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The EU migrants Political Participation at the Local Level in Post-Brexit England: A Comparative Analysis of the Institutional Effects in Four Local Authorities.

by

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Abstract

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The Migration Observatory estimates that at the end of 2022 the number of EU-born migrants in the UK was 4 million, 6% of the population and 37% of all foreign-born residents. EU migrants who resided in the UK before Brexit still retain the right to vote and stand in elections at the local level. However, despite representing well over 10% of the population in many British towns, little is known about their engagement with local authorities and their participation in local politics. The limited data available are not particularly comforting. EU migrants' electoral registration rate is lower than both British citizens. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of elected Councillors born in the EU is extremely low compared to the size of the EU migrants' population, with only a handful of cases mostly concentrated in London.

Besides being at odds with democratic principles, the political underrepresentation of such a large minority is also problematic from a democratic practice perspective. The lack of responsiveness of local authorities to EU migrants' political demands can lead to the social and economic marginalisation of the most vulnerable individuals. Meanwhile, at the national level, the quick rise of grassroots organisations advocating EU migrants' rights, like the *3million* and *Settled*, demonstrated how in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum EU migrants made their entrance into the British political arena, but questions remain about their relevance beyond Brexit.

This thesis reports the results of a mixed-methods study that fills this gap in the literature about migrants' political participation. The methodology applied was two-fold: the first phase consisted in a web content analysis (WCA) of the administrative support offered during the EUSS period by the 341 English local authorities; the second phase was a comparative analysis of four English local authorities.

The WCA revealed how nationwide the support for EU migrants was scarce and mostly lead by the results of the Brexit referendum (Remain councils were more supportive than Leave councils). Then, using the WCA results I selected four local councils (Coventry, Haringey, Portsmouth, and Torbay) as a sample for a small-n in-depth comparative analysis. This included conducting 50 semi-structured interviews with EU migrants, EU migration experts, council officers, and Councillors. The comparative part of the study showed that English local authorities tend to consider EU migrants as 'transient economic migrants', self-sufficient and disinterested in local politics. These

perceptions, based on anecdotes and personal biases rather than actual data or repeated experiences, make EU migrants less worth engaging than non-EU migrant communities, seen instead as more permanent and committed to their host society. As a result, council actors (elected Councillors and council officers) tend to neglect EU migrants in favour of non-EU migrant communities with regard to integration policies, administrative support, outreach, and political campaigning.

Councils' neglect, cultural distrust of politics and politicians, and limited 'bridging' social capital make most EU migrants politically quiescent. Their invisibility to council actors creates a feedback loop that reinforces the initial perceptions of EU migrants being temporary residents with no interest in local politics, which further fuels political marginalisation. Moreover, because of their former status of mobile citizens, EU migrants appear to be lacking the social capital that has helped other migrant communities to self-organise and become vocal political constituencies for British local institutions. Some of them even believe that they should not engage with local politics because they are 'guest', not residents. I called this phenomenon the 'Mirror Illegitimacy', as it replicates the arguments used by council's actors to justify their inactivity with EU migrants.

However, a surprising silver lining may come from Brexit: interviews with Councillors hinted to the fact that EU migrants who stayed despite Brexit or moved to the UK after Brexit might be now seen as permanent rather than transient residents with the same 'civic legitimacy' of other non-EU migrant groups, hence opening an institutional engagement path that could lead to their political incorporation. The proposed theoretical model presented at the end of the thesis posits that institutional and political neglect render EU migrants invisible to public authorities and generally disengaged with local politics. This negative effect is on the one hand reinforced by 'Mirror Illegitimacy', and on the other possibly mitigated by the 'Brexit Effect'.

These findings raise important questions about the future political integration of European citizens in post-Brexit England and about the capacity of local governments to account for their views and needs in their decision-making process. Although the qualitative nature of the enquiry does not allow a generalisation of the results beyond the four cases , it represents a useful starting point for a large-n quantitative analysis to verify if the theoretical model developed in this thesis is applicable across the whole UK. Future comparative studies should look into similarities or differences between the political behaviours of EU migrants in the UK and EU migrants in current EU member states. The thesis concludes with four key recommendations to local government to increase EU migrants' political participation: inform them about their political rights; proactively engage with visible EU communities; include them in integration and welfare programmes; and celebrate them through institutional discourse and symbolic acts.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Michele Zadra

Title of thesis: The EU migrants Political Participation at the Local Level in Post-Brexit England: A Comparative Analysis of the Institutional Effects in Four Local Authorities.

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: *Michele Zadra*..... Date: 17/12/2024

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This PhD has been a rollercoaster, no doubts about that. It was never smooth sailing, and there was not a boring day. Exactly how I expected it to be. It has been stressful, challenging, emotionally draining, but I did enjoy it the journey and, looking back, I would everything the same (well, maybe not everything…). At the beginning of the journey I thought that doing a PhD was the best decision I ever took in my life (second only to support AC Milan of course). Fast forward four years, and I haven't changed my mind a bit. I love politics and I love social research, and I hope that this PhD will allow me to keep doing it until I retire (when I'll be 85, probably…).

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Finally, a special pat on the shoulder…to myself. Doing a PhD has been a dream of mine for many years, since when I failed my first attempt in 2010, at the Birmingham University. This time, I wanted to have another go, but I was really unsure I could do it. I did not know if I had it in me. And yet, here I am. It has taken 14 years, 3 countries in 2 continents, a marriage, a baby, lots of tears and lots of laughter to get to today, but, eventually, I made it.

The saying 'better late than never' could not be a more appropriate description of my road to the PhD.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father Felice, who passed away in 2016, before I started my PhD journey. He would have been proud of me. I still miss him every day.

Questa tesi e' per te, papa'.

Definitions and Abbreviations

A8 migrants..... Natives of the 8 Central and Easter European countries that joined the EU on the 1st of May 2004.

A2 migrants..... Natives of Bulgaria and Romania.

CEEP ..... Polish and Eastern European Christian Family Centre.

Council actors..... Elected councillors and council's employees.

CSO..... Civil Society Organisation.

DIs ..... Democratic Innovations

EU..... European Union.

EU15 ..... 15 European countries that were member of the EU before 2004. Due to the UK leaving the EU, since 2001 EU15 have become EU14. For clarity and consistency I identified EU14 countries as EU15 throughout the thesis.

EU27 ..... 27 countries currently members of the EU.

EUSS ..... EU Settlement Scheme.

EU migrant..... Any individual born in the European Union who has established their main residence in the UK for at least for 12 months. The definition is adapted from the UN definition of long-term international migrant (unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/concerns/migration).

IMD ..... Index of Multiple Deprivation.

POS..... Political Opportunity Structure.

SES..... Socio-Economic Status.

WCA ..... Web Content Analysis.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis provides a neo-institutionalist account of why political marginalisation affects EU migrants more than other foreign-born communities in the UK, and how Brexit might be changing the way local institutions relate with Europeans, and not necessarily for the worse. Initially, it is important to establish why this research is needed, and why it is relevant for scholars of migrants' political participation, politics practitioners and local policymakers alike. This first chapter lays out the rationale for pursuing this doctoral project and highlights its timeliness and relevance, after Brexit and the first visible political mobilisation of EU migrants ever in the UK. After justifying why this research is needed, the chapter then explains why the focus on local democracy and what are the four research questions that I tried to answer. The last section outlines the research plan chapter by chapter.

1.2 Why EU Migrants Political Participation Matters

Political inclusiveness and effective participation are two pillars of modern democracy (Dahl, 1989). A functioning democracy requires that every member of a polity has equal right to participate in the collective decision-making process, either by electing representatives or by directly contributing to the formation of political outputs.

As it happens, these normative principles tend not to apply fully to contemporary Western democracies. As put by Smith and Wales: 'Expressions of economic power and social influence undermine significantly the assumption of political equality on which representative forms are frequently defended' (2000, p. 51). As a result, non-native residents, who often lack social influence and economic power, are excluded from the democratic life of their country of residence and from the formulation of public policies that concern them: 'migrant communities are among the most politically marginalized in Western politics' (Spierings, 2016, p. 13). On a normative level, this is a worrying phenomenon: to be legitimate, decisions must be appraised by those who are bound to respect them (Lafont, 2017). It follows that the lack of participation of a consistent part of the population undermines the democratic legitimacy of policy choices (Ruedin, 2018; Ortensi & Riniolo, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of representation and 'voice' in the policy-making process make instances and interests of disenfranchised minorities like migrants overlooked or ignored (Smith and Wales, 2000). Political marginalisation can in turn induce the exclusion of groups of migrants from the social and economic fabric of their polity (*ibid*.).

The consequences of political marginalisation can be harmful for all foreign-born communities. Despite the persistence of the EU in calling intra-EU movers 'mobile EU citizens' instead of EU migrants, to promote the idea of a single European citizenship propelled by the freedom of movement principle and to reinforce the reputation of EU migrants as privileged foreign-residents (Balch, 2018), at an empirical level EU migrants do not differ much from migrants coming from outside the Union. Like other migrant communities, EU migrants are still subject to 'inequalities and hierarchies within European citizenship' (*ibid.*, p. 162). In these regards, Brexit represents a perfect example of the dangers of disenfranchisement and political invisibility of the four million of first-generation migrants from the EU who live in the UK, in particular for the most vulnerable (O' Brian, 2021; Zuther, 2022). Brexit has exposed the risk for those with low skilled jobs, low education, lack of fluency in English, and IT illiteracy of being 'left behind' (Barnard et al., 2019). It is not too dramatic to claim that the cascade effect of the UK living the EU has the nefarious potential to become one day another Windrush generation scandal, while still disrupting the lives of thousands of individuals and families. One figure is enough to exemplify the size of the problem: just 1% unsuccess rate of applications to the EU Settlement Scheme[1] could mean up to 50,000 EU migrants becoming illegal denizens (Barnard et al., 2022). It all started because non-British citizens, non-Irish and non-Commonwealth citizens were not allowed to vote at the 2016 EU Exit referendum. Given the close result (52%-48%), there is an extremely high chance that millions of additional EU migrants' votes would have reverted the result in favour of Remain (Low, 2016). This single life-altering political event shows how migrants' political rights and migrants' political participation matter. Low (2017) even compared the disenfranchisement in the Brexit referendum to a violation of human rights. Nevertheless, at the local level EU migrants who resided in the UK before 2021[2] do maintain full suffrage rights (they can vote and run for a seat in the Council), hence it is important to know if and how they participate in local politics, and analyse why they do or they do not.

[1] The EUSS is the mass regularisation programme for EU migrants living in the UK before 01/01/2021 launched by the Home Office in 2019. It is the largest identity verification exercise ever undertaken by a state government. As of 31st December 2023, the EUSS had processed 7.7 million applications from an estimated 6.2 million people, and granted 5.7 million temporary and permanent residence permits. Source: the3million.org.uk/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics [accessed on 14/05/2024].

[2] Also citizens who moved to Britain after 01/01/2021 from countries that signed bilateral agreements on mutual citizens' rights with the UK. As of May 2024 the UK governments has signed agreement with Luxembourg, Spain, Poland and Portugal. Source: commonslibrary.parliament.uk/can-eu-citizens-take-part-in-uk-elections-after-brexit [accessed on 14/05/24].

1.3 The Political Marginalisation of EU migrants in UK

Because of the UK's past membership to the EU, until the 1st of January 2021 EU migrants had a different legal status from non-EU migrants. Differently from other groups of non-EU migrants[3], following the introduction of the European citizenship through the Maastricht treaty in 1992 EU migrants who reside in another EU country enjoy suffrage rights at European and local elections (Collard, 2013). For the UK, the partial franchising of migrants with EU citizenship means that an additional 4 million people (6% of the whole population and 39% of all foreigners living in the UK)[4] are included in the democratic life of their local community.

Even though the enfranchisement of mobile EU migrants happened almost three decades ago, their political integration in the country of residence is still far from being achieved. Studies of electoral data from local elections of several major EU countries, such as Italy, Belgium, France, Netherlands, Sweden and Spain (Collard, 2013; Dancygier et al., 2015; Mendez Lago & Perez-Nievas, 2011; Nikolic, 2015; Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020; Seidle, 2015; Vintila et al., 2024), indicate that across Europe migrants are less engaged with local politics than native citizens. This phenomenon also affects the UK, where EU migrants' turnout at local elections is on average 10% lower that of British voters (Collard, 2013; Ziegler, 2018). In a report published in 2022, Benson, Craven and Sigona in which they claimed 'a strong level of political participation by EU citizens in the UK' (2022, p. 4), because 83% of respondents to their survey claimed they voted in the last local elections. However, this percentage is very unlikely to be realistic: not only the sample is quite small (365 responses), not randomised and statistically not representative of the EU-born population, but the result is probably further skewed by a self-selection bias. A survey on Brexit, politics and political participation in the UK is always going to attract respondents who are already interested in politics, hence more likely to vote than the average person.

According to the Electoral Commission, in 2022 the EU migrants registration rate in the electoral roll was 70%, four points more than Commonwealth citizens (66%), but 17% less than British nationals (87%)[5]. It is a substantial improvement since the previous survey (2018), when only 54% of potential EU voters was registered in the electoral roll. The reasons of this boost of electoral registrations are merely speculative at this stage, but might be linked to the 'Brexit effect' I report about in section 8.3., or to a change in the demographic composition of the population due to EU

[3] EU citizens are not the most 'privileged' migrants in terms of electoral rights. Commonwealth citizens can vote in General Elections and national referenda.

[4] Source: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk [accessed on 17/02/2024].

[5] Source: electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/electoral-registration-research/accuracy-and-completeness-electoral-registers/2023-report-electoral-registers-uk [accessed on 06/06/2024].

migrants leaving the UK after Brexit[6]. Moreover, in the UK people register for reasons unrelated to voting, for instance to improve their credit rating (James & Bernal, 2020), an instrumental approach confirmed by several EU migrants during the interviews. A higher electoral registration rate is a good aggregate proxy of political participation, but does not necessarily entail a higher voting turnout.

Despite the considerable gap in electoral registration and their under-representation in parliament, Commonwealth citizens were found to have remarkably similar participation patterns to white British citizens, both in terms of formal (voting, party/union membership) and informal forms of participation (protests, petitions, boycotts, etc.). These levels of political engagement are consistent even in the 1.5[7] and 2nd generations (Heath et al., 2013). The picture seems bleaker for EU migrants: a study from the CSO *The3Millions* reported a consistent and significant percentage gap between the share of EU migrants in the local population and the share of EU migrants in the electoral registers, together with a lack of EU migrants elected as Councillors in the ten councils with the largest EU communities in England, which is indicative of a participation gap compared to both natives and other non-native groups (Gergs & Bulat, 2020). A second report on this topic, again by *The3Millions*, investigated the potential reasons behind this participation gap using qualitative methods (expert interviews and focus groups). The charity concluded that EU migrants are largely unaware of their electoral rights at local level, feel unrepresented due to the absence of EU migrants as elected Councillors and believe the perceived lack of interest in local politics by politicians is a disincentive to run awareness campaigns about electoral rights across the EU communities. Furthermore, because of the disinterest in EU migrants, local politicians tend to ignore EU groups when they allocate funding for migrants integration and political education programmes (Bulat & Dzhingozyan, 2020).

1.4 The Importance of Being Represented

The limited political engagement of EU migrants put them at risk of being unrepresented and unheard within the decision-making institutions. From a normative perspective, having a significative minority of the population that is not having a say on decisions that they are nonetheless obliged to respect undermines the democratic legitimacy of British local authorities. As Nguyen Long maintains: 'Political representation is a tenet of democracy. As a standard of

[6] The net flow of EU migrants to the UK has been negative since 2021 and the number of EU immigrants fell by 70% since the peak of entries in 2016. Source: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk [accessed on 06/06/2024].

[7] The term '1.5 generation migrant' refers to individuals who were born in a different country from where they currently reside but moved to their new country of residence before they were 10 (Ellis & Goodwin-White, 2006).

fairness, it is fundamentally married to ideas of legitimacy in governance' (2016, p. 819). Political underrepresentation, or no representation at all, is a common problem of foreign communities across Western countries (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011; Monforte & Morales, 2018), and EU migrants in the UK are no exception. The inability to vote in the Brexit referendum represented the epitome of electoral disenfranchisement and a lack of democratic representation of EU migrants. A 2021 survey revealed how not being able to have a say in such unprecedented and pivotal political event:

> *Left a mark on many EU citizens* […] *Survey data show what they do not feel well-represented, neither individually nor as a group* (Bueltmann & Bulat, 2021, p. 19).

According to the survey, 90% of EU migrants feel either 'entirely' unrepresented or 'not well' represented in British politics (*ibid*.). These are doubtlessly worrying numbers, which add gravity to the increasing sense of rejection and alienation generated by Brexit (*ibid*.). The respondents' perception reflects the reality: in absence of official statistics, anecdotal evidence suggests that considering the size of the population, EU migrants are elected in the local councils extremely rarely, mainly because they tend not to run for public offices[8].

Together with direct (referenda) or indirect (elections) political participation, representation is a key variable to achieve political equality among all social groups. The concept of 'representation' in politics is often intended in descriptive terms, i.e. when the representative shares one or more key demographic features of the represented, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and age (Brown, 2006). For politically marginalised groups like migrants, descriptive representation symbolises a democratic system open to anyone rather than reserved only to privileged citizens. In turn, this 'like-me' effect increases the perceived legitimacy of policymaking processes, raises political interest, and improves relationships with public institutions (Mewhirter et al., 2022; Pow et al., 2020).

As Hanna Pitkin established in 1967 in her pivotal book *'The Concept of Representation'*, political representation is not limited to its descriptive nature. The Germany-born author famously argued that: 'representing means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (1967, p. 209). This definition of political representation is 'symbolic', as it requires 'standing in' for the represented rather than just resemble them (Chandhoke, 2009). Instead of descriptive cues and perceived likeness, symbolic representation demands an emotional recognition of the symbol by

[8] Anecdotal data kindly provided by a representative of the charity *Migrant Project Democracy*.

the represented group[9] (Stokke & Selboe, 2009), and entails an understanding of the cultural, social and economic experiences of the constituents (Brown, 2006). In the case of substantive representation, i.e. 'acting for' the represented by protecting their 'best interests' (Pitkin, 1967), a representative does not need symbolic recognition from the represented. Despite the fact that that substantive representation is a rather normative and abstract concept, tricky to measure using policy impact as a metrics (Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou, 2010; Sobolewska, McKee and Campbell, 2018), it has been empirically proven that descriptive/symbolic and substantive representation are usually correlated (Minta, 2009; Saalfeld and Bischof, 2013; Chaney, 2015; Sobolewska, McKee and Campbell, 2018). It follows that elected representatives can represent the worldviews and demands of a specific group of people even if they do not belong to it. Conversely, political representation does not need to happen within elected assemblies. Non-elected leaders can represent the interests of their community by influencing public authorities on their behalf[10]. Community leaders are perceived by political actors as 'intermediaries' who gather demands, facilitate integration and generate electoral support (Uhlaner, 2012). The roles of elected and non-elected representatives are complementary and mutually beneficial: native Councillors gather information and political demands from community leaders, whereas community leaders obtain in return favourable political outcomes for their members, reinforce their role of unelected representatives of their community and create opportunities to run for office themselves (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011).

Nevertheless, descriptive representation in legislative assemblies is needed to warrant fair policy outcomes. A true understanding of social disadvantages comes only from sharing the experiences and the conditions that generate inequalities (e.g. can a non-disabled person understand the lived experience of a disabled person?). Consequently, some level of description is a pre-requisite for both symbolic and substantive representation, because it enables the protection of specific interests at risk of neglect or suppression and the empowerment of marginalised groups (Phillips, 2020). For this reason, the scarcity of EU migrants in local councils is no less important than the limited political engagement.

[9] A paradigm of a 'symbolic' representative was John F. Kennedy, who in the 1960s was regarded by the Afro-American community as a 'cultural hero' – only second to Martin Luther King - despite being a privileged white person (Van Deburg, 2008) .

[10] An example of the former is a Councillor who has knowledge of, and insight from, a particular ethnic group, even though that person is not a member of their community. In this case, even without descriptive representation the ethnic group's interests can still be defended.

1.5 EU Migrants Mobilisation After the EU Referendum

The legal status of EU migrants in the UK has changed radically since 1st January 2021, when the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement came into force after an 11-month transition period. An immediate effect of the Withdrawal Agreement was the end of freedom of movement for EU migrants. From that moment on, EU migrants entering the territory of the UK with the intention to live and work in the country are subject to the current immigration law and need to obtain a residence permit to stay beyond 90 days, just as any other non-EU migrant. Undoubtedly, the Brexit referendum represented an unprecedent shock to the EU community in Britain (Ranta & Nancheva, 2019; Zontini & Genova, 2022). Sense of rejection and perceived hostility became common experiences for EU migrants (Guma & Dafydd Jones, 2019; Zontini & Genova, 2022).

We know that widespread hostility from native residents stimulates migrants' political mobilisation (Tyrberg, 2020). This seismic event was a rude political awakening of many EU migrants living in the UK, who decided to vigorously manifest their deep dissent towards an unsettling and potentially life-changing decision (Grabowska & Ryan, 2024) in which they were not allowed to have say. In this sense, Brexit created an unprecedented political context that 'redefined the opportunities and modalities of [EU] citizens' political participation, both formally and informally' (Benson et al., 2022, p. 11) Thousands of EU migrants joined British citizens equally disappointed with the outcome of referendum in a series of marches across the country (in particular in London). It was the first time in the history of the EU that citizens mobilised in defence of the EU political project, in the name of an ideal of European identity (Benson et al., 2022; Craven et al., 2022). The same mobilisation occurred on social media, where numerous groups of anti-Brexit activists were created to support the mobilisation happening on the streets (Craven et al., 2022; Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2021). For millions of Europeans, the sudden discovery of the fragility of their long-standing residency and mobility rights, never put under discussion before, generated anxiety about their future and spurred the necessity to organise a vocal response (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2020). The perceived dangers of Brexit prompted the self-organisation of EU migrants in a series of advocacy organisations, like *The3Million*, *The European Movement*, and *Settled* (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2021). The main goal of these charities was to lobby UK and the EU negotiators to protect the existing rights of EU migrants. Facing the same dilemmas than EU migrants in the UK, British citizens living in EU countries launched their own charity, *British in Europe*. The *3Million,* in particular, became the *de facto* unofficial representative body of EU migrants in the UK[11], a role legitimised by the EU

[11] An emerging literature on the effects of the UK exit from the EU (Craven et al., 2022; Ranta & Nancheva, 2019; Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2020, 2022) argues that Brexit created a brand-new constituency, the EU migrants, whose interests are unrepresented in national politics because of the lack of franchising in general elections and national referenda.

Commission invite to take part to the post-EU referendum negotiations (*ibid.*). After the Withdrawal Agreement's entry in force on 1st of January 2021 and once the residency status for the large majority of EU migrants was sorted through the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), the political momentum behind advocacies such as *the3million* seems to have waned. Some went out of business (i.e. *British in Europe*), others kept functioning as free legal support for EUSS-related matters with no visibility on the national debate, having lost their political *raison d'etre* (Benson et al., 2022; Craven et al., 2022).

In the longer term, Brexit is likely to aggravate the risk of political marginalisation of EU migrants. On the one hand, without the legal obligation arising from the EU treaties the British government has now the power to deny EU migrants of local electoral rights with a simple stroke of a pen. In this scenario, then at least four million people will be left disenfranchised not only in national politics (the current status quo) but also in sub-national elections. As a result local authorities would completely ignore their views and needs. On the other hand, the negative, at times xenophobic, political climate towards EU migrants generated by the Brexit debate (Benedi Lahuerta and Iusmen, 2021), may fuel 'the development of feelings of exclusion towards the place of residence among people who experienced discrimination' (Pilati and Herman, 2020, p. 107).

The pervasive lack of political participation might be also a symptom of a growing sense of exclusion of EU migrants from the fabric of the British society. Evidence of this phenomenon is seen for example in the distrust of EU-born residents towards the fairness of the UK judiciary system: not only EU migrants vote less than British citizens in local elections and are underrepresented in local councils, but they are also more reluctant than British citizens to assert their rights through the judicial process (Barnard and Butlin, 2020). This feeling of exclusion, exacerbated by the Brexit process, can induce in EU migrants further emotional detachment from the host country, withdrawal from democratic life, and reduced trust in the rule of law, ultimately manifested in the refusal to defend their employment rights in court (*ibid.*).

The Brexit process has ignited a synchronous phenomenon of increasing self-identification as 'EU migrants' on the one hand (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2020, 2022) and of resentment towards the host country on the other (Browning, 2018; Benedi Lahuerta and Iusmen, 2021), which might put EU migrants' integration in the UK under severe stress. As Ranta and Nancheva put it:

> […] *in the process of reconstituting belonging, the individual decisions of more than three million U.K. residents excluded in the context of Brexit become politically relevant; the impact of which remains to be fully understood* (2019, p. 9).

What we already know is that EU migrants tend not only to vote and run for office less than British citizens and Commonwealth migrants in local elections do, but they are also less engaged with other forms of political participation, including participatory mechanisms run by local governments. In

particular, those with a lower socioeconomic status are the most detached from the host country politics (Alaminos et al., 2018). Considering the statistics on EU migrants' political participation presented above, the uncertainty about their future legal status in the UK, the development of a group identity as 'EU migrants', and the loss of sense of belonging in their host country triggered by Brexit, it is not an exaggeration to state that EU migrants in the UK are at risk of political marginalisation.

1.6 Why the Local Level?

This project investigates the nature of local political participation of EU migrants living in England. The choice of the local level over the national one might seem counterintuitive. Despite of the lack of suffrage in national consultations (but maybe also because of that), after the EU referendum, EU migrants mobilised nationally to influence Westminster politics and have become a much more recognisable political constituency (Craven et al., 2022; Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2022). This section explains why I took the conceptual and methodological choice to focus on local rather than national politics.

The literature shows that, historically, citizens have snubbed local politics, in favour of national politics, perceived as more salient. A consistently lower turnout at municipal and regional elections is a good thermometer of the lower ranking of importance of these electoral events among electors (Kouba et al., 2021; Parsons & Rumbul, 2021). Reif and Schmitt (1980) characterised local elections (but also European elections) as 'second order' in respect of national elections, because of the widespread perception that there is 'less at stake' than in national elections. Heath et al. confirmed Reif and Schmitt's hypothesis, but found that, at least in the UK, voters saw local elections as more 'salient' than European elections (1999). Notwithstanding these arguments, I argue that, in light of the ongoing decline of representative democracy, understanding local political participation is particularly important, as towns, districts and counties are the communities where the successes or the shortcomings of institutional efforts to revitalise citizen engagement are more visible (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2006). Even Reifs and Schmitt conceded that:

> [In local politics] *there is less at stake to be sure, but there is still something at stake, nevertheless. Local councils and mayors often make decisions on important matters* (1980, p. 10).

It is logical to investigate the political participation of EU migrants at the local level, because, as of 2024, it is still the only level of government where they have full suffrage rights. Indeed, many thousands EU migrants took the streets or joined online groups to protest against Brexit, and that in itself is a fascinating social phenomenon to study, but many more vote (or do not) in their

boroughs and in their counties. Despite the falling turnout, voting still is the most popular form of political participation (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018), and arguably the real litmus test of a democratic system's health (Solijonov, 2016). For Europeans, the chance of directly influencing decisions that affect their life is limited to voting in local elections, lobbying the Councillors they contributed to elect, or respond to consultations launched by their local government. I therefore argue that sub-national entities are the most relevant system of democratic governance for studying the political participation of non-citizens residents in a country, above the national one.

Local administrations are also the level of government closest to the citizenry and the most likely to generate participation (Panagiotopoulos and Al-Debei, 2010). Famously, in his seminal paper 'The city and the future of Democracy', Dahl argued that: 'The smaller the unit the greater the opportunity for citizens to participate in the decisions of their government' (1967, p. 960). The prevalence of the local dimension over the national or supranational ones in terms of political participation has been confirmed also empirically: 80% of all citizens' interactions with public institutions of any sort (traditional and innovative, online and offline) happen at local level (Shahin, Soebech and Millard, 2009). Local political participation is thereby intended in the most extensive meaning, namely any form of engagement with local authorities meant to influence democratic decision-making processes. Even when considering virtual participation on the Internet (e-Democracy), which eliminates citizens' need for physical proximity to the political institution, the local dimension remains at the forefront of scholarly interest on innovative ways for increasing public engagement. The local level offers more opportunities for participation and for government responsiveness than the national one, regardless of the channels used for government-to-citizens, citizens-to-government, and citizens-to-citizens communications. This phenomenon is quite intuitive: because of the smaller size of local administrations, a citizen is more likely to establish a direct dialogue with their Council than the central government. It is arguably easier to talk in front of a local scrutiny and review panel than in front of a parliamentary commission, or to reach a signature threshold for a petition addressed to the Council than one addressed to the Government, or to get a reply to an enquiry from the Leader of the Council than the Prime Minister.

In general, most citizens are locally orientated, more attached to their closer community, feel they have a higher political efficacy at local than national level (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2006; Kelleher and Lowery, 2009), and are more knowledgeable of local issues than national issues (Andrews, Entwistle and Guarneros-Meza, 2019). Due to the closeness of local officials to citizens' most urgent demands, local democracy is also regarded as a good indicator of the overall health of democracy in a country and the best arena for learning and practicing civic skills (Åström and Grönlund, 2011). For John (2006) local governments are a suitable size for political research, because of the greater observability of the effects of political processes ('propinquity') and the

easier generalisation of findings given by the high number of homogeneous entities available for comparison within the same nation ('numerability').

More crucially, the local dimension is 'a laboratory for democratic innovation' (Kersting, 2016, p. 251), the most appropriate government level for increasing citizens engagement using the Internet (Falco and Kleinhans, 2018), and optimal for studying migrants' political activity (Morales and Giugni, 2011). The local dimension is also where political integration of migrants happens in practice (Koopmans, 2004). Municipalities are the democratic institutions that first experience the challenges brought by immigration and that execute the policies that have the biggest impact on migrants: '…local policies, local institutional settings and the prevailing public discourses at the local level can importantly shape the pace, intensity and level of migrants' incorporation into the public arena' (*ibid*., page 3). Finally, local governments are the most affected at social and political level by intra-EU migration (Scholten and Van Ostaijen, 2018). Overall, they are the ideal arena for understanding the dynamics of political participation of EU migrants.

The UK in particular is a perfect fit for studying sub-national political participation because of its strong majoritarian democratic tradition (reflected at local level in the large use of 'head counting' participatory systems, such as municipal and neighbourhood referenda, surveys and petitions) that coexists with bottom-up deliberative practices, such as petitions, public consultation, citizen panels, policy co-production and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), which have been increasingly adopted after cross-contamination with other countries with a prevalent consociativist tradition like the Netherlands (Hendriks and Michels, 2011).

1.7 Democratic Innovations: A Possible Solution?

Many scholars believe that the legitimacy of democratic institutions is in a crisis caused by widespread mistrust in the political system and the declining rates of political participation[12] (Stoker, 2017). Keane (2009) went even further and argued that democracy is dying and its future should not be taken for granted[13]. Warnings against the alleged existential threats to modern democracy are not new: almost 50 years ago, Huntington, Crozier and Joji published a report titled 'The Crisis of Democracy' (1975).

[12] From early 1990s to late 2010s, in OECD countries the turnout in general elections declined by 10% on average, from 75% to 65% (OECD, 2019)

[13] Not all political scientists agree on the existence of a democracy crisis. Others, such as Norris (1999) and Dalton (2004), believe it is more an evolution of democracy rather than a crisis, due to emergence of 'critical' citizens. Empirical data tell of a constant decline of voting turnout and other traditional metrics (party membership, trade unionism) in OECD countries, however new forms citizen-led participation have emerged in the meantime (Newton, 2012).

In response to this alleged crisis of democracy (Newton, 2012; OECD, 2020; Wright, 2012, 2016), for decades national and local governments across the world have experimented with ways to include citizens in policymaking processes (Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1996; Macpherson, 1977; Manin et al., 1987; Martin & Webb, 2009; Pateman, 1970). Participatory and deliberative processes simplify the integration of bottom-up inputs in the policy-making cycle, legitimise authoritative decisions (Fung, 2003), increase the quality of democratic outputs (Åström & Grönlund, 2011; Sønderskov, 2020), the acceptance of political decisions regardless of policy preferences (Shahin et al., 2009), and improve citizens' internal and external sense of political efficacy (Smith and Wales, 2000).

These offline and online citizen engagement initiatives, also called Democratic Innovations (DIs) (Smith, 2009) are institution-led (top-down) mechanisms that translate participatory and deliberative principles into inclusive political practices. Although the first experiments with DIs date back to the 1960s, it was in the 1990s that they became statutory requirements to obtain European and national grants and, simultaneously, the mainstream strategy for involving citizens in politics (Martin, 2009). Beyond their normative purpose, DIs are also instruments used to improve social justice, as all must give all citizens an equal chance to participate and equal voice during the proceedings (Schmitt-Beck, 2022). Arnstein called them 'the means by which [the politically excluded groups] can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society' (p. 216).

In Britain, local authorities have been experimenting with DIs in an attempt to increase participation and to gauge the residents' opinion on key policies (King & Wilson, 2023; Lowndes et al., 1998). The austerity cuts that from 2010 to 2018 deprived local authorities of up to 47% of the annual government's financial transfers (Eckersley & Tobin, 2019) and the pervasive disinterest[14] of the population in local politics (Martin, 2009) have pushed local authorities to streamline their budgets and provide the residents only with necessary and effective services (beyond statutory obligations). Responding to external financial constraints, councils sought alternative ways to engage with their residents and build consensus around tough decisions on unavoidable cuts in service provision. The emergence of formal and informal fora for discussion between local authorities and migrants communities suggest a positive effect on migrants' political mobilisation (Nyseth & Ventura López, 2021). However, because of holes in the data collection of English local authorities, it is not known to what extent the approaches used by local governments were effective in engaging politically marginalised communities, like migrants, who are often among the most affected by the downsizing

[14] In an opinion poll, 75% of British citizens declared that are not interested in what their local authority does, or do not want to get involved with the Council (Martin, 2009). In UK, the local elections turnout is 35% on average, the lowest among all OECD countries.

and the outsourcing of public services (Humphris, 2019). As traditional forms of participation (e.g. voting, party membership) are in decline across all liberal-democracies, in particular in the UK, and fail to give representation and responsiveness to foreign minorities who face formal and informal barrier to political participation (Carrillo-López, 2018), participatory and deliberative processes can help fill this democratic gap. However, if substantive representation is not guaranteed to all major strata of a society, democratic innovations become just institutional window-dressing that increase the participation deficit of the outsiders, rather than reduce it. In the case of four million EU migrants in the UK, we do not know yet if and how democratic innovations can be part of the solution, or part of the problem.

1.8 Research Questions

In this introductory chapter I have argued that the political disengagement of EU migrants is a democratic and socio-economic problem for English local councils. The self-exclusion of EU migrants from the democratic life of the polity can lead to policy decisions that do not account for their views and that are taken by elected representatives who are not familiar with issues affecting EU communities.

What are the possible root causes of the political marginalisation of EU migrants? There are many reasons why individuals do not participate in politics, which can be summarised in three main arguments: 'because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked' (Brady et al., 1995, p. 127). Existing literature offers very little evidence of what affects EU migrants' political behaviours in the UK, in particular at the local level (Gergs & Bulat, 2020). Despite the fact that the post-2004 migration from the EU represents the most important people movement towards the UK since WWII (Goodhart, 2013), most of social scientists' attention turned to EU migrants only after the Brexit referendum, when the public perception of EU migrants shifted from 'mobile workers' to migrants. This new field of research has so far focused mostly on EU-born residents' political mobilisation at national level (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2020, 2022), the loss of legal status and sense of belonging, and the consequent adaptive strategies (Godin & Sigona, 2022; Hall et al., 2022; Sigona & Godin, 2023), or the risks created by the EUSS to vulnerable migrants (Bueltmann, 2019; Jablonowski & Pinkowska, 2021; O'Brien, 2021). None of these studies explain how democratic innovations influence migrants' political integration (Munro, 2008), which is why little is known about the role of local governments in shaping EU migrants' civic engagement. At the same time, most empirical works on democratic innovations are often limited to case studies (Steinbach, Wilker and Schöttle, 2020), which selection is often biased towards success stories (Spada & Ryan, 2017) and lack the comparative richness and depth needed to produce theoretical advancements

and to 'determine what works and what does not' (Guy Peters, 2013, p. 3). With this doctoral research I contribute to fill these gaps in the current literature.

Through a comparative analysis of four English local authorities, based on a neo-institutional theoretical approach, I unveil the institutional, cultural, social, and environmental factors impacting the political engagement of a numerically significant and socially heterogeneous minority such as EU migrants. By comparing and contrasting similarities and discrepancies found in the case studies (see chapter 3 for a detailed description of the methodology), I drew some preliminary conclusions about group-level determinants of EU migrants' political behaviour that can potentially apply across England.

The aims of this research are:

To bring to the surface how EU migrants in England perceive local politics and their role within their polity; to understand what institutional, political, social and cultural contextual factors influence their perceptions; and to gain insights on how these perceptions affect their participation and representation in the local public sphere.

Utilising a 'hierarchisation' strategy (from larger to smaller scope) (White, 2017), I initially translated the above research objectives into an overarching main research question:

How institutional, cultural, socio-economic factors, and political opportunity structures, influence EU migrants' political participation and their descriptive representation at the local level in post-Brexit England?

I deconstructed this high-level question into four subsidiary 'researchable' questions. However, before introducing the sub-questions, a clarification on the close relationship between political participation and representation is due. Descriptive representation is a precursor of political participation (Geese, 2023; Henson & Wood, 2023; Rosenthal et al., 2018). At the same time, descriptive representation in elected assemblies is also the most evident consequence of political participation, as members of migrant communities must run for office to be elected as representatives, hence becoming true political activists (see section 2.5 for the working definition of political participation used in this study). In synthesis, as figure in picture 1, political representation is part of a cycle reinforcing various forms of political participation, while being itself the result of political participation.

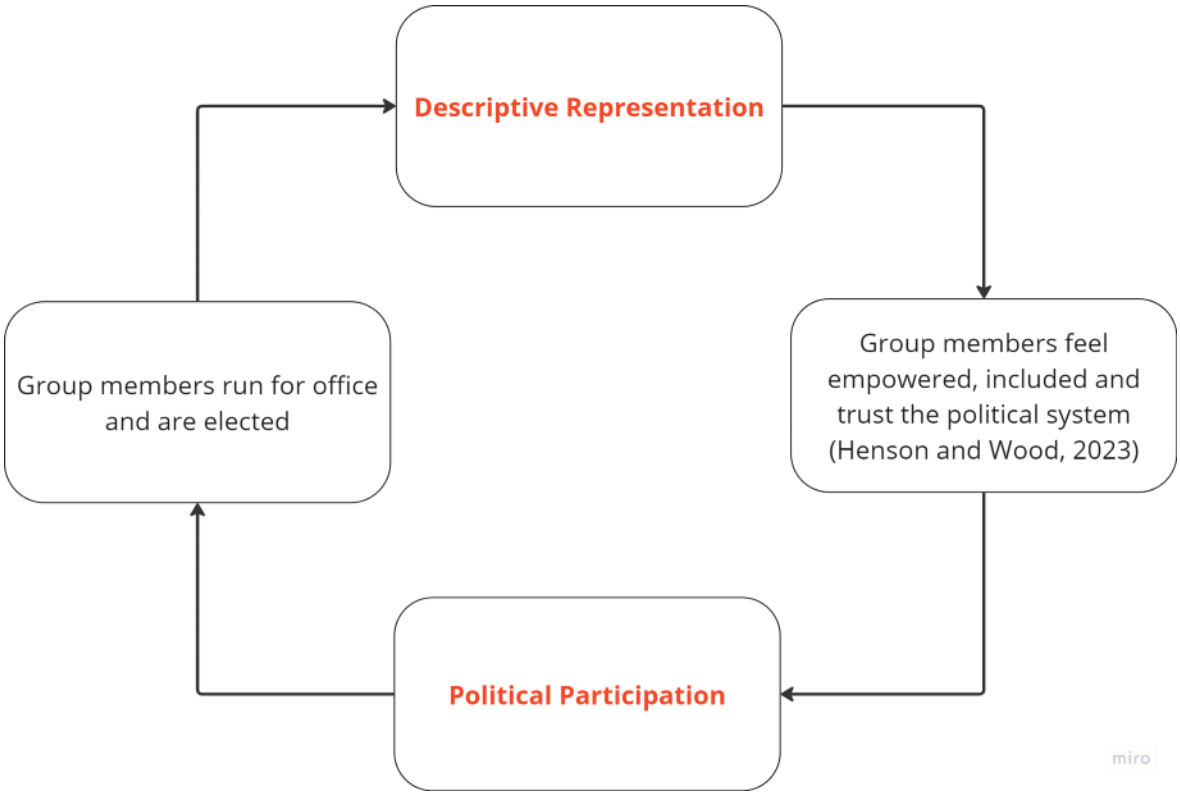

Figure 1 The representation/participation cycle.

To avoid unnecessary repetitions, within the following four operational sub-questions the term political participation is intended to encompass political representation too.

Because one of the focuses of the project is on the agency of local political systems in shaping EU migrants' political participation, the first subsidiary question I developed is:

1. Does engagement between English local authorities and EU migrants foster political participation?

The second subsidiary question is focused on the role of integration policies. There is a dearth of theoretical and empirical studies on how integration policies influence migrants' political participation. So far, an exploratory study on the effect of welfare policies on native citizens with social and economic disadvantages similar to those of non-native populations demonstrated a moderately positive effect on political participation (Marx & Nguyen, 2018), but we do not know if the same mechanism works as well for migrant communities. The following research question also answers a call for addressing a noticeable knowledge gap in this area: 'future comparative research should go beyond our exploratory approach and zoom in on the effects of specific policies on specific groups' (*ibid.*, p. 925). I addressed this appeal for studies on the impact of group-specific policies by answering the second subsidiary question:

2. Does policy support from English local authorities stimulate EU migrants political participation?

Policy effects are complemented by participatory instruments that foster political inclusion. From section 1.7 we know that when democratic innovations, such as participatory budgeting or citizen panels, are salient and effective, they help participants to grow interest in public affairs, develop democratic skills, improve trust in public institutions, and increase their sense of political efficacy (Fishkin, 2009; Fung, 2003, 2006; Loeffler & Martin, 2024; Swaner, 2017). Migrants seem equally affected by institutional citizen engagement:

> *Like other citizens, immigrants tend to become involved and invested in their communities and the nation when given a voice and means of participating in social and political processes* (Hayduk, 2004, p. 508).

In light of these considerations, the third subsidiary question addresses the capacity of local participatory instruments, in particular citizen panels, to integrate migrants politically:

3. Do local government-led participatory instruments stimulate EU migrants political participation?

Lastly, this study could not ignore the fact that the term 'EU migrants' does not encompass just a large homogeneous population, but an ensemble of 27 countries which represent a variety of political cultures, socialisation habits and socio-economic conditions. The most visible differentiation is between citizens of the 15 pre-2004 member states (EU15) and citizens of the 10 post-2004 EU expansion member states (A8+A2). EU 15 countries have experienced democracy longer than A8 and A2 countries. For this reason, A8 and A2 nationals are more inclined to mistrust political institutions and have an apathetic approach to politics (Savelyev, 2013)[15] . A8 and A2 migrants also have a lower socio-economic status and tend to accrue social capital differently when living abroad, as Central and Eastern European communities develop stronger in-group bonds and are more self-segregated from natives than other migrant groups (Cook et al., 2011). Therefore, this enquiry also investigates how national differences change political opportunity structures for nationals of EU15 countries, versus nationals of Central and Eastern European countries that joined the Union after 2004. To do so, the fourth, and last, subsidiary question is:

4. How political cultures and forms of socialisation differentiate the propensity to participate in English local politics between EU15 and post-2004 accession countries?

From a scholarly perspective, this doctoral research contributes to push forward the boundaries of the academic field of migrants' political participation, an important but understudied interdisciplinary sub-field that sits at the interjection of migration studies and political participation.

[15] With the exception of Greece, Portugal and Spain, which turned democracies from 1974 to 1978, still between 10 and 15 years before post-2004 countries (1989-1993).

This study is also timely, as it comes in the aftermath of Brexit, a generational political event with the potential to disrupt the life of thousands of EU migrants. Because of this, knowing more about the determinants and the characteristics of political engagement of EU migrants has become a necessity, not only academic, but also societal. Without this knowledge, future policymakers might not be able to design effective policies to answer the normative, social and economic issues that the political disengagement of a significant foreign population generates. Even worse, they could underestimate and ignore the problem. The findings of this thesis support this possibility (see chapter 10 for a discussion on the theoretical and empirical implications). For this reason, this work is not only academically relevant, but also needed for improving local democracy and for overcoming the political marginalisation of EU migrants.

1.9 Conclusion and Plan of the Thesis

This introduction laid out why this research is timely and relevant. EU migrants represent the largest group of foreign-born residents in the UK, most of whom still maintain full political rights at the local level. However, they are largely politically inactive and underrepresented in local councils. There are both normative and substantive reasons why their political marginalisation has negative impacts on vulnerable individuals inside EU migrants' communities.

Compared to other large migrants communities, EU migrants present peculiar features that make their case even more scholarly interesting and worth studying. For decades they enjoyed freedom of movement in and out the UK. This privilege was suddenly revoked by an unprecedent political event: Brexit. This unique scenario makes Brexit a quasi-natural experiment to understand how highly disruptive events affects migrants' political behaviours.

In next chapter (**2**) I define the concept of political participation for the purpose of this study, then I review what academic and grey literature say in relation to the crisis of representative democracies and to migrants' political participation. In the second part of the literature review, I shift the focus towards EU migration to the UK, the evolution of their presence in the country, and the impact of citizen panels, one of the most popular participatory channels used by local authorities to engage their residents and gauge their opinions.

