

A low-angle photograph of a child flying a kite. The child's hands are visible at the bottom, holding a red ring attached to the kite string. The kite is colorful with sections of red, yellow, green, and purple. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with some light, wispy clouds. The overall mood is bright and hopeful.

**M. Golubeva, K. Žibas, V. Petrušauskaitė, M. Rikša,  
A. Austers and J. Segeš Frelak**

# **Do mobile citizens engage?**

**A Study on the Participation of Polish, Lithuanian and  
Latvian Citizens in Ireland**

**2016**

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Political participation of immigrants .....	3
Mobile EU citizens from Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in EU Member States.....	4
Participation opportunities and limitations in Ireland.....	5
What is to be done? .....	6
Research questions for the present study.....	6
<b>Survey target group.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Demographic data.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>9</b>
English language proficiency .....	9
Plans to acquire Irish citizenship or to return.....	9
Trust in Institutions.....	13
Political Participation and Civic Engagement .....	17
Electoral participation .....	20
Knowledge of political institutions in Ireland .....	26
Labour market confidence and lack of faith in unions .....	28
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>32</b>



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## Introduction

This study looks at the political participation of mobile European Union (EU) citizens in Ireland, focusing primarily on the Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish communities.

Mobile citizens are EU citizens exercising their right of free movement and living temporarily (or not) in another EU Member State than their country of citizenship.

The study was conducted as part of the project “Energising mobile citizens’ participation”, supported by the European Union and implemented by PROVIDUS (Latvia), Diversity Development Group (Lithuania), Institute of Public Affairs (Poland), Forum Polonia (Ireland) and Leinster Latvian Association (Ireland).

The study looks at the actual situation with engagement and participation of Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish citizens in Ireland, the barriers they encounter and the opportunities that need to be explored in order to improve participation.

The methods used during the study include focus groups with Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish citizens in Ireland (conducted in December 2015 and January 2016) and a survey of mobile citizens belonging to the three communities (conducted in February and March 2016).

### *Political participation of immigrants*

Political participation can be studied from a number of aspects. Martinello proposes that political integration of immigrants has four dimensions - political rights, identification with the target country, adoption of norms and values, and “political participation, mobilisation and representation”.<sup>1</sup> While the EU institutions and EU policies make a consistent and well-founded distinction between two types of migrants – EU mobile citizens and third-country nationals – and Martinello’s dimensions of integration are primarily formulated with third country nationals in mind, to a large extent these aspects of integration concern also mobile citizens.

This study concerns primarily one of Martinello’s dimensions – political participation, mobilisation and representation. It would make sense, however, to distinguish between several aspects of this dimension, namely:

- level of engagement or mobile citizens’ orientation towards participation in the country of residence, or affective dimension,

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<sup>1</sup> M. Martinello (2005) Political participation, mobilisation and representation of immigrants and their offspring in Europe. Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic relations, 1/05. Malmö University, page 2-3.

- actual participation practices and patterns or the extent to which mobile citizens are participating in local political activities in the country of residence via civil society, in elections, political parties and local elected councils).

On the whole, there exists a negative gap between conventional (electoral) participation rates of immigrants and local citizens in Europe: immigrants participate in political activities at significantly lower rates than the majority population; these rates can differ by 10% in Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> This concerns also EU mobile citizens: a report on the impact of free movement of EU citizens at the local level<sup>3</sup> concluded that EU mobile citizens' participation in the cities' civic and political life was still limited. In terms of conventional (electoral) participation, participation gap with local citizens decreases with years spent in host country.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Mobile EU citizens from Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in EU Member States*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have played an important role as 'sending' countries and have witnessed population outflow, mainly to EU countries, creating migrant communities, which are not always politically active in the new country of residence. Ireland is the second biggest destination country for Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish migrants, after UK. Currently, there are 117 918 Poles, 35 817 Lithuanians and 20 252 Latvians living in Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

Data on the participation of Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish citizens in local and European elections in other EU countries has not been studied in depth. A study on the participation of Polish citizens in the UK notes that the level of activism among Poles in the UK is still limited,<sup>6</sup> and another study indicates that participation of Poles in trade unions is below the national average in the UK.<sup>7</sup> There are no similar studies on Latvians and Lithuanians in the UK or Ireland.

A study commissioned by the Lithuanian government in 2014 shows that the majority (68%) of Lithuanians living abroad assessed the possibility of participation in the political life of receiving country as good or satisfactory, however, 73% of those surveyed still have not taken the opportunity to participate. More than half (53%) of respondents indicated that Lithuanians living abroad are not sufficiently involved in the political and public life of the country of residence.<sup>8</sup>

Existing studies of the participation of Latvian mobile citizens in national elections in Latvia show that they are politically much less active than citizens staying in Latvia (26,42% in 2014

<sup>2</sup> E.A. De Rooij (2011) Patterns of Immigrant Political Participation: Explaining Differences in Types of Political Participation between Immigrants and the Majority Population in Western Europe. *European Sociological Review*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> EY for the European Commission (2014) Evaluation of the impact of the free movement of EU citizens at local level. Final report. Brussels.

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2015) 'Civic engagement of immigrants', in *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat (2016).

<sup>6</sup> J. Kucharczyk (ed.) (2013) *Nothing about us, without us*. Civic participation of Poles in Great Britain, IPA, Warsaw.

<sup>7</sup> L. Fulton (2015) *Polish Workers in the UK. Their Involvement with Unions and Their Employment Rights*. IPA, Warsaw.

<sup>8</sup> Market and Opinion Research Centre VILMORUS (2014).

parliamentary elections versus 58,85% among citizens resident in Latvia).<sup>9</sup> Another study has also discovered that Latvians living abroad are less inclined towards participation in a wider sense than Latvians in Latvia.<sup>10</sup>

There are no comprehensive studies showing the trends of political participation of Baltic and Polish citizens in EU member states.

#### *Participation opportunities and limitations in Ireland*

According to Migration Policy Group (MIPEX, 2010), political participation opportunities in Ireland rate among the highest in Europe. This includes both electoral rights and political liberties: EU citizens and even third-country nationals in Ireland can vote in local elections, can be elected and can enjoy the same civil liberties. At the same time, there are limiting factors, such as complicated registration for voting. Ireland is among the 5 EU countries with rules leading to a loss of voting rights for Irish citizens in national elections because of residence in another EU country (European Commission, 2014).

Past experience of local elections shows that opportunities for participation of immigrants exist and that parties have been receptive to the fact that many voters come from other countries. E.g., a study by University College Dublin indicates that in the 2009 local elections, more than 40 immigrant candidates stood for election.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the level of activity or engagement of non-Irish residents has been low: e.g., in Dublin about 17% of the population are immigrants, yet at the end of 2013 of all the people registered to vote in the Dublin City Council area, under 5% were immigrants (including EU nationals).

Participation of foreign-born citizens in elections in Ireland seems to have been problematic in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – according to OECD, whereas more than 80% native-born citizens reported that they participated in recent elections, only between 50 and 55% foreign-born reported the same.<sup>12</sup>

Given these differences in level of participation, a number of questions remain unanswered: is the complicated registration system the main reason why many mobile citizens do not participate politically, or are there other important factors at play? If yes, what are those factors? Are the inactive mobile citizens in Ireland more likely to be inactive in national elections, (not) exercising external voting rights in their countries of origin? And, finally – what is to be done to improve political participation of mobile citizens in Ireland?

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<sup>9</sup> E. Kļave (2015) Latvijas diasporas politiskā līdzdalība un pārlamentāra pārstāvniecība. In: A. Lulle et al (2015) Diasporas politiskā pārstāvniecība Latvijā un Eiropas Savienībā: parlamentāra dimensija. University of Latvia.

<sup>10</sup> I. Mieriņa (2015) Are emigrants less pro-social in their new community than they used to be at home? A comparative analysis of Latvians at home and abroad. Presentation at the Center of Studies in Demography and Ecology, University of Washington, 04/12/2015.

<sup>11</sup> B. Fanning, N. O'Boyle and V. Di Bucchianico (2014) Inclusive Politics for a Diverse Republic. University College Dublin.

<sup>12</sup> OECD (2012) Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2012.

Some suggestions for strategies outlined in other studies for improving political participation of mobile citizens and foreign-born citizens will be summed up in the next section.

#### *What is to be done?*

According to European Commission report on the impact of free movement of EU citizens at local level,<sup>13</sup> activities to improve participation might include "production of guides to raise awareness on the right to vote and the voting process" as well as monitoring and analysis that is currently limited by the shortage of data.

More far-reaching proposals have been made regarding the participation of mobile citizens: thus, the proposal for a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) submitted by Philippe Cayla and Catriona Seth in 2012 proposed national voting rights for EU citizens. Others, e.g. Rainer Bauböck, have argued that according the right to vote in national elections in the country of residence to mobile EU citizens is not the right way to solve a democratic deficit which is created by limited access to citizenship, and that naturalisation should still be the main way to access full political participation rights.<sup>14</sup>

This normative approach is not supported so far by the actual behaviour of mobile EU citizens: according to OECD, free movement of persons as in the EU does not have a pronounced positive effect on nationality acquisition.<sup>15</sup> Due to this tendency, more action is needed on behalf of European institutions and national governments to ensure that current democratic deficit for mobile citizens is diminished, and their actual capacity to influence local and national politics in the country of residence is brought to the level of 'native' citizens.

#### *Research questions for the study*

It would be wrong to limit our study of political participation of mobile citizens to conventional forms of participation, such as participation in local elections (as voter, candidate, or both). As pointed out by Martinello, participation in the host country can also include, for example, trade union politics, and the fact that a migrant does not have conventional political rights does not bar him or her from having political views and being active in other ways. Martinello proposes a typology for political activity of immigrants in their host countries, dividing their activities "according to the geographic-political level of action and the level of conventionality, i.e. the contrast between state and non-state politics".<sup>16</sup> For conventional participation, Martinello proposes that we should look at: electoral turnout, electoral lists and elected positions (as well as executive branch positions), the formation of political parties by immigrants, and participation in consultative institutions for immigrants. For non-conventional participation, he identifies trade

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<sup>13</sup> EY (2014).

<sup>14</sup> R. Bauböck (2012) [EU citizens should have voting rights in national elections, but in which country?](#)

<sup>15</sup> OECD (2015) 'Civic engagement of immigrants', in *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>16</sup> Martinello (2005), page 7.

unions, pressure groups and community groups 'organised along ethnic, racial, national, cultural or religious lines, and participation in community groups with wider goals (either local, national or global)'.<sup>17</sup>

The dichotomy of conventional and unconventional participation, however, does not allow to make an important distinction between engagement (as orientation/ commitment towards participation) and actual participation patterns (conventional and unconventional practices of participation in political life in the country of residence). While the conventional and unconventional forms of participation proposed by Martinello can all be studied under 'participation patterns', it is still interesting to look at levels of engagement with host country politics on the affective level (what Martinello describes as "having political views", but in this case more specifically being ready to express these views and / or act on them in host country society).

On engagement the research questions here should be:

- Do mobile citizens see political participation in the host country as important?
- How do mobile citizens evaluate the ease of access/ difficulty of political participation in the host country?
- Arguably, in order to compare the extent of engagement in diaspora politics of the country of origin, a third question could be asked: "Do mobile citizens see political participation in the country of origin (through national elections) as important?"

