, affordable and innovative, and countries work together to improve prevention, treatment and aftercare for diseases such as cancer.

Action 17 – The Commission will increase its support for young EU citizens, including those from disadvantaged groups, to help them access education, training and finally the labour market through the strengthened Youth Guarantee scheme.

5.2. Solidarity in action for EU citizens outside the EU

Prior to the global pandemic, a growing number of Europeans travelled outside the EU - including to remote destinations¹²². It is estimated that close to 7 million EU citizens¹²³ travel or live in places where they are unrepresented¹²⁴. However, not all EU Member States have an embassy or a consulate in every country of the world. The right to equal access to **consular protection** is one of the specific rights that the Treaties grant to EU citizens¹²⁵ and is a

¹¹⁹ The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 are offered good quality employment or continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

¹²⁰ The package is coordinated with the European Skills Agenda and in particular the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET), which will help equip people with a balanced mix of knowledge, skills and competences which provide strong foundations for resilience, lifelong learning, lifelong employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.

¹²¹ COM/2020/276 final.

¹²² Many EU citizens, including dual-nationality citizens, also live permanently in third countries.

¹²³ SWD (2018) 273 final

¹²⁴ The term 'unrepresented' refers to the citizens whose Member State either does not have an embassy or consulate in a third country or is not effectively in a position to provide assistance.

¹²⁵ This right is enshrined in Articles 20(2)(c) and 23 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and in Article 46 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

tangible example of European solidarity. Member States must assist unrepresented EU citizens in a third country under the same conditions as they assist their own nationals. According to Flash Eurobarometer 485 survey, around three quarters of respondents (76%) are aware of this right.

While consular protection is mostly provided on a day-to-day basis to individual EU citizens in distress around the world, there are larger events that require **EU-27 coordination and common action**. A number of events requiring common action have arisen in recent years, including natural disasters, terrorist attacks, civil unrest and preparation for global sporting events, but never to the extent and complexity as during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In an **unprecedented repatriation effort**, Member States, supported by the European Commission and the European External Action Service, managed, between February and May 2020, to bring home over half a million European citizens affected by COVID-19 travel restrictions across the world¹²⁶. The Commission co-financed joint repatriation flights from the EU budget through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism at up to 75%. This effort demonstrated EU solidarity in action during a difficult period, and the benefits of consular protection as part of EU citizenship rights¹²⁷.

When organising the repatriation of EU citizens stranded abroad due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Member States rightly **did not treat unrepresented and represented EU citizens differently**. Where repatriation capacities were available, all European citizens were assisted¹²⁸.

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the **need to further strengthen EU solidarity to better protect EU citizens abroad**, in particular during crises. There are still large differences between Member States as regards their capacity to provide assistance in third countries, including in terms of the size of their consular networks, number of local staff and material assets available for repatriation. This can affect not only unrepresented EU citizens, but also represented EU citizens when their Member State is not in position to provide timely assistance during a crisis¹²⁹.

The lessons learnt from the crisis shed light on the important role played by EU delegations who coordinated with EU Member States to repatriate citizens, helping prepare the lists of people on commercial flights and on flights organised by EU governments. Current EU law

¹²⁶ A dedicated consular taskforce was set up by the European External Action Service for this purpose, working in close cooperation with the Member States and the Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) to coordinate repatriations.

¹²⁷ This effort was very visible to citizens, with more than 60% of respondents to the open public consultation for this report saying they were aware of the repatriation flights that the Member States and the European Commission organised for those EU citizens who were in the third countries at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak

¹²⁸ This massive and historically unique consular cooperation between EU Member States and EU institutions also benefited citizens from partner countries such as Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK, with their nationals also being repatriated with EU flights.

¹²⁹ The UK's departure from the EU must also be taken into account, as this country has a large consular network and capacity to assist in crisis situations.

limits the role of EU delegations to coordination and information provision, but most EU citizens¹³⁰ would welcome their more active role in providing support to EU citizens in need¹³¹. As part of its key priority ‘A stronger Europe in the world’, the Commission will **review of the consular protection Directive** to facilitate the exercise of the Union citizenship right to consular protection and to reinforce EU solidarity to better protect EU citizens abroad, in particular during crises. This would enhance cooperation among Member States and strengthen the EU’s supporting role, making best use of its unique network of EU delegations to provide consular assistance to EU citizens in case of need, for example, by allowing them to organise of repatriation flights and issue emergency travel documents. EU delegations should complement Member States’ consular networks, in particular in third countries where no or very few individual Member States are represented. As not all of these challenges can be addressed on the basis of Article 23 TFEU (consular protection), the Commission will also reflect on whether to expand the EU citizenship right to consular protection based on Article 25(2) TFEU.

