

# Common Ground

## Building a new relationship with the United Kingdom



Closing conference publication

Delivered by:



British  
Future...



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Project name: Common Ground – Building a new relationship with the United Kingdom – Contract n.: NDICI FPN FPI/2022/439-669  
Website and contacts: <https://www.ourcommonground.uk/>

Common Ground is a project co-funded by the European Union delivered in partnership by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, the3million and British Future, exploring the future UK-EU political relationship and supporting communities of EU citizens in the UK to thrive.

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Report completed in January 2025

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# Executive summary

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The **Common Ground closing conference**, held in November 2024, marked the culmination of a two-year initiative dedicated to fostering stronger EU-UK relations, empowering EU citizens and strengthening their networks in the UK. This report captures the key discussions, insights, and recommendations from the conference, offering a blueprint for future events, collaboration and progress.

Post-Brexit, EU citizens in the UK have faced significant challenges, including navigating complex immigration systems, reduced access to welfare, and systemic inequities. The conference brought together policymakers, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and grassroots leaders to reflect on these challenges, on the project activities to date, and to share best practice, and outline the priorities of grassroots EU communities in the context of the broader political climate of support for closer collaboration. An overview of the Common Ground project outputs and impact was presented, highlighting its role in promoting social contact, strengthening networks and empowering EU communities to advocate for policy change.

Discussions focused on the interplay between the current warmer tone of the narrative on the relationship between the UK and the EU and the priorities for EU diaspora in the UK emphasising opportunities for deeper collaboration while highlighting the areas of need.

Key priorities included:

- **Full implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement** to protect EU citizens' rights.
- **Expanding support networks for EU citizens**, especially those from marginalised groups.
- **Need for engagement between policy makers with civil society.**

EU citizens' priority advocacy and community organising interests were highlighted through breakout sessions. The themes of breakouts corresponded to the themes of the working groups formed as part of Common Ground project activities to further empower communities to actively engage for change. Breakout sessions enabled participants to discuss:

- **Digital immigration status & e-visas** – persistent challenges with digital-only status, including accessibility barriers and risks for digitally excluded individuals.



- **Barriers in access to services** – the impact of the “No Recourse to Public Funds” (NRPF) policy which is a condition attached to one’s immigration status preventing them from accessing public funds, which disproportionately affects vulnerable groups including pre-settled status holders .
- **Democratic and civic participation and representation** – divergences in voting rights across the UK & depending on the type of election and barriers to civic participation for migrant communities.
- **Electoral advocacy and representation** – calls for residence-based voting rights, civic education initiatives, support for migrant political leadership programmes, helping to increase representation in local and national politics.
- **Co-liberatory community engagement** – addressing inequalities and systemic racism through transformative approaches to advocacy with a focus on addressing power dynamics and fostering cross-community solidarity.
- **Eastern European communities** – highlighting the unique challenges faced by these communities and the emerging grassroots tailored collaborative projects.
- **The power of lived experience & storytelling** – the conference showcased the Stories of Hope photography exhibition, which highlighted the resilience and diversity of EU citizens in the UK and focused on personal migration experiences and racialised perspectives, exploring the intersection of race and migration in the EU citizen experience.

A dedicated session on sustainability explored strategies to maintain momentum and ensure long-term impact. Key proposals that emerged from this collective reflection include:

- **Strengthening networks and digital platforms:** enhancing collaboration through improved digital tools and cross-border networks to foster information sharing, best practices, and joint initiatives between UK and EU stakeholders.
- **Advancing policy and community support:** promoting policy frameworks that prioritise

community-led initiatives while encouraging greater cooperation between local authorities and civil society to address shared challenges and opportunities.

- **Expanding people to people contacts, engagement and funding, including:**
  - Developing **youth exchange programmes** to strengthen long-term UK-EU ties.
  - Increasing **access to EU funding** for grassroots organisations and community-led initiatives.
  - Expanding **support for migrant political engagement**, ensuring broader representation in decision-making processes.

The **Common Ground** closing conference highlighted the achievements and impact of project activities while looking forward to establishing need and strategies for future actions. To foster positive EU-UK relations it is crucial to keep addressing existing issues requiring continued attention. Discussions reinforced the importance of:

- Sustained advocacy efforts to address systemic challenges, including digital only status.
- Stronger networks and partnerships, ensuring ongoing collaboration between civil society organisations, policymakers, and affected communities.
- Cultural and civic engagement initiatives to promote inclusivity, empower underrepresented voices, and strengthen democratic participation.

As the UK and EU continue to redefine their relationship, the insights and recommendations from this conference offer a foundation for lasting change.

The next phase of this work will require commitment, innovation, and a continued collective effort to ensure that EU citizens in the UK are valued, supported, and included in the country they call home.