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: **Chapter 3** illustrates the theoretical framework I used to theorise the initial causal mechanism that explains EU migrants' lower political engagement at the local level. **Chapter 4** outlines in details the comparative research design I used in this study, which included a Web Content Analysis of all English local authorities' institutional websites (further described in **chapter 5**). **Chapters 6 to 9** illustrate the themes emerging from the reflexive thematic analysis of interviews and documental data. **Chapter 10** includes a discussion of

the results in light of theoretical expectations and novel insights, and present a revised version of the theoretical model introduced in chapter 3. Finally, **Chapter 11** concludes the thesis with the limitations of the study, a research agenda for future testing and expansion the findings, and some recommendations for local politics practitioners to stimulate the political integration of their EU migrants.

Chapter 2 Background of the Research

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I established that the political integration of migrants is key for both normative and substantive meanings. This second chapter serves the purpose to justify this statement and provide an overview of the relevant literature that frames scope and aims of the research. It begins with the alleged crisis of democracy, which gives a rationale for outlining the importance of migrants as active actors in a polity. The chapter then provides empirical evidence to substantiate the claim that in western democracies migrants are politically marginalised. Sections 4 outlines the normative justification on why in a democracy migrants ought to be part of the *demos*. Because conceptual clarity is the foundation of reliable and effective research (Voss et al., 2022), section 5 defines the concept of political participation utilised in this study. The chapter then narrows its focus from migrants in general to the main characters of this doctoral projects: EU migrants in England. Section 6 traces history and characteristics of EU migrants' fluxes to the UK in the last 40 years, explains how Brexit mobilised EU migrants at the national level (section 2.6.1). The section then reviews the literature that support, or oppose, the thesis Brexit cast the seeds of a shared European identity among EU migrants (section 2.6.2), a prominent factor of the post-Brexit political mobilisation (section 2.6.3). Finally, sections 7 to 9 introduce the concept of 'democratic innovations', a set of participatory and inclusive practices meant, in theory, to foster political engagement of all residents, natives and foreigners alike. Section 8 and 9 review the scientific body of work on Democratic Innovations, in particular 'citizen panels' and their online version 'e-panels', which are among the most popular democratic innovation instruments used by English local authorities. A review of the scientific literature on democratic innovation is instrumental to understand the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3.

2.2 The Democratic Problem

Most scholars agree that liberal democracies worldwide are under pressure, as elected representatives and political institutions grow increasingly unpopular (Geissel, 2012; Hay, 2007; Newton, 2012; Stoker, 2017; Wright, 2012). This alleged crisis of legitimacy and representativeness is characterised from the 1980s onward by increasingly lower electoral turnouts and widespread mistrust on democratic institutions, political parties, and trade unions (Smith, 2009).

Traditional metrics of political participation are signalling a constant decline in all OECD countries (OECD, 2019), some faster than others. Higher level of socio-economics inequalities is associated

with lower participation. As a result, social-democracies with a pervasive welfare system and strong redistributive policies such as Scandinavian countries present higher level of political engagement than more market-oriented countries such as the US and the UK (Parvin, 2018). The magnitude of this decline is evident in the UK: in the 21st century, the average turnout at British general election is only 63%, 5 points below the OECD countries' average (68%), while for local and European election is even lower, around 30%. Other classic forms of political participation have also lost much of their appeal: Labour and Tories combined party membership dropped from over 2 million in the 50s to 940,000 in 2017, and trade unions lost 6.6 million members in the last 40 years (*ibid.*). The UK is also the country with the lowest rate of political participation among the young population (18-30 years old) compared to EU15 democracies, both in traditional and informal methods of participation, and has a high level of political apathy and disengagement (Kitanova, 2020). Youth political apathy is particularly worrying, because it is a good predictor of political disengagement in general, at least for formal participation. For example, the decision to vote or to abstain at the first elections after acquiring voting rights tends to create a pattern of engagement/disengagement that continues throughout every stage of a citizen's life (Franklin, 2004). This phenomenon seems reinforced by voting for the first time in 'second order' elections (Franklin & Hobolt, 2011). The frequent occurrence of local elections in England, even three times every four years[16] in 94 local governments[17], suggests that the decreasing electoral turnout might be linked to many young residents snubbing their first vote in a local election.

The level of trust in representative democracy and in political participation in-between elections is also at an historical low in Britain. In 2019, all indicators of political disaffection and disengagement were on the rise: only 1/3 of British citizens had confidence in democratic institutions and politicians, well below the OECD countries average (47%), 47% of them believed they cannot have any influence at all in national policy-making, while 32% are not involved at all in local democracy (Lee-Geiller & Lee, 2019). Overall, the British population is one of the least satisfied with their political system[18]. Only 17% of British citizens responded positively when asked about their level of satisfaction in the functioning of their political system, well below other European countries like Sweden and Germany, and only slightly better than Russia (16%) and other two major European countries, Italy (12%) and France (13%) (King's College London Policy Institute, 2023).

[16] A popular system for Councillors rotation in England is the so-called 'election by thirds', when one third of the Council is elected every year on a four-year mandate. This system produces an electoral cycle of three years with consecutive elections followed by one year with no elections. Source: electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/how-elections-work/types-elections/local-councils [accessed on 16/04/2024].

[17] Source: gov.uk/government/publications/election-timetable-in-england/election-timetable-in-england [accessed on 16/04/24].

[18] The King's College Policy Institute analysed data from 24 countries that represent over half of the world population out of the 90 included in The World Value Survey.

However, the weakening of traditional political participation does not affect the whole British society in the same way: lower income and less educated strata of the population are disproportionally less politically engaged and underrepresented than middle and upper classes (Brady et al., 1995; Gallego, 2014; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Manning & Holmes, 2013; Prats & Meunier, 2021; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). In his book 'The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality' Dalton speaks of:

> *Pervasive SES participation gap across all modes of political action. A person's education, and to a lesser extent other social-status traits, is a very strong predictor of who participates. This applies to turnout in elections and for non-electoral activities* (2017, p. 210).

Despite the overall level of political participation having increased since the 1960s, thanks to the affordances of the Internet and the growth of informal politics and democratic innovations, the playing field is not even and the less privileged strata of the society are more and more politically inactive and underrepresented in government and legislative assemblies (*ibid.*). Because of their below average SES, among the most politically marginalised groups there are also migrants and ethnic minorities (Anwar, 2001; Bird, Saalfeld, & Wust, 2011; Ruedin, 2018; Wass et al., 2015).

Some scholars do not concur with the narrative of the 'crisis of democracy' and argue that citizens have not become politically apathetic, but are instead engaging with innovative forms of participation beyond voting, party membership or protesting (Kersting, 2016; Norris, 2011; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). The rate of informal citizens engagement through channels and in spaces (physical and virtual) not defined and controlled by political institutions has increased in recent times (Kersting, 2016). Pippa Norris (1999) argued that this phenomenon shows a shift from 'invited spaces' (government-led) to 'invented spaces' (citizens-led) for political participation, in line with the rise of the so-called 'critical citizen'. *Critical citizens* are overly critical of (hence the name) and detached from traditional political institutions that they no longer revere, but are not disengaged from politics. They are also still firm believers in democratic values. Norris's argument is confirmed by public opinion data emerging from the World Values Survey, which, despite the crises of political engagement and trust in the political system, put support for democracy at 90% (King's College London Policy Institute, 2023).

Still, the decline of all traditional forms of political participation generated serious concerns about the future of liberal democracies (Keane, 2009). For Kersting, the decline of formal participation and the simultaneous increase of informal participation 'are reflecting the lack of legitimacy of the political systems' (2016, p. 252).

2.3 Migrants and Democracy

In the previous section I argued that the idea that in the Western world representative democracy is not in good shape is justified by the constant decline of citizens' participation, a crucial element of a functioning democratic system (Dahl, 1971; Gallego, 2014). The situation is worsened by the fact that in many developed countries migrants represent a significative portion of the population are either totally or partially disenfranchised. Migrants minorities have often none, or limited, political rights. Even when considering all forms of political participations, formal and informal, traditional and 'new', they are still less politically active than the native population (Morales & Giugni, 2011; Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020; Pilati, 2018). Pilati (2016) compared the level of migrants' political participation in 9 European cities, including London, and found that on average there is a 23% participation gap between natives and non-natives residents. The OECD (2019) reported a 6 points electoral turnout gap across all OECD countries, but a wider gap (between 12% and 20%) in Southern Europe, Nordic Countries, Ireland, Germany and Switzerland. In developed countries, where non-native residents often constitute over 10% of the entire population[19] (and more than 30% in major urban areas[20]), migrants' lower political participation means that a significative part of the population is unable to express their political views and demands. Migrants' political inclusion represents a way not only to increase their integration in the host society (IOM, 2017; Scuzzarello, 2015; Woetzel et al., 2016) but also an opportunity to improve the public political engagement and the representativeness of the political system. Migrants also provide additional valuable perspectives and expertise on societal issues that help policymakers to produce more effective policies, for example on healthcare provision (Roura et al., 2021). Better informed and more representative political bodies can contribute to reverse the decline of trust and legitimacy of representative democracies.

2.4 The Normative Basis of Migrants' Political Rights

Migrants' political participation is not important just as a way for mitigating the legitimacy crisis of Western democracies. It is also a matter of fairness and justice. The Greek etymology of the word

[19] 25 OECD members countries fell in this category in 2019 (OECD, 2023). Approximately 15% of the UK population, or 10.3 million people, were born outside the UK in 2022 (OECD, 2024).

[20] Source: ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics explained/statistics_on_cities,_towns_and_suburbs _foreign-born_persons_living_in_cities [accessed on 12/02/24]. In the UK, the largest foreign communities live in Slough (44%), Leicester (41.6%), and Greater London (40.6%). Other major cities like Birmingham and Manchester also have over a quarter of their population born abroad (31.4% and 26.7% respectively). Source: ONS (2021). 'Country of birth and passports held, 2011 and 2021, local authorities in England and Wales'. Available at: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/internationalmigrationenglandandwales/census2021. [accessed on 12/02/2024].

democracy means 'the rule of the people', not 'the rule of some people'[21]. According to the 'all-affected interests' principle, all those whose interests are affected by a policy, ought to have a say on that policy (Goodin, 2007; Shapiro, 2003). A similar but narrower conceptualisation of *demos*, tied to the concept of statehood, is the 'all-subjects to a law' principle, which establishes that a polity is composed by all individuals who are subject to decisions taken by a legitimate authority, regardless of their citizenship status (Dahl, 1989; Lopez-Guerra, 2005) or enforced through coercive force (Abizadeh, 2008)[22].

All these philosophical approaches concur that, from a normative perspective, non-native residents have equal right to self-governing as those who have the country's citizenship. According to the liberal principles upon which advanced democracies are founded, all residents, citizens and non-citizens, must enjoy the same legal rights and should benefit equally from the economic, social and cultural development of their *polis* (Carens, 2005). All definitions of *demos* agree that all members of a polity have the right to have their legitimate interests and aspirations protected, either through representation or direct political action, and should be allowed to participate in the social project that defines national and local communities. As Bevelander and Spång put it:

> *By taking part in politics, it is possible both to change the distribution of resources and opportunities in society and to challenge power relations, norms, and attitudes. Being excluded from politics is to lack an important tool to change one's situation as well as that of others.* (2015, p. 2).

Consequently, if not all individuals enjoy equal political rights, then a democratic system is not really democratic. International migrants, who are subject to the same policies, processes, and decisions of anyone else residing in the same authority, should be considered rightful democratic actors as much as native and naturalised citizens. For these reasons, Lupien (2018), who studied participatory initiatives in Ecuador and Venezuela, concluded that any initiative meant to foster democratic inclusion should not target just the traditional outsiders of democracy, which traditionally included the poor and less educated strata of the population, but ethnic and national minorities as well. To avoid meaningless forms of participation, political institutions should 'ensure that their [ethnic minorities and migrants] specific grievances are recognized' (*ibid*., 2018, p. 1265).

The political marginalisation of migrants contributes not only to the general decline of political participation, but also creates, or reinforces, social and economic inequalities. For Jones-Correa (1998), migrants' political disengagement produces three negative consequences:

[21] However, in ancient Greece only a small part of the populace could take part in the democratic life of their polity (Näsström, 2011).

[22] This definition of the *demos* extends the right to self-government to all individuals upon whom authoritative decisions are enforced, i.e. anyone subject to border control, regardless of their citizenship and place of residence.

1. It undermines the fundamental democratic principles of representativeness and accountability.

2. It reinforces the depreciation of representative democracy among citizenry and perpetuates the image of migrants as outsiders of the community.

3. It prevents migrants' full integration in the hosting society as their needs and demands remain unheard by policymakers.

These three claims justify Jones-Correa's argument that the political marginalisation of migrants is 'an unsustainable state of affairs' (*ibid*., p. 47) for all liberal-democracies.

Having clarified the normative basis that make migrants' political participation a key ingredient of a fair and healthy democratic system, in the next section I define the meaning of political participation as I intend it in this research project.

2.5 What is Political Participation?

Conceptual clarity is a precondition of empirical research (Bishop, 1992). It is therefore important to define, contextualise and justify the theoretical concept at the centre of this research: political participation. Political participation[23] is a debated concept. Many different definitions of this term co-exist in the literature (Ma & Cao, 2023). One of the most cited definition comes from Verba and Nie's classic book *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*, in which they define political participation as:

> *Those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take* (1972, p. 2).

By the authors' own admission, this definition is 'rough' (*ibid.*, p.2). Nevertheless, it identifies the minimum common denominator of all restrictive interpretations of political participation: citizens performing actions meant to influence the outcomes of governmental decisions. Prior to Verba and Nie, the only type of activity regarded as proper political participation was voting (Campbell et al.,

[23] For convenience, in this thesis the terms 'political participation' and 'political engagement' are used interchangeably, as it often happens in academic and grey literatures (Berger, 2009). Some authors consider even the concept of 'civic engagement' to be akin to political participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Others, like Putnam (2000), stretch the civic engagement concept to include individual activities that are just remotely linked to societal and political issues. Adler and Goggin (2005) argued that civic engagement has a broader scope than political participation and includes all forms of voluntary and communitarian activities. For Adler and Goggin, a key difference between civic engagement and political participation is the inclusion or exclusion of activities that do not have inherent political goals: political participation requires political aims. The other differentiating criterion between civic engagement and political participation is the intrinsically collective nature of the latter. Individual actions such as voting or donating to a party are universally considered being political participation. In summary, political participation is a form of civic engagement, but not all types of civic engagement are political participation (Berger, 2009). In line with this conceptualisation, I do not use these terms as synonyms.

1960; Milbrath, 1965; Westholm, 2007). Despite being limited to targeting government personnel, the importance of Verba and Nie's definition of political participation resides in the fact that for the first time it included other actions besides voting, such as protesting or petitioning.

Twenty-three years after *Participation in America* Verba, with Schlozman and Brady, proposed a more refined the concept political participation:

> *An activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action— either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies'.* (1995b, p. 38).

Even though the underlining principle did not change (influencing government action), this updated definition of political participation is more precise in its wording (no more '*more or less directly aimed at*') and clear in distinguishing between a direct way and an indirect way to influence government action.

In the following years, other authors proposed broader definitions of political participation that included any act meant to influence decisions that produce political outcomes, taken by government personnel and also private stakeholders, such as corporations and NGOs. Brady defined political participation as an 'action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes' (1999, p. 720). The key elements of this definition are the lack of a reference to policymaking, and the agency assigned to ordinary citizens. The former implies that 'political participation' can be any activity meant to influence not only government actions but also anything happening in the public sphere that could be qualified as 'political' (e.g. campaigning to boycott a multinational company). The latter is a concept adopted from classic participatory theories (e.g. Barber, 1984, or Pateman, 1970) that conceive democracy as inclusive and citizens-led, thus excluding professional political elites' such as politicians and lobbyists from being the driving forces of politics (Westholm, 2007).

The evolution of the definition throughout the decades shows how political participation is a dynamic concept that changes in response to societal changes and to the affordances of modern technologies that allow citizens to express political opinions and make demands to decision-makers in innovative and more informal ways. Classic definitions of political participation like the ones quoted above are now seen by some contemporary scholars as too narrowly focused on the instrumental purpose of participation (i.e. influencing policymaking or political outcomes) to allow for the inclusion of newer forms of political activities that are more 'expressive', i.e. not necessarily intended to get a specific political outcome (Hooghe et al., 2014).

To sort the increasingly quick obsolescence of commonly used definitions of political participation, Van Deth (2014) proposed to shift the focus from the continuous (and hopeless) adaptation of the

concept to the endlessly growing list of possible activities, to adopting guidelines that define political participation by identifying its boundaries rather than its content. The framework is built upon seven rules that lead onto four distinct types of political participation. The first three rules describe the *minimum terms* of political participation:

1. The activity cannot be limited to political interest or to expressing opinions, and must imply an action. This criterion excludes private acts like chatting politics with a friend or watching the news.

2. The action must be voluntary. Any act that is forced or mandatory is not considered political participation.

3. The action must be performed by lay citizens and not by politics professionals while acting in such capacity.

The remaining four rules determine the *type* of political participation. Contrary to previous definitions, in van Deth's framework the agent's intentions matter only in case of non-political activities, which becomes political only if so-intended. For example, buying fair trade coffee is a political act only if intended by the buyer as a protest against international trade regulations.

A major criticism to these criteria is that in practice it is not possible to know the nature of individual intentions unless they are declared explicitly. Yet, when applied to the digital sphere, this motivation-based approach helps to discern if low commitment actions, often shamed as 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism' (Karpf, 2010), such as giving a like to a politician's post on Facebook, should, or should not, be regarded as political participation. For this reason, Hosh-Dayican (2014) contends that the conceptual framework designed by van Deth's is better suited to define political participation on the Internet and on social media than in the physical world, because it categorises as 'political' also non-instrumental activities peculiar to the online public sphere.

In a symposium on *Acta Politica*, Hooghe and Hosch-Dayican (2014) critiqued van Deth's framework on the premises that knowing the intentions of the agent is irrelevant to defining political participation. They argue that intentions cannot be measured and ultimately bear no impact on the outcome of the participation. Theocharis (2015) addressed this criticism in the virtual sphere, by excluding online acts that approve/disapprove others' political acts, such as a like on Facebook, from representing a form of political participation, on the ground that they do not meet the first fundamental criterion of van Deth's framework: political participation is made of actions, not behaviours. Yet, the definition of what is an action is in itself controversial. Brady (1999) is more precise in defining what activities display participatory value and what not, as he excludes mere approvals of others' political acts *tout-court*, regardless of the nature of the act (action or opinion) and the intentions of the approver.

When political participation happens through channels managed by a public institution, the locus of the participation is under government control and the intrinsically political nature of the act becomes self-evident. By its own nature, government-led participation can only be 'minimalistic'. For example, no one signs an online petition or submits a comment for an online consultation on a local Council's website with no intention to influence a political decision.

In conclusion, according to van Deth's conceptual framework, citizen engagement enabled by public bodies (invited spaces, Barber 1984) is classified as a type I of political participation, or 'minimalistic' participation (ibid., p. 356):

> *All amateurish, voluntary activities located in the sphere of government/state/politics are specimen of political participation as defined by this minimalist definition.*

The mode of participation analysed in this research, i.e. individuals engaging with their local administration, respects all the conditions of type I participations: voluntary actions located within the sphere of government that are executed by ordinary citizens (Ohme et al., 2018).

In light of these theoretical considerations, for this project I am adopting a working definition of minimalistic political participation that is suitable for top-down forms of democracy:

> *Voluntary actions performed by a layperson aimed at influencing government policies and policymaking through institutional channels.*

This definition also fits the conceptualisation of online participation, built upon van Deth's conceptual map, proposed by Theocharis (2015). Theocaris contends that 'various common manifestations of digitally networked participation conform to minimalist, targeted, and motivational definitions' (*ibid*., p. 3) and 'digitally networked participatory acts are thus often inseparable from a conventional understanding of participation even by the standards of the narrowest definitions' (*ibid*., p. 5). Although Theocharis is concerned only with digital networked participation, i.e. participation on social media, I argue that his analysis can be extended to any form of online political participation, including, e-petitions, e-surveys, e-consultations and e-panels.

Having defined how the term 'political participation' is intended in this study, in the next section I contextualise the most established theories and known predictors of migrants' political participation. This literature provides the empirical rationale I used to building an initial theoretical framework that described how the relationship between institutional actors and EU migrants' influences the latter' political participation at a local level in England.

2.6 EU Migration to the UK

2.6.1 EU Migrants Before and After the EU Referendum

In 2021, an estimate 4 million of EU migrants[24] lived in the UK. Because of Brexit, every EU citizen living in the UK before the end of 2020 was expected to register with the Home Office and apply to get a 'pre-settled' (less than 5 years of residence) or a 'settled' status (more than 5 years of residence). These statutes allow to reside in the country, temporarily if 'pre-settled', or indefinitely if 'settled'. As of December 2023 the number of pre-settled or settled statuses granted by the Home Office was 6.5 million. Given the significative discrepancy with the 2021 Census[25], it is believed that the actual number of EU migrants in the UK is higher than this figure[26]. In lack of more robust statistics, in this study the estimates of EU migrants living in the UK are taken from the 2021 Census data.

The presence of EU migrants in the UK has not grown regularly over the years. In just two decades, from 1995 to 2015, their number increased approximately 3.6 times, from less than a million to 3.3 million (Wadsworth et al., 2016). The reason for the unprecedented spike of intra-EU migration, when people began moving in mass from Eastern and Central Europe to Western Europe, occurred after 2004, with the simultaneous accession of eight new member states to the EU and the implementation of the directive 2004/38. The combination of these two events made the subsequent intra-EU movement of people 'the main migration flow within Europe' at the time (Scholten & Van Ostaijen, 2018, p. 10).

As Portes (2017) explains, freedom of movement was a pillar of the EU well before the UK joined in 1973, but until the accession of eight eastern European countries in 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 intra-EU migration was almost irrelevant (until 2000 only 0.1% of the EU population had moved to another EU country, Goodhart, 2013, p. 2). This situation changed rapidly when in 2004 the 'Free Movement of Citizens Directive' (2004/38) came into force. The directive extended workers' freedom of movement to jobseekers and their families. Prior to 2004, the right to work and reside in another EU country was granted only to individuals in employment. In 2007, other

[24] 3.6 million EU migrants were living in England and Wales as of March 2021, according to the 2021 Census. The Census total is rounded to 4 million to account for Scotland and Northern Ireland, which do not take part to the 10-yearly Census with England and Wales. Source: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk [accessed on 12/04/2024].

[25] Source: gov.uk/government/collections/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics [accessed on 12/04/2024].

[26] The discrepancy between the EUSS numbers the 2021 Census is explained by the fact that many EU migrants could have left the UK after applying for a pre-settled or settled status. However, it is also possible that the Census 2021 underestimated the total number of EU migrants. Source: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk [accessed on 12/04/2024].

two Eastern European countries, Romania, and Bulgaria, acceded the EU (Accession 2, or A2 countries), followed by Croatia in 2013. In total, 13 new members joined the EU in 9 years, the biggest expansion of the EEC/EU since 1957. At the time of their accession, all new members had a pro-capita income well below the EU average (47% less for A8 countries and 73% less for A2 countries). The wealth gap between old and new EU members made A8 and A2 countries populations naturally prone to migrating westward, looking for job opportunities and better life conditions (Coleman, 2016).

10 years after the enlargement, in 2014, the number of Central and Eastern Europeans living in the EU-15 country had grown from 1.1 million in 2004 to 6.1 million, a 5-fold increase. Most of this East to West migration wave went to the UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, the Scandinavian countries, and the Netherlands (Engbersen, 2018). In the UK, the Blair government decided, alone among all major EU15 nations, not to impose any residence limitation on people coming from A8 countries (Coleman, 2016). Because of this political decision, immigration fluxes to the UK from within the EU soared by 500% (Portes, 2017, p. 183). From 2004 to 2011, 1.5M central and eastern Europeans migrated to the UK. By the EU referendum in 2016, 5 million EU migrants had entered the UK workforce (Moreh et al., 2020). Goodhart called this migratory movement 'the biggest peacetime immigration and the UK–EU Relationship movement [of people] in European history' (2013, p. 3).

On average, EU migrants are younger, better educated, less likely to be unemployed and recurring less to welfare benefits than native citizens (Wadsworth et al., 2016). Work is largely the main reason for migrating to the UK: jobseekers account for 47% (1.7 million) of all the migration from EU countries. Since the 2004 EU expansion, the UK has been the most attractive destination for intra-EU migration, thanks to the choice of not apply temporary restrictions on work for A8 citizens, (Penninx, 2018), and 'a relatively low unemployment rate, labour shortages and comparatively higher economic performance, particularly in relation to CEE countries' (Duda-Mikulin, 2019, p. 27). However, after the Brexit vote in 2016 the trend inverted: in 2023, the net migration of EU migrants to the UK hit the lowest level since before the 2004 EU expansion, with a deficit of 86,000 long-term EU migrants. This number represents a fall of over 116% since the peak of EU migration in

June 2016 (521.000 arrivals)[27,28]. This emigration trend has been referred by the British media as 'Brexodus' (Eaton, 2018).

Before January 2021, what really set EU migrants apart from other third nationals living in the UK was their legal status. Because of the freedom of movement principle protected by EU treaties, and the consequent capacity of going back to the country of origin or to move to another EU state at ease, EU migrants are regarded within the EU as 'mobile EU citizens', rather than long-term economic migrants (Bruzelius, 2020). Differently from non-EU migrants, who need a VISA to reside in EU countries and tend to settle permanently, EU migrants enjoy the capacity of 'floating' indefinitely between EU member states without administrative or legal constrictions (Reeger, 2018, p. 46). This type of mobility has two defining characteristics: a broader range of socio-economic statuses, in terms of education and skills, and a different temporality of stay. While before 2004 Europeans who moved within the EU were in majority low-skilled workers who were taking seasonal jobs or wanted to settle permanently, post-2004 'mobile' EU migrants also include medium/highly skilled workers and flexible length of stay (Scholten and Van Ostaijen, 2018). Inspired by Bauman's theory of the 'liquid society' (2013), Engbersen calls this new kind of migration 'liquid migration': 'The main feature of liquid migration is its temporary, flexible and unpredictable character' (2018, p. 63).

Due to their nature of 'liquid' migrants, EU migrants who moved within the EU are expected by national and local authorities to be self-sufficient and not resort to the social security resources offered to third national migrants by the hosting state and by local authorities. However, according to the EU treaties, EU migrants should have the same access to welfare and social services as native citizens, but often this is not the case (Collett, 2013). Their privileged legal status (compared to non-EU migrants) 'trap' them in a limbo between mobility and settlement, and create the political premises for not receiving the same level of support to integration that local authorities give to migrants coming from outside the EU, despite EU migrants' needs do not differ much from those of other migrants (Bruzelius, 2020). For example, local authorities often organise free language and orientation courses for non-EU migrants. The same opportunity is rarely offered to EU migrants (Collett, 2013). As Bruzelius puts it: 'As a result of social protection gaps, significant numbers of

[27] Source: ons.gov.uk/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalimmigrationemigrationandnetmigrationflowsprovisional [accessed on 13/04/2024].

[28] The accuracy of these estimates is disputed by many experts, as the sources used to gather the data, such as the International Passenger Survey (IPS), present multiple flaws (Trevena, 2009). For this reason, in 2019 the ONS downgraded the reliability of their quarterly bulletins on immigration from 'golden statistics' to 'experimental statistics'. Source: ons.gov.uk/news/statementsandletters/statementfromtheonsonthereclassificationofinternationalmigrationstatistics [accessed on 13/04/2024].

migrant EU migrants end up in socio-economic precarity in gaps in the country of destination' (2020, p. 2).

2.6.2 Did Brexit Created a European Identity?

The group of non-native EU migrants living in the UK is composed by 27 different nationalities (although the top 10 nationalities represent 84% of the migrants), which makes it a culturally and socio-economically highly heterogeneous cohort (Scholten and Van Ostaijen, 2018). For this reason, until recent times EU migrants never shared a sense of European identity. Despite some scholars' claim that EU transnationalism (intra-EU migration) is positively correlated with European identity (Carrillo-López, 2018), there is not much empirical evidence of this phenomenon in the pre-EU referendum literature. Brexit changed this scenario and triggered a stronger attachment to the EU (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2020, 2022). As Sigona et al. reported: 'respondents explicitly linking their "feeling European" to the experience of Brexit and how they felt treated by their country of residence' (2022, p. 12). The aggressive pro-Brexit propaganda that often used 'the EU migrant' as a villainous figure (Barnard & Butlin, 2020; Blachnicka-Ciacek et al., 2021), the degrading political climate that culminated with the Brexit referendum and its aftermath, and the drastic loss of certainty about legal and social rights determined by the secession of the UK from the EU, have created issues common to all EU migrants, and have made them appear as an homogenous group of people in the eye of the British public opinion. From the EU migrants perspective, Brexit has for the first time put under serious discussion their sense of belonging and integration within the British society, and has forced them to see themselves as sharing the previously unacknowledged, or even unwanted, status of 'EU national' (Ranta and Nancheva, 2019). By being depicted and antagonised as a united and undifferentiated group of migrants, despite the clear cultural and political differences that characterise them, EU migrants have in turn started to develop a sense of shared identity across the spectrum of the 27 EU national groups (Browning, 2018; Sigona et al., 2022).

In an increasingly atomised Western society, personal identification is a psychological and social process defined, for migrants in particular, by 'a certain sphere of problems, rather than a well-defined concept' (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016, p. 1125). Discrimination and marginalisation are indeed triggers for political mobilisation of migrants, who, feeling excluded by the natives, react by strengthening identity bonds within their own group (Pilati and Herman, 2020). Group identity in turn stimulates political self-organisation to defend collective rights vis-à-vis their host country (Vathi and Trandafoiu, 2020). In this regard, by forging a pan-European identity, Brexit worked as a driver for EU migrants' mobilisation (Craven et al., 2022) .

2.6.3 Brexit: A Catalyst for EU Migrants' Political Mobilisation

For Koopmans (2004), the two indicators that better measure migrants' political participation are the level of engagement in local and national debates on issues that strongly affect migrant's life and the number of proactive migrant-led initiatives for the extension of economic, social and political rights. The existence of an extremely divisive policy that significantly reduces migrants' integration in the host society should fuel debates and bottom-up demands for more rights and legal protection, and consequently become a stimulus for migrants' political participation.

In relation to EU migrants, Brexit is a perfect example of this scenario. Despite the lack of political rights at the national level, the period in-between the Brexit referendum and the exit of the UK from the EU has seen a mass mobilisation of EU migrants, supported by millions of Remain voters, who protested in front of Westminster and across the country (Brändle et al., 2018), launched the most successful petition ever recorded in UK history[29], created dozens of Facebook groups, posted 1000s of Tweets, and organised themselves in a plethora of local and national EU migrants rights organisations (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2021). Among these organisations, '*the3million*' is worth a special mention. This large advocacy for EU migrants rights was created in response to the Brexit challenge and quickly rose into prominence within the post-referendum Remain movement (Craven et al., 2022). *the3million* became so representative of EU migrants' rights that it earned an invitation by the EU Commission to provide their perspective on the Withdrawal Agreement negotiations (Vathi & Trandafoiu, 2022, 2023). Their success is testament of the fact that since the day after the referendum, the 'EU immigrant' was no longer just a fictional figure fabricated by the pro-Brexit propaganda, but the symbolic representation of a bond felt by many EU migrants and the landmark of a political presence on the national political arena. At a smaller political scale, the injection of millions of new voters from the EU should have had a visible impact on British local governments. Contrary to this assumption, there is no evidence that the continuous EU migration wave of the last 20 years has affected the course of local politics as much as expected. This fact is somewhat puzzling, especially when considering the significant size of this migration.

We know that non-natives are on average less politically active than the native population (Bevelander, 2015; Bevelander & Spång, 2015; Zani & Barrett, 2012). Before reaching the same level of political opportunities of native citizens, migrants have to overcome not only institutional restrictions to their active participation, like the lack of the country's citizenship (Zani & Barrett, 2012) but also go through a complex process of redefinition of their personal identity, learning political knowledge, and new social and civic skills (Morasso, 2012). The demanding entry

[29] Source: bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47772682 [accessed on 15/04/2023].

requirements for engaging in politics tend to depress migrants' active participation, regardless of their level of political interest in the host country or political habits brought from the country of origin. Because migrants' political quiescence is often interpreted as the absence of interest in politics (Baubock et al., 2006), my working hypothesis to explain this phenomenon is that the perceived lack of engagement of EU migrants with local authorities, suggested by the low electoral registration rates, low electoral turnout and extremely rare candidatures (Carrillo-López, 2018; Collard, 2013; Ziegler, 2018) demotivates local political and institutional actors to make concrete efforts to integrate them in the political system, hence creating a feedback loop that maintains EU migrants' political participation marginal.

Having completed an overview of the literature on the migration from the EU to the UK and on the political presence of EU migrants in Britain, in the next section I discuss Democratic Innovations, government-led instruments used to increase political participation. I then focus citizen panels, a consultative mini-public extremely popular among English local governments that I used as a measure of EU migrants' political engagement.

2.7 Democratic Innovations

Participatory democrats such as Carole Pateman (1970) and Macpherson (1977), and deliberative democrats (Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1996) and the theorists of the deliberative 'turn' of the 1990s (Kersting, 2016), have advocated through the years to include participatory and deliberative principles into political practice and address the shortcomings of representative democracy (Dryzek, 2009). While participatory democracy emphasizes political participation as a mean to educate citizen and reduce social and economic inequalities, deliberative democracy value procedure over inclusion as a solution to the crisis of political legitimacy (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Together, these two philosophies of democracy represent the theoretical foundations of Democratic Innovations: 'institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process' (Smith, 2009, p. 5) and respond to the crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy (Kersting, 2016). Democratic Innovations aim in particular at reducing the power imbalance between citizens and governments (Warren, 1996), engaging the most politically marginalised groups of the society and increase their confidence they have the ability to participate (internal efficacy) and their trust government will respond to their inputs (external efficacy) (Siebers et al., 2019). Success stories such as participatory budgeting in Brazil (Cabannes, 2004; Ryan, 2021) or 'mini-publics' experiments (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006) show that theories can indeed be put into practice. Online tools of e-Democracy are also regarded as democratic innovations (Smith, 2009).

Democratic Innovations have the capacity to include all strata of a polity, in mini-publics through random or stratified sortition and equal voice, or, in other instruments like participatory budgeting (Ryan, 2021) and National Public Policy Conferences (Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018), through delegation of power and purposed engagement of marginalised groups. Because of their declared intent to democratise exclusionary political systems through participation and deliberation, DIs are ideal examples of government-driven instruments that, on paper, allow migrants to express their political demands, even when legislative restrictions prevent alien denizens from voting and running for office.

Although the idea of involving the public in policy-making was theorised by Sherry Arnstein over 50 years ago in the seminal paper 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' (1969), it is only in recent years that society's pressure for a more transparent and accountable public management, together with the declining interest toward traditional representative democracy, shifted the focus of public administrations from 'government', to 'governance' (Bingham et al., 2005; Pina et al., 2017; Yetano & Royo, 2017). The term 'governance' encompasses 'ways of governing that are non-hierarchical and involve networks of actors, both public and private, determining policy through negotiation, bargaining and participation' (Weale, 2011, p. 58).

Citizen participation is at the centre of this inclusive and cooperative way of governing, especially at the local level (Bingham et al., 2005; Pina et.al, 2017). Bingham et al. define the quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial processes that require citizen engagement as 'New Governance Processes', instruments that can be applied at any stage of the policy-making: 'all of them connect people to the policy process, whether "upstream" in policy making, "midstream" in policy implementation, or "downstream" in policy enforcement' (2005, p. 553). 'New Governance Processes' are innovations of old governance processes based on participatory and deliberative principles (Warren, 2012). According to Warren, governance-driven innovations arise in response to democracy deficits, are led by governments, are disjointed from elections, and create new, overlapping, and dynamic constituencies. Smith (2009), who coined the term 'democratic innovations', contend that all Dis must share two fundamental characteristics:

1. they engage ordinary citizens, rather than individuals representing organised groups such as social movements, lobbies, or trade unions.

2. they are top-down measures initiated and regulated by public actors. This public monopoly over DIs is justified by the fact that the 'policy, legislative and constitutional decision-making power' is exerted by governmental institutions only, whereas private organisations can confront and challenge current democratic institutions but not innovate them (*ibid*., pp. 2-3).

For Pogrebinschi and Ryan (2018), another essential feature of Democratic Innovations is effectiveness. They argue that citizens' inputs to policymaking should have an impact on actual policies. Without effectiveness, equality of participation and quality of deliberation remain just a 'normative ideal' (*ibid.*, p 136).

There is no consensus among scholars if democratic innovations are boosting political participation and restoring trust in democratic institutions, hence tackling the crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy, and contributing to achieve the ideals of participatory and deliberative normative theories. For example, Lafont believes that mini-publics are a 'shortcut to bypass citizenry' (2017, p. 99), rather than an enhancement of public engagement. However, recent evidence shows that citizens feel that a democratic system is indeed fairer when political decision-making processes includes inputs from the public (Pow et al., 2020; Werner & Marien, 2020).

The UK is a perfect case to understand the institutionalisation of democratic innovations. Since the 1990s, British public authorities have implemented a vast array of democratic innovations (surveys, focus groups, petitions, juries, town meetings, participatory budgeting, etc.) to develop more citizen-centric policies and nudge apathetic citizens to become active political actors. This is true especially for local governments, where 58% of citizens are not involved with local politics, 42% believe they have no influence over local decision-making (Hansard Society, 2019), the electoral turnout is particularly low (35%) (Martin, 2003), and budget cuts have severely limited their capacity to deliver services. The crisis of local democracy is not a UK only problem. It is affecting also other European countries, which are experiencing the same drop in voters' turnout (see Haug's analysis of the Norwegian case (2008), or Vetter (2014) for Germany).

In the UK, budget's cuts pushed local governments to prioritise areas of intervention. The need to take unpopular choices prompted many local councils to interrogate their citizens about policies and services they want (Parsons et al., 2019). In such scenario, the representativeness of the inputs collected by the local government from the citizenry becomes even more relevant: 'when participatory exercises are about exploring how authorities should do less (or the community do more), it is all the more important that participatory exercises reach a broad range of affected people.' (*ibid.*, p.7). In a report to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Lowndes et al. (1998) found that nine out of ten British local authorities had already implemented some sort of method to consult the citizenry. Yet, despite the almost universal diffusion of inclusive democratic practices, as many as four out of 10 local authorities do not monitor their impact on policy-making (Pina, Torres and Royo, 2017). The apparent disinterest of many British local authorities towards the outcomes of democratic innovations suggests that local politicians might

intend citizens participation more as a strategy to get electoral gains or preserve their status quo, rather than as an effective way to integrate the people in the 'governance' of the town (*ibid.*).

The most popular mechanisms of citizen engagement put in place by English local authorities are consultations, petitions, and citizen panels, both face-to-face and online (Zadra, 2022). Among democratic innovations, citizen panels deserve a closer analysis, as they represent a cross-over between deliberative mini-publics, such as deliberative opinion polls (Fishkin, 1991), and institutional top-down consultative tools such as public consultations.

2.8 Citizen Panels

In 2021, 108 English local councils, nearly one on three, were using a Citizen panel to inform their policy decisions, and many others had one at some point in the last 25 years (Zadra, 2022). A citizen panel is a standing panel composed by a representative sample of few hundreds/thousands residents regularly surveyed by a local authority about topics related with the management of their city, town or parish (Van Ryzin, 2008). They have a consultative function during agenda-setting and policy preparation (Van Dijk, 2010) and are among the most diffused democratic innovations (Andrews, Entwistle and Guarneros-Meza, 2019).

In the UK, one of the first example of Citizen panel, called the 'People's Panel', was run from 1998 to 2001 by a central government body, the Cabinet Office (Martin, 2003). At local level, in the late 1990s already 20% of councils had launched a Citizen panel (Chandler, 2001). Since then 'many local councils, police forces and health authorities in the UK have used citizen panels […] as sounding boards whose views are sought regularly about key policy issues' (*ibid*., p. 196).

citizen panels allow a regular and quick collection of vast amount of data about a population's opinions on local matters (Siebers, Gradus and Grotens, 2019). Since citizen panels are intended to represent the whole population of a local authority and feed policy-makers with opinions on a variety of different issues, their composition should be 'weighted for gender, age, ethnic background and occupation' (Stewart, 1996, p. 35). In the UK case, given the high number of international migrants reaching the country every year (1,218,000 in 2023[30]), nationality should also be a demographic criterion for the composition of the panels. If nationality is not considered, migrants are at risk of being severely underrepresented in citizen panels and their voices not heard by local administrations.

[30] Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2023 [accessed on 09/06/2024].

Andrews et al. (2019) found that citizen panels do increase participants' external political efficacy by offering them an opportunity to participate, especially in larger communities, but they do not improve their understanding of local decision-making and democratic processes (internal political efficacy). Chandler (2001) argues that citizen panels, as other participatory instruments adopted by local governments, do not increase control over policy-making, nor stimulate an active political participation and collective dialogue between citizens and authority, but simply reproduce individualistic and passive acts of participation similar 'to filling in a customer satisfaction survey at a particular supermarket' (*ibid.*, p.13). Furthermore, evidence from a study on three Dutch municipalities (Siebers, Gradus and Grotens, 2019) showed that citizen panels tend in fact to decrease, rather than increase, citizens' trust in their local governments, possibly because the participants believe public officials would not listen to them regardless of the method of communication (*ibid.*).

To avoid these shortcomings, Crosby, Kelly and Schaefer (1986, p. 171) recommend that citizen panels should reflect six participatory principles:

(1) the participants should be representative of the broader public and should be selected in a way that is not open to manipulation; (2) the proceedings should promote effective decision making; (3) the proceedings should be fair; (4) the process should be cost effective; (5) the process should be flexible; and (6) the likelihood that the recommendations of the group will be followed should be high.

The first criterion, the representativeness of the panel, is the most relevant for investigating the level of political participation. Because of the complexity of post-industrial societies, political decision-making on key issues is prevalently shaped by technical experts and bureaucrats (Bell, 1967). Consequently, the most marginalised strata of the population develop a sense of low political efficacy and do not register in citizen panels (Crosby et al., 1986). To incentivise the inclusion of all categories of people in citizen panels, the membership selection process should require the use of probabilistic sampling techniques, such as 'stratified random sampling' (*ibid.*), as self-enrolment is less effective to ensure representativeness. From a normative perspective, a random selection of panel members would guarantee a 'symbolic form of public authorization' (Brown, 2006, p. 209). The aim of random sampling is to achieve descriptive representation: a selection of members that mirror the ethnic, social, and economic composition of the society the Citizen panel intends to represent. For Manin (1997), it is always possible to attain descriptive representation through random selection, no matter the size of the population.

Brown (2006) critiques descriptive representation and argues it is not an effective way to achieve fair representation. In his view, descriptive representation assumes that representativeness is

based on 'who the representative is, rather than what he or she wants' (*ibid.*, p.218). Instead of shared identities, Brown proposes a less stringent method to select mini-publics, based on shared experiences (e.g., racial discrimination, being capable of having a baby) that he calls 'social perspectives' (*ibid.*). The assumption in this case is that shared experiences would generate 'shared concerns and questions, though not necessarily shared interests or preferences' (*ibid.*).

As discussed before, the Brexit referendum campaign has contributed to create a category of people – the EU migrants – that before that moment had never been regarded as a single constituency (either in negative, neutral or positive terms) by members of this group or external observers. As a result, EU migrants living in England now shares 'social perspectives', in terms of political marginalisation and negative perception of the political system's responsiveness to their participation (i.e. political external efficacy). Their involvement in democratic innovations such as citizen panels becomes then a good indicator of their propensity to participate in local politics and, conversely, of their level of political marginalisation.

2.9 e-Panels

As for other participatory mechanisms, citizen panels are increasingly becoming online tools. The global diffusion of ICTs and the Internet have permitted the launching of virtual panels (e-panels) that do not require the physical presence of participants and, contrary to traditional remote surveying methods as mail or phone surveys, are immediate, allow asynchronous communication and cost considerably less resources to the surveyor. Attracted by the perspective to maximise the response rate, reduce costs, and minimize panel's attrition (the drop-out rate), many local governments have decided to move their citizen panels fully online, or at least have a hybrid offline-online version.

Just like in-person citizen panels, members of online citizen panels (also known as 'People's panels', 'Residents panels' or 'Community panels'), are asked by a public authority to take part in periodic surveys, consultations, polls, policies proposals and policy evaluations. Participation rests only on the will and availability of the residents to engage with local politics through non-anonymous self-enrolment. Citizen panels are not issue-related, allow collection of data over time and, unlike most consultations, are not statutory mandate and, because of the voluntary recruitment of panellists, are less depending by the perceived salience of the issue to generate engagement. However, citizen panels entail additional financial costs and organisational adaptations (Kathlene & Martin, 1991). Therefore, we can assume that local councils create citizen panels when they believe the cost/benefit balance is tipped towards the benefits. This happen when local politicians and council officers are genuinely interested in knowing what a sample of their population think about major

policy plans and community-wide projects, and intend to use the panel frequently. Only then public resources should be invested in building the required infrastructure, acquire a suitable pool of professional expertise and recruit panellists (*ibid.*). The required investment of resources and their broad diffusion among British local authorities (Andrews, Entwistle and Guarneros-Meza, 2019), make citizen panels the most suitable democratic innovation to be used to operationalise the degree of openness (or, conversely, closeness) of a local authority towards citizens' engagement and representation of diverse interests in their policy making processes.

Despite their popularity, the effectiveness of these e-panels is not universally recognised. According to Van Ryzin (2008), online citizen panels suffer from several methodological issues. Van Ryzin argues that the 'digital divide' might limit the number of potential participants, as not all citizens have access to the Internet, know how to use it, or understand/care about its democratic potential. This seems a problem of the past though, as ONS statistics[31] show that in 2020 92% of the adults in the UK (16 or older) were Internet users. Since this percentage is increasing year after year, it is realistic to expect that in a few years close to 100% of the British adult population will have access to the technology and will own the skills needed to take part to an e-panel. Having a population of technologically equipped and Internet literate individuals is a necessary but not sufficient, condition to guarantee the functioning of e-panels, which to function need an adequate number of members of the public aware and willing to enrol.