Action 18 – The Commission will review in 2021 EU rules on consular protection in order to improve the EU’s and Member States’ preparedness and capacity to protect and support European citizens in times of crisis.

6. Conclusions

EU citizenship is at the core of the European project. Citizens look to the EU to protect their rights and add value to different areas of their lives. The global health crisis has further illustrated the reality of today’s EU, where the multitude of cross-border connections and spill-over effects make common European approaches necessary to protect the lives and livelihoods of Europeans.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, new political, social and technological challenges prompted the rethinking of old approaches and the introduction of new actions to protect and improve the ability of EU citizens to exercise their three main rights: freedom of movement; participation in free and fair elections; and consular protection outside the EU. However, as this report reflects, the concept of EU citizenship and the EU’s actions focused on the citizen, goes beyond this.

¹³⁰ In the 2020 Eurobarometer, more than 9 in 10 respondents (92%) agreed that, if they were in a country outside the EU with no consulate or embassy from their own country and needed help, they would like to seek support from an EU delegation instead.

¹³¹ Similarly, the open public consultation for this report showed that around 90% of the respondents supported the idea that EU delegations should be able to assist EU citizens in third countries, if necessary.

The Commission continuously monitors and assesses the situation in the Member States and acts in accordance with the EU treaties and the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice. It will propose legislative actions in a number of areas in the coming years in order to close gaps and improve legal certainty for citizens in exercising their rights. In other areas, the full enjoyment of citizens' rights does not only depend on legislation, but also on its implementation, which would change the context, enabling citizens to benefit fully from the spirit of these rights. In these areas, this report puts forward actions through which the Commission will work towards achieving the necessary changes.

The Commission is committed to implementing the actions set out in this report. To this end, it will work in partnership with others – EU institutions, Member States, local and regional authorities, civil society and, most importantly, citizens themselves.