On participation patterns the research questions here should be:

- What is the level of participation of mobile citizens in conventional forms of political participation (local elections, EP elections, political parties, elected office)?
- What is the level of participation of mobile citizens in other forms of political activity in host country (trade unions, petitions, demonstrations, pressure groups with political agenda, etc.)?
- What role do diaspora institutions (formal and informal) play in enabling/ supporting these forms of participation?
- What role do local/ national institutions in host country play in enabling/ supporting this participation?

In the case of mobile citizens from Latvia, it would have been interesting to explore the differences in engagement levels and participation patterns between Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking Latvians. However, given the small sample in the survey, there is no opportunity to study such differences, if any. Theoretical literature suggests that the dichotomy of society of origin and state of origin plays an important role in defining political participation of migrants. E.g. Zapata-Barrero et al propose to distinguish between state and society of origin, as the relationship dynamic

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., page 16.

between migrants and their state or society of origin is different, as well as the interests of the society of origin differ from those of the state.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, another set of research questions concerns barriers and enabling factors:

- What barriers do mobile citizens identify to their political participation (especially conventional participation)?
- What enabling factors exist for enhancing participation?

The latter may concern factors in Irish society and political system, that have not been sufficiently utilized, but also factors within national diasporas.

### Survey target group

The online survey of Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens, living in Ireland was conducted in February and March 2016. The questionnaire was available in four languages – English, Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian.

The potential respondents were contacted through migrant communities and NGOs in Ireland. The survey used targeted sampling and snowballing methods to form the survey sample. Invitations to participate in the survey were emailed to individual community leaders, members of NGOs, diaspora school members, posted on Facebook groups of migrants in local communities (i.e. Lithuanians in Cork, Lithuanians in Dublin) as well as on broader platforms of migrant communities.

### Demographic data

In total, 604 respondents participated in the survey, of which 374 were Polish citizens, 90 - Latvian citizens (including 1 non-citizen of Latvia) and 140 were Lithuanian citizens.<sup>19</sup> Women were more represented in the survey: 68.9% of all respondents were women. A majority of the respondents were 26–45 years old (79.3%). Sample age structure corresponds to the general migrant age structure in these communities.

The surveyed respondents lived in different parts of Ireland. The largest part (43%) lived in small or middle size towns, one third (31%) lived in the capital city, 18% - in large cities and 8% in rural areas or villages.

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<sup>18</sup> R. Zapata-Barrero et al (2013) The political participation of immigrants in host countries: An interpretative framework from the perspective of origin countries and societies. INTERACT Research Report 2013/07, 23.

<sup>19</sup> This corresponds to the share of Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens in Ireland (if one takes this group as a total, 117 918 Poles , 35 817 Lithuanians and 20 252 Latvians constitute roughly 68%, 20% and 12%) – Eurostat (2016).

Absolute majority of surveyed respondents (78%) were currently employed and worked in different sectors of economy. Of those, who were unemployed at the time of the survey, majority (51%) were taking care of children and home, 22% were unemployed or temporary not working.

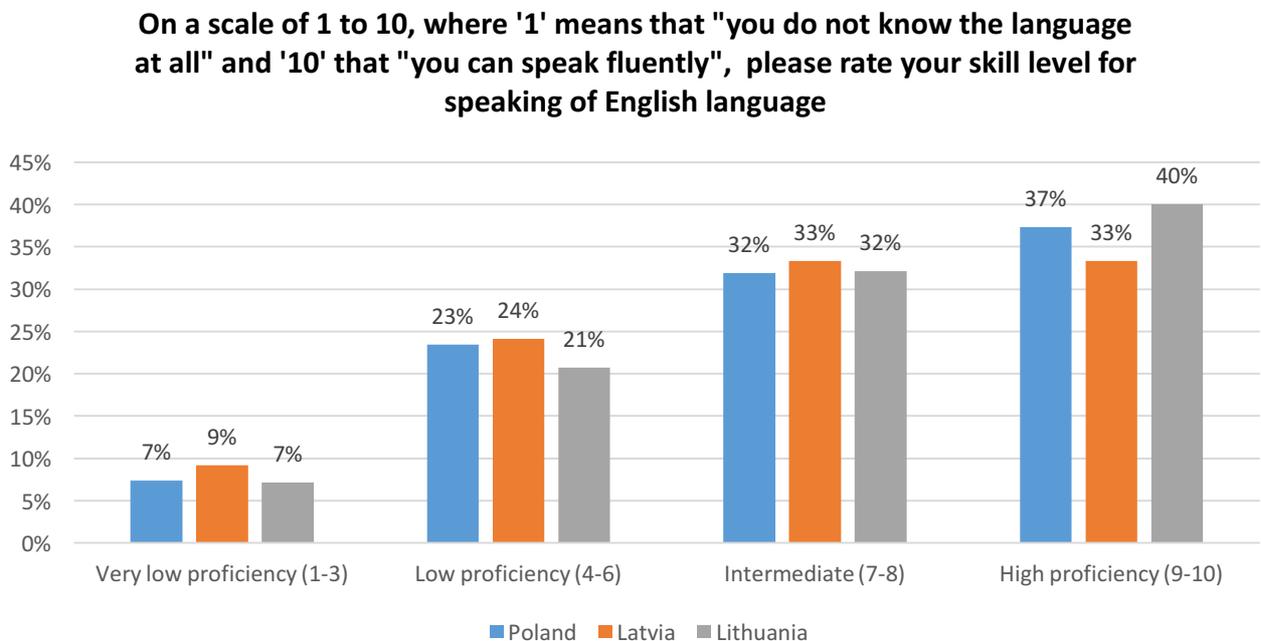
On the whole, the sample of respondents in the survey was not large and representative enough to analyse the influence of specific factors or to study correlations within special groups (e.g. Latvian citizens), but the survey provides descriptive data on the patterns of political engagement and participation among Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens in Ireland.

## Findings

### *English language proficiency*

The English language skills of Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrants in Ireland are rather good – majority of respondents (more than 60%) evaluated their English skills as good and very good. Only less than one tenth (7–9%) of respondents evaluated their language skills as very low. There are no significant differences in English language skills among surveyed migrant communities (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. English language skills among Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrant communities in Ireland. N=594 (Missing=10).**



### *Plans to acquire Irish citizenship or to return*

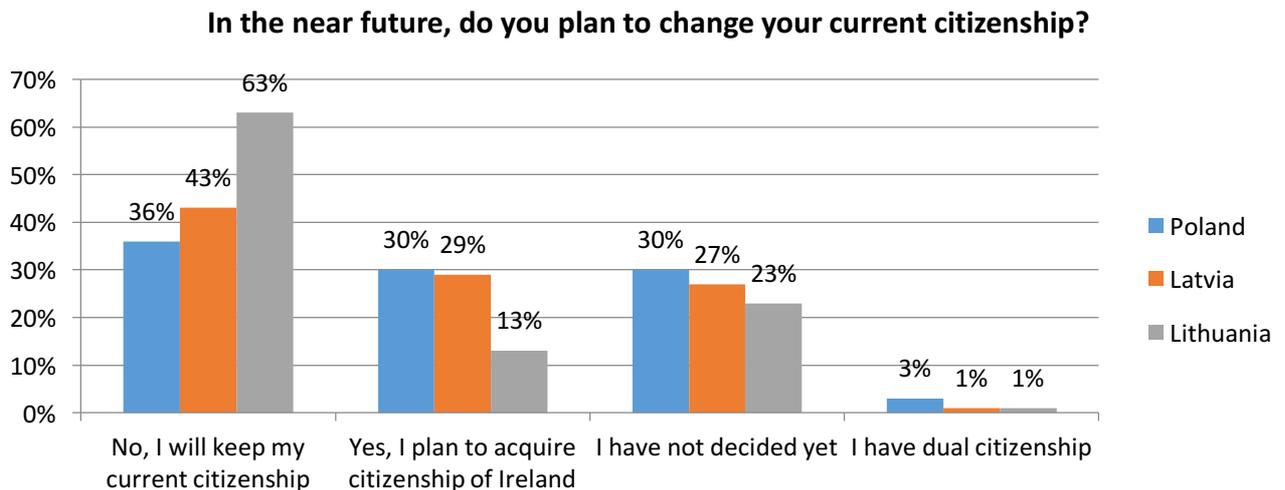
When asked about plans to change their current citizenship to Irish citizenship, about a third of all respondents stated that they had made a decision to acquire Irish citizenship. Yet, the decisions

regarding change of citizenship differed among various groups. Among Lithuanian migrants in Ireland, only slightly more than one tenth (13%) said they plan to acquire Irish citizenship and majority stated that they plan to keep their current citizenship (63%). This may be explained by the fact that Lithuania still does not allow dual citizenship, except for those who left Lithuania under Soviet occupation before 11 march 1990 and their descendants.<sup>20</sup> Polish respondents were more open to the decision of citizenship change – 30% planned to acquire Irish citizenship, 30% were yet undecided, and slightly more than one third of Polish respondents (36%) planned to keep their current citizenship (. In Latvian group, 43% of respondents planned to keep their current citizenship (see Figure 2). It is important to note that some of the respondents indicated that they already have dual citizenship of Ireland and their home country. The number of migrants with dual citizenship is slightly higher in Polish group (3%) than in Lithuanian and Latvian groups (1%).

Future plans to stay in Ireland permanently were also flagged up in Lithuanian focus group discussions and mentioned as one of the characteristics shared by those who had voted in local elections. Similarly, in the same focus group participants who were planning to leave Ireland (for a different country, not Lithuania) expressed a hesitancy to “invest their time and interest in Irish politics” (direct quote of participant).

Plans to acquire Irish citizenship can be affected by the difficult naturalization process in Ireland that was mentioned as one of the hurdles of active participation by Polish focus group participants.

**Figure 2. Plans regarding citizenship change among Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrant communities in Ireland. N=567 (Missing=37).**

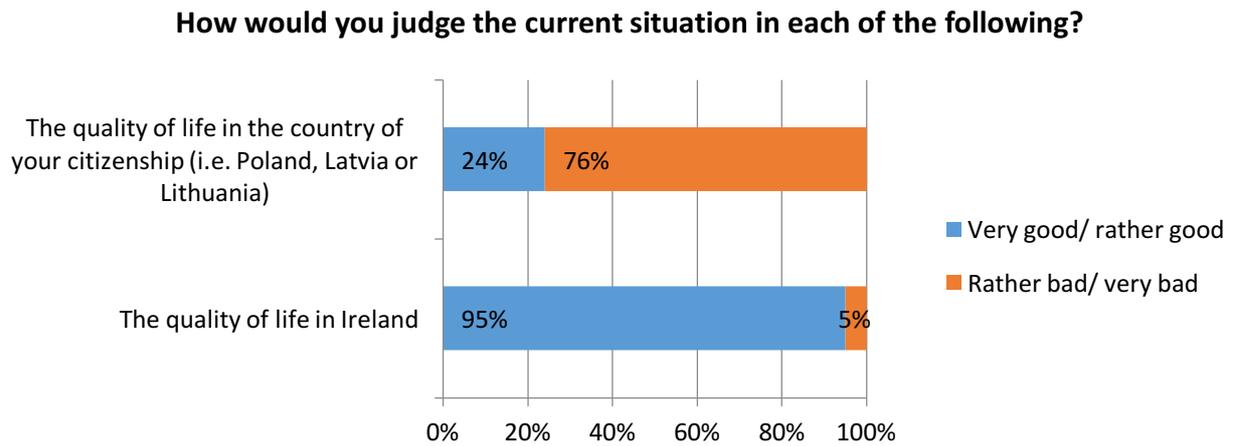


On average, 14% of the respondents stated that they plan to return to live in their country of origin in the next 5 years (about 45% indicated that they plan to stay in Ireland).

