

Reaching Europe's Diverse Voters: Evaluation of the VoteEuropa Campaign

By Hind Sharif and Thomas Huddleston

Acknowledgements: *MPG would like to thank its Democracy Fellows, volunteers, the European Parliament and Humanity in Action. This campaign would not have been possible without their support and commitment.*

Context

For the 2019 European elections, a major target group for voter turnout included young first-time voters. The number of national citizens aged 20-24 in the EU-27 are 22 million or 6% of the voting-age population. This focus on young citizens misses the large number of 'mobile' first-time voters. Nearly 5 million immigrants—or 2% of the European electorate—naturalised as national citizens over the past decade. Add to that the record number of EU mobile citizens living in another Member State—over 11 million or 3% of the electorate that can vote in either their country of residence or citizenship.

Research shows that immigrants are actually much more likely to identify as "European" than native-born Europeans are. These pro-European mobile voters should be getting better information and support. Naturalised EU citizens are rarely targeted in European campaigns, while mobile EU citizens receive little-or-late information from government websites. As a result, the foreign-born and 2nd generation have much lower levels of awareness on European elections and much lower voter turnout than non-immigrants.

VoteEuropa

The Migration Policy Group (MPG) has a long-standing commitment to immigrant political participation and extensive experience of training and pilots, including our recent [VoteBrussels](#) campaign, which doubled the voter registration rate of non-Belgian voters in the Brussels local elections.

Under the umbrella of [this time i'm voting](#), MPG launched [VoteEuropa](#): a non-partisan campaign funded by the European Parliament to encourage a diverse, mobile and welcoming Europe to vote in the May 2019 European elections. Particularly, the campaign sought to increase the registration and voter-turnout among mobile EU citizens, naturalised migrants and refugees, young people of diverse backgrounds and citizens who care about human rights and migration issues in **Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, and Poland**.

Methodology

Interpersonal contact—face-to-face or online—has proven the most effective and cost effective among first-time voters including immigrants. To this end, MPG hired Democracy Fellows across seven EU countries to implement the campaign on the ground.

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With MPG's support, the Democracy Fellows were responsible of conducting focus groups, training volunteers from the target group and working with them on videos and social media actions to spread our tested messages.

Step 1: Recruit and train Democracy Fellows from seven EU countries

In partnership with Humanity in Action – an international nonprofit organisation that educates and connects people who work on human and minority rights – MPG recruited 11 Democracy Fellows across seven EU countries. The Fellows were selected according to their networks and experience on community campaigning with the target groups. 72% of the Fellows were 1st and 2nd generation immigrants, three were participants of The Transatlantic Migrant Democracy Dialogue (TMDD) which trains migrant and refugee leaders, and the rest were experienced youth political education trainers. The Fellows worked with three staff members at MPG – the Communications Coordinator, Video and Scripts Coordinator and Networking Coordinator – who supported the Fellows in their communications strategy, social media, focus groups, scripts development, video editing, networking and overall work. The team at MPG also conducted a training organised by The European Network Against Racism with anti-racism activists from across Europe, collected the most reliable materials and tools for European elections, developed a campaign [website](#) and quizzes to engage the target to vote, and worked with Odisee students to develop videos for the campaign.

Following the recruitment, the Democracy Fellows were invited to Brussels for a 4-day intensive training which covered the literature and best practice on how to increase voter turnout among diverse and mobile voters. The Fellows also received trainings on focus groups, social media, the story of self, voter aid applications and other EP election tools. A Plan of Action was prepared and agreed by the team on how they will work together online on a daily basis.



VoteEuropa's Democracy Fellows from across 7 EU countries

Step 2: Conduct secondary research to choose the primary target

With MPG's support, the Fellows across the different countries conducted research and a power/impact analysis to identify their primary target audience. As such, each country had a

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different primary target on the basis of the impact (in terms of numbers) and feasibility (ability to reach the target). The research included a segmentation exercise of the target groups, identifying their demographics, geographical distribution, interests and previous engagement levels with European elections.