# Introduction: A new era in EU-UK relations

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The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2020 marked a transformative moment for millions of EU citizens living in the UK. It redefined their legal, social, and cultural realities, often in ways that disrupted established norms and structures. The Common Ground project, co-funded by the European Union and delivered in partnership by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, the3million, and British Future, was launched as a response to these challenges, focusing on creating solutions, advocating for rights, and building bridges between the EU and UK.

At its heart, Common Ground seeks to empower EU citizens by addressing systemic inequities, fostering inclusion, and ensuring

their contributions to UK society are recognized. This is achieved through research, community engagement, strategic communication and advocacy, and sustainability actions. With activities ranging from grassroots organising to international conferences, the project exemplifies the power of collaboration in addressing shared concerns.

This publication provides an overview of the project's journey, culminating in the final conference held in London in November 2024. By highlighting key discussions, outcomes, and recommendations, it sets the stage for continued collaboration and progress in EU-UK relations. ■



# Welcome address

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**BARBARA DE MICHELI, *Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini*, and OLA SOBIERAJ, *the3million***

The Common Ground initiative recognizes that strengthening networks and changing narratives around EU-UK relations require long-term commitment. The project has served as a bridge, connecting civil society organisations, grassroots leaders, and policymakers to address shared concerns and aspirations.

The project delivery was designed on four pillars: research, engagement, strategic communication and advocacy, and sustainability. Two of the project leads, Barbara De Micheli and Ola Sobieraj, representing FGB and the3million, warmly greeted the conference attendees and reflected on the project timeline, activities and outputs. The welcoming remarks reminded participants that British Future carried out research on the attitudes of the British public towards cooperation with the EU and shared values, and compiled the 'Beyond Brexit' Report and Policy Paper as a result. The research, along with mapping Civil Society Organisations and extensive stakeholders' engagement, led to developing a program of six outreach events in London, Birmingham and Manchester and ten UK-wide working group sessions organised virtually that focused on shared pragmatic interests or 'shared values in action' as identified by the research, priority concerns and policy proposals. A dedicated [ourcommonground.uk](https://ourcommonground.uk) website and communication strategy were developed for sharing information and good practice, as well as two online campaigns, two art competitions, two international conferences in London and a networking event in Brussels. A number of knowledge-based outputs have been produced during the project's lifespan: Campaigning and Advocacy Toolkit, EU Citizens' Stories, alongside additional campaign briefs and toolkits, conference publications and the

upcoming CSO advocacy report. So far, over 500 people signed up to the website, 130 civil society organisations have engaged with the Common Ground Project in various ways, around 350 people attended our events, close to 50 volunteer days were contributed and the project social media reach exceeded 700,000 hits.



Barbara De Micheli, *Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini*

Connections and partnerships strengthened and established throughout the project highlighted that it coincides with the current warmer public narrative of a renewed relationship between the EU and UK, which gave hope that this work was impactful and the support and resourcing for it would continue. These efforts emphasise the project's focus on celebrating diversity of experience, fostering inclusion and amplifying marginalised voices to ensure that all EU citizens in the UK feel valued in the country they call home.

The appetite for closer collaboration is evident. ■

# The mission of Common Ground

- **Empower communities:** Equip EU citizens with the tools, knowledge, and networks to navigate the challenges of Brexit.
- **Steward equity:** Challenge systemic discrimination and advocate for equitable policies.
- **Celebrate European heritage:** Highlight the diversity as the cultural, social, and economic contributions of EU citizens to the UK.
- **Strengthen networks:** identify and connect pockets of good practice and facilitate networking.

This mission was underpinned by a commitment to long-term collaboration, recognizing that the process of building relationships and changing narratives requires sustained effort and continuous resourcing.



Andreea Dumitrache, the3million



Ola Sobieraj, the3million

## Achievements and milestones

The speakers highlighted key milestones of the project:

- Over **350 individuals** and **130 civil society** organisations engaged in project activities, workshops, conferences, and outreach events.
- Development of an **advocacy toolkit**, tailored to the needs of EU citizens and grassroots organisations.
- A comprehensive communication and advocacy strategy in place, including two online campaigns and two art competitions, which reached a combined audience of over **700,000 people**.

These achievements reflect the project's focus on inclusivity and its commitment to amplifying the voices of EU citizens living in the UK and celebrating their authentic lived experience.

## Looking forward

A call to action, urging participants to reflect on the lessons of the project and envision a future where EU citizens are empowered to thrive in a post-Brexit UK.

