



TEIN4citizens - Engaging civil society in cross-border regions for the future of Europe

Final report

Project activities and main conclusions



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Overview

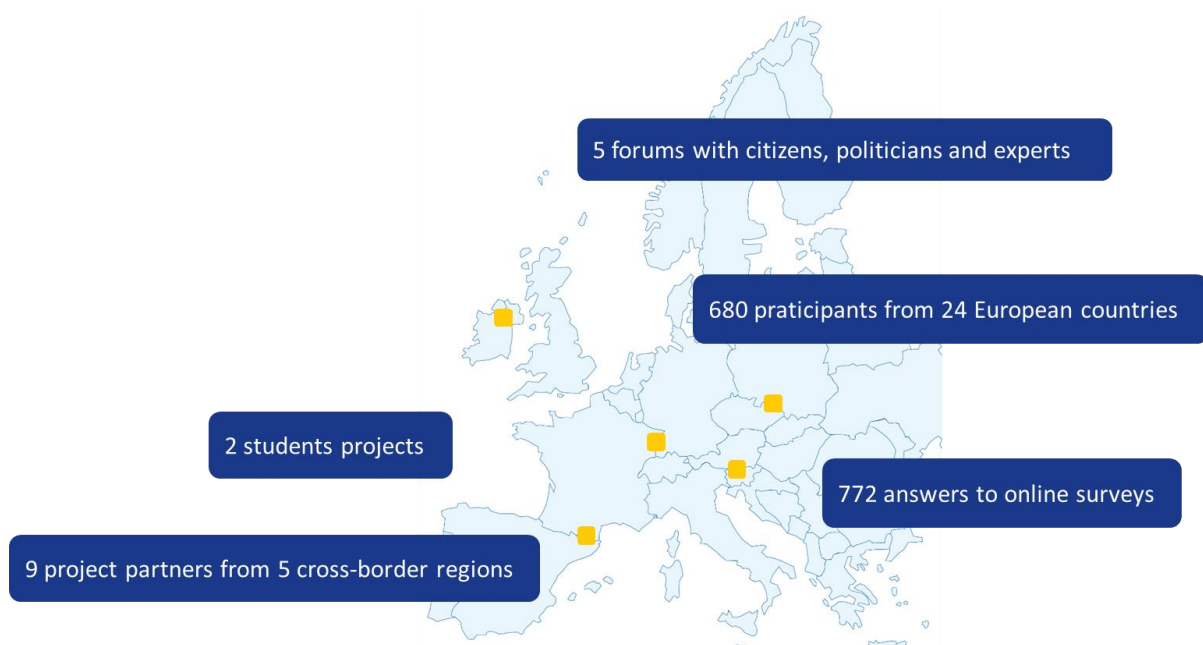
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Introduction

It is not only since the launch of the *Conference on the Future of Europe* that the institutions of the European Union have encouraged citizens to share and debate their visions and ideas for the future of the Union. With the TEIN4citizens project, the partners of the Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (TEIN) seized the opportunity within the framework of the “Europe for citizens” programme to give citizens from cross-border regions a voice in the debate on Europe’s challenges and priorities.

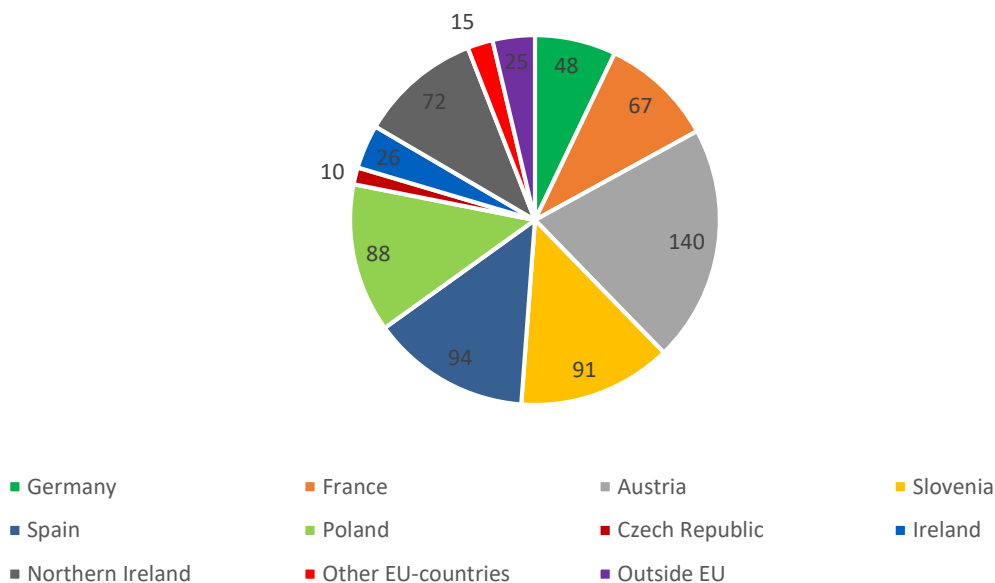
Despite conflictual past experiences, cross-border flows and intercultural engagement have become a part of many citizens’ everyday life in border regions, therefore considered as laboratories of European integration. However, there are still many obstacles in the various areas that make living together difficult and the decisions taken at national or European level sometimes fail to take into account the specificities of cross-border regions and the impact policies can have on them.

In the light of the political, social and economic challenges of the last years, the project partners decided to focus the discussion with citizens, NGOs, experts and politicians from different levels on 5 topics: **EU citizenship & Human rights**; **Minorities & Integration**; **Civil Society Engagement**; **Multilingualism & Identity** as well as **Borders in Europe**.