The selection criteria of online citizen panels seem a bigger issue than the digital divide, because most e-panels are made of self-selected volunteers. If participants are selected through self-registration, then the panel will be composed of 'a highly self-selected group' (*ibid.*, p. 240). Self-selection compromises the descriptive representativeness of the panel, and in turn make the results of the surveys become unreliable and not representative of the opinions of all socio-economic classes, genders, ethnicities, nationalities and neighbourhoods about local issues they care about or policy proposals that might affect them. For these reasons, Internet nonprobability samples tend to provide different results than probability samples such as phone surveys (Malhotra & Krosnick, 2007). Some research suggests that the statistical distortions induced by these biases can be reduced by applying weighing schemes and corrections for mode effects (Van Ryzin, 2008). In any case, even if the scientific validity of online citizen panels can be partially adjusted, if these instruments are not representative of the entire population, then their democratic value becomes highly questionable, or even void.

[31] Source: ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry [accessed on 09/06/2024].

Since migrants tend to be less engaged with politics (Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020), and citizens who don't have strong political views tend to be less represented in participatory events (Fiorina, 1999), it is then realistic to assume that when recruiting is based on self-selection only, EU migrants are underrepresented in either physical and online citizen panels. How local councils decide to counter the potential unrepresentativeness of offline and online citizen panels influences the EU migrants capacity to express views and political demands, and ultimately can have an impact on how EU migrants engage with local democracy.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature on EU migrants, and their relationship with democratic processes and political participation in England. Starting from an overview of theories and empirical evidence of migrants' political participation, the chapter then focused on the target population of this research project: EU migrants in the UK. For EU migrants, Brexit has had a mobilising effect, and might mean the beginning of a shared European identity, in contrast with their apparent political quiescence at the local level. The same phenomenon is noted also on British-born citizens. To contrast the generalised apathy towards local democracy, since the 1990s British local governments have been implementing new strategies to raise citizen engagement, mainly to understand about what the citizenry wants from them and boost public support, but also to enhance participation and representativeness across all strata of the population. These democratic innovations have then potential to reach disengaged EU migrants and make them feel rightful members of the community. Because of their popularity among local councils and their inclusive design, citizen panels are an ideal tool to test the efficacy of DIs with EU migrants.

In the next chapter I illustrate in detail the theoretical framework that supported the research. Starting from the grand theory that encompasses the whole study, neo-institutionalism, I then move to the middle-level theory, Political Opportunity Structure, which guided the initial theoretical model I applied to study the political participation of EU migrants at the local level in England.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the political theories underpinning my research. I envisaged a multi-level theoretical framework, where each level is based on the principles of the upper one, in ascending degree of conceptual abstraction and scope, from macro to micro, or, conversely, in descending capacity of descriptive power, from the most general and abstract theory to the most specific and descriptive.

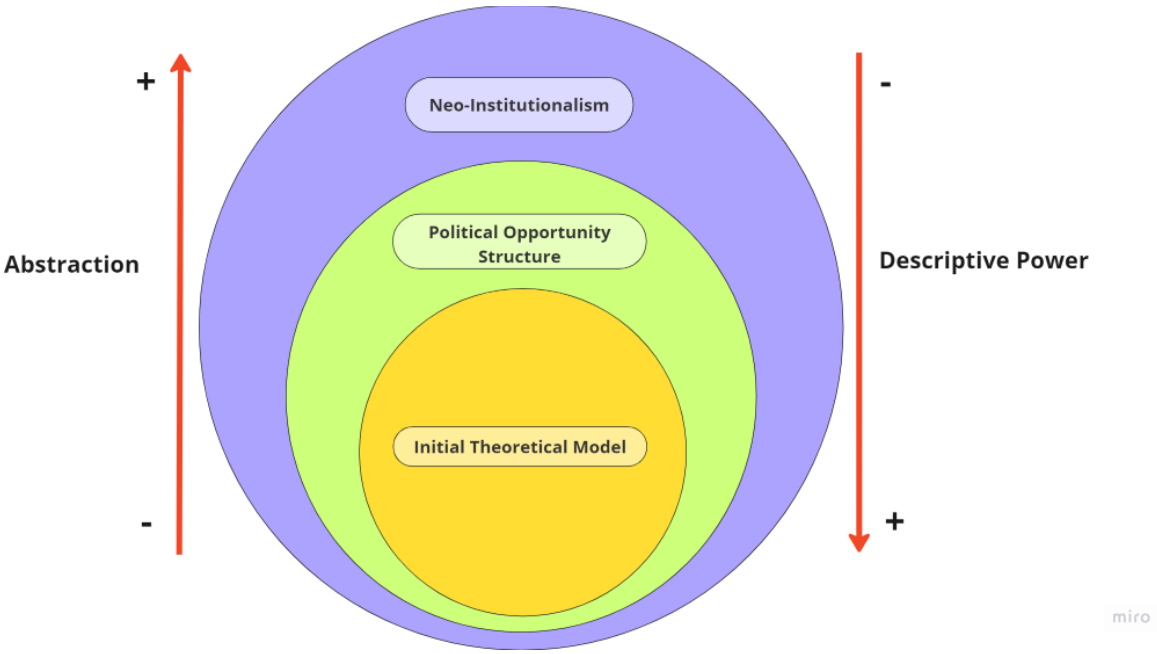

Figure 2 Onion chart of the theoretical framework.

The above figure represents how the three theories nest into each other. The following sections describe each level of the framework more in detail, starting from the broader theoretical foundation (macro-level), Neo-institutionalism, to the mid-level theory, the Political Opportunity Structure(POS), and concluding with a newly developed ground-level theory, the Initial Theoretical Model. A philosophical *trait d'union* links the three theoretical dimensions: the Initial Theoretical Model contains elements of the POS, which in turn roots its fundamental tenets, such as the nature of institutions and their impact on individuals' political behaviours, in Neo-Institutionalism.

While Neo-Institutionalism and the POS are well-known theories established upon a vast literature, I conceived the Initial Theoretical Model from anew, starting from empirical studies on exclusionary practices towards EU migrants perpetrated by local administrations across the EU (Afscharian et al.,

2023; Bruzelius, 2020; Ratzmann, 2021), then integrating their results with assumptions derived from POS frameworks applied to migrants (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011; Morales & Giugni, 2011) and Lea Klarenbeek's conceptualisation of migrants' civic legitimacy (2021; 2020). From the higher level to the bottom level, the framework goes from general theorisation and established knowledge (Neo-Institutionalism) to particular theorisation and novel knowledge (the Initial Theoretical Model).

This multilevel theoretical framework is suitable to support an *abductive* research design (described in detail in Chapter 4) which combines deductive and inductive analysis. Abductive analysis integrates testing hypotheses derived from pre-existing theories with developing new explanatory concepts emerging from data analysis, and is very common in qualitative research (Tracy, 2020). This methodological approach is aligned with Critical Realism (CR), the epistemological philosophy I adopted for this study (see chapter 4). CR scholars argue that only a limited portion of social reality is knowable through empirical experiences, and social theories can only explain *tendencies* rather than make predictions (Fletcher, 2017). A critical realist only interprets empirical results as provisional and theories as 'initial theories' that are by definition fallible and can never fully explain the reality of social phenomena[32] (Bhaskar, 1989). It follows that deductive analysis must be 'flexible' and leave room for new concepts to *inductively* emerge from the data. The final stage of the *abductive* analytical process is *retroduction* (*ibid.*), i.e. the identification of the 'contextual conditions for a particular causal mechanism to take effect and to result in the empirical trends observed' (Fletcher, 2017, p. 191), which in this study is rendered in the inner circle of the theoretical structure: the Initial Theoretical Framework.

I used qualitative data to verify working hypotheses while generating new concepts that could integrate it and improve the model. This is why throughout the analytical chapters of this thesis (from 5 to 10) I could make references to the Initial Theoretical Framework, while simultaneously rely on self-reflections on emerging themes, new literature, and intermediate outcomes.

As explained in detail in the following section (3.2), the central tenet of Neo-Institutionalism is that institutions are not just arena where politics happen, but actors that contribute to shape individual behaviours (March & Olsen, 1983). It follows that exogenous factors affecting if, how, and when people engage with politics can (and should) be studied. Neo-Institutionalism is a 'grand theory' that can be used to conceptualise universal high-level features assigned to social phenomena (e.g. 'institutions matter') but, despite its relevance when studying political behaviours, lacks the granularity to be applied to specific cases and cannot directly applied to interpret real-world data.

[32] This is the reason I called the theoretical model I developed from anew 'Initial Theoretical Framework' and let bottom-up results integrate it and improve it.

To overcome the empirical inapplicability of Neo-Institutionalism, I used a mid-level descriptive theory founded based on its principles: the POS theory.

The POS-based models allow empirical observations of neo-institutional credos. The theory is built on the tenent that institutions and institutionalised actors create structural opportunities that induce or deter political behaviours, including participation. The POS theory brakes down this abstract and high-level concept into a series of more fine-grained statements that can be operationalised in working hypotheses about political behaviours and political systems. The POS theory, which was first applied to social movements (Tarrow, 2011), was then adapted to other forms of political participation. Its scope, previously centred on institutional structures and political environment (Koopmans, 2004), was extended by including elements of Putnam's social capital theory (1995), such as ethnic organisations (Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2004) and the type of social capital they develop (bridging vs bonding) (Morales & Pilati, 2011). To further increase the reach of POS framework, scholars of migrants' political participation, such as Bird, Saalfed and Wust (2011) and Morales and Giugni (2011) added more independent variables, such as the political culture of the sending country (Bilodeau et al., 2010; Voicu & Comşa, 2014) and well-known individual drivers of participation like socio-economic status and resources (Brady et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972). Yet, this lower level of abstraction is still insufficiently granular to encompass the peculiarities of subnational social, economic and political contexts, and the lived experiences of participants. In the case of EU migrants in post-Brexit England, a generic POS model, even if adapted to migrants' political participation (e.g. Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011; Morales & Giugni, 2011) does not account for their unique status of mobile citizens, and therefore cannot predict how local political institutions and their bureaucracies (i.e. local councils and political parties) interpret the EU migrant exceptionalism.

The specificity of the Initial Theoretical Model, which draws from POS paradigms of migrants' political participation and from Lea Klarenbeek's critique of two-way theories of migrants' integration (2021), comes from being inspired by some empirical studies (Afscharian et al., 2023; Bruzelius, 2020; 2017), which highlighted how local governments neglect EU migrants across the EU. Because of the congruity of theoretical and empirical components, i.e. the latter support what the former argue, the Initial Theoretical Model allowed me to generate working hypotheses applicable to the population under study (EU migrants in the UK) that guided the empirical part of the research.

Lastly, it would be wrong not to mention that EU migrants are not all the same. The literature often treat them as a single migrant population together because they all come from a quasi-federation (the EU) (Verdun, 2016), they all enjoy the same immigration regime (freedom of movement), and there are cultural, religious and ethnic affinities. In spite of all national differences, EU migrants are

more similar to each other than with any other non-EU migrants. In light of these common features, and because of the identification of EU-born residents as a single bloc of people made by media, politicians and the British public since the Brexit referendum, the theoretical model I propose also refers to them with the generic term of '*EU migrants*'.

However, in the empirical chapters they are not treated as such. The EU is clearly split in two macro-regions: the 15 European member states that joined the Union before 2004, called EU15 countries; and the 10 Central and Eastern European countries that joined after 2004, called A8 and A2 countries. These two macro-regions have distinct economic, cultural and historical in-group similarities and out-group differences. The research accounted for the EU15/A8+A2 divide through social capital, democratic history, cultural traits and other resource-based individual indicators.

This introduction presented the structure of the theoretical framework and its rationale. The remainder of the chapter illustrate more in details the three theoretical levels: Neo-Institutionalism, the POS theory, and the Initial Theoretical Model.

3.2 Neo-Institutionalism

This section provides an overview of Neo-Institutionalism, the grand theory on the formation of political behaviours which describes and justifies the foundations of this research. Neo-Institutionalism provides the theoretical principles I used to build assumptions and advance hypothesis on the determinants of political participation of specific populations, such as migrants and national minorities.

Neo-institutionalism is a late 20th century prominent school of economic, social and political thinking, which finds its roots in the traditional institutionalism of early 20th century (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019). In political science, the novelty of the neo-institutional theory resided in the departure from the normative approach of old institutionalists, such as Max Weber (March & Olsen, 1983) and the former US president Woodrow Wilson (Hadler, 2015), whose research aim was to simply describe political institutions and their legal developments without developing new theories. Neo Institutionalists prefer instead to focus on how institutions, intended as a set of norms and rules embedded in a polity, influence political behaviours, and sometimes produce unintended consequences.

Neo-Institutionalism as a scholar movement started in 1977 (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019; Jupille & Camporaso, 2022, p. 9) after two seminal papers, both on organisation theory, from John Meyer and Brian Rowan, and Lynn Zucker. Meyer and Rowan (1977) wrote on the impact of rules and

myths of the institutional environment that provides structure and legitimisation to complex organisations, while Zucker (1977) conducted an empirical study on the role of institutionalisation[33] in shaping organisations' cultural resistance to change. In political science, Neo-Institutionalism became popular as a grand theory of institutions in the early 1980s, starting with March and Olsen's pivotal paper 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life' in 1983. Overcoming behaviouralists' standard views that dominated social sciences in those years, March and Olsen commented that:

> *It is a commonplace observation in empirical social science that behaviour is constrained and dictated by cultural dicta and social norms. Although self-interest undoubtedly permeates politics, action is often based more on discovering the normatively appropriate behaviour than on calculating the return expected from alternative choices. As a result, political behaviour, like other behaviour, can be described in terms of duties, obligations, roles, and rules* (1983, p. 744).

In short, neo-institutionalists understand individual actors' choices in politics as the results of complex interactions of a set of institutions (or institutionalised norms), rather than a strategic calculation of perceived benefits over perceived risks. In the following sections, I intend to demonstrate why I consider the former approach to be better suited to my research goals. I start by defining what is an institution in the context of this research.

3.2.1 What is an Institution?

Scholars do not agree on a single definition of 'Institution'. In the social sciences the term has been intended in many ways and used in numerous fashions (Immergut, 1998). Ersson and Lane call the definition of 'Institution' problematic because it is 'ambiguous in two senses' and, consequently, give two definitions:

> *'An institution may be a rule that directs behaviour by means of sanctions, i.e. it is a norm that has been institutionalized* […] *or behaviour systems dictated by means of a set of rules, i.e. it is organized activity'* (2000, p. 24).

The first definition of institution is agent-based, the second one is holistic. Neo-institutionalists who believe in an agent-based society, see individual preferences created by an agent (the individual) and then altered by institutional constrains and collective bargain, similarly to followers of the rational choice theory. Opposite to this perspective, scholars who adhere to the holistic view understand individual preferences as shaped by institutions. For them, institutions come before the definition of individual interests and collective bargain (*ibid.*).

[33] Zucker defined institutionalisation as the process 'by which individual actors transmit what is socially defined as real' (1977, p. 728).

For this study, I adopted a holistic-sociologic approach. Therefore, in this work I define institution as:

> *Behaviour patterns that people form expectations about and that tend to involve interests and belief-systems* (*ibid*., p.4).

This is a 'thick' definition of institutions, as opposed to the 'thin' definition applied by agent-based scholars, where an institution is no more than an institutionalised rule.

According to this definition, institutions can take a variety of forms, such as:

> *'Routines, procedures, conventions, roles, strategies, organizational forms, technologies, beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures and knowledge…'* (March & Olsen, 1989, p. 22).

Consequently, the term 'institutionalisation' is intended as a process by which a norm, a role or a practice (or systems of) becomes a rule (or a system of rules) considered legitimate by all members of a society, either by formal enforcement of penalties or by informal social acceptance (Ersson & Lane, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, in a democratic system elections are events shaped by highly institutionalised procedures.

3.2.2 Why Institutions Matter

Despite the ontological differences among scholars about the concept of institution, all neo-institutionalists share the basic tenet that 'institutions matter'. Institutions are not just a collection of rules, roles, procedures, and practices that create an arena for social and political interactions, but political actors in their own right. As such, institutions actively concur to determine individual political choices: 'Political democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions' (March & Olsen, 1983, p. 738). Because of this premise, neo-institutional theorists sustain that political behaviours do not happen in a vacuum, but are the result of the influence of specific institutional contexts on the complex interactions happening among different political actors with different goals and strategies (Odmalm, 2005):

> *Institutions are thus important when we want to understand what type of strategies are involved in terms of sequence of move, set of choices and information available to the players. These parameters, it is argued, are ultimately determined by the institutional structure of the situation…much political behaviour and collective decision-making is an artefact of the procedures used to make decisions.* (*ibid.*, pp. 77-78).

For neo-institutionalists, institutions shape political interests and political behaviours. However, institutions are not neutral and carry intrinsic *biases* that can be either instrumental or detrimental towards a particular group of people or interests. The ultimate goal of neo-institutionalists is then to unpack institutional biases and indicate procedural ways to make institutions more aligned to normative democratic principles. Neo-institutionalists hence promote a form of procedural

democracy, where 'substantive justice [is sought through] formal procedure' (Immergut, 1998, p. 12).

3.2.3 A Critique of Neo-Institutionalism

The major critique of neo-institutionalism is that it is not possible to recognise the effects of institutions on political behaviours from the conditions that generated them. Przeworski (2004) argues that political institutions are just epiphenomena of the power relations between social and economic forces existing in a society. Institution are endogenous to their conditions, and, because of that, can 'at most organize power that lies elsewhere' (*ibid.*, p. 529). The logical consequence of this analysis is that comparisons across institutions are invalid because local conditions differ from a case to another, and it is impossible to discern if the same institution can impact two cases in the same way. However, a few years prior to the 2004 essay *Do Institutions Matter?* the same Przeworski, writing about conditions that sustain democratic systems, concluded that:

> *This is not to deny that institutions matter: in fact they do, and not just parliamentarism and electoral systems but others that we have left out of consideration because we lack data (1996, p. 55).*

Jupille and Camporaso countered Przeworski's objection to neo-institutionalism by arguing that it is not possible to simply decouple institutions from the causes of political events[34], and that the complex mix of institutions observed in any social setting 'overdetermines some level of causal autonomy' (2022, p. 12). It follows that people's understanding of their own political preferences and participation opportunities is partially shaped by external social forces expressed not only through, but also by, institutionalised rules, policies, and attitudes. For this reason, political behaviours should not be analysed in isolation from their institutional context (Smith & Wales, 2000).

Refuting the alleged endogenous nature of institutions has also important methodological consequences. As Przeworski argues, if institutions are irrelevant in determining political behaviours, then comparing institutions in different social, economic, and cultural contexts is analytically flawed[35]. If, on the contrary, for observing the causality of political behaviours we cannot discount the role played by institutions, then analytical cases that share their defining

[34] It is the causal inference paradox: causality does not happen in a vacuum but is always co-determined by institutions. Whatever social, cultural, political, or economic conditional factors we apply to describe a social event, including the come into being of institutions, we must always recur to one or more pre-existing institutions, the ultimate one being language itself. See Alexander Field's work for a critique of treating institutions as endogenous factors (1981).

[35] Przeworski (2004) offers several examples of cases where the same democratic institution was arguably successful in some countries and a failure in others, or opposite regimes (e.g. democracy and dictatorship) were irrelevant to the economic performance of their countries.

characteristics, such as local authorities within the same country, can be compared through institutional lens to allow some degree of causal inferences about the object of the study (Gerring, 2004).

3.2.4 Sociological versus Rational Choice Neo-Institutionalism

Over the last 40 years, neo-institutional theorists have produced a vast academic literature (Ersson & Lane, 2000), and many variants of the theory have emerged[36]. A lengthy excursus over the rich body of work related to Neo-Institutionalism and its many ramifications is outside the scope of this thesis. In this section I intend to briefly cover just the two types of Neo-Institutionalism that in my view are the archetypes of most other variants: rational choice neo-institutionalism and sociological neo-institutionalism.

Rational choice and sociological neo-institutionalism reflect the divide I described in the previous section between the atomistic (individualistic) view, adopted by rational-choice scholars, and the holistic view, adopted by sociological neo-institutionalists (Ersson & Lane, 2000). For this reason, sociological and rational choice accounts of neo-institutionalism are considered mutually exclusive (Peters, 2005).

In the worldview of neo-institutionalists, policy preferences are not dictated only by objective analyses and an aggregation of personal goals, but are co-constructed by all actors involved in policymaking (Boswell et al., 2011). In cooperative and/or competitive settings such as political arenas, strong empirical evidence (Rees & Kopelman, 2019) supports March and Olsen's hypothesis that more often than not individuals adhere to institutional rules and routines because of a *logic of appropriateness* – i.e. what an individual considers as a 'appropriate behaviour' in each social context – rather than, or even against, a *logic of consequences*[37]. As the two scholars explain:

> *Actors seek to fulfil the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices, and expectations of its institutions.* (March & Olsen, 2009, p. 478).

I therefore contend that the sociological approach is preferrable to the rational choice approach for studying political participation. Contrary to rational-choice neo-institutionalists, for sociological

[36] The scholar field of Institutions Theory is in constant evolution. See Jupille and Camporaso (2022, p. 14) for an updated, yet partial, list of 'institutionalisms'.

[37] The *logic of consequences* implies that self-interested and rational actors decisions are guided by expected benefits and perceived costs. It is the opposite of the *logic of appropriateness*. In practice, individuals' decision is often based on a mix of self-interested calculations based on biased and/or incomplete information, and cognitive shortcuts offered by social norms. The two types of behaviours are normatively opposite to each other, but empirically they tend to coexist to different degrees in most individuals (Goldmann, 2005). The logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness are indeed more similar to opposite poles of a continuum than to dichotomic choices (Balsiger, 2014) .

neo-institutionalists, personal preferences are not predetermined. Political behaviours are co-produced by individual attitudes, power distribution among social groups and the institutional context (Hadler, 2015). Lane and Hersson (2000) identify three fundamental axioms of institutions beyond the historical 'intrinsic' value assigned by old institutionalists. Firstly, institutions have been around for so long that have become a frame of reference for individual and collective behaviour, and for other institutions too; secondly, institutions carry a moral value that can be either embraced to model social behaviours or contested; finally, and perhaps most importantly, 'institutions have a causal impact upon social results' (Odmalm, 2005, p. 83), hence can be intended as social actors, despite not having proper agency. Institutions also have an 'extrinsic value', which is their capacity to influence both individual and collective action. Following this line of thought, it is difficult to regard EU migrants' political participation at the local level just in a rational choice fashion, as the result of the aggregate behaviour of individuals balancing personal gains and risks determined by a set of institutional opportunities and constraints.

In summary, I maintain that a sociological approach to neo-institutionalism is the most appropriate theoretical foundation for this doctoral research. Alternative theories are too determinist, because they either reduce political participation to the result of a mere aggregation of individual choices that can be empirically observed and tested (Immergut, 1998; Landman, 2008) and only see institutions as a consequence of long chains of individual actions and deny the power of social structures, as in rational choice theory (Scott, 2000). Analogously, atomistic approaches (or rational choice neo-institutionalism) relegates institutions to the role of simple regulators of trends that occur when human selfishness is left to operate undisturbed and, by doing so, ignore the contribute of social, economic or political forces operating above the individual in the formation of opinions and behaviours (Ersson & Lane, 2000; Fiorina, 1995). This is true especially when it comes to first-generation migrants, who, because born in a different country with a different political culture and different political institutions, experience a series of limits and obstacles to political participation unknown to native citizens. An example of migrants' limits to political participation is the lack of suffrage rights, i.e. voting or running for office, that in advanced democracies are warranted by default to native citizens but not to foreigners (Morales & Giugni, 2011). The rational choice argument that the structure of national and local political institutions has no bearing in determining political behaviours is untenable if related to migrants.

Furthermore, sociological neo-institutionalism is the theoretical backbone of participatory and deliberative democratic innovations, which include citizen juries and citizen panels (Smith, 2009). By giving to the citizens the opportunity to shape their own policy preferences through mediated deliberation, democratic innovations intervene to counterbalance the distortions in the creation,

perception and representation of individual interests produced by representative democracy through aggregation processes like voting (Smith & Wales, 2000):

> *Aggregation processes fail to recognize that preferences, interests, and values are shaped and constrained by the political, social, and economic context in which individuals find themselves – numerous social forces shape an individual's sense of what is possible. Preferences are not exogenous to institutional settings.* (*ibid*., p.52).

If preferences are not exogenous to institutional settings, then the government's choices can incentivise or deter the political activity of any group of people.

The sociological neo-institutionalism provides a solid account for explaining political participation of disadvantaged individuals, politically excluded groups, and national/ethnical minorities. On this point, it is possible to argue that when a government of any level engages with a particular sub-set of citizens within the broader population (e.g. a national minority) this action alone can create opportunities to voice opinions, which in turn can influence political behaviours. As put by Immergut:

> *Not only may political institutions, political authorities and political culture play a role in the definition, mobilization, and organisation of interests, but the structure of political opportunities will shape the strategies of organized interests and their beliefs regarding the efficacy of different types of political action* (1998, p. 21).

Assuming political opportunities matter to influence migrants political behaviour, then English local governments that practice participatory principles should influence EU migrants in taking an active interest in local politics. Consequently, if any interaction with the authorities is a political opportunity, then it is possible that councils that provided help and support to their EU migrants throughout the Brexit process could have empowered them to become political actors.

In conclusion, from an institutionalist viewpoint local political institutions create openings or hindrances for political participation. However, the high abstraction of Neo-Institutionalism does not allow to make more specific context-related analyses. To solve this issue, I integrated in the theoretical framework the Political Opportunity Structure theory, which is founded on Neo-Institutionalism's principles, but is more descriptive and allows for a more granular understanding of the determinants of the political participation of EU migrants at the local level.

3.3 Theories on Migrants' Political Participation

3.3.1 Individual Drivers of Participation

There are several migrant-specific 'individual, organisational and contextual factors' (Morales & Giugni, 2011, p. 3) that jointly concur to determine the degree of political inclusion of non-native

minorities. At individual level, the socio-economic and resources models (Brady et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972) that usually predict native citizens' levels of political participation quite accurately are not sufficient to describe the determinants of participation for non-native populations. The cost required to participate is considerably higher for migrants, which explains their lower in all traditional metrics of political participation (voting turnout, number of elected representatives, party memberships, etc.). Compared to native[38] citizens, migrants must overcome additional hurdles to become politically 'incorporated'. They must master the language of the country, learn how the political system and the democratic processes of the host country work, be aware of their political rights, and deal with social habits acquired in the country of origin. Above all, they must develop a sense of external political efficacy and believe their participation matters even as foreigners and outsiders. None of these constraints to participation apply to native citizens.

Factors often regarded as important individual drivers of political participation among migrants are the language proficiency and the level of cultural 'assimilation', which is also called 'exposure' when measured by the length of residence in the hosting country (Nguyen Long, 2016). A study from Wass et al. (2015) found that assimilation, in this case operationalised as having a native spouse or parenting native children, is strongly correlated with voting turnout. Other well-established migrants' political integration theories are *early socialisation*[39], and *transferability*. These theories apply only to long-term migration, which is defined as any person who moves their usual residence to another country for more than 12 months[40]. Short-term stayers (less than a year) usually have no political rights and, due to the transitional nature of their residence, have no interest in the politics of the hosting country.

The early socialisation model posits that political habits are learned in youth and act as information filter and guiding values afterwards. According to this theory, family values and democratic culture of the country of origin are key factors in determining migrants' political behaviours in the receiving society (Sears & Valentino, 1997). This theory was partially corroborated by Alesina and Giuliano's work (2011) on family ties and political participation. The authors found that the stronger the family ties are in the country of origin, the lower is the level of migrants' political engagement in the

[38] Depending on what political culture they come from, how they socialised in their family, with friends, at school, at work, and in any other social environment they were embedded in before migrating and at what age they emigrated.

[39] The early socialisation theory is also known as 'resistance theory' (Khan, 2021).

[40] The UN and the ONS define long-term migration as 'A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.'. Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/noteonthedifferencesbetweenlongterminternationalmigrationflowsderivedfromtheinternationalpassengersurveyandestimatesofthepopulationobtainedfromtheannualpopulationsurvey/december2016 [accessed on 19/04/2024].

receiving country. Conversely, national cultures characterised by weaker family ties have abroad communities with higher levels of political participation in hosting countries.

Complementary to the early socialisation model, the exposure theory suggests that migrants' political participation depends on the level of 'exposure' (or 'late socialisation') to the host country values and culture, which facilitate their 'assimilation' (Aleksynska, 2011; Converse, 1969; White et al., 2008). Gherghina's findings (2016) on Romanian communities in Western Europe (Italy, Spain, France, and Germany) also support the exposure theory. Gherghina found that the length of stay of the individual is a strong predictor of political participation in the receiving country. Similar conclusions have been reached by previous studies (Togeby, 1999; White et al., 2008), but the added value of Gherghina's study is that the migrant population analysed in the paper is the Romanian community, which in the UK represent the second biggest group from the EU.[41]

Finally, the transferability model sits in between early socialisation and exposure. It proposes that initial behaviours learnt through socialisation persist in the host country but adapt to the new values and democratic institutions experienced by the migrant (Black, 1987). The transferability theory (akin to a multicultural vision of society) is not supported by strong empirical evidence. A quantitative study on migrants' electoral participation (Voicu & Comşa, 2014) concluded that political culture seems to be not transferrable from the country of birth to the host country, and can only be either kept (early socialisation) or replaced (assimilation/exposure). Comparing USA, Canada and Europe, Wright and Bloemraad (2012),did not find any evidence of an increase of migrants' political participation in countries with a policy context favourable to multiculturalism (transferability theory). , However, neither did they find evidence of a positive effect on participation of open citizenship regimes, a core element of the assimilation theory. According to Voicu and Comşa (2014), the exposure model is the strongest predictor of migrant's participation at the local level: while political attitudes learnt in youth might affect interest in the national politics of the host country (where most migrants are disenfranchised), they have a weak effect on local participation. These results also undermine the thesis that migrants from recent democracies, like Eastern European countries, are inclined to be politically apathic because not used to engage in politics in their country of birth (Savelyev, 2013).

Long-term migration also allows foreign nationals to become citizens of the host country through naturalisation. Naturalisation is a legal process that permits migrants who fulfil certain

[41] According to Census data, in 2021 538,840 Romanians were living in the UK. Romanians are the 4th foreign group by country of birth after India, Poland and Pakistan. Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/internationalmigrationenglandandwales/census2021 [accessed on 07/06/2024].

requirements, in particular a minimum number of years living in the country, to acquire the citizenship of the host country[42] and the associated political rights. The acquisition of the host country citizenship is seen by assimilationists as a marker of political integration (Guarnizo et al., 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that naturalisation is positively correlated with political participation (Bevelander & Spång, 2015; Just & J. Anderson, 2012; Koopmans, 2004), possibly because it increases the sense of attachment to the hosting nation and the desire to belong to the adopted national community by taking part in collective rituals like elections (Rapp, 2020). For Just and Anderson (2012), naturalisation improves migrants' political participation by providing formal membership in the polity, by enabling voting in all elections and referenda, and by informing migrants about their civic rights and civic duties. The authors also found that, at least in Europe, naturalisation tends to foster citizen-led forms of participation (e.g. protesting, boycotting or petitioning) more than institutional forms of participation (e.g. voting, party membership, trade-unionism) and has stronger effect on migrants who 'socialised in less democratic countries' (*ibid*., p. 506). These results show how naturalisation helps to offset, at least partially, negative experiences of democracy occurred in the country of origin.

Yet, according to some literature, both naturalised and non-naturalised migrants still behave differently than native citizens. When controlling for migrants' generation (first or second) and for citizenship status, foreigners still present significant differences with natives in terms of voting turnout (González-Ferrer, 2011). These results indicate that the assimilation[43] and exposure hypotheses are not always reliable predictors of political participation (Guarnizo et al., 2003). However, the major limit of these studies is that they only account for electoral voting and do not consider other forms of political participation. When the analysis is extended to other traditional types of political engagement, like membership in trade-unions, foreign-born residents tend to behave similarly to those born in the country (Aleksynska, 2011). Aleksynska's findings corroborate the exposure theory: 20 years after migrating, natives and non-natives achieve the same rate of union memberships. There is a wealth of empirical literature on migrants political participation, which, has seen above, does not always provide results fitting the predictions of major theories. What seems to be missing in these works are (to some extent) the historical, social, economic and institutional context of the polities under scrutiny.

[42] The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 requires at least 5 years of residency in the UK and an indefinite leave to enter/remain to apply for the British nationality. Source: gov.uk/government/publications/naturalisation-as-a-british-citizen-by-discretion-nationality-policy-guidance/naturalisation-as-a-british-citizen-by-discretion-accessible [accessed on 20/02/2024].

[43] The assimilation hypothesis posits that migrants' political participation and civic engagement increases not only over time but also across generations.

3.3.2 Collective Drivers of Participation

The determinants of migrants' political engagement mentioned so far regard individual factors, like socioeconomic status, education, early socialisation, length of stay and citizenship. There are also collective aspects and contextual characteristics that concur to determine migrants' political behaviour. Known examples are ethnic/national identity and in-group bonding. There is evidence that a powerful sense of national identity and communitarian culture are conducive to cohesive communities abroad. Ethnic and national communities build social capital and strengthen interest in political issues affecting the ethnic/national group (de Rooij, 2012; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999). Nguyen Long defines social capital as 'the value entrenched in our relationships that can be transformed into tangible assets for the pursuit of individual and collective interests' (2016, p. 820). Social capital supports knowledge sharing, increases civic skills, and enables the establishment of personal networks that facilitate political engagement (*ibid.*). As Gil De Zúñiga, Barnidge and Scherman put it: 'political behaviour is an outcome of social capital' (2017, p. 47) (2017, p. 47).

An important cradle of social capital are civic associations. Since Alexis De Tocqueville's classic analysis of the American democracy in 'Democracy in America' (1840), scholars have considered a prosperous non-political associationism as a promoter of social capital and a sign of a healthy democracy (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995; Putnam, 1995; Stoker, 2017). This notion applies in particular to migrants: volunteering in organisations is generally positively correlated with political participation (Cho et al., 2006; Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2001; Seidle, 2015a). However, not all forms of associationism seem to promote the engagement of their members with the democratic processes of the country of residence. Putnam (2000), for example, distinguishes between the effects of 'bridging' and 'bonding' organisational structures. 'Bridging' organisations nurture civic skills and create social networks beyond the identity sphere (cross-ethnic/nationals), thus providing members with tangible and intangible resources that lead to engagement with national and local politics. On the other end of the spectrum, 'bonding organisations' are based on the ethnic homogeneity of their members and advocate for ethnic-related issues only, reinforce group identity and sustain intra-group solidarity at the expense of political mobilisation on matters of interest for the whole population (González-Ferrer, 2011; Bevelander and Spång, 2015) Similarly to Putnam, Burt's 'structural holes theory' (2005) (2005) posits that individuals who are able to fill the 'hole' between social groups, e.g. migrants and natives, are exposed to opportunities for political participation. It follows that migrants who entertain relationships outside their community tend to be politically active.

Morales and Pilati (2011) surveyed migrants in eight European cities and collected empirical evidence of their political attitudes and behaviours. In line with the above studies, they concluded

that the social capital deriving from activism in bridging associations is clearly a stimulus of political participation. Conversely, they found that bonding social capital is to a large extent detrimental to migrants' participation because it isolates them from the hosting society and its democratic processes (Strömblad & Adman, 2010). These findings corroborated the negative role of bonding social capital highlighted by Kim (2017) in his study of foreign brides in South Korea. Similarly, minorities' spatial segregation in 'ethnic' neighbourhoods, which tend to incentivise bonding social capital, is associated in France with lower electoral turnout (Maxwell, 2010).

However, the net effect of bonding versus bridging social capital on political participation is still not clear. Other studies (Jacobs et al., 2004; Kastoryano & Schader, 2014) provide different results from the ones mentioned above. Some scholars disagree with Putnam and Burt's theories and argue that bonding organisations can have a positive effect on migrants' political engagement (Morales and Pilati, 2011). Bloemraad (2006) found that intra-ethnic associationism, as well as ethnic media and ethnic business are conducive to political participation, thanks to the easier spread of information about citizenship and naturalisation processes. They also make migrant communities 'attractive' to politicians as a potential source of votes (interestingly, the opposite effect was noted by Strömblad & Adman, 2010). Berger (2004) found a correlation between membership in ethnic and non-ethnic associations and political activity among three migrant groups in Berlin (Italians, Turks, and Russians). His hypothesis is that ethnic association would raise political interest and, consequently, political activity, but only in relation to migrants' issues rather than German politics as a whole. Heath et al. (2013) analysed the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study (EMBES) data and discovered that ethnic/bonding social capital is **not** a depressor of political participation among Commonwealth migrants, or at least no more than for white British citizens. Jacobs et al. (2004), after finding that in Brussels Turks and Moroccan communities did not show political behaviours complying with Fennema and Tillie's (1999, 2001) theory of ethnic-associationism density[44], wrote that the interaction between bridging and bonding social capital might have a role in predicting levels of non-nationals' political engagement, as ties with mainstream politics ultimately stimulate political participation within ethnic groups.

Nguyen Long (2016) offers a more exhaustive and nuanced description of social capital's effect on migrant's political participation. He assumes that bonding and bridging social capital also operate within communities (embeddedness), rather than only between communities. His hypothesis is that bonding social capital would pressure individuals to conform with other members of the

[44] According to Fennema and Tillie (1999, 2001), the higher the density of ethnic associations, the higher the level of involvement in local politics at group level. Their theory was confirmed empirically by the behaviour of Turks communities in Amsterdam.

community. Communities leaders would then use bonding ties (enforced trust) to favour co-operation with local institutions and promote political integration, in order to acquire bargain power when presenting demands on behalf of their community and for reinforcing their leadership vis-a-vis their co-ethnics/co-nationals. To do so, they support voting, the most institutionalised political activity, over protesting, by definition an informal political activity. His empirical study of migrants communities in Rome (Italy) confirmed his hypothesis and integrates Morales and Pilates' (2011) results: bonding social capital drives political participation, but favours formal acts of participation, such as voting, and deters informal political activities, like protesting. Conversely, a prevalence of bridging capital, based on stronger ties outside the ethnic/national community, tends to correlate with informal political activities. For example, we know that in the USA the presence of a strong and charismatic community leader (the 'bridge' with white elites, e.g. Reverend Jesse Jackson) has a mobilising effect on black minorities and increases their voting turnout (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999). This effect seems to be even stronger in local politics (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Cohen & Dawson, 1993), if the local context is conducive to electoral mobilisation. Although it would be an error to assume that the political behaviours of African-Americans in the USA can be extended to any ethnic or national minority, because of their unique history, culture and experience (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999), it is nevertheless a good indication of how political mobilisation in culturally homogeneous and cohesive communities works.

Limitations to the social capital theory have been found by other authors (Klofstad & Bishin, 2014). Grasso and Giugni (2022) went further and, in their empirical study of migrants' political participation in four European cities, challenged the validity of the social capital theory as a whole. In addition to social capital, they did not detect any relevant impact on migrants' political integration also for group consciousness and civic voluntarism. The authors found that the strongest predictor of political participation it is the network effect generated by being members of an association.

In addition, Morales and Pilati (2011)[45] determined that the degree of openness of the *political opportunity structure* (POS) provided by the institutional context is a contributing factor of migrants' political engagement: 'the more individual rights migrants are granted, the more they tend to participate in residence-country activities and less in homeland or ethnic activities' (*ibid.*, p. 107). Seidle's empirical study (2015) on the political participation of non-native residents in Sweden, Netherlands and Belgium confirmed the importance of legal and administrative frameworks as incentives for migrants' civic engagement. Bloemraad (2006) also adopted the

[45] See also Bird, Saalfeld, Wüst (2011) for similar conclusions.

principles of POS theory to elaborate the 'Structured Mobilisation' theoretical framework to explain migrants' political integration beyond individual factors, but broadened the traditional institutionally-driven POS structure by including the supporting role played by other actors external to both migrant communities and the state (political parties, unions, churches, etc.). The 'Structured Mobilisation' model is completed by a feedback loop that reinforces the government's proclivity to provide material and symbolic support to migrants' political integration[46].

Both at individual and group level, ethnicity and nationality seem indeed to influence political behaviours (Aleksynska, 2011). Studying survey data in Australia, Zingher & Thomas concluded that there is: 'empirical support for the importance of ethnic differences in shaping political dispositions and behaviour' (2012, p. 392). For example, Schulze (2014) noted that second generation Russian migrants in Estonia were less politically engaged than their Estonian peers and concluded that 'ethnicity remains a significant predictor of political and civic participation when controlling for socioeconomic and demographic variables" (*ibid.*, p. 22). Likewise, ethnic minorities seem less engaged by participatory initiatives driven by local authorities (Michels & de Graaf, 2010).

For Prosser et al. (2017), if migrants do not feel sense of belonging in the host community, they tend to be less engaged with local politics. The main problem with this claim is that the direction of the causal arrow between belonging and participation is ambivalent. It can be argued that participating in local politics increases self-identification with the place of residence, rather than then the opposite. Having said that, empirical evidence shows that political attitudes tend to precede political behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), thus Prosser et al. argument remains valid.

3.3.3 Migrants and Drivers of Participation

This review of the literature shows that the classic explainers of political participation, such as socio-economic status (Campbell et al., 1960; Verba and Nie, 1972), individual resources (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995), social capital (Putnam, 1995; Putnam & Schuster, 2000; Morales and Pilati, 2011) and individual characteristics, like religion, gender, age, marital status, host language knowledge, body of work. Ethnicity, national background and group identity also explain different level of political engagement between different communities.

Other well-known political participation drivers, like resources, social capital or mobilisation affect migrants to a lesser extent than native citizens (Ruedin, 2018; Wass et al., 2015). As argued by Pilati and Herman: 'classical predictors of political behaviour, especially socio-economic status (SES)

[46] In Bloemraad's model, the positive reinforcing feedback means that the more migrants integrate politically, the more the state provides symbolic and material opportunities for their political integration.

ones, serve only as partial explanations for the minority and migrant population' (2020, p. 107). Coherently, policy interventions to encourage civic activism and political engagement among migrants are effective for some group of migrants more than others (Aleksynska, 2011). Aleksynska's findings are particularly germane for this research: non-native residents who are more responsive to top-down engagement from public political institutions are 'from developed countries, non-Muslim, and with a relatively short span at destination' (*ibid.*, p. 580). This is the exact profile of EU migrants in the UK.

3.4 The Political Opportunity Structure Theory

The 'Political Opportunity Structure' theory (POS) was first developed in the field of political protests and social movements studies to explain the role of contextual factors, such as constitutions, laws, governments, and other institutions, as triggers of collective political action in relation to contentious politics (Rootes, 2020). In other words, a political opportunity structure is a dynamic set of options for political participation created by contextual factors operating within a given polity at any given time (Sipinen, 2021). Tarrow argued that political opportunities are 'consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics' (1996, p. 32). This claim supports the idea that mobilisation to achieve political change outside electoral or government channels depends, at least partially, on the existence of a set of exogenous structural characteristics of the political system. For Eisinger, patterns of political behaviours become evident when the elements of the political environment:

> *are conceived as a political opportunity structure*[47] *of a political community* […] *Taken individually or collectively serve in various ways to obstruct or facilitate citizen activity in pursuit of political goals* […] *By measuring these environmental factors, the analyst develops a means to judge the nature of the biases which groups in a political system must confront* (1973, pp. 11–12).

For POS theorists 'the degree of openness or accessibility of a given political system is expressed by a mixture of institutional and contextual factors' (Bird et al., 2011, p. 13). In short, an open political system is expected to enable outsiders such as migrants to engage with politics and formulate demands to be considered in the policy formation process, while a closed political system should deter outsiders to express their identities and demands (Eisinger, 1973; Koopmans, 1996).

[47] Emphasis in the original text.

According to Tarrow, there are four types of POS frameworks, which he organised in a 2X2 matrix along a spatial (local vs national) and a temporal (cross-sectional vs longitudinal) dimension. The POS type he termed *Group specific opportunities* (1996, p. 43) is characterised by a focus on the changes in political opportunities at sub-national level and overtime. This POS model aims not only to identify incentives and disincentives to the political mobilisation of certain groups of people, but also to analyse how crucial events that changes the position of these groups in society in turn alter their opportunity structure. Considering the unprecedented transformation brought by Brexit to the legal, economic, and social position of EU migrants in the UK, such approach seems a good fit for this research.

Cruz Lera claims that since its beginning in the 1970s, the POS has become 'the most developed theoretical approach for explaining the mechanisms that link institutional and policy structures to peoples' activism' (2023, p. 295). Although social movements scholars like Eisinger and Tarrow, wrote about opportunity structures for collective political action, their conceptualisation of POS can be equally applied to political behaviours of individuals (Morales & Giugni, 2011). In Political Science, POS frameworks have been used to explain, among other topics, voting turnout, minority representation in elected assemblies, lobbying, political parties' membership (Baubök et al., 2019) and party candidates recruitment processes (Norris & Lovenduski, 1994; Sipinen, 2021). Because of its applicability beyond social movements, the POS theory was also adopted by migration scholars to analyse discursive and institutional determinants of migrants' collective political mobilisation (Koopmans et al., 2005; Scuzzarello, 2012) and migrants' individual political participation (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011; Morales & Giugni, 2011).

3.4.1 A Critique of the POS Theory

Despite its popularity both in sociology and political science, throughout the years POS theory has been criticised by scholars who challenged its lack of conceptual clarity, its tendency to oversimplify social reality and the neglect of individual agency. McAdam (1996) criticised the elusiveness of the concept of 'political opportunity' and the fact that political opportunities are often mistaken with other non-political facilitators of mobilisation, such as the role of media in framing collective processes. Similarly, for Arzheimer and Carter the concept of POS is 'notoriously vague' (2009, p. 337). Using the same argument, Gamson and Mayer warned that POS is in danger of becoming a:

> *a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment - political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts* […] *It threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all."* (2012, p. 275).

