

Mind the gap

An analysis of EU citizens' political participation and representation in the UK

Key report findings and recommendations

Why did we do this research?

The rights of EU citizens to vote and stand in the UK 2021 local elections have been confirmed. Yet there is limited knowledge on EU citizens' political participation and representation patterns in the UK. For politicians and campaigners to plan effective strategies for EU citizen voter mobilisation, a more comprehensive understanding of the existing data on EU citizens' political participation and representation is needed.

Key findings

1 EU citizens' political participation gap varies by region

- There is considerable variation in the local voter registration of EU citizens across England.
- Analysis of EU citizen population and electoral register shares indicates that EU citizens appear less likely to register to vote than others in certain local authorities. Yet, based on the available data, we cannot conclude precisely how large these gaps actually are or which causal mechanisms are driving them.
- The local authorities where this participation gap is likely to be most pronounced lie outside Greater London but are estimated to have above average EU citizen population shares.
- Preliminary results regarding EU citizen councillors suggest that even local authorities with high shares of EU citizens do not field any EU citizen councillors.
- Overall, this paints a picture of relatively lower local-level political engagement, mobilisation and representation of EU citizens.

2 Thus, there is a need for regionally focused mobilisation efforts

- Eligible EU citizens will have an opportunity to participate politically in the 2021 local elections.
- We recommend that EU citizen mobilisation campaigns with the aim to increase voter turnout focus on the areas we identified as most likely to have a participation gap, predominantly outside Greater London.
- For campaigners focussing on increasing the political representation of EU citizens in UK politics, we recommend targeting the areas with the highest EU citizen population share, to be able to effectively point out discrepancies between the share of the EU citizen population and the corresponding share of EU citizen local politicians (once data becomes available, or through own further local-level research).

3 However, there is little available, high quality data on EU citizens' political participation and representation

- Any analysis of these issues is further complicated by lack of available, high quality data.
- To facilitate research and evaluation of the representation of EU citizens in UK politics, we recommend collecting richer data in future local election waves. Specifically, we recommend collecting data on local councillors of EU citizen background as well as EU citizen turnout at the local authority level.



What next?

Based on this research insight, the3million will be focussing its campaign on democratic rights and EU citizen voter mobilisation in 2021 on a sample of areas which are likely to have the largest participation gap, outside of Greater London. Given the timing of the 2021 elections, we are advising political stakeholders to engage with our report and recommendations to be able to implement effective strategies of democratic engagement. To ensure longer term political integration of EU citizens in the UK, we recommend launching an inquiry into this topic, to be able to collect more comprehensive data, particularly providing qualitative insight from councils and key organisations.