



ALL ON BOARD

All on board for your right to citizenship without borders

The EU should close the gap between its Treaty aim — namely that “in all its activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens, who shall receive equal attention...” (Article 9 TEU) and the reality. Only a relatively privileged one third of the 448 million in the 27 Member States have the opportunity to become active European citizens. This leaves space for anti-EU forces to attack European democracy. Instead, an all-of-society approach is needed for democratic resilience in the interests of both citizens and a more powerful EU.

Every EU citizen has the right to:

- Learn about European rights, values and participation in the EU, alongside their national civic education, as part of a shared European democracy.
- Experience the right to participate in a European exchange programme through a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, ensuring that this right is not only theoretical.
- Have their results recognised and validated both at home and across the EU, with academic, technical, vocational and transversal qualifications treated equally.

From 16, everyone receives a statute on European citizenship explaining this new right. The Commission provides support measures (a Centre of Excellence for teacher training and European Citizens' Houses). National authorities should have flexibility to apply a European law creating this new right in their own way, subject to proper monitoring. There should be pilot projects. Cooperation is established with the Council of Europe and UNESCO. Applicants and neighbouring countries are encouraged to participate.

Legal basis

Articles 21 and 25 (TFEU) (EU citizenship); Articles 43,53 and 62 (Internal market); Articles 165 and 166 (Education and training)

ANNEX

Erasmus has benefited 16 million people since 1987. This has allowed young people to broaden their opportunities in other countries and back home, whilst also expanding and “Europeanizing” their networks and perspectives.

Yet these benefits remain too unevenly distributed: they are largely limited to relatively privileged groups - those with financial support, language skills and access to higher education. Why not build



on this success and make this a right, so that it becomes a genuine opportunity for all who wish to take part?

Inequalities are inevitably reflected in the lower levels of trust and enthusiasm that society shows towards the EU with only 50% voting in European elections. To build a strong transnational democracy, every citizen must have the right to experience what EU citizenship really means. All mobility programs should be included and extended to reach more democratic targets. This aim should be achieved by implementing the following:

- 1. Learn about European rights, values, and participation in the EU. In today's uncertain world, building a stronger European future matters more than ever.**

Whilst European citizenship education is supported by EU resolutions, the gap between rhetoric and practice remains stark. A genuine European citizenship education must become the response to strengthening democracy, digital transformation, and the green transition. Citizens themselves have called for this during the 2022 Conference on the Future of Europe and since then whenever they come together in European panels or assemblies.

The Commission should provide support measures and in particular a statute bringing together the scattered elements of a European citizenship of rights, participation and belonging in order to explain this European status.

This proposal has been supported by the European Parliament. But is this enough?

Teachers already face significant pressure and will require additional training and resources from a Centre of Excellence. Civil society should be mobilized. If Europe is taught, it is as a distant set of institutions rather than as a living, participatory project. A more active approach is essential if citizens are to engage in the democratic life of the EU.

- 2. Experience the right to participate in a European exchange programme through a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, ensuring that this right is not only theoretical**

European citizenship education can only be meaningful if it can be put into practice. The EU's 2024 recommendation "Europe on the move-learning mobility for everyone" has a target of 23.5% of university students participating in an Erasmus study abroad and 12% in a professional training program by 2030. But is that truly "for everyone"?

To create a shared project, we need to turn the privilege of a European learning experience into a right for all. This does not mean that everyone will take up such a right or that it will be unconditional. It will not be introduced from one day to the next but can build on existing structures provided the necessary resources are in place to create a European service to the public. An all-of-society policy is essential for the democratic strength of the European project. Reforms currently fail to reach their full potential due to insufficient participants and the lack of a genuine European public sphere. A Europe of the privileged and the lobbies is not a proper Europe. Is this proposition realistic? Even though the reach of European mobility and youth exchange programs is insufficient, they do succeed.



Opportunities have been gradually enlarged to different age groups under life-long learning policy. Targets are also set for groups with fewer opportunities. Much more can be done to reach disadvantaged people, minorities and those living in remote areas. Such efforts to create a Europe of equal opportunity will only reach their potential, when everyone has the right to be included in the first place. That is a basic principle of both citizenship and education.

In practice, the European, national, and local structures can extend the benefits currently enjoyed by the few to the wider population. This will depend on partnerships with civil society. Europe Direct offices across EU regions should become European Citizens Houses and this title should be given to accredited local structures. Here, the proposal for European Cross Border association regulation is relevant to remove barriers to cross-border cooperation.

3. Have their results recognised and validated both at home and across the EU, with academic, technical, vocational and transversal qualifications treated equally.

In turn, these benefits fall short when the additional knowledge, skills, and qualifications acquired abroad or outside formal education are not recognised or face barriers at home and throughout the EU. The evidence from this whole-of-society approach should be persuasive and provide the Commission and national authorities with democratic legitimacy to remove geographical, socio-economic and regulatory barriers to recognition, access, and participation. Recognition should also include skills gained through informal and non-formal learning, such as volunteering and civic engagement.

Better recognition of skills and competences is essential to strengthen the EU internal market, as barriers limit mobility, restrict employment and reduce economic participation. The International Monetary Fund estimates that single-market barriers are equivalent to a 110% tariff on services. A European skills and job market—where formal, non-formal and informal competences are recognised across borders—would boost freedom of movement. Removing recognition barriers would let citizens move, work, and offer services freely across Member States, enhancing internal market efficiency and integration.

As a first step, credits for vocational training and competences acquired through practical experience should be recognised equally to those for academic learning, leading to genuinely European degrees, skills frameworks, and qualifications. This approach would support mobility and opportunity across sectors and professions, rather than limiting recognition to a narrow range of regulated professions.

This ECI should practice what it preaches. Youth task forces should be set up to campaign for signatures and claim their European rights.

A draft basic law, implementing text, and amendments to the Erasmus+ Regulation are proposed. Legislation should be preceded by widespread consultation and lay down an approach that is enabling rather than top-down. This will give Member States flexibility while monitoring progress. Pilot projects should test demand and costs for this new European right.

Finally, this ECI advocates outward-looking EU citizenship. Europe should give everyone the chance to participate, improving living standards, strengthening democracy, and reinforcing the shared civic space.