Few years earlier, Goodwin and Jasper (1999) had already widely criticised POS theory for proposing models that overstretches few theoretical concepts to explain every possible causality for collective political action[48], regardless of historical and contextual frames, strategic behaviours and individual agency. They called these catch-all POS 'invariant models': fixed theoretical frameworks that, by trying to find universal causes to political action, eventually become trivial, or tautological, and lose all their explanatory power. They believe POS scholars see structural opportunities even where there are no structures and overlook the role of culture (above all), but also strategic thinking, feelings, and individual will. In short, they asked for more balance between structure and agency, and bigger consideration for cultural aspects.

Ruud Koopman (1999) published a short essay to address Goodwin and Jasper's alleged failures of the POS theory. While he agreed on the accusations of conceptual blurriness and invariance of the models, he countered that not all drivers of participation are based on agency (strategic thinking, personal traits, will, etc.) and that political opportunities that are exogenous to the group, or to the individual, and cannot be changed by single actors, are by definition, structural:

> *If opportunities are configurations of options, chances, and risks originating outside the mobilizing group, then* […] *any such opportunities appear as structurally given that cannot be influenced - a least not in the foreseeable future- by collective action. Such opportunities may be relatively stable and fixed - for example, the chances that are provided by the electoral system - but they may also change from one day to another.* (1999, p. 99).

In synthesis, by merging the views of POS supporters and their critics, it is possible to conclude that the causes of political participation in a given context are determined by mutable mix of structural opportunities, cultural opportunities, and individual agency that must be studied empirically case by case.

3.4.2 POS and Neo-Institutionalism

The choice of the POS as the middle-level theory for my multi-level theoretical framework is primarily explained by its consistency with broader neo-institutional principles. Differently from other social-political approaches, POS-based theoretical models usually prioritise the cultural, social and economic contexts in which political systems are situated and develop, and their interaction with group and individuals, over assumptions about people's choices, or merely descriptive analyses of formal structures like constitutions, laws, and parliaments. For example, Pippa Norris

[48] Goodwin and Jasper's critique was only concerned with the use of POS theory to explain rise, development and successes (or failure) of social movements. However, political participation analysts have adapted POS principles to individual political behaviours (such as voting or party membership). *Mutatis mutandis*, their criticisms to POS frameworks applied to social movements are applicable to all sort of POS-based explanatory models, including migrants' political participation at group and individual level.

(1997) declared that the POS-based research design on parties' recruitment strategies she developed belonged to the 'new-institutionalist' school, because it integrated macro institutional factors dear to classic institutionalists with political actors' attitudes, concerns and agenda, that is analytical categories closer to the behavioural school.

As described above, the political participation of minority groups is shaped by individual and group-level factors (Sipinen, 2021), such as the political culture of the country of origin and the size of the foreign community within the host community, but also by the interactions and mutual influences among the actors of a given political environment, of which culture, rules, routines, and boundaries are determined by institutions. Ultimately, in line with neo-institutionalists, POS theorists contend that institutions influence collective agents (public and private organisations) as well as individuals, and by doing so create opportunities and/or constraints for political participation (Odmalm, 2005).

Beyond the institutional characteristics of the political system, which are regarded as fixed variables by most POS analysts, Meyer and Minkoff (2004) stressed the role of more volatile conditions and 'signals' sent by governments through policies and public statements, or, more broadly by changes in the political environment (e.g. a left-wing party particularly in favour of expanding migrants' rights takes power). Changes of political conditions are perceived by political agents as openings or closures to political activities. In this regard, Meyer argues that:

> *Political opportunity variables range from the very volatile, such as issue salience and public opinion, to far more stable elements, such as institutional structures in stable polities. Further, in order to be meaningful, opportunities must be perceived by potential activists* (2003, p. 20).

For protest politics scholars like Meyer, the recipients of these signals are political activists, whereas, in the broader field of political participation where agency belongs to all citizens, opportunities are perceived and interpreted by both individuals and organised groups. More, importantly, Meyer argues that, to hold analytical value, the political agent must be cognizant of the existing political opportunities at any given time. A purely materialistic understanding of political opportunities is incomplete, and a POS framework should include and give equal weight to both structural opportunities and cultural and symbolic signals (*ibid.*).

Similarly, Koopmans et al. (2005; 2004) saw merely institutional approaches, like the one presented by Bird et al. (2011), too limited and lacking the cultural and identarian elements that make migrants' political claims relevant and legitimate for native citizens, so they added discursive side to the institution-driven determinants of participation of the POS. Koopmans claimed that the more positive the local discourse climate about migrants and minorities is 'the more they participate in

public debates, the less they focus on homeland issues, and the more they formulate proactive demands' (2004, p. 460)[49].

3.4.3 POS Models Applied to Migrants' Political Participation

Because of its flexibility and its capacity to embrace both group and individual factors, POS models have been become popular analytical tools for research about migrants' political participation. One of the most referenced POS models was published by Bird et al. in 2011. They built a two-dimensional POS framework with *Collective Identity and Capacity to Mobilise* and *Responsiveness of the Political System* as analytical components. The former contains the characteristics of a migrant community and their hosting society; the latter reflects the overall openness of the sub-national/national political system. These two dimensions are interconnected and interdependent, and are determined by three systemic levels: legal system and migration history (macro), party system (meso), and local context (micro).

Each level of the framework can be more or less favourable to migrants' political engagement, regardless of the openness or closure of the others. For example, a state (macro level) can have a low entry barrier to citizenship, which is a main determinant of political participation in foreign-born citizens, mainly because of the acquisition of suffrage rights (Just & J. Anderson, 2012) and the resulting sense of belonging (Devadason, 2011). Yet, the same state can have an electoral process that limit migrants' representation in the political arena, or a modest/unevenly spread migrant population that make foreign-born citizens politically irrelevant at the local level.
All the variables of the framework are either cultural, socio-demographic, or institutional. Critically, volatile elements such as discursive and symbolic acts (e.g. public celebration of national days) and individual resources of the migrant (e.g. socio-economic status) are not included in the POS model.

On the other hand, Morales and Giugni (2011, p. 6) developed a multidimensional theoretical framework for migrants' political participation that integrates the institutional aspects of the POS model with national/ethnic traits (macro-level), collective social capital (meso-level), and individual characteristics of migrants (micro-level). Their POS is more comprehensive than Bird et al. as it takes also into account the individual characteristics that affects migrants' political integration, while Bird et al. (2011) stopped their analysis at group level. Morales and Giugni have the additional merit to include the public discourse around immigration as a structural factor that either creates or suppresses political opportunities.

[49] Not surprisingly, Marco Giugni, who worked with Ruud Koopmans, researched extensively about the role of discourse opportunities in influencing migrants' participation in several case studies he published with Manlio Cinalli (2011, 2013, 2016).

Sipinen (2021, p. 42) borrows from Bird et al. (2011) and from Norris & Lovenduski (1994) 'supply-demand' political recruitment process to propose a multi-level POS that explain migrants' groups representation in elected bodies. On the one hand, like Norris & Lovenduski, Sipinen claimed that the number of non-native Councillors in a local assembly at any given time depends on the one hand on the *supply* of resourceful[50] migrants willing to run for a seat in the Council; and on the other on the *demand* of foreigner candidates from local political parties and voters. On the other, Sipinen adopted Bird et al. (2011) analysis of the contextual characteristics of the multi-level political system that affect migrants' collective identity and their capacity to mobilise, as well as the overall responsiveness of the political system.

All these POS models try to be catch-all frameworks that include all possible institutional-based and agent-based variables, either static or dynamic. In a PhD research conducted by a team of one, it would not be realistic to try and capture all these variables, so conceptually different with each other. Even if it was possible, such a broad multi-level analysis would be too high level to provide meaningful insights. However, these POS models are modular in nature, and can be seen more as a series of linked mobile elements (Sipinen, 2021), than monolithic analytical tools. For each local political context, some components of macro, meso and micro levels would have higher explanatory power than others (Gamson & Meyer, 2012).

A modular application of existing POS frameworks is particularly appropriate for this study as it allows connecting different propositions about migrants' political participation in a single overarching theoretical model fitting the available empirical data. In other words, the Initial Theoretical Model I used to lead my data analysis borrows from comprehensive POS frameworks only the concepts and assumptions I deemed relevant to explain EU migrants' political participation. Because of the multidimensional structure of these POS models (systemic, group and individual levels), which requires a deep understanding of key actors' attitudes and perceptions, this approach is well suited to support qualitative data creation and interpretive analysis (Norris, 1997).

In this study, I considered in particular two elements that belong to the POS models described above: collective identity and group mobilisation capacity, and responsiveness of the political system (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wust, 2011; Morales & Giugni, 2011). The former element is the result of community-related factors (size of the group, prevalent political culture, bridging/bonding social capital, etc.) while the latter is determined by the structure of the local political system. The

[50] In the political participation literature, the resources that facilitate someone's decision to enter an electoral competition are mainly education, income and occupation (SES model, Verba & Nie, 1972); money, time and civic skills (Resource model, Brady et al., 1995); and social capital (Putnam & Schuster, 2000).

interdependency of these two levels affects the characteristics and the intensity of political participation of individuals belonging to a specific group.

In summary, to address my research questions I relied on a conceptual framework based on the POS model developed by Bird, Saalfeld and Wust (2011), further enriched with the ethnic and national dimensions introduced by Morales and Giugni (2011). Such hybrid POS model provides a flexible approach that allows to consider inputs from different theories and to embed them in the Initial Theoretical Model.

3.5 Initial Theoretical Model

Empirical evidence shows that classic determinants of political participation have a weaker effect on ethnic minorities and migrant groups. After studying participation to the 2010 UK General Election among ethnic minorities Heath et al. concluded that:

> Age, educational qualifications, social class and organizational involvement are not the strong predictors of turnout among minorities that they are among the majority (2011, p. 272).

These findings were confirmed by Ruedin (2018) in his study about voting turnout of ethnic minorities in the Swiss canton of Geneva. He found that the participation gap between migrants and Swiss citizens in municipal elections remained unaccounted for even after considering all major determinants of political participation found in the literature, i.e. education, income, political interest/knowledge, and mobilisation.

Since the classic paradigms of political participation do not tell the whole story about migrants political engagement, and because of the unique situation of the UK after Brexit, to explain the lower engagement of EU migrants I developed a theoretic model based on the role of the local governments, which I termed 'Initial Theoretical Model'.

The Initial Theoretical Model is built upon two main assumptions. The first is derived from the legitimacy theory proposed by Lea Klarenbeek (2021) as a response to the more established two-way theory of migrant integration. Klarenbeek posits that some migrant groups are more 'legitimate' than others in the eye of the insiders of the host society (*ibid*.). The second assumption is taken from the political opportunity structure (POS) frameworks developed by Morales and Giugni (2011) and Bird, Saalfed and Wust (2011). Both POS models propose that institutional context, local government's policies, and political actors attitudes contribute to shape migrants' political behaviours. By including these two complementary foundational assumptions, my theoretical model acquires a 'duality of structure' (Sibeon, 1999). In other words, migrants' political integration is regarded as the result of the combined action of contextual and institutional forces with individuals' traits and personal decisions.

According to the 'two-way' integration theory, migrants' political integration depends on a shared effort between insiders (local political actors) and outsiders (migrants) of the host society (Phillimore, 2012). If the newcomers are as much responsible for their own integration as local institutions and native residents, the logical consequence is that whenever international migrants do not 'pull their weight' to learn the social norms of the host country, they deserve to remain at the margins of their new society. Despite the fact that the two-way theory indeed recognises the importance of the receiving authorities in facilitating migrants' integration (Sipinen, 2021), for Lea Klarenbeek (2021), scholars of the two-way theory have put too much emphasis on the outsider's role in the integration process. She argues that because of that, two-way theorists have unintentionally fed the asymmetrical power relationship between insiders and outsiders that their theory intends to prevent. Her analysis underlines how the mainstream interpretation of the two-way theory induces a differentiation between 'civic legitimate' and 'civic illegitimate' citizens: '…some immigrants are therefore seen as more 'foreign', and hence less legitimate citizens than others' (ibid., p. 905). In this context, the concept of foreignness is not necessarily linked to ethnicity or legal status, but to their perceived personal stake in the host society. Klarenbeek postulates that this approach to political incorporation provides the ideological basis for distinguishing two types of citizens based on their 'civicness':

> *Civic integrationism thereby implies a distinction between legal citizens, who are citizens in name only, and active citizens, who are considered to be 'real citizens'. Citizenship is portrayed as a virtue of 'civicness', which prescribes a notion of feeling engaged with the national community, feeling responsible for its well-being, and acting upon these feelings through 'active citizenship* (2020, p. 217).

When the concept of civic legitimacy is applied to integration policies, governments become legitimised to demand political participation to newcomers as a proof of their need and willingness to integrate in the host society. To the eyes of public authorities, non-native residents who are proactive in raising their political demands are 'legitimate' citizens, while those who do not show the same level of interest in politics are not. Even migrants who hold a legal status as permanent residents or naturalised citizens are citizens 'in name only' as long they do not prove to care about the community they joined through active citizenship. Differentiating between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants is an empirical manifestation of the two-way integration theory, which conditions insiders' support to outsiders to their subjectively assigned deservedness to be supported. Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas went even further than Klarenbeek's and assigned to the receiving institutions a decisive responsibility in determining migrant's integration:

> *The receiving society, especially its institutional structure and reaction to newcomers, is far more decisive for the outcome of the process than the immigrants themselves are* (2016, p. 17).

I argue that, despite EU migrants in England being, in most cases, legally legitimate, they have less civic legitimacy than other migrant groups. The subjective understanding of migrants' commitment to integration creates in local institutional actors expectations about the needs of different migrants communities and about their will to be a contributing part of the host society. Mügge and van der Haar well described the importance of policymakers' perception of migrant communities when it comes to identify the recipients of integration policies (which often include political integration): 'Whether a group is problematized or targeted as in need of integration depends on the combination of characteristics and statuses attributed to it' (2016, p. 77). State actors use perceived needs and/or worthiness of political inclusion to build a civic differential between foreign groups that justify their prioritisation, or de-prioritisation, in integration policies and engagement campaigns.

In 2003, the EU officially embraced the two-way theory as the official guiding principle of immigration and integration policies for third-country nationals (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016). As for EU migrants, EU institutions always tend to assume by default that they are integrated in the host country, because of their privileged immigration status stipulated in the EU treaties. Unlike any non-EU migrant group, EU migrants are foreigners who enjoyed freedom of movement and access to the same level of welfare and social protection guaranteed to native residents in all the 27 member states (Favell, 2013; Mügge & van der Haar, 2016). The consequence of this categorisation *a priori* is that authorities do not see EU migrants as needing policy interventions to support their economic, social, and political integration (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016). Furthermore, empirical evidence showed that this attitude towards EU migrants tend to trickle down from the supranational to the local level (Bruzelius, 2020). As a result, the *de iure* equality between native citizens and EU migrants does not become a *de facto* equality (Ratzmann, 2021). The discrepancy between real and expected capacity of integration of some EU communities, in particular Eastern and Southern Europeans (Favell, 2013), can lead the authorities to overestimate the EU migrants' status of 'privileged' migrants in the host society. When the prejudices do not match the observed reality, the tendency of state actors is to blame the migrants for lack of effort in their own integration (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016) .

In the UK, until 2021 EU migrants were able move in and out of the country as they pleased in pursuit of better working conditions. Because of their former privileged legal status, their assumed high level of employment, their stereotyped work ethic (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016), and their cultural and ethnic closeness with the native population, they were not seen as in-need as refugees and asylum-seekers, nor likely to stay indefinitely as other economic migrants who did not have freedom of movement (Bruzelius, 2020; Collett, 2013; Ottonelli & Torresi, 2014). I contend that the combination of these two prejudgments (presumed social and economic integration and

presumed mobility) leads institutional actors into believing that pre-Brexit EU migrants are mobile workers who have no real interest in the fortunes of the place they have only temporarily moved to. For this reason, they regard EU migrants as 'civic illegitimate', thus underserving to be the focus of integration policies and engagement strategies.

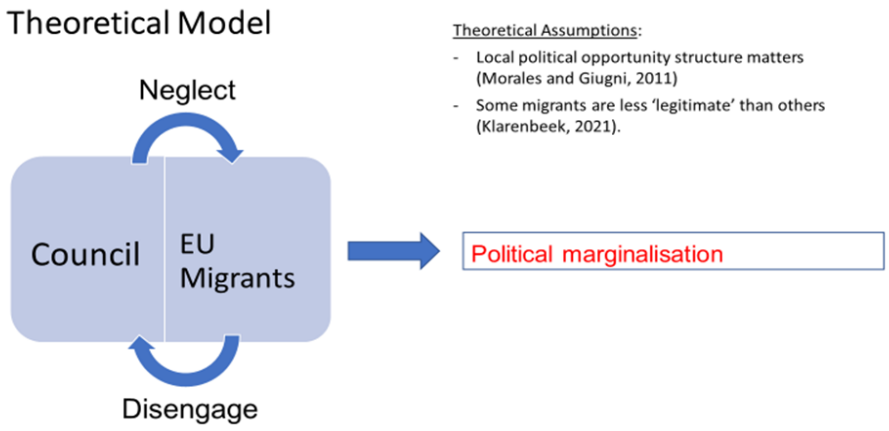

Figure 3 The Initial Theoretical Model

Cinalli and Giugni's cases show how local authorities interpret and implement of migration laws, as well as develop local integration policies, can produce various levels of political engagement within the same national group living in different cities (2011, 2016). Combining Cinalli and Giugni's with Bruzelius' findings (2020), which demonstrate how EU migrants tend to be forgotten by local authorities, and the fact that that institutional engagement and feeling of inclusion in the host society are drivers of migrants' political participation (Michon & Vermeulen, 2013; Ruedin, 2007, 2018), I hypothesised that EU migrants are seen by local authorities, explicitly or latently, as less civically legitimate than non-European communities. As a result, EU migrants do not receive the same attention in terms of integration policies and discursive participation opportunities made available to other migrants' groups.

In turn, EU migrants political disengagement confirms institutional actors' initial perception of a migrant population made of individuals who are either fully integrated in their host society or self-isolating from it. Both scenarios are deemed not worthy of the same level of political engagement that is reserved to permanent and 'legitimate' foreign residents, and so the cycle of neglect and disengagement repeats and reinforces itself. Along with other causes at societal and individual level, I argue that this negative loop contributes to the observed political marginalisation of EU migrants.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the structure of the theorical framework underpinning this study. At a high and abstract level, this research belongs to the tradition of Sociological Neo-Institutionalism, a grand-theory that sits in-between *a priory* deterministic approaches (e.g. Marxist theory) and *a posteriori* behavioural methods. in line with the principles of Sociological Neo-Institutionalism I contend that the existing structures, roles, rules, norms (i.e., institutions) of a polity do play an important part in shaping group and individual political behaviours.

Within the broad theoretical background of Neo-Institutionalism, I adopted the POS theory, which offer a descriptive, granular, and flexible approach to account for the influence of local institutions and local context in understanding the political behaviours of a specific target population, such as EU migrants in post-Brexit England. Morales and Giugni (2011) and Bird, Saalfeld and Wust (2011) POS models for migrants' political integration are ideal choices for this study as both encompass Putnam' social capital theory and established resource-based propositions, *ergo* can account for the inherent cultural, economic and social differences embedded in a large multi-national population.

Finally, to achieve a higher level of descriptive and explanatory power, I selected specific features of two POS frameworks on migrants' political integration and I integrated them with Klarenbeek's 'civic legitimacy' theory. I then used POS and the Civic Legitimacy theory to develop an Initial Theoretical Model specific for the research objectives.

In the next chapter, I will describe in detail the methodology I designed to verify how much of the proposed theoretical model is adherent to empirical observations and to further develop it through inductive reasoning.

Chapter 4 Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describe in detail the structure of the methodology I applied to answer the research questions listed in section 1.7. As a reminder, the overarching research question was:

How institutional, cultural, socio-economic factors, and political opportunity structures, influence EU migrants' political participation and their descriptive representation at the local level in post-Brexit England?

Each of the four actionable subsidiary questions addresses different institutional, political, socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Initial Theoretical Model:

1. effects of institutional engagement on EU migrants' perception of local politics and sense of belonging in the local polity;
2. effects of integration policies on EU migrants' perception of local politics and sense of belonging in the local polity;
3. effects of Council-led participatory mechanisms on EU migrants' perception of local politics and sense of belonging in the local polity;
4. the role of socio-economic status and political culture of EU15 vs A8 and A2 national groups in determining EU migrants' perception of local politics and sense of belonging in the local polity.

The first three subsidiary questions are related to institutional and political inputs of the POS-based Initial Theoretical Model (left side of the reinforcing cycle). The last question refers to the influence of known socio-economic and cultural macro-characteristics of 'old' and 'new' EU migrants on their political engagement (right side of the reinforcing cycle).

Following the layered structure of the theoretical framework described in chapter 3 and its 'from general to particular' direction, the methodology is composed of two nested approaches, each using different data collection and data analysis methods. The outer layer is a large-n comparative design of the full population of cases, i.e. the 341 local administrations existing in England in 2021. The inner layer is a qualitative comparative analysis of four local councils selected through the initial large-n part of the work. This double-layered design makes this doctoral study a mixed-methods research.

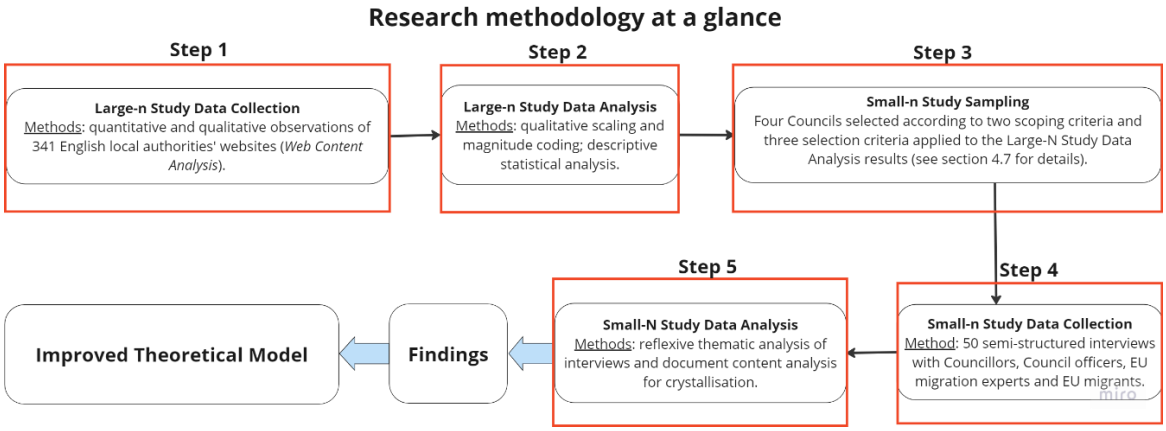

Figure 4 Flow chart of the research design.

This two-phases methodology includes the use of a variety of data collection and data analysis methods. The above flowchart (figure 3) represents the whole research design and its research methods at a glance. Clockwise, the first step was creating a Web Content Analysis database by collecting a series of numerical and qualitative observations of the 341 English local authorities' websites. In the second step, I analysed the WCA data to assess the level of institutional support to EU migrants during the EUSS application period and their inclusivity. The first metrics was converted in the 'EU Migrants Support Scale' through magnitude coding (Saldaña, 2016), while the second was standardised using a discrete variable[51]. I then used descriptive statistics to determine if there was a correlation between the results of the Brexit referendum and the support given to EU migrants (see Chapter 6). In step three, I used the results of the large-n study, to select four case studies.

The small-n part of the research included the selection of participants, 50 semi-structured interviews (step 4), the analysis of interview data through interpretive coding and reflexive thematic analysis (Brown & Clarke, 2022) and a content analysis of key councils' documents and (step 5). The last phase of the research consisted in interpreting the theoretical framework proposed in chapter 3 in light of the new empirical evidence, to connect findings with theory and produce an Improved Theoretical Model that reflects more accurately the social reality experienced by participants.

Starting from the philosophical basis of the research (section 4.2), the remainder of the chapter provide a richer description of the work done for each of the five stages, and a sound justification for all the methods applied.

[51] The values of the discrete variable were 0 for absence of a Citizen panel, 1 for the presence of a Citizen panel, and 2 for the presence of a Citizen panel selected through stratified random sampling. Councils that scored 0 showed no interest beyond statutory duty to engage residents in policymaking; councils that scored 1 valued citizens' participation in policymaking but not the representation of all strata of the population; while councils that scored 2 proved to have an inclusive approach by seeking to achieve an accurate descriptive representation of their residents within the panel.

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological Approach

According to the epistemology of critical realism adopted for this research, the understanding of social reality is limited and mediated by both contextual factors and individual traits. Critical realism borrows the ontology of realism and the epistemology of constructivism: as in realism, there is an objective social reality that exists independently of local settings and human discourse. At the same time, in line with constructivism, the understanding of social phenomena is mediated, hence limited, by personal experiences, individual perceptions and societal forces (Vincent & O' Mahoney, 2018). Critical realists reject the concept of 'objective' reality and acknowledge that 'all knowledge is partial and incomplete, interpretative and provisional' (Brown & Clarke, 2022, p. 171). The realm of 'real' social objects and mechanisms generating 'actual' events exists, but it is beyond our empirical experience (Hoddy, 2019). As Fletcher puts it, for critical realists: 'human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality' (2017, p. 182). The capacity of critical realisms to explain reality beyond contexts and individual perceptions, while acknowledging their role in knowledge discovery, allows the researcher to suggest causal mechanisms behind social phenomena and propose solutions to social problems (*ibid.*).

Critical realism is not a deterministic philosophy of science like positivism. A critical realist study can only look for tendencies rather than causes, or *demi-regularities*, i.e. 'rough trends or broken patterns in empirical data….that can be effectively identified through qualitative data coding' (Fletcher, 2017, p. 185). Demi-regularities are context-dependent and fallible by nature, therefore cannot produce 'laws' as in natural sciences (*ibid.*). For critical realists, social phenomena and social events are caused by the complex interaction of multiple structural and contextual factors. In some cases these factors are directly observable without recurring to an indirect analysis of vast databases. A researcher can then identify causal mechanisms at work through personal observations and interpretation of data by applying qualitative methods for data creation and analysis. According to Maxwell: 'this realist view of causation is compatible with, and supports, all the essential characteristics of qualitative research' (2004, p. 247). A critical analytic researcher believes for example that political preferences are not dictated simply by objective analyses of reality and aggregation of personal goals, but are context-dependant and co-constructed by all actors involved in policymaking (Boswell et al., 2011). Patterns, or demi-regularities, are easier to determine through the description and the interpretation of qualitative data and written texts.

The critical realistic approach of this study explains why I consider qualitative data jointly constructed by participants and the researcher through the shared experience of the interview.

The analysis of the data is not neutral either, but mediated through the researcher's own perceptions, beliefs, and opinions. Nevertheless, the comparative aspect of the research design

allows to catch glimpses of the mechanisms of social phenomena that go beyond the restrictions of local context and individual experiences. By comparing and contrasting thick descriptions of local settings, selected through a thorough and transparent process (see section 4.4), the analysis holds enough explanatory power to generate and test theoretical hypotheses, which can be then translated and verified in different cultural, social, economic, and political settings across the UK and beyond.

I argue that Neo-Institutionalism, the grand theory that provided the conceptual roots for this research, well-suits the tenants of critical realism. As described in chapter 3, Neo-Institutionalism posits that institutions contribute to shape (but not determine) individual choices and behaviours, such as those determining political participation, by creating opportunities, incentives, and constraints both at group and individual level (March & Olsen, 1983; Odmalm, 2005). According to Psillos, institutions have the causal power to exercise tendencies that 'may be unactualised and/or unmanifest to people' (2007, p. 57) and induce, or negate, transformative change of a social phenomenon. Neo-Institutionalism assumes that individual characteristics traditionally considered as universal predictors of political engagement, like education and socio-economic status, are influenced, mitigated, and complemented by subjective experiences with institutions. The relativistic and context-based method of critical realism is the ideal philosophical approach for Neo-Institutional theoretical frameworks.

In accordance with these ontological, epistemological, and theoretical premises, the methodology I designed for this project is qualitative in nature, although supported by some quantitative analysis. Semi-structured interviews, and separately, observations of English local government websites were selected as the main data creation methods. From a critical realist's viewpoint, qualitative data creation and analysis methods give the flexibility needed to challenge assumptions derived from existing theories, while letting the interpretation of data produce new knowledge and, consequently, confirm, modify or reject theories, or even suggest new ones (Fletcher, 2017).

4.3 Nested Analysis

As outlined in the introduction, the research design is based on a nested analysis that integrates the results of a large-n quantitative study of 341 English local authorities with an in-depth small-n comparative analysis of four cases selected within this population. The universe of cases included all tier 1, tier 2, and single tier local authorities in England (as of 2020[52]):

[52] Further reforms of the local administration in 2021 and 2023 have resulted in the merge of some districts and, consequently, have slightly reduced the total number of local governments in England.

- **189** Districts, Boroughs, and City councils – tier 1 of the English local administrative system.
- **25** Non-Metropolitan County councils – tier 2 of the English local administrative system.
- **124** single tier authorities (combining powers of both tier 1 and tier 2 authorities): 56 Unitary Authorities, 36 Metropolitan Authorities and 32 London Boroughs.
- **2** *Sui generis* authorities, the City of London and the Isles of Scilly (equivalent to single tier authorities).
- **1** regional authority, the Greater London Authority (GLA).

A nested analysis is an ideal approach to address research questions that combine a broad analytical scope, i.e. the determinants of political participation of EU migrants in England, with high levels of specificity and local complexity, because it 'improves the confidence in the central findings of a study […] and the analytic payoff is greater than the sum of the parts ' (Lieberman, 2005, p. 436). The breath of census-like data and the descriptive richness of the case studies within the same research design well complement each other. As Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker explain: 'national survey investigations of participation cannot capture the impact of rules-in-use and so provide only a partial picture of what drives participation in local politics' (2006, p. 559).

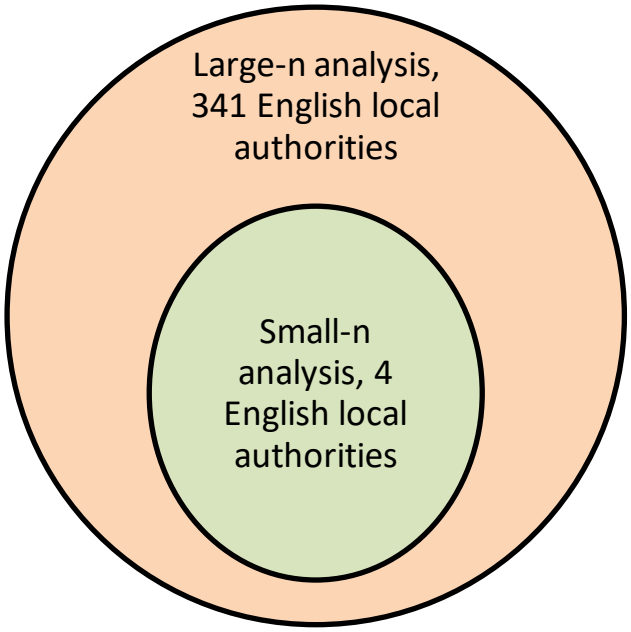

Figure 5 Onion chart of the nested analysis.

The nest analysis was carried out through two separate phases: a large-n Web Content Analysis (hereafter WCA) of the whole population of English local governments and a small-n comparative analysis of four case studies. In political science, comparative studies offer the 'most obvious route to testing theoretical proposition' (Hopkin, 2002, p. 250). As Ryan puts it: 'Comparison is the method at the heart of both theory generation and testing the scope and proper application of

theories' (2021, p. 36). A comparative analysis is preferable to the more common single case study approach, as it allows for a broader and deeper understanding of which democratic structures 'may work, when and why' (Åström & Grönlund, 2011, p. 75). Åström and Grönlund also recommend to 'move [research] from descriptions of isolated projects toward comparative evaluation' (*ibid.*, p. 76).

Because of the non-standardised provision of participation opportunities among British municipalities, 'different local governments will attach different degrees of priority to citizen engagement at the same time as they adopt different techniques or methods for its realization' (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 666). A comparative analysis is therefore a suitable method of investigation to understand if and how local authorities influence the political participation of EU migrants by creating different political opportunity structures.

The added value of a mixed large-n/small-n comparative research design rests as well in the capacity of such methodology to strengthen the *credibility* (or truthfulness) and the *transferability* of the results, quality criteria that correspond to the quantitative concepts of *validity* and *generalisability* (Slevin & Sines, 2000). As Slater and Ziblatt explain using quantitative terminology: 'this research design can generate both internal and external validity under certain restrictive conditions' (2013, p.1304). Alike in Putnam's book 'Making Democracy Work' (1993), the qualitative and quantitative investigation carried out with sub-national units of government (local authorities) allows for moderate transferability beyond the small-n sample. In Putnam's case, the differences in socio-economic performance between northern and southern Italian regions were so deep that allowed him to draw conclusions that could be extended to any industrialised democracy (Slater & Ziblatt, 2013). To achieve this level of generalisation the authors of 'Making Democracy Work' gathered evidence from different countries across the world that confirmed how the social mechanisms that shaped the North-South divide in Italy, such as the self-reinforcing nature of trust and social norms or the lasting effects of path dependency, characterise in fact *all* human societies, which implies that their observations about social capital in Italy can be theoretically extended to *any* country/society. Similarly, if this research highlights different EU migrants' political participation patterns across the four case studies, then it is possible to argue that variation across social and economic contexts and political opportunity structures, among an otherwise relatively homogenous universe of cases (all English local governments), would suggest the existence of conjunctural causal relationships influencing EU migrants political participation across England, and possibly shed light over unknown drivers of migrants' political participation in all advanced democracies. The following two sections illustrate the large-n WCA and the subsequent small-n comparative analysis.

4.4 Web Content Analysis

The first phase (large-n comparative analysis) of the research consisted in a Web Content Analysis of all official English councils' websites. The main goal of the WCA was to select a sample of cases to be studied in-depth during the second and last phase of the study.

If a Content Analysis (CA) is 'a systematic technique for coding symbolic content (text, images, etc.) found in communication, especially structural features (e.g., message length, distribution of certain text or image components)' (Herring, 2010, p. 234), a WCA represents the application of established CA standards to Web content (*ibid.*). In a research about the impact of local institutions on political participation, local governments' official websites are appropriate units of analysis because 'effective information provision is often seen as a corollary of effective engagement and empowerment.' (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006, p. 2). A website is the 'shop window' of an organisation and reflects how such organisation intends to present itself to the public. As such, its content and design can convey intended and an unintended institutional effects, decision-makers' attitudes and political goals (Yavuz & Welch, 2014). From a practical standpoint, a WCA is also an effective data creation and analysis method when dealing with a large population of cases, because it allows analysis of a large volume of qualitative and quantitative data in an unobstructive way without losing analytical power (I. Kim & Kuljis, 2010).

Considering the sizeable amount of cases and the time and resource constraints faced by the researcher, the WCA focused only on features of Brexit-related webpages and of the three most diffused online participation tools: citizen panels, e-Consultations, and e-Petitions. I used mixed indicators: qualitative, e.g. the location within the structure of the website and the quality of the information provided; and quantitative, e.g. the number of clicks needed to access participatory tools or Brexit-related webpages from the landing page (for a similar analysis, see Panagiotopoulos, Moody and Elliman, 2011).

Initially, the WCA was composed in total of 51, or 46, researcher's observations, the difference depending on the presence or absence of a Citizen panel. After 164 of the 341 councils' websites (48%) had been analysed, the number of observations was reduced to 14 (or 11) because of time constraints and personal issues (e.g. incapacity to work for months due to Covid 19 and the subsequent long Covid syndrome). The reduced version of the WCA included 5 observations related to the 'Support to EU migrants' criterion (see description below) and 6 to 9 observations on presence and representativeness of citizen panels (Participatory Inclusiveness). In the following sections I am going to illustrate in detail how this level of analysis is sufficient to achieve a preliminary understanding about local authorities' organisational positioning towards participatory democracy and EU migrants.

The structure of the initial WCA was adapted from the Democratic E-Governance Website Evaluation Model, or DEWEM (Lee-Geiller & Lee, 2019), which is based upon the democratic principles of 'transparency', 'accountability' and 'collaboration'. Differently from all previous website quality evaluation models, the DEWEM presents the advantage, from a political participation perspective, of including new variables that measure not just the extent to which governmental websites open their information system to the public and deliver services online, but also their capacity to integrate citizens' engagement in policymaking.

The WCA was therefore built upon the qualitative assessment of three areas: 1. overall usability of the website (user friendliness); 2. openness to participatory democracy and quality of participatory channels (citizen engagement); 3. presence and quality of a page/section providing information and/or support to EU migrants regarding the Brexit process and the EU Settlement Scheme (EU migrants support). The first dimension, user-friendliness, was included in the WCA because the provision of quality information on social media stimulates online political participation (Arshad & Khurram, 2020). Hence, *mutatis mutandis*, a modern-looking and functional website that provides quality information (easy to find, useful and clear) can contribute to increasing local political participation.

The user-friendliness of councils' websites was assessed according to an index composed of six qualitative criteria. Each criteria received a score of 3,2, and 1 point, corresponding respectively to the descriptive categories 'high', 'medium' and 'low'. The six criteria are: Ease of Use, Navigational Structure, Content Organisation, Information Quality, Design and Visual Elements. Their description is included in the 'Council's Website User-friendliness Assessment Table' in **Appendix A**. The 15 criteria used to assess the second dimension, which for simplicity I called 'Citizen Engagement Index', refer to the concepts of 'Transparency', 'Service Quality' and 'Engagement Quality'. The Citizen Engagement Index partially corresponds to the DEWEM variables, as shown in table 2.

DEWEM	CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT INDEX
Transparency criteria	
Public service standards	Public engagement policy
Information quality	Information quality
Information disclosure	Meetings webcasts
Performance reports	Surveys and consultations' reports
Alternative channels	Social media and contact details
Service Quality criteria	
Usefulness	Information Quality
Navigational structure	Navigational structure
Content organization	Content organization
Visual Elements	Visual Elements
Error Management	Error Management
Terms of use statement published	Public engagement policy
Engagement Quality criteria	
Direct communication with elected government officials	Direct communication with elected government officials
Responsiveness to inquiry/ complaints	Responsiveness to inquiry/ complaints
Collaboration	Responsiveness to online participation
	Representativeness

Table 1 DEWEM and Citizen Engagement Index comparison

The purpose of the above table is to illustrate the work I undertook for both the 'User-friendliness' and 'Citizen Engagement' indexes. However, both indexes were not included as such in the reduced WCA. Only the third dimension, 'EU migrants Support' was instrumental in selecting the case studies, together with a smaller version of the 'Citizens Engagement' index, called 'Participatory Inclusiveness', based just on citizen panels, the only major outlet for collecting citizens' inputs on current and future policies that has no statutory components, like public consultations, and is not

the legacy of a past legislative mandate from the central government, like e-petitions (for more details on this reform see Panagiotopoulos et al., 2012).

	No Citizens' panel (0)	**Non-Representative Citizens' panel (1)**	**Representative Citizens' panel (2)**
Low EU Support	Low; 0	Low; 1	Low; 2
Medium EU Support	Medium; 0	Medium; 1	Medium; 2
High EU Support	High; 0	High; 1	High; 2

Table 2 Case selection matrix

The criteria applied for selecting the cases were *Participatory Inclusiveness* and *EU Migrants Support*. For the first one, a scoring from 0 to 2 was assigned depending on the presence or absence of a Citizens' panel and its representativeness. If the WCA found no Citizens' panel, the score assigned was 0. If there was a panel but its recruitment strategy was based only on the self-selection of the participants, then the Council received 1 point. Finally, if the local authority tried to make the panel representative by selecting voluntaries according to demographic strata or by inviting applications through random/stratified sortition, then the score assigned to the local authority was 2.

As for the EU migrants Support, the score of the Council on the EU migrants Support scale[53] determined if the level of support was low (1-2), medium (3-4), or high (5). Table 2 shows how the two criteria were combined in a matrix to select the four cases . The following sections explain in detail how the reduced WCA of English local councils' websites was used to select four case studies for the next phase of the PhD.

4.5 Small-n Case Selection

The cases selected for the small-n analysis are both typical and diverse. The combination of typicality and diversity in selecting cases for comparative research is frequent. A good example of this hybrid case selection strategy is the Fernández-Martínez et al. (2020) study of participatory frustration in six Spanish municipalities: the authors initially decided to analyse two very diverse participatory processes (participatory budgeting and citizens' assemblies) and then selected the most typical cases within the sets of municipalities that experimented with either participatory budgeting or citizens' assemblies, or both.

[53] See section 4.5 for a full breakdown of the EU migrants Support Scale criteria.

For Mahoney and Goertz (2004), a small-n comparative analysis requires *homogeneity* across the universe of cases and *heterogeneity* within the sample of cases. Sharing fundamental characteristics makes cases highly comparable (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009). To ensure maximum homogeneity, all the four case studies are located in England. Local governments in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not share the same legal, administrative, and funding framework (Fahy et al., 2023), therefore a UK-wide comparative analysis would not yield valid findings. English local authorities were chosen as units of analysis because England accounts for 84% of the country population and 89% of EU migrants[54] living in the UK. On the other hand, to further increase the level of similarity across the universe of cases, only metropolitan boroughs and unitary authorities were considered, as they have identical powers[55].

Complementary to homogeneity across the universe of cases, heterogeneity within the sample shows the range of 'diversity within the selected universe' (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009, p. 21). Similarly, Seawright and Gerring described the aim of having *diverse* cases as 'the achievement of maximum variance along relevant dimensions' (2008, p. 300). Diverse cases are suitable for exploratory research where the explanatory variables are totally independent of one another and yet may all exert an influence on the dependant variables (*ibid.*).

The two institutional variables that were used as main criteria for selecting the cases, *Participatory Inclusiveness* and *Institutional Support to EU migrants* were derived from the political opportunity structure theory (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011; Morales & Giugni, 2011; Tarrow, 2011):

1. **Participatory Inclusiveness** reflects the institutional openness to participatory democracy. It is operationalised by assessing through the WCA the quantity and quality of participatory opportunities made available to all residents by local councils.

2. **Institutional Support to EU migrants** represents local councils' attitude towards integration and wellbeing of EU migrants. It is operationalised by assigning a magnitude code (Saldaña, 2016) to the WCA dimension 'Institutional Support to EU migrants', which reflected the level of information and support offered by English local councils to EU migrants during the EU Settlement Scheme application period (March 2019 – June 2021)[56].

Participatory Inclusiveness is linked to Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust's theoretical concept of '*Responsiveness of the political system*' (2011, p. 13) and the akin Morales and Giugni's '*Openness*

[54] ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration [accessed on 01/06/2020].

[55] lgiu.org/local-government-facts-and-figures-england [accessed on 14/04/2023].

[56] See section 4.5 for more details.

of public authorities' (2011, p. 6). Both norms propose that the capacity of a political system to include migrants depends on its formal and informal openness to outsiders' participation. On the other hand, the **Institutional Support to EU migrants** dimension is derived from the notion of '*access to legal citizenship rights*' (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011, p. 6) which increases migrants' collective identity and their ability to mobilise. Acquiring the British citizenship secures residence rights for life, but it is a costly and lengthy path that many EU migrants, not knowing about their future, were not ready to undertake (Sredanovic, 2022). As of April 2024, 266,214 EU migrants[57] decided to become British citizens since the EU referendum, only a small portion of the millions who applied for a settled status. For many EU migrants, a Settled Status was the only realistic option to guarantee their future in the UK. In this study I argue that, in terms of feelings of safety and belonging to a community (Kostakopoulou, 2003), for many EU migrants receiving indefinite leave to remain through the Settled Status is partially comparable to the acquisition of citizen rights for non-EU migrants, ergo the support offered by public institutions to non-EU migrants for acquiring and exerting citizenship rights is equivalent to the help given to EU migrants in obtaining a Settled Status.

There are of course more conditions that can be taken into account when considering the determinants of political participation for a specific population, but, as Berg-Schlosser and De Meur explain, for case selection in small-n studies it is 'very important to keep the number of conditions low' (2009, p. 27) to avoid the number of logical combinations between conditions become higher than the actual number of cases (the famous 'many variables, small number of cases' problem raised by Lijphart in 1971).

Clearly, two theory-based conditions do not encompass all possible institutional factors influencing political participation. However, the combination of these two institutional determinants of political participation at the meso-level of analysis[58] (institutional/organisational), is an effective way to select an appropriate number of cases while still exceeding the number of variables, while keeping with the 'parsimony' principle (generically known as the *Occam's Razor*). This principle postulates that having the smallest possible number of causes helps to better identify and explain the central causal mechanisms of the studied phenomenon. In line with critical realism (see section 4.1), I consider social phenomena too complex to be comprehensively understood and explained, so parsimony helps clarity and has a higher explanatory power than redundancy (Walsh, 1979). Because this case selection strategy limits the selection conditions to two and the resulting cases

[57] Source: https: gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables [accessed on 09/06/2024].

[58] In this context, if institutions/organisations are the mesolevel of analysis, microanalysis is based on single individuals, and macroanalysis on societies/countries.

to four, it allows for a good degree of 'intimacy' with each of the cases, a fundamental aspect of both within-case and cross-case analysis, whilst keeping a manageable but representative sample of cases.

The institutional support to participatory democracy (Participatory inclusiveness) was operationalised by looking at the presence of **citizen panels** as a form of integration of citizens' inputs in the policy-making process. Previous empirical studies have highlighted the efficacy of online democracy in increasing citizens participation in big cities (Alonso & Barbeito, 2016; Chung et al., 2011). However, differently from other popular participatory tools such as consultations and petitions, citizen panels are not imposed by the central government, so their existence depends completely on local decision-makers. The choice to establish a Citizen panel without conditioning from Westminster is then indicative of the commitment of the Council to include the general public into the agenda setting and policy formulation phases of the local policymaking process. Because setting up a Citizen panel requires time, resources, and changes of working practices within the Council, it is fair to assume that any independent initiative that creates an online and/or offline Citizen panel is likely to reflect favourable political will and institutional openness towards public engagement in local democratic processes. For this reason, I argue that citizen panels are a suitable indicator for measuring the attitude of local governments towards participatory democracy. For Morales and Giugni POS theory (2011) – see the theoretical framework explained in chapter 3 – *openness of public authorities* and *openness of formal institutions* are variables that favour migrant political integration. In line with these theoretical assumptions, it seems appropriate to associate the significance that local councils give to participatory democracy on their official websites to the participation opportunities offered to EU migrants.

