

**Background note****European Year of Citizens 2013:
European citizenship at local and regional level**

This document gives an introduction to the scope of the European Year of Citizens 2013, and in particular to its local and regional impact. Members of the Committee of the Regions and other policymakers and stakeholders in EU regions and cities can use this background information in their communication activities during/about the European Year.

European Citizenship: a legal reality or a long-term ideal?

European citizenship is not a meaningless concept but a clear status, explicitly defined and described in the EU Treaties (Articles 20 to 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

As an EU citizen, which you are if you are a national of an EU country, you benefit from specific rights under EU law, notably the right:

- [A] to move and reside freely within the EU;
- [B] not to be discriminated against on the grounds of your nationality;
- [C] to vote and stand as a candidate in municipal and European Parliament elections wherever you live in the EU;
- [D] to be assisted by another EU country's embassy or consulate outside the EU, under the same conditions as a citizen of that country;
- [E] to petition the European Parliament, apply to the European Ombudsman and address the EU institutions (in any official EU language);
- [F] to organise or support, together with other EU citizens, a citizens' initiative to call for new EU legislation.

Reinforced by treaty revisions, and by the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union, EU citizenship, which is now also enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (Chapter V), encompasses individual rights, which have developed in parallel with European integration over the last decades. These developments reflect a strong intention, also underlined by President Barroso in his address on the State of the Union, to go beyond the single market approach towards a true political union putting the citizen at the heart of the European project.

At all levels in the EU we need to combine our efforts to make sure that EU citizenship is a **tangible reality in citizens' lives**. The ultimate goal of EU citizenship policies is for all EU citizens to feel at home wherever they are in the EU and to feel truly European, even when they are at home.

This means enhancing their EU rights and making sure that they can effectively enjoy them in their daily life. It also means fostering citizens' active participation in the life of the EU, through the creation of genuine European public spheres where they can express their concerns and ideas about the development of the EU and through projects which will enable them to work, study and live with fellow EU citizens, helping to build a common European identity (in parallel with national citizenship and regional or local identities).

Given its perspective and long-term objectives going beyond the rational and functional corporate story of the EU, this debate is at the top of the institutions' political and communication agenda. It is very timely in the context of the current economic and confidence crisis and in view of the European Year of Citizens in 2013 and of the European Parliament elections in 2014.

Why a European Year of Citizens?

In 2010, the European Parliament called upon the Commission to give momentum to the debate on European citizenship and inform EU citizens of their rights, in particular the new rights resulting from the Treaty of Lisbon.

In its 2010 EU Citizenship Report the Commission announced that it would propose the designation of 2013 as the European Year of Citizens, to make sure that citizens are made aware of their rights and can exercise them in their daily life.

The Commission's proposal was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in November 2012. The purpose of the Year will be to raise citizens' awareness of their rights and opportunities in the EU and engage with them in dialogue on the development of EU citizenship and of the European project in general.

With a specific focus on the millions of citizens in cross-border situations or moving around the EU every year, and with a view to achieving a true European space for citizens, the European Year will highlight:

- what EU citizens' rights are;
- how EU citizens can benefit from them;
- what the main obstacles are;
- what the potential impact of EU rights is;
- how and why citizens should get involved in EU democratic life.

What will happen in 2013?

Activities of the European Commission

The EY 2013 will be launched officially on 10 January in Dublin, alongside the meeting of the European Commission and the Irish Presidency, and will take the form of a 'citizens' dialogue'. Further such dialogues will be organised across the EU in the course of 2013, bringing the discussion on EU issues to the people of Europe and creating genuine European public spaces across EU municipalities.

Given the budget of 1 million euro (*final budget will be confirmed with the formal adoption by the Council and the EP*), cooperation with institutional and other partners will be key in order to give the European Year more visibility. The Commission will cooperate with civil society stakeholders and a number of European and national organisations which have formed an "alliance" for the purposes of the European Year of Citizens. The Commission has also developed a communication tool and a slogan "It's about Europe, it's about you", which will brand EY2013 activities.

