



Research Article

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Challenges and future prospects of EU Citizenship

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolution, rights, challenges, and future prospects of European Union (EU) citizenship. Tracing its origins from the early stages of European integration to the present day, the paper examines the development of EU citizenship rights and their impact on individuals' lives within the EU. It delves into the rights and benefits conferred by EU citizenship, including free movement, social entitlements, and political participation. Furthermore, the paper discusses the challenges and controversies surrounding EU citizenship, such as citizenship acquisition, integration policies, and the implications of Brexit. Through case studies and comparative analysis, it offers insights into member state practices and legal precedents shaping EU citizenship. Looking ahead, the paper explores potential reforms, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening EU citizenship in the context of evolving European integration. Additionally, it underscores the importance of citizenship education and awareness in fostering civic engagement and promoting a sense of belonging among EU citizens. By providing a comprehensive analysis of EU citizenship, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on European identity and integration, with implications for policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike.

Keywords: EU, integration, EU citizenship, analysis.

1. Introduction

European Union (EU) citizenship stands as a cornerstone of European integration, embodying the principles of freedom, democracy, and solidarity among member states. Since its inception, EU citizenship has evolved from a concept enshrined in treaties to a tangible set of rights and obligations that shape the lives of millions of Europeans. As the EU continues to deepen its integration and face new challenges, the question of EU citizenship has become increasingly pertinent.¹ This paper aims to provide a comprehensive examination of EU citizenship, exploring its historical evolution, rights and benefits, challenges and controversies,

¹ European Union. (n.d.). Citizenship of the European Union. Europa. Retrieved from https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/eu-citizens-rights/eu-citizen/index_en.htm

and future prospects within the context of European integration. By delving into the complexities of EU citizenship, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on European identity and integration, offering insights into the significance of citizenship in shaping the future of the European project. The research question that will guide this research is: "How has EU citizenship evolved over time, and what are its implications for European identity and integration in the 21st century?"

2. Literature

The literature review examines scholarly works, legal texts, and official EU documents relevant to the topic of EU citizenship. Key themes explored include the historical evolution of EU citizenship, rights and benefits conferred by EU citizenship, challenges and controversies surrounding EU citizenship, case studies and comparative analysis of EU citizenship practices, and future prospects for EU citizenship. Case studies and comparative analyses have provided insights into the practices of EU member states regarding the implementation and interpretation of EU citizenship rights. Legal cases and rulings, both at the EU and national levels, have shaped the development of EU citizenship law and jurisprudence.

3. Methodology

The research methodology adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing a systematic literature review methodology to analyze primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources include official EU documents, such as treaties, directives, regulations, and reports, related to EU citizenship. Secondary sources encompass scholarly articles, legal texts, case law, and policy documents from reputable sources. Comparative analysis is utilized to explore variations in EU citizenship practices among member states and to identify best practices and areas for improvement. By synthesizing findings from the literature review, this research paper aims to provide insights into the multifaceted nature of EU citizenship and its implications for European identity and integration.

4 Historical Evolution

The concept of EU citizenship represents a significant milestone in the process of European integration, reflecting the evolving nature of the European Union (EU) and its aspiration to create a sense of European identity and belonging among its citizens. While the roots of EU citizenship can be traced back to the founding treaties of the European Communities, it was not until the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 that the concept was formally introduced and enshrined in EU law. The Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957,² established the European Economic Community (EEC) and laid the groundwork for economic integration among its member states. While the Treaty of Rome did not explicitly address the concept of EU citizenship, it set the stage for deeper integration and cooperation among European nations. Subsequent