# The vision for the future EU-UK relationship

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ISABELL POPPLEBAUM, Deputy Head of EU Delegation to the UK

The resilience demonstrated by EU citizens living in the UK in adapting to the challenges posed by the post-Brexit reality highlighted as it required navigating complex legal landscapes to secure the rights while retaining a sense of belonging. The solidarity and collective strength exhibited by these communities, transforming uncertainty into positive action were also highlighted and special recognition was given by the Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to the UK to the British individuals who showed empathy and supported EU citizens throughout this transition. For the most vulnerable, the provision of essential support services has been and continues to be indispensable.

## Creative expressions of identity and belonging

Throughout the project, the Common Ground initiative also showcased real lived experiences and creativity through artistic expressions via the [Stories of Hope](#) photography exhibitions and competitions. These initiatives explored the themes of identity, belonging, and aspirations from the perspective of EU citizens living in the UK, emphasising shared values despite diverse backgrounds. The networking opportunities fostered by the project, including the conference itself, serve as a lasting platform to strengthen and connect communities.

Acknowledging the indispensable role of the organisations supporting EU citizens is essential in recognising their guidance, advocacy, and

unwavering commitment to fostering inclusion. Their resilience and dedication have been critical in enabling EU citizens to feel valued and empowered during challenging times. These organisations remain at the heart of efforts to build a stronger, more connected, and compassionate society.

## Sustaining achievements and strengthening partnerships

Looking ahead, sustaining the achievements of the Common Ground project must be a priority. The Deputy Head of the EU Delegation noted the active exploration of options to ensure the initiative's success continues to grow. This includes securing new funding to address emerging needs and strengthening the networks of organisations that support EU citizens. Sustainability, empowerment, and connection will drive the project's future, ensuring its long-term impact.

*'In the broader context of the EU-UK relationship, fostering a stable and forward-looking partnership is not just an aspiration but also a necessity. Shared values and the pressing global challenges we face make this partnership essential for long-term cooperation. Recent meetings between EU and UK leaders have reaffirmed the commitment to fully implement the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Windsor Framework, and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. These*

*agreements form the cornerstone of EU-UK relations, providing a foundation for structured and strategic cooperation.'*

The evolving EU-UK agenda demands focus on several key areas. Security and resilience, particularly in response to geopolitical challenges, must remain paramount. Strengthening people-to-people contacts is equally vital. Rebuilding bridges torn by Brexit and exploring initiatives like a potential youth experience scheme will foster understanding and unity.

*'This new phase in the relationship is filled with opportunities. The transformative contributions of the Common Ground project exemplify*

## Shared priorities and next steps

The “reset” in EU-UK relations presents an opportunity to redefine this partnership based on shared values and to develop future projects around pragmatic shared interests such as:

- **Mobility:** Re-establishing opportunities for youth exchanges, educational programs, and cultural collaborations.
- **Security, energy and climate action:** Strengthening cooperation in renewable energy and sustainability initiatives and on security and defence.
- **Cultural and social ties:** Building connections that celebrate shared European heritage while fostering mutual respect.

## Implementation of agreements

The importance of implementing the **Withdrawal Agreement** and the **Trade and Cooperation Agreement** was emphasised. These frameworks provide a foundation for addressing key issues such as:

- Border management and trade facilitation.
- Safeguarding the rights of EU citizens and their families.
- Enhancing cooperation in security and research.

*what can be achieved through collaboration and shared purpose. Gratitude extends to all involved in making this vision a reality. Supporting EU citizens and strengthening partnerships with UK authorities and civil society remain central to this effort.'*

In closing remarks to the keynote speech, the Deputy Ambassador stressed that upholding the rights of EU citizens and advancing the shared aspirations of both regions will guide the way forward, ensuring that this partnership thrives for years to come.



## Youth as catalysts for change

Youth engagement was identified as a critical area for fostering long-term collaboration. Initiatives like Erasmus+ were cited as examples of programs that could be adapted to facilitate UK-EU youth exchanges, promoting understanding and shared purpose.

## Policy recommendations

To realize the potential of the EU-UK “reset,” participants recommended:

- Enhanced funding for joint projects in education, climate action, and cultural exchange from the EU.
- Strengthened mechanisms for civil society engagement in policy discussions in the UK and the EU.
- Greater transparency and accountability in implementing agreements by the UK government.

# Panel discussion:

## What does 'reset' in EU/UK relationship mean for EU citizens in the UK

CLAUDIA DELPERO, *EuropeStreet News*  
MONIQUE HAWKINS, *the3million*  
PIOTR SADOWSKI, *Volonteuropé*  
JACK O'CONNOR, *EU-UK Follow-up Committee*

Civil society leaders, policymakers, and academics were brought together in a panel to discuss the lived experiences of EU citizens in the UK. Key topics included digital immigration statuses, access to welfare, and representation in political processes.