As a concrete deliverable of the Year, the Commission will adopt its second EU Citizenship Report in May 2013 which will take stock of progress made since 2010 and make further proposals to remove obstacles preventing EU citizens from drawing the full benefits that EU citizenship offers. This report will be based on a wide reaching public consultation launched in May 2012 and on the results of events such as the citizens' dialogues and the present event.

Activities of the Committee of the Regions

The CoR was involved in the pre-launch of the European Year and organised a forum on 28 November in close cooperation with the European Commission (Cabinet of VP Reding, DG Communication and DG Justice).

At the forum, the CoR presented a study about the impact of EU citizenship at local and regional level and it launched a toolkit for its members and other stakeholders at local level for communicating the European Year. This toolkit includes an "EU Citizens' Passport": a publication for the general public on Europe's diversity and the EU citizens' common rights. How far the CoR and its members will become actively involved in interinstitutional citizens' dialogues and other events remains to be seen.

On the political side, the CoR will discuss (and adopt) an own-initiative opinion on EU electoral rights, drawn up by CoR member Mr Györgi Gemesi (on the agenda for the CoR CIVEX commission on 4 December 2012). A further related opinion on the regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations is also in preparation by CoR member Mr Sértő-Radics (on the agenda for the same CIVEX meeting). Both opinions are scheduled to be adopted by the CoR plenary session on 31 January/1 February 2013.

Why focus on EU citizens' rights during the European Year?

EU citizens' rights are - now more than ever - a key element in tackling the major problems Europe faces today. EU citizenship adds a political dimension to the economic unification process. Citizens' rights promote better understanding of the value of European integration and citizen participation in shaping it.

For instance, the right of free movement will have a major impact in the future, given the increasing importance of labour mobility, cross-border employability or lifelong learning. It is key to implementing the Europe 2020 strategy. On the other hand, the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in local and EU elections, petition rights and – by means of the European Citizens' Initiative – the possibility of initiating EU legislation can provide a strong

riposte to growing EU scepticism. It demonstrates clearly that citizens, regardless of their nationality or place of residence, have the first and the last word in the European legislative process.

EU citizens still face many obstacles in exercising their rights. The 2010 EU Citizenship Report (a new report will be presented on 9 May 2013) identified three areas where action was needed. One area of improvement was ensuring that citizens' rights are fully enforced on the ground by the Member States; the transposing of EU directives into national laws or administrative provisions in the legal system of each Member State needs to be scrutinised more closely. A second recommendation was to remove all bureaucratic obstacles and make the exercising of individual rights simpler. The third, most urgent finding was that awareness among citizens about their rights is still too low, a conclusion that was also confirmed by a Eurobarometer survey (EB 294) in 2010. According to this Eurobarometer, although the majority (79%) of EU citizens claim familiarity with the term "citizen of the European Union", only 43% say they know what it means and less than one-third (32%) of respondents from the 27 EU Member States consider themselves well informed about their rights as citizens of the European Union.

The European Year, being mainly a communication platform, should respond to this need and bring all stakeholders at EU, national and local level into play in communication and advice efforts.

What role can local and regional authorities play in guaranteeing EU citizens' rights?

Being the closest to citizens' daily lives, local and regional authorities have an important role to play in this domain. As the citizens' first port of call, they have to increase people's awareness of their rights and duties as EU citizens and take all necessary measures to encourage use of these rights, make sure they are properly enforced and remove any obstacles. They are also in the front line when it comes to welcoming new EU citizens as they arrive and making them feel at home in their new society. They are also key in supporting their fellow citizens who wish to spend part of their life elsewhere in the EU. They are central to highlighting how valuable and mutually-enriching such initiatives are.

