

# Growing the influence of civil society organisations through participation in the Common Ground project.



Delivered by:





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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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# Contents

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<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
<b>Participation and network growth</b>	<b>p. 6</b>
<b>Qualitative assessment of the Common Ground CSO network</b>	<b>p. 8</b>
<b>Case studies</b>	<b>p. 12</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>p. 15</b>

# Executive summary

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This report presents a comprehensive assessment of the engagement and influence of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) participating in the Common Ground initiative between 2023 and 2025. The analysis demonstrates a notable increase in both individual and organisational participation in advocacy efforts related to EU citizens' rights in the UK.

A key metric of success was the transition of participants from passive engagement at outreach events to active roles in advocacy networks and campaigns. Of 109 individual participants at outreach events in Birmingham, Manchester, and London, 10% joined the EU Citizens Campaign Network and 10% went on to volunteer with the3million. These figures reflect the effectiveness of in-person outreach in fostering long-term civic participation.

Organisational engagement similarly increased. Among CSOs attending outreach or working group sessions, the proportion that co-signed joint advocacy letters rose significantly: from 20% to 47% in outreach events and from 23% to 50% among working group attendees between Year 1 and Year 2. The average co-signing rate across all activities reached 47% among CSOs engaged in both streams, indicating growing confidence, trust, and investment in collaborative advocacy.

Further, 89% of CSOs remained engaged in follow-up events, signalling the project's success in retaining participants through meaningful involvement. Several organisations took leadership roles—co-hosting events, shaping content, and contributing to strategic planning. These included Centrala, Europia, Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community, Citizens' Rights Project, Settled, and the European Welfare Association CIC. Such long-term commitment has led to continued collaboration, including joint funding proposals and the development of new initiatives.

The qualitative assessment highlights the strength of the informal CSO network that emerged: a space for diverse organisations to share best practices, build solidarity, and contribute to collective policy advocacy. While challenges such as sustainability and the dynamic nature of grassroots organising persist, the network has demonstrated the capacity to influence policy and strengthen community infrastructure.

Ultimately, the report confirms a growing and resilient civil society ecosystem. This growth has been made possible by sustained relationship-building, inclusive dialogue, and targeted support. Continued investment in collaborative platforms and engagement opportunities will be essential to maintain this momentum and advance the rights and visibility of EU citizens in the UK



# Introduction

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Common Ground was a project delivered in partnership by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, the3million and British Future supporting communities of EU citizens in the UK to thrive.

The project aimed to facilitate new activities, conversations and dialogues to strengthen the network of EU citizens in the UK, enabling grassroots groups across the country to grow their influence, have their voices heard and contributions celebrated.

Through events, workshops and campaigns informed by research, the project worked with civil society organisations and grassroots leaders to build stronger and more positive ties between the UK and the EU.

Co-funded by the Foreign Policy Instruments of the European Union, the project mission was to inspire more empowered EU communities in the UK by building connections, celebrating our shared European identity and sharing knowledge, with the aim of building a more positive relationship between the UK and the EU.