<sup>20</sup> [Migration Law Center](#).

Absolute majority of surveyed respondents (95%) evaluated the quality of life in Ireland as very good / rather good. In comparison, only 24% stated that the quality of life is very good / rather good in the country of their citizenship (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Evaluation of quality of life in Ireland and in countries of their citizenship among the migrant communities. N=567 (Missing=37).**



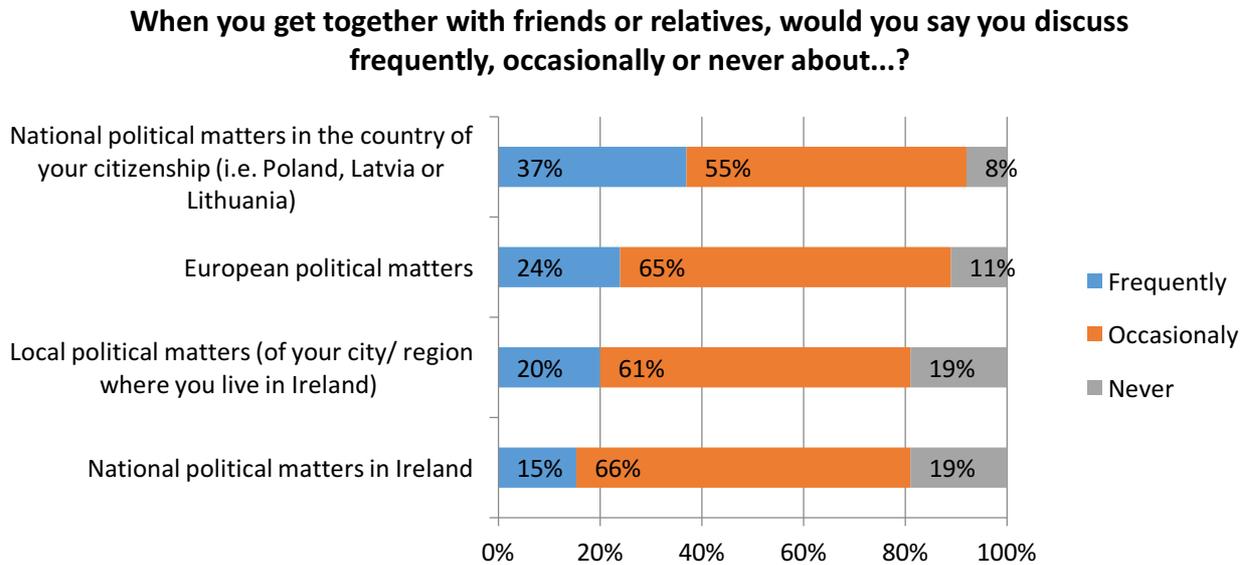
### *Political Engagement*

In the survey the respondents were asked how often they discuss political issues with their friends or relatives. The survey showed that Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens in Ireland most often discuss national political matters in the country of their citizenship (37% discuss such matters frequently) and European political matters (24% discuss frequently). Political discussions regarding issues in Ireland more often relate to local political matters of the city/ region where migrants live (20% discuss these issues frequently), national level political matters are discussed less often (15% discuss frequently) (see Figure 4).

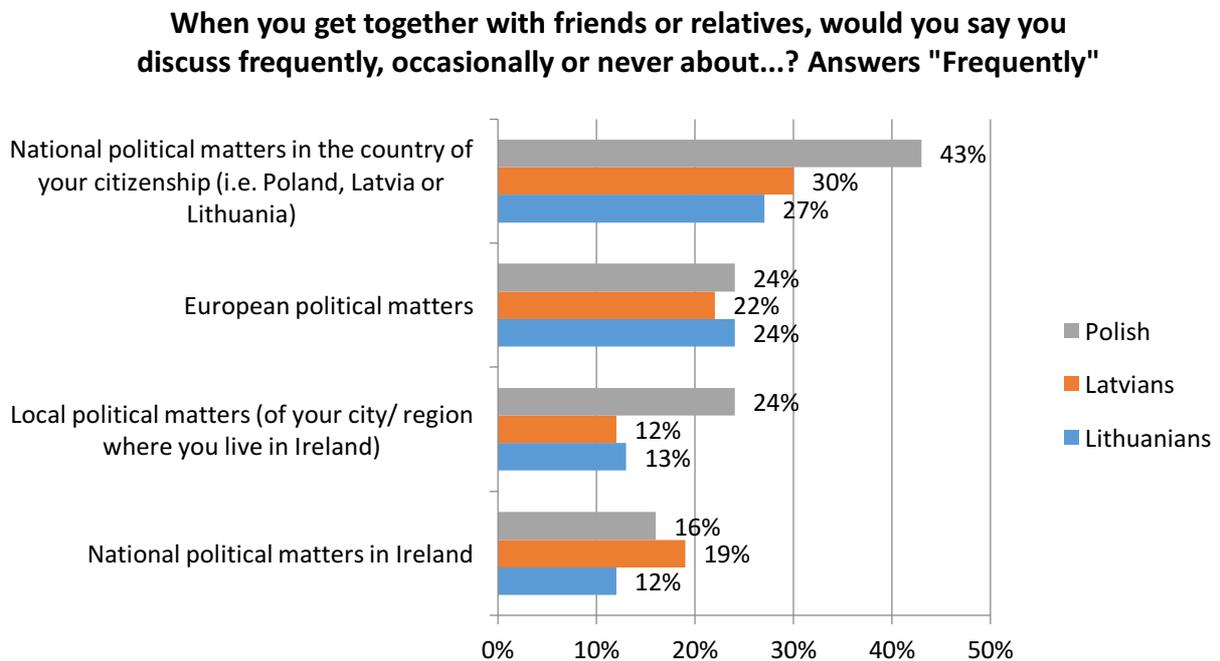
There are some differences of interest in political matters among different migrant communities. Polish citizens in Ireland discuss Irish local political matters more often than Latvian and Lithuanian citizens (24% Polish citizens discuss such matters frequently, compared to only 12–13% of Lithuanians and Latvians). There are no significant differences among the surveyed migrant communities when discussing national political matters in Ireland (see Figure 5).

About one fifth of all respondents (19%) indicated that they never discuss national or local political matters in Ireland (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Discussion of political matters among the migrant communities. N=569 (Missing=35).**

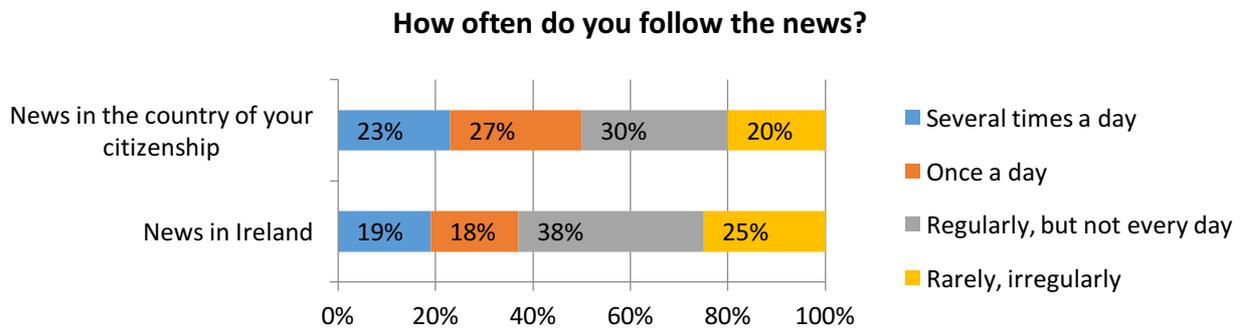


**Figure 5. Discussion of political matters among the migrant communities by citizenship. N=569 (Missing=35).**



The tendency that migrant communities are somewhat more interested in political matters in the countries of their citizenship than in Ireland is also confirmed by the data on interest in the news. Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens follow the news in their home countries more regularly than in Ireland (50% follow the news in the country of their citizenship at least once a day, 37% do so in Ireland) (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Interest in the news in the country of their citizenship and in Ireland among the migrant communities. N=470 (Missing=134).**



In the Lithuanian focus group participants noted that their overall lack of interest in politics was due to the “lack of strong identification with either location”. According to one of the participants, they are “still seen as guests in Ireland and already as traitors at home”.

A similar feeling of being stuck between two communities was mentioned in the Polish focus group. Poles who “hope to return to Poland one day” do not feel the need to be engaged with Irish political life.

### *Trust in Institutions*

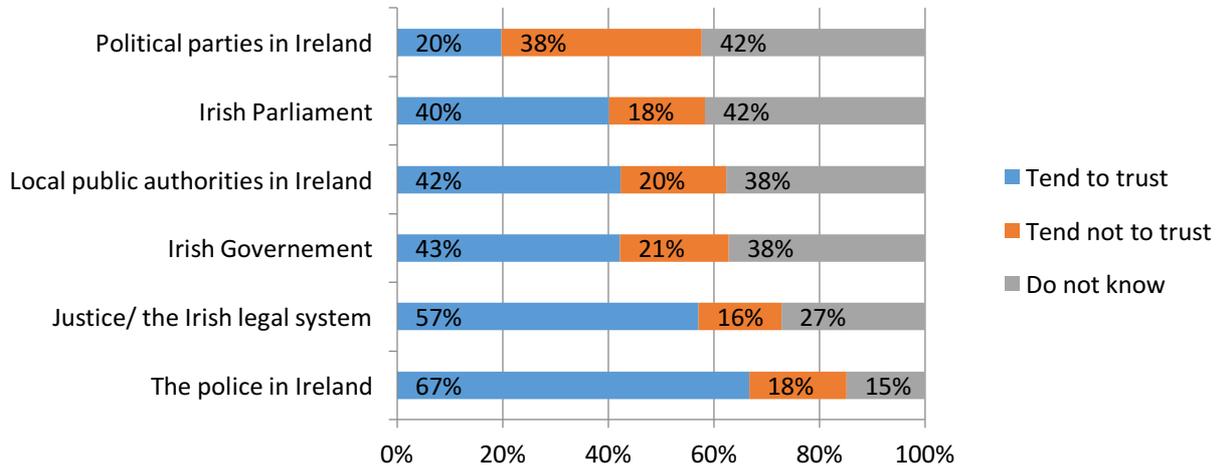
Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrant communities tend to trust Irish institutions at a much higher level than the institutions in their home countries. Among the most trusted institutions in Ireland is Irish police (67% tend to trust it) and Irish legal system / justice (57% tend to trust). These institutions are also among the most trusted in the home countries, yet at a much lower level – only 28% of respondents tend to trust the police in their home countries, 16% - the legal system / justice (see Figures 7 and 8).