treaties, including the Single European Act and the Treaty of Maastricht, further expanded the scope of European integration, paving the way for the introduction of EU citizenship (Miha, 2024). The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992,³ marked a significant turning point in the history of European integration. In addition to establishing the European Union and laying the foundations for economic and monetary union, the Maastricht Treaty introduced the concept of EU citizenship for the first time. Article 8 of the Treaty conferred EU citizenship upon every person holding the nationality of a member state, granting them a set of rights and responsibilities under EU law (Nela, 2024). Subsequent treaty revisions, including the Treaty of Amsterdam,⁴ the Treaty of Nice,⁵ and the Treaty of Lisbon,⁶ further expanded and consolidated the legal framework of EU citizenship. These treaties introduced new rights and protections for EU citizens, such as the right to diplomatic and consular protection, the right to petition the European Parliament, and the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. The development of EU citizenship has also been shaped by landmark court cases and legal interpretations by the European Court of Justice (ECJ). Cases such as *Grzelczyk v Centre public d'aide sociale d'Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve*⁷ and *Rottmann v Freistaat Bayern*⁸ have clarified and expanded the scope of EU citizenship rights, establishing important precedents for future legal developments. Today, EU citizenship represents a fundamental aspect of European identity and integration, providing individuals with a sense of belonging and solidarity within the Union. While challenges and controversies remain, including issues related to citizenship acquisition, integration policies, and Brexit, EU citizenship continues to evolve and adapt to the changing realities of European society.

The historical evolution of EU citizenship reflects the ongoing process of European integration and the gradual expansion of rights and responsibilities for EU citizens. From its origins in the founding treaties to its consolidation in subsequent revisions, EU citizenship has become a defining feature of European identity and solidarity.

5. Rights and Benefits

EU citizenship grants individuals a wide array of rights and benefits aimed at promoting mobility, equality, and participation within the European Union. At its core, EU citizenship represents an additional layer of citizenship that complements national citizenship, providing individuals with a set of rights and responsibilities

³ Treaty on European Union (1992). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:11992M/TXT>

⁴ Treaty of Amsterdam (1997). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l24040>

⁵ Treaty of Nice (2001). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l24022>

⁶ Treaty of Lisbon (2007). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l3A114542>

⁷ *Grzelczyk v Centre public d'aide sociale d'Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve* (2001). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:l3A61998J0267>

⁸ *Rottmann v Freistaat Bayern* (2010). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:l3A62008CJ0414>

that transcend national borders.

EU citizens have the right to move freely within the territory of the European Union, including the right to live, work, and study in any EU member state. This freedom of movement is facilitated by the abolition of internal border controls within the Schengen Area, allowing EU citizens to travel seamlessly across participating countries. EU citizens have the right to vote and stand as candidates in European Parliament elections, as well as local elections in their country of residence. They also have the right to petition the European Parliament and the right to access documents of the European institutions. EU citizens are entitled to diplomatic and consular protection from the diplomatic and consular authorities of any EU member state when outside the EU in a third country where their own country is not represented. They enjoy also a range of social and economic rights, including access to healthcare, education, social security benefits, and employment opportunities across the European Union. These rights are protected under EU law and ensure that EU citizens are treated fairly and equally regardless of their nationality. EU citizenship entitles individuals to certain consumer rights, such as the right to return goods purchased online within a specified period and the right to protection against unfair contract terms and practices. EU citizens benefit from legal protection under EU law, including the right to appeal to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to enforce their rights and challenge actions by EU institutions or member states that violate EU law. EU citizens have the right of family reunification so to be joined by family members, including spouses, children, and dependent relatives, regardless of their nationality. This right ensures that EU citizens can maintain family ties and relationships across borders within the European Union.

Overall, EU citizenship enhances the sense of European identity and solidarity among individuals, promoting cross-border cooperation, mobility, and integration within the European Union. By providing a set of rights and benefits that transcend national boundaries, EU citizenship contributes to the vision of a united and prosperous Europe.

6. Challenges

The process of acquiring EU citizenship can be complex and vary significantly among member states, leading to disparities in access and eligibility criteria. Some EU citizens, particularly migrants and minorities, may face challenges in meeting the residency and language requirements necessary for citizenship acquisition, hindering their full integration into society.