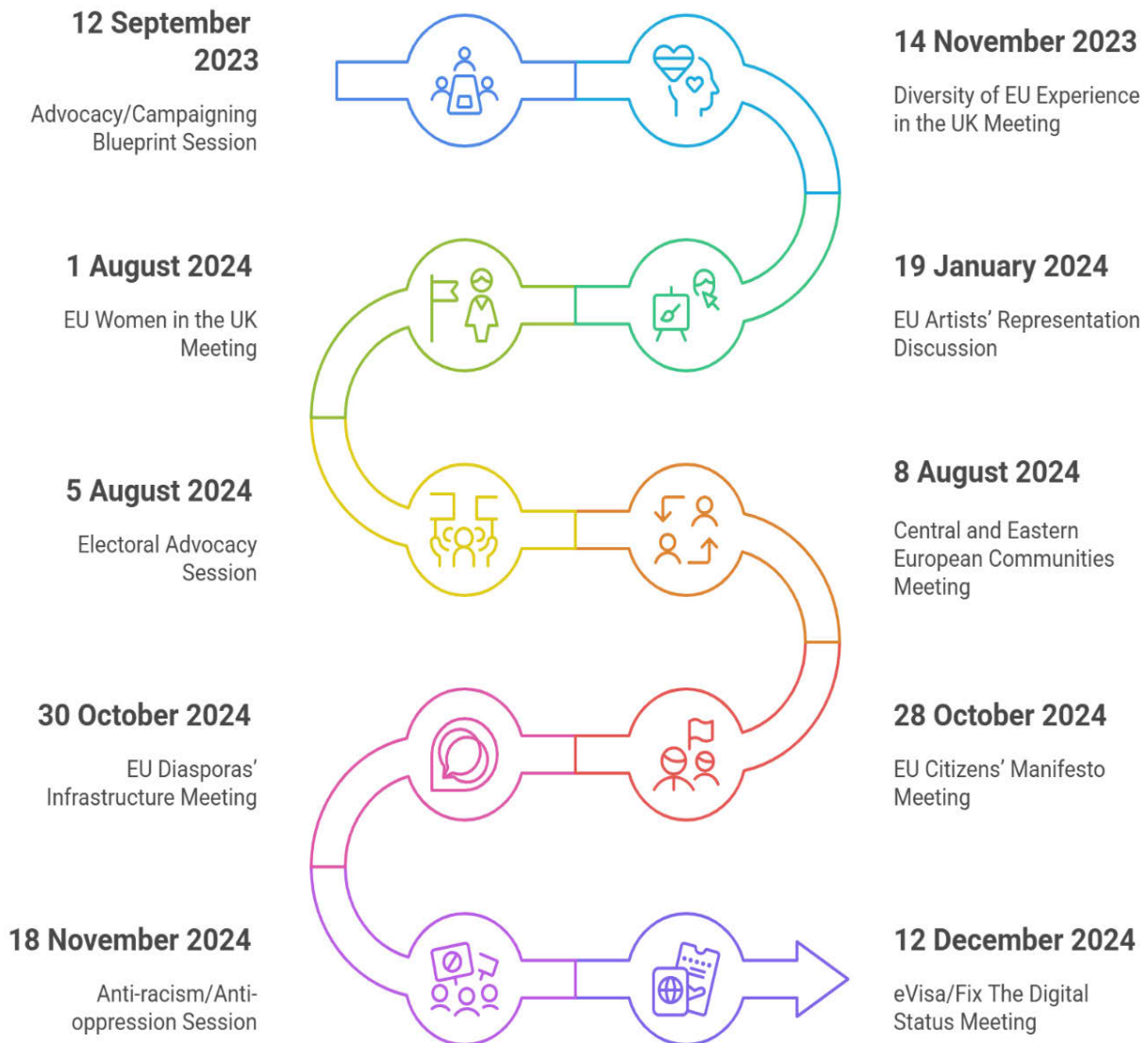
The project delivery was designed on four pillars: research, engagement and advocacy, strategic communication and sustainability. The project played a crucial role in fostering engagement among Civil Society Organisations on issues related to citizens' rights, particularly through outreach activities and working groups.

Common Ground project facilitated six outreach events aiming to raise awareness of the initiative and engage with grassroots EU citizens' community organisations across the UK in Birmingham, Greater Manchester and Greater London. The events attracted both individuals and Civil Society organisations and served as opportunities to network, build relationships and explore EU citizens' shared values and shared pragmatic interests and concerns with a view to empower participants to get involved in campaigning and further Common Ground and the3million activities.



The project also facilitated ten online working groups and discussion sessions, each designed to foster collaboration and address key themes relevant to EU citizens as identified through the sector mapping exercise, individual discussions and evidence base collated through the3million stakeholder engagement. These sessions brought together diverse Civil Society Organisations from various regions and national backgrounds to explore their shared interests and areas of work through their unique lens.

## Key Milestones in EU Community Advocacy Working Groups



Through moderated discussions, participants exchanged insights, debated solutions, and developed actionable next steps or recommendations. The inclusive format encouraged meaningful engagement, allowing diverse perspectives to contribute to shaping the outcomes of the project

**A key measure of the growing influence of the Civil Society Organisations was their increasing participation in advocacy efforts, such as signing joint letters (co-)drafted by the3million and engaging in multiple project activities as a result of building trust and a good working relationship through outreach. This report evaluates the influence of these organisations using participation data across two years of the project.**

# Participation and network growth

One significant indicator of influence was the extent to which individuals and organisations transitioned from passive participation in outreach activities to active involvement in advocacy networks and campaigns.

Throughout the project duration 109 individual participants attended outreach activities in Birmingham, Manchester and London.