The least trusted institutions are political parties – both in Ireland and in home countries. Yet, it is important to note that a high proportion of respondents indicated that they did not know whether they trusted political parties in Ireland (42%), whereas 38% stated they tend not to trust Irish political parties. Evaluating trust in political parties in the countries of their citizenship, respondents were less ambivalent – 87% stated that they tend not to trust political parties, whereas only 9% did not know how to answer this question.

Among the representative political institutions, parliaments are the least trusted both in Ireland and in home countries of surveyed migrant communities (although the differences from other political institutions – the Government and local public authorities – are not very significant). Again, it is important to note, that a large proportion of respondents indicated that they did not know whether they trusted these institutions in Ireland or not (38–42% were undecided), whereas evaluation of political institution in home countries was less ambivalent (see Figures 7 and 8).

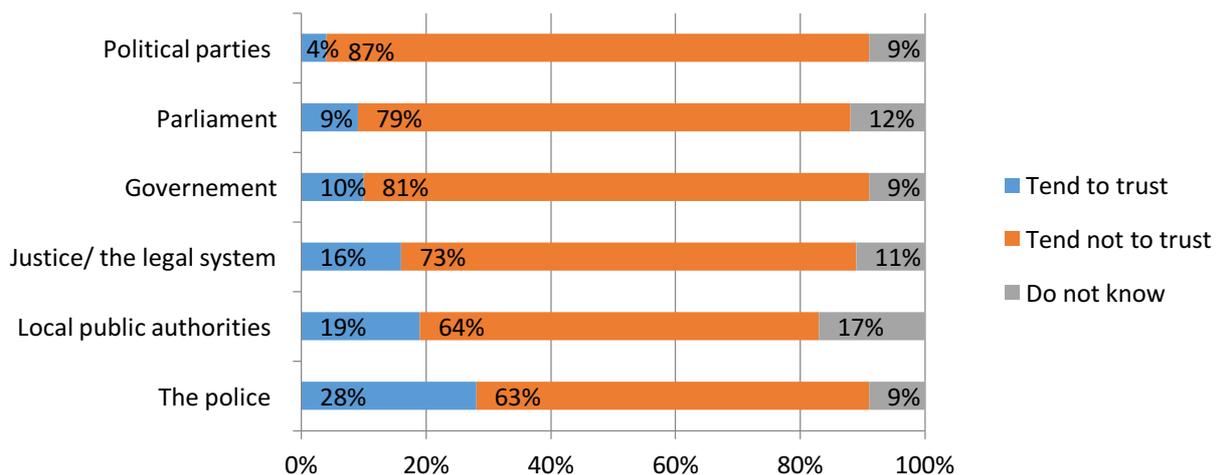
**Figure 7. Trust in Irish institutions among migrant communities. N=525 (missing=79)**

**How much trust do you have in certain institutions in Ireland? For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.**



**Figure 8. Trust in institutions of home countries among migrant communities. N=532 (missing=72)**

**How much trust you have in certain institutions in the country of your citizenship (Poland, Latvia or Lithuania)? For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.**

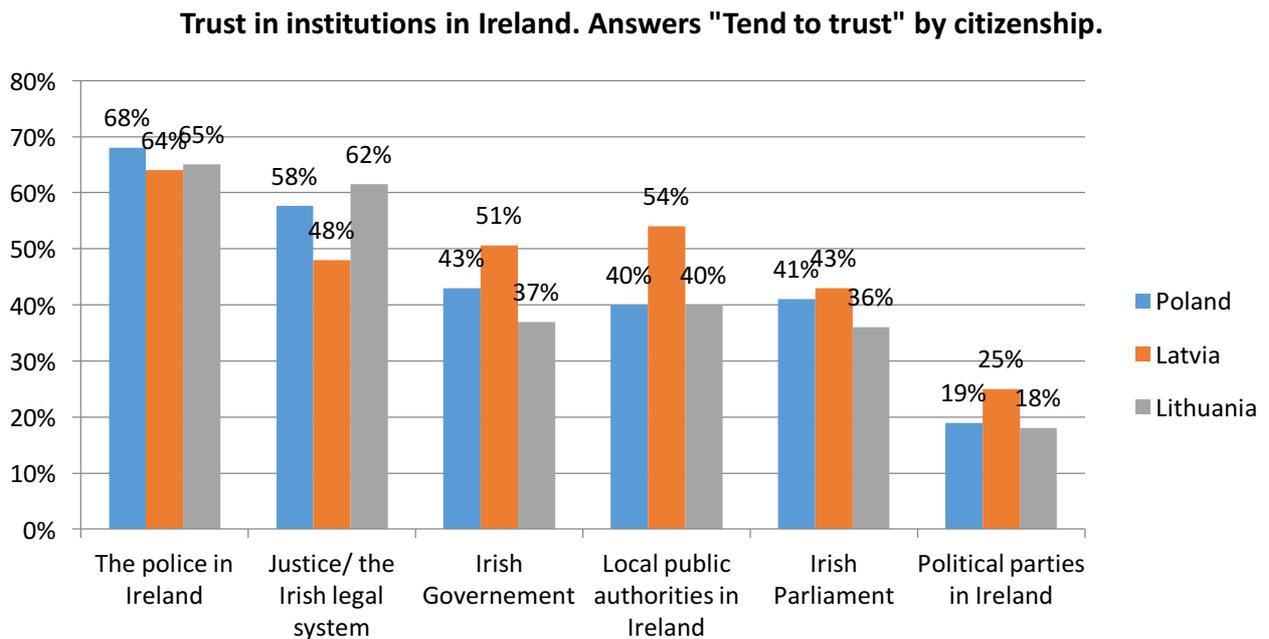


There are some differences among migrant communities in answering the question about the trust in institutions in Ireland (see Figure 9). Latvian migrants tend to trust political institutions in Ireland at somewhat higher level than Polish and Lithuanians. Yet, it must be taken into account that the

sample of Latvian citizens consisted mainly of local diaspora activists who might be more active on political level – this might have influenced the survey results.

Indicative of low trust in the Lithuanian political system are comments from participants in the Lithuanian focus group, as for many of them political participation itself is seen to carry a “negative connotation”. Politics is seen to be “a dirty business over there” (direct quote of participant, *ibid*).

**Figure 9. Trust in Irish institutions among migrant communities by citizenship. N=525 (missing=79)**

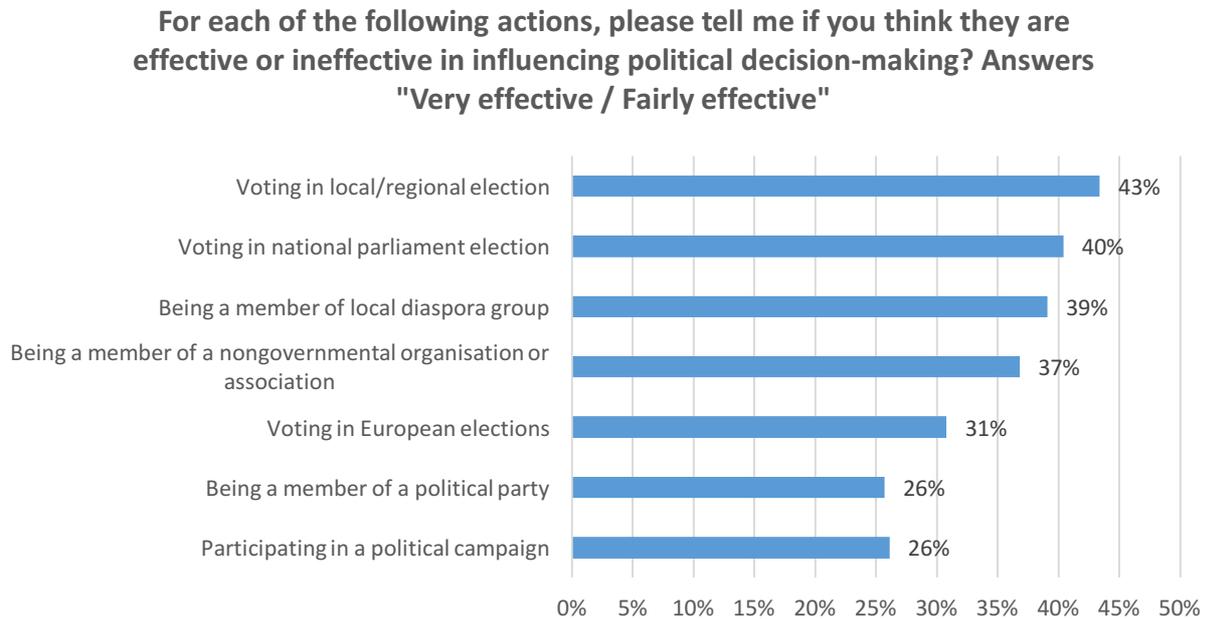


*Effectiveness of political engagement*

The survey respondents evaluated the effectiveness of participation in elections (voting) relatively favourably, namely, 40–43% stated that voting in local, regional or nation elections is very effective/ fairly effective in influencing political decision-making. Participation in local diaspora group or non-governmental organisation was also seen as an effective way to influence political decisions – 37–39% of the respondents evaluated these activities as very effective/ fairly effective (see Figure 10).

It is important to note that a significant group of respondents did not have a strong opinion about effectiveness of different political activities, especially when evaluating membership in political party and participation in political campaign – more than half of the respondents (53–54%) did not provide an answer to these questions.

**Figure 10. Evaluation of effectiveness of political activities among migrant communities.**



There were some differences in evaluating effectiveness of political activities among migrant groups – the most significant one (12 percentile points) is between Polish and Latvian/ Lithuanian communities on the effectiveness of voting in European election. Only 26% of Polish respondents indicated it as very effective/ fairly effective, when 38% Lithuanians and Latvians thought so. Also, slightly more Lithuanians (43%) evaluated voting in national election as very effective/ fairly effective way to influence political decision-making compared to Polish and Latvians (36%).