Country	Primary Target Audience
Belgium	Mobile EU citizens in Brussels.
Denmark	Young immigrants and descendants from non-western countries between 19-29 years in Copenhagen and surroundings (Frederiksberg, Gladsaxe and Høje-Taastrup).
France	Youth who care about human rights, migration and minority rights (including 1st and 2nd generation) in Paris, Marseille, Lille, Lyon, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Nice, Toulouse, Grenoble.
Germany	Registration campaign targeting mobile EU citizens aged between 25-35 years old and voter-turnout campaign targeting pro migration youth in Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Munich, and Stuttgart.
Greece	Newly naturalised citizens of migrant background and second generation in the Attica region.
Italy	University students who care about migration issues and naturalised citizens in Rome, Bologna, Napoli, Torino and Milano.
The Netherlands	Registration campaign targeting mobile EU citizens and voter-turnout campaign targeting newly naturalised citizens in The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Groningen and Utrecht.
Poland	Registration campaign targeting mobile EU citizens and voter-turnout campaign targeting youth who care about migration and diversity aged between 19-36 in Warsaw and Kraków.

Step 3: Conduct focus groups with the chosen target and finalise communications plan

After choosing a primary target audience, the Democracy Fellows conducted focus group interviews with their target group in order to design the most appropriate communications and campaign strategy. The focus groups enabled us to identify the barriers that may obstruct the target from voting, and the messages and inspirations that could encourage them to vote in the European elections.

In total, 50 focus groups were conducted in all countries amongst the target groups. The number of individuals that participated in focus groups per country include 19 in Denmark; 46 in France; 43 in Germany; 40 in Greece; 75 in Italy; 27 in the Netherlands; 52 in Poland. To organise the focus groups, the Fellows largely relied on their own networks and ability to reach out to the selected target – ranging from friends, family, colleagues or their volunteers' connections. As such, it was essential for the Fellows on the ground to be connected with the

target audience prior to the campaign. The results proved how necessary message testing is as many results came as a surprise, with various trends amongst the different groups.

The focus groups have exhibited the following obstacles that hinder the target groups from voting in European elections:

⇒ **Lack of knowledge on who to vote for**

Many have an intention to be part of the elections, but they simply don't know who their MEPs are and who to vote for. This creates a significant obstacle for all target groups and is a crucial reason why many are not motivated to vote in European elections in particular. Very few candidates of diverse ethnic backgrounds can be identified, which is an additional obstacle for people of diverse backgrounds.

What to do about it: Redirecting users to reliable quizzes and national aid applications to match them with an MEP was a crucial part of the campaign's communications, including its videos and social media visuals. According to our findings, the best EU-wide resources included www.yourvotematters.eu and www.euandi2019.eu.

Further, MPG created its own quizzes (www.voteeuropa.eu/quizzes/) to highlight the diversity pioneers of the European Parliament and show that voting can enhance the diversity of representatives in the EP.

⇒ **Lack of plan and knowledge on EU elections and how to vote**

Citizens lack the necessary knowledge regarding European elections and the voting procedure: why, how, and when. Many did not know that the European elections were taking place in May 2019 or how to vote in the European elections. For instance, in Denmark, the target group was not aware whether they should vote for individuals, political parties, or only Danish politicians. Mobile EU citizens also lack awareness of the registration dates or how to register to vote. Official governmental websites often only provide information in national languages and the letters do not provide clear and comprehensive information for mobile EU citizens on their voting rights and procedure. Furthermore, citizens generally lack awareness of the power of their vote, particularly in European elections.

What to do about it: The campaign focused on guiding users to reliable websites with information on the voting procedure and producing social media visuals to remind the target of the election date and voting steps. In Greece, focus groups showed that this is a key obstacle for naturalised refugees, hence infographics with the steps on how to vote were created and distributed in areas where the target resides.

For mobile EU citizens, this is also a crucial obstacle since they often need to register to vote in advance if they wish to vote in their country of residence. As such, the campaign's communications directed users to websites to find the deadline and registration process. When official websites were not clear or only available in the national languages, the Democracy Fellows simplified the information and created various communications outputs, from videos produced in various languages, to Facebook posts and flyers.



The European elections are getting closer! Have you made a plan for how and when you're going to vote? If not, it's time to do so. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- ! When is the election date in Germany? Sunday, 26 May
- ! Info on how to vote? Go to <https://www.european-elections.eu> (change the language setting to get info for your country)
- ! Not sure who to vote for? Take this quiz to find who matches your views: <https://yourvotematters.eu/en/quiz/start>

#thistimeinvoting See less



Facebook Ads, examples of election date reminders



Flyer targeting mobile EU citizens in Poland

⇒ Lack of awareness how the EU affects the issues they care about

The target groups are generally interested in societal topics, but do not see the importance of the European election since it is unclear how it will impact the issues they care about or influence their lives. The EU is often viewed as a distant institution that does not affect citizens' daily lives. Though we initially assumed the target groups would be mostly engaged in content regarding the EU's role in migration issues, the focus groups demonstrated that they are rather interested in topics ranging from the economy, unemployment, hospitals, schools, the environment and freedom of movement – and how the EU could have an impact on these areas.