- **10% of those individual participants subsequently joined the EU Citizens Campaign network facilitated by the3million, which developed the EU Citizens' Manifesto for Change and hosted EU Citizens Summit in Sept 2024**
- **10% of participants took up volunteering opportunities with the3million following their participation in outreach events**

This demonstrates the value of in-person outreach efforts in mobilising support for citizens' rights advocacy.

## Civil society organisations participation in advocacy

Beyond the individual engagement, the increasing confidence and commitment of CSOs to engage with advocacy work is evident in their willingness to co-sign joint letters\* drafted by the3million & other organisations in the sector.

[\\* 7th June 2023 - EUSS digital status after refusal decision](#)  
[16th Nov 2023 - Aug 23 changes to EUSS](#)  
[7th May 2024 - EU Citizens' Manifesto](#)  
[11th June 2024 - Open letter on eVisas](#)  
[15th July 2024 - Open letter to incoming PM \(10 urgent asks\)](#)  
[25th Oct 2024 - Open letter with Migrants Organise \(DWP\)](#)  
[22nd Nov 2024 - Joint letter with ILPA re Cancellation and Curtailment](#)

The percentage of CSOs attending outreach events who co-signed these letters grew from 20% in Year 1 to 47% in Year 2, culminating in an overall project average of 36%. This increase suggests rising awareness, confidence and commitment among CSOs to collectively advocate for citizens' rights and policy change.

Similarly, among CSOs participating in working group meetings, both participation and the co-signing rates increased as the project went on. In the first year of the project, 23,3% CSOs endorsed one or more joint letters and in year 2 this figure increased to 50%, giving the project average of 33%.

Percentage of CSOs attending Working Group Meetings who co-signed the3million letters relating to citizens' rights or Manifesto for Change:

- **Year 1: 23.3% (7 out of 30 CSOs)**
- **Year 2: 50% (19 out of 38 CSOs)**
- **Project total: 33% (26 out of 68 CSOs)**

The upward trend in both outreach and working group participation indicates that CSOs are becoming more engaged over time, translating their involvement into tangible advocacy actions.

## Combined outreach and working group participation

CSOs which attended both outreach activities and working groups demonstrated an even stronger commitment to advocacy. The proportion of those CSOs co-signing the 3million and joint letters grew markedly:

- **Year 1: 22.2% (10 out of 45 CSOs)**
- **Year 2: 65% (40 out of 61 CSOs)**
- **Project total: 47% (50 out of 106 CSOs)**

These figures reflect a significant shift, with nearly two-thirds of CSOs in Year 2 actively supporting joint advocacy initiatives. The consistency in their engagement highlights the Common Ground project's success in building an active network with growing influence.

## Continued engagement beyond initial participation

A further measure of CSO influence is the degree to which CSOs and individuals remained engaged with Common Ground or the 3million activities beyond their initial outreach or working group involvement.

Out of the total number of CSOs involved in outreach and working groups:

- **86% attended at least one further event in Year 1 (39 out of 45)**
- **91% attended at least one further event in Year 2 (56 out of 61)**
- **The overall project rate of continued engagement was 89% (95 out of 106 CSOs).**

This high retention rate suggests that CSOs found value in Common Ground initiatives, leading them to sustain their involvement by taking part in conferences, summits, and listening sessions

## Long term commitment and active engagement

Several CSOs demonstrated further commitment to Common Ground project activities and the 3million advocacy efforts by taking an active role in and co-designing project activities and campaign activities beyond the co-signing of the joint letter.

For example, [Centrala](#), following being identified via sector mapping exercise and a 1-2-1 meeting co-hosted one of the Common Ground outreach events in Birmingham as well as contributed to planning for a panel discussion at the International Conference.

Similarly, [Europia](#) co-hosted one of the outreach events in Manchester and also assisted in organising the EU Citizens' summit watch party. Moreover, [Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community](#) contributed to numerous CG initiatives as conference participants, panellists as well as co-hosts of a listening session and the Belfast EU Citizens' summit watch party. [Citizens' Rights Project](#) as well as [Settled](#) were other CSOs which stepped up their engagement and co-hosted the summit watch parties in Edinburgh and Newport respectively. [European Welfare Association CIC](#) hosted a listening session and co-facilitated one of the breakout sessions at the Common Ground closing conference.

This continuity of engagement has resulted in exploring a potential joint funding application and an idea for a research project on issues identified via the listening sessions. These sustained efforts reflect the deepening collaboration within the Common Ground network, demonstrating its growing impact.

Beyond organisational partnerships, it is worth noting that individual project participants demonstrated eagerness for continued engagement.