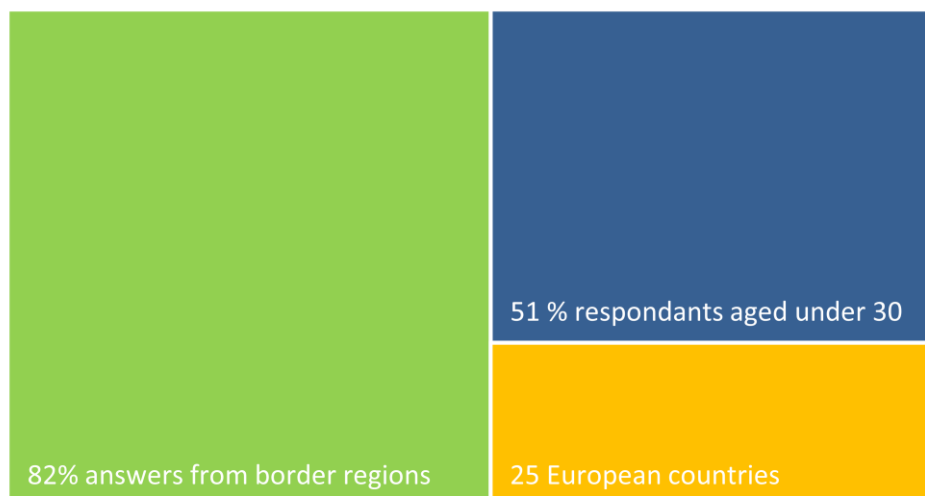
Between March 2019 and April 2021, 680 persons from 24 European countries participated in the forums, conferences, workshops and panel discussions held in five different border regions. They exchanged their experiences of living in cross-border regions and shared their thoughts on the future of Europe with local, regional and EU politicians as well as experts, also from other borders in Europe. Young people in particular showed great interest in the debates: 50% of the participants were under 30 years old.

Participants per country



However, the project did not stop there. In order to give even more citizens the opportunity to join the debate, five thematic online surveys were established based on the ideas discussed during the events mentioned above. Citizens from all over Europe, mainly from border regions, made their voices heard with regards to their rights as EU citizens, their concerns about environmental protection, the engagement of civil society, cross-border mobility, language as a vector of identity, the integration of minorities and many other issues raised during the debates – always bearing in mind the question which Europe they would like to see in the future.

772 responses to 5 online surveys



1. Human Rights, Civic Rights, Entitlements and Obligations: What does it mean to be an EU citizen?

Ireland-Northern Ireland border / Belfast / 11.03.2019

Against the background of the Brexit negotiations that were ongoing at the time of the conference, participants attributed great importance to the EU's role in supporting the peace process on the island of Ireland and in protecting EU citizens' rights.

On the one hand, EU law and EU institutions were said to play a crucial role. The Court of Justice of the European Union, by interpreting the EU Charter of fundamental rights, but also other EU institutions such as the EU Parliament were seen as important guarantors for the protection of human and civic rights, which are underpinning European values and peacebuilding in Ireland and other European conflict regions. On the other hand, the European Convention on Human rights as well as the European Charter on Social rights drafted by the Council of Europe are useful instruments in the eyes of the participants. Thus, the European Court of Human Rights' role in ruling on alleged violations of the civil and political rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights was an integral part of the participants' vision of the future Europe. However, participants also highlighted the need for the EU institutions to look carefully at the implementation of their directives and rights on the ground.

At the local level, associations defending human and civic rights were said to have a strong role to play in defending the implementation of EU instruments and legislation in applying a rights-based approach to social and economic issues. From the point of view of many citizens living in the Northern Ireland-Ireland border region, the right to freedom of movement is an important value built into people's everyday lives. For the participants it was therefore important to preserve the right to work, study and live in another EU country.

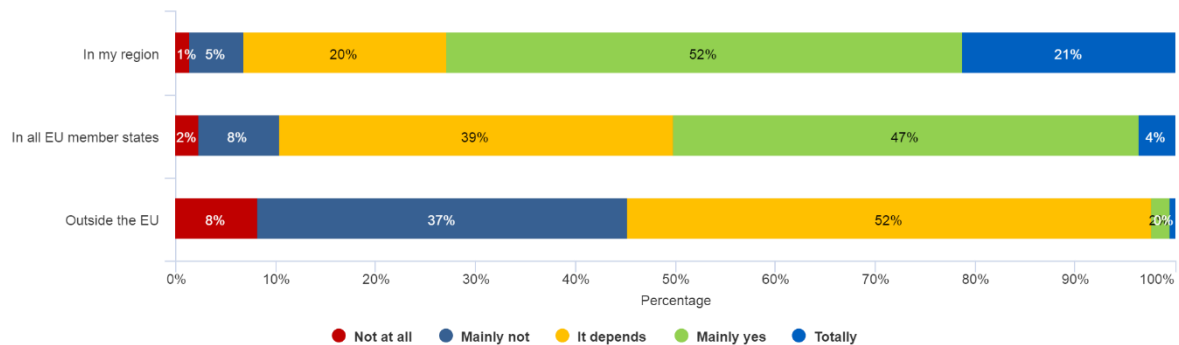
Online survey on human and civic rights in Europe

221 answers – 14 countries – 85% respondents from border regions

The online survey confirmed that citizens all across Europe see the European institutions as an important guarantor for the protection of human civic rights in their regions (55% of respondents) and the EU member states (61% of respondents). Outside the EU however, only 17% of the respondents said that the European institutions currently play a major role.

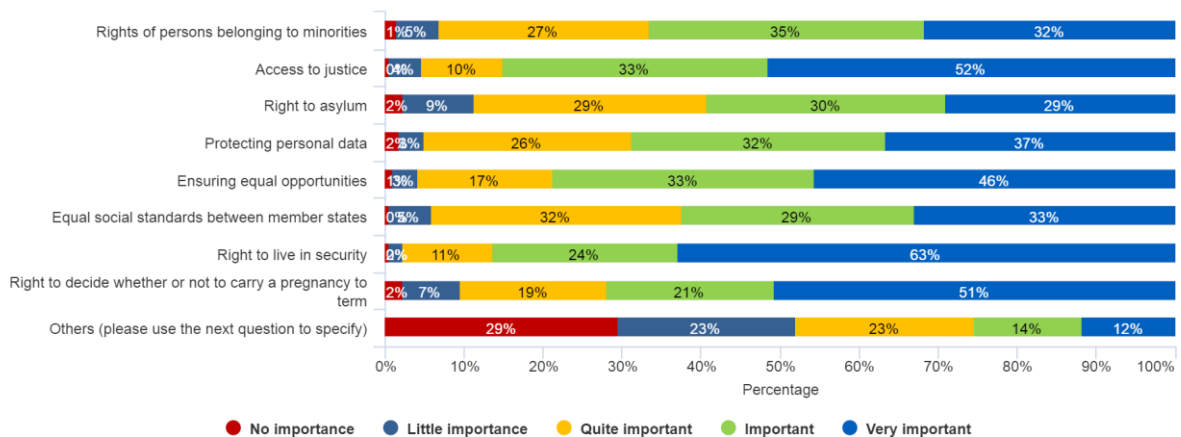
Most citizens think that human rights are mainly (52%) or totally (21%) protected in their region. Looking at all EU countries, optimism is somewhat lower, with 51% sharing this opinion. Outside the EU, respondents are quite sceptical. Only about 2% see protection as guaranteed, whereas almost half of the respondents think that the protection of human rights is mainly not guaranteed or not guaranteed at all.