What to do about it: Using targeted content from websites like www.what-europe-does-for-me.eu/, the campaign disseminated videos with volunteers on how the EU affected their life in their region, life or issues they care about, including [this](#) example which was promoted via Facebook Ads.

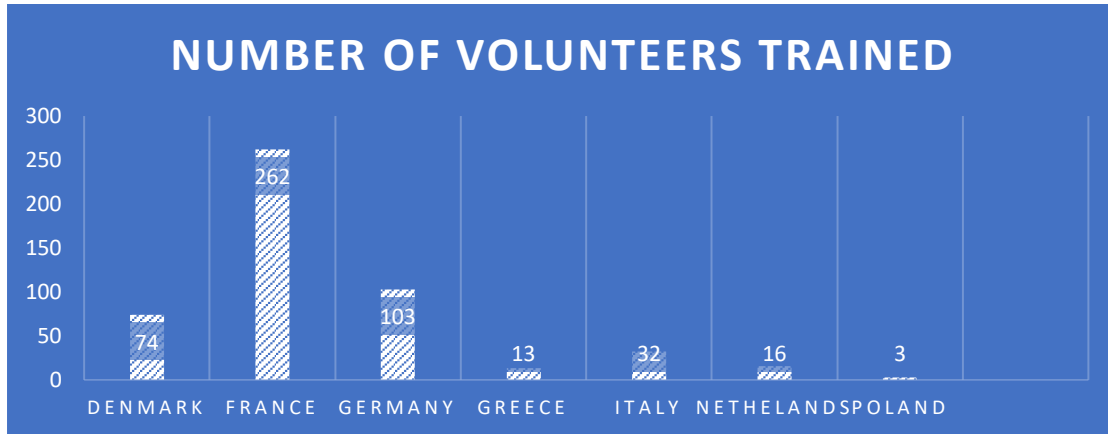
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Step 4: Train volunteers, record videos and reach voters at events

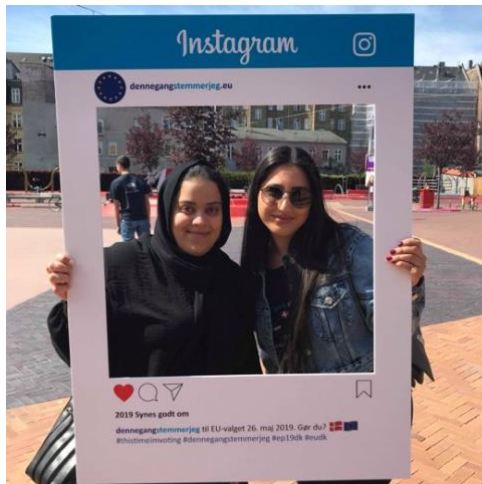


Following the focus group findings per country, MPG and the Democracy Fellows agreed on a communications plan and strategy, resulting in seven different plans. These strategies were the basis of the volunteer trainings, video scripts and overall messaging of the VoteEuropa campaigns. The next step involved training volunteers and attending events to spread the tested messages and resources that motivate the target audience to vote. In total, the campaign's Democracy Fellows were able to train 503 volunteers from the target groups and reach around 5,901 through existing events.

After providing the key information, resources and inspirations to get-out-the-vote, volunteers were provided with adaptable scripts to guide them to mix storytelling with the key information in 1-minute videos that were edited by MPG's Video Coordinator. Since Facebook Insights displayed that on average, around 80% of users watched the videos without sound, subtitles were also added to each video. To this end, VoteEuropa produced 46 videos from a diverse range of volunteers and messengers targeting young, mobile and diverse voters that were published on Facebook and promoted via Facebook Ads.



Step 5: Social media content, Facebook Ads and digital efforts



With the launch of Facebook pages for the various countries and social media content based on the communications strategy, the last month of the campaign focused on digital and social media efforts. MPG additionally launched three quizzes that were developed according to the focus groups findings: 1) [The power of your vote](#), 2) [Diversity pioneers in the European Parliament](#), and 3) [How important is the EU to you](#). The quizzes also accompanied social media visuals and moving images which were all based on the results of the focus groups.