Many of those who first came in contact with Common Ground by attending an outreach event took up opportunities to attend further events, take part in art competitions, share their stories via case studies or to volunteer with the3million. One notable example saw a participant from a case study join the3million board of directors and conduct an in-depth analysis of the Report It! Tool to tease out systemic issues within the EU Settlement Scheme as reported to the3million. Others, having gained awareness of the scope of Common Ground and the3million advocacy work developed a taste for active campaigning and joined EU Citizens' Campaigns Network. These instances highlight the project's ability to empower individuals, building confidence and capacity for long-term engagement in both advocacy and organisational leadership. Through sustained participation and growing influence Civil Society Organisations continued to strengthen the impact of the Common Ground platform, nurturing a dynamic network of organizations and individuals dedicated to bringing about policy change.

# Qualitative assessment of the Common Ground CSO network

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The network of CSOs emerging from the Common Ground project is an informal collaborative platform aimed at fostering dialogue, sharing best practice and knowledge, and community-driven solutions among EU citizens Civil Society Organisations in the UK. This qualitative assessment highlights the network's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth, based on observations of the Common Ground project facilitators and records of project activities.

Strengths of the Common Ground CSO network

## ■ **Facilitating meaningful collaboration**

One of the core strengths of this emerging network is its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders from different backgrounds, including community organisations, policymakers, academics, and individual professionals to share their experiences and knowledge of issues relevant to them as EU citizens and collaborate and support each other and other organisations and networks in their advocacy efforts.

## ■ **Broad and inclusive membership**

The network embraces the diversity of EU citizens in the UK and actively seeks to amplify underrepresented groups to have a platform to express their perspectives and foster mutual understanding. The membership overlaps with other networks that have a specific remit, such as the EUSS Alliance, EUD Monitoring Network and the EU Citizens Campaigns Network, but seeks to provide a broader space for engagement beyond EU Settlement Scheme and advocacy.

## ■ **Knowledge sharing and capacity building**

The network and the website has the potential of effectively serving as a hub for exchanging best practices, case studies, and research findings. Workshops, webinars, and discussion forums provide members with valuable insights and professional development opportunities, contributing to capacity building within communities and organisations.

## ■ **Impact on policy and advocacy**

Civil Society Organisations which have participated in the Common Ground project have shown potential to develop a collective influential voice by supporting various advocacy efforts and policy discussions relating to citizens rights. By leveragin shared knowledge, lived experience and coordinated action the network has contributed to policy recommendations and initiatives that address systemic challenges for EU citizens in the UK.

## Challenges faced by the Common Ground Network

### ■ **Scalability and sustainability**

While the network has gained momentum and relationships have been established, sustaining long-term engagement remains a challenge and requires continuous effort, particularly as resources fluctuate, both in terms of finance and people involved.

### ■ **Dynamic nature of grassroots EU citizens' organisations**

The constantly evolving and largely volunteer based landscape of grassroots EU citizens' organisations presents an additional challenge. The organisations within this network continuously adapt to emerging issues, shifting priorities, and evolving structures within civil society. This requires substantial resources to keep up with and map the changes and sustain meaningful relationships over time.

## Opportunities for improvement and growth

### ■ **Formalising the network structure and defining its unique position**

While the network is as yet informal and emerging, clarifying its target albeit broad constituency and defining opportunities for both individuals and organisations to participate in is essential. Broad membership base of EU citizens' civil society organisations as well as individuals, with a focus beyond organisations involved in service provision and campaigning although not excluding those. This network should prioritise objectives such as sharing and celebrating lived experiences, exchanging good practice examples, embracing differences among EU citizens, and identifying partnerships where common pragmatic interests emerge with a view to empower individuals and emerging leaders and strengthen the network.

### ■ **Enhanced engagement strategies**

Introducing structured engagement mechanisms, such as regular and varied networking and exchange opportunities as well as rotating hosting and chairing roles could deepen participant involvement and increase sustained collaboration.

### ■ **Leveraging technology for greater impact**

Expanding website functionality, data visualisation tools, and mobile-friendly features can enhance user experience and improve knowledge dissemination if resourced and maintained appropriately.

## Conclusion

The Common Ground CSO network could potentially play a vital role in fostering collaboration and driving meaningful change. As an informal and emerging network, it offers a broad and inclusive space for EU citizens' civil society organisations to connect and engage. While challenges exist, strategic improvements in engagement, technology, and the formalisation of its structure and mission can further strengthen the network's impact and sustainability.