Annex on follow up to the actions announced in the 2017 EU Citizenship Report

Priority 2017-2019	Actions
Promoting EU citizenship rights and EU common values	
<p>1. In 2017 and 2018 conduct an EU-wide information and awareness-raising campaign on EU citizenship rights including on consular protection, and electoral rights ahead of the 2019 European elections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support electoral participation and empower citizens to take informed decisions in advance of the European Parliament elections in May 2019, the Commission, cooperating closely with the European Parliament, conducted information and communication campaigns, including on what the EU does, how to vote and how to engage. These campaigns were proactive and multilingual with a strong local dimension, and provided information on deadlines for registering, where to register, and all the necessary practical steps. • In summer 2018, the Commission (DG JUST) ran a successful social media campaign to inform EU citizens who were travelling about their right to consular protection abroad. The campaign marked the entry into application of the EU Directive on consular protection.
<p>2. Take action to strengthen the European Voluntary Service and promote the benefits and integration of volunteering in education. By 2020, invite the first 100 000 young Europeans to volunteer with the European Solidarity Corps which will provide the opportunity to develop new skills and meaningful experiences, to make an important contribution to society across the EU, and to gain invaluable experience and acquire valuable skills at the start of their career.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation (EU) 2018/1475 laying down the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps entered into force in October 2018. The regulation establishes a legal framework for young people to volunteer or work in beneficial projects across Europe under the European Solidarity Corps.
<p>3. Safeguard the essence of EU citizenship and its inherent values; produce a report on national schemes granting EU citizenship to investors describing the Commission's action in this area, current national law and practices, and providing some guidance for Member States.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In January 2019, the Commission adopted its report on investor citizenship and residence schemes in the EU (COM(2019) 12 final). It is the first, comprehensive factual study on all investor citizenship ('golden passport') and residence ('golden visa') schemes in the EU. It maps existing practices and identifies the risks such schemes imply for the EU, in particular as regards security, money laundering, tax evasion and corruption. The Commission continues to monitor wider issues of compliance with EU law that result from these schemes. • In May 2018, the Council adopted a Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching. The Recommendation aims to promote a sense of belonging – conveying common values, practising inclusive education, and teaching about the EU and its Member States to help strengthen the sense of belonging to one's school, local community, and country, and also to the EU family. Also in May 2018, as part of the first package in delivering on the European Education Area, the Council adopted a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, which includes a competence related to citizenship. • In November 2019, the Commission (DG EAC) launched the Jan Amos Comenius Prize, which rewards secondary schools that use creative methods when teaching their pupils about the European Union.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2017, 2018 and 2019, the Commission (DG EAC) implemented the Altiero Spinelli Prize for Outreach, which rewarded outstanding works that enhance the citizens' knowledge and awareness of the EU.
Promoting and enhancing citizens' participation in the democratic life of the EU	
<p>1. Intensify Citizens' Dialogues and encourage public debates, to improve public understanding of the impact of the EU on citizens' daily lives and to encourage an exchange of views with citizens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From 2014 until the European Parliament elections in May 2019, some 1 800 Citizens' Dialogues were organised, in more than 635 different locations, bringing together some 200 000 citizens of all nationalities, ages, races, religions and political opinions. Every single Commissioner actively participated in these dialogues, which helped citizens understand how EU policies work for them, in an effort to increase their direct engagement with senior decision-makers in the Commission, as well as with EU democracy more broadly.
<p>2. Report on the implementation of EU law on local elections to ensure that EU citizens can effectively exercise their voting rights at local level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering on its commitments in the 2017 EU Citizenship report, in February 2018 the Commission issued a report (COM/2018/044 final) on the right of EU citizens to vote and stand as candidates in municipal elections when they live in another EU Member State. The report took stock of how such 'mobile' citizens have exercised these rights since 2012, and pointed the way to improving knowledge of their democratic participation, informing and raising awareness of this right among citizens, making the voting process easier, and engaging with stakeholders to help achieve this. This report presented practices from the Member States on promoting the democratic engagement of citizens.
<p>3. Promote best practices which help citizens vote and stand for EU elections, including on retaining the right to vote when moving to another Member State and cross-border access to political news, to support turnout and broad democratic participation in the perspective of the 2019 European elections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In February 2018, the Commission issued a Recommendation on enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the 2019 elections to the European Parliament (C (2018)900 final). It called on the competent national authorities to promote the exercise of electoral rights of underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities, and overall to support democratic conduct and help achieve a high turnout. The same authorities were also tasked with identifying, based on the experiences of Member States, best practices in identifying, mitigating and managing risks to the electoral process from cyberattacks and disinformation. The Commission hosted an event to facilitate this in April 2018, which centred on the planned exchange of practices between Member States, and which included presentations on increasing the participation of disabled citizens as candidates. As part of broader efforts to ensure free and fair elections, the Commission adopted in September 2018 the Election package, which included a Communication and Recommendation, encouraging Member States to set up national election networks, involving national authorities with competence for electoral matters and authorities in charge of monitoring and enforcing rules related to online activities relevant to the electoral context. The national election cooperation networks appointed contact points to take part in a European cooperation network on elections, which serves as a platform to alert on threats, exchange best practices, discuss common solutions to identified challenges and encourage common projects and exercises among national networks.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In November 2018, the Commission dedicated its annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights to democracy in the EU. It brought together high-level representatives from Member State governments, international organisations, the private sector, academics and civil society to debate: (i) the issue of democratic participation and political representation of EU citizens in the democratic debate; (ii) the role of civil society for a vibrant democracy; and (iii) the importance of transparent and sound information for an informed and inclusive democratic debate and secure elections. • The Commission also encouraged the promotion of EU citizens' rights at local level, thanks to funding from the rights, equality and citizenship programme and via events, for example, the European Week of Regions and Cities.
Simplifying daily life for EU citizens	
<p>1. Submit a proposal for setting up a 'Single Digital Gateway' to give citizens easy, online access to information, assistance and problem-solving services and the possibility to complete online administrative procedures in cross-border situations by linking up relevant EU and national-level content and services in a seamless, user-friendly and user-centric way. Moreover, assess cutting red tape in national administrations by requiring citizens to supply their data only once.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 establishing a single digital gateway to provide access to information, to procedures and to assistance and problem-solving services and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012, entered into force on 11 December 2018. The new gateway is fully integrated in the upgraded Your Europe portal and provides access to online information and procedures, as well as assistance and problem-solving services to individuals and companies.
<p>2. Further facilitate and promote EU-wide multimodal travel in order to make mobility of EU citizens more efficient and user-friendly, through the specification of EU-wide multimodal travel information services and improvements to the interoperability and compatibility of systems and services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegated Regulation 2017/1926 of 31 May 2017 supplementing the Intelligent transport systems Directive 2010/40/EU provides a framework to improve the provision of EU-wide multimodal travel information services. It established the necessary requirements to make EU-wide multimodal travel information services accurate and available across borders. It establishes the specifications needed to ensure the accessibility, exchange and update of standardised travel and traffic data and distributed journey planning for the provision of multimodal travel information services in the EU. • 2018 was designated to be the 'Year of Multimodality' – a year during which the Commission raised the importance of multimodality for the EU transport system by holding a series of events aimed at promoting the functioning of the transport sector as a fully integrated 'system'.
Strengthening security and promoting equality	
<p>1. In the first quarter of 2017 finalise the study on EU policy options to improve the security of EU citizens' identity cards and residence documents of EU citizens residing in another Member State and of their non-EU family members. The Commission will evaluate the next steps, options and their impacts in view of a possible legislative initiative by the end of 2017.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation (EU) 2019/1157 of 20 June 2019 on strengthening the security of identity cards of EU citizens and of residence documents issued to EU citizens and their family members exercising their right of free movement entered into force on 1 August 2019 and will apply from 2 August 2021. It aims to help mobile EU citizens and their family members exercise their EU right to free movement by increasing the reliability and acceptance of their documents in cross-border situations. At the same time, it aims to strengthen European security by closing security gaps that result from insecure documents. • Security features of identity cards will be aligned with those of passports, as both types of travel documents will contain a