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However, a few weeks before the election date, Facebook changed its advertising rules and stopped pan-EU campaigns from using Facebook Ads that discuss European elections. These restrictions made it very difficult, if not impossible, for non-partisan campaigns across Europe to campaign on European elections at such a critical period before the end of the campaign. The VoteEuropa campaign relied on Facebook ADs for targeting our hard-to-reach groups (young, diverse and mobile Europeans). We planned for the ADs to run centrally and by MPG's communications team in Brussels. However, the change of policy compelled us to create the Ads through the Fellows personal Facebook accounts, since they are based in the targeted EU countries. To this end, the Fellows were required to verify their accounts and each AD had to be approved by Facebook, which took a very lengthy process. This also created a lot more unexpected work for the Fellows and MPG's communications team since they had to instruct, assist, supervise and evaluate the Fellows. A group of NGOs, including MPG, wrote a [letter](#) to the Commission to complain about the restrictions, but Facebook's political Ad rules remain unchanged.

Despite the challenges, the campaign's combined Facebook efforts (including Ads) enabled a reach of 47 million and the engagement of 13 million young people representing a mobile, diverse and welcoming Europe. Examples of the most viral content include the video of [Sean Binder](#), an Irish citizen who was put in jail for saving refugees lives in Greece, calling those who care about migration issues to vote. The [video](#) organically reached more than 22,000 people and was shared 150 times via MPG's Facebook channel. The video was also promoted on the various VoteEuropa Facebook pages with subtitles.

In Italy, the most successful [video](#) was a 1-minute video by a volunteer on why to vote in this election (126,300 reach; 1200 engagements; 171 shares). In the Netherlands, the Democracy Fellow had the chance to record a [video](#) with a survivor of modern-day slavery, who spoke about why this election matters (24,500 reach; 184 engagements; 48 shares). Further, for the registration campaign targeting mobile EU citizens in the Netherlands, videos in the most common languages (including English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Romanian) were recorded to inform the target of the registration date and process, such as [this](#) video by a German volunteer living in the Netherlands. In France, a [video](#) by a French-speaking Belgian volunteer explaining the context of this election has a reach of 29,500. In Denmark, influencers from the target group (Mary Consolata Namagambe and Tareq K. Ghanoum) recorded a [video](#) where they discussed minorities' low voter turnout and the crucial effect minorities' votes have on the EU-election (17,500 reach; 261 engagements; 1,900 link clicks). In Greece, Generation 2.0 produced a [video](#) targeting naturalised refugees who will vote for the first time (15,000 views; 450 engagements; 77 shares).

What contributed to the success of videos on Facebook?

- **Videos with community leaders or relevant messengers to the target audience.** An example is a [video](#) recorded in the Netherlands with the president of the Bhutanese community, calling the public to vote in this election. The video was then shared by the personal profile of the president himself, which enabled a stronger reach and impact on the community. Another example is a [video](#) by a naturalised Indonesian in

the Netherlands, which had a similar effect on the community, with 18,700 reach and 329 engagements.

- **The importance of subtitles.** Facebook insights showed that around 80% of the audience watched the videos on their phones without sound. Including subtitles is key to ensure that the target watches and engages with the videos.
- **The shorter, the better.** It did not come as a surprise that 1-minute videos were the most successful ones. This however involves a lengthy process to achieve – not only by editing the video – but also by developing a script. The Video and Scripts Coordinator at MPG supported the Fellows in providing script guidelines to volunteers on the key messages, information and resources for 1-minute videos. This was a crucial step to ensure that the content was both short and focused on the tested messages that would encourage the target to vote.