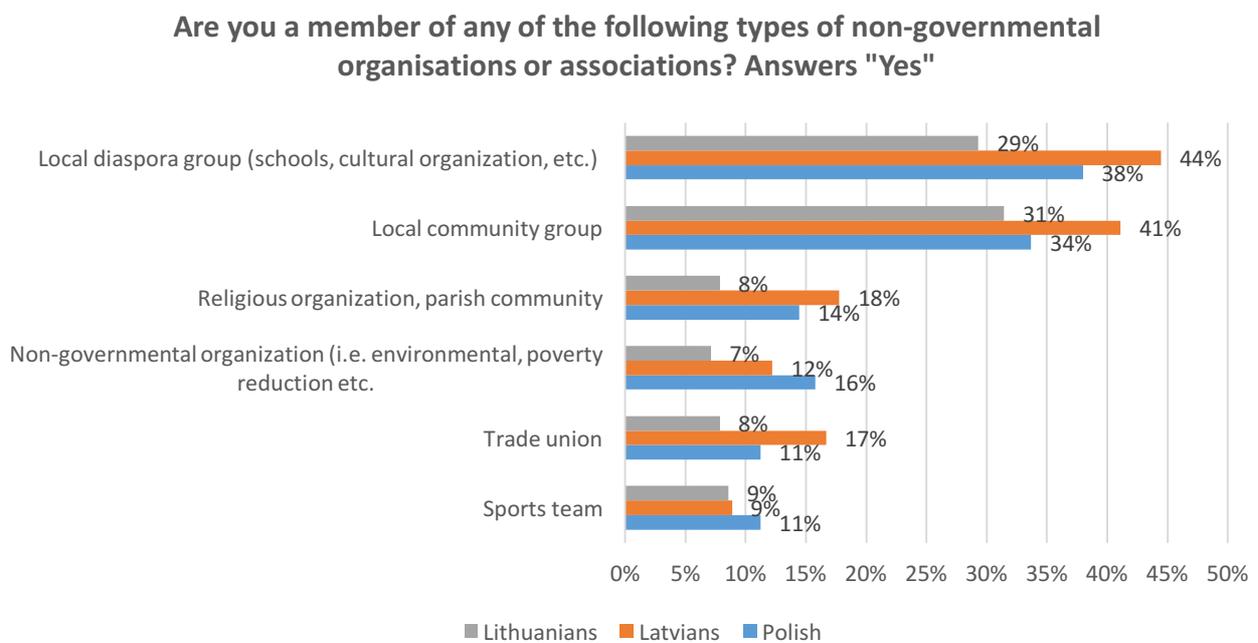
Other differences were marginal (less that 5 per cent difference).

*Political Participation and Civic Engagement*

Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrants in Ireland are most active on local level – especially in local diaspora group organisations and local community groups (about one third of all respondents said they were members of these organisations). Participation levels in religious, non-governmental organisations and trade unions is much lower (about 10%) (see Figure 11).

There are some differences in participation patterns among different migrant groups – Latvian citizens are most active in many different types of non-governmental organisations (but this might have been influenced by the sample characteristics – the sample of Latvian citizens in Ireland consisted mainly of local diaspora activists). The least active are Lithuanian citizens in Ireland – their participation levels in different types of non-governmental organisations are rather low.

**Figure 11. Membership in non-governmental organisations or associations in Ireland among the migrant communities. N=504(Missing=100).**



The survey results show that the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrants participate in non-governmental organisations in Ireland more actively than in their home countries. For example, about one tenth (11%) of all respondents indicated that they were members of trade unions in Ireland, whereas only an average of 2% did so in the countries of their citizenship. For Latvia and Lithuania, this may be also explained by the relatively low popularity (and influence) of trade unions in the Baltic States.

The three most popular civic activities of Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrants in Ireland were participation in charity events/ actions (56%), signing a petition (47%) and expressing one’s views on public issues on the Internet or in social media (44%) (see Figure 12).

The participation in civic activities differed significantly among surveyed migrant communities. Lithuanian citizens were least active in majority of analysed civic activities, while Polish and Latvian participation in different activities was fairly higher, especially in expressing one's opinion in social media and expressing one's views to elected representatives on local and national levels (see Figure 12).

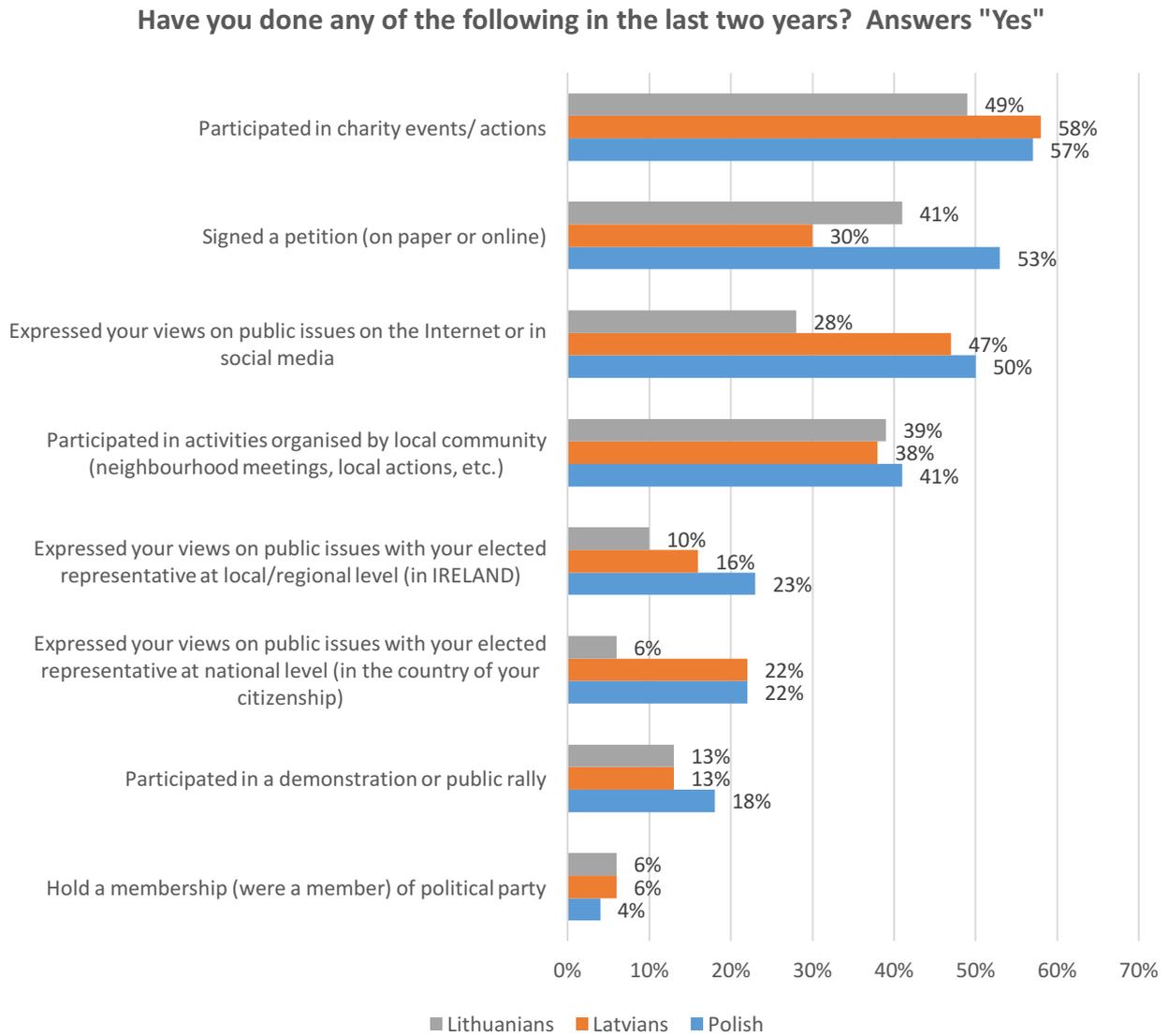
Polish focus group participants associated participation with local activism, and some also expressed views that in this sense civic engagement should be considered as more important (as the local community affects one's daily life more directly). The participants associated political participation with activities more related to elections – “active participation in the elections, casting a vote and contacts with the politicians”. In comparison to Poland, they consider Irish politicians to be more accessible, which makes participation in Ireland easier. In both focus group discussions Poles exhibited a cautious attitude to any kind of political participation.

Also Lithuanian focus group participants regarded wider civic engagement as more important than conventional political participation, however, due to somewhat different reasons. They associated civic engagement with patriotism understood as the promotion and celebration of one's national culture and upbringing, as well as the representation of the group's national interests. Political participation was linked to involvement with party politics and elections, which triggered negative associations for many. Combining these two views together Lithuanians regarded civic engagement as more important due to its connection to their identity and their desire “to remain a true Lithuanian, no matter where you are” (direct quote of participant). Most participants saw themselves as active members of the Lithuanian community, but they stressed the “apolitical nature of their activities” . While participants were sceptical about the concept of a singular Lithuanian community they mentioned a new initiative that aims to connect the many local groups under one umbrella organization. Among the aims of the organisation participants mentioned the advocacy of Lithuanian interests in Ireland and the facilitation of civic involvement of Lithuanians in their local communities.

Participants in the Latvian focus group consisted of long-term residents who were all active in their communities and displayed a good level of knowledge about civic and political engagement .

Among EU-13 citizens, attitude towards participation was divided. All participants agreed that at least in some form civic participation is expected of all members of society. According to one participant, civic participation means “more than just simply learning the language of the country you are in, it takes time to adapt to a new culture, learn about your own community”. At the same time, some felt that calls to participate politically can feel “forced” and result in people feeling annoyed. In comparison to Latvian focus group participants, discussants from EU-13 countries were less engaged in community participation. While four out of five were involved with some environmental or sports groups or volunteered to teach English as a second language, none of them were involved in societies or associations dedicated for bringing together nationals from their home country. There were a few respondents who recognised that other communities are more active and organized, like the Polish community.

**Figure 12. Political and civic activity in Ireland among the migrant communities. N=503 (Missing=101).**



## Electoral participation

The survey results show that only one third of Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrants in Ireland registered and voted in the last local election in 2014.

Disaggregated data by citizenship shows that Polish migrants were the most active in the Irish local elections among the surveyed migrant groups– 39% indicated that they registered and 34% voted in the elections. Latvian participation was similar to the Polish (31% registered, 29% voted), while Lithuanians were the least active – only 17% of them registered and voted in the elections.

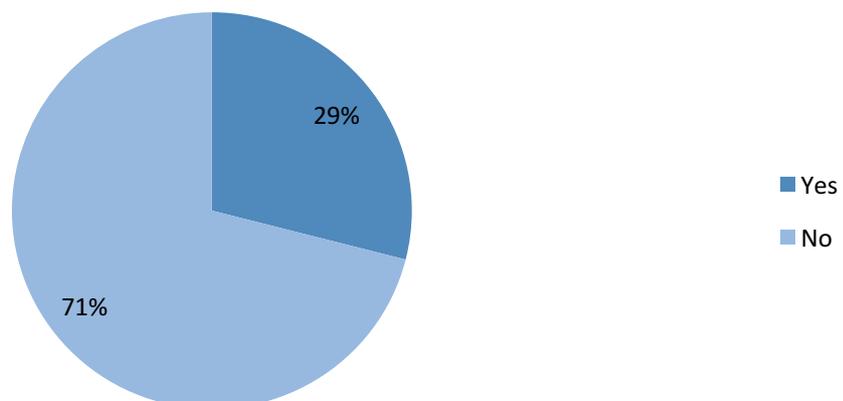
**Figure 13. Electoral participation in local election in Ireland in 2014 – registration. N=503 (missing=101).**