Despite efforts to promote integration, disparities persist among EU member states in their integration policies and practices, leading to unequal access to rights and opportunities for certain groups of citizens. Also marginalized communities, including ethnic minorities and migrants, may experience social exclusion and discrimination, exacerbating integration challenges and undermining the cohesion of EU societies (Kiri, 2023).

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the EU, commonly referred to as Brexit, has raised concerns about the loss of EU citizenship rights for UK nationals residing in EU member states and vice versa. Uncertainty remains regarding the future status of UK nationals living in the EU and EU citizens residing in the UK, particularly concerning their rights to residency, employment, healthcare, and social security benefits post-Brexit (EU, 2021).

Dual and multiple nationalities present legal complexities and challenges, including issues related to jurisdictional conflicts, consular protection, and voting rights, particularly in the context of EU citizenship and cross-border mobility. Dual nationals may face questions about their loyalty and allegiance to multiple countries, leading to debates about the implications of dual nationality for national identity and citizenship responsibilities. Many EU citizens may lack awareness of their rights and obligations as EU citizens, leading to underutilization of EU citizenship rights and limited civic engagement in EU decision-making processes. Enhancing citizenship education and awareness initiatives is crucial for promoting active citizenship, fostering a sense of European identity, and strengthening the legitimacy of EU institutions among citizens.

Addressing these challenges and controversies requires coordinated efforts by EU institutions, member states, civil society organizations, and stakeholders to ensure inclusive citizenship policies, promote social cohesion, and uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination within the European Union.

7. Case Studies and Analysis

In examining Member State practices regarding EU citizenship, it is evident that legal interpretations and implementations vary across the European Union. In France, the concept of EU citizenship has undergone legal scrutiny, notably in the landmark case of [Rottman v. Freistaat Bayern]⁹ where the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) affirmed the autonomous nature of EU citizenship rights and their importance in the context of EU law. Similarly, Germany's approach to EU citizenship has been shaped by its national constitutional framework. The Federal Constitutional Court's ruling in the [Solange II case]¹⁰ emphasized the primacy of EU law while highlighting the need for a balance between EU integration and national sovereignty. The examination of Member State practices regarding EU citizenship underscores the diverse approaches and legal frameworks at play within the European Union. While EU citizenship rights are enshrined in EU law, their interpretation and implementation are shaped by the legal traditions and constitutional principles of individual Member States. This diversity enriches the European legal landscape but also underscores the ongoing dialogue and cooperation necessary to ensure the effective protection and realization of EU citizenship rights across the Union.

Several legal cases have played a significant role in shaping EU citizenship rights

⁹ [Rottman v. Freistaat Bayern, Case C-135/08, 2010] <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=79849&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=162340>

¹⁰ [Solange II case, BVerfGE 73, 339, 1982] <https://www.servat.unibe.ch/dfr/bv073339.html>

and obligations. The case of [Zambrano v. Office national de l'emploi]¹¹ marked a milestone in EU citizenship law. The CJEU established the principle that EU citizens residing in their own Member State could rely on their rights as EU citizens to prevent their expulsion, even if they were not exercising free movement rights under EU law. Furthermore, the judgment in [Carpenter v. Secretary of State for the Home Department]¹² clarified the criteria for acquiring EU citizenship rights through naturalization. The CJEU affirmed that a genuine link to the Member State concerned is essential for the acquisition of such rights.

8. Future Prospects

The future prospects of EU citizenship entail ongoing reforms aimed at addressing existing challenges and strengthening the concept of EU citizenship (European Commission, 2020). Efforts to streamline and harmonize citizenship acquisition processes across member states are underway to promote greater consistency and inclusivity (European Union, 2021). Additionally, initiatives to enhance integration policies and combat social exclusion are being pursued to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all EU citizens (European Parliament, 2019).

