

Young Europeans feel uninformed about their rights post-Brexit

*Young Europeans are an 'easy to reach' group – yet many feel uninformed about their rights post-Brexit, and unrepresented in UK politics. In this blog, **Alexandra Bulat** (the3million) presents a summary of key findings from [the3million Young Europeans Report](#).*

Meet Julien, a young European who attended a research focus group about rights and representation in the UK. Julien is Belgian and arrived in the UK less than a year ago to work in hospitality, alongside many other young European colleagues. He tells the group that he feels he has the same rights in the UK as he does in Belgium. He is not concerned about Brexit and thinks that very little will change. He is not sure that he will apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. In his words, Julien is 'just trying here', working in a London bar, unsure whether he will stay in the UK for a long time. He considers the EU Settlement Scheme to apply only to long-term residents or those who are confident they will stay. He does not know he could become unlawfully resident overnight if he does not apply by the deadline of 30 June 2021.



Julien is one of the 90 young Europeans who participated in a focus group research project by EU citizens' rights organisation the3million, funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Citizens' Led Engagement Programme. The research report, published on 20 May 2020, shows what young Europeans in London know and think about their rights and politics in the UK. It has findings and recommendations on three themes: the EU Settlement Scheme, British citizenship and political engagement. It focusses on migrants aged 16-30 from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds and from 11 countries of origin, who are less represented in policymaking: Denmark, Romania, Belgium, Hungary, Bulgaria, The Netherlands, Greece, Latvia, Slovakia, Switzerland and Albania. The report is based on peer research methodology and involved a team of young Europeans from design to dissemination.

This new report from the3million shows there is much more work to be done to ensure Europeans feel safe in the UK. Young Europeans are usually assumed to be an 'easy to reach group' who have little trouble applying for the EU Settlement Scheme. In practice, their experiences range widely – from successfully applying to the EU Settlement Scheme, to finding about the scheme during the focus groups. Some thought they do not have to apply (when they did), whereas others conflated settled status with citizenship or were generally confused about what they have to do.

On citizenship, the research shows how most young Europeans in the focus groups consider becoming British at some point in their lives, with some already making steps towards this process. However, as in the case of the EU Settlement Scheme, there is little awareness about the rights attached to citizenship and the requirements to apply. What is most interesting is that every young European who considered citizenship did so for pragmatic reasons – from the need to feel more secure with their status, to gaining additional rights, such as voting in national elections. The barriers to apply for citizenship were also pragmatic. The £1,330 application fee, unaffordable for most young people in the research, and restrictions on dual citizenship in some countries of origin, were the most frequent reasons for not considering applying.

Let's return to Julien's story. After speaking about his rights, he also commented on representation. Julien is not involved in UK politics and he is much more interested in politics in Belgium. He told the group how the electoral system in the UK prevents him from being more involved because he does not identify with 'either blue or red'. Julien felt he can discuss his political views much more openly in Belgium than he can in the UK. He never voted in the UK and describes his surprise when he recently received a letter from the council informing him about a local election. Before that, he was unaware he had the right to vote in local elections as an EU citizen.

Julien's story speaks to many others in the focus groups, who overall felt unrepresented or underrepresented in the UK, both as young people and migrants. The majority said they are not engaged with politics at all. Even when aware of their right to vote in local elections, the vast majority who could vote chose not to. The young Europeans in the research explain this low engagement in reference to their socio-economic situations, with frequent references to having limited spare time due to working long hours and limited opportunities to engage locally when frequently changing rented accommodation addresses. Young Europeans are not only mobile internationally – they also frequently migrate internally within the UK.

Overall, the report findings on all three key themes – EU Settlement Scheme, citizenship, and political engagement – show that there is a need for more support and outreach, particularly at the local level. This research presents the picture before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the immediate term, it is even more crucial now that adequate support is put in place to ensure everyone living in the UK feels secure with their status. In the longer term, there needs to be a wider, constructive consultation on how to include the voices of young people like Julien and other young migrants in the decisions affecting them directly.

This post represents the views of the author and not those of the Brexit blog, nor the LSE. The Young Europeans "Rights and Representation" report is published on the3million's library page [here](#). Image by [When Europe Was Young8](#), [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic](#).