The analysis of CSO's engagement in project activities presented in this report demonstrates that the influence of CSOs has grown significantly over time due to sustained and consistent investment in building those relationships and a variety of opportunities presented. This is evidenced by:

Increasing rates of individual and organisational participation in advocacy networks.

A rising number of CSOs signing joint letters to policy makers

Sustained and repeated engagement in outreach, working groups, and further events.

Deeper integration of CSOs into collaborative activities and leadership roles.

Going forward, a continued investment in outreach, relationship building and collaborative initiatives is crucial in order to sustain and further expand the influence of this emerging network.

# Case studies

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## Europia, Manchester

Europia is a registered charity and community development organization dedicated to supporting and empowering European nationals and Roma communities in Greater Manchester and beyond. Established in 2008, Europia has been committed to ensuring that European residents in the UK's ten boroughs of Greater Manchester feel secure and supported as they navigate life in the UK. The organization's mission is to support, empower, and connect European nationals, promote cultural diversity and inclusivity, and inspire community cohesion.

Europia offers a wide range of services tailored to meet the diverse needs of European communities. These services include immigration assistance, welfare advice, and health and well-being support. Europia provides free assistance with the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to ensure that European nationals' rights are protected post-Brexit. Additionally, the organization offers legal surgeries, benefits advice, health and well-being projects, and emergency funds for the most vulnerable community members.

Recognizing the importance of mental and physical health, Europia designs wellness workshops to promote mental health practices through various engagement activities. These initiatives aim to help individuals lead healthy and fulfilling lives. The organization also provides free support, therapy, information, and workshops tailored for EU nationals. Europia is committed to advocacy, offering free drop-in sessions, advice, and guidance to the most vulnerable EU nationals. The organization provides practical community projects, events, training sessions, advice clinics, and legal support to equip European citizens with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to integrate into their local communities.

By fostering inclusion, Europia helps EU nationals feel at home in Greater Manchester.

In response to the ongoing situation in Ukraine, Europia has extended its support to Ukrainian nationals. The organization offers assistance with E-visa transitions, well-being and emotional support, welfare benefits, housing advice, free immigration advice, upskilling opportunities, and emergency grants. Regular Ukrainian Community Sessions are held to provide advice and support to those affected by the conflict.

To assist vulnerable EU nationals across Greater Manchester, Europia has established an Emergency Fund. Eligible individuals can apply for grants to help purchase essential supplies. This initiative highlights Europia's commitment to supporting community members facing financial hardships.

Europia's friendly, multilingual team is dedicated to supporting individuals with various queries. The organization's inclusive approach ensures that clients feel connected and valued while cherishing their identities and values. By contributing to an inclusive society, Europia enables individuals to access quality opportunities and lead prosperous, fulfilling lives.

Beyond its core services, Europia offers various engagement opportunities, including volunteering, internships, and student placements. The organization also hosts events, publishes research and case studies, and produces podcasts to inform and connect with the community. These initiatives aim to promote cultural diversity, inclusivity, and community cohesion.

Europia's comprehensive services and initiatives play a crucial role in empowering European nationals and fostering a sense of belonging within the Greater Manchester community.

## **Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community**

The Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community (BIRC) is a dynamic organisation dedicated to fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding between the Romanian community and the broader populace of Belfast and Northern Ireland. Established to support the integration of Romanians into local society, BIRC also serves as a bridge, introducing Romanian culture to those unfamiliar with its rich traditions.

BIRC's primary mission is to promote intercultural dialogue, ensuring that the Romanian community feels welcomed and valued in Northern Ireland. The organisation strives to:

- Facilitate integration - provide practical support, resources and guidance for Romanian people in adapting to life in Northern Ireland
- Promote Romanian culture and heritage - showcase traditions, arts, and customs to the local community through various events and programmes
- Support community development - offer a platform for Romanians to connect, share experiences, and support one another in their new environment
- Education - run a Romanian Saturday supplementary schools across Northern Ireland to promote bilingualism and cultural awareness among both Romanian and local communities
- Promote civic education and participation - facilitate opportunities to register to vote both in NI, Romanian and EU elections

Throughout the year, BIRC organises a variety of seasonal events aimed at celebrating Romanian culture and encouraging intercultural exchange. These include traditional dance performances, art exhibitions, culinary festivals, and film screenings. Such events not only provide Romanians with a sense of home but also offer the local community an opportunity to experience and appreciate Romanian culture firsthand.