	<p>highly secure contactless chip with the holder's photo and fingerprints. Member States will begin to issue the new identity cards in 2021. All new identity cards will have to comply with the new security standards.</p>
<p>2. In 2017 assess how to modernise the rules on emergency travel documents for unrepresented EU citizens, including the security features of the EU common format, to guarantee that citizens can effectively exercise their right to consular protection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Directive (EU) 2019/997 of 18 June 2019 establishing an EU Emergency Travel Document and repealing Decision 96/409/CFSP entered into force on 10 July 2019. It aims to make the document more secure and streamline the applicable procedures. • The Directive updates the rules, format and security features of the EU emergency travel document (ETD). It simplifies the formalities for unrepresented EU citizens in non-EU countries whose passport or travel document has been lost, stolen or destroyed, to ensure that they are provided with an emergency travel document by another Member State, so they can travel home. The Directive therefore allows unrepresented EU citizens to easily and more effectively exercise their right to consular protection. The Directive also seeks to ensure consistency between the specific conditions and procedures for issuing EU ETDs, and the general rules on coordination and cooperation measures to facilitate consular protection of unrepresented EU citizens in non-EU countries.
<p>3. Carry out in 2017 a campaign to combat violence against women, actively support the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention alongside Member States and present proposals to address the challenges of work-life balance for working families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The then Commissioner Věra Jourová launched a 'Year of Focused Actions to Combat Violence Against Women' in 2017, to raise awareness, facilitate national and cross-border collaboration, provide information and educate about violence against women. For example, EUR 15 million was made available to 12 national authorities and 32 grassroots projects tackling violence against women across the EU. The European Commission's Non.No.Nein. communication campaign – under the hashtag #SayNoStopVAW – drove the focused actions forward, with new communications tools being developed until the end of 2018. • Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU entered into force on 1 August 2019. It aims to increase the participation of women in the labour market and the take-up of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements. The new act also provides opportunities for workers to be granted leave to care for relatives who need support. The legislation means that parents and carers will be better able to reconcile their professional and private lives, and companies will benefit from having more motivated workers.
<p>4. Act to improve the social acceptance of LGBTI people across the EU by implementing the list of actions to advance LGBTI equality and actively support the conclusion of the negotiations on the proposed horizontal Anti-Discrimination Directive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission has supported every Council Presidency since 2008 in advancing the proposal for an Equal Treatment Directive. Nevertheless, the proposal remains stalled in the Council, where it requires unanimity. • On 22 June 2018, the Commission adopted a Recommendation on standards for equality bodies, in order to ensure that national equality bodies are independent and effective. The Recommendation sets minimum standards for the mandate of equality bodies; their independence; their effectiveness, including sufficient resources and appropriate powers; and the national institutional architecture for equality.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In April 2019, the Commission issued a Communication (COM(2019)186), which highlighted the gaps in protection and proposed ways of facilitating decision-making in the area of non-discrimination through enhanced qualified majority voting and the ordinary legislative procedure. • In October 2019, the Commission published the Special Eurobarometer 493 - ‘Discrimination in the EU’ - which included detailed data from Member States on the social acceptance of LGBTI people and perceptions on discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. Overall, support for LGBTI relationships has grown in the EU, but it varies considerably between EU Member States. • The Commission has also promoted equality through education, culture, youth and sport, including through the 2018 digital action plan, which includes a measure that supports girls (aged 12-18) with developing digital and entrepreneurial skills through dedicated educational workshops in cooperation with the EIT. The measure will be continued and expanded in the new Action Plan (2021-2027). Also, as part of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020), there is a dedicated working group on promoting common values and inclusive education that brings together experts from Member States to exchange best practice on topics including LGBTI rights, gender inequality and the integration of migrants and refugees.
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