Challenges persist in the form of legal complexities surrounding dual and multiple nationalities, necessitating continued dialogue and cooperation among EU institutions and member states (European Union Democracy Observatory on Citizenship, 2018). Furthermore, uncertainties stemming from Brexit underscore the importance of clarifying the rights and status of UK nationals and EU citizens in a post-Brexit landscape (European Union, 2021).

Strengthening EU citizenship entails fostering a sense of belonging and active participation among citizens through citizenship education and awareness initiatives (European Commission, 2018). By promoting civic engagement and enhancing awareness of rights and responsibilities, the EU aims to bolster the legitimacy of its institutions and promote cohesion among its diverse population (European Economic and Social Committee, 2020).

9. Citizenship Education

Citizenship education plays a crucial role in empowering individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate actively in democratic processes and civic life. By educating citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of democratic institutions, citizenship education helps instill democratic

¹¹ [Zambrano v. Office national de l'emploi (ONEm), Case C-34/09, 2011] <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=97404&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=516879>

¹² [Carpenter v. Secretary of State for the Home Department, Case C-60/00, 2002] <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=43569&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=470150>

values such as equality, tolerance, and respect for human rights. Citizenship education contributes to building inclusive and cohesive societies by fostering a sense of belonging, understanding, and solidarity among diverse communities.

Citizenship education raises awareness among EU citizens about their rights as EU citizens, including the right to free movement, residency, employment, and participation in EU decision-making processes. By providing knowledge about the legal and political framework of the EU, citizenship education empowers citizens to exercise their rights effectively and engage in informed civic action. In the digital age, citizenship education also encompasses digital literacy and awareness of digital rights and responsibilities, including online privacy, data protection, and digital participation in democratic processes.

Citizenship education encourages active participation in civic life through volunteerism, community service, and advocacy for social and political causes. Targeted citizenship education initiatives engage young people in democratic processes, encouraging their participation in youth councils, student government, and grassroots activism. Promoting media literacy is essential for citizenship education, enabling citizens to critically evaluate information, media messages, and sources, and participate in media-rich democratic discourse.

Citizenship education is a cornerstone of democratic societies and an essential tool for building an inclusive, informed, and engaged citizenry within the European Union. By promoting awareness of EU rights and responsibilities, fostering civic engagement, and nurturing a sense of European identity, citizenship education contributes to the vitality and resilience of European democracy.

10. Conclusion

European Union (EU) citizenship stands as a beacon of democracy, solidarity, and inclusion within the European project. From its inception as a concept enshrined in treaties to its evolution as a tangible set of rights and obligations, EU citizenship has played a pivotal role in shaping the lives of millions of Europeans and promoting the values of freedom, democracy, and solidarity across borders. Through this research paper, we have explored the multifaceted nature of EU citizenship, examining its historical evolution, rights and benefits, challenges and controversies, case studies and legal analyses, future prospects, and the importance of citizenship education. The historical evolution of EU citizenship reflects the ongoing process of European integration, marked by milestones such as the Maastricht Treaty and subsequent treaty revisions that have expanded and strengthened the legal framework of EU citizenship. However, challenges and controversies remain, including issues related to citizenship acquisition, integration policies, rising nationalism, Brexit, and the need to enhance citizenship education and awareness. Looking ahead, there are opportunities for reforms, such as streamlining citizenship acquisition procedures, expanding rights and protections, addressing challenges posed by rising nationalism and Euroscepticism, mitigating the impact of Brexit, and

promoting civic education and engagement. Strengthening EU citizenship is essential for fostering social cohesion, promoting democratic values, and advancing the vision of a united and prosperous Europe.

In conclusion, EU citizenship is not merely a legal status but a symbol of shared values and aspirations that bind Europeans together. By embracing the principles of freedom, democracy, and solidarity, and by promoting active citizenship and civic engagement, we can build a more inclusive, resilient, and democratic European Union for generations to come.

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