According to you, are Human Rights effectively protected?



According to the respondents, in the future, the EU should put more emphasis on a number of rights, especially the right to live in security. Furthermore, access to justice and equal opportunities seem to be very important for many citizens. In addition to the given answer options, respondents also mentioned rights such as: freedom of expression and the press; rights of minorities, refugees, immigrants, and LGBT; right to work and fair pay as well as other social rights. Many respondents also regret the lack of control and sanctions of states that do not respect human and civic rights.

Which rights should the EU put more emphasis on in the future?



Further information

[Short report of the conference on human and civic rights in the EU](#)

[More survey results](#)

[Short film presenting the Ireland-Northern Ireland border and the TEIN4citizens conference held in Belfast](#)

2. Old and New Minorities – The Relevance of Identities for Border Regions in Today’s European Union

Austrian-Slovene border / Klagenfurt & Ljubljana / 03.10.2019

The cross-border forum held in both Klagenfurt (AT) and Ljubljana (SL) identified that the experiences and issues facing both traditional minority groups and new minorities originating from recent migration waves have certain parallels. Despite clear differences, both minorities nevertheless share some basic commonalities around needs for preservation and development of their identities, languages and cultures; integration into majority societies; and effective participation in public life.

It became clear that trying to reconcile the claims and needs of ‘old’ minorities (i.e. the Slovene-speaking minority in Carinthia) and ‘new’ minority groupings (i.e. immigrants and refugees) is of utmost importance in the context of reconciling and maintaining European unity in diversity. It is also necessary in the pursuit of a tolerant and diverse Europe, one valuing the integration of both citizens and non-citizens.

There was a significant discussion of the fact that despite being part of the European Union, the positions of states vis à vis ‘old’ and ‘new’ minority groups are extremely diversified. At the European level, the participants wished faster decision-making on bigger problems like the migration crisis in EU and unity of laws and standards. At the local level, the participants explained that they would wish for more flexibility in general, especially more administrative flexibility and stressed the need for cross-border education.

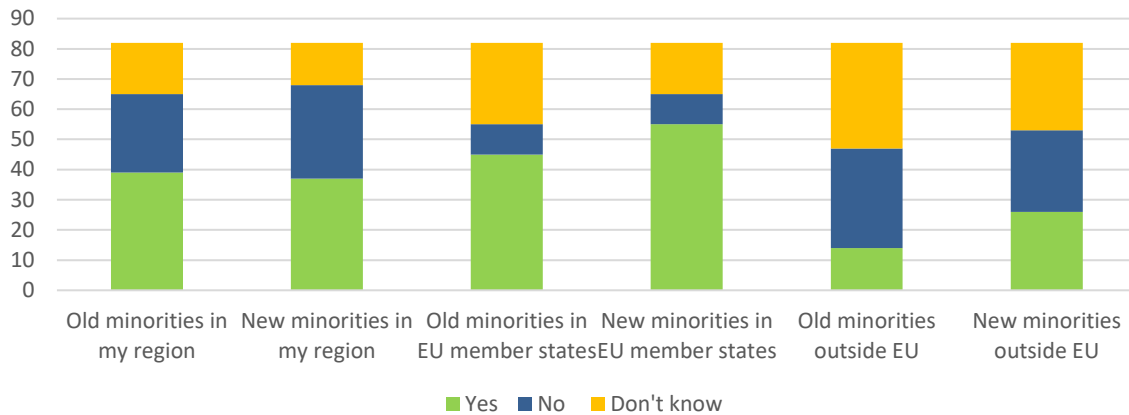
In this context, the question of a European identity was also discussed. Participants of the forum noted that they feel as if they are part of the EU and that they see that certain institutions try to promote the idea of an EU identity. However, it seemed that first and foremost national identity was important, mainly because of a rich history among countries and their strong national legacies.

Online survey on the integration of minorities

82 answers – 10 countries – 74% respondents from border regions

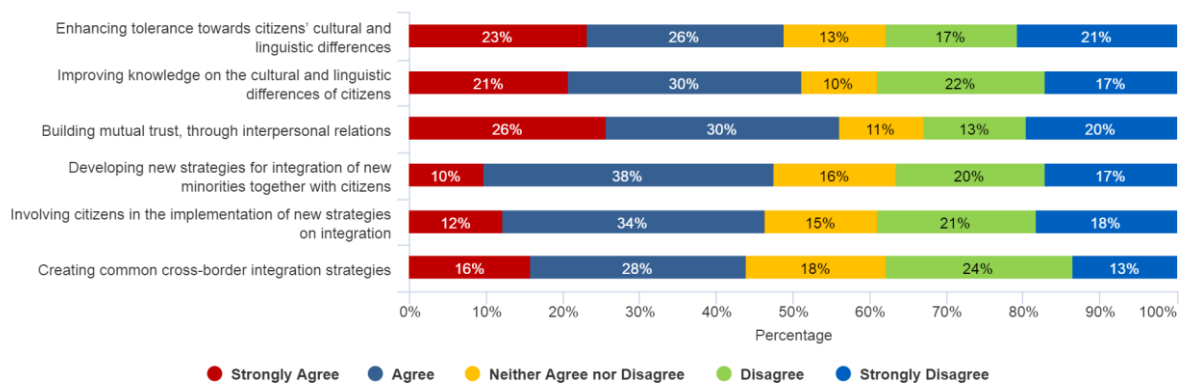
The survey results reflect the mixed opinions of the role of the EU in the integration of ‘new’ (refugees, asylum seekers) and ‘old’ (ethnic, historical minorities) minority groupings. Whereas the respondents acknowledged the importance, though to various degrees, of the EU in integrating minorities in their regions and EU member states in general, they were less convinced of the role of the EU when considering the situation of minorities outside its borders.