In addition to the inclination to participatory democracy of English local authorities, I created an indicator of the willingness to include minorities measured the inclusiveness dimension to measure **Participatory Inclusiveness**. If I had surveyed only the presence citizen panels in 341 English local governments, I would have produced a dichotomous variable (0 or 1 values). Dichotomous variables can only state presence or absence of a given attribute and do not capture intermediate values. In this case, the simple existence of a Citizens' panel does not tell us anything about less obvious, but nevertheless important, nuances of political participation, such as the actual capacity of this participatory tool to include all views and represent all demographics and social strata of a population. The 'inclusiveness' element cannot be detected by a dummy variable.

The inclusion of all individuals in decision making is a pillar of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970) and a guiding principle of deliberative mini-publics (Pateman, 2012). Citizens' panellists should then be selected through processes that aim to guarantee a proper descriptive

representation of all minorities to avoid self-selection biases (Michels & Binnema, 2018; Setälä, 2017). If panel members are self-selected, there is a high chance that those who are already engaging with local politics will be over-represented. These 'usual suspects' are often UK-born citizens. By the same token, foreign minorities, including EU migrants, are normally underrepresented (Michels & Binnema, 2018). When participants are invited to join the panel through a simple random sampling or a stratified random sampling, the chances that the panel is a more faithful representation of all the population strata are naturally higher (Curato et al., 2021).

Consequently, to integrate inclusiveness in the analysis and create a more nuanced and fine-grained understanding of the institutional support to participation, I further developed this metric by considering if panel members are randomly recruited or are self-selected. Following this specification the possible values of the variable 'Participatory inclusiveness' became:

- **Low** (absence of a Citizens' panel).

- **Medium** (presence of a Citizens' panel).

- **High** (presence of a Citizens' panel which members are selected through random or stratified sampling of self-selected or invited citizens[59]).

In short, the participatory dimension is represented by the presence of a Citizens' panel, while the inclusiveness is expressed by their degree of representativeness. This two-level structure of the variable permits detection not only of a generic favourable attitude towards participatory democracy, but also whether local political institutions care about inclusivity or not.

The variable **Institutional Support to EU migrants**, was operationalised by looking at the breadth and quality of the information given to EU migrants about the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)[60] and the administrative and legal help offered to correctly fill the application. A higher level of support represents a higher level of interest in protecting the rights and needs of the EU migrant minority. The following section describes in detail how I measured this second selecting condition.

[59] Obviously, the selection of panel's members through random sortition of the whole Council's population guarantees an even higher degree of representativeness compared to random sortition of a self-selected sample of spontaneous applicants. However, to keep the case selection manageable and to catch all hybrid cases (for instance councils that launched a call for participants but prioritised the selection of specific demographical characteristics), I grouped these two panellists' selection techniques.

[60] The EUSS is a UK government scheme that ran from March 2019 to the end of June 2021 and aimed at registering all EU migrants living in the country before the end of the Brexit transition period, and grant or refuse them an indefinite or temporary leave of stay.

4.6 Institutional Support to EU migrants

Between 2019 and 2022, all EU migrants in the UK needed to apply for settled or pre-settled status through the Home Office 'EU Settlement Scheme' (EUSS) to guarantee their legal right to remain in the country after the exit of the UK from the EU. Arguably, the provision of competent help in submitting a complete and correct application was of crucial importance for the life of thousands of people, and for this reason I argue it is a good operationalisation of how much local administrators cared about their EU migrants during Brexit.

To measure the **Institutional Support to EU migrants**, between May 2020 and April 2021 I made a series of quantitative and qualitative observations of all Brexit-related sections and/or pages for each of the 341 English local Council's websites. The resulting database (attached as **Appendix A**) provides a comprehensive picture of the array of information and services to the residents that the English local councils created because of the EUSS. I then used these data to create a magnitude scale, the 'EU migrants Support Scale'. Magnitude coding consists in associating an alphanumeric code to a given piece of qualitative data to express its intensity, frequency, or direction in relation to similar data (Saldaña, 2016). According to Saldaña, magnitude coding is 'appropriate for descriptive qualitative studies that include basic statistical information such as frequencies or percentages' (2016, p. 73). This coding technique is used to 'quantify' qualitative data by assigning scores 'in some objective and operational sense to these qualitative categories' (Tanaka, 1979, p. 113) (Tanaka, 1979, p. 113), and as such represents a suitable coding technique for classifying and ranking a large-n population of local governments along the same variable (support to EU migrants). Finally, I assigned to each local Council the score from the EU migrants Support Scale that in my view best represented the degree of support given to EU migrants during the Brexit transition.

The scale **EU migrants Support Scale** is composed by a series of dummy variables that account for the presence or the absence of website features, information or services related to the EUSS, along with qualitative observations. Its measurement criteria were adapted from the WCA performed by Panagiotopoulos et al. (2011, 2012) in studying the impact of e-petitions imposed by the UK central government on local authorities in 2009.

Dummy variables:

- Presence/absence of webpage/section for EU migrants on Brexit and/or the EUSS.
- Presence/absence of links to the UK Government's Brexit/EUSS webpages.
- Presence/absence of links to external organisations that provided personal support for preparing the EUSS application.

- Presence/absence of a paid support service for completing the EUSS application provided by the local Council **OR** presence/absence of a support service for completing the EUSS application offered by the local Council free of charge.

Qualitative observations:

- Breadth and quality of the information about the Brexit process and the EUSS.

The EU migrants Support Scale ranges from 1 to 5. The score 1 represents absence of support, while 5 the highest level of support.

EU MIGRANTS SUPPORT SCALE
Support Level 1 = There is no webpage/section for EU migrants in the Council's website
Support Level 2 = There is a webpage/section of a page for EU migrants with links to the Brexit/EUSS webpages of the Government, but scarce or no information on the Brexit process and the EUSS.
Support Level 3 = (3a) The website has an informative webpage/section for EU migrants on the Brexit process and the EUSS, but no links to organisations offering individual support to apply to the EUSS; OR (3b) there are details of organisations offering individual support to apply for the EUSS, but scarce or no information for EU migrants on the Brexit process and the EUSS.
Support Level 4 = (4a) The website has an informative webpage/section for EU migrants on the Brexit process and the EUSS that also provides links to organisations offering individual support to apply for the EUSS; OR (4b) the website has an informative webpage/section for EU migrants on the Brexit process and the EUSS, and the Council offers individual support to EU migrants for applying to the EUSS[61] but charges for the service.
Support Level 5 = The website has an informative webpage/section for EU migrants on the Brexit process and the EUSS that provides links to organisations offering individual support to apply for the EUSS and the Council offers FREE individual support to EU migrants for applying to the EUSS.

Table 3 The EUSS support magnitude scores

The data emerging from the observations described above were clustered and summarised into six coding units. Each coding unit represents additional information and services for EU migrants. The

[61] During the EUSS application period English local governments were not allowed to advice EU migrants on the content to include in the application form. Some councils provided instead a document scanning service, assistance in uploading documents using the EU Exit phone app and generic guidance on the application process. Instead, authorised charities and private organisations were free to advice the applicant on the merit of the application and suggest additions and/or changes to increase chances of approval.

incremental aggregation of coding units produced seven distinct levels of support, then further reduced for simplicity into five magnitude levels of magnitude.

The Council offers FREE individual support to EU migrants.							
The Council offers PAID individual support to EU migrants.							
The website has links to organisations offering individual support to EU migrants.							
Some information about the Brexit/EUSS processes.							
Links to the government's Brexit/EUSS webpages.							
There is a webpage/section of a webpage for EU migrants on Brexit/EUSS processes.							
	Level 1	**Level 2**	**Level 3a**	**Level 3b**	**Level 4a**	**Level 4b**	**Level 5**

Table 4 Magnitude by coding unit

In the analysis, levels 3a and 3b and 4a and 4b of the above table became respectively level 3 and level 4 because they provided equivalent magnitude of support. Level 3a councils offered information about the Brexit/EUSS processes to EU migrants but did not have links to external organisations providing personal support for preparing the EUSS application, while level 3b councils had links to other organisation helping EU migrants but scarce/no information on the Brexit/EUSS processes. Similarly, level 4a councils' websites signposted to charities that helped EU migrants with their EUSS application, but themselves did not provide help in preparing the EUSS application, while level 4b Council charged a fee for helping individuals with their EUSS application but did not have links to external organisations offering individual support to EU migrants. The decision to charge a fee of £14 (or £21 in London) per applicant for scanning ID documents and attaching them to the EUSS application form, despite the availability of government funding for covering expenses generated by this service, denotes a limited interest from the institution in reaching all possible EU migrants in need of such support, some of which could not afford this cost. For this reason, these local governments were awarded 4 points instead of the top score 5, which was given only to councils that decided to offer free support. On completion of the WCA, all 341 English local authorities had received a score from 1 to 5 from the EU migrants Support Scale that represented their level of institutional support to EU migrants.

4.7 The Small-n Case Sample

After completing the WCA, and having applied the scoping and selection criteria described in section 4.4, the selected four cases were:

1. **Haringey** (London).
2. **Torbay** (South-West).
3. **Coventry** (West Midlands).
4. **Portsmouth** (South-East).

Participatory inclusiveness		**Institutional Support to EU migrants**	
		High	Low
	High	Haringey, 270k people, 85k EU migrants, 17.1% of tot[62].	Torbay, 136k people, 4k EU migrants, 3.3% of tot[5].
	Low	Coventry, 345k people, 45k EU migrants, 9% of tot.	Portsmouth,208k people, 16k EU migrants, 6.7% of tot.

Table 5 The 2X2 case selection table

In synthesis, the four local councils comply with the following three conditions:

1. Represent four sub-populations with high and low levels of 'Participatory inclusiveness' and 'Institutional Support to EU migrants'. High and low thresholds were determined by dividing in three equal bands the distribution of local administrations along each of the two selecting dimensions resulting from the WCA.

2. Allow for a large gap between high and low levels of the two selection conditions. A large difference of outcome is more effective in highlighting explanatory factors and is less prone than small differences to spurious relationships between variables (Rohlfing & Rohlfing, 2012, p. 68).

[62] Own calculation of the proportion of EU migrants as of the 31st of December 2023. The raw data were taken from the ONS 2021 Census datasets. ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/internationalmigrationenglandandwales/census2021 [accessed on the 14/04/2024].

3. Offer a longitudinal perspective to the study (Toots, 2019). All cases ran participatory tools such as citizen panels, consultations, and petitions for at least a few years.

Table 6 Summary of the scoping and selection criteria.

- *Case homogeneity (scoping criteria):*

1. Only English local governments (same legal-admin framework, England hosts 89% of EU migrants in the UK).
2. Only metropolitan boroughs and unitary authorities (same powers).

- *Case heterogeneity (selection criteria):*

3. High/low levels of participatory inclusiveness and institutional support to EU migrants.
4. Geographical spread (London, South-East, South-West, and Midlands).
5. Variance in EU population size (3.3% to 17.1%).

To keep with *case homogeneity*, all four councils are either metropolitan boroughs or unitary authorities and share the same powers. Conversely, in compliance with *case heterogeneity,* to guarantee a good geographical spread the cases are located in different regions of England and also offer a good variance in terms of size of the local EU population. The WCA resulted in a 2X2 table (see table 5) representing high and low values of the two selecting criteria. Mid-rank cases were discarded from the case selection to ensure a larger gap between high and low levels and keep the workload for a lone researcher manageable.

The above table summarises the five criteria applied to select the four case studies. The first two criteria defined the scope of the sampling, English local authorities with equal administrative powers, whereas criteria from 3 to 5 were used to diversify the selected cases. 341 cases met criterion 1, 124 criterion 2, but only the chosen four represented a quadrant of the 2X2 table (criterion 3) but also criterion 4, all located in different regions, and criterion 5, different sizes of the resident EU community.

4.8 Data Creation

I created the qualitative data through **50 semi-structured interviews** recorded between May 2021 and October 2022[63] across the four cases. In-depth interviews are a popular method of data creation in qualitative studies because of their capacity to provide a rich description of contextual elements, to capture perceptions of reality and solicit explicit or latent meanings attributed by participants to the social phenomena of interest for the research (Landman, 2008). Among standard

[63] The 50th and last interview was recorded in March 2024.

interviewing techniques (unstructured, semi-structured and structured), semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are:

> […] *well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers. Second, the varied professional, educational, and personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of a standardized interview schedule* (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330).

The variety of personal backgrounds represented in the sample of participants and the search for subjective perceptions of a self-defining topic such as political participation (Campbell, 2005) made semi-structured particularly apt for addressing the research questions of this study. I was conscious that the choice of semi-structured interviews over structured interviews, when questions are closed and repeated in the same way to all participants, similarly to a verbal questionnaire, produce a trade-off between the comparability and replicability of data guaranteed by structured interviews and the gain of breadth and depth of personal insights gathered through semi-structured interviews. Considering the inherently subjective nature of political behaviours, I decided that for the purposes of this research the gain of the latter outweighed the loss of the former.

The participants were selected non-randomly through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to 'concentrate on people with particular characteristics who will better be able to assist with the relevant research' (Etikan, 2016, p. 3). In the context of this study, the purposive sampling was used to recruit participants because of their country of origin, as well as their specific knowledge and/or firsthand experiences related to European migrants. Consequently, I planned participants' selection according to Maxwell's principle of *criterion-based selection*: 'a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices' (2005, p. 88).

Despite migrants' political participation being less influenced by the traditional individual and collective drivers of participation (see chapter 2 for a review), intersectionality is still an important element when investigating complex social attitudes and behaviours through qualitative interviews (Windsong, 2018). In this study, aspects of intersectionality are expressed by nationality and class, i.e. variability in political culture of the country of origin, and variability in social and economic status (SES). Because the research design is underpinned by a theoretical model based on different POS frameworks (see chapter 3), which include elements such as bonding/bridging social capital, *within-case* diversity of participants is required for comparative purposes and to observe different behaviours from distinct groups of participants. A higher degree of homogeneity across participants would not allow reliable conclusions on how the local POS impacts migrants with different nationality and higher or lower SES. Within-case diversity increases the explanatory power of the study: when interviews with participants with different national, social, and economic background

produce the same results (*equifinality*) then the evidence of institutional and context-related impact is strengthened (Johnson et al., 2019). When the opposite is true and participants from the same case study produce diverse results (*multifinality*), then the outcome is useful to identify and explain weaknesses of neo-institutional theoretical approaches in a certain locality. Methodologically, the broad socio-demographic diversity of the participants is an added value because it allows us to capture a richer array of insights, perspectives, and personal experiences than a more homogenous sample could provide.

The participants' recruitment process occurred mostly through announcements on local EU migrant groups on Facebook, personal connections, and snowballing. To interview 8 Councillors and 8 council officers across the four local administration, 69 people/offices were contacted through hundreds of emails and phone calls. Similarly, to agree 34 interviews 31 EU migrants and five EU migration experts (two of them represented both categories), 77 migrants and Eastern European organisations and Facebook groups were contacted through hundreds of Facebook posts, direct messages on WhatsApp, messages through their websites, emails, and phone calls. For recruiting purposes I also personally visited 10 ethnic shops, restaurants, churches and a Coventry-based Eastern European community organisation, during two fieldwork trips of three days each in Coventry (December 2021) and Torbay (June 2022), where I distributed dozens of flyers about the project and engaged in conversations with many potential interviewees.

The size of the interviews' sample (N=50) was large enough to allow reaching *thematic saturation*. Thematic saturation is the aim of qualitative data generation (Guest et al., 2006), when no additional data provide new themes or new meaningful information about the themes already defined by the researcher (Staller, 2021). Kuzel (1992) suggests between six to eight interviews per homogeneous sample. For each of the four cases I interviewed *at least* seven EU migrants, a Council officer and two Councillors, one in cabinet and one on the opposition, plus an EU migration expert. The four EU migration experts (all of them also EU migrants) were recruited as individuals who, due to their professional role within organisations that provide services to European migrants, have an in-depth knowledge of the local European community. Their interviews allowed me to gather expert opinions about Europeans and local politics, as well as insights about the relationship of EU migrants with their local administrations, especially with regards to those migrants who live in marginalised and/or vulnerable situations (homeless, unemployed, suffering from mental health issues, etc.) who I could not reach through my online recruitment campaign. Council representatives were selected because they work (or worked) in areas related to migrants and/or citizen engagement, or, in case of elected members, because they hold (or held) a policy portfolio that includes community inclusion and/or local democracy. The fifty semi-structured interviews were divided as follows:

- **16 interviews** of participants from **Portsmouth**: 2 Councillors, 3 council officers, 1 expert of the local European community and 10 European citizens (4 French, 2 Germans, 2 Romanians, 1 Italian and 1 Hungarian);
- **11 interviews** of participants from **Coventry**: 2 Councillors, 2 council officers and 7 EU migrants (3 Polish, 2 Italians, 1 Hungarian and 1 Austrian). As the director of a community organisation for EU migrants, one of the European citizens has also been interviewed as an expert of the local European community;
- **12 interviews** of participants from **Haringey**: 3 Councillors, 2 council officers, 1 expert of the EU migrants local community and 7 European citizens (3 Italians, 2 Polish, 1 Portuguese, 1 Czech and 1 Lithuanian). A participant born in the EU is also an elected member of the Council, so their participation counts for both the Councillors and EU migrants categories.
- **10 interviews** of participants from **Torbay**: 2 Councillors, 1 Council officer and 7 European citizens (2 Polish, 1 Italian, 1 Spanish, 1 Danish, 1 Belgian and 1 French).
- **1 interview** with the Executive Director of the SCO 'The Migrant Democracy Project'[64], who has extended experience with EU migrants and local politics.

All the 31 EU migrants interviewed (23 women and 8 men) are first-generation migrants, have been residents in the UK for at least 5 years (over 20 years in many cases) and have lived no less than a year[65] in one of the four local councils considered in this research. The 3:1 ratio between women and men in the sample of EU migrants is due to a self-selection bias and is explicable with the tendency of women to participate in survey and qualitative research more than men (Wild et al., 2001), but also by the fact that women use Facebook, the main recruitment source, more than men (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012).

The participants came from 13 different EU countries (six A8 or A2 EU members and seven EU15 members[66]) and have an age comprised between 24 and 74 years old. In each Council the sample of participants from the EU covers a wide range of education levels and professions: from students, waiters, and warehouse workers to university lecturers and executive managers. Before I began recruiting participants, I obtained approval from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Social Science (ERGO n. 56438). Immediately after the interview was agreed, all participants received a

[64] The Migrant Democracy Project' is a charity advocating to extend first-generation migrants' voting rights and political representation in the UK. Source: migrantdemos.org.uk [accessed on 06/06/2024].

[65] One year of residency within one of the four councils I am studying is the minimum time threshold I considered for a person being considered a 'resident' rather than just someone with a short-term living experience in that place. For most people is also the minimum amount of time needed to experience at least a round of local elections.

[66] A8 or A2 EU members are all member states that joined the EU after 2004, EU15 members are all members states that joined the EU before 2004.

participant information sheet and signed an informed consent form to formally consent to the interview, in compliance with the ethics policy of the University of Southampton. All interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes and were recorded online, except for one in-person interview in Coventry. The guide questions I used during the interviews are annexed as **Appendix B**.

In summary, the core of the interviews with EU migrants and EU migrants' experts regarded how EU migrants interact with their local administration and what support they expect from the Council, as well as what they know about their political rights and how they experience local politics and political participation. The interviews with Council officials and Councillors focused more on their perceptions of local EU communities and on the role of their institution in engaging them. Due to their semi-structured nature, all interviews ended up being unique reflections of subjective experiences and private opinions. It depended on how the conversation with the participant developed spontaneously, what the participant had to say unprompted by me and what topics I decided to explore 'on the fly' with probing or follow-up questions.

The recordings of the interviews were then transcribed using the automated transcription software Otter.ai. and then edited applying an 'edited verbatim approach'[67], which enhances readability while keeping as much as possible with the intended meaning of the interviewee. The interviews were recorded in English, so all participants were recruited on condition of being fluent English speakers. I am an Italian native speaker, so the only exception to this rule were the seven Italian interviewees, who were allowed to speak Italian. I made this choice to facilitate the communication, make them feel as at ease as possible, and remove all obstacles to their capacity to understand the questions or to express themselves. The interviews in Italian were then translated by the translation software Happy Scribe and edited by me for clarity and correctness.

4.9 Data Analysis and Research Quality Criteria

I analysed the interview data through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2012). Thematic analysis (TA) is a popular analytical approach to analyse interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2023). It allows the researcher to provide a 'a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data' (Braun et al., 2021, p.6) and is particularly appropriate for detecting explicit and latent mechanisms within the participants' accounts. Emerging themes highlight 'factors that influence, underpin, or contextualize particular processes or phenomena' (*ibid.*, p.8). Based on these premises

[67] Edited verbatim transcription means that all mumbling, stutters, fillers, broken sentences, repeated words, and grammar errors present in the audio file are removed from the written text. It increases clarity and flows of reading, and it is suitable for text analyses that do not intend to investigate unintended verbal meanings. Source: penguin-transcription.co.uk/transcription-type-verbatim-intelligent-verbatim-or-edited. [Accessed on 23/05/23].

and on the belief that 'reality is socially constructed, and it is what participants perceive it to be' (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). I found reflexive TA to be an appropriate qualitative analytical framework for identifying institutional and context-based elements favouring or deterring political participation through people's perceptions of reality (mine included). Therefore, the aim of this project is not trying to unveil what reality actually is, as other qualitative analysis methods based on a realistic paradigm and a 'scientific-descriptive' approach aim to achieve (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p. 2). Braun and Clarke's understanding of TA is therefore substantially different from hybrid forms of qualitative research that rely, explicitly or implicitly, on positivist/quantitative principles for analysing data and assessing research quality (e.g. using *a priori* codebooks or linking research quality to intercoder reliability), such as the popular Qualitative Content Analysis method ('there is no clear dividing line between QCA and quantitative content analysis', Schreier, 2012, p. 191).

Reflexive TA distinguishes itself from other types of thematic analysis (see Braun et al., 2012, for a brief overview) also for the importance given to the researcher's 'reflexivity': the recursive self-questioning and self-monitoring of how the researcher's personal background, experiences, feelings, and worldviews influence their qualitative enquiry. Reflexive TA rejects the concept of 'objective' social research and relies instead on the notion that social meanings do not exist in a vacuum but are co-constructed by the researcher and the participants. A reflexive researcher does not see personal biases as a problem but as a *resource* to embrace (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p. 6). For this reason, being reflexive does not mean to mitigate, or control, researcher's biases that are inherent to any social investigation. Reflexivity should be used instead to 'unpack how subjectivity becomes relevant to producing certain knowledge' (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020, p. 162).

It is because of my own reflexivity that I did not use the conventional expression 'data *collection* and analysis' to title this section, but I called it instead 'data *creation* and analysis'. Coherently, throughout the thesis I avoided using the word 'collection' in relation to data. I am aware that in doing qualitative research I am not simply retrieving data produced by another person or included in a written/audio/visual document. Instead, through my personal and critical interaction with the sources I was actively contributing to generating the outcome of the research, which is why I wrote using an active voice and the first person 'I', rather than hiding my presence behind passive verbs, or suggest objectivity using third person pronouns (Braun & Clarke, 2023). As a qualitative researcher I also know that I bring my identities and worldviews into my work. Therefore I am not agnostic about the topic of my research and migrants' issues in general.

My subjective position is that I am an EU migrant from Italy, who has been living in England since 2014 (ten years at the time of writing). I am also a white straight man who comes from a highly educated middle-class household. I have left-leaning political views that determine how I see the world. In the context of this research, my views influenced how I interacted with the participants,

with a personal and empathic attitude, and how I analysed the data. I found myself always naturally identifying with the point of view of a migrant rather than of an institutional actor. On the contrary, at times I felt almost enraged while reading the transcripts of interviews with Councillors who were perpetrating borderline xenophobic stereotypes about European migrants or talked about them with condescension and contempt, without even realising it. My politics determine who I am and certainly influence how I do research. I am a social democrat at heart, who has always voted for left-wing parties, who is firmly against Brexit and Tory's austerity and is also passionate about migrants' rights. Because of my personal position I believe that public institutions have an ethical obligation to ease the social, economic, but also political, burden of migrants' integration in the host society, not only for the migrants' sake, but for the benefit of the whole community and for a fairer society.

I am convinced that being personally and emotionally attached to the subject of a study is not necessarily an obstacle to producing good research. When it allows unlocking the understanding of human experiences and behaviours that are invisible to outsiders, it becomes an added value. This is particularly true when applied to the study of marginalised groups. Instances of marginalisation are 'interrogated often by those who were in some way close enough to identify as problematic these issues' (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020, p.165). Migrants are often politically marginalised (Smith & Wales, 2000; Spierings, 2016): because I am a migrant too, although surely a privileged one in terms of socio-economic status and political awareness, I can empathize with stories and views heard during the interviews, and understand them in a way that someone who has never lived in another country for long periods might not be able to.

It is not a coincidence that at the beginning of my PhD I found myself wondering about how millions of European migrants engage with politics in England and thought about the academic and practical relevance of such subject, especially after Brexit. Would have I done it if I were not a European migrant in England? Probably not.

I am also convinced that the innovative theoretical model I built for this project is a direct result of myself, the lone researcher, being an EU migrant in England. One of the two main assumptions of my model is that institutional actors assign lower 'civic legitimacy' to EU migrants, consciously or not. This concept is derived from the critique of Lea Klarenbeek (2021) to the 'two-ways' integration theory (see chapter 3). Since the first time I read Klarenbeek's paper, it resonated with me in a powerful way, because during my lifetime I have listened so many times to the narrative that migrants' communities that are disconnected from the rest of the host society are in such a situation because 'they want it like that' and that 'we cannot help them if they do not want to help themselves'. I was immediately drawn to use this theory for my own research project. I believe that

someone who is not an EU migrant would struggle to see the link between Klarenbeek's generic observations about insiders' attitudes towards outsiders of the host society (i.e. the migrants) and how a specific manifestation of this phenomenon at a local level in England might have an impact on EU migrants' political participation.

Finally, for what concerns research credibility, i.e. the 'truth value of the enquiry' (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 18), I decided not to utilise the standard term 'triangulation' to describe the technique I used to enhance the strengths of my findings. I agree with Tracy, who argues that 'different methods, data, or researchers often do (and perhaps should) yield different results. […] [therefore] triangulation does not necessarily result in improved accuracy' (2010, p. 843). Instead of triangulation I adopted the alternative concept of 'crystallisation'. There are clear similarities between the two concepts: both crystallisation and triangulation require applying multiple data sources and/or research methods to the same phenomenon to cross-validate qualitative results (Webb, 1978). Both crystallisation and triangulation provide insights about the social realities under investigation that might escape a mono-dimensional methodology (Jick, 1979).

However, while the value of triangulation in qualitative studies is measured through quality criteria that belong to a quantitative paradigm, such as validity and reliability (Tracy, 2010), and may rely upon post-positivist practices such as 'intercoder reliability' (Tracy, 2019, p. 276), crystallisation affects the 'credibility' of a research report, intended as trustworthiness and plausibility of the results (*ibid.*). In line with the critical realistic epistemology of this research, crystallisation does not aim to validate a unique truth, but only a partial version of it, that is context-dependent and co-constructed by participants and the researcher. Crystallisation helps to construct 'situated knowledge' rather than objective truths pinpointed by a triangulation of research methods, and recognises the value of the researcher's personal biases over presumed impartiality and consensus interpretations. For this reason, crystallisation requires significative 'evidence of researcher's reflexivity'(Ellingson, 2009, p. 10).

In this thesis, the crystallisation of the results comes in the first place from mixing different analytical methods, such as scaling and quantification of qualitative data in the WCA, comparative analysis, interpretive data analysis and case study analysis. Secondarily, by coupling the multimodality of data analysis with the multivocality of data sources. I intend 'multivocality' as 'analysing social action from a variety of participants' points of view and highlighting divergent or disagreeable standpoints' (Tracy, 2019, p. 277). I believe that by generating data from 341 local councils websites, 50 original interviews, and several official Council's documents, I was able to encompass the variety of viewpoints and social perspectives that Tracy describes as multivocality.

4.10 Conclusion

Chapter 5 The Four Case Studies

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of the socio-economic and cultural context of the migrants is an integral part of Morales and Giugni's POS theoretical framework (2011). Next to '*Political and discursive opportunity structures'* Morales and Giugni propose '*Characteristics of the migrant group'* as the second dimension of macro-level analysis. The group characteristics taken into consideration by Morales and Giugni are: 'Socio-demographic composition and size'; 'Migration history'; 'Socio-economic status'; and 'Relevant aspects of the political culture of the ethnic group'. This chapter provides contextual information about the four case studies and an overview of the cultural, social, and economic characteristics of the EU migrants living in those localities that address the '*Characteristics of the migrant group'* part of the POS model.

To contextualise the social, economic and political situation of EU migrants I used Census, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and electoral register data, integrated with some interview data and information about past and current migration waves found in scholarly and grey literature. Each section of the chapter is going to be divided in four sub-sections, one per case study. First, I am going to look at the presence of international migrants, European in particular, and compare their numerical weight within their local communities. Then, I look at the social and economic situation of migrants considering the wealth distribution of the Council where they reside. Finally, I assess EU migrants' level of political engagement, based on what electoral registers[68] and interviews tell us.

5.2 EU Migrants Presence in the Four Cases

5.2.1 Haringey

Haringey is a London Borough Council located in North London. In 2021, it had a population of 264,236 inhabitants[69], 18th out 33 Boroughs in London. Haringey is a highly diverse local authority, with residents coming from over 75 countries and speaking over 100 languages. In north London, only Barnet is more multi-ethnic than Haringey (Haringey Borough Council, 2020). In 2001,

[68] Unfortunately in England local administrations to do not collect data about election turnouts at sub-populations level, so it is impossible to tell how many EU migrants effectively voted in the past.

[69] Source: ONS (2021), *How life has changed in Hackney: Census 2021,* ons.gov.uk [accessed on 07/07/23].

Haringey was the 5th most diverse local authority in the UK (the other top four also being London Boroughs), with 38% of the population born outside the UK, 22% of which from Sub-Saharan Africa, 17% from the Americas and the Caribbean and 13.5% from the EU27 (9,985 residents) (Craw et al., 2007)[70]. By 2021, the percentage of non-UK born residents has grown to 45.2%[71].

Beyond the statistics, the ethnic melting pot is a visible feature of the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Haringey, thanks to the presence of hundreds of small migrant-run retailers, shops, bars and restaurants, especially in the eastern part of its territory. For example, the so-called 'Latin Village', an ethnic market characterised by a strong presence of Latin-American stalls near the Seven Sisters' metro station, was once dubbed by the BBC as a "mini United Nations in action" (BBC, 2008, as quoted in Hasenberger & Nogueira, 2022), while the neighbourhood of Tottenham has been named the 'most diverse constituency in the world' (Visser, 2020, p. 325).

The presence of EU migrants in Haringey became noticeable only a few years later, in the early 2000s, mainly because of the mass migration from Eastern Europe that followed the first and second EU eastwards expansion, in 2004 and in 2007 (*ibid.*). In less than two decades the sheer size of intra-EU migration changed the ethnic composition of the Borough quite radically. According to Census data, in 2021 17.1% of Haringey residents (45,201), over 1 in 6, were born in the EU. At the time of writing, EU migrants represent 37% of all non-UK born residents in Haringey (121,119), more than the next two macro-regions of origin combined, Americas and the Caribbean region (17%, or 8% of the total population), and all Africa (16%, or 7.5% of the total population). Comparing 2001 and 2021 Census data it emerges how over the last 20 years the presence of EU migrants in Haringey increased by 453%, almost entirely thanks to the influx of migrants from A8 and A2 countries after the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements. To give an idea of the growth of Eastern Europeans in Haringey, since 2001 the Polish community has multiplied its size by a factor of 8, from 868 to 7,212 individuals[72].

[70] The number of EU27 residents in 2001 is the result of my own calculation from Census 2001 data. Craw et al. grossly overestimated the amount of Eastern Europeans (15.1% of all migrants) probably because they inflated A8 and A2 countries with other European countries non in the EU, like Türkiye, which in the 2001 Census were all clustered under the same statistical category ('Eastern Europe'). The claim that before 2004 there was already a significant 'Eastern European' community in Haringey is false, unless the concept is extended to Türkiye, that alone had more migrants than the whole EU15 countries together.

[71] Source: ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/population/country-of-birth [accessed on 07/07/23].

[72] Own calculation based on 2001 and 2021 Census data.

5.2.2 Coventry

Coventry is an English city of 345,300 residents located in the West-Midlands region and in the West-Midlands metropolitan county, 32km south-east of from Birmingham. The 2021 Census ranks Coventry as the second largest local authority of the region, after Birmingham, and as the 10th largest city in England (Coventry City Council, 2016).

Coventry is a diverse and multicultural city. In the early and mid-twentieth century, Coventry was the fastest growing urban centre in the UK, mainly because of the boom of the automotive industry and its satellite activities. The motoring sector was so important for the economy of the city that, in the 1950s, Coventry was nicknamed the 'Detroit of England'. Due to the abundance of manufacturing jobs during the interwar period and in the aftermath of the Second World War, Coventry became a major pole of attraction for international migration. Already in 1961, 10.4% of the population was born outside the UK. In the 1970s, when the influx of economic migrants decreased because of the process of de-industrialisation of the British economy and many important factories shut down (Sissons, 2019), the city became a safe haven for migrants fleeing wars and humanitarian crises. A wave of refugees running from autocratic regimes, in particular from Eastern Africa, arrived in Coventry in that period, followed in the 1990s by refugees fleeing the war in former Yugoslavia. More recently, the city received refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iran (Coventry City Council, 2018). Since 2014 Coventry is the local authority that resettled the highest number of asylum-seekers in the UK (787) (Sturge, 2023).

After the 2008 financial crisis, which hit Coventry harder than the rest of the UK and brought the unemployment rate up to 10% (Green et al., 2016), the quick recovery of the local economy and the higher availability of jobs (5% above the national average), made Coventry once again a popular destination for international migrants (Griffith & Mackela, 2018). Because of the high demand of labour, between 2005 and 2017 Coventry had the highest population increase in the UK outside London, mostly because of international migration (*ibid.*). According to the 2021 Census, 28% of its residents were not born in the UK, well above the England average (17.4%)[73].

Because of its multiculturality, Coventry gained the reputation of being a city of 'newcomers', open to the world and welcoming all migrants (Ewart, 2011). Indeed, as seen the city has a long history of being a safe haven for all sort of foreigners. This reputation earned Coventry the current

[73] Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/internationalmigrationenglandandwales/census2021 [accessed on10/06/2024].

title of 'City of Sanctuary', for its support to migrants and its welcoming attitude towards asylum-seekers and refugees (Coventry City Council, 2018, p. 5).

According to Census data, in March 2021 **34,802 EU migrants** lived in Coventry:

- 12,860 people from A8 countries (3.7%).
- 9,215 from A2 countries (Bulgaria and Romania) (2.7%).
- 12,303 from EU14 countries (3.6%).
- 424 from all other EU countries (0.1%).

EU-born residents constitute approximately 9% of the Coventry population and represent the second largest macro-regional group after the Middle east/Asian group (10.4%). However, if we consider the EUSS data quarterly published by the Home Office, the portion of residents born in an EU country is probably higher than the Census figures. We know that, as of 31st March 2023, approximately 54,500 Coventry residents had obtained a settled or pre-settled status, or 15.7% of the population. Even when accounting for European citizens who might have been granted a status and then moved out of Coventry (of whom there are no data at the Council level), it seems unlikely that in just 2 years (2019-2021) the EU migrants' downturn involved as many as 23,135 people, almost 7% of the Coventry's population.

Similar to the rest of the country, the EU communities in Coventry underwent an unprecedented growth in the 21st century. In 2001 Coventry had 3,526 residents born in the EU, who became 14,779 in 2011 and 30,937 in 2021 (+777% from 2001 and +109% from 2011). In terms of size of the group over the whole resident population, EU migrants went from 1.2% in 2001, to 4.7% in 2011, and to 9% in 2021. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of EU migrants who moved to Coventry from the EU came from the eight Central and Eastern European states that joined the Union in 2004, and from Romania and Bulgaria, which accessed in 2007 (Green et al., 2016). In 2007, at the peak of the post-2004 migration wave, Eastern Europeans accounted for over half of all National Insurance numbers issued to foreigners in Coventry (*ibid.*). Interestingly, in Coventry there is as well an older Polish community, made by the descendants of the Polish families that settled in the UK during the war, following Polish pilots who joined the RAF after the Wehrmacht[74] invaded Poland.

[74] Sources: bbc.co.uk/coventry/features/local-history/history-of-poles-in-coventry [accessed on 10/06/2024].

5.2.3 Portsmouth

Portsmouth is a unitary authority located on the south coast, 120 km south-west of London. In 2021, it had 208.098 residents, which make it the 4th city in the South-East region of England after Brighton, Milton Keynes and Southampton. Portsmouth is a port city with a long naval tradition, most famous for harbouring the Royal Navy, and a major point of entry for international tourists (Apostolakis et al., 2015).

Despite its position by the sea, its marine vocation and a rich history of port open to the world and to international trade, Portsmouth is not a particularly cosmopolitan city. In 2021, 16.9% of Portsmouth residents were born abroad, slightly below the English average (17.4%)[75]. Quite differently from the melting-pot culture of Haringey or the welcoming reputation of Coventry, Portsmouth is often seen from the outside as a reactionary and xenophobic community, where the British Union of fascists leader Oswald Moseley held rally with 5000 people in the audience in 1938, and extreme right and anti-migrants movements thrive (Skyes, 2016). To corroborate this reputation, Portsmouth ranks second among the most right-wing local authorities in the UK[76]. In the 2015 General Election, the far-right, anti-immigration and anti-EU UKIP party targeted Portsmouth South as a winnable seat[77] and was the overall second party after the Conservatives. At the last EU Parliamentary elections that included the UK, in 2019, the Brexit party, a political spin-off of UKIP born after its leader Farage quitted the party, dominated the votes tally by doubling the votes received by the second party[78]. Not surprisingly, 58% of Pompey[79] voted Leave at the 2016 EU referendum, six points above the national result and 3.5 points above the English result[80].

This reputation, although well-evidenced, just tells one side of the story and does not portray the full social complexity of Portsmouth. Portsmouth is also a city that welcomes refugees and asylum-seekers from every corner of the world. Because of this humanitarian activity, since 2019 a group of residents, supported by over 120 organisations and endorsed by the City Council, have made of Portsmouth a 'City of Sanctuary'[81], just like Coventry.

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[75] Own calculation based on the 2021 Census dataset 'Country of Birth for England and Wales'.

[76] Source: businessinsider.com/britain-labour-conservative-jeremy-corbyn-theresa-may-2016-9 [accessed on 04/08/23]. A study from the marketing company Reach Data Unit looked into the amount of votes collected by the Conservative party in all UK parliamentary constituency from 1983 to 2015, and Portsmouth resulted second in the UK after Bournemouth. Source: mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/left-and-right-wing-8850583 [accessed on 10/05/2024].

[77] Source: ft.com/content/c3873c9e-cb63-11e5-be0b-b7ece4e953a0 [accessed on 04/08/2023].

[78] Source: portsmouth.co.uk/news/politics/european-election-results-nigel-farages-brexit-party-secures-largest-number-of-meps-970116.

[79] The residents of Portsmouth.

[80] Source: bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results/local/p [accessed on 10/06/2024].

[81] Source: hiveportsmouth.org.uk/hive-directory/service/428 [accessed on 08/08/2023.

International migration to Portsmouth has a long tradition. According to Skyes (2016), because of its flourishing naval industry and the presence of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth received foreign communities since at least the early 1800s, to the point that around mid-19th century 'rarely would you have heard English being spoken during those times at the dockyard' (Thomas, J., 2015 – as cited in Skyes, T., 2016).

The arrival of European migrants dates quite far back: in 1834, a contingent of Polish soldiers who defected the Russian Tzar and fled to England were welcomed and helped with food and shelter by the Portsmouth's population. They were so positively impressed that they decided to settle in Portsmouth (Skyes, 2016). Today, EU migrants represent 6.7% of the Portsmouth population[82] the largest macro-group of migrants, above the communities coming from 'Middle-east and Asia' (5.3%). The local EU community has had an exponential growth after the arrival of A8 and A2 citizens: according to Census data, in 2001, there were only 2,948 EU migrants in Portsmouth. 10 years later, in 2011, the Europeans were 7,921. In 2021, the latest Census data estimate the number of EU migrants to be 14,731, which represent a growth of +400% from 2001 and +86% from 2011. EU migrants went from representing just 1.6% of all Portsmouth residents in 2001, to 6.7% in 2021. The Rumanian community in particular experienced a boom since the country joined the EU in 2007, and is now the largest foreigner national community in the city. A few numbers convey the sheer magnitude of the expansion of A8 and A2 communities in Portsmouth: in 2001 there were only 15 Romanians living in Portsmouth, who 20 years later had become 3124, a 208-fold increase. Similarly, in 2001 only 75 Polish citizens resided in the port city. In 2021, they were 2902, a 3900% growth[83].

5.2.4 Torbay

Torbay is a unitary authority located on the south coast of Devon, in South-West England. The Council is composed by three contiguous but separate resort towns, all facing the waters of the Tor Bay: Torquay, the largest settlement and the seat of the Council, Paignton and Brixham. The three towns, historically autonomous from one another, were reunited under a single local authority in 1968. According to the 2021 Census, Torbay has a population of 139,200, and to a large extent it can be considered a British local authority, as only 7.1% of its residents were born outside the UK, well below England's average (17.4%). Because of the low natality rate, Torbay's population is also quite elderly, having the 25th highest median age in England and Wales (out of

[82] Own calculation based on the 2021 Census dataset 'Country of Birth for England and Wales'.

[83] Own calculation from 2021 Census data.

332 local authorities)[84]. There is no known history of significative international migration to Torquay before the 2004 EU expansion. Even after, the number of EU migrants and international migrants remained relatively negligible compared to the British population.

Currently, EU migrants are the largest group of migrants, above Middle-East and Asia (1.6%), Africa (0.8%) and the Caribbean and Americas (0.4%). Despite the relatively small number, Europeans are still a larger group than all other national and ethnic minorities combined. Alike the other three case studies, and the rest of the country, the EU expansion eastwards in 2004 coincided with a sudden growth of EU immigration. In 2001, 1,273 EU migrants resided in Torbay. The number grew to 2,936 in 2011, and to 4,584 in 2021 (+130% in 2001 and +56% on 2011). EU migrants went from 0.9% in 2001, to 2.2% in 2011 and 3.6% in 2021. The case of the Polish community is emblematic: in 2001, only 127 Polish citizens lived in Torbay. In 2021 they had become 1493, over twelve times more. The exceptional arrival of Eastern Europeans in Torbay, mostly driven by the availability of job in the tourism industry, drew media attention, with the BBC reporting that one year after the accession of the Eastern European countries to the EU, over 5,000 Polish people had moved to the Torbay area[85]. In 2006, the Torquay Herald Express estimated that up to 8,000 Poles were working in the tourism and hospitality sector in Torbay[86]. Because of the large Polish speaking community living in the bay, the same year the local newspaper started a column in Polish[87].

Beyond the numbers, there is also a visible cultural impact of the Polish community on Torbay. Since 2005, ever Sunday a Catholic Mass in Polish language is held every at the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady, an extremely crowdy event that I personally witnessed[88]. Another tangible sign of the Polish presence in the region are the two Polish grocery shops located in Torquay centre, and the Sunday Polish language and culture school for Polish children[89]. Church attendance also shows a significative presence of migrants who come from Orthodox countries

[84] ONS, 2021. *Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021, unrounded data*.

[85] Source: bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/4571762.stm [accessed on 07/08/2023].

[86] Source: torbay.gov.uk/LocalNewsPaperIndex/entry/c6190fca-6443-42bc-8114-88d4f0089b61 [accessed on 07/08/2023].

[87] Source: pressgazette.co.uk/archive-content/torquay-paper-latest-to-launch-polish-content [accessed on 07/08/2023].

[88] I attended the Sunday Mass on the large Church was packed with people standing in the back, and I was the only non-Polish person attending.

[89] Source: interview to Torbay EU migrant Expert.

like Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, who every Sunday congregate at the Christian Orthodox Church of St. Andrew in Torquay to attend Mass[90].

5.3 Social and Economic Status of EU migrants

5.3.1 Haringey

Haringey is one of the most deprived local authorities in the UK (40th out of 317, or 13 percentile)[91]. Haringey is also considered the fourth most 'challenging' London local authority, according to several metrics associated with poverty, such as overcrowded dwellings, underage pregnancy, and dependency on the welfare state (Leurs, 2014). Not surprisingly, it is one of the most dangerous London Boroughs too, with the fourth highest rate in knife crime and the sixth highest rate in domestic abuse (Haringey Borough Council, 2022).

Deprivation, crime and anti-social behaviour are not evenly distributed across the Haringey's territory, as a clear wealth and quality of life divide splits in two the Borough. The train line that links the stations of Harringay and Alexandra Palace creates a perfect border between deprived residents who live east of the railway and affluent residents who live west of the railway. Most of eastern Haringey residents belong to the working or lower-middle class, and households living in Council estates and/or dependent on state's benefits for a living are frequent occurrences (Leurs, 2014). Deprivation is particularly concentrated in the northern-east corner of the Borough (Tottenham, Bruce Castle, White Hart Lane and Northumberland Park) (Haringey Borough Council, 2022). In 2011, Tottenham was also the theatre of violent ethnic riots. That event prompted the report 'It Took another Riot', commissioned by the Mayor of London's Office, which defined the ward as a:

> *'difficult business'* […] *intergenerational unemployment, boredom, poor aspiration, households living in poverty* […] *this can be a dismal environment'* (Independent Panel on Tottenham, 2012, p. 76).