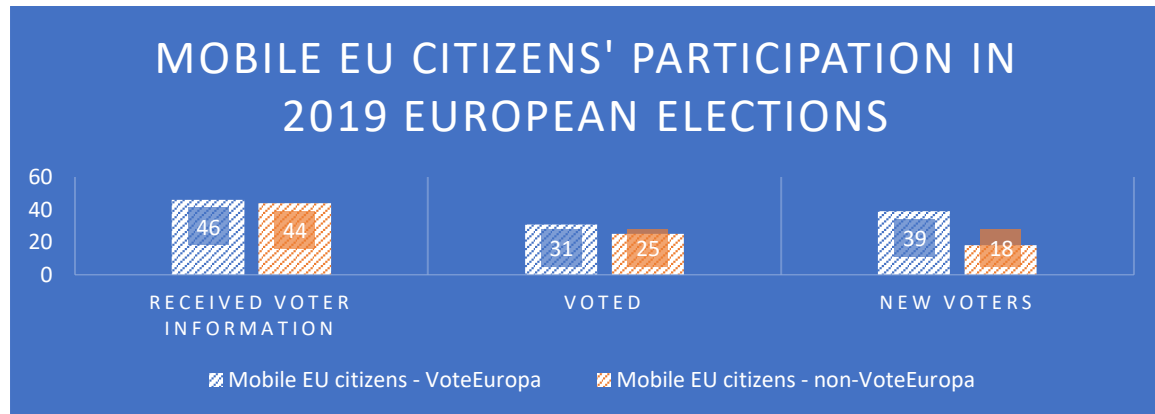
Country	Reach	Engagement
Denmark	1,844,334	2,313,113
France	33,362,706	1,097,974
Germany	8,088,835	1,549,724
Greece	206,339	26,827
Italy	8,158,479	895,107
The Netherlands	12,585,299	5,343,491
Poland	15,950	195

Impact

In terms of impact, VoteEuropa's impressive online reach seems to have improved access to information and new voter participation in its target countries. According to the European Parliament's post-electoral Eurobarometer survey in June 2019, 49% of all EU citizens said that they remembered seeing messages from the European Parliament encouraging people to vote in the EP elections. Voter turnout for the European Parliament elections in 2019 reached 50.6%, the highest level since 1994. The survey found that 22% of 2019 voters were 'new voters', who only decided to vote in the last months, weeks, or days before the election. This historic increase in voter turnout was driven by a surge in voting among young people, according to the European Parliament's analysis.

VoteEuropa was able to analyse this post-electoral survey for one of its main target groups: mobile EU citizens. Data is not yet available to identify other diverse first-time voters. The descriptive statistics were analysed for the 8 VoteEuropa countries and then subjected to logistic regression in order to identify statistically significant findings. The descriptive statistics in the Table below show that mobile EU citizens were slightly less likely than national citizens to receive 'Get Out the Vote' information, vote and be 'new voters'. However, these democratic deficits were lower in the 8 VoteEuropa countries than in the 20 other Member States where VoteEuropa did not campaign. In VoteEuropa countries, mobile EU citizens were more likely to access voter information (46% vs. 44%), vote (31% vs. 25%) and were over-represented among new voters (39% vs. 18%). This six-percentage points difference in voter

turnout in VoteEuropa countries translates to approximately 450,000 additional votes, based on estimates using Eurostat data on the adult mobile EU citizen population. Note that the survey does not clarify whether these mobile EU citizens voted for the lists of their country of citizenship vs. residence.



The logistic regressions below look at citizens' access to voter information and their likelihood to be new voters in 2019 and show which factors were significantly positive or negative during the 2019 elections. The VoteEuropa campaign may have helped to close the gap in access to information for **mobile EU citizens**.

Across the EU, access to voter information from the European Parliament was generally greater among women, the university educated, politically interested voters and lower among young people (below age 40), people in Central and Southern Europe and mobile EU citizens. Whereas in the VoteEuropa countries, there was no significant information gap for mobile EU citizens, even after controlling for the other major determining factors. In VoteEuropa countries, mobile EU citizens were just as likely to see 'Get Out the Vote' messages as national citizens were.

Logistic regression of access to voter information from the European Parliament

Variables	All Member States	EU Non-VoteEuropa countries (20)	VoteEuropa countries (8)
Female	(+)**	(+)**	No effect
Age ≤40	(-)***	(-)**	(-)**
University educated	(+)***	(+)***	(+)***
Political interest index	(+)***	(+)***	(+)***
Mobile EU Citizen	(-)**	(-)***	No effect
Southern Europe (compared to Northwestern Europe)	(-)***	No effect	(-)***
Central Europe (" ")	(-)**	(-)**	(-)**
Pseudo R2	.028	.026	.052
Number of observations	26,532	18,102	8,430

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Q: "Personally, do you remember having seen on TV, in the Internet or on posters, read in newspapers or heard on the radio messages from the European Parliament encouraging people to vote in European Parliament elections?"