Does the EU play an role in the integration of old and new minorities?



When looking more closely at cross-border regions, citizens seem to consider a number of aspects to be important for the integration of 'new' minorities living in these regions. Enhancing tolerance towards cultural and linguistic differences and improving knowledge on these differences seem to be almost equally important as developing new strategies for integration and involving citizens in the implementation of these strategies. However, most respondents agree that building mutual trust is the most important.

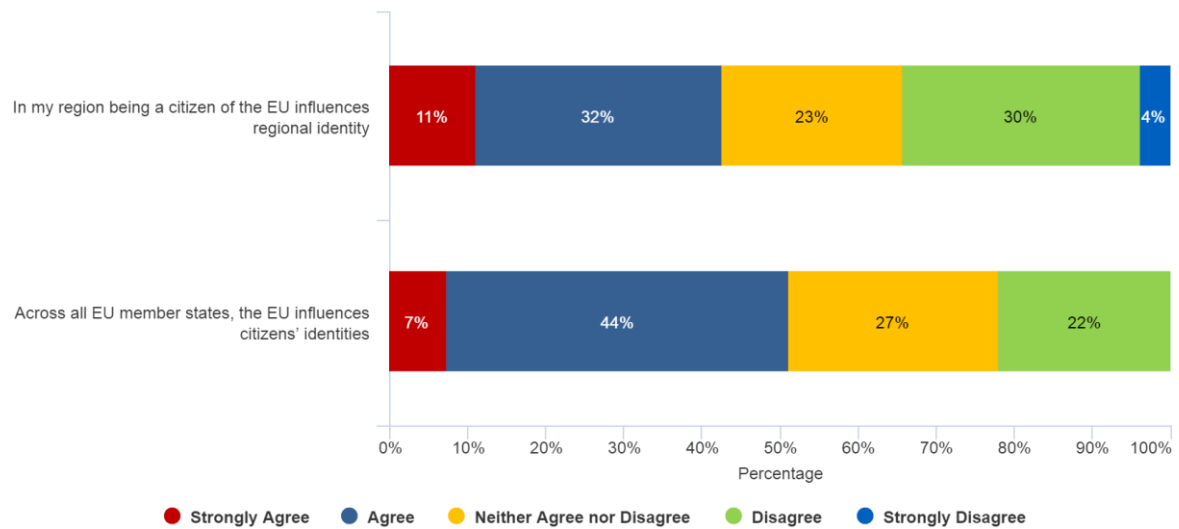
Which of the following statements do you think contributes to the integration of new minorities (refugees, asylum seekers) living in cross-border regions?



According to the respondents, the EU is engaged in all these fields, mainly in building trust (50% of respondents agree), enhancing tolerance (48%) and creating common cross-border integration strategies (48%). Although 69% of the respondents say that they are not well-informed about integration policies within the EU, many are in favour of more civic participation in this area: 60% of the respondents claim that citizens should participate in the design of the EU's integration policies.

Intrinsically linked to integration policy is the question of identity. The survey results show that 43% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that being an EU citizen influences regional identity. When looking at all EU member states, 51% of respondents agree that the EU influences citizens' identities.

In your opinion, does the EU play a role in shaping its citizens' identities?



Further information

[Short report of the conference on the integration of “old” and “new” minorities](#)

[More survey results](#)

[Short film presenting the Austrian-Slovenian border and the TEIN4citizens conference held in this cross-border region](#)

3. Cross-border identity and engagement of civil society in twin cities

Polish-Czech border / Cieszyn & Český Těšín / 05.03.2020

Discussants of the cross-border forum underlined that border regions and twin cities like Cieszyn - Český Těšín, divided by national borders, should be understood as places where people and cultures meet. In this context, local identity was said to play a very important role. According to participants lots remains to be done to overcome fear and mistrust in order to foster cross-border cooperation and build a cross-border identity. Engaging citizens in twin cities in consultations, decision-making processes and joint projects would allow them to build interpersonal relations with a cross-border as well as international dimension and become active drivers of cross-border and European integration.

That's why EU institutions, as well as local and regional authorities ought to take measures to ensure transparency and civic participation. On the one hand, funding streams for cooperation should be distributed in a transparent way and citizens should have their say, for example, by voting on a participatory budget.

On the other hand, participants sought opportunities to get involved in planning and implementing projects, from which they will benefit in the future. Be it at local, regional, national or European level, civil society should be involved in the elaboration of cross-border action plans as well as project management. This would lead to further democratization and cross-border integration. Furthermore, this could contribute to better decisions for local cooperation. Cross-border initiatives are often of a secondary interest for public servants representing the central government and they therefore tend to marginalize cross-border cooperation.

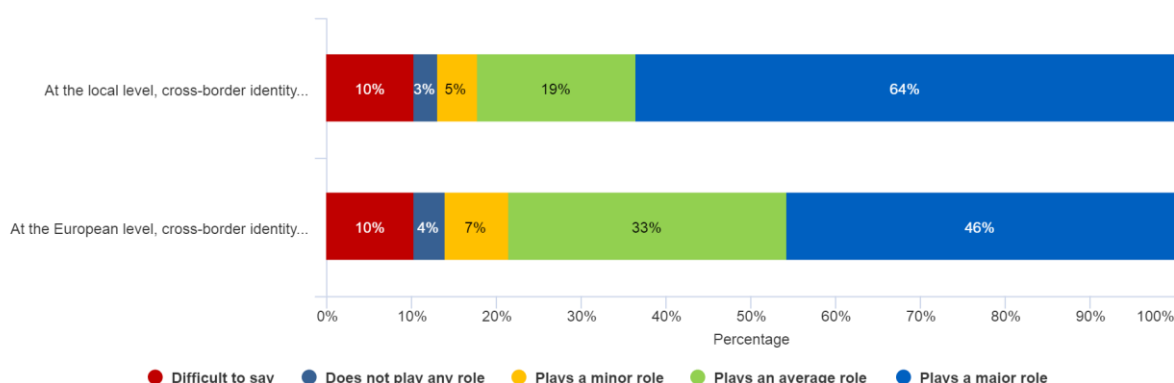
Finally, in the course of the discussions it became clear that cross-border cooperation requires intercultural competences, which will enable the representatives of civil society to collaborate across borders. Cooperation leaders and specialised trainers have an important role to play in facilitating collaboration.