**The last local election took place in Ireland in 2014. Did you register for this election?**

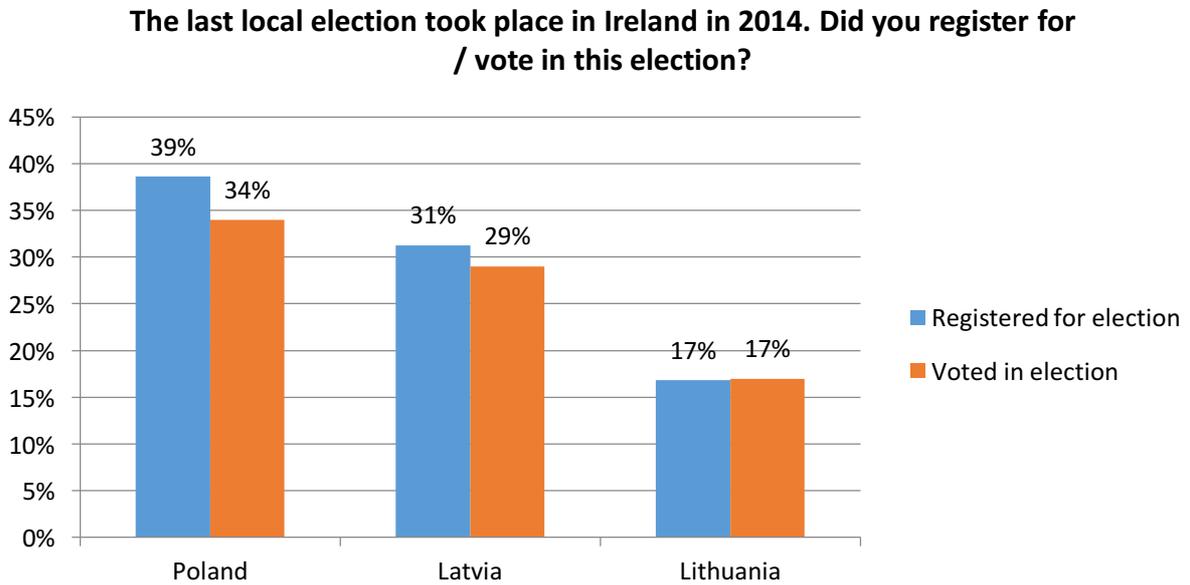


**Figure 14. Electoral participation in local election in Ireland in 2014 – voting. N=503 (missing=101).**

**And did you vote in this election?**



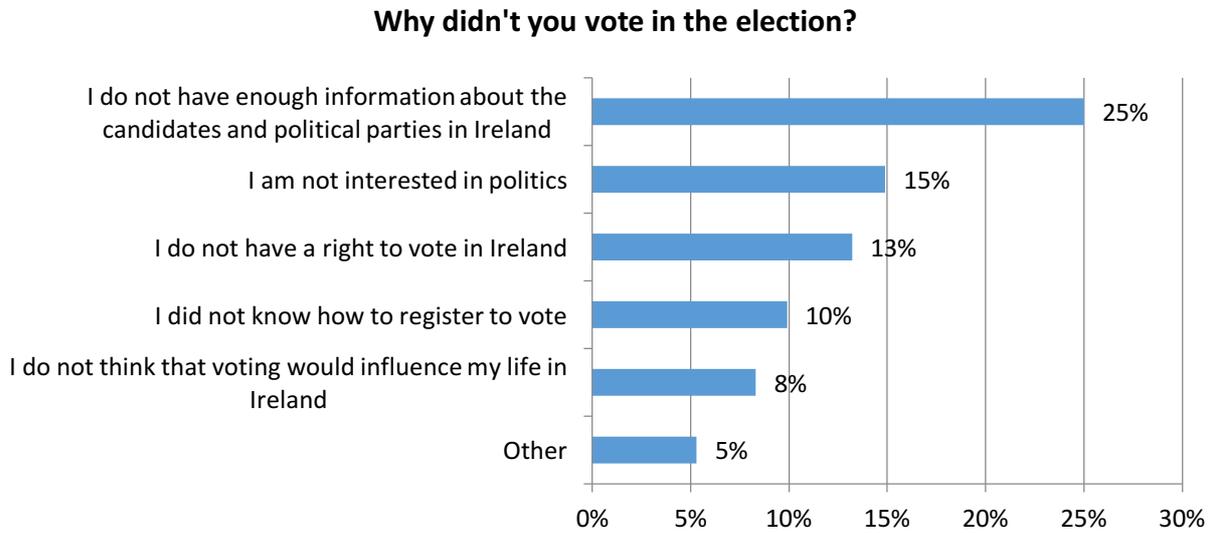
**Figure 15. Electoral participation in local election in Ireland in 2014 – registration and voting by citizenship. N=503 (missing=101).**



The respondents were asked to provide up to 2 reasons why they did not vote in the local Irish election in 2014. The most common reason, indicated by one fourth of the respondents (25%), was lack of information about the candidates and political parties in Ireland. The following most prevalent responses were “I am not interested in politics” (15%) and “I do not have a right to vote in Ireland” (13%). One tenth of the respondents indicated that they did not know how to register to vote in Ireland.

Most of the respondents chose one response for the reason why they did not vote in the election (the most common replies “I do not have enough information about the candidates and political parties in Ireland”, “I am not interested in politics” and “I do not have a right to vote in Ireland”). Among those respondents who indicated two reasons for not voting in the election, the most common replies were: “I do not have enough information about the candidates and political parties in Ireland and I am not interested in politics”, “I do not have enough information about the candidates and I do not have a right to vote in Ireland”, “I do not have enough information about the candidates and I do not think that voting would influence my life in Ireland”.

**Figure 16. Reasons for not voting in local election in Ireland in 2014. N=357 (missing=247).**

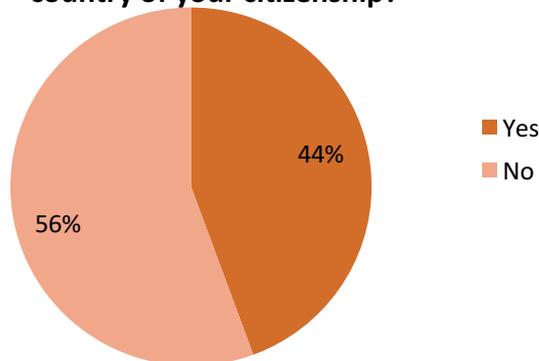


The respondents were invited to provide other reasons why they did not vote in the local elections – about 9% chose to do so in the survey. Most common reasons for not voting included “Lack of time”, “Did not register on time” and “I was not in Ireland at that time/ was not able to participate in the election”.

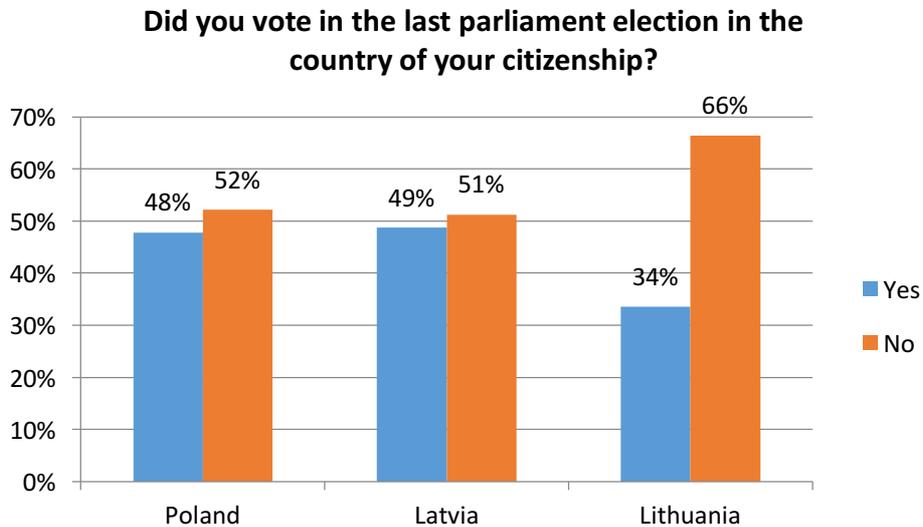
Survey results show that Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens were more active in national parliamentary election in their home countries – 44% indicated that they voted in the most recent national election. The most active – as in local Irish election – were Polish and Latvian residents (48–49% voted), least active were Lithuanian citizens (34% indicated that they voted).

**Figure 17. Electoral participation in national parliamentary election in home countries – voting. N=504 (no reply=100).**

**Did you vote in the last parliament election in the country of your citizenship?**



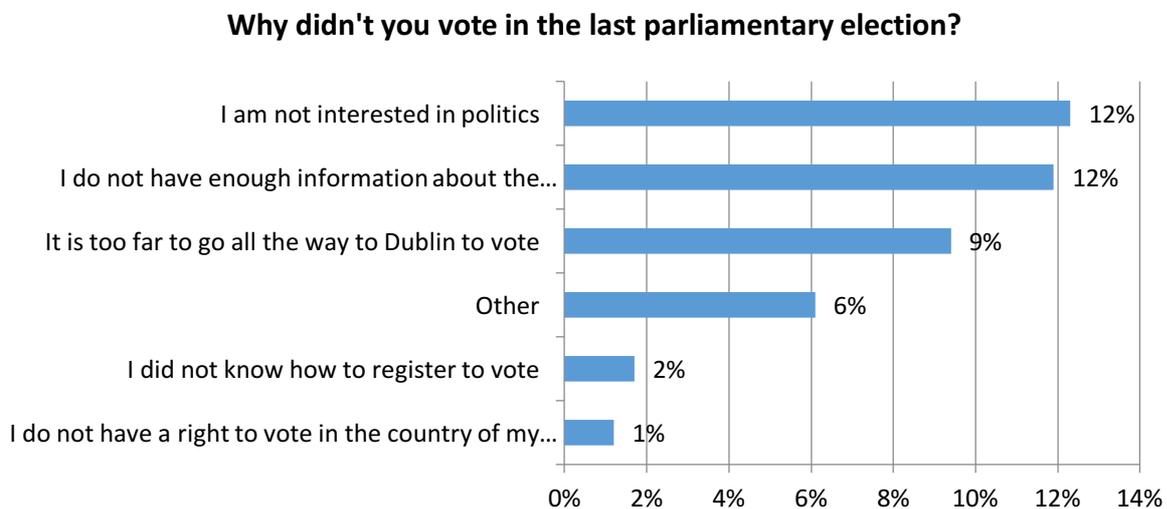
**Figure 18. Electoral participation in parliamentary elections – voting by citizenship. N=504 (no reply=100).**



The most common reasons for not voting in the parliamentary election in home countries were similar to the reason provided for not voting in local Irish elections – lack of interest in politics and lack of information about candidates and political parties (see Figure 19). Slightly less than one tenth of the respondents stated the reason why they did not vote was that it was too far to go all the way to Dublin to vote.

Among the respondents who indicated other reasons for not voting in the last parliamentary election, most common replies were related to disappointment with politics in their home countries: “It is not worth it”, “There are no good candidates/ political parties”, “There are only clowns”, “There are no politicians who sincerely care about the state” etc.

**Figure 19. Reasons for not voting in the last parliamentary election in home countries. N=280\* (those who did not vote in last parliamentary elections and answered the question)**



Among Polish focus group participants, almost all had voted in the last Irish local elections and expressed a wish to vote also in the Irish general elections. Respondents mentioned the difficult and costly process of gaining Irish citizenship as one of the reasons keeping them from full participation. Opinions were divided on whether Polish and Irish elections should be seen as equally important or Irish elections should take priority while residing in Ireland. Participants mentioned one period when Irish politicians had started to express interest in the Polish community after observing how many had turned out to vote for Polish elections, however this interest has waned since Poles do not have the same level of interest in Irish local elections.