It is known that migrants suffer from occupational 'penalties' and tend to have low-wage and bad quality jobs (Zwysen & Demireva, 2020). Not surprisingly, the map of the most deprived areas of Haringey almost perfectly overlaps with the map of the neighbourhoods with the higher percentage of foreign-born residents.

[90] I also attended a service on in June 2022. The congregation in attendance was mainly from Romania, Bulgaria and Greece and Ukraine.

[91] Source: data.cdrc.ac.uk/dataset/index-multiple-deprivation-imd [accessed on 09/08/2023].

While most of Western Europeans live in the southern wards, Eastern Europeans, who are heavily employed in poorly paid jobs and experience limited salary progression even after 15 years of work (Clark et al., 2019; S. Scott & Brindley, 2012), tend to concentrate in the poorest districts of the eastern part of the Borough, such as Tottenham Hale, Tottenham Green, and Bruce Grove (Haringey Borough Council, 2020). Indeed, extreme poverty seems to affect particularly A8 and A2 migrants, who represent as many as 38% of rough sleepers in Haringey (Haringey Borough Council, 2022), despite being only 10% of the whole Borough's population[92]. In 2022, the Council surveyed the local homeless population and found that 'in Haringey, Eastern European nationals were between 4.3 and 6.1 times more likely to be sleeping rough in the last 12 months compared with UK nationals and they were also between 2.5 and 3.7 times more likely to be a guest in our [Council's] hotels' (Haringey Borough Council, 2022, p. 22).

5.3.2 Coventry

According to the Index of Multiple Depravation 2019, Coventry does not fare particularly well either in terms of quality of life and wealth: 15.4% of the Coventry population lives in highly deprived areas, which puts the city in the 86th rank[93], or 27th percentile of all low-tier English local administrations (n=317). Despite some pockets of significant economic activity, affluent areas are rare within the city boundaries and most neighbourhoods present high indices of depravation and disadvantage (Sissons, 2019).

Most EU migrants in Coventry are of working age (16-64) and as economically active as British residents. Their employment rate is also in line with British citizens. On average EU migrants are more qualified than local residents (Griffith & Mackela, 2018), but they earn on average £3 per hour less than British-born workers, because mostly employed in low-skilled jobs (*ibid.*). We know for example that 75% of post-2004 EU migrants were employed in low-skilled occupations, mostly in local factories and in the hospitality sector (Green et al., 2016). The Census 2021 map and the 2019 IMD map show how A8 and A2 migrants tend to live in the most deprived areas of the city, around Wood End, and north of the city centre, in neighbourhoods like Great Heat, Paradise and Edgwick.

[92] Own calculation from Census 2021 data.

[93] Source: gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019 [accessed on 06/06/2023].

5.3.3 Portsmouth

Similar to Haringey and Coventry, Portsmouth is regarded as a fairly deprived local authority, sitting 58th in the national ranking of the IMD (18th percentile). The most deprived areas of the city are Landport, Fratton and Somers Town in the city centre, and the Paulsgrove suburb outside the Portsea Island. Fratton and Landport are also two of the most diverse neighbourhoods in Portsmouth, where the percentage of foreign-born residents range from 20% to beyond 40%, almost doubling on average the city total (16.9%). Not surprisingly, it is also the area where the majority of A8 and A2 migrants live. The rest of EU migrants seem to concentrate around the more affluent district of Southsea. In terms of unemployment, the situation looks mixed; whereas some parts of Fratton, Landport and Southsea have unemployment rates above the national average, between 5% and 10%, other patches of the same neighbourhoods have unemployment rates around 2%-3%, below the national average.

5.3.4 Torbay

Like the other three cases studies, Torbay is considered a deprived local authority, as it stands in the 15th percentile of the most deprived local authorities in the UK[94]. Also like Haringey, Coventry and Portsmouth, in Torbay too the deprivation is not spread evenly across the territory, and some areas are much better well off than others. The IMD map shows how poverty is highly concentrated in Torquay centre and Paignton centre, while almost all wealthier neighbourhoods are located in the outskirts of the three towns (Torquay, Paignton and Brixham) that compose Torbay local authority. The census 2021 map produced by the OMS clearly shows how EU migrants, in particular A8 and A2 citizens, tend to live in the most deprived areas in Torquay, in the Torre ward and in the city centre, were the presence of non-UK born residents is extremely high, oscillating between 20% and 30%.

This statistic is not surprising, considering that in Devon (Torbay's county) EU migrants tend to be employed in farming, care, and the hospitality sectors (Denton, 2018). Hospitality is infamously known for offering low salaries all across the UK, but particularly in Torbay, which is ranked among the ten local authorities with the lowest average employee rate in Great Britain (House of Lords,

[94] Source: MHCLG (2019), *UK Index of Deprivation 2019.* Available at: data.cdrc.ac.uk/dataset/index-multiple-deprivation-imd [accessed on 06/06/2023].

2019). The same areas are also those showing high rates of unemployment, between 4% and 11%, above the national average (3.4%)[95].

5.4 Electoral Enrolment and Political Participation

5.4.1 Haringey

Haringey has a long history of migrants' activism. In 1985, Haringey became the first London Borough since 1913 to have a Black Leader of the Council, Bernie Grant, who two years later went on to be one the first ever non-white MPs elected in Westminster. Grant was himself a first-generation migrant, having arrived in 1963 from the British Guiana (Horton & Penny, 2023). In more recent times, the Borough saw representatives of migrant communities fighting shoulder-to-shoulder against the gentrification of the Tottenham Council's estates and the consequent expulsion of current residents (Dillon & Fanning, 2015). In 2022, after a two decade-long dispute with the Labour Cabinet, the same mobilised migrants obtained a historical legal win and forced the Council to scrap their redevelopment plans for the 'Latin Village' (Hasenberger & Nogueira, 2022). The two movements are tightly linked, as the 'Stop Haringey Development Vehicle' group that is battling against the Council's 'Plan for Tottenham' stemmed out from the older 'Save Latin Village' community network (Dillon & Fanning, 2015; Horton & Penny, 2023).

There are forms of community self-organisation among EU migrants who live in Haringey, especially from Eastern Europe (e.g., the Polish and Eastern European Christian Family Centre, or CEEP). The aim of these organisations is non-political, as they offer migration services and do not advocate for EU migrants rights, as opposed to other migrants' communities that exert a tangible political influence over the Council, either through elected representatives or long-established political relationships with local parties. Despite the fact that EU migrants represent 17.1% of the population, as of 2024, out of 56 elected Councillors only two EU-born. Other three Councillors are second-generation EU migrants who were born and raised in the UK.

However, the electoral register numbers suggest that the level of political participation among EU migrants might not be as low as their representation in the Council suggests, at least if compared with other non-EU migrant groups. As of July 2023, in Haringey there were 27,200 EU migrants registered in the Council's electoral roll, 60.6% of those eligible (44,892). The gap with the British

[95] Source: ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/employmentinlocalauthoritiesenglandandwales/census2021. The figure reflects the percentage of unemployed people on Census Day (21/03/2021).

citizens' completion rate is large (85%), but was still above the average EU migrants' completion rate in 2019 (54%) (Electoral Commission, 2019).

The data collected through interviews to EU migrants seems to indicate that voting is not a rare occurrence among Europeans. All seven EU migrants based in Haringey who participated in this research vote for the Council on a regular basis, mostly because of the preceding voting habit they acquired in their country of origin, in line with the early socialisation theory: early acquired political habits tend to resist in a changed environment, even when moving to a new country (Eckstein, 1988; Voicu & Comşa, 2014). Only one participant declared that she started voting in local elections in England after she bought a property and felt rooted in Haringey.

Obviously, this sample is too small to draw any meaningful conclusion about voting behaviours of an entire population. Moreover, the apparent high level of voting is likely to be the result of self-selection bias, as individuals who are interested in politics are more inclined to volunteer for research on political participation (Weiner et al., 2017).

5.4.2 Coventry

The Coventry City Council confirmed that as of June 2023, 20,831 EU migrants were registered in the electoral roll, out of 237,410 entries (8.8%). The estimated registration rate is 68%[96], 14% above the EU migrants rate at national level (54%), although still lower than British citizens (85%) (Electoral Commission, 2019). If we take electoral registration as a proxy for political participation, these figures suggest that EU migrants in Coventry have a relatively high level of engagement in local politics. The small sample of EU migrants who live in Coventry and participated in this research seems to confirm this trend (n=7). All seven at the moment of the interview were registered in the electoral roll and voted in local elections, at least occasionally. Although it is entirely possible that in Coventry the EU migrants' voting turnout could be higher than other places, it is worth remembering that, just like Haringey, a plausible explanation for this political behaviour is self-selection bias, as only politically active participants volunteered for the interview.

Similar to Haringey, in Coventry there is a well-developed ecosystem of ethnic organisations that lobby the Council to influence policymaking towards the needs and demands of the community they represent. Among EU migrants, Eastern Europeans seem those with higher bonding social capital, or 'reciprocated relationships that bind individuals to their community' (Nguyen Long,

[96] According to Census data 88% of EU migrants in Coventry were 16 or above in 2021, which corresponds to 30,613 individuals. 20,831 EU entries in the electoral register represent 68% of 30,613 eligible voters.

2016, p. 822). There are several charities and for-profit organisations run by A8 and A2 migrants that offer migration and integration services to other Eastern European migrants, like administrative and legal assistance, job-seeking help and ESOL[97] classes (more details in the next chapter). The most known among these community organisations is probably NewStart4You, an Eastern European charity that receive funds from the European Union, the British government and the City Council to implement migrants' integration projects. They have a long-standing working partnership with different sectors of the City Council. The director is regularly invited to attend as an 'expert' Council meetings and events related to migration issues. Together with other organisations, during the EUSS application period NewStart4You was working with the Council's Migration Team to offer support to Europeans who weren't aware of the scheme or struggled with the application form. However, none of these EU migrants organisation advocate collective rights on behalf of their customers, nor raise awareness about EU migrants political rights within their communities. Not surprisingly, as of 2023 no EU citizen has ever been elected in the City Council.

5.4.3 Portsmouth

According to data provided by the Electoral Service, in May 2022 8,866 EU migrants were registered in the city's electoral roll, out of 13,539[98] who were entitled to vote in local elections, for an electoral completion rate of 65.5%. As for Haringey and Coventry, this registration percentage is above the EU migrants' national average (54%) but over 20 points below the British citizens registration rate (86%) (Electoral Commission, 2019).

Once again, the interviews differ from the electoral roll numbers provided by the Council. Out of the 10 self-selected EU migrants from Portsmouth who were interviewed for this project, only a French woman was not registered to vote (and she was not even aware she could), and another French woman was registered but never voted (or possibly once, but she was not sure if or what she had voted for). The remaining eight migrants were regular voters in local elections. The value of this anecdotal evidence is two-fold: on the one hand, it does confirm the powerful effect of the selection biases on self-selected samples; on the other, it provides an indication that in Portsmouth there is at the very minimum some level of political engagement among EU migrants, that comes mostly from habits learned in the country of origin (in particular the French

[98] Source: ONS (2021). *Country of Birth by Age*, ons.gov.uk [accessed on 09/08/23]. All age brackets are included in the calculation, minus the 'under 15' age, because not eligible to vote.

interviewees see voting as a civic duty entrenched in the French culture), or pre-existing personal political interest, further validating the early socialisation theory.

Portsmouth diverges from Haringey and Coventry when it comes to other forms of political participation, beyond voting. Not only the Portsmouth sample included a person who in the past did run for the Council with the Labour party (although not elected[99]) but also someone else who has been a Conservative party member and activist for decades, and other two people who were heavily involved in a successful political campaign to introduce recycled waste collection in the city. There is no trace of this level of participation in the other three local authorities.

Yet, the political engagement of individuals does not seem to favour collective self-organisation and mobilisation of EU migrants. In Portsmouth too, local politicians reported an important level of politisation of some non-EU minorities, which throughout time have been able to build robust relationships with the local political parties in view of advocating for the interests of their communities, while no political engagement of that sort has come from EU groups. Moreover, in Portsmouth there are no community organisations run by EU migrants, like NewStart4You in Coventry or the PEEC in Haringey, which provide immigration and integration services to their customers. The lack of EU migrants-run organisations does not mean tough that structured community bonds among Europeans in Portsmouth are completely inexistent. Informal examples of nationality-based groups can be easily found on Facebook (the Romanian community is quite active in this sense), but so far, they have not translated into organised support in the same way it has happened in Haringey or Coventry. Due to this lack of visible community structures, some of the unmet needs of these communities have become business opportunities for migrants with entrepreneurial spirit. For example, a private accountancy firm based in Portsmouth, 'AB Accounting and Translations', run by a Romanian citizen, offers legal, administrative and translation services to their customers, who are for the majority self-employed Romanian taxi drivers (EU migrant XX). Some of their services do overlap with what NewStart4You and PEEC do for their customers in Coventry and Haringey. In Portsmouth, a regular business is filling a gap that in other places is covered by migrant charities. It is quite unlikely though that interactions occurred in an accountancy firm can inspire political participation.

[99] This is not a unique case in the four councils under consideration. In Haringey there is an Italian Councillor who won her seat for the Lib.-Dems in consecutive elections (2019, 2023).

5.4.4 Torbay

Torbay has the lowest electoral completion rate among the four case studies in this research. In 2021, there were 4,744 EU migrants eligible to vote, but only 2,315 were registered in the electoral roll, or **48.8%**, 5.2 points below the average EU migrants' registration rate in England, and 37 points below the British rate. Torbay is also the only case of this study where the electoral registration rate is aligned with the anecdotal evidence collected during the interview. Out of seven interviews, four EU migrants declared they regularly vote in local election, one registered out of fear to be fined and does not vote, one was not aware he could vote locally, and the last one despises politics in general. However, two voters were personally involved in national anti-Brexit movements, while another one is an active union member in his workplace and is passionate about local politics. Alike Portsmouth, in Torbay there are no organisations offering services tailored for EU communities, and individual political engagement is not reflected in collective action at local level. As already mentioned, the local Polish community organises a children Sunday school in Polish language and is active within the Catholic parish. While these networks serve to create cultural and spiritual bonds and maintain a sense of national identity, and according to the resources theory (Brady et al., 1995) can lead to some form of political engagement they are not meant, at least officially, to provide legal or administrative advice to EU migrants, let alone represent their interests in front of the Council.

5.5 Conclusion

In Chapter 4, I explained the methodology used to select the four case studies. Two known differences, the geographical location and the size of the EU community, were used as additional selecting criteria to create further heterogeneity among the cases. In this chapter, I evidenced through Census data how the four cases indeed cover a significative range in size of EU migrant communities established within their authority (from 3.3% of the population in Torbay to 17.1% in Haringey). Despite the geographical spread and the different demographic profile, EU migrants share a comparable socio-economic status, probably because their migration history is similar.

All four cases, like almost all urban areas across the UK, have experienced an exponential growth of EU migrants after the 2004 EU expansion, for the vast majority explained by the influx of A8 and A2 migrants attracted by the EU's open borders and the prospect of better salaries and better working conditions than in their countries of origin. Most Eastern Europeans took on manual labour and low-paid jobs, especially in the agricultural, construction and hospitality sectors (Anderson et al., 2006), which explains why so many EU migrants live in the most deprived areas in all the four case studies.

EU migrants in Haringey, Coventry and Portsmouth have a similar electoral register completion rate, above 60%**,** which is lower than the 85% rate of British citizens in England, but above the 54% rate of EU migrants in England. Torbay is the only case below the England average, with only 48.8% of EU migrants registered in the electoral roll. It is not clear why Torbay performs worse than the other three places, as only the Lib.-Dem. party in Haringey conducted a targeted campaign to promote electoral registration among Europeans in the past, nor is the composition of the EU nationalities particularly different from the other three cases (A8 and A2 citizens are the majority of EU migrants across all four cases).

In Haringey and in Coventry there are non-profit organisations that provide migration services, education, and other form of support specifically to European migrants. As far as I am aware, such organisations are not present in Portsmouth and Torbay. Yet, informal communities exist online and offline in both places, providing mostly opportunity for socialisation, information sharing, and some cultural activities, such as national day celebrations or a Polish Sunday school for children. In Portsmouth, a private accountancy firm owned by a Romanian citizen offer legal, administrative and translation services to the Romanian community, the largest foreign group in the city. According to a Romanian participant, this company has expanded their services to meet demands usually covered by migrant organisations or by the local Council.

An important similarity across all four cases is that, regardless of the different degree of institutionalisation of EU communities' networks, there is no sign of an organised form of political advocacy in favour of EU migrants. This is a stark divergence from many other migrant communities who have established relationships with all the major local political groups and have elected representatives in the Council[100]. For EU migrants, political participation seems to be a personal rather than a collective endeavour, strongly influenced by the prevalent political culture of the country of origin and by political habits learnt in the formative years. Most EU migrants I interviewed declared themselves registered on the electoral roll and voters in local elections, except in Torbay, where only 4 out of 7 participants are regular voters, in line with the lower registration rate reported by the Torbay Council.

These qualitative data, together with the quantitative data coming from the electoral registers, suggest a high rate of individual political participation (except in Torbay). However, there are important caveats to be considered. First of all, the interviews' sample is too small to allow for generalisations about the political behaviours of EU migrants. Secondly, there is a high chance

[100] At the time of writing there were no EU-born Councillors, with the exception of an Italian and a Greek Lib.-Dem. politicians elected in Haringey.

that self-selection bias may have skewed the sample in favour of EU migrants already interested in politics. Lastly, the interviews have also revealed how there are other motivations for registering in the electoral roll unrelated to political participation. For example, credit agencies increase the credit score of individuals who are registered for voting in their Council of residence[101]. This fact alone can motivate EU migrants to register even when they have no intention of participating in local elections. Other participants said that they registered only out of fear of being fined a hefty sum of money (up to £1000), which is what local electoral offices threaten in case of a missing registration. Finally, some migrants are not even aware that being registered on the electoral roll gives them the right to vote in local elections or enter the electoral competition as a candidate.

Overall, this chapter has revealed how, despite the differentiation criteria applied during the selection process, there are strong similarities among the four EU communities. EU migrants are of relatively recent arrival, with some older roots in the case of Coventry and Portsmouth. In all four places Eastern European migrants tend to have low-skills occupations, in line with the national trend (Felbo-Kolding et al., 2019), and tend to live in the most deprived areas of their cities, together with other international migrants. Western Europeans seem to have higher-paid jobs and to be less concentrated in the poorest neighbourhoods. Bonding social capital (in-group networks) is more institutionalised in Haringey and Coventry, where migrants-run charities offer support to their communities, whereas in Portsmouth and Torbay there are only unstructured networks, mainly on social media and revolving around churches. These informal networks keep a sense of community and shared cultural identity alive, but do not provide the same level of professional support as in the other two places, and do not see to foster political participation. Remarkably, a characteristic shared by all the four places is the lack of bridging social capital, defined as 'social networks and links among socially heterogeneous groups' (Morales & Pilati, 2011, p. 90). Bridging social capital is required to collectively influence local politics through advocacy with and membership in out-group networks. The capacity to accumulate bridging social capital seems a strength of other non-EU migrant groups, despite their smaller size. For EU migrants, political participation seems to be a personal affair. The number of records in the electoral registers, alongside the anecdotal evidence gathered through interviews, portray a picture of relative widespread engagement in all cases but Torbay (with the caveats explained above).

[101] Lenders are able to validate applicants identities through electoral details. Having a verified identity increases applicants chances of obtaining a loan and, in turn, raises their credit score. Source: experian.co.uk/consumer/guides/electoral-roll.html [accessed on 15/06/2023].

In the coming chapters, I compare primary qualitative data across the four cases using thematic analysis as the main analytical tool and the initial theoretical model described in chapter 3 as conceptual basis for the analysis. The results described in chapter 6, 7, 8 and 9 determined the overarching analytical themes and were applied to develop the improved theoretical model that I described in chapter 10.

Chapter 6 EUSS Support Across England

6.1 Introduction

This chapter contains descriptive statistics that compare the local results of the 2016 EU referendum and the institutional support for EU migrants of all 341 English local administrations through the lens of the EU Migrants Support Scale (see chapter 4 for the details). I also describe what measures (if any) were taken to facilitate the registration to the EUSS of EU migrants living in the four councils I am studying. The aim is to start the data analysis by presenting an England-wide picture of the local authorities' commitment in supporting their EU migrants, which serves as a broader national context to position the next chapters, where I am going to delve into a rich and fine-grained analysis of primary data related to the four case studies. Because of the neo-institutional theoretical approach of this research and the nested analysis method I adopted (see chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of the methodology), the thematic analysis of the interviews would result incomplete if not complemented with the overall trend of institutional support given to EU migrants by English local authorities after the EU referendum.

6.2 Theoretical Background

The results show a generalised low level of support to EU migrants across England, but also suggest a correlation between the Brexit orientation of the electorate emerged with the referendum (either Remain or Leave), with the level of substantial and symbolic support delivered by local authorities during the EUSS application period, in line with rational choice theories (Downs, 1957) that posit how political actors' choices are primarily based on self-serving behaviours and office-seeking motifs. As Bailey puts it, at the local level:

> *'Deficiencies in demand articulation and lack of competition may allow both local politicians and bureaucrats to act opportunistically. Politicians may seek to increase their chances of re-election and political survival rather than promote the public interest. Politicians may seek to increase their chances of re-election and political survival rather than promote the public interest. Bureaucracies tend to become larger (empire building) and* […] *they can acquire sufficient political power to guarantee self- preservation and self-interest.'* (1993, p. 10).

The Brexit process was triggered by a national referendum. Referenda are instruments of direct democracy that offer a black and white expression of the will of the people, as voters only have two or few more closed policy options on a single issue to choose upon. This system allows the winning proposition to become 'what the majority wants' (Jacobs et al., 2018). In theory, the flattening of people's preferences around a simplistic dichotomous choice allows politicians and bureaucrats to react to the referendum's local result in a way that prioritise what they perceive as policies (or the lack of) that maximise their popularity among the electorate.

Brexit has undoubtedly brought profound structural changes to local governments (Hadfield & Turner, 2021). At the same time, Brexit and post-Brexit policy decisions and narratives have been dominated by Westminster, in line with the centralised organisation of local issues in British politics, leaving local decision-makers unable to exert any influence on the Brexit debate (Billing et al., 2021; Huggins, 2018).

According to the median voter theory (Congleton, 2008; Downs, 1957) and the dynamic representation model (Stimson et al., 1995), policymakers take decisions to respond as closely as possible to what they believe the median voter and the public opinion stands for, in order to maximise their chances to stay in office. Following this theoretical approach, the assumption underlining this chapter is that local politicians were incentivised to act in line with the Brexit views of the majority of their constituents, a highly salient political issue they had no control upon. The local referendum's outcome gave local administrators a clear positioning of the median voter on Brexit and also a proxy to understand the public mood about public support to EU migrants. Accordingly, the working hypothesis is that local authorities are expected to offer less EUSS support services to EU migrants if the majority of the population voted Leaves[102].

6.3 The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)

In England, where of one every 16 residents was born in the EU27[103], migration policies are designed in a non-prescriptive way by the central government, which leaves ample leeway to local authorities regarding their 'on-the-ground' implementation (McCollum & Packwood, 2017). Local councils have the power to decide what resources allocate to integrate large foreign communities and guarantee their rights. Across Europe, non-EU communities receive more support to integration than EU migrants, because the latter are perceived by governments as 'mobile citizens' rather than long-term migrants (Bruzelius, 2020; Collett, 2013).

For millions of EU migrants living in the UK, Brexit meant the sudden need to prove their legal right to stay in the country, a requirement they never had to fulfil prior to that. To regularise EU migrants, in 2019 the British government launched the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), a mass registration programme meant to release permanent (settled status) or temporary (pre-settled status) VISAs to EU/EFTA nationals who met some residence or family criteria before the end of the transition period (01/01/21). The consequences for not acquiring a pre or a settled status

[102] The option 'Leave' was the referendum's outcome in 259 out of 341 English councils. Source: electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/our-reports-and-data-past-elections-and-referendums/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum [accessed on 10/06/2024].

[103] Source: ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS004/editions/2021/versions [accessed on 21/08/2023].

ranged from not being able to work and not having access to welfare benefits and healthcare, to being deported (Smismans, 2018). Considering the extreme seriousness of the consequences of not getting granted a status, the help local governments offered to fill and submit the EUSS application became an effective litmus test of how much local administrators 'care' about their EU population. If a local Council did not support its EU community against something potentially so disruptive for their lives, then the same Council would probably pay limited attention to other needs EU migrants might have.

An initial confirmation of this hypothesis is found in the fact that all English local administrations had the opportunity to apply for funds that the government released, in form of grants, to cover the costs of helping vulnerable EU migrants during the EUSS application period, yet 99.8% of them chose not to. Since March 2019, 71 organisations[104] received funding, of which only 8 were English local governments.

I argue that, faced by budget constraints, local administrations in Leave areas did not want to allocate their own resources, or apply for ad-hoc government grants, to support a minority, mobile EU migrants, whose presence in the UK is widely seen as one of the reasons the Leave movement won the Brexit referendum in 2016 (Coleman, 2016; Dennison & Geddes, 2018). Because of the relative recent closure of the application period (30/06/21) not much is known about the relationship between this mass migrants' registration scheme and local public policies.

6.4 The EUSS Problem

In November 2019, the UK-based migration NGO 'Migrant Voice' conducted a survey among 229 EU migrants to collect qualitative data about their experience with the EUSS. According to the authors of the report, the findings of the survey were 'deeply concerning, especially given the vast scale of this scheme and the devastating consequences for those who are failed by it or who do not apply before the deadline' (Migrant Voice, 2019, p. 9). Given the struggles that many respondents reported about their experience of going through the EUSS application process (one in two found it difficult and one in three faced complications), Migrant Voice estimated that 'scaling this up, we can assume that thousands, if not tens or hundreds of thousands, of the estimated 3.5 million people eligible to apply will face similar problems' (*ibid.*, p.7).

Reports from other independent organisations confirmed the risk that many EU migrants, in particular those belonging to vulnerable groups, could have fallen through the cracks of the EUSS

[104] Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-support-for-vulnerable-citizens [Accessed on 15/08/2021].

process and become irregular migrant, despite fulfilling the conditions required to obtain a pre-settled or settled status (Elfving & Marcinkowska, 2021). The Migration Observatory (Sumption, 2020) identified four categories of EU migrants at risk by associating vulnerable demographics (elderly, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME), deprived households, etc.) with known structural problems of the EUSS application process. The four categories are: 1. those who do not know about EUSS rules or the EUSS altogether (e.g. parents who did not know their children too must apply for a settled status); 2. socially disadvantaged people who have limited autonomy and/or capacity to fill in an application (e.g. victims of abuse or homeless); 3. people who have problems in completing the application (e.g. digitally illiterate); 4. people who cannot prove their identity (Sumption & Zovanga, 2018). Furthermore, a report from the pro-bono lawyers' association 'Law Centres Network', based on data collected from over 1000 difficult EUSS cases, highlighted how the 'intersection of multiple vulnerability characteristics and socioeconomic circumstances, as well as race and ethnicity, and mental health' (Jablonowski & Pinkowska, 2021, p. 4) aggravated the difficulties of vulnerable EU migrants facing the EUSS application process, in particular for BAME applicants.

A clear example of a community of EU migrants exposed to this problem is the Roma minority (approx. 200,000 living in the UK in 2012, Brown et al., 2013) who have historically suffered from economic deprivation and social marginalisation, and are particularly at risk of exclusion from the EUSS process because of their difficulties with the English language and new technologies, as well as the frequent lack of any identification documents (Doležalová et al., 2021).

All these reports, although not based on a representative sample, clearly highlight the existence of high administrative burdens for some categories of EU migrants. The burdens can be divided in learning costs, psychological costs, and compliance costs (Moynihan et al., 2015). For an EU migrant, filling in an application to obtain a pre-settled or a settled status represented a learning cost, as the individual could pay a high price for not being aware about the programme, for not knowing the scheme requirements, for being Internet illiterate (10% of adults in the UK[105]), for being unable to use the 'EU Exit: ID Document Check' phone application required to verify the applicant identity, for not speaking English, or for not having an education level sufficient to understand the application form.

There is as well a significant substantial compliance cost related to the EUSS, for example the need to prove five years of continuous residence in the UK. Anecdotal accounts also reported

[105] Source: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04. Accessed on 25/03/22.

psychological costs arising from the obligation to register for the EUS. Some long-time migrants in the UK were not able to overcome the sense of rejection arising from the requirement to prove their right to keep residing in the country where they have lived for many years, if not decades (Elfving & Marcinkowska, 2021). Moreover, for some EU migrants the lack of access to the appropriate technology (a smart phone or a computer) and the incapacity to prove their identity represented entry barriers even before experiencing learning and psychological costs. Emerging literature on the EUSS seems to confirm these concerns (see Botterill et al., 2020; O'Brien, 2021; Tomlinson, 2020; Tomlinson et al., 2021).

As said above, as of June 2023, the Home Office has received 7.4 million EUSS applications, of which 5.6 million were granted settled or pre-settled status[106], while the Office for National Statistics estimate that only 3.6 million EU migrants were living in England and Wales in March 2021, close to the ending of the EUSS submission window (30 June 2021)[107]. The considerable discrepancy between Home Office and ONS numbers[108] shows the difficulty in understanding the actual size of the EU population in the UK and, consequently, the high level of uncertainty in knowing exactly how many EU migrants needed to register their residency through the EUSS (Sumption, 2020). Given the sizeable amount of Europeans living in the UK, it is realistic to assume that even if only a small fraction of individuals belonging to one or more of the risk categories identified above did not apply or submitted an incomplete/incorrect EUSS application to the Home Office, then thousands of EU migrants in future could be prevented from working or will even face deportation, regardless of their legal status and their right to stay. We do not know yet the seriousness or the scale of this phenomenon, but that in principle the issue is comparable to the Windrush scandal, which in 2018 affected thousands of Commonwealth citizens of Caribbean heritage (Elfving & Marcinkowska, 2021).

6.5 Support to EU Migrants and the Brexit Referendum

The descriptive analysis of the EU migrants Support Scale data clearly shows how most English councils offered null or limited support to their EU migrants (see table 6 below). Slightly less than half of all local administrations (44%) did not provide useful information or offered any assistance in preparing the EUSS application (level 1). The 23% of local administrations only provided a few

[106] Home Office (2022). *EU Settlement Scheme quarterly statistics tables, June 2023*.

[107] Source: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/press/euromillions-census-shows-fewer-eu-citizens-in-england-and-wales-than-expected [accessed on 31/08/23].

[108] It is important to bear in mind that number of EUSS applications include those from non-EEA family members and does not discount those EU migrants who obtained a pre-settled or settled status and then moved to another country (Jablonowski, 2020). The actual difference between Home Office and ONS is then likely to be smaller than what represented here, but still within the order of hundreds of thousands of people.

links to EUSS-related government webpages and zero or minimal information about the scheme (level 2). Level 1 and level 2 councils represent then 67% of all English local governments, which means that during the Brexit transition two out of three councils were little or not concerned at all with ensuring that their EU population was aware of the EUSS and therefore able to claim their right to stay in the country.

Table 7 Institutional support for EU migrants during the EUSS.

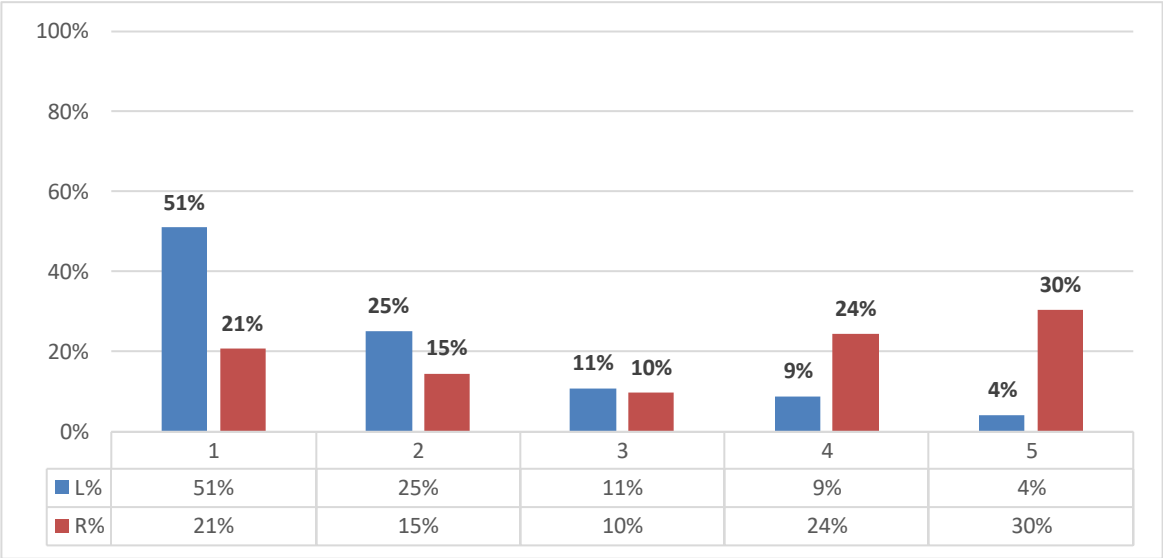
Level of support	N. of councils	%
1	149	44%
2	77	23%
3	36	11%
4	43	13%
5	36	11%
Total	**341**	**100%**

Only a quarter of English councils, corresponding to the levels of support 4 and 5 (24%), linked their webpage to external organisations that provided face-to-face or remote help to applicants. Finally, only one Council out of 10 (11%) decided to use their own resources to assist EU migrants in scanning documents and in using the EU Exit app. Other councils were offering the same service, but charged a minimum of £14 per application, an amount that went up to £21 in some London boroughs. When multiplied for all members of a household, the cost of the service was likely to be unaffordable for low-income households. The pricing of the EUSS support service is indeed indicative of either a lack of awareness or interest about the wellbeing of the poorest EU migrants or limited understanding of the threat represented by the EUSS to their future in the UK. Overall, both the median (**2**) and the average level of support (**2.2**) confirm the scarce interest in protecting EU migrants' rights.

The results also support the working hypothesis, i.e. Leave councils tend to offer less support to EU migrants. Table 7 shows a correlation between the outcome of the Brexit referendum and the support given by the local administrations to EU migrants. The amount of Leave councils is inversely proportional to the increase of support. Half of them did not offer any information about Brexit or the EUSS to EU migrants. Only one in four Leave councils (24%) gave indications to their EU migrants on where to get external help through other organisations (levels 3,4 and 5), as opposed to 64% of Remain councils. Almost a third of Remain councils (30%) put in place at their

own cost help points to assist EU migrants struggling with their EUSS application (level 5), whereas only a tiny minority (4%) of Leave councils did the same.

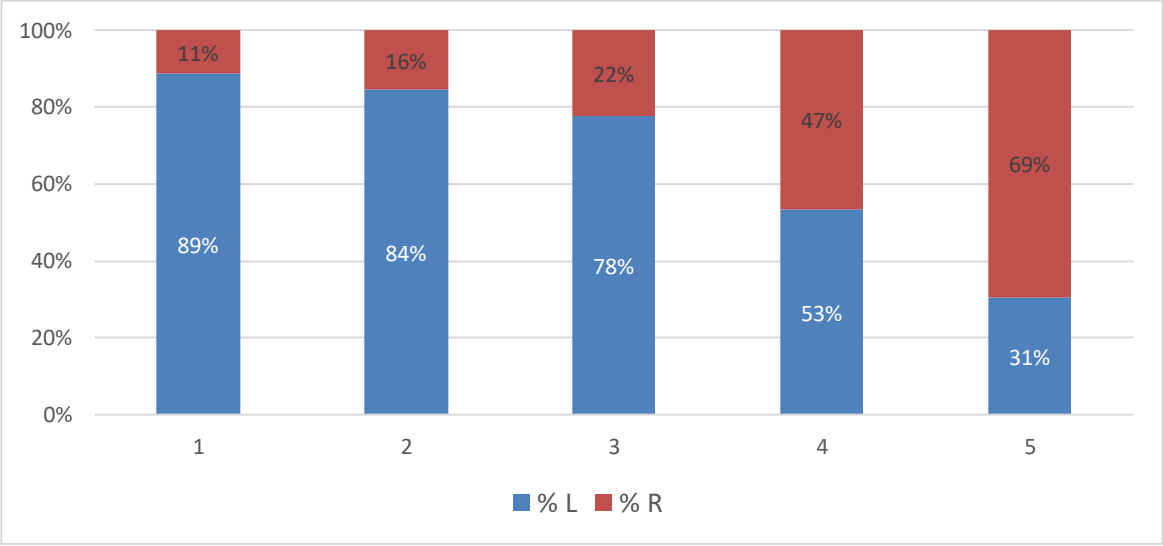
Table 8 Ratio of Leave and Remain councils by level of support.



	1	2	3	4	5
L%	51%	25%	11%	9%	4%
R%	21%	15%	10%	24%	30%

The correlation is even more evident in table 8, which shows the ratio between Leave and Remain councils per level of support. Despite Leave councils being more than three times as many as Remain councils (259 vs 82), they represent only 53% of level 4 and just 31% of level 5 councils.

Table 9 Ratio of Leave and Remain councils by level of support.



6.6 The 'EU councils'

The size of the EU community also plays a role in defining policies for EU migrants implemented by local governments.

Keeping with rational choice theory, local politicians want to maximise the popularity of their policies to guarantee re-election. If this premise is true, then it is possible to argue that the bigger the target population, hence the amount of potential votes, the harder is for local politicians to ignore their needs and higher is the incentive for designing and implement effective policies that meet those needs. In this case, the incentive for the Council to help EU migrants to protect their rights is linked to the fact that in England EU migrants who arrived before Brexit still retain suffrage rights at the local level.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the result of the WCA, which shows that as the average size of the EU community increases, the level of support grows too[109]. English councils with a higher number of EU migrants provided a better assistance with EUSS applications. These results corroborate Walker and Leitner's findings (2011): local governments with higher concentration of migrants develop inclusive policies that favour migrant's integration (see also Wells, 2004).

Table 10 Average size of EU groups by level of support.

Level	Avg. EU size
1	3.9%
2	4.9%
3	5.1%
4	6.5%
5	9%

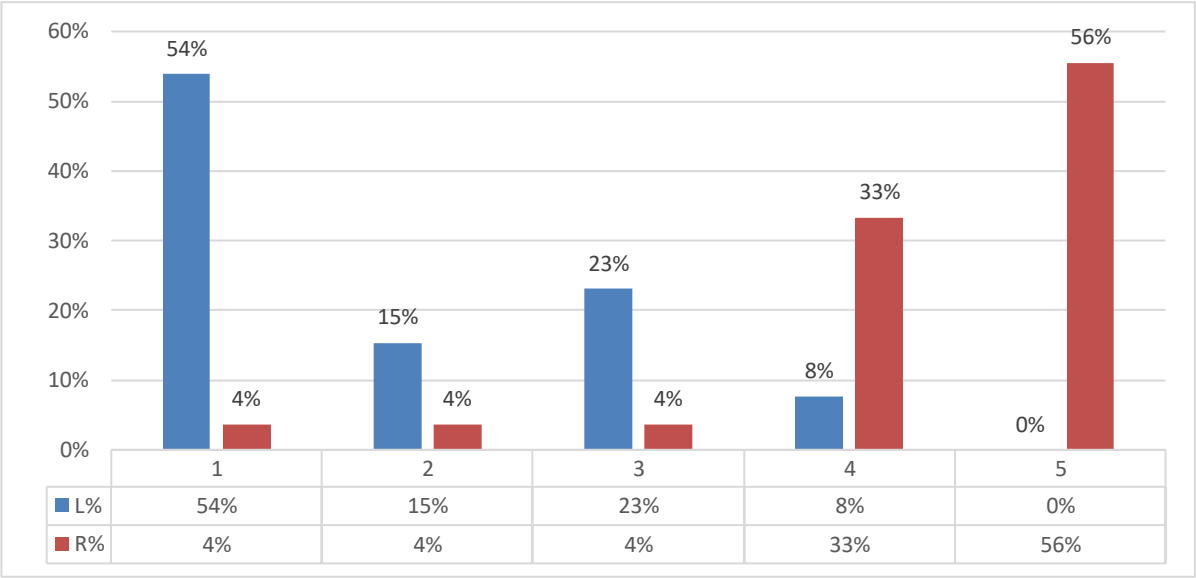
To mitigate the confounding effect of the size of the local EU population on the level of support to EU migrants, I took a sample of local administrations with an EU community bigger than 10% of the Council's population. Anwar (2001) defines as 'ethnic' any territorial entity where at least 10% of the population is foreign-born. In the same vein, English local authorities that have a share of the total population born in an EU country equal or above 10% are considered in this study as 'EU councils', i.e. local councils with a sizeable EU community. 40 councils, 12% of the total, meet the threshold, 27 Remain and 13 Leave.

Descriptive statistical metrics confirm that EU councils tend to be more supportive of EU migrants. The average level of support increases from **2.2** (all local authorities) to **3.5**, and the median value from **2** to **4**. When controlling for EU population size, the proportion of councils that qualify for

[109] Own calculation from ONS dataset (2019), *UK population by country of birth and nationality, January 19 to December 19.*

the top level of the EU migrants Support Scale grows from 11% (or 7% if only non-EU councils are considered[110]) to 38% (15 local governments out of 40).

Table 11 Ratio of Leave and Remain EU councils by level of support.



	1	2	3	4	5
L%	54%	15%	23%	8%	0%
R%	4%	4%	4%	33%	56%

Table 10 shows that level 1 (54%) and level 2 (15%) of support (complete absence or little information for EU migrants about Brexit respectively) account for almost 7 out of 10 Leave EU councils (69%), while no Leave EU Council decided to allocate their own resources to provide face-to-face help to individuals struggling with the EUSS application (level 5). Only 8% of EU councils websites had links to organisations offering individual support for the EUSS application, or charged a fee in return of individual assistance to EU migrants (level 4). In comparison, almost 9 out of 10 Remain EU councils belong to levels of support 4 (33%) or 5 (56%).

Table 11 reveals how for EU councils the number of Leave and Remain entities per level of support is even more unbalanced in favour of Remain than when all local governments are considered. The two upper tiers of the magnitude scale, levels 4 and 5, account for 25 councils combined (10 and 15 respectively), 24 of which are Remain EU councils, all except for a single level 4 Leave EU Council (Southampton). On the other end of the spectrum, 9 out 11 councils rated level 1 or level 2 are Leave EU councils, despite Leave being the dominant Brexit view in only 13 out of 40 (33%) English local governments with large EU communities.

[110] Own calculation based on the number of level 5 non-EU councils divided by the total number of non-EU Council: (36-15)/(341-40) = 21/301.

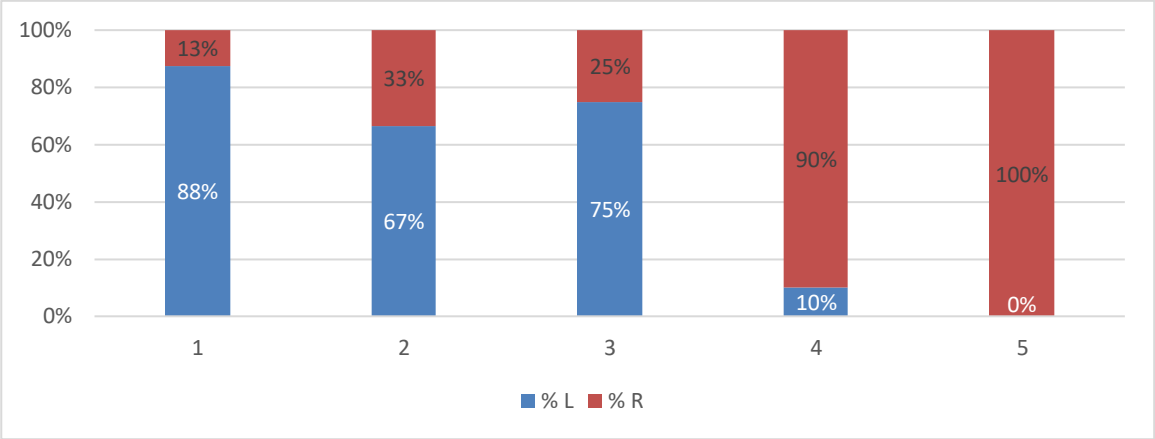


Table 12 Ratio of Leave and Remain EU councils by level of support.

6.7 The Four Case Studies and the Brexit Referendum

After analysing the provision of institutional help for EU migrants across England, I am going to introduce the comparative analysis of the four case studies by explaining more in details the policies they did, or did not, implement to help EU migrants during the EUSS application period. Because having variance along this dimension was one of the case selection criteria (see chapter 4 for details), the level of support is naturally split between highly supportive local authorities (Coventry and Haringey) and scarcely supportive local authorities (Portsmouth and Coventry). Haringey and Coventry scored 5, the highest level of support on the EU migrants Support Scale, whereas Portsmouth and Torbay, scored 2, the lowest level of support bar councils that did not give any information about the EUSS on their website.

6.7.1 Coventry

Coventry is one of the eight local authorities in the whole UK that received grants from the Home Office to provide EUSS-related advice to EU migrants. Coventry secured funding to run the project until 31st March 2023, almost two years after the end of the official EUSS application window (30th June 2021). The goals of this project were to raise awareness about the EUSS among frontline services and community organisations and to liaise with local charities to reach out target users, especially Central and Eastern Europeans.[111] The funding received from the central government was managed by the Council's 'Migration Team', who re-distributed it to local charities with the

[111] Source: coventry.gov.uk/immigration-asylum/newly-arrived-communities/4 [accessed on 29/08/23].

outreach capacity needed to engage with vulnerable categories of EU migrants[112]. The main Council's third sector partner was the pro-bono lawyers association 'Central England Law Centre', which offered free of charge walk-in surgeries to any EU migrant who needed support with their EUSS application. NewStart4You, an Eastern European community organisation, was one of the charities that partnered with the City Council and the Central England Law Centre to host EUSS surgeries within their premises.