## Challenges facing EU citizens

The discussion highlighted several urgent systemic challenges contained in the3million's publication Ten urgent asks for the EU Settlement Scheme and the digitalisation cliff-edge of 31 December 2024 and the EU Citizens' Manifesto:

- **Outstanding issues with EU Settlement Scheme:** delays, extending full Withdrawal Agreement rights to pre-settled status and Certificate of Application (COA) holders.
- **Digital-Only Immigration Status:** Participants discussed the vulnerabilities created by the lack of physical proof of immigration status, particularly for digitally excluded populations.
- **Access to Welfare:** The "No Recourse to Public Funds" (NRPF) condition continues to disproportionately affect low-income families and individuals, exacerbating social inequalities.



- **Representation and Advocacy:** Limited engagement with decision-makers hinders the ability of EU citizens to influence policies that directly affect their lives.

## Practical strategies for inclusion and advocacy

*'I think the fact that civil society is mobilising and it's often working with limited resources but still finding the belief in its mission to deliver social justice is something that needs to be applauded as well, it is very important.'*

Jack O'Connor

# Solutions and strategies

Panellists proposed several strategies to address these challenges:

- Advocate for **physical proof of immigration status** to complement digital systems and introduce mitigating measures throughout the transition period.
- Develop targeted campaigns to raise awareness of rights and entitlements among EU citizens.
- Leverage mechanisms like the Domestic Advisory Groups under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement to amplify the voices of civil society organisations.

# Participants engagement

Participants contributed valuable insights, sharing personal stories and suggesting practical steps for fostering inclusion and equity. The session highlighted the importance of grassroots organising in driving systemic change.



From left: Piotr Sadowski, Volunteurope; Claudia Delpero, EuropeStreet News; Monique Hawkins, the3million; Jack O'Connor, EESC



“I’m a Polish-Irish migrant woman. I’ve been listening to this discussion from a different perspective. I have family members living in the UK. My brother lives in Cambridge, and my other brother lived in Cambridge before moving to Romania post-Brexit. I live in Dublin and I’ve been listening to this conversation and thinking about how it all changed for everyone in this room after Brexit. So my question is, because there was a lot of conversation here about the role of civil society as a bridge: How are you energising people to vote? How are you an active citizen? How are you energizing people to fight for their rights? Because nobody will give those rights to us. We are waiting for the British government to show compassion. I can tell you that from my perspective that compassion is very, very rarely given... until it’s taken. So my question is how are you engaging people in civic activity?”



“I became a British citizen in 2012 and sort of had no idea that there would be a referendum vote. But having the ability to express my views and express my wishes in the referendum vote was extremely important to me having lived in the UK since 1996(...).”

“I live in Scotland. This, in London, is a foreign country to me. You have to identify that. You have the right to be noticed. You have the right to be seen. We have the right to be discussed, and for something to be done about us. As in we’re European. The meeting we had in Brussels was where these meetings should take place. I have to say though, it’s fantastic today to see how many people have come from the EU here to talk to us because this should be European citizens discussing these things wherever they live”



“I’ve also been engaged, albeit on the other side of the channel, in mobilising around the European Parliament elections.(...) So not necessarily coming out to say ‘It’s important for you to go out to vote because you have got the right to vote.’ but rather start taking it from another approach: talking about issues, exploring what the issues that are important to the demographic are and then framing through this conversation the fact that they actually do possess the power and actually the privilege to contribute to change with their democratic right to vote as well and should utilise it.”

# Emergent campaigns: E-visas and access to welfare

SARAH MARAMAG, *the3million*  
ARNAS TAMASAUSKAS, *the3million*

This session focused on two critical issues affecting EU citizens in the UK: the transition to digital-only e-visas and the impact of the No Recourse to Public Funds condition.

## E-visa challenges

KEZIA TOBIN, *the3million*

The transition to digital-only immigration status creates significant barriers, particularly for vulnerable populations. Common issues highlighted<sup>(1)</sup> include:

- **Technical Glitches:** Errors and outages in digital systems prevent individuals from accessing and proving their status, leading to denied entry to the UK, services or employment opportunities.
- **Digital Exclusion:** Those with limited access to technology, limited digital literacy and non-English speakers face disproportionate challenges.
- **Lack of awareness and insufficient training of frontline staff:** concurrent rollout of eVisas and ETAs is confusing and under-resourced leading to people being facing barriers, detention and financial burden when returning to the UK.

## Campaign objectives

Advocacy efforts of [the3million](#) relating to digital only immigration status and the imminent eVisas

rollout as outlined in [Ten urgent asks for the EU Settlement Scheme and the digitalisation cliff-edge of 31 December 2024](#) and the [EU Citizens' Manifesto](#) are focused on:

- Provision of a secure **QR code** or equivalent physical proof alongside the digital system.
- Public inquiry into the current digital-only system looking at inclusivity, accessibility and reliability.
- Harm reduction measures:
  - **24/7 human staffed helpline**<sup>(2)</sup> for urgent resolution (including a dedicated travel helpline).
  - **Transparent & accessible compensation route** for Home Office or third-party errors.
  - Clear communication on the **importance of updating UKVI accounts** with current travel documents.