When discussing the reasons for the low participation of the Poles in Irish elections, participants stressed that low engagement from Irish politicians and the low interest of Polish people in politics complemented one another. Other reasons that were mentioned included lack of time (given the high work load that Polish immigrants put on themselves), absence of Polish or other migrant leaders that would be active in Irish politics, failed integration, as well as the small number of Poles who register to vote in the first place. One participant described how the general absence of migrant issues on the political agenda was also a part of the problem:

“How many Irish politicians address or even mention immigrants’ issues? There are no immigrants present at election meetings or events (...) There is no lobby or a strong group that would be able to advocate for the issues of migrant communities” (direct quote of participant).

At the same time, participants mentioned examples of voter mobilization campaigns aimed at immigrants (Dublin City Council used multilingual posters in 2009 and 2014, two main parties hired Polish citizens to conduct community outreach).

In addition, participants in Cork added that the low interest in Irish politics is further fuelled by a “distrust towards participation” and a self-seeking attitude (“what is in there for me?”) They also added that the registration process is difficult and therefore discouraging, in addition some people are also wary of personal data protection issues in the registration process.

Participants agreed that the way forward was to be more active in lobbying their interests directly with Irish politicians.

Among Latvian focus group participants voting in local Irish elections had been only occasional. Those who had been in Ireland for more than eight years, expressed a greater willingness to participate politically. Several discussants viewed voting in Ireland as a two-way relationship between them and their new home – they have the right to work and reside in Ireland and therefore they should also fulfil their duty and vote.

For Latvian participants, general elections in Latvia are still more important because of their perceived link to national identity. At the same time, they acknowledged that as they are residents in Ireland, Irish elections are of significance as well.

When asked to explain why participation in local elections is low among Latvians, the difficult registration process was mentioned as one of the main reasons. In addition, advanced political concepts used to describe the electoral system in Ireland present difficulties for Latvians whose English skills are not so advanced. One participant noted that: “Some people are rather confused and I keep getting questions from my friends and acquaintances about the type of election they can participate in”.

While respondents mentioned some initiatives that aimed to involve EU citizens in local elections (leaflets, TV advertisements, door-to-door canvassing), they still raised concerns about the insufficient information available to EU citizens in regard to their rights and opportunities to get involved. In a similar vein to Polish respondents, Latvian focus group participants also mentioned a sense of feeling “invisible” and also not welcomed by Irish local authorities.

Lithuanian focus group results were similar to the Polish discussions in the sense that an overall lack of interest in politics was mentioned as the main reason why Lithuanians do not vote in Ireland. Lithuanian participants similarly to Latvians mentioned the lack of information in their language and the lack of clarity regarding registration and voting procedures as another significant reason for not voting. As further reasons, participants mentioned the view that their vote does not carry any power and that they were not familiar with Irish politics.

In the words of one participant: “We’re a minority here, we don’t have a strong unified voice”. Thus, Lithuanians do not see their votes as being influential. Just as in the Polish and Latvian focus groups, participants mentioned that local authorities “did not take [migrants] seriously”, which again feeds into the negative feedback loop between low interest in politics, a low belief in the efficacy of their votes and a corresponding lack of interest from Irish politicians.

Participants agreed that their own communities should play a more active role in engaging less active Lithuanians so that their community would become more visible. Just as with Latvian participants, also Lithuanians highlighted the need for accurate information on voting.

For EU-13 focus group participants, participating in their home country’s national elections was seen as being more important. Participants stated that they had no interest in Irish politics, did not see how their vote would make a difference or expressed an interest in perhaps participating in the next elections after having observed the previous election. Some participants expressed the view that given how small their national community is Ireland, their political participation and their vote would not really matter.

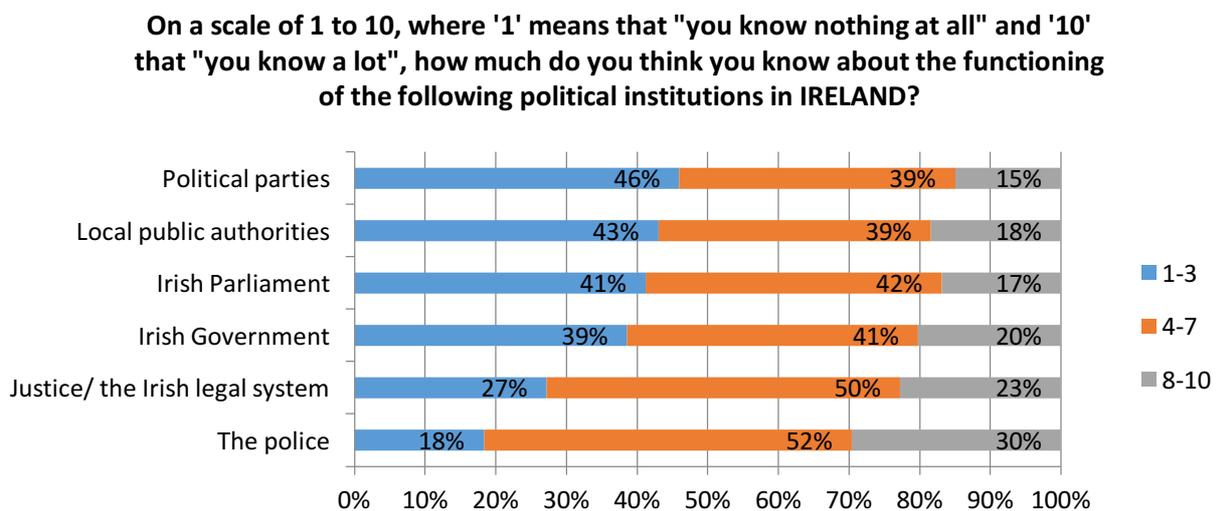
Similar to previous focus group participants, also EU-13 citizens expressed the need for better information regarding voting procedures for EU citizens in Ireland.

## Knowledge of political institutions in Ireland

The survey results show that Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian migrants in Ireland have rather little knowledge about the functioning of representative political institutions in Ireland, especially about political parties, local public authorities, Irish Parliament and Government. Almost half of all respondents (46%) stated that they have no or very little knowledge about political parties in Ireland, 43% - about local public authorities, 41% - about Irish Parliament and 39% about Irish Government (see Figure 20).

The knowledge about the Irish legal system and the police is higher – only 18–27% of all respondents indicated that they do not know anything at all or have very little knowledge about these institutions.

**Figure 20. Knowledge about the functioning of political institutions in Ireland. N=430 (missing=174).**

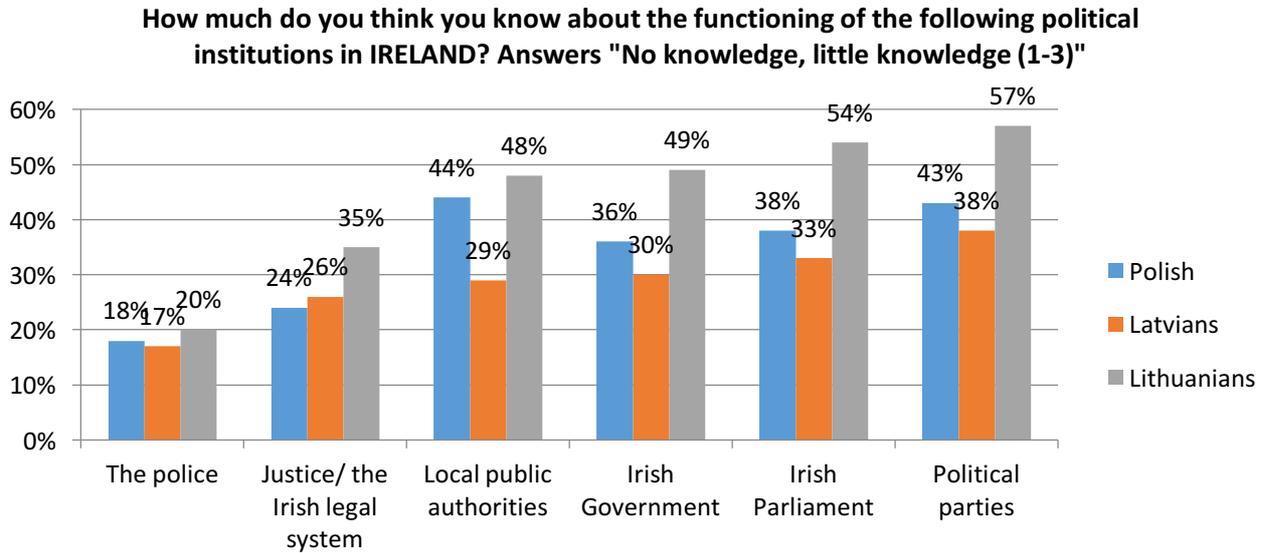


There are some significant differences among migrant communities regarding the knowledge of functioning of political institutions in Ireland. Lithuanian citizens in Ireland indicated that they have an overall lower knowledge about the majority of political institutions in Ireland – 57% stated that they have no or little knowledge about political parties in Ireland (Polish – 43%, Latvian – 38%), 54% knew very little about Irish Parliament (Polish – 38%, Latvian – 33%), 49% – about Irish Government (Polish – 36%, Latvian – 30%) (see Figure 21).

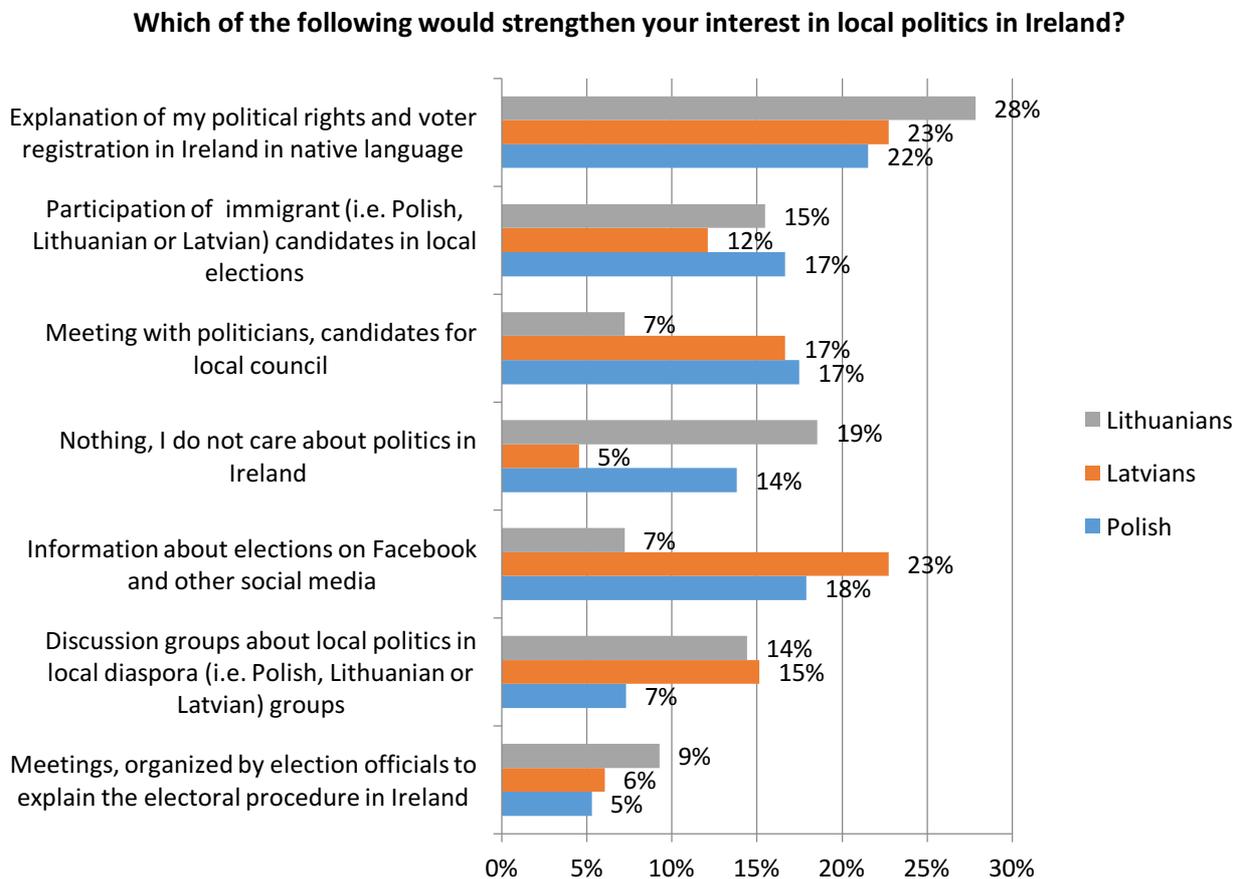
The respondents were asked what measures would be most efficient in improving their interest in local politics in Ireland. Although about one tenth of all surveyed migrants (9%, in Lithuanian group – 19%) stated that no measures should be implemented because they have no interest in politics, the majority of respondents indicated some measures that would be helpful. The most popular measure among surveyed migrant communities would be explanation of one's political rights and voter registration in the native language (23% chose this option), participation of