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Furthermore, the VoteEuropa campaign may have increased voter turnout among mobile EU first-time voters. Across the EU, the following groups were over-represented among ‘new’ voters: men, young voters, voters with lower levels of education, lower political interest and lower participation in national elections, voters who cared most about migration and borders and voters in Central and Southern Europe. In contrast, mobile EU citizens are generally under-represented among new voters. The exception is the VoteEuropa countries where mobile EU citizens are over-represented among new voters. In VoteEuropa countries, the results are also positive and nearly statistically significant ($p=0.06$) for access to voter information. This means that voter information was slightly more likely to reach new voters in the VoteEuropa countries than in the non-VoteEuropa countries, where this information was slightly more likely to reach traditional voters. These logistic regression results require further analysis once the full Eurobarometer results are published, as this analysis could not consider whether people who care about these issues were more or less likely to vote.

Logistic regression of characteristics of new voters in 2019 European Parliament elections

Variables	All EU Member States	Non-VoteEuropa countries (20)	VoteEuropa countries (8)
Female	(-)*	(-)*	No effect
Age ≤40	(+)**	(+)**	(+)**
University educated	(-)**	No effect	(-)**
Political interest index	(-)**	(-)*	(+)*
Access to voter information	No effect	(-)*	(+)
Voted in national elections	(-)**	(-)**	(-)**
Mobile EU Citizen	(-)*	(-)**	(+)*
Migration is a top issue	(+)*	(+)*	No effect
Human Rights are a top issue	No effect	No effect	(-)*
Borders are a top issue	(+)**	(+)*	No effect
Southern Europe (compared to Northwestern Europe)	(+)**	(-)**	(+)**
Central Europe (“ ”)	(+)**	(+)**	(+)**
Pseudo R2	.068	.064	.124
Number of observations	14,631	9,195	5,436

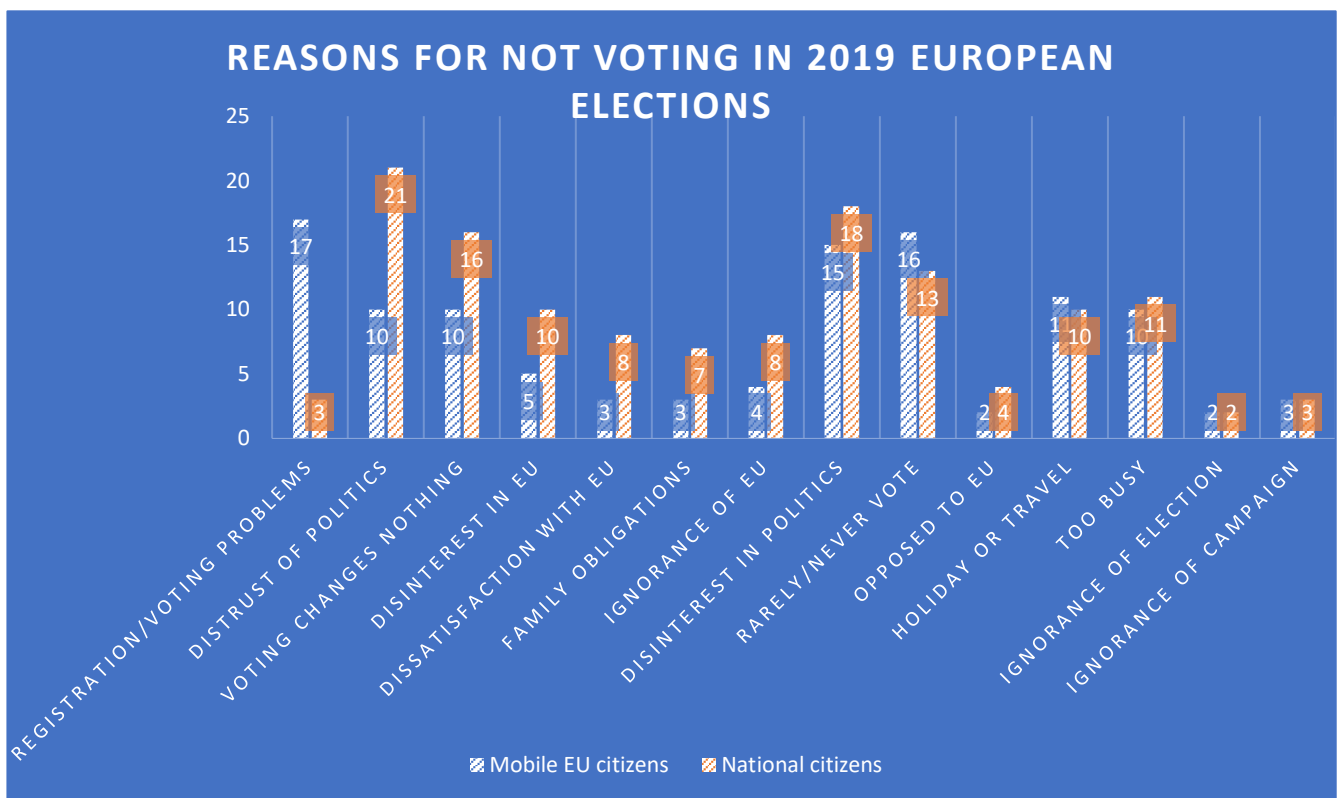
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Q: “When did you decide to vote in the recent European Parliament elections?” No = “I always vote”, Yes = “I decided a few months/weeks/days ago”