Online survey on the engagement of civil society

107 answers – 10 countries – 90% respondents from border regions

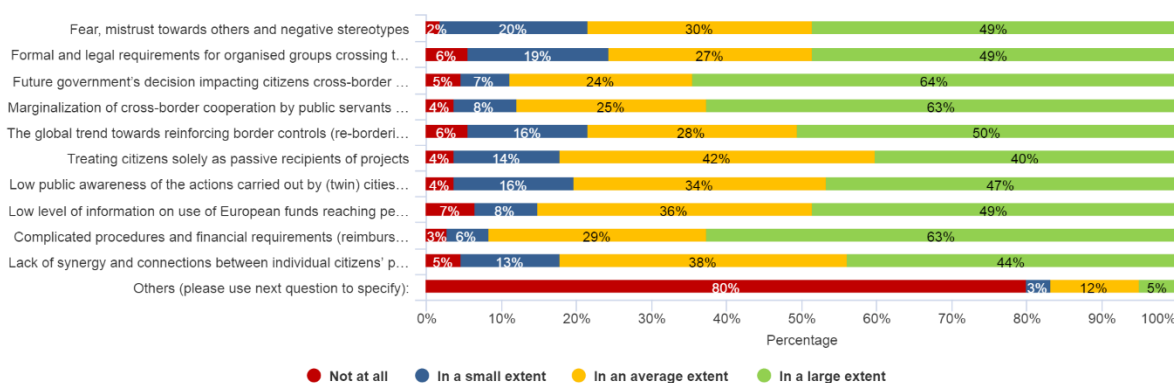
The survey results confirm the conclusions of the conference debates in Cieszyn/Český Těšín. At local level, for 64% of the respondents cross-border identity plays a major role in integrating and building civil society. 19% rate its importance as average. At the European level, 48% rate the importance of cross-border identity as important and 33% as average.

Please assess the role that cross-border identity plays in integration and building civil society



However, citizens from different European borders agree that the integration of civil society faces a number of obstacles in cross-border regions. At the operational level of project implementation, most respondents say that complicated procedures and financial requirements, concerning reimbursement of cost within INTERREG programs for example, make it difficult to carry out joint civil society projects. But the decisions and actions of national governments are also an obstacle in the eyes of many citizens. 88% of the respondents consider that the marginalization of cross-border cooperation by public servants representing central state level and future government's decisions impacting citizens' cross-border activities limit to an average or large extent the integration of civil society living in cross-border regions. In addition, the respondents indicated further obstacles such as language barriers, religion and sectarianism as well as fear and distrust caused by the integration of refugees and migrants in border areas.

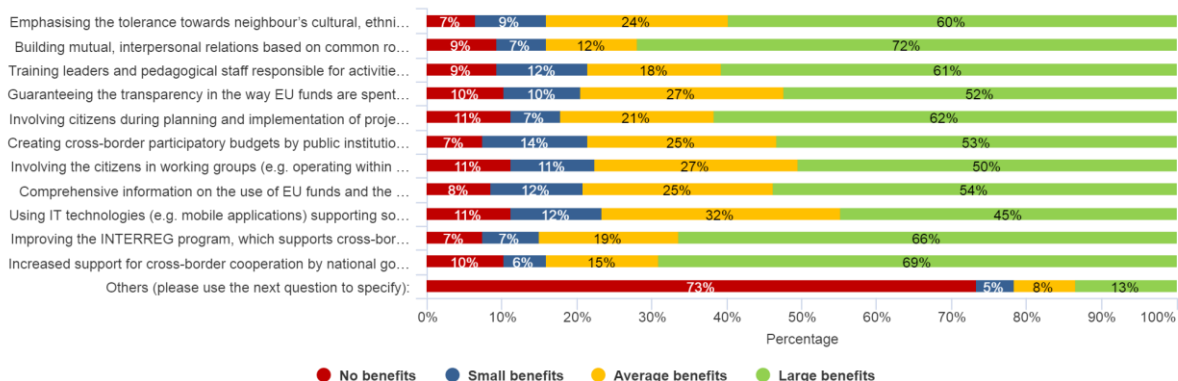
How much do the following obstacles limit the integration of civil society living in cross-border regions at the local level?



In order to overcome these obstacles, the respondents agree with most of the recommendations elaborated during the conference with regards to civil society in cross-border regions. On a personal level, tolerance, trust and interpersonal relations are said to have a large benefit. On an institutional level, most respondents agree that the INTERREG program needs to be improved and national governments should support cross-border cooperation more. Even though the engagement of civil society by means of working groups or cross-border participatory budgets are rated the least useful out of the propositions made, a large proportion of respondents (almost 80%) said that they had some

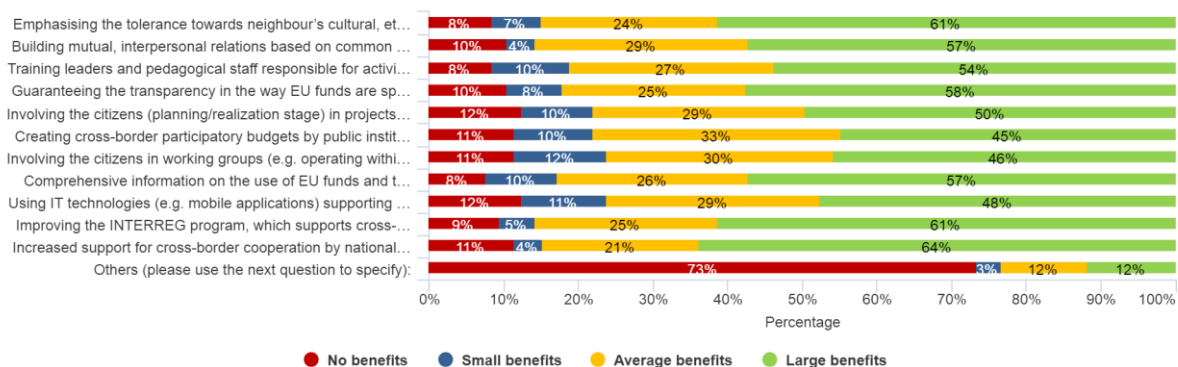
average or large benefit. Other recommendations made include school and company partnerships as well as better transport possibilities i.e. the improvement of cross-border public transport.