In addition to the EUSS project, the Council published on their website useful links and general information about Brexit and the EUSS. At the time I was conducting the WCA, in 2021, the Council's website contained a sub-section of the 'Newly arrived communities' category titled 'EU Settlement Scheme'. The page included basic information on the scheme, the contact details of the EUSS Team and detailed guidance for EEA nationals (EU+EFTA nationals), employers, and landlords. The EEA nationals section alone had 10 thematic pages organised as a FAQs[113]. Most importantly, the EUSS webpage had links to FAQ sheets translated in Polish and Romanian, the two largest EU communities in town. WCA 's results showed how the provision of multilingual Brexit-related material is a rare occurrence among English local authorities.

The rich and multilingual information provided, alongside the effort made to guarantee funding for delivering free and in-person support for 21 months beyond the natural end of the EUSS application period, qualified Coventry for the highest score on the EU migrants Support Scale and made it one of the most EU migrants-friendly local authorities in the country, even though in the 2016 EU referendum its population voted Leave with a 56% to 44% majority (a differential of approximately 17,000 votes). The referendum's result contradicts the hypothesis that Leave councils would not be supportive of EU migrants. A possible explanation for this deviation from the expected result is related to the traditional welcoming approach of Coventry towards migrants (see chapter 5 for more details), which is reflected in the high number of asylum-seeker and refugees received by the city and in the variety of integration programmes put in place by the Council for 'newly arrived communities'[114]. It is plausible to theorise that the institutional culture

[112] According to the Home Office, qualify as vulnerable EU migrants: homeless people, elderly people, people with severe mental health issues, disable, children, victims of trafficking, victims of domestic abuse, and people without a permanent address. Source: gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-support-for-vulnerable-citizens [accessed on 28/08/23].

[113] Source: coventry.gov.uk/eu-settlement-scheme/guidance-eu-eea-swiss-citizens [accessed on 29/08/2023].

[114] Namely: the Refugee Resettlement Scheme; the Support for Asylum Seekers and the 'Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers' projects, both aimed at supporting recently arrived asylum seekers; the integration projects 'My Coventry', 'Your Vision, Your Future' and 'Mi Friendly Cities' (in partnership with other West Midlands authorities); the Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund project for 'newly recognised refugees'; the 'Welcome to Coventry' app for migrants to access information about healthcare and other basic services; the 'Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers' Children'; and the 'Welcoming Ukrainian guests to Coventry' project. Source: coventry.gov.uk/welcometocoventry [accessed on 29/08/2023].

of inclusion and support towards migrants overcame local politicians' self-serving strategies to seek re-election. An alternative explanation is that Coventry's local politicians might look at Brexit as a national issue that does not impact voting intentions at the local level.

These two effects do not need to be mutually exclusive and might reinforce each other. In a city with a long history of incoming migration such as Coventry, local politicians could have a natural predisposition to 'care' about migrant needs beyond short-term electoral interests. At the same time, they could also believe that they would not be punished by the electorate for devoting public resources to help EU migrants at risk of illegalisation, because the belief that Brexit was perceived by their constituents as an issue more about controlling national borders than local policies.

6.7.2 Haringey

Like Coventry, Haringey also scored 5 on the EU migrants Support Scale. The Borough Council's migrants integration flagship programme is called 'Connected Communities', which is designed to 'improve access to Council and voluntary support in Haringey'[115] and is fully funded by Council's money. Although 'Connected Communities' is a support and information programme for all nationalities, it does include support for 'Applying for the EU Settlement Scheme'. Since the onset of the programme, EU migrants represented the main recipients of the 'Connected Communities' services. Because of the size of EU communities, since 2019 the support for EUSS application became the most popular service provided by the programme (Council Officer 2, Haringey). Although 'Connected Communities' was launched in 2018, Haringey has a longer history of providing migration services to EU migrants. In 2004, when the first EU expansion eastwards happened and A8 migrants represented the major influx of new residents in Haringey, the Council was already running free 'Access to Services' workshops that included informational material and live interpretation in 10 languages, including A8 languages (Councillor 1, Haringey).

The support to EU migrants on the ground was coordinated by the Bridge Renewal Trust and delivered by a series of EU migrants' organisations, like PEEC. The staff of these organisations was trained to liaise with EU communities and help the most vulnerable members in filling in the EUSS application form. The Connected Communities team preferred to delegate the implementation of the programme to local charities because of the trust they had already established with EU migrants:

[115] Source: haringey.gov.uk/community/connected-communities [accessed on 29/08/2023].

> *'We felt those organisations already had a level of trust within the community, whereas if someone's a Council worker, sometimes they are less trusted by some members of the community.'* (Council Officer 2, Haringey).

This engagement strategy is overly relying on bonding capital (in-group networks), at the expenses of bridging capital (across-group networks), and can be detrimental to the EU migrants' political integration. The lack of interaction with the Council prevents the formation of a mutual relationship based on trust (Morales & Pilati, 2011; Putnam & Schuster, 2000). Overall, the Council believe that approximately 80,000 EUSS applications were submitted, 90% of the number they were expecting (91,500), and they consider Connected Communities a success story (Council Officer 2, Haringey)[116].

Similarly to Coventry, Haringey has been a destination for migrants from all over the world for many decades, and a place of inclusion that prides itself of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of its residents. Being a constituent part of the most cosmopolitan city in the world, London, has certainly helped to shape the Borough's political openness to foreign incomers. Furthermore, Haringey has been a Labour stronghold since its creation in 1964. The Haringey Council has been under the control of the Conservative party only once, in 1968, and no Tory Councillor has been elected there since 1998. In the 21st century the only opposition to the Labour party has been the Lib.-Dem. party, which also holds strong pro-immigration stances and was the most anti-Brexit party in England before and after the referendum. It is not surprising then that in Haringey the political and institutional discourse over migration and multiculturalism is overall positive.

The institutional EU-friendliness clearly emerges from the analysis of the Council's website. The 'Haringey and Brexit' page, located in the news section, was long (58 lines) and extremely rich of information on Brexit and on the EUSS. It also featured over 20 links to external organisations, like Citizen Advice, which helped EUSS applicants. The page also included a link to a very thorough FAQ page on Brexit and the EUSS. Beside the virtual campaign, the Council also distributed to 117,000 households an informative leaflet on Brexit, published 2 letters of solidarity with EU migrants, one from the Leader of the Council, and another one from the full Council, and signed an official commitment to support EU migrants throughout Brexit.

In Haringey, the use of public resources to help EUSS applicants despite the severe budget constraints, and the post-referendum political discourse that show strong symbolic support for

[116]According to Home Office official data, as of March 2023 the total of EUSS applications in Haringey has reached 113,600, the 5th highest amount in the UK. Source:

EU migrants is clear evidence of a high degree of 'openness of public authorities' (Morales & Giugni, 2011, p. 6), as it can be expected in a London Borough that is politically **extremely Remain** (76% vs 24%, with a 54,000 votes differential between Remain and Leave). Differently from Coventry, in this case there seems to be a correlation between the dominant Brexit orientation of Haringey's residents and the extent of the support provided to EU migrants, in line with theoretical predictions.

6.7.3 Portsmouth

Portsmouth scored just 2 on the EU migrants Support Scale. The City Council never designed any policy meant to help their EU migrants during the EUSS application window, nor disseminated information on their website. The 'Information for EU migrants living in the UK' webpage contained only a short paragraph on the importance of EU migrants for the city and had a link to the generic government Brexit page. There was no information about the EUSS, in contradiction with the incipit of the text:

> *We want to make sure everyone is fully aware of information on applying for settled status or pre-settled status to ensure your continued right to live in the UK.* '[117]

No symbolic message of solidarity was issued after the EU referendum, nor I could retrieve any social media campaign. During the interviews, a Councillor and a Council Officer hesitantly reported that at some point in the past the Council ran multilingual awareness raising activities about the EUSS, but neither could recall dates, modality, or places, and there is no trace of these campaigns on Council official documents. It is possible that the answers resulted from a social desirability bias rather than factual knowledge. This supposition is corroborated by the fact that none of the 10 EU migrants from Portsmouth interviewed, or the Portsmouth EU Migration Expert, were aware of this campaign.

Migrant-oriented policies seem lacking in Portsmouth. The only migrants' integration project found on the Council's website, called 'The Gateway Project', ran from 2012 to 2014 and was funded by the EU Integration Fund. The goal of the project was to support the integration of non-EU migrants in Portsmouth by training migrant women to become community advisors (Lister & Cheverton, 2014). Because the EU funding strictly targeted to support non-EU migrants' integration, EU migrants were not allowed to participate. A representative of the Council who worked on the Gateway Project confirmed that no further funding was sought to renew the project after its natural ending in 2014, nor that a similar form of public engagement was ever

[117] Source: portsmouth.gov.uk/services/Council-and-democracy/exiting-the-eu/information-for-eu-citizens-living-in-the-uk [accessed on 30/08/23].

conceived for EU migrants. Therefore, in Portsmouth the level of 'openness of public authorities' (Morales & Giugni, 2011)seem quite low, and the 'prevailing discourse' about EU migrants almost inexistent.

The complete disengagement of the Lib.-Dem./Independent administration of Portsmouth from the EU migrants during the EUSS application period is surprising, given the pro-EU reputation of the Lib.-Dems and the long-standing tradition of the city as a multicultural hub, due to the presence of the Royal Navy and the trade and touristic connections to mainland Europe (see chapter 5 for more details). Yet, since the Portsmouth's electorate voted Leave 58% to 42% at the 2016 EU referendum, the lack of policies addressing EU migrants issues after the EU referendum is in line with the national trend highlighted in the previous section.

6.7.4 Torbay

Like Portsmouth, the support given to EU migrants in Torbay qualifies as level 2 on the EU migrants Support scale, i.e. a bare minimum of information on the EUSS process and links to government's webpages. The Brexit section of the Council's website (now discontinued) was a webpage with just two links to government webpages: the EUSS online application form and a link to the immigration adviser online locator on the government website. In addition to the lack of online information, no significant support programme was created between 2019 and 2021 to help vulnerable EU migrants to fill their EUSS applications. All institutional actors I interviewed, both Council Officers and Councillors, justified the political neglect of the EU population by pointing to their small number in absolute terms, as EU migrants represents only 3.3% of all the residents of the bay. They also deflected the blame for the lack of support towards the central government, guilty of having severely reduced funding transfers to local governments for over 10 years. When I asked if the Council worked with EU communities, Councillor 1 replied:

> *The lack of capacity I would say it's the challenge. It's the reality of it, as I said earlier on with the cuts to the local authority* (Councillor 1, Torbay).

Because of the limited resources, Torbay Council's must prioritise the needs of larger cohorts of residents, like the oversized elderly population, at the expense of smaller subset of the population. Yet, in Torbay EU migrants, Eastern Europeans in particular, are mostly employed in the hospitality and in the care sectors (Turnpenny & Hussein, 2022), two of the most important industries of the area, and as such can be considered 'critical' workers. Some of these critical workers might have suffered from a language barrier and low IT literacy, or might have been completely unaware of the EUSS requirements, hence at risk of missing the EUSS submission deadline or of submitting an incomplete and/or inaccurate application. It can be then argued that, beside the statutory duty of care that every local government has over all its residents, it would

have also been in the best interest of the Council to make sure that all the 4,584 EU migrants who live in Torbay were given all the support they needed to stay in the UK.

Torbay Council's weak relationship with EU migrants is inferable also through official documents. In September 2022, the Council published the 'Torbay Racism Review Panel Report'. The report concluded the work of the Torbay Racism Review Panel, a multi-partisan panel composed of Councillors and representatives of ethnic minorities. The panel, created in the wake of the Floyd George murder in May 2020, was tasked 'to undertake, as far as they could within their resources, a holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive approach to exploring and attempting to understand the issue of racism in Torbay' (Torbay Council, 2022, p. 3). Interestingly, the same urgency to address institutional racism in Torbay did not surge in 2016 after the Brexit referendum, when a 25% spike of hate crimes, most of which against EU migrants, was recorded throughout the country. Despite the EU community being numerically as big as all other migrant groups combined and twice as big as the second ethnic minority (Asian) present in Torbay, no European was included in the panel or interviewed at a panel meeting. For comparison, the panel included two representative of the British Black community and one of the Asian communities. In the report, Europeans (as in Eastern Europeans) are mentioned only twice in relation to the 'Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service' recruiting strategy and to language barriers that limit their understanding of what to do in case of fire (Torbay Council, 2022, p. 23).

Overall, the disinterest in providing policy and symbolic support the EU communities shown by Torbay Council's interviewees is not surprising. 63% of the electorate chose to vote Leave at the EU Referendum in 2016 (48,000 Leave vs 28,000 Remain ballots). The logic inference local politicians can make from the overwhelmingly Leave victory in the Borough is that Torbay's public opinion is not favourable to supporting EU migrants.

6.8 Discussion

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis reveal that, even when controlling for the size of the EU migrants' communities, the initial hypothesis (Leave councils would provide less support to EU migrants) is still verified. The size of the EU community does matter, and bigger communities seem to get better support from their local representatives. Even when looking only at local authorities with a substantial group of EU migrants (>10% of the population), the support offered during Brexit by English local administrations continues to correlate with the electorate's orientation along the Brexit divide.

The median voter and the dynamic representation models, based on politicians' expectations and rational choices, are a good fit to describe such trend. However, other theoretical frameworks

could also contribute to explain this phenomenon. For example, the apparent association between inclusive policies and the size of the migrant community may be also determined to some extent by the assimilation 'by contact' prevailing over the competing 'threat' model: local policy-makers would be influenced to develop migrants-friendly policies by being in 'contact' with large group of migrants, rather than having a reaction of opposite sign and promote anti-migrant policies to protect native residents from the 'threat' represented by a substantial minority of foreigners (Ellis, 2006).

In EU councils where in 2016 there was a Leave majority the level of support is still lower than where there was a Remain majority. Having a critical mass of EU migrants seems then to matter to determine the magnitude of support but not enough to overcome a majoritarian support for Brexit. Looking at the data it appears that the political orientation of the local British population has a greater impact on local governments' policy outputs than the size of the EU community. This result confirms Walker and Leitner (2011) findings on the influence of local political views on local migration-related policies, especially in locations where migrant communities experienced a rapid growth, which is exactly what happen in most of English towns after 2004, when the number of A8 migrants (and A2 migrants after 2007) started to increase exponentially.

Finally, I want to add a spatial dimension to the analysis and consider the London 'effect'. The concentration of EU migrants in the British capital differs hugely from the rest of the country. 25 out of 40 councils with large EU communities are London boroughs, 62% of the total, and all but one - Barking and Dagenham – are Remain councils. It is not surprising to discover that 22 London Boroughs were extremely supportive of their EU migrants during the EUSS application period and ranked 4 or 5 on the EU migrants Support Scale. Among all Remain EU councils in London, only Greenwich and the City of London offered less support to EU migrants (level 3 and 1 respectively). In fact, the City of London is a case on its own: because of its *sui generis* administrative status and its unique history, economy and governance, the Square Mile is not really comparable with the other 32 London boroughs, so the lack of support to its substantial EU community (16% of the whole population) can be regarded as an 'outlier' within the otherwise quite homogeneous political landscape of the British capital, rather than an exemplificative case.

London is one of the most cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse metropolis in the world[118], hosting approximately one million EU migrants[119]. Its elected representatives probably have a natural propension to care about EU migrants more than their colleagues governing councils with smaller

[118] Source: worldatlas.com/articles/the-most-cosmopolitan-cities-in-the-world.html [accessed on 15/08/2021].
[119] ONS (2021). *Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality, July 2020 to June 2021*.

EU communities elsewhere in England. From a rational-choice point of view, Councillors of London Boroughs with a large EU population, eligible to vote at local elections, and a British population highly favourable to the European Union, would maximise their chances of re-election by voting for 'EU-friendly' policies, such as offering free access to EUSS help points. This explanation is a good fit to explain Haringey's decision to invest part of the overstretched Council's resources to make sure their EU migrants could secure their future in the country.

In general, the analysis of the four cases studies does not present major discrepancies with the national picture. In line with the rest of the country, the theorised correlation between public opinion on Brexit and EUSS-related policies is confirmed on three out of four cases. Because of the case selection process, Coventry and Haringey are clearly more supportive of EU migrants than Portsmouth and Torbay. Haringey voted 76% Remain, one of the highest percentage in the country, while Portsmouth and Torbay were both firmly on the Leave camp. The sole case not aligned with rational choice-based predictions is Coventry. In the West-Midlands city, in spite of the electorate being in favour of Brexit (54% Leave vs 46% Remain), the Council became a national champion in supporting EU migrants during the post-Brexit transition. Other historical, social, and political factors described in the previous section have probably intervened to determine Coventry's approach towards EU migrants.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter shown the existence of an England-wide deficiency of support for EU migrants who were struggling with the EUSS process. In a country with at least 4 million EU migrants, where at least several tens of thousands of them belong to vulnerable demographics or have disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, this lack of support at local level is concerning.

Local councils were the closest and often only public institution EU migrants could access for getting help. It is early days to know the actual impact of the EUSS process on the lives of millions of EU migrants but, given the account of previous studies and of CSOs' reports, it is realistic to expect that thousands of EU migrants, neglected by their local authorities, might be at risk of losing their legal right to stay in the UK.

This study also revealed that the support for EU migrants from local administrations increases with the size of the EU community and that Leave councils tend to help their EU migrants less than Remain councils. The effect of the Brexit referendum on local policymakers is confirmed even when controlling for the size of the EU community. These results reinforce both hypotheses that politicians would strategically aim to maximise their chances of being re-elected by trying to

please the median voter (Congleton, 2008), and that public opinion influences the formulation and execution of migration policies (Stimson et al., 1995; Walker & Leitner, 2011).

However, it would be risky to generalise these results beyond the English political realm. In the other three constituent nations of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the relationship between local governments and EU migrants could be very different, due to smaller EU communities, public views opposing Brexit (especially in Scotland and Northern Ireland) and the different legal, administrative, and funding framework that characterise the lower layers of government in the devolved nations.

Furthermore, a large-n comparative work cannot yield the analytical depth required to unveil the possible socio-political causes of the observed phenomena. We do not know if, beyond the Brexit referendum, other context-specific factors have also weighted in the formulation of policies targeting EU migrants. This study does not tell us either if EU migrants were 'forgotten' only during the Brexit transition, or if the lack of political care extends to other critical areas of intervention of local governments, such as social services, housing, or cultural integration, as Bruzelius (2020) suggests. The results call for qualitative case studies that can go further in understanding the underlying reasons behind the trends highlighted in this chapter, possibly by studying how local administration treat EU migrants in different key policy areas.

Finally, based on the theoretical model introduced in chapter 3, I argue that, besides the rational choices of elected Councillors, another important factor impacting policies addressing migrants needs are council actors' perception of foreign-born residents assimilate in the local context and how they interact with their local authority and public institutions in general. The next comparative chapters, based on the thematic analysis of the interviews, provide answers to these questions and look for further evidence that support, modify, or dismiss, the initial theoretical model on how local governments affect EU migrants' political participation in England.

Chapter 7 EU Migrants and Political Participation

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how EU migrants tend to be neglected by local authorities across England, and how policy choices targeting EU migrants seem influenced by local policymakers' perceptions of public support for intra-European migration.

Aside for institutional support aside, the theoretical model presented in chapter 3 addresses the effects of the perceived capacity and will of these groups of 'outsiders' (EU migrants) to integrate socially, economically, and politically with the 'insiders' (British citizens). According to the social capital model (Eggert & Giugni, 2010; Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2001; Putnam & Schuster, 2000), the development of bridging (in-group) rather than bonding (across-group) social capital, or the absence of both, is an important test to measure the possibility to achieve political integration in the receiving society.

To investigate this component of the proposed theoretical model, in this chapter I analysed what interviews and other primary sources revealed about EU migrants' social networks in the four case studies. The results tell us that 'old' Europeans, born in one of the 15 countries that were EU member states before 2004, develop different integration strategies from 'new' Europeans coming from A8 or A2 countries, but the outcomes in terms of recognition from the local political actors are surprisingly similar and seem not to lead to political integration.

7.2 Strong EU communities

As anticipated in Chapter 6, the interviews revealed how in all four cases Eastern Europeans have a stronger community bond than EU15 migrants[120]. The first example of self-organising community mentioned by almost all interviewees is the Polish community, most likely because is the largest and most visible of all migrant minorities, non-EU groups included. Other major communities like Romanians and Bulgarians also seem to have developed formal and informal nationality-based networks. The interviews also revealed that among A8 and A2 migrants in England there is a sense of transnational identity, probably forged by living in close proximity one another, by sharing similar social and economic conditions, by working in the same low-paid jobs (Cook et al., 2011b), and by sharing Slavic roots. Been constantly referred by the media and by the ruling political and economic

[120] In this study EU15 migrants are first generation migrants who come from one of the 15 countries that were part of the EU before 2004.

British class as a monolithic bloc of foreigners (the 'Eastern Europeans') contributed to reinforce their sense of in-group belonging, a phenomenon known in social psychology as 'other-defined' identity (as opposed to self-defined identity). As postulated by Connor (1994, p. 103), while the idea of a nation is self-defined, an ethnicity is observed and defined by outsiders of the ethnic group and may, or may not, be accepted by the members of that ethnicity as their own identity. The qualitative data suggest that in all the four cases, A8+A2 migrants have come to accept, and sometimes own, the lumping of their 10 different nationalities under the single banner 'Eastern Europeans'. In reality, A8+A2 countries have strong cultural (Mitteleuropean, Baltic and Balkan cultures), linguistic (Finno-Ugric, Latin and Slavic languages) and religion (Catholics and Orthodox Christians) differences. Yet, their similarities seem to prevail over their differences. For example, both NewStar4You in Coventry and the PEEC in Haringey were born as organisations run by and for Polish nationals, but they quickly evolved in local 'go-to' places for all A8 and A2 communities.

EU15 Europeans are on average less in need of support because of their higher SES (Bridget et al., 2020; Van der Wielen & Bijak, 2015), but are not all necessarily fully integrated in the British society, as shown by anecdotal evidence gathered during the research fieldwork. Yet, they rarely access Eastern European organisations for support, probably because they are unaware of their existence or because they have access to other kinds of support networks[121]. EU15 migrants also seem not to develop strong community ties with co-nationals based on shared traditions, religion, or culture. Possible explanations for this observed phenomenon, aside higher SES that helps the 'blending-in' the host society, are related to the lower sense of ethnonationalism found in Western European countries (Hjerm, 2003). On the contrary, EU migrants from A8 and A2 countries, like Poland, maintain a strong sense of national identity and patriotism (Fanning et al., 2021).

In Coventry and Haringey, informal networks of Eastern Europeans exist alongside structured organisations. EU migrant 2, a young Polish woman who grew up in a British-Polish family, explained that in Haringey the local Polish community is well organised and efficient in offering all sort of personal and home services to their members, from hairdressing and plumbing to accommodations and jobs:

> *There was a group of people who really just arrived.* [Among them] *there was a girl who was probably about 18 and she just cut my hair, but I don't think she had ever cut anyone's hair before, but she just wanted to, you know, she said: 'I do it, I'll make some money'. There was a lot of people living in their house and children and stuff, and it definitely felt like that there was people that were put in touch because of the community. They didn't know each other*

[121] None of the EU15 citizens I interviewed in Haringey and Coventry was aware of PEEC and NewStart4You respectively, and both EU Migration Experts told me these organisations dealt with very few EU15 customers even during the EUSS 'crisis', despite many being at odds with the EUSS application process and in need of support. In Haringey, both Councillors identified the Italian community as being at higher risk of falling through the cracks of the EUSS, because of the older age of many members and, for some of them, the decades-long length of stay in the UK.

> *before, but they were all sort of living in this house together. Maybe that's something that they would go to the Council for otherwise.* (EU migrant 2 – Haringey).

Interestingly, she spontaneously identified the Polish community as a natural 'competitor' of the Council for delivering public services, especially housing. Local politicians are also aware of the transnational support networks for Eastern Europeans, rooted in close-knit national groups and existing before the A8 countries accession in 2004:

> *What happened with the accession as well [is that] at that time there was a...pre-accession. You [could] see people getting off lorries all the time. People who got here illegally. Tottenham was a destination for lorries. [..] Because they had networks, or they knew somebody. But I don't think that people were particularly politically engaged. However, what does happen is that people get involved in their own ethnic organisations.* (Councillor 1 – Haringey).

The Eastern Europeans' support system is highly informal, yet it allows its members to live and work with almost no need to interact with outsiders, let alone with the local authority. EU migrant 2 highlighted how many support services provided by these communities either overlap with the Council's remit or meet needs ignored by the Council. As noted in Portsmouth for the Romanian community, the gaps in supporting migrants' integration non covered by the public authority are naturally filled by forms of self-organisation and social 'entrepreneurs' belonging to the migrant community. The overlap of roles between public institution and national/ethnic networks can function as a filter between the EU migrants and the Council. The 'competition' between support systems prevents A8+A2 migrants from interacting with their local administration, and, consequently, from formulating demands to their Councillors. The absence of interaction between public institutions and political actors on the one hand, and Eastern European communities on the other, kerb the chances for them to integrate within the political life of the Council.

Moreover, a Council officer in Haringey remarked that the informality of the A8+A2 support networks creates a fertile terrain for illegal situations to emerge. Housing in particular is a critical area of contentiousness between Council and Easter European transnational networks. The Council is in charge of social housing and for ensuring that privately rented properties meet the housing quality standards set by the law, which often are not met in houses of multiple accommodation rented informally to A8+A2 migrants:

> *It's a big thing that we have to grapple with this informal advice networks and, while they're like a really useful scene setter, [it becomes problematic] when the information just isn't correct. Particularly for landlords and housing, for example. We do have an issue with people living in housing that is overcrowded or doesn't meet tenancy rights, or it is actually really quite expensive for what it is, but because it's been secured from within someone's own community, so they might have secured it before they arrived, there's a natural trust there, like: 'Oh, a fellow Romanian told me that this was a good deal, and therefore, I think it's a good deal* (Council Officer 2 - Haringey).

Even the use of the English language is superfluous when migrants are supported by their own national community. Because of the insularity of these networks, the language barrier becomes a serious obstacle for opening an institutional dialogue with them:

> *I don't think that they use* [Council] *English-speaking services, they might miss such events* [note of the researcher: he means public events for migrants organised by the Connected Communities team] *because of the language barrier. They listen to different radios, watch different TV, read different newspapers. This is the problem...[unintelligible] our language, not only common English local newspapers. They might miss some information* [from the Council]. (EU Migration Expert – Haringey).

> *I know people who have been 50,60...20 years in this country and they still can't speak English, […] for example, Polish or Romanians. So they communicate only with people from their* [own] *countries.* (EU Migration Expert – Coventry).

The same situation is found in Eastern European communities in Portsmouth and Torbay, as a Romanian and a Polish participants told me:

> *They [*note of the researcher: with 'they' she means in 'Eastern Europeans'] *brought their families after* [them] *and most of the people stay within their communities and don't speak a lot of English, maybe their kids now because they're in schools and they're learning more. Sometimes the parents rely on their kids to help them with admin stuff, like an Eastern European does* [laughter]. *So, a lot of families do not have the language capacity*. (EU migrant 2 – Portsmouth).

> *I believe that some Polish people live in isolation from the local media, the British media, and live in isolation from the British citizens. They keep themselves to themselves, they speak [only] the Polish language and live in a Polish way, although they live in the UK.* (EU migrant 2 – Torbay).

Most of Eastern Europeans also seems have a natural mistrust for public institutions, acquired in their countries of birth where the public sector performance is poor and corruption high. This political apathy makes them wary of government bodies in the UK too:

> *Because of our background, we are used not to trust very much the government in Poland, this is still an issue* [here]. (EU Migration Expert – Haringey).

In Portsmouth, the Romanians are not only the largest nationality after the British, but also the better organised EU group, both online and on the ground. Despite the lack of trust in Romanian institutions, they still feel a sense of attachment to their home country politics and vote in mass at Romanian national elections[122]. Romanians even lobbied with their consulate in London to have a polling station in Portsmouth every time there is a presidential or parliamentarian election in Romania:

> *There is one place in Fratton which the Portsmouth City Council is aware of. It's organised by a fellow Romanian. Every time we have to vote, for example, for the president in Romania, or somebody in the parliament from Romania, we have that place to go and express our vote.* (EU migrant 2 – Portsmouth).

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However, because of the cultural habit to sort issues within the community rather than appealing to the public authority, community self-organisation does not lead to political engagement:

> *It's also cultural: in Romania, if you know someone, you can sort things out. So, that tends to be a continuation of this practice and Romanian slash Eastern European culture of: 'I know someone, they can tell me the information, I don't need to do anything else' […] I think we've built a wall around us, and we just keep it really high. I think our own ways of dealing with any issues and problems, and the lack of engagement with politics as main national culture, contribute to that lack of representation as well.* (EU migrant 2 – Portsmouth).

The lack of confidence of many Eastern Europeans in interacting with the local authority is worsened by the complexity of bureaucracy and its unfriendly jargon:

> *Here people also struggle to communicate with the Council, especially around housing issues, like getting in houses or doing some repairs in a Council house. Just in general dealing with the Council finances [is difficult], we receive lots of letters. The system, like how they calculate the housing* [unintelligible] *is so complicate that people don't understand*. (EU Migration Expert – Haringey).

Unfriendly bureaucracy is an issue for British residents too, but for migrants the intensity of the problem is heightened by cultural and language barriers, and by the lack of awareness about the English welfare and administrative system, all challenges that native residents do not have to overcome:

> *I think the language barrier is kind of underlying all the problems. But of course, the lack of knowledge about the system and how it works…about social benefits. People often don't know that if they lost a job, they could apply for support from government.* (EU Migration Expert – Haringey).

> *We know that people* [Note of the researcher: with 'people' she means EU migrants] *don't always register with a GP here. They might just go home to get their treatment because it's easier, because they understand the system.* (Council Officer 2 – Haringey).

The cumulation of limited knowledge of English, the mistrust towards public authorities and the impenetrability of bureaucratic language makes it difficult for many Eastern Europeans, especially those with a low SES and/or belonging to vulnerable categories (elderly, disable, homeless, etc.) to engage with the Council. It becomes then natural for these migrants to seek resources and support from their own national community or from friendly charities like PEEC, or NewStart4You in Coventry, or even from migrant-run businesses, like in Portsmouth. All these organisations somewhat replace the Council as a first port of landing for fulfilling basic needs (housing, schools, access to benefits, etc.).

In summary, A8 and A2 migrants communities are well developed and appear to be self-sufficient and inward-looking, with well-established transnational social networks that help building bonding social capital even before the individual has moved to the UK, but do not support the development of the bridging social capital the facilitates political participation.

7.3 Weak EU communities

EU15 migrants, on the contrary, tend to establish weaker communities, often existing online only[123] and as such barely visible to their local councils[124]. In Portsmouth, for example, Western Europeans seem to easily 'blend-in' with the local social context and, consequently, have personal networks that are more likely to include British residents:

> *The Western European ones, as in Northwesterners, French and Germans, Dutch people that I know, Scandinavians that I know, are more likely to assimilate and be part of Portsmouth, whereas all the other ones come here and make their own little group of people, spend all their time together, and hardly ever spend any time with the people of Portsmouth.* (EU Migration Expert – Portsmouth).

The different perception about the integration of Eastern and Western Europeans is glaring:

> *The thing* [note of the researcher: he means the application form] *to apply for the Council for a rent rebate, or whatever it might be, comes up in all sorts of different languages, but they don't do it in Italian, French, and Spanish, usually because they just assume that people* [note of the researcher: with 'people' he means EU15 migrants] *who want housing benefit, either don't need it, because they're here being paid a fairly substantial amount of money because they're working as engineers or whatever, or they are generally available to go ahead and sort things out themselves by having enough English to do the forms* (EU Migration Expert – Portsmouth).

The words of the EU Migration Expert highlight the fact that the Portsmouth City Council sees EU migrants, from EU15 countries in particular, differently from other migrants communities. The Council expects them the to be fully integrated, with a high SES, and able to sort their own issues without external help. This view finds partial confirmation in the words of a Lib.-Dem. Councillor with cabinet responsibility:

> *Generally, I think there is more of a blending in* [of EU migrants] *and, perhaps, a level of invisibility of some of those communities and what they require. It's often the case that the engagement that you have with any community in the city is driven by them reaching out to you in the first instance because you need those points of contact and I don't see that happening with French, or German, or Dutch, or Romanians. Poles are possibly the one exception, to the same extent that we see from more visible communities such as the Chinese who have been long established here, as well as the Bangladeshis and the Kurds* (Councillor 1 - Portsmouth).

The theme that emerges here is the 'invisibility' of EU migrants, except for Polish nationals (term often used by council actors as a metonymy for all Central and Eastern Europeans), coupled with the idea that it is a migrants' responsibility to take the first step in engaging with the public authority. Indeed, the fact that this prominent local politician included Romanians, the biggest and

[123] I have found Facebook groups for migrants from one or more of these nationalities - French, German, Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese - in all four councils. Given that Haringey is embedded in London, foreign residents also have membership in London-wide FB pages (i.e. Portuguese Expats in London group).

[124] One could argue that a search on Facebook would made council actors aware of all virtual communities related to their town, like I did.

most organised foreign community in Portsmouth, among the 'invisible' migrants is quite telling of the lack of institutional dialogue between the Council and the many European communities represented in the city. In contrast, the two Romanian interviewees were fully aware of the activities run by their own community, which has a strong presence both online and offline, despite neither of them being active members in such groups.

In the next chapters I expand upon the political agency vs structure problem (Cook et al., 2012). In other words, which actor between the institution or the migrant is supposed to initiate the engagement, and if it is the power structure or the individual and group experiences to determine political behaviours and policy outcomes. The lack of awareness about the EU migrants presence, aside for the obvious ethnic supermarkets, affects not only council actors, but EU15 migrants themselves. Emblematic in this sense is the case of a participant from Italy, who has been a successful entrepreneur and a Conservative activist in Portsmouth for 45 years. Because of his entrepreneurial and political activity, he is well-known in the community, also among British residents. He claims to have employed many foreigners and even to have made a few of them join the Conservative party, not least due to the lack of European representatives:

> *I was the only one who made Albanians, French, Germans, some Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese members of the party […] I told them that it was better if they joined because there are lots of Europeans here and nobody represents them!* (EU migrant 1 – Portsmouth).

Yet, despite his deep knowledge of Portsmouth gained in decades of social and political prominence, the only foreign community he was aware of is the Bangladeshi community. The remaining six EU15 migrants interviewed in Portsmouth had no awareness of gatherings of EU migrants, nor other EU migrants in their personal social network (except for the few who were already known before moving to the UK). A young French woman (24 years old) was the only participants who told me that all her friends are from the EU. Her younger age, which facilitate socialisation, the relatively recent arrival in Portsmouth, approximately a year, which made her in need of making friends, and the higher likelihood for her to meet other migrants over British residents, are elements that combined can explain the difference with all other interviewees. Indeed, the French community and the German community seem to be slightly more structured than others EU15 groups, with a relatively lively page on Facebook and even some recurrent in-person social events tied to French and German cultures, like the celebrations for the French national day every 14th of July and a regular meet-up of German nationals with children.

Both online communities are not the result of spontaneous socialisation among co-nationals but were started by a British resident for professional reasons (he is a translator, interpreter, and a teacher of both languages) and are addressed to all 'French/German speakers', not necessarily only to French and German nationals.

In Torbay, where there are no formal ethnic organisations, EU15 migrants' ways to socialisation and integration is quite similar to Portsmouth. Remarkably, aside for the presence of a couple of Polish grocery stores, none of the EU15 interviewees was able to mention any physical place where it is easy to meet other EU migrants.

EU migrant 4 from Denmark told me that his social network is made mostly of British citizens. He also mentioned Polish, Spanish and Portuguese acquaintances, who he mostly knows from his job in the healthcare sector, where many EU migrants also work. However, compared to other EU migrants he can be considered an outlier because the presence of Scandinavians in England is limited, especially outside London, which makes it nearly impossible for him to bond with migrants who share the same national background. The absence of EU migrants in his social network was also reported by EU migrant 1 from Italy, EU migrant 3 from France, and EU migrant 6 from Belgium. Not surprisingly, the two EU migrants from Poland I interviewed are part of social circles made by co-nationals.

Migrant 7 from Spain has an international group of friends, mainly because her customer-facing job in the hospitality sector puts her in a privileged position to encounter other EU migrants, either as co-workers or as customers. She told me to have known '20 to 30' Europeans before Brexit, and that only two or three are still in Torbay now. All others left initially because of Brexit, then to escape Covid and the downturn of the economy (especially in tourism, the largest source of jobs in Torquay). At the time of the interview she was clearly showing a natural aversion to native residents, due to the sense of rejection acquired because of Brexit and for having been the victim of two racial attacks[125].

Like the two previous cases, Coventry lacks structured networks for EU15 migrants. Similarly to Portsmouth and Torbay, social networks among EU15 migrants seem to be rather weak. For example, EU migrant 6, who is Austrian but comes from a Croatian family, does not have significative friendships with other EU migrants. She explained that the reason she only has British friends is because she is married to a British man, and she became integrated into his social network. A similar example was given by a French woman in Portsmouth:

> *I met my other half in 2012. Is that it? Oh, yeah. So, I became a British citizen in 2011 and then I met Mike in 2012. Mike is very politically aware, and he kind of woke me up to what goes on in the country, and we both decided to register with the Labour Party.* (EU migrant 7 – Portsmouth).

[125] Another participant suffered from anti-EU street-harassment in Portsmouth. These despicable acts occurred, perhaps not coincidentally, in the two most Brexit-friendly cities of the small-n sample.

Indeed, intermarriage is regarded as of the main drivers of social integration in the hosting society (Elwert, 2020; Rodríguez-García, 2015) that in turn can weaken bonds with other migrants (Gordon, 1964). In Coventry, both participants from Italy for distinct reasons rejected the idea of being part of an Italian community, or even that an Italian community in Coventry exists:

> *Italians? I won't hide from you that in these years I've tried to stay as far away as possible from them. I try not to involve myself with Italians, because I prefer to stay out of Italian environments.* (EU migrant 1 - Coventry).

> *I came here alone, with two children, who then were 8 and 10 years old, she said: 'Come here in Coventry, housing is cheaper, and I can help with the children'. I said: 'Of course, ok'. I left [London], I arrived here, and she disappeared [laughter]…never trust Italians! […] You know how we are, us Italians, right? If I use a service and I have a benefit, I won't tell you. You must sort yourself on your own. […] [in the Italian community] everyone minds their own business.* (EU migrant 2 - Coventry).

They are both members of the Facebook page 'Italians in Coventry', used by Italian residents mainly for exchanging information of any sort, from trivial requests such as 'what's the best pizzeria in Coventry?' to providing unqualified legal advice on important matters. Interestingly, this Facebook group was widely used during the EUSS application window to gather first-hand information on the application process:

> *I noticed that on the Facebook page 'Italians in Coventry', there were a lot of people asking for information on how to do to request the pre-settled [status], what were the steps for to properly complete the pre-settled [status]. Because I've seen so many people that didn't know which way to go* (EU migrant 1 – Coventry).

This fragment of interview shows that between 2019 and 2021 some Italians in Coventry needed help to navigate the EUSS application. Despite the loose character of the Italian community in Coventry, some decided to call upon the support of unqualified co-nationals on a social media platform rather than seek free counselling from the pro-bono migration lawyers working in partnership with the Council. This anecdotal evidence is illustrative of how the official Council channels offered to receive support in preparing the EUSS application, which were targeting Eastern Europeans mainly through ethnic organisations like NewStart4You, probably did not reach many EU15 migrants, who as a result sought help in other ways.

7.4 The Haringey Peculiarity

Haringey is a slightly different case from the previous three, because it is located in the heart of one of the most cosmopolitan megalopolis in the world, London, where migrants' social structures rarely respect borough's boundaries.

EU migrant 1 from Portugal has a few Portuguese friends scattered all over London. The Facebook groups for EU migrants of which she is member are not tied to any specific location. They

represent virtual spaces for all Europeans in the UK. These pages became popular during the Brexit period:

> *It was mostly when Brexit started that these groups started to gather on Facebook, and I started to join them, obviously, because as everyone I was wondering…what does that mean for us? So, I joined all these groups* (EU migrant 1– Haringey).

The Italian EU migrant 4 gave a similar answer, while the other Italian interviewee stated he has no connection with Europeans citizens. I received comparable accounts from a Polish, a Lithuanian and a Czech migrant. This trend seems to confirm how EU migrants living in London tend to develop personal networks within and across national communities have a London-wide dimensions.

A Polish participant, who worked at a Polish bar in Camden, was living in Haringey with other EU migrants (an Italian, a Swedish and a German) and had other European friends living all over the capital. When asked about which EU migrants she knew in Haringey, she told that 'everything is across London'. Being born in Poland from a Polish mother and a British father, she said that most of her acquaintances have the same mixed background:

> [We can] *relate to each other about being Polish in the UK, but not feeling like as much part of the Polish-Polish community*[126]*. The Polish-Polish community, to me would be more people who really just arrived recently, and also people who are here temporarily, like they are here to work, but then they're going back to Poland, whereas for me, I think me, and my family are sort from here you know.* (EU migrant 2 – Haringey).

Despite her mother being is a member of the Polish community in London, EU migrant 2 does not identify herself as Polish. Yet, her drive in creating new acquaintances comes more from the Polish 'half' of her background:

> *I think for me, there's the bar and a lot of my friends who are sort of half Polish. I had an interaction with someone on the Tube the other day, who was half Polish, half Spanish, and we got really excited about kind of, you know...relating to each other about being Polish in the UK, but not feeling like as much part of the Polish-Polish community.* (EU migrant 2 – Haringey).

Remarkably, for someone who grew up and was educated in England, she seems more connected with other youngsters who share the 'half' Polish side than her British peers. Despite belonging to both the British and Polish worlds, her Polish identity is the minimum common denominator of her personal social network, further evidence of the strong attachment of Polish citizens in the UK to their home country (Fanning et al., 2021), even for 1.5 generation migrants and mixed-heritage migrants. A strong national identity is a predictor of low interest in local politics among non-naturalised migrants (*ibid.*), like the vast majority of EU migrants.

[126] Throughout the interview she referred to Polish nationals as 'Polish-Polish', to differentiate them from migrants with mixed national background. For example, she referred to herself as 'British-Polish'.

Another peculiarity that separates Haringey from the other three councils is that since 2018 there a first-generation EU migrant sitting in the Council (for the Lib.-Dems.). who was introduced to local politics by another Italian resident who was a Labour activist. This friend made her aware not only that Europeans could run for office at local level, but that they could even win a seat in the Council:

> *In a way, I was facilitated, because my best friend, who, as I was saying before, moved to Frankfurt, was a Labour party activist and also Italian, so...let's say that for me it was maybe more normal to see a European person involved in local politics, whereas for other people, if they are not used to it, maybe it can seem that it is not something for them*. (Councillor 3 - Haringey).

The process of political integration by social 'contact' with politically active individuals or group was also described to me by a French participant in Torbay:

> *I think that what made me more politically aware is knowing people who were politically aware. I had a good friend who was very actively part of the Green Party and another friend in the group was very much conservative, so there used to be loads of conversations. At the beginning, it was all very dull and tedious, then gradually, it got more intuitive, so I started to listen and making my own mind up, really. So, yeah, it's really the people I met that made me look more into it. Then, as time went on, I think I really drilled into it.* (EU migrant 3 – Torbay).

Both cases support the claim that among migrants the social capital acquired through membership in a political organisation can extend from the individual to their close social network and in turn facilitate the political mobilisation of other foreigners (Tillie, 2004). Notably, the political mobilisation of the Haringey Councillor 3 was not caused by her being part of a group of fellow Italians, or Europeans, residing in Haringey, but was the consequence of the informative and inspiring effect of the political activism of an Italian friend, coupled with her personal interest in politics developed while growing up in Italy (early and late socialisation combined). Like in Coventry, Portsmouth and Torbay, in Haringey too Italians do not seem to establish community bonds with fellow countrypeople.

7.5 Conclusion

Evidence from the interviews shows how A8+A2 migrants seem to create stronger bond with their co-nationals than EU15 migrants, which in turn facilitate the creation of formal and informal transnational networks between sending countries and the UK. On the contrary, EU15 migrants tend to create loose networks with co-nationals and other Europeans, which do not provide a fertile soil for the emergence of structured support networks. The difference in average SES between EU15 migrants and A8+A2, and an apparent stronger national identity of the latter, play a vital role in shaping relationships within their national communities. Central and Eastern Europeans also maintain a high interest and level of participation in their home country politics, despite the deep lack of trust in the fairness and justice of their political system as a whole.

'Invisibility' is another important concept surfaced during my conversations with council actors. This theme brings to the surface the underlying social construction that drive the institutional approach to EU migrants in all four councils. Local governments' engagement strategy with EU migrants can be summarised with the slogan 'no engagement means no demands'. Differently from other major migrant communities (e.g., Africans and Asians) EU migrants, both EU15 and A8+A2, are not capable or interested in making themselves seen and heard by their local political actors.

In line with other studies on the dynamics of the Eastern European diaspora, the results I presented in this chapter suggest that A8+A2 migrants develop bonding social capital that help their adaptation in the new country, but in doing so partially replacing the role of the local government in delivering information and basic services. The overlap between institutional and informal networks can prevent these migrants from developing political agency, even within the limits of their 'thin' sense of EU community (Fanning et al., 2021). On the flip side, EU15 migrants seem to 'blend-in' so well within the socio-economic context of the receiving polity to become completely invisible to the local government. Paradoxically, both strong and weak EU communities develop the same relationship with the Council, although for diametrically opposite reasons.

Interestingly, these findings are equally valid in three out of four councils. All three cases are different one another in terms of size of the population, economy, social context and political tradition, but have comparable pre and post 2004 EU immigration patterns. The only partial exception to the homogeneity of the picture is Haringey. Its location within Greater London creates social networks that overcome Borough boundaries and make the growth of established and self-aware EU communities at a Council level more difficult.

Having described the local context of intra-EU migration of the four cases in chapter 6, and the effect of EU migrants social networks and communities on their chances of political integration in this chapter, in the next chapter I analyse how the perceptions of EU communities constructed by council actors end up influencing policy decisions that deter or enhance (thanks to Brexit in the latter case) the capacity of EU migrants to participate in local politics.

