socialplatform



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Social Platform is the leading alliance uniting networks of civil society organisations advocating for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. With a membership of 49 pan-European networks, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.



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Introduction

Ahead of the European Parliament elections in 2019, we launched a survey investigating how local, regional and national civil society organisations working in the social field view the EU. More than 700 ideas and opinions were received from 97 national organisations from 23 EU countries. It was open from June to September 2018 and was published in all EU languages.

The survey results were intended to be a useful tool for shaping civil society organiations' European elections 2019 campaigns.

Participants

In total, 97 organisations participated in the survey. The largest share of participants are based in Belgium, Germany and Greece. Of the 97 organisations, over half are based at national level (53.5%), with nearly one-third of the rest coming from regional or local level (20.6% and 11.3% respectively). Over one-fifth of participants are affiliated with the European Disability Forum (22.6%), with the next largest proportion of participants linked to Mental Health Europe and the Salvation Army (8.2% each). 46.2% of participants represent people who face obstacles to voting. The majority of participants did not organise a campaign or engage in any kind of activities around the last national elections or European Parliament elections in 2014 (69%).

Key findings

What is Europe?

Participants were asked to complete the sentence, "To me, Europe is…". The majority of responses centred on the following topics:

- Human rights, democracy and shared values, e.g. "To me, Europe is a fair and equal community that embraces its diversity and leaves no one behind, promotes social fairness, equal rights as well as inclusive and sustainable growth."
- Peace and community, e.g. "To me, Europe is a great opportunity to overcome nationalism and secure peace."
- Freedom of movement, e.g. "To me, Europe is freedom of movement, travel, work and free trade."
- A continent of different nations, e.g. "To me, Europe is a society of different nations."

Of the 94 responses, 17 were negative, e.g. "To me, Europe is a fortress", and "To me, Europe is too focused on economic issues and not enough on social".

What works well in Europe?

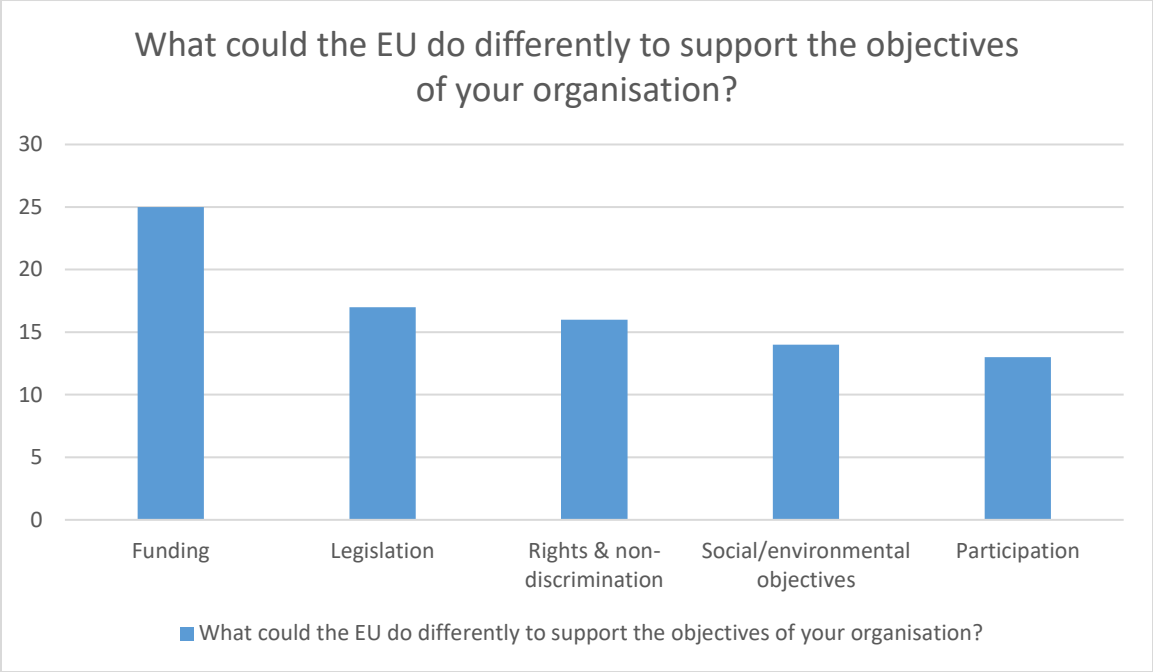
When asked what works well in Europe, participants came up with a wide array of 90 different responses, from international aid, to the rule of law, to disability legislation. Two themes recurred the most: goods, services and the economy (30 responses); and freedom of movement and cultural interaction (21 responses). For example:

- "Visa-free travel, no roaming charges, Erasmus Programmes, Erasmus+ programmes."
- "Minimum consumer protection laws."

- "Upkeep of standards such as construction of roads and road safety."
- "Freedom of movement (the opportunity to live, study, work and retire in any EU country). Regional protectionism (ensures that the food we consume is safe and supports EU producers and farmers). EU cultural funding (protects and enriches the arts and culture in Europe)."

What should the EU do differently?

Of the 93 responses received, the majority focused on five areas:



Improved access to and information about funding was cited by 25 participants as the main action the EU could take to support the objectives of their organisation. Participants also highlighted greater harmonisation and/or implementation of legislation and policies (17 responses), greater promotion of rights and non-discrimination (16 responses), better (and in some cases more) policies in the social and/or environmental fields (14 responses), and more emphasis on participatory democracy (13 responses).

EU-level coordination: more, less, or just enough?

Participants were asked whether they think there should be more, less or the current degree of EU-level coordination on a range of areas:

- Universal access to quality, affordable and accessible public and social services
- Dialogue with civil society organisations
- Socio-economic inequalities and redistribution of wealth
- Inclusive, effective and efficient social protection and welfare systems
- Non-discrimination and equality in all areas of life
- Decent work and quality employment
- Migration

In all cases, participants overwhelmingly supported more EU-level coordination. 'Socio-economic inequalities and redistribution of wealth' and 'Migration' got joint highest support for both more (82%) and less (6%) coordination.

Three wishes

When asked to imagine that EU leaders have a magic wand, participants' top three wishes were:

1. For the EU to fully guarantee and protect human rights and equal opportunities for all (18.7%)
2. For no one to live in poverty (13.3%)
3. For more EU money to go to social inclusion, employment and education (10.5%)

Key demands to European Parliament candidates

A wide range of demands were put forward by participants, including stopping the European Parliament's two-seat arrangement, doing more on climate change, and fighting corruption. Of the 96 responses received, 23 focused on rights, values, equality and non-discrimination. Doing more on social issues received 29 responses, with migration (19 responses) and poverty, social security, wealth and wages (17 responses) standing out in their own right.

What would you change about the EU?

When asked to image having the power to make changes to the EU, participants put forward 95 diverse ideas. 33 of the responses were based on reducing bureaucracy and improving the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the European institutions (e.g. "Delete the 'unanimity decision' to speed up the decision-making process"), and 15 responses focused on improving participation and representation (e.g. "More participatory democracy, more regional involvement").

Getting the vote out

Participants were asked what initiative could encourage their users, employees, activists or volunteers to vote. A large proportion of the 93 responses fell into one of two categories: communications (37 responses) or social policies (25 responses). For example:

- "Launch an information campaign with many civic, political organisations on local, regional and national levels."
- "Campaign on social media and tv (older generations)."
- "Better social policy, free public health and education."
- "Social economy programmes."

Conclusion

The majority of the local, regional and national civil society organisations working in the social field that participated in the survey have a positive view of the EU, and would like it to be more ambitious on social issues. The open nature of the majority of the survey questions resulted in wide ranging responses, with key trends including rights, participation and fighting poverty and social exclusion. Participants have limited involvement in national and European election campaigns, and feel the EU can do better in reaching out to the electorate.