In addition to cultural events, BIRC hosts workshops and seminars in partnership with the local advice sector addressing topics such as employment rights, healthcare and educational opportunities. These sessions are designed to equip the Romanian community with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate life in Northern Ireland successfully. BIRC places a strong emphasis on community engagement, recognising the importance of building relationships between Romanians and the wider Northern Irish community. By collaborating with local organisations, schools, and government agencies, BIRC works to create a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Understanding the challenges that come with relocating to a new country, BIRC offers a range of support services to assist Romanian citizens. These services include translation and interpretation assistance, guidance on accessing public services, and support with employment and housing issues and signposting to good quality immigration advice providers, which has become a crucial need since Brexit and implementation of EU Settlement Scheme.

As the Romanian community in Northern Ireland continues to grow, BIRC remains committed to its mission of promoting intercultural understanding and supporting integration. Future plans include expanding outreach programmes to rural areas, developing online resources for those unable to attend in-person events, and strengthening partnerships with other cultural organisations.

Through unwavering commitment BIRC was successful in making a case to the Romanian authorities for opening a Romanian Consulate in Belfast. This is a great achievement which made a hugely positive difference to the life of many people and also contributes to maintaining their relationship with their homeland as well as Europe.

## European Welfare Association

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At the heart of EWA CIC's educational initiatives is the Polish Saturday School in Walsall, established in 2009.

This supplementary school provides instruction in the Polish language, as well as elements of Polish history and geography, to children and young people aged 3 to 18. The overarching goal is to nurture future ambassadors of Poland abroad, equipping the younger generation to pursue their aspirations while maintaining a strong connection to their Polish heritage.

EWA CIC extends its support beyond education by offering a range of advocacy and support services tailored to the needs of European citizens living in the UK. Understanding the challenges faced by migrants, such as language barriers, access to mainstream services, and issues related to employment and legal matters, the organisation provides guidance and assistance to help individuals navigate these complexities. EWA CIC addresses issues related to social exclusion, unemployment, education, hate crime, and domestic violence, offering advice and support to empower individuals and promote their well-being.

## Key Projects and Initiatives

EWA CIC has been involved in several significant projects aimed at supporting the community:

- **Census 2021:** Assisting the community in understanding and participating in the national census to ensure accurate representation and access to resources.
- **Hate Crime Reporting Centre and 'Speak Out' Initiative**
- **Vaccine Up' Campaign:** Promoting awareness and understanding of vaccinations within the community to enhance public health outcomes.

- **Settled Status Assistance:** Providing guidance to European nationals in securing their residency status post-Brexit, ensuring their rights and access to services are maintained.
- **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL):** Offering English language courses to improve communication skills, enhance employment opportunities, and facilitate better integration into British society.

EWA CIC actively promotes Polish and European culture and heritage by organising a variety of cultural events, such as Polish Picnics in Walsall and Christmas Concerts. By sharing Polish culture, the organisation works against stereotyping to support integration and mutual respect. These events serve as platforms for cultural exchange, fostering mutual understanding and respect between different communities.

In recognition of its outstanding work, EWA CIC was honoured with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVC) in 2017, the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK. This accolade reflects the organisation's dedication to community service and its significant impact on the lives of European immigrants in the region.

## Conclusions

The observations detailed in this report indicate a tendency for increasing engagement of Civil Society Organisations in advocacy and campaigning and reflect a potential for growing movement of collective action and influence. The steady rise in participation rates as the Common Ground project unfolded demonstrates the willingness of CSOs to commit to long-term engagement in advocacy and campaigning for their communities. This trend signifies a robust and developing network of organisations dedicated to championing citizens' rights and related policy issues.

To sustain and further this growth, it is crucial to continue fostering spaces where CSOs can collaborate, strategise, and advocate effectively. Providing resources and structured platforms for engagement, such as working groups, conferences, and outreach events, ensures that CSOs remain active and empowered in their advocacy efforts. Additionally, enabling organisations to form partnerships, share resources, and develop joint campaigns will further enhance their collective impact.

The Common Ground project has successfully nurtured an environment conducive to sustained civil society engagement. However, continued investment in these networks is necessary to maintain momentum and ensure that CSOs have the support and opportunities needed to expand their influence. By strengthening existing platforms and exploring new avenues for collaboration, the influence of civil society in shaping policy and advocating for citizens' rights can continue to grow



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