Chapter 8 The Role of the Council

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I found how opposite ways to create intra-community bonds between EU15 migrants and A8+A2 create distinct perceptions in the local authority but produce similar consequences in terms of engagement with local politics.

While EU15 migrants tend to have loose national networks that do not turn into structured ethnic organisations, A8+A2 migrants have a stronger sense of national identity and are inclined to form tight-knit communities that favour the emergence of formal and informal support networks. Typically, these networks replace the role of the public authority in delivering some basic services, such as housing or social care, and by doing so prevent the accumulation of bridging social capital, a proven contributing factor to migrants' political integration (Morales and Pilati, 2011).

EU15 nationals are seen by councils as fully integrated migrants, while A8+A2 communities are perceived as closed and self-sufficient. Yet, neither groups develop a relationship with the local authority. This phenomenon was observed to varying degrees in all four councils, although with a clear divergence in Haringey: its location in London facilitates the extension of personal networks city-wide and makes it more difficult to build Borough-bond networks.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed analysis of the themes emerged in relation to the perception of EU migrants by council actors. In the second half of the chapter I report what the interviews revealed about the self-perception of EU migrants and how this vision of the self seems consistent across the four cases. I then discuss how external and self-perceptions can influence policymaking. The analytical themes described in the coming sections are transiency, civic illegitimacy, the Brexit effect, and the differential treatment reserved to EU migrants by local councils.

8.2 Transiency and Civic Illegitimacy

The prevalent perception of council actors across the four councils is that EU migrants are fully employed and transient. This belief is founded in the nature of intra-European migration (firmly based on economic reasons and lifestyle) and on the freedom of movement EU migrants enjoyed until 2021. As noted in chapter 7, council actors perceive Western Europeans as fully blended in with the local social fabric, while Eastern Europeans (Polish, Romanians, and Bulgarians mainly), are believed by council actors to form visible but closed and hard-to-reach communities:

> *Maybe part of it is that some EU migrants living within Portsmouth don't necessarily see it as a permanent base in the way, again for example, [of the] Kurdish people in Portsmouth, who have moved here not necessarily just for economic reasons; they've moved here to flee quite often, so they probably then see Portsmouth as a permanent place that they fled home to and they're therefore interested in the long term politics and outcomes, whereas it might be the some EU migrants see it as a more temporary or transient place that they live in. […]So, I guess, what that probably means is that people who are transients, for wanting of a better word, who may be moving around, or only living in a place for a limited period of time and then moving on, we're less likely to build up that kind of longer term relationship […] because we might go there one election, speak to them, and the next election they've moved on somewhere else. So, we're not able, at a local level, to build those longer-term relationships with people.* (Councillor 2 - Portsmouth).

This quote by a Labour Councillor in Portsmouth reveals not only that EU migrants are perceived as transient but also that they are viewed as having a lower 'civic legitimacy' than an ethnic community of non-EU migrants, the Kurds. The Labour Councillor believes that permanent migrants are more engaged politically because they see themselves as permanent citizens of Portsmouth, while temporary migrants like EU migrants are less likely to take an interest in local politics because as mobile workers cannot build 'longer term relationship' with the Council.

The unsolicited comparison uncovers a latent bias for outsiders who came to settle permanently after fleeing from a war. Economic migrants like EU migrants, who moved to Portsmouth to chase better jobs and better life conditions, are instinctively deemed less interested in the development of their local community, because they are assumed to be wanting to go back to their countries of origin at some point. For this reason, they are also presumed not to have a long-term stake in the city. The expected shorter length of stay in Portsmouth and their motivation for migrating appears to create a hierarchy between Kurds refugees, who cannot go back and see the new place as their permanent 'home', and economic migrants who came just to improve their living conditions and might not have the future of the city at heart.

In the case of EU migrants, this profiling is justified by the freedom of movement EU migrants enjoyed until 2021. The unrestrained intra-EU mobility fuels the narrative that portrays EU migrants as 'mobile workers' rather than actual migrants. Because of this perception EU migrant become easier to be ignored by local authorities in the EU than asylum-seekers and older foreign communities:

> *The latter* [EU migrants] *is a group that municipalities can chose to ignore, which may seem appealing given strains on local budgets and housing shortages resulting from obligations towards asylum- seekers, as well as challenges to integrate previous waves of immigrants'* (2020, p. 617).

Empirical evidence shows that among migrants bot effective and intended length of stay have a positive correlation with sense of belonging and attachment to the host society (Decieux & Murdock, 2021). The more migrants want to stay in the host country, the more they develop place identity (feeling 'home'). The interviews indicate that natives of the host society might develop a

similar feeling: the longer is the presumed stay of the migrant, the more insiders see that individual as belonging to their society, rather than being just sojourning in it. The perception of EU migrants as 'sojourners' from council actors put them at a deficit compared to migrants perceived as permanent stayers.

Although the understanding of EU migrants as disinterested mobile workers willing to leave as soon as their economic or personal goals are achieved might be true in some cases, the council's actors interviewed for this project differentiated between civically "legitimate" and "illegitimate" foreign residents only on the basis of anecdotes and speculation rather than statistical truths. In the same vein, a senior Council Officer with extended knowledge of the electoral registration system believed that those who are in Portsmouth permanently are more likely to register to vote than temporary residents. Like the Councillor, the Senior Officer could not substantiate his claim with qualitative or quantitative data:

> […] *it's whether people are coming to stay for a long term, or they got a more permanent address. I don't have any data to back that up, particularly. I mean, this isn't just EU migrants, this could be students as well, if you're somewhere for a short time, maybe you're less likely to register, because you see yourself as transient* […] *but if you think you're... you know, if you bought your own property, for example, and you're settled, then you're going to be probably a lot more likely to register because there are other things that it can have consequences with.* (Council Officer 2 - Portsmouth).

The participant openly admitted that the claim that the majority of Europeans in Portsmouth are temporary residents, just like students, is not backed by data. It is true that home ownership is an indicator of long-term residency and correlates with the development of place identity (Hernández et al., 2007) and propels political engagement (DiPasquale & Glaeser, 1999; Yamamura, 2011), especially among migrants (Arbel et al., 2012). The problem is that the amount of EU migrants who own a property is 28% lower than UK-born residents and 7% lower than non-EU migrants. 58% of EU migrants live in rented private properties and social housing (67% in case of A8+A2 migrants). A8+A2 migrants in particular tend to live in private rented accommodations, because of the difficulty to get a social housing (Cook et al., 2012; Rutter & Latorre, 2009). However, contrary to the participant's perception, these data do not imply that EU migrants are more mobile than other migrants, just because they are less likely to own the place where they live. What they tell us instead is that, since EU migrants are employed mostly in low-income jobs, they are less likely to become homeowners, regardless of their length of stay. In fact, almost 2 million EU migrants, or 53% of the total, have lived in the UK for more than 10 years and can be

considered full-fledged permanent residents. Another 24% have stayed more than 5 years, so only less than a quarter of EU migrants are indeed 'short-term'[127] .

The perceived transiency driving civic illegitimacy theme is also present in Coventry's interviews, despite the fact that the Midlands' city provided extensive support to Europeans during the EUSS application period. Yet, ideas about EU migration are similar in both councils:

> *One of the things that it will be interesting to see how it develops for people who were here before 2019 , who would have been thought of as temporary residents to an extent and part of shifting populations. Evidence would say that was the case for a sizeable number of people from particularly the more recent...how are they called? You know, the kind of Eastern European countries […] I think there was a lot of evidence to say that people came and went, came, and went, came, and went.* (Council Officer 1 – Coventry).

All the perceptions about the nature of EU migration reported in this section are not only circumstantial, but also proven inaccurate. The qualitative data collected by Cook et al. (2011) tell a different story about EU migration trends: A8+A2 nationals' migration plan changes as a function of the length of stay and the possibility of a reunion with relatives, and tend to shift from temporary to permanent through time. As seen above, these findings are corroborated by polls published by the Migration Observatory. Both qualitative and quantitative studies have then refuted the myth of the European 'mobile worker' so entrenched in the British political narrative.

The narrative of the settled migrants who 'care' about the city (as opposed to short-stayers) gets often conflated with the stereotype that EU migrants, especially from Eastern Europe, are 'hard-working'. The words of both Labour and Tory Councillors in Coventry well represent the stereotyping of EU migrants:

> *I remember going to a house and [meet] this family [...] they were working, then they lost the job, and I think that [the State] took away the right for benefits and everything. They didn't ask for help with benefits, they said: 'Can you help me to get a job?'. For me, that sums it up all in terms of people coming here: they contribute, and they want to work, and they want to work hard. You know, that stuck with me.* (Councillor 1 - Coventry).

> *I always find they are really clever and skilled people the Polish people... amazing. They are hard workers, aren't they?* (Councillor 2 - Coventry).

Even a positive prejudice such as 'hard-working' can lead to underplaying the support from the Council that some Europeans might need, simply because, contrary to the Councillors' belief, not all EU migrants have a job or speak good English. If anything, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) experience has shown how thousands of vulnerable individuals struggled to deal with a straightforward bureaucratic procedure (Bueltmann, 2019; Barnard, Fraser-Butlin and Costello,

[127] Source: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/permanent-or-temporary-how-long-do-migrants-stay-in-the-uk [accessed on 10/06/2024].

2022). Even before Brexit, European mobile workers already had problems and needs similar to any other migrant group (Bruzelius, 2020).

Literature on social psychology tells us that political actors' subjective understanding of the social reality in their jurisdictions influences policies' design and objectives (Cheng, 2014). As explained by Campbell: 'political actors are more likely to favour policy interpretations that best conform to their cognitive schema and political beliefs' (Campbell, 2002, p. 32). In the context of this study, this means that Councillors' worldviews, anecdotal experiences, and stereotypes about EU migrants contribute to shape policymaking choices and to councils' engagement strategy.

8.3 The Brexit Effect

The most revealing, and unexpected, aspect of the interview with one of the Coventry's Council Officers is when he told me that, because post-Brexit EU migrants have earned the status of long-term residents, it is plausible that in future they become beneficiaries of Council's migrant integration policies for which they are currently ineligible:

> *Now, I think, whilst there are still opportunities for EU migration into the UK, it's more difficult, and, you know, I think there will be more the case of people who are here and will be seen more as, you know, longer term residents, and, therefore, you know, thought of in a similar way to other distinctive parts of the Coventry community.* (Council Officer 1 - Coventry).

As an example of the possible inclusion of Europeans in integration activities, he said that in the future post-Brexit EU migrants might be entitled to take part in publicly funded English courses for migrants. This change of perspective about the expected length of stay of EU migrants has the effect of increasing their civic legitimacy, in this case intended as their worthiness of benefitting from integration policies. A local politician also imagines that EU migrants will change from transient to permanent residents in the UK:

> […] *the fact that people want to stay, I think just actually shows that people come here, and they want to contribute. And, you know, again, I think a lot of people may have gone back because of the feeling around immigration and everything, but people who want to stay, I think settled communities, diverse communities that decided to settle, have a stake in this country and this is a good thing.* (Councillor 1 - Coventry).

It is quite telling that both a senior Council officer and a member of the cabinet Councillor not only believe that Europeans were highly transient before Brexit, but that Brexit in itself might have been the turning point for showing their willingness to 'have a stake in this country' and make their presence in Coventry as relevant as other migrant communities that are seen as 'other distinctive parts of the Coventry community'. These fragments reveal how the loss of mobility caused by Brexit prevents the characterisation of post-Brexit EU migrants as transient, hence

disinterested in their new, and now presumed permanent, home. When temporariness is removed from the perception of the intended stay in town, then EU migrants acquire the potential to become committed member of the community, like any other non-EU migrant or asylum-seeker. In Haringey, a Council officer who worked with migrants shares the same view:

> [Brexit] *has made a real political priority of making sure* [EU] *migrants' voices are heard and recognising that this is people's home. It probably has made sort of EU migrants more of a kind of block to be considered in a way that perhaps they weren't before* (Council Officer 2 – Haringey).

The newly acquired right to be 'considered' differently from before the referendum demonstrates the increased civic legitimacy in this case. This shift in perception is similar to the change in attitude of street-level bureaucrats noted by Ratzmann (2021) while studying EU migrants access to social security services in Germany: the more civil servants saw EU migrants as wanting to become 'Germans' the more they thought of them as deserving access to welfare state just as German citizens. Similarly, after Brexit EU migrants are regarded alike non-EU migrant communities: permanent and committed to become members of the local community, hence civically legitimate.

Within the four cases, Torbay is the Council with the lowest percentage of EU migrants (3.3% according to the 2021 Census data) and the one that in the WCA received the lowest score for both participatory democracy and support services for Europeans during the EUSS. Despite the differences with the other three councils, in Torbay too council actors perceive pre-Brexit EU migrants as transient migrants, while post-Brexit EU migrants are assumed to be permanent and 'rooted':

> *It's because they* [EU migrants] *are here to get on and make some money, but we've got an open mind and we need to push on that door, because clearly, post Brexit, those that are still here are here for the long term. I think so, because travel around Europe is not as easy as it has been, hence clearly those that remained here have probably got deeper roots and plan to be here on the longer term. So, we should be going out to them again.* (Councillor 1 – Torbay).

In this quote the Councillor is saying that because of Brexit the local branch of the party might change their citizens' engagement strategy with pre and post 2021 EU migrants. Similarly to his colleague in Coventry, he assumes that post-Brexit EU migrants are permanent economic migrants with 'deeper roots' (i.e. sense of belonging) in Torbay rather than disengaged mobile workers. Now that they are permanent, they are suddenly worth engaging for electoral purposes. The concept of civic 'legitimacy' (see chapter 3 for more details) surfaces in the unconscious link between the suitability for receiving Council's support or political engagement and the perceived permanency of the migrants. Post-Brexit EU migrants enjoy a higher civic legitimacy thanks to their status of permanent residents. Europeans are now equals to other migrant communities, and, for this reason, deserve the same treatment by the Council.

Two unfounded assumptions seem to sustain the institutional narrative about pre-Brexit EU migrants:

1. they were perceived mobile in nature, regardless of the fact that most of them have lived in the UK for decades. The reality is that migration plans change with time depending on a plethora of contextual factors and life events, such as Brexit (Sime et al., 2020; Tyrrell et al., 2019). No migrant's choice is binary (short-term or permanent), nor indefinite.

2. mobile citizens, who come for work and not to settle, have no stake in the local community.

After Brexit, and the loss of the privilege of freedom of movement, both these two negative assumptions on EU migrants could be reverted. The results illustrated in this section showed how the seismic impact of Brexit on EU migration has the potential to completely reset the narrative and open the way to a more aware and inclusive approach of local authorities with their European residents. A certain degree of caution is required. Certainly, this positive spin of Brexit is not happening everywhere. Lara, Councillor in Hounslow, told me that until now (2024) she had not noticed any particular shift of attitude from politicians and council officers towards the EU migrants. In her borough, political parties kept mostly ignoring EU migrants, because they cannot vote at the General Election and are perceived hard to mobilise, while the Borough Council even before Brexit had already run campaign to inform the EU migrants about their political rights. Lara's insights are a clear signal that it is too early days to say if the 'Brexit effect' is real, or these interviews represent only just few fluky cases dictated by the temporal proximity with the events, and their noble intentions towards post-Brexit EU migrants are destined to fade with time. Yet, the data I created by speaking with council actors do point towards an unintended positive effect of Brexit. From a scholar perspective, in the coming years scholars should investigate a broader range of councils to seek for more conclusive evidence of the 'Brexit effect'.

8.4 Mirror Illegitimacy and Lack of Political Awareness

The interviews to EU migrants surprisingly revealed how EU migrants mirror the characterisation of themselves put forward by council actors: transient, not attached to their place of residence and disengaged from politics. If, on the one hand, EU migrants understand why council actors question their civic legitimacy, on the other they sometimes question their own right to be members of the polity as anyone else. They seem to have internalised the idea of not belonging to their polity, hence being 'illegitimate' holders of political right. For example, in Portsmouth, a Polish participant believes that the mobility associated with EU migrants reduces their stake in the city and, consequently, limits their personal attachment to the local community:

> *I can imagine that they think that, because we have another hometown or another home country, we are not as invested in the English local community where we live.* (EU migrant 3 - Portsmouth).

Indeed, many migrants, and among them many EU migrants, maintain stable plans for a return to the country of origin throughout their stay. This category of temporary migrants is less interested in acquiring and exercising political rights (Ottonelli & Torresi, 2014). However, as we have seen most EU migrants are in fact long-term resident in the UK and are not planning to go back to their country of origin.

A Polish migrant in Coventry interiorised this narrative, shared with council actors, based on perceptions rather than evidence (despite herself being a long-term migrant with no plan to return to Poland). She felt she was not entitled to vote in local elections because she is a foreigner:

> […] *in the beginning I thought that* [voting] *was strange since I'm not British. I think I shouldn't vote if I am not British, because it's not related to me.* (EU migrant 7 - Coventry).

She is a working resident, who lives in Coventry and pays Council tax. Yet, her lack of 'Britishness' is enough to make local democracy irrelevant to her and, at the same time, doubt her ethical right to vote. Even after 16 years in England, this migrant sees herself as a perennial guest who should not interfere in local democracy. The sentiment of being just a temporary resident in the place where one lives, work and pay taxes, is also mentioned by another Coventry participant:

> *I am here, but I'm a little more of a guest than* [a resident]. *I should* [not] *be making decisions or influencing them in a way* [..] *You know what? I do want to know what's going on. I do want to have an influence on that. Yeah, I might be looking into it. To be honest, I wasn't aware that I can actually sign up and go and watch how they* [Coventry's Councillors] *decide matters.* (EU migrant 3 - Coventry).

Her words well describe both themes (Mirror Illegitimacy and Lack of Political Awareness). First of all, she believes that as a foreigner she is not morally entitled to have a say in local politics, no matter for how many years she was a member of that polity. In this regard, it is possible to draw an interesting parallel with non-white migrants in Australia, who experience the same feeling of being 'perpetual strangers' (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2020). Obviously, race and race-related marginalisation are not components of marginalisation experienced by EU migrants, who are for the vast majority white (although Eastern Europeans have been victims of racists' attacks after Brexit). For Europeans, instead on race the reason for self-marginalisation could be found in the internalisation of their status of mobile citizens: the unlimited right to move in and out from the UK imprints in them the idea of always being just 'guests'. Again, the self-exclusion from the local polity based on this form of 'impostor syndrome' is remarkably similar to the narrative created by council actors to justify their lack of interest in engaging EU migrants.

Secondly, the participant was not aware about any participatory channel made available by the Council. Lack of awareness about 'invited' spaces for participation is a recurrent issue among all EU migrants I have interviewed, with very few exceptions. When a minority is not electorally represented, does not exert political pressure through community leadership or advocacy groups, or is not making use of any other mode of participation, formal or informal, it becomes invisible to policymakers and irrelevant for local parties. Regardless of the fact that many English citizens are also either unaware or disinterested in petitions, consultations, Councillors' surgeries, etc., contrary to foreigners, they are still represented within the Council by local politicians with whom share nationality, culture, and social status.

When I made the participant aware of the official channels available for interacting with the Council, she immediately showed interest on the topic. The sudden change of tone suggests that institutional engagement has the potential to modify migrants' political behaviours, in line with Michon and Vermeulen's findings (2013). As I was able to raise her awareness just by mentioning opportunities to participate, it is realistic to assume that the same effect would be achieved if the information had reached her through an institutional channel. It must be considered though that a social desirability bias (Bergen and Labonté, 2020) could be the real underlying cause for the sudden change of heart, as the participant might have wanted to meet what she believed my normative expectations were by declaring future higher levels of political engagement.

A similar lack of feelings of belonging in the local polity is found among Haringey's EU migrants. Sense of belonging in this context is intended as: 'knowledge of being a social group member together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Decieux and Murdock, 2021, p. 267). As long as EU migrant Agne (who is a professional with a higher education degree) was relocating often throughout London, she did not develop any attachment to a place that could motivate her to vote in local elections, therefore fitting the profile of the transient EU migrants with scarce political interest described by council actors:

> *I think before... because I never had a stable place, it was renting, moving around. I never knew how long I am going to stay, so I never got involved in any of these* [elections] […] *being not English sometimes I felt like this is not my place to vote. I felt like maybe my opinions are not of any interest to English people. I felt maybe... yeah, it's just not my place. It's not my country, so I should not be in involved.* (EU migrant Agne, Haringey).

Beside the low sense of political efficacy ('my opinions are not of interest to English people'), which is a strong determinant of individual political participation among first and second-generation migrants (Spies, Mayer and Goerres, 2020) and tend to be low among non-native citizens (Grotlüschen et al., 2021), she shares with other participants from Portsmouth and

Coventry the idea of being an outsider of the community, therefore not entitled to have a voice in local politics.

The same feeling is experienced by a Spanish participant who lives in Torbay:

> *I also don't feel that I have the right to vote. I don't know if that makes any sense, but I don't think I have the right.* (EU migrants 7 -Torbay).

When I reminded her that she is entitled to vote and run for office at local level, she questioned her 'ethical' right to participate in local politics:

> *Yeah, but ethical [right]? If that makes any sense.* […] *I do not know the culture enough to try and...I don't know how to explain it. I'm not English, I don't want to be shamed in that way, or shame myself. Why are you voting in another country? You're not English, why are you trying to decide their future?* (EU migrants 7 -Torbay).

Despite several years spent in Torbay, the fact that she owns a successful commercial activity in the hospitality sector, and that she has no plan to move to another country, she still refers to the future of Torbay as 'their future', not 'our future', as in what happens in the city does not affect a 'guest' like her .

The above interviews show how the idea of EU migrants being somehow illegitimate members of the polity is a narration that travels across the four cases, despite all their differences, and is upheld by both council actors and EU migrants. Unexpectedly, the self-perceived political agency of the interviewees mirrors the civic illegitimacy of EU migrants expressed by some council actors. At an unconscious level Brexit might have a role in creating a sense of anxiety, precarity and otherness even in Europeans who settled in the UK for more than a decade. During the EU referendum campaign, EU migrants were constantly misrepresented by the Leave camp to spread xenophobic and fearmongering propaganda about undeserving migrants stealing from deserving British citizens jobs, housing, and welfare benefits (Outhwaite, 2019). This unprecedented anti-EU migrants rhetoric fired a spike of verbal and physical attacks all over the country (Outhwaite, 2019), and induced in many Europeans a sense of un-deservedness about their right to live in the UK (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al., 2021), that some might have translated in un-deservedness to belong to their local polity.

Even when EU migrants feel proper members of the polity, sometimes they are unaware of their rights and how to participate. Quite emblematic in this sense is another response I received from a Romanian participant in Portsmouth. EU migrant 2 is politically active and passionate about political decisions that affect her: Romanian, EU, Westminster's, but also Portsmouth's. For instance, she campaigned among Romanians to petition the City Council to start a waste sorting programme. She has always voted at local elections since she arrived in England in 2012. Yet,

despite her high interest in politics, she was not aware that after Brexit she is still allowed to vote and run for the Council. Possibly even more surprising, she was completely unaware of other institutional ways to influence local policy making beside voting:

> *'I'm not aware of any other channels that they have when it comes to the inclusion of immigrants, or at least European immigrants when it comes to local matters.'* (EU migrant , Portsmouth).

Besides the unawareness about local political participation opportunities, by making an explicit and unsolicited reference to the lack of inclusive engagement strategies for migrants, the participant demonstrated a low sense of external political efficacy. She seems to doubt the willingness of the Council to seriously account for migrants' voices in policymaking. This is an important insight, as political efficacy is a known predecessor of political participation (Görtz & Dahl, 2021; McDonnell, 2020).

Similarly, EU migrant 3 in Coventry was completely unaware of the participation opportunities provided by the City Council. Believing that the Council is not open to listening to its citizens can contribute to the sense of alienation from the place where the participant lives. These are just few examples, but just a handful of the 31 EU migrants I interviewed demonstrated any knowledge of other forms of political participation beside voting.

A Coventry Council Officer who interacted extensively with EU migrants during the EUSS period observed that Europeans are on average less aware about their rights and how to participate in local politics than native residents:

> *I think that in terms of actually participating [in politics], I would say they [EU migrants] are the same as British citizens, or people that live in a local authority area. But I would say in terms of awareness, I would say it's lesser.* (Council Officer 2 - Coventry).

International migrants have an information deficit compared to local citizens and internal migrants that reinforce known individual depressors of participation such as SES, age, and gender. Targeted information campaigns have the potential to mobilise different strata of the migrant population that are currently politically marginalised because of their lack of familiarity with the political system. An invited space for political participation (Barber, 1984; Kersting, 2013), even if just for passive participation (such as attending full Council sessions), can empower migrants and enhance their place identity and sense of political efficacy. The resulting trust in out-group members enhances community cohesion (Devadason, 2011). In turn, trust in the hosting community produces attachment to the place and higher political efficacy. Both factors are expected to increase migrants' community engagement and political participation (Anton and Lawrence, 2014; Scuzzarello, 2015).

In this respect, EU migrant Agne believes that the Council can play a significant role in facilitating Europeans' political participation:

> *But if maybe the Council got involved and tried to actively encourage others to do something, then perhaps I would have started voting earlier. But I wasn't that interested, and I do not remember any communication, any encouragement...yes, I was registered to vote, but I just wasn't interested. Nobody would talk to me.* (EU migrant Agne - Haringey).

Again, this another example of the low sense of external efficacy I have noted in other participants (e.g. EU migrant 2 from Portsmouth). Her view appears to be common among EU migrants in England. The idea that the Council should inform and encourage EU migrants to engage in local politics was shared by 18 of the 31 EU migrants interviewed for this research, across all four councils . Information nudging prompted a higher voting turnout among Indians in Coventry:

> *Those from the Indian community I mentioned before, they've only just started voting. When we started talking to them, virtually none of them voted. We said: 'Why don't you vote?' and they never engaged in that. Some of them now vote, because we have encouraged them to do so.* (Conservative Councillor – Coventry).

The response to information nudging is known to have positive effect on low-income migrants, who represent a large part of EU-born residents in the UK (Hotard et al., 2019). In line with empirical evidence, the results suggests that a public campaign inviting migrants (not necessarily only of European origin) to register to vote, and then to vote, might have a positive impact in getting the more vulnerable strata of non-British minorities politically integrated.

8.5 The Invisible Migrants

The interviews also highlighted how European communities are less visible and less vocal than other migrant groups:

> *My experience of knocking thousands of doors and talking to all sorts of people from across the EU is that they see themselves as just part of the fabric of Portsmouth and are blended in, we don't see as much focus around the visibility of those communities as entities. […] generally, I think there is more of a blending in and, perhaps, a level of invisibility of some of those communities and what they require. It's often the case that the engagement that you have with any community in the city is driven by them reaching out to you in the first instance because you need those points of contact and I don't see that happening with French, or German, or Dutch, or Romanians - Poles are possibly the one exception - to the same extent that we see from more visible communities such as the Chinese who have been long established here and the Bangladeshis and the Kurds.* (Lib-Dem Councillor - Portsmouth).

The Councillor's baseline assumption is that no demands from a migrant community mean there are no specific needs, and no Council intervention is required. Once again, this belief is not

corroborated by empirical evidence. On the contrary, between 2019 and 2022, first the EUSS and then the Covid19 public health crisis showed how more vulnerable strata among EU migrants are not at all self-sufficient and need Council support.

The Lib-Dem politician, who sits in the Cabinet, links migrants' visibility with the length of the time spent in Portsmouth, like for the Chinese, the Bangladeshi, and the Kurd communities, which have been part of the fabric of the city for multiple generations. A similar perception of EU migrants is found in the words of a Labour Councillor, who sits in the opposition. The contrast between EU and non-EU groups is clear:

> *I've had conversations with groups... it's quite often group individuals who are from countries around the world that have come up in Portsmouth have said to me: 'We don't think the Council is doing enough for our community', or: 'Our community has these particular issues that need to be addressed by the Council, therefore can we work with you, or can you take this up for us?'. I don't think I've ever had that conversation with someone from a European country, at all.* (Labour Councillor - Portsmouth).

EU migrants themselves seem to be aware of their lack of visibility, cohesiveness, and political advocacy, which conversely seem a strength for some African communities in Portsmouth:

> *It's not like the African community, for example. There are churches in Portsmouth where the African community goes. You got lots of different African countries together in the church, blah, blah. There's no such thing for Europeans. So, you don't really know where they are. (*EU migrant 10 - Portsmouth).

At the time of the interview, the first African woman ever had just been elected in the Council. The historical event triggered public celebrations among all Black African communities in the city, regardless of their nationality. The occasion gave the opportunity for a German participant to compare the keen sense of community shared by all Africa-born residents with the tangible lack of cohesiveness of Europeans, both across and within national groups.

> *I think that's a cultural thing* […] *They* [African-born migrants] *use this kind of opportunity to celebrate. A German person wouldn't do that. If you get elected, you might go for a nice dinner with your family, but you wouldn't organise a dance for the whole German community. It's just a completely different culture. They come together and celebrate. They don't care if they know each other or not. They just organise a dance, they publish it, then whoever wants to come is invited and welcomed.* (EU migrant 10 – Portsmouth).

However, this perception is not an accurate depiction of the social reality of Portsmouth, where several self-organised Eastern European communities exist online and offline and occasionally gather for social events. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the Southern port city there is a sizeable Romanian community that manage an electoral polling station to allow co-nationals to vote for Romanian presidential and parliamentary elections:

> […] *there is a sense of community. Social media wise, there's quite a few groups created by a lot of Romanians. Some of them are extremely popular* […] *there is one place in Fratton, which*

> *Portsmouth City Council is aware of. It's organised by a fellow Romanian. Every time we have to vote, for example, for the president in Romania, or somebody in the parliament from Romania, we have that place to go and express our vote.* (EU migrant 2 - Portsmouth).

> *There's a [Romanian] lady who's got a big accountancy business and most of the people who are taxi drivers are self-employed and they are their customers. So, it's within her interests to kind of provide a basic platform for possible support for customers, because most of her customers are Romanian. So, she facilitated this sort of discussion and dialogue and cooperation between members.* […] *So, before the pandemic, she used to organise parties for the first of December, which is the National Day.* (EU Citizen 3 - Portsmouth).

In Torbay, the words of both Councillors from the majority (Lib-Dem) and the opposition (Conservative) show how for the Council the burden of engagement rests on the migrants, rather than on the institution. Since Europeans are not as vocal as other minorities, the logical conclusion is that they are either politically satisfied or are fully integrated within the local community, to the point that they lose their status of foreigners and become just like UK-born residents, despite the evidence showing that EU migrants experiences are far from being the same of native citizens. In both scenarios, they are not expected to have demanded for the local authority:

> […] *potentially BAME [residents] are more in line of sight, whereas with European citizens can be a little bit hidden at times.* […] *They* [BAME residents] *are very much self-starting [politically]. Perhaps people who have views already come forward and put them forward.* (Councillor 1, Torbay).

It is difficult for Councillors in Torbay to imagine EU migrants on the receiving ends of discriminatory practices and behaviours, probably because, contrary to BAME residents, they are white, like over 90% of the local population. This racial bias is akin of what Pruitt calls 'white invisibility' when arguing that in academia low-income white migrants are disadvantaged in comparison to non-whites elites (Pruitt, 2015). A clear example of the stereotypical construction of EU migrants' integration in Torbay is given by a Conservatives Councillor:

> *I think they [EU migrants] blend in and are part of the community, and people don't see them as immigrants or whatever.* […] *They would just be part of the community.* […] *A thing they would do [if in need] is to ask for help. It's what I said at the beginning, unless there's a problem, life goes on. If there was a problem and a family from Italy came and they were in that situation, then of course, the Council would help, in exactly the same way as they would if someone came from Scotland, or anywhere else.* […] *So, the Council has got his work cut out without actually going looking for problems that probably aren't there: what they are there for is when people need help and need support.* […] *it's not an issue in Torbay, it's not the job of the Council to go out and find problems, it is the job of the Council to give full support.* (Councillor 2 - Torbay).

It seems rather unusual, and perhaps out-of-touch, to assert that 'people', i.e. native English, do not see EU migrants as migrants, in a Council where 63% of the electorate voted 'Leave' and when it is common knowledge that reducing intra-EU migration was one of the main drivers for voting Leave (Outhwaite, 2019). Because of this misrepresentation, Europeans are not expected to experience any of the cultural, economic, or social struggles usually associated with other

migrants. This belief is also evident in this other statement from the Conservative Councillor in Torbay:

> [The EU migrants] *are probably very comfortable and don't need any help'.* (Councillor 2 – Torbay).

This opinion is entirely based on stereotypes rather than direct knowledge of EU migrants in Torbay, as per own admission of the Conservative Councillor (who voted Remain and is 'pro-EU'). Unlike other national minorities that collectively seek engagement with local public bodies, Europeans must prove their need to get the Council's attention. If they do not, they are simply assumed to be happy members of the community. Expressing collective demands is key to start a dialogue between migrants and Council's representatives.

In Haringey, where almost one in five residents was born in an EU country, the Borough Council operates along the same lines as the other case studies. The Council seems to be working only with communities that are represented within the Council and/or took the initiative to engage with local politicians or the Council, as explained by two different senior council officers:

> *There was a self-initiated Turkish and Kurdish network. There is, I think, kind of supported by some of our Councillors that have that background* […] *There's also an equivalent kind of group that's emerging for Somali for our Somali community. I suspect that what we'll see is that there might be an emergence of other kinds of groups as well* […] *Where there are networks, it has partly been because people within those communities have initiated them and have approached us.* […] *there is this programme of work about knowing our communities, which is this sort of a first step. So, I think we cannot engage with people who we don't know. But I think also it's not an even picture, there are some communities that are better represented than others.* (Council Officer 1 - Haringey).

> *For example, we've got a really well-established Turkish community in Haringey, we still do specific outreach to that community on things like the early years offer. I think that's more just recognising the needs of the community and the need to speak to that community specifically, rather than them necessarily being underrepresented in the way that some of our new arrivals are.* (Council officer 2 - Haringey).

Both the participants recognised that some communities are more sought than others by the Council. The Council officer spoke about a need that is recognised and that guide the Council's decision to speak with that specific community. This mechanism of acknowledging a community and their needs does not happen with EU migrants. A senior Council officer admitted that during Covid they were surprised and unprepared in front of the number of A8+A2 single men living in dire conditions who dependent on the bank food to survive. They were there before Covid, but without the public health emergency their existence would have never been noticed by their own local authority.

The problem is that, in general, in Haringey too EU migrants' political silence is interpreted as 'they have no issues and do not need us'. EU migrants have the reputation of being as perfectly

integrated in the host society. Because of that, they are equated to native residents. This depiction applies in particular to Western Europeans, who are seen as well-educated and culturally close to native residents, as opposed to Eastern Europeans, who are perceived as 'outsiders' who self-organise in closed and independent communities. Both groups are described as politically silent, albeit for varied reasons. In the eyes of council's actors, being invisible and/or silent justify the lack of institutional interest and of engagement efforts.

Exactly like in the other three councils, in Coventry too Europeans are rather silent. The lack of demands for representation from EU communities is used to justify the approach the Council adopts with them: 'if they needed us, we would hear from them'. Perhaps because of the heavy reduction of financial transfers from the central government suffered over the last decade, the City Council is only reactive, and never proactive, with economic migrants:

> *The* [European] *groups that we have in Coventry have generally been quite self-sufficient and have not been particularly active in saying: 'Oh, we need this, we need that, and we need the other'.* (Council Officer 1 - Coventry).

> *I don't think there's anything strong within Europe as such that I'm aware of. I certainly don't think of any Spanish or Italian or even French communities here that I'm aware of, no.* […] *Do we engage with all the communities? I think it's very up and down. I think we engage* [with some] *more than we do with others.* (Councillor 2 - Coventry).

And, again, in Portsmouth:

> *It's difficult to address an issue that's neither being raised nor visible from people or showing up on any significant dataset.* […] *I am not hearing any kind of need being expressed* [by EU migrants]. (Councillor 1 - Portsmouth).

> *I wouldn't say that European communities have an obvious presence in Portsmouth. Obviously, they are here. The comparison I would give is with the Kurdish and Bangladeshi communities here in Portsmouth are quite large and have an* [organised] *community. There is a Kurdish Community Association, in fact I think there are five or six* [organisations]. *Same with the Bangladeshi community associations. They have an obvious presence, they organise events, invite people along, try to promote their culture and also promote involvement within Portsmouth civic life, etc. I don't really see the same happening with European nationalities, necessarily. It's not something that necessarily comes across your radar. Again, to put a comparison group, the Bangladeshi and the Kurdish communities, quite often are quite politically engaged, so politiciansl actively go and seek them out because they know that they're going to vote and they're trying to curry favour with those particular groups.* (Councillor 2 - Portsmouth).

This last quote also supports the social capital theory, which sees ethnic associationism as a driver for political participation at group level (Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2001; Putnam, 1995; Putnam and Schuster, 2000). In particular, 'bonding' social capital seems to foster political participation in this case (Fennema and Tillie, 1999), rather than 'bridging' social capital, usually considered as a better predictor of migrants' political engagement (Morales and Pilati, 2011). The Council can play an effective role in stimulating the politically organisation of these communities through associationism (Fennema & Tillie, 2004). The idea, which emerges quite clear in many interviews

with council actors, that migrant communities are seen and heard by the public institutions only because they got representatives within the Council or they self-organised and initiated the dialogue with public institutions is nor supported by empirical evidence. In this sort of 'chicken-egg' situation, a virtuous circle of engagement can be started by both sides, the local authority or migrant activists.

Overall, the analysis of the interviews points towards EU migrants' perceived transiency, invisibility, and self-sufficiency as important explaining factors of their low civic 'legitimacy'. The 'illegitimacy' of Europeans is contrasted by the 'legitimacy' of non-European groups who are either well rooted in the local community (e.g. Commonwealth nationalities), or are newly arrived migrants fleeing life-threatening situations, like refugees and asylum-seekers (e.g. Syrians and Ukrainians) and are believed to have moved to the UK permanently.

8.6 Differential Treatment

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is Differential Treatment, which is consequential to Transiency and Illegitimacy. Because of the limited resources at their disposal, council actors use their subjective assessment of migrant groups' commitment to the host society (based mostly on expected length of stay, perceived needs, and visibility) to prioritise some communities over others when planning and executing engagement strategies. In other words, the observed diminished civic legitimacy of EU migrants as community stakeholders is reflected in the limited amount of engagement opportunities they receive in comparison to non-EU groups. This differential treatment is observed in Council's symbolic acts that express closeness and support to specific migrant communities. This quote from a Lib-Dem Cabinet member in Portsmouth is quite revelatory in this sense:

> *We've tended to do some community pride emphasis, by* [having] *the Councillors getting together at the flag-raising on National Day. We've recently done the 75th anniversary of the independence of both India and Pakistan and we've done the Bangladeshi National Day each year, we do that with that community. We've also recently done one with the Ukrainians, because we absolutely want them to feel welcome and safe in Portsmouth. We do it on Pride Week, each year, for the members of the LGBTQ+ community, and we do Armed Forces Day for the veterans' community. It gives them a focal point to come around and say: 'This city recognise the importance of your community in the city'.* (Councillor 1 - Portsmouth).

No support is given for celebrating European nations, despite the Polish and Romanian communities are the two largest foreign groups in the city, and themselves organising celebrations for their national days. These symbolic acts of closeness and inclusion (or exclusion, when absent) are influential in this analysis. Celebrating a foreign national day is a discursive act characteristic of an inclusive political opportunity structure (Morales and Pilati, 2011). Such symbolic initiatives create an emotional bond between foreign-born residents and the hosting

community, promote a sense of place identity, and are inducive of political engagement (Cinalli and Giugni, 2011, 2016). Symbolic and institutional discourse can be as impactful as participation opportunities in fostering migrants' political participation (Cinalli and Giugni, 2011). This aspect is particularly clear in the words of a Labour Council:

> *I know from recent conversations I've had with people from African countries, Nigeria, Zambia, and might be Ghana as well* […] *When it was the Zambian Independence Day, or a kind of national celebration related to that particular nationality, the Council would be supportive of organising events, or promoting it, or celebrating it. They felt that really helped in terms of their ability to get involved in civic life and within local democracy. We had a meeting with these representatives a little while ago and they were asking the question of whether Portsmouth City Council could do more around that, so that's something that we're going to take up.* (Councillor 2 – Portsmouth).

The process is relatively simple, and once put in motion becomes a positive feedback loop that complements the negative cycle theorised in chapter 3: informal contacts between a Councillor and community leaders (bridging social capital) creates the opportunity to make demands, which in turn open new avenues for the political engagement of foreign residents. Politically engaged foreigners with right to vote at local elections become of much more of interest for local politicians, who are then incentivised to reinforce their ties with these communities and to consider their demands. Considering that A8+A2 migrants do have an informal structure that allow them to run community events, including national celebrations, and to provide basic services to fellow nationals, there is a leadership that could be identified and engaged by the Council as a gateway to their broader communities. A relatively low-cost start of this process could be sponsoring their national day celebrations and attend them with an official delegation, as it happens for other national groups.

Beside symbolic and discursive support, we have seen in chapter 5 that the City Council also helped migrants' integration in more practical ways through the 'Gateway Portsmouth' project. The aim of the project, funded by the EU, was 'smoothing migrants' path to integration' . All third countries nationals, except for EU migrants, benefitted from the services offered by the project, such as access to health, education and employment, and training to become community leaders. The exclusion of Europeans was due to funder's restrictions (the EU Commission). Yet, nothing similar has ever been attempted, nor funding sought, for integrating EU migrants. The fact that none of these demonstrative and substantial activities for migrants are accessible to Europeans further confirm Bruzelius' conclusions (2020) about the exclusionary approach to integration services that local governments reserve to EU migrants across all the EU and in the UK.

In Portsmouth, the differential treatment of Europeans is indicative of their low political relevance. Another example of the 'special' relationship between some migrant groups and the local authority was evident when a senior Council officer told me about how the Local Democracy

Team prioritise their engagement activities. When they were promoting electoral registration among specific ethnic minorities with a low registration rate, the choice of the migrant group to target was uniquely driven by pre-existing relationships with the Council:

> […] *that does tend to be approaching some of the groups that the Council works with, to try and promote registration. Within the Bengali community, we've done that. That's probably one of the more recent ones.* (Council Officer 3 - Portsmouth).

When I asked if a similar initiative had ever been undertaken for EU migrants, he replied:

> *I am not aware that it has, I couldn't say that it hasn't, but I'm not aware that it has, no.* (Council Officer 3 - Portsmouth).

It is clear from these words how the lack of relationship between a migrant community and the local institutions implies that the Local Democracy Team would never even try engaging with them, regardless of their size, as in the case EU migrants. In 2022, the City Council created the Inclusion and Engagement Team to reach out migrant groups:

> *I know they* [members of the Inclusion and Engagement team*] went to meet with a Guinean group in the city. They're reaching out and try to build relationships with more different groups. I think there are various groups already liaising with different parts of the Council. We are just trying to pull that together and, where we can, we'll try to promote things to those groups. Where we know about them, where we have worked* [with them] *and we've got a good relationship with them. It's just something we're trying to constantly build.* (Council Officer 2 - Portsmouth).

Their starting point for planning specific interventions is mapping which nationalities other teams within the Council are already talking to. This approach creates a path-dependency and prevents nationalities that are not engaging with the Council, like EU migrants, from getting any attention from politicians and council officers.

As noted in chapter 5, there are pots of deprivation and social marginalisation among EU migrants in Portsmouth. It seems though that because of the lack of relationship with the Council they have remained off the radar of the Inclusion and Engagement team. A prominent reason the Guyana community gained visibility with the Council is because they 'run events and support each other'. The Eastern European community, in particular the Romanian community, have similar level of self-organisation, and yet, at the time of the interview the Inclusion and Engagement Team had no plan to engage with them. The absence of a recognisable counterpart, like a community organisation or a cultural association, is for the Council a contributing factor in keeping Europeans out of their engagement reach. Indeed, the city Council 'Equality & Diversity strategy for 2019 – 2022' mention as an objective for 'promoting community' to:

> *To work with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors in the city, working to improve partnership and integration between different groups. This integration and*

> *collaboration with diverse and minority groups will work to support our understanding of our communities and their needs.* (Portsmouth City Council, 2019, p.12).

This statement is based on the legal obligations for public authorities generated by the Equality Act 2010. Despite all national and ethnic groups being protected categories under such legislation, in the eye of the Council Europeans appear not to qualify for 'integration and collaboration'. An explanation for this attitude is that council actors, who are overwhelmingly white and come from a Christian background, see EU migrants, also overwhelmingly white and Christians, too similar too themselves to need support for their integration. Another possible explanation is that European communities do not demand to the local authority to become beneficiary of integration policies. Even the two biggest ethnic minorities in the city, Romanians and Polish, are not organised in a way that make them relevant to council actors.

In Portsmouth, the few existing institutional relationships with EU communities are instrumental, rather than structural, and motivated only by the need to respond to major crises that affect some European groups disproportionally. For example, the Portsmouth City Council managed to establish a relationship with representatives of the Polish community, through the Community Champions programme, launched in partnership with the NHS to encourage vaccination during the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme focuses on healthcare access and mental health. Long-term political integration is outside the remit of the programme, however the plan of the Council is to make responses to crises opportunities for opening new communication channels with hard-to-reach groups, such as EU migrants:

> *The* [Community Champions] *funding is focused on the pandemic, but our aim is to prove the benefit of it and hopefully be able to secure that for longer term, so that we can use that for various health messaging, or anything that the Council is working on if they want to reach out to different audiences.* (Council Officer 2, Portsmouth).

The channel opened by the Council with the Polish community during the Covid vaccination campaign so far has not led to the establishment of a permanent rapport between the two parties. Comparable situations occurred in the other three municipalities. In Coventry, the major migration wave from the EU began in the 1990s and increased after the EU expansion in 2004, similarly to the rest of the country. Most adult Europeans are still first-generation migrants, as opposed to Commonwealth migrants who arrived decades earlier and are seen as a much more established presence. An EU migration expert (and an EU migrant herself) who works closely with vulnerable EU migrants, especially from Eastern Europe, considers the different timelines of migration waves as a decisive factor in determining the agenda of institutional engagement with migrant communities:

> *People from European countries are a quite new migration. So there's much more support for people from Pakistan, India, or Jamaica, because they are an