As part of a report commissioned by the CoR in 2012, external experts from the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (CSES) made an inventory of the role local and regional authorities can play in the different EU citizens' rights.

| EU citizens' right | Role of local and regional authorities |
|---|--|
| <i>Freedom of movement and residence in the EU</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and regional authorities can play an important role in raising awareness and in facilitating the exercising of these rights, which are key to EU citizenship and to the functioning of the internal market. |
| <i>Right to vote and stand as a candidate in European Parliament elections in the Member State of residence</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration of EU citizens would normally occur at municipal level • Involving foreign residents, raising awareness of opportunities for registering on an electoral roll and promotion of participation in European elections |

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|---|--|
| <i>Right to vote and stand as a candidate in municipal elections</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registering and involving foreign residents, raising awareness of opportunities for registering on an electoral roll and promotion of participation in municipal elections. • Forging a sense of local belonging through other measures |
| <i>Right to complain to the Ombudsman</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to citizens about the possibility of complaining to the Ombudsman • Notion that a local/regional Ombudsman exists is linked to the right to good administration |
| <i>Right to petition the European Parliament</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to citizens about the existence of this right |
| <i>Right of good administration: right to be heard; right to have access to files; right/obligation of administration to give reasons; right to ask for damages if EU action has caused damages; right to receive response in any official EU language.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right applies directly to EU institutions and Member State authorities in the context of Article 41 of the Charter. • Similar obligations of good administration apply to local and regional authorities by virtue of national law. |
| <i>Right of access to documents</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right applies directly to EU institutions and Member State authorities in the context of Article 42 of the Charter. • Similar obligations apply to local and regional authorities by virtue of national law. |
| <i>Right to diplomatic and consular protection if their country is not represented</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and awareness-raising |

The Committee of the Regions has adopted some opinions in the past two years confirming the recommendations of the EU Citizenship Report 2010. The opinion on the Citizenship Report (2010) insisted that regional and local authorities must be more present in participatory processes that will be put in place allowing citizens to better contribute to defining EU policies that give concrete effect to their rights. The opinion on the Stockholm Programme for freedom, security and justice (2010) stressed that regions and cities help to form a healthy "culture of fundamental rights", with a particular commitment to the principles of political participation as laid down in the Lisbon Treaty and in the Member States' constitutions. This opinion, as well as the own-initiative opinion currently being drafted, also recommends looking into giving EU citizens more extensive opportunities to take part in elections in their country of residence.

More info

European Commission:

- EU citizenship: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/>
- EU Citizenship Report 2010: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/com_2010_603_en.pdf
- Eurobarometer 294: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_294_en.pdf
- Proposal on the European Year of Citizens (COM/2011/0489 final): http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&lg=EN&type_doc=COMfinal&an_doc=2011&nu_doc=489
- European Year thematic website (to be launched): <http://www.europa.eu/citizens-2013>

European Parliament:

- Adoption procedure, European Year of Citizens:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?id=593294>

European Year of Citizens Alliance:

- Civil society network: <http://ey2013-alliance.eu/>

Committee of the Regions:

- Website on the forum on 28 November 2012 and on the European Year 2013 (including toolkit): www.cor.europa.eu/ey2013
- Opinion on the EU Citizenship Report (Pella, 2010):
<https://toad.cor.europa.eu/corwipdetail.aspx?folderpath=CIVEX-V/015&id=20820>
- Opinion on the Stockholm Programme (Poppenhäger, 2010):
<https://toad.cor.europa.eu/corwipdetail.aspx?folderpath=CIVEX-V/015&id=20820>
- Draft opinion on EU electoral rights (Gemessi, to be adopted in January 2013):
<https://toad.cor.europa.eu/corwipdetail.aspx?folderpath=CIVEX-V/036&id=21680>
- Draft opinion on European political parties and political foundations (Sértő-Radics, to be adopted in January 2013):
<http://toad.cor.europa.eu/corwipdetail.aspx?folderpath=CIVEX-V/037&id=21751>
- Report on Local and Regional Authorities Promoting EU Citizenship and Citizens' Rights (edited by CSES, 2012): <weblink>

European Economic and Social Committee:

- Opinion on the European Year of Citizens (Gobiňš, 2012):
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-opinions.19907>