immigrant candidates in local elections (16%) and information about elections on Facebook and other social media (16%).

**Figure 21. Knowledge about the functioning of political institutions in Ireland by citizenship. N=430 (missing=174).**



**Figure 22. Improving interest in local politics in Ireland by citizenship. N=409 (missing=195).**



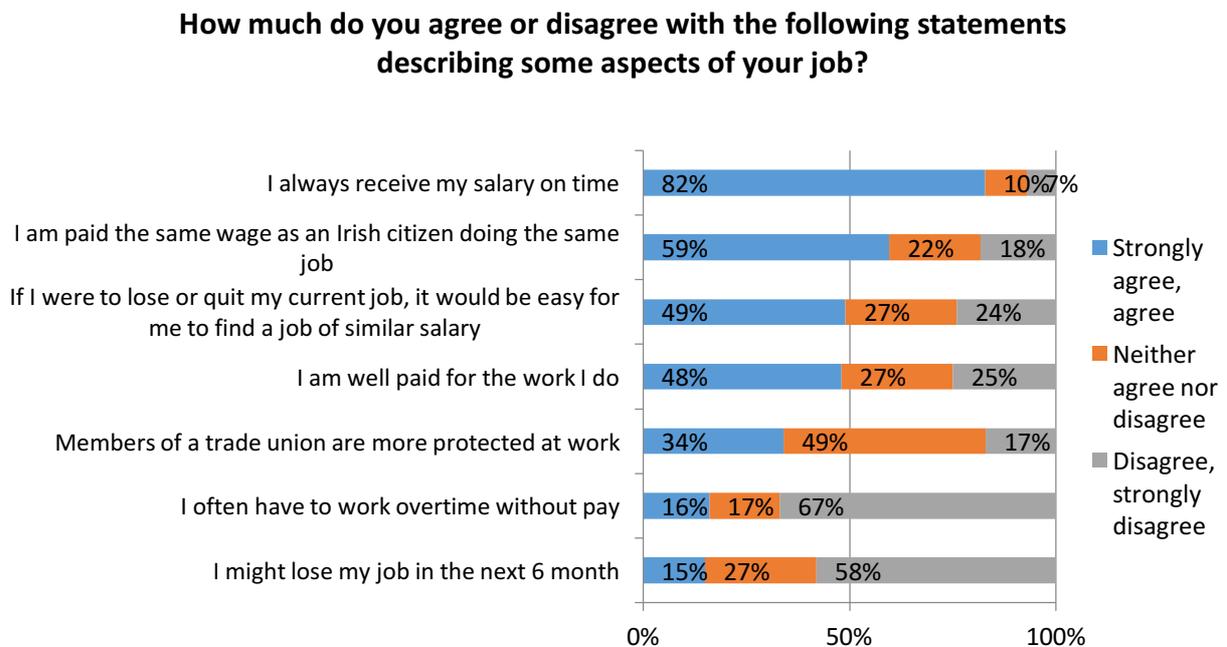
There are some significant differences among migrant communities regarding interest in local politics – more Latvian and Polish citizens indicated that they would be interested to meet with politicians, candidates for local council (17%) than Lithuanians (7%). Lithuanians would also be less interested in following information about elections on Facebook and other social media (7%, while 18% of Poles and 23% of Latvians would be interested in information on social media) (see Figure 22).

The respondents were also asked to indicate their second choice of measures for improvement of interest in local politics. The most popular measure was again explanation of one’s political rights and voter registration in native language (13%), followed closely by participation of immigrant candidates in local elections (10%) and meeting with politicians, candidates for local council (9%).

*Labour market confidence and lack of faith in unions*

One of the key characteristics of the surveyed immigrant communities in Ireland is their overall sense of being treated fairly in the labour market and relative lack of job-related insecurity. The majority seem to be confident of being paid the same as Irish citizens doing similar jobs, and only 15% believe they might lose their jobs in the next 6 months.

**Figure 23. Labour market vulnerability of Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian citizens in Ireland. N=461 (Missing=243)**



At the same time, the majority do not see a direct connection between union membership and being protected at work – this despite the fact that more Poles, Latvians and Lithuanians in the survey sample are union members in Ireland than in their home countries (11% on average in

Ireland, versus 2% average in countries of their citizenship). Activism, at least at union membership level, is not seen as directly beneficial to one's economic security. This may be linked to low prominence of unions as social partners in Latvia or Lithuania, although Poland has a much stronger history of civic and political engagement of trade unions.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish citizens in Ireland have relatively sceptical views regarding the effectiveness of political participation. No form of participation elicits confidence in its effectiveness among 50 or more percent of the respondents. Having said that, it is still true that local elections are seen as the most effective way to influence politics, if at all – 43% of the people who participated in the survey believe in the effectiveness of voting in local elections.

On the other hand, the interest of mobile EU citizens in local politics in Ireland is relatively low. Only 24% of Poles (and a much smaller percentage of Latvians and Lithuanians) have stated that they discuss local political matters in Ireland frequently. Interest in politics 'back at home' is higher, especially among Poles. Among Latvians and Lithuanians specifically, talking about European political matters is more common than talking about the politics of the cities or regions where they live in Ireland. (Incidentally, Latvians and Lithuanians also have a greater trust in the effectiveness of European Parliament elections than Poles – 38% of Latvian and Lithuanian citizens versus 26% of Poles have assessed voting in EP elections as an effective way to have influence).

The actual participation of mobile citizens in local elections in Ireland is rather low. The overall share of Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian citizens who registered and voted in the last local elections in Ireland among respondents was roughly 30%. At the same time, there are significant differences between communities – thus, it appears that relatively more Poles and Latvians (34% and 29% respectively) and relatively fewer Lithuanians (17% ) voted in the last local elections in Ireland. The rest have given several reasons for not registering and not voting in local elections – not having enough information about the candidates and the parties being the most frequent (25%).

On the whole, Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens living in Ireland believe they have rather little knowledge about the functioning of representative political institutions in the country, especially about political parties, local public authorities, Irish Parliament and Government. About half of Lithuanians in particular indicated that they have an overall lower knowledge about key political institutions in Ireland (political parties, the Parliament, the Government). At the same time, self-assessed knowledge of the Irish police and justice/ legal system is higher, as is trust in these institutions – while 67% of respondents trust the Irish police, and 57% trust the justice system, only 40% trust the Irish Parliament and 42% trust local authorities. Significantly, the majority of respondents have an overall higher trust for institutions in Ireland than for the ones in their home country. Only 28% of respondents trust the police in their country of origin, only 16% trust the justice system and only 9% trust their national parliament.

Mobile citizens believe that in order to improve their interest in and knowledge about local politics in Ireland, some measures would be more effective than others. The most popular options include explanation of their political rights and the procedure of voter registration in their native language (23% chose this option), participation of immigrant candidates in local elections (16%) and information about elections on Facebook and other social media (16%).

It is also worth noting that Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens in Ireland possibly choose different forms of wider participation. While among the Latvian respondents membership in Latvian diaspora groups and local community groups is rather high (44%), Poles and especially Lithuanians choose these forms of participation relatively less frequently. At the same time, slightly more Poles report membership in non-ethnic NGOs in Ireland.

To conclude, Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian citizens residing in Ireland tend to have greater trust in Irish institutions, including police and the courts, than in the institutions in their countries of origins. They are overall sceptical about the effectiveness of political participation, but tend to believe that voting in local elections is more effective than other forms of participation. Nevertheless, less than one third of them votes in local elections in Ireland. They explain this lack of engagement by having little knowledge about politics in Ireland, and by a number of other reasons. At the same time, they believe that participation of their communities in Ireland can be improved.

Given these responses, the following recommendations for improving the level of participation among mobile citizens in Ireland can be made:

- The Irish political parties, the Government and local authorities should pay more attention to communicating with mobile EU citizens residing in Ireland about the importance and opportunities of political participation. Where possible, this communication should be accessible also in the languages of immigrant communities, such as e.g. the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian languages.
- Information about registration and voting in local elections in particular should be promoted more actively, encouraging immigrant communities to use the political rights they have in Ireland – not only to vote in local elections, but also to run for office.
- Local municipalities and political parties in Ireland should engage the leaders of immigrant communities and encourage them to introduce community members to election procedures and party programmes. This engagement could lead to more peer pressure within the community to participate in local elections.
- Proactive approaches – not only informing, but also engaging mobile citizens in initiatives designed to raise their political activity seems to be the way forward to ensuring that in next local elections in Ireland, more mobile EU citizens vote and more of them run for office.
- The choice of the right channels of communication with immigrant communities is significant – thus, among the Latvians in Ireland, diaspora groups seem to be the hub of local activity, but

this is not necessarily true of Lithuanians. Communication strategies taking note of these differences may be more effective than 'one size fits all' approaches.

- EU countries with diaspora policies should look not only at the participation of mobile citizens in national elections in the home country, but also at their use of civic, political and labour rights in the country of residence. For instance, Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian embassies in Ireland could collect data on political participation and civic engagement of their national communities in Ireland, and promote the use of research to monitor engagement.
- The European institutions can do more to monitor and encourage participation of mobile citizens. Surveys and detailed data collection on voting, on local community engagement of mobile citizens, their volunteering activities and involvement in migrant associations would enable creating political instruments to increase political participation at different levels and in various forms.

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