## Access to welfare

LUCY LEON, *Researcher, COMPAS*  
SARAH CUTLER, *Director, Migration Exchange*

The “no recourse to public funds” (NRPF) condition prevents many migrants including some EU citizens holding pre-settled status and the certificate of application (COA) from accessing welfare and homelessness support, leaving them vulnerable to destitution and homelessness. Even though pre-settled status and COA holders are not overtly barred from claiming welfare benefits or applying for housing assistance, they are subject

(1) based on “Loss and Liability - Glitching immigration status as a feature of the British border after Brexit”. Manuscript as accepted by the *Journal of Immigration, Asylum & Nationality Law*, by Kuba Jablonowski and Monique Hawkins, published under CC BY licencea

(2) Since the conference, the UK government did set up a [24/7 passenger support helpline](#) for those traveling and experiencing issues with the eVisas



# Electoral Advocacy

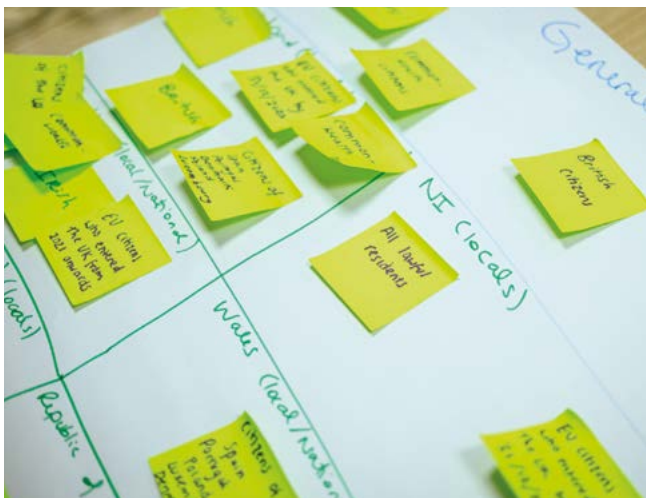
LARA PARIZOTTO, Migrant Democracy Project  
ROISE BLAYNEY, Migrant Democracy Project  
TERESA BUCZKOWSKA, Migrant Voice

Raising awareness of voting rights, supporting campaigns for residence based voting rights and increasing democratic participation among

migrants including EU citizens are key priorities for the Common Ground initiative. This session focused on the Residence-Based Voting Rights (RBVR) campaign and strategies for empowering migrants as political leaders used by UK and Ireland based activists.

## Barriers to participation

Despite being fully-fledged residents and contributing to the economy and society, many EU citizens are excluded from voting due to restrictive policies and lack of consistency in voting rights across the devolved nations.



Lara Parizotto, Migrant Democracy Project

All those lawfully resident, including EU citizens, can register to vote in devolved elections in Scotland and Wales.

In England and Northern Ireland, the eligibility<sup>(3)</sup> is:

■ Citizens of Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain who are resident in the UK, have permission to enter or stay in the UK (or the Channel Islands or Isle of Man) can register to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland. The UK has bilateral treaties with these countries.

■ Citizens of any other EU country who on or before 31 December 2020 were legally resident in the UK, had permission to enter or stay in the UK (or the Channel Islands or Isle of Man) and have remained resident without a break can register to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland.

Cyprus and Malta are both EU and Commonwealth countries. Citizens of Cyprus and Malta are able to register for full voting rights as Commonwealth citizens as long as they fulfil the other eligibility requirements.

Voting rights summary table <sup>(3)</sup>

Election	Voting age	Resident British citizen	Resident EU citizen	Overseas British citizen	Resident Irish citizen	Resident qualifying Commonwealth citizen
UK Parliament	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>ENGLAND</b>						
Elected mayor	18	Yes	Eligible EU citizens	No	Yes	Yes
Council and parish	18	Yes	Eligible EU citizens	No	Yes	Yes
<b>SCOTLAND</b>						
Scottish Parliament	16	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Council and community council	16	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>WALES</b>						
Senedd Cymru	16	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Council and community council	16	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>						
Assembly	18	Yes	Eligible EU citizens	No	Yes	Yes
Local Council	18	Yes	Eligible EU citizens	No	Yes	Yes

(3) Based on 'Who can vote in UK elections' report

The fragmented voting rules across the UK create confusion for voters, activists, and even politicians. A unified, residence-based system would simplify voter registration and increase clarity, fostering broader political engagement and leveraging migrants' voting power in advocacy and campaigning work. Migrant Democracy Project's call for change in England and Northern Ireland electoral policies seeks to align these regions with the progressive practices of their counterparts and ensure equal representation for all residents.