Which of the following recommendations for the local level benefits the integration of civil society living in cross-border regions ?



When asked how the European Union could enhance the integration of civil society in cross-border regions, similar conclusions can be drawn. Most respondents say that the EU should increase its support for cross-border cooperation (85%) of national governments, improve the INTERREG program (86%) and foster mutual and interpersonal relations (86%). A little less important, but still estimated to have a large benefit by over 40% of the respondents, seems to be the creation of cross-border participatory budgets or the participation of citizens in working groups at EU level.

Which of the following recommendations for the European level benefits the integration of civil society living in cross-border regions ?



Further information

[Short report of the conference on cross-border identity and engagement of civil society in twin cities](#)

[More survey results](#)

[Short film presenting the Polish-Czech border and the TEIN4citizens conference held in Cieszyn - Český Těšín](#)

4. Multilingualism and Identity in the 21st Century Europe

Spanish-French border / Girona (online) / 9.-18.03.2021

In a Catalonia, with a strong national identity closely linked to the Catalan language, most of the participants (Catalans from the Spanish and French states) agreed in calling for more respect from regional, national, and European institutions towards minority languages. They saw how—despite the declarations of intent regarding linguistic diversity as well as linguistic and cultural rights—the European institutions ignore in practice a language spoken by some 10 million European citizens. This seems to be the case also for the rest of the indigenous languages that are minoritised and hundreds of languages that immigrants, new European citizens, have brought with them.

As regards the European Union, all the official languages of its member states are used in its legislation and institutions. According to the participants, this idea should be extended beyond the official languages of the member states in order to embrace minority languages. Furthermore, existing instruments, such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, promoted by the Council of Europe in 1992 should be ratified and fully applied in all EU member states.

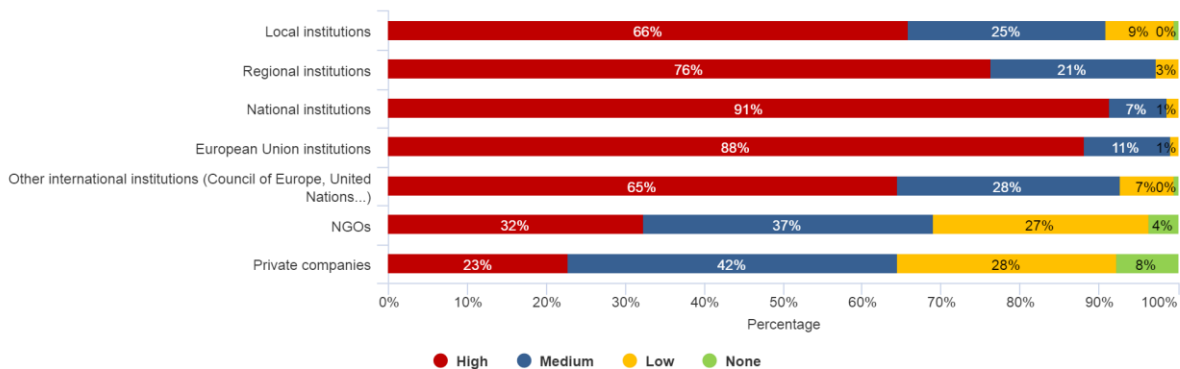
Part of the debate focused on the role of schools in promoting multilingualism. One of the main conclusions was that linguistic diversity should be supported in the educational world through respect and interest for all languages. Therefore, better training for teachers should be encouraged so that they have the tools to promote multilingualism and interculturalism (not forgetting the languages and cultures brought by immigrants in recent decades) as a vehicle for a more united Europe.

Online surveys on identity and multilingualism in 21st century Europe

220 answers – 10 countries – 70% respondents from border regions

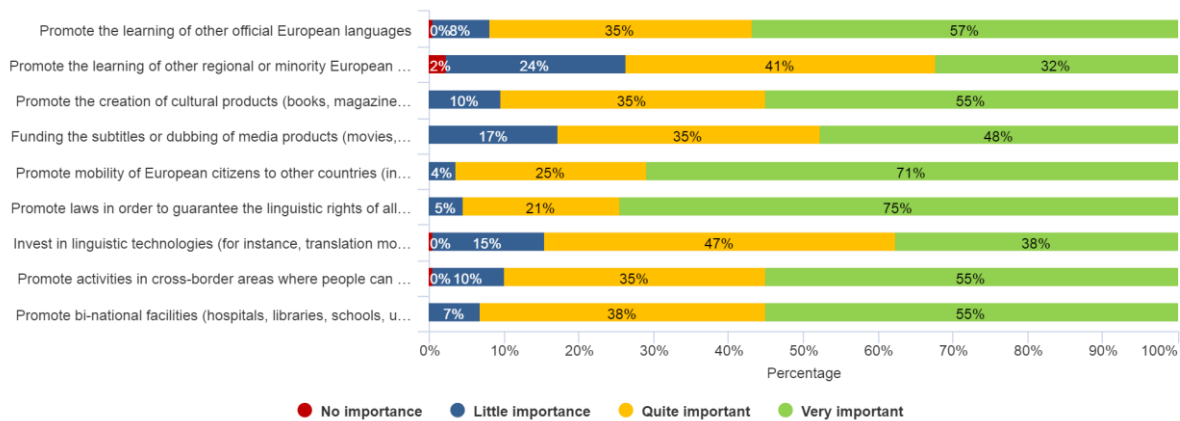
The survey results underline that citizens from cross-border region and beyond place a very high importance on multilingualism. They call for more support from different institutions in its promotion, but especially from national (91%) and EU (88%) institutions. NGOs and private companies are considered to have the least responsibility. But overall there's a great need to promote multilingualism.

How much responsibility should the following institutions have in promoting multilingualism?