It is also interesting that the VoteEuropa countries saw different electoral dynamics on migration and human rights issues. Voters who cared most about migration and borders were not over-represented among new voters in VoteEuropa countries, while voters who cared most about human rights were over-represented among traditional voters in these countries. While the positive effects of this first collaboration between the European Parliament and civil society are encouraging, the democratic deficit is still significant for the diversity of Europe’s first-time voters, including mobile EU citizens.

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The chart below shows the reasons given by non-voters for not voting in the 2019 European elections. While the top two reasons for not voting among national citizens were distrust and disinterest in politics, the top two reasons for mobile EU citizens were registration/voting problems and rarely/never voted. These major problems with registration/voting are five times as common among mobile EU citizens (17%) than among national citizens living in their country of EU citizenship (3%). This finding is just one indicator of the major practical obstacles and information gaps that the European institutions and civil society must overcome together over the next five years before the next European Parliament election in 2024.



General Recommendations

1. Our background research and focus groups showed they lack information on 1) how to register/vote and 2) who are the parties/candidates/MEPs. These two elements were often missing or under-emphasized in the communications of institutions and organisations that tended to assume that the main obstacle was a lack of motivation. To address these two information gaps, resources are often non-existent and hard-to-understand. Information needs to be multilingual, simple and dynamic for the ordinary citizen. National & EU Voter Registration websites/tools (multilingual, simple step-by-step) and National Voter Aid Applications are the most important tools but generally lack visibility among the target groups. All content must be in all languages.

Updates on legislative milestones on What the EU Does for Me based on topics of interest.

2. The European Parliament national offices were inconsistent in their reactivity and their willingness to facilitate access for our VoteEuropa fellows to volunteers who were interested in our target groups. When this collaboration worked, as for example in Denmark, the Fellow was able to assist the Parliament national office and train and coordinate the relevant volunteers. The national offices should convene national partners as a common space/coordination structure and create incentives for volunteers (recommendation letters, sharing videos from partners, build pages). They should also bring together multi-lingual materials for mobile EU citizens and ask to be used by civil society. Outreach and events/materials need to take into account the diversity of the national population, finding partners from the diversity of the communities that they are currently not reaching, because the current approach only reaches the elite/high-interest/convincing.
3. Videos made by volunteers, ordinary citizens and professional community messengers prove to be effective on social media campaigning for electoral participation. Professional vs. voluntary Ambassadors with the greatest reach to the community should be specifically targeted, engaged and supported with the relevant technical support and budget for recording/ads. This however could have improved by having a stronger access to volunteers willing to do videos, more support for video editing and subtitles, and a longer period to build Facebook pages for the campaign.
4. Facebook Ads rules should be put in place years before the election, rather than a few weeks in advance. Further, the Institutions must ensure that Facebook transparency rules do not prevent European wide get-out-the-vote campaigns of civil society and citizens movements.
5. Nearly all campaigns targeted young people without any focus on diversity. VoteEuropa Fellows were often told that they were the only campaign targeting diverse and mobile voters. A non-partisan campaign for inclusivity requires that the EP take ownership of outreach and online voter registration (or automatic/none) for mobile citizens (resident EU citizens and nationals in other EU Member States e.g. BE, FR, GR, NL) and needs mechanisms to report and sanction hate speech of MEPs. The EU should directly regulate hate speech online and eligibility for voting in the European elections.