## Campaign strategies

The session highlighted initiatives such as the campaigns of **Migrant Democracy Project**, which train migrants in political leadership and advocacy using the following key strategies:

- Promoting civic education to raise awareness of voting rights.
- Providing material and social support for migrant candidates.
- Advocating for the adoption of residence based voting rights across the UK.
- Organising electoral registration clinics.

## Good practice example

The MPower Programme, a political leadership initiative by Migrant Democracy Project is aimed at empowering migrants in the UK. The programme focuses on training potential political candidates, equipping them with practical skills necessary for running successful campaigns and holding public office.

The MPower Programme offers workshops led by experienced professionals, including migrant councillors and public-speaking coaches. Participants learn transferable skills to navigate the complexities of electoral processes, build effective campaigns, and foster community

engagement. By nurturing leadership among migrants, the programme aims to increase their representation in local governance and strengthen their role in shaping policies that affect their lives.

Extending voting rights in a uniform way across the UK is not just a matter of equity but a step toward a more inclusive democracy. Scotland and Wales have set a precedent, proving that residence-based voting rights enhance political engagement and representation. England and Northern Ireland must follow suit to ensure that all residents, regardless of origin, have a voice in shaping their communities.

Furthermore, addressing the challenges faced by migrant candidates requires a multi-faceted approach. Providing institutional support, combating racism, and raising awareness about voting rights are crucial steps in levelling the playing field. By empowering migrants to participate in electoral processes, the UK can unlock the full potential of its diverse population and create a more vibrant, representative democracy.



Teresa Buczkowska, Immigrant Council Of Ireland

# Co-liberatory community engagement

SARRI BATER, OpenEdge Transforming Conflict

## Introducing co-liberation

Co-liberatory engagement as introduced by OpenEdge is a transformative concept that emphasises mutual empowerment, equity, and shared responsibility in addressing systemic injustices. This approach goes beyond advocacy to foster a sense of solidarity among diverse groups, encouraging participants to work together to dismantle systemic oppression.

## Themes explored

- **Power and privilege:** Discussions focused on recognizing how systemic power dynamics and privilege shape relationships within communities. Participants reflected on how unconscious biases perpetuate inequities.
- **Interconnectedness and multiple social truths:** A key theme was the recognition of shared humanity and the ways in which personal and collective experiences are intertwined and exist alongside each other.
- **Equity in action:** The session highlighted the importance of aligning internal self-awareness with external systemic action to create inclusive spaces.

## Key workshop activities

The session employed a combination of reflective exercises, theoretical exploration, and practical activities:



- **Orchard metaphor:** Participants analysed images depicting exclusion and equity, reflecting on how systemic barriers can be dismantled to create inclusive environments.
- **Blind men and the elephant:** This analogy illustrates how individuals perceive different aspects of systemic oppression based on their positionality, fostering empathy and a broader understanding of shared struggles.

## Outcomes and reflections

By the end of the session, participants had practiced actionable strategies for sharing and receiving multiple social truths and navigating a multitude of loved experiences in a transformative way fostering co-liberation within their communities.

- The session concluded with a **call to action:**
- Move beyond individualizing blame and instead focus on transforming entire systems.
  - Consciously dismantle the structures that perpetuate systemic otherness rather than merely target individuals labelled as “baddies.”
  - Adopt a broader view of social change, one that integrates personal, relational, and systemic dimensions.

# Eastern European communities

OLA SOBIERAJ, *the3million*

PIOTR KARDYNAL, *European Welfare Association CIC (EWA CIC)*

DAVID JAY-PERSAD, *Polish and Eastern European Christian Family Centre(PEEC)*

## Unique challenges

Eastern European communities face distinct challenges, including stereotyping, limited access to services, and political underrepresentation. These issues are often compounded by language barriers leading to discrimination and exclusion.

## Key discussions

- **Stereotyping and discrimination:** Participants shared experiences of being stereotyped and how those tropes and stereotyping patterns shift from more established groups to less established, newer communities. The origins of the East/West generalisations dichotomy were also discussed in the context of experiencing discrimination due to language barrier or accent.
- **Gaps in access to services:** Discussions highlighted disparities in access to healthcare, social services and education among Eastern European communities due to lack of awareness and mistrust of those systems.
- **Political disenfranchisement:** Limited voting rights and underrepresentation in public offices were identified as significant barriers to full civic participation.

## Strategies for change

- **Building networks:** Participants stressed the importance of creating strong networks to address common challenges and advocate for shared goals.



Piotr Kardynal, European Welfare Association CIC (EWA CIC)

- **Cultural celebrations:** Events such as cultural festivals can counter stereotypes and foster understanding.
- **Leadership training:** Developing leadership within Eastern European communities was seen as a vital step toward amplifying their voices.

## Recommendations

- Increase funding for organisations supporting Eastern European communities.
- Promote inclusive policies that address linguistic and cultural barriers.
- Develop advocacy campaigns to challenge stereotypes and highlight contributions.

# Stories of Hope: Photography Exhibition

## The power of storytelling

The **Stories of Hope** exhibition highlighted the resilience and creativity of EU citizens through photography. By sharing their lived experiences, participants explored themes of identity, belonging, and aspiration.

## Structure of the exhibition

The exhibition featured shortlisted entries from two editions of Stories of Hope competition:

- **Stories of Hope:** inspired by **Stories for Change** project, the entries focus on EU citizens unique journeys of migration to the UK through images of objects, places and people symbolising those journeys and the challenges of adapting to life in the UK.
- **Stories of Hope: Diverse Voices Edition:** Timed to coincide with Black History Month, this edition focused on the experiences of racialised EU citizens, highlighting the intersection of race and migration.

## Winning entries



## Impact and legacy

Stories of Hope provided a platform for amplifying EU citizens' voices and lived experience through artistic expression fostering empathy and understanding among audiences. It is hoped that the competition will be rolled out annually beyond Common Ground project life, ensuring its continued impact.



Anette Jager; Cameron Kirkwood



Toni Petkova, Settled; Elena Remigi, InLimbo



Sara Giorgio, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini

# Sustainability of the Common Ground initiative: Future perspectives

BARBARA DE MICHELI and SARA GIORGIO, *Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini*

Strengthening the sustainability of initiatives supporting EU citizens in the UK is essential for fostering long-term impact and collaboration. This section consolidates findings from a needs assessment conducted during the **Common Ground Closing Conference** on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

The assessment identified actions to ensure the longevity of the Common Ground initiative while proposing future strategies for enhancing the EU-UK relationship. The outcomes provide a framework for promoting equity, inclusion, and robust engagement in the evolving policy landscape.



Sara Giorgio, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini



## Methodology

The sustainability session invited civil society organisations (CSOs) and EU citizens to explore potential linkages, resources, and solutions to challenges in future EU-UK collaboration. Structured brainstorming and facilitated discussions were conducted across 12 small groups of 6–8 participants. Spontaneous dialogue was encouraged, alongside guiding questions to focus the exchange of ideas:

- Identifying unaddressed challenges facing EU citizens in the UK.
- Exploring efficient communication channels for collaboration.
- Promoting social justice within marginalised EU communities.
- Sharing good practices to improve future initiatives.
- Encouraging individual and organisational commitments to fostering joint initiatives.

Each group's spokesperson presented their main recommendations in a plenary session to shape collective strategies.

# Key findings for sustainability actions proposed by CSOs

## Mapping and engagement

Continuous mapping of CSOs and regular engagement mechanisms are pivotal for addressing emerging needs. Actions include:

- Establishing an updated contact database for all stakeholders involved in the initiative
- Organising periodic stakeholders' meetings to share knowledge, network and identify partnerships
- Rotating leadership roles to ensure diverse representation and foster inclusion within collaborations

## Centralised online platform

A central website hub is critical for sustaining connections and promoting information-sharing. Key features should include:

- A repository for multilingual resources tailored to the needs of diverse EU citizen groups
- Tools to facilitate government engagement and CSO advocacy efforts
- A section for best practices, success stories, and actionable guidance for stakeholders

## Promoting cultural activities

Cultural initiatives serve as a vehicle for fostering inclusion and enhancing EU identity. Recommendations include:

- Hosting art competitions, storytelling events, and festivals that celebrate diversity
- Engaging marginalised communities to ensure equitable participation in cultural programs

## Advocacy and campaigning

Advocacy should prioritise anti-oppression and intersectionality while integrating grassroots organisations into democratic processes. Key actions:

- Supporting campaigns that amplify marginalised voices, particularly among racialised and excluded groups
- Advocating for inclusive policies through targeted outreach and public engagement

## Replicability

Potential for the Common Ground project delivery model can be adapted and replicated in EU diaspora communities across the UK e.g. in the devolved nations in the UK or elsewhere in the world.

# Future actions proposed by CSOs in case of additional funding opportunities

## Growing and formalising the Common Ground CSO network

Establishing a strategy for increasing membership and geographical spread while ensuring local connectivity through local sub-networks:

- Conducting systemic analyses to map organisational linkages and identify gaps
- Tailored engagement with excluded and underrepresented groups as identified through the mapping exercises
- Developing a regular program of stakeholder events, training and activities
- Hosting family-friendly events to ensure inclusivity for individuals with caregiving responsibilities

## Enhancing digital platforms

A comprehensive digital platform that would have functionality for interactive resource-sharing, collaboration, and advocacy. Key features to include:

- Matchmaking tools for partnerships in future projects
- Volunteer recruitment and training opportunities
- Centralised data on community resources and activities

## Promoting diversity and equity

Efforts should emphasise anti-discrimination and intersectionality while addressing systemic inequities. Priority areas:

- Supporting the Roma community and addressing labour exploitation among marginalised groups
- Raising awareness of racialised needs within EU citizen populations
- Integrating cultural sensitivity training for policymakers and service providers

## Cultural and social activities

Fostering community cohesion through cultural initiatives remains a critical focus. Recommended actions include:

- Organising in-person events such as conversation cafés or listening sessions
- Celebrating European heritage through art exhibitions, song contests, story telling and cultural exchanges
- Building shared understanding of European heritage and EU institutions British people and EU citizens living in the UK through information sharing and events

## Advocacy and democratic engagement

Proactive strategies for enhancing civic participation and advocacy must address structural barriers. Recommendations include:

- Expanding democratic engagement activities, such as voter education and outreach campaigns
- Promoting representation of EU citizens in decision-making forums
- Engaging young people in shaping mobility agreements and shared policies

# Ideas for future development

## Advocating for EU Funds accessibility for UK-based CSOs

Although the current availability of EU funding in non-member states is very limited, efforts should be made to explore making EU funding mechanisms more accessible to CSOs

Recommendations:

- Where funds are available, simplify application processes and provide capacity-building support for managing funds
- Create guidance materials tailored to small and grassroots organisations
- Raise awareness of available funds that could potentially be accessed via partnerships or member states

## Collaborative engagement and local action

Greater focus on local communities and engagement with individual needs is essential. Proposed actions:

- Creating platforms for sharing stories, FAQs, and migration-related resources
- Hosting locally driven cultural and civic activities to strengthen community ties
- Need to address distinct priorities in devolved nations. Enhanced engagement with EU citizens in these regions should reflect their unique political and cultural landscapes, ensuring tailored support and advocacy efforts

## Addressing needs around psychology of migration

Increasing engagement between EU diaspora and member states embassies beyond consular and legal matters to raise awareness of the make up and infrastructure of the grassroots community and how individuals are impacted by having to navigate their migration journey.



# Conclusion

Sustaining the achievements of the Common Ground initiative requires a coordinated and multifaceted approach combined with appropriate resourcing. Emphasising inclusivity, equity, and collaboration will be critical for addressing the needs of EU citizens and strengthening the EU-UK relationship.

The need assessment underscored several priorities:

- Enhancing community building and advocacy networks
- Expanding access to resources and opportunities for marginalised groups
- Promoting cultural initiatives and democratic participation
- Developing new platforms and tools to foster collaboration and engagement
- Ensuring a balance of virtual and in person initiatives and activities

Participants highlighted the positive atmosphere and collaborative spirit throughout the conference, reflecting the trust and relationships built throughout Common Ground project life and a shared commitment to progress. Future actions, albeit largely dependent on available resources, will focus on incorporating these recommendations into ongoing efforts, ensuring that the initiative's impact continues to grow.

**The project partners are committed to** leveraging existing tools and nurturing the networks and connections established by:

- maintaining [ourcommonground.uk](https://ourcommonground.uk) website
- continued mapping the civil society landscape and CSO engagement
- continued dissemination of Common Ground [research and publications](#)
- showcasing Stories of Hope exhibition or online gallery where possible
- facilitating a mailing group and online networking opportunities for Common Ground stakeholders



Barbara De Micheli, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini

# Conclusion:

## Building bridges, shaping futures

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The **Common Ground** project exemplifies the power of collective action in addressing complex social, political, and cultural challenges. Through its activities and advocacy efforts, the initiative has:

- Empowered EU citizens to navigate post-Brexit realities.
- Fostered inclusion and challenged systemic inequities.
- Celebrated the cultural and economic contributions of diverse communities.

## Key achievements

- Engaging over 350 individuals and 130 organisations in meaningful dialogue and action.
- Developing tools and resources, such as the [advocacy toolkit](#) and communication platform, to support civil society efforts.
- Organising impactful events, including the “Stories of Hope” exhibition and multiple workshops.

## Future directions

The Common Ground initiative has laid a strong foundation for continued collaboration and progress. To build on its achievements, stakeholders must:

- Sustain and expand networks established through the project.
- Advocate for inclusive policies that protect the rights of EU citizens.
- Promote cultural and social initiatives that celebrate diversity and foster mutual understanding.

By embracing these priorities, the Common Ground initiative can continue to shape a future where EU citizens feel valued, included, and empowered to contribute to the societies they call home.