In order to respond to this great need to promote multilingualism, the respondents largely agreed with the recommendations addressed to the EU by the participants of the conferences and debates. Most important seems to be the promotion of mobility of European citizens to other countries, be it for students, other young people or workers. Furthermore, the EU should promote laws in order to guarantee the linguistic rights of all citizens (including those of the speakers of minority or regional languages). Concerning cross-border regions, activities which bring together people speaking different languages as well as bi-national facilities such as hospitals, schools, libraries and universities are rated as quite or very important.

Which actions should the EU implement in the future?



Further information

[Short report of the conference on identity and multilingualism](#)

[More survey results](#)

[Short film presenting the Spanish-French border and the TEIN4citizens conference on identity and multilingualism](#)

5. Mobility, Environment, Culture, Identity & Multilingualism - Borderless in Europe?

German-French border / Strasbourg-Kehl (online) / 13.-22.04.2021

In the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, which affected people in the Upper Rhine region, especially due to border closures in the spring of 2020, many participants expressed the wish for increased cross-border and European cooperation. They hoped that the proposals developed during the event regarding mobility, environment culture and multilingualism would give new impetus to cross-border projects in order to realise a Europe of open borders.

At the local level, language(s) or multilingualism were seen as a key to identity and communication in a region, which is interconnected across borders. The participants agreed that language learning must be promoted from an early age, also outside of school, for example through civil society initiatives. Furthermore, the training of teachers and the recognition of their university degrees was said to be of crucial importance in order to promote the mobility of staff to neighbouring countries and thus offer pupils the opportunity to be taught by native speakers.

Similarly, culture was seen as an important vector for exchange and integration. Therefore, information about and access to cultural offers on both sides of the border ought to be improved. The possibility of organising more bi- or trilingual events as well as more opportunities for cultural actors to meet and work together were also discussed.

With regards to the European level, the participants debated mostly on the role of the EU in ensuring freedom of movement and environmental protection. In order to guarantee the free movement of persons as one of the four EU fundamental freedoms, the citizens demanded increased coordination between the EU member states, especially in pandemic situations. But fast, efficient, user-friendly and inexpensive transport connections were deemed to be important also outside of times of crises. Especially, environmental friendly means of transport should be promoted. Furthermore, the participants called for more harmonisation, tightening and controls of EU standards with regard to air and water pollution. A healthy environment should contribute to the well-being of all citizens in the EU, so the desire for less plastic packaging and the ban on the use of glyphosate were also topics of discussion.

Online surveys on borders in Europe

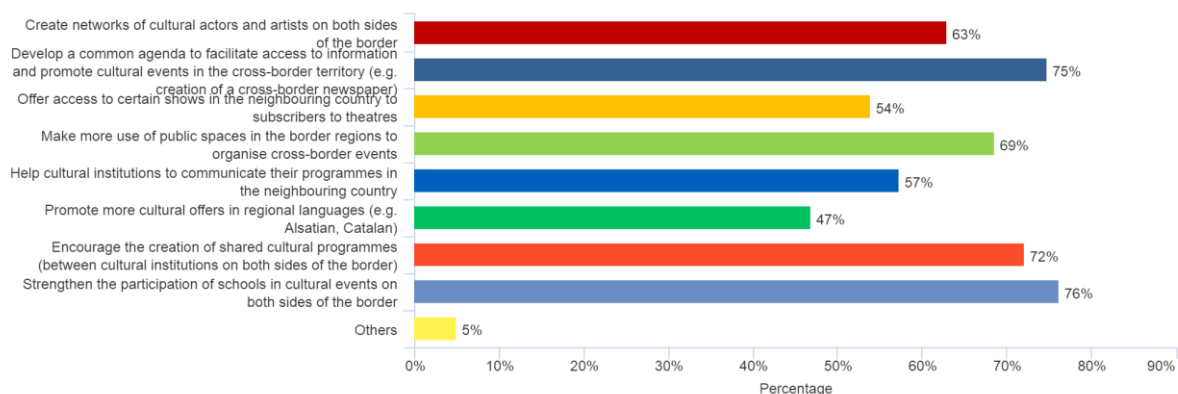
143 answers – 11 countries – 92% respondents from border regions

When looking at the survey results we can observe that overall people from other border regions seem to agree with the recommendations elaborated about the promotion of multilingualism, cultural offers, mobility and environmental protection, both at local cross-border and EU level.

With regards to cultural promotion in cross-border regions, a large majority of respondents say that it is important to involve more schools in cultural events (76%), facilitate the access to information about cultural events on both sides of the border (75%) and created more shared cultural programmes in

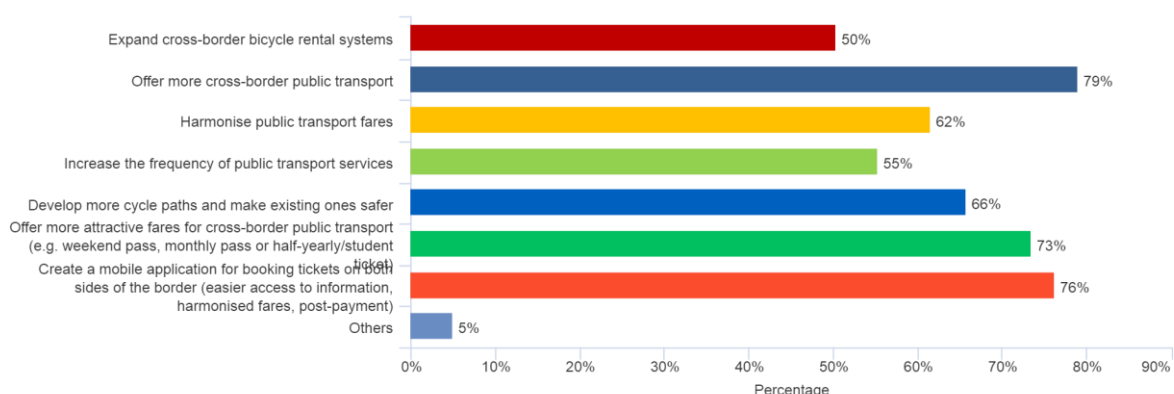
collaboration with cultural institutions from both neighbouring countries (72%). Even though the promotion of cultural offers in regional languages was highly recommended during the conference debates at the French-German border, interestingly, people responding to the survey from the same or other border regions, seem to attach less importance to this point (47%). In addition, respondents underline, for example, the need to develop a common law on associations for the border regions, in order to facilitate cultural cooperation across borders.

From a local point of view, cross-border cultural promotion should be carried out in the following way... (several answers possible)



Cross-border mobility seems to be a preoccupation in many border regions and respondents have plenty of ideas how to improve the different means of transport. Of the given recommendations, the increase of cross-border public transport and the creation of mobile applications to facilitate the access to information and ticket purchase were rated highest. But the respondents also put forward suggestions such as: bilingual signage in public spaces, adjustment of the frequency of public transport (especially for cross-border connections), reactivation of the cross-border railway lines, recognition of foreign means of payment at electric and gas filling stations.

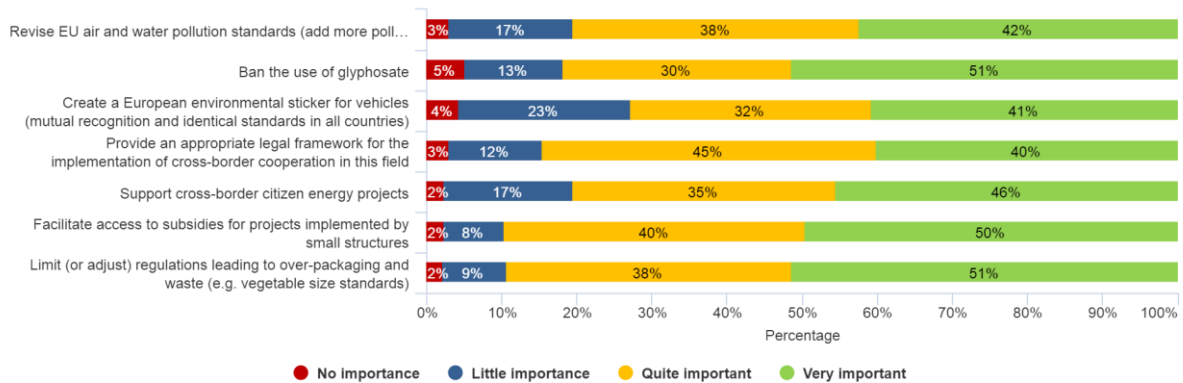
In order to change local cross-border mobility, it would be necessary to... (several answers possible)



At the European level, EU institutions have an increasingly important role to play in promoting environmental protection and sustainable development. All the proposed recommendations for action seem to be similarly important to citizens: the EU should adjust regulations leading to over-packaging and waste (51% very important), ban the use of glyphosate (51% very important), facilitate the access

to funding streams for environmental projects implemented by small structures (50% very important) and support cross-border citizens' projects (46% very important). Only the creation of a European environmental sticker for vehicles was rated a little less important with 73% of respondents saying it was quite or very important.

In order to protect the environment and to promote sustainable development, the European Union should...



Further information

[Short report of the conference on borders and the future of Europe](#)

[More survey results](#)

[Short film presenting the Franco-German border and the TEIN4citizens conference on borders and the future of Europe](#)

General conclusions and cross-thematic observations

The objective of the TEIN4citizens project was to bring together citizens, experts and politicians in order to discuss current EU issues and their visions for future development, especially from the perspective of border regions. Even though the topics dealt with at the different borders ranged from human rights protection and identity questions to mobility and covered various aspects, a number of general questions about the communication and visibility of EU institutions, citizens' participation and EU funding programmes were raised by the participants of all events.

Firstly, they identified a general lack of visibility of the EU institutions and communication. The majority of the population does not understand EU instruments and institutions. At one event the participants suggested that the Members of the EU Parliament should reach out to citizens and inform people, thus be more visible and tell citizens about their plans. It was said that more communication was needed, especially on tangible outcomes of its policies and concrete actions. Maybe the communication could also be organised in more participative and innovative forms such as discussion rounds. In this respect, it would also be important to include minorities' languages in the communication. In the eyes of other participants, a better coordination of cross-border and European communication was needed.

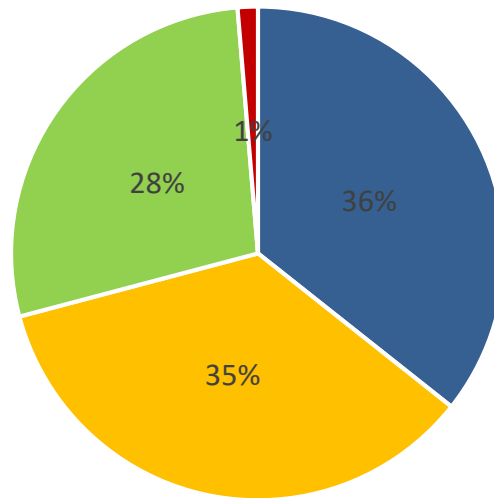
Secondly, a large proportion of citizens were explicitly interested in more active participation in projects and discussions, but did not always know how to get involved. Therefore, more long-term "facilitators" are needed. According to the participants this would not primarily require financial support, but people who take on problems and ideas, provide information, bring together affected actors and interested persons, maintain contacts, mediate across borders and, if necessary, point out funding opportunities - in other words, people who actively facilitate citizens' engagement in the long term.

In this respect, citizens would also like to see more commitment to action at all levels. Participants agreed that consultations and discussions should continue, but the insights gained should be applied and the numerous common goals, ideas and strategies that already exist in all thematic areas should now be implemented consistently and actively.

Finally, be it the EU Peace program at the Ireland-Northern Ireland border, the INTERREG A program in other cross-border regions or European wide programs such as Erasmus+, citizens seem to place a high importance in EU funding and are aware of the opportunities they offer for joint projects, exchanges, economic development etc. However, the difficulties in accessing these funding programmes and the complex and time-consuming administrative procedures were deplored by citizens and cross-border actors in the discussions across all themes.

In conclusion, many citizens recognize their own responsibility in shaping the future of Europe but above all hold local, national as well as European authorities and politicians responsible. This view also seems to be confirmed by the online survey results, which show that an almost equal part of respondents place either the regional, national or European level at the heart of the future EU construction.

In the future, the EU construction should rely essentially on...



■ ... the regions ■ ... the European Union ■ ... the national states ■ Others

Further information about the TEIN4citizens project

[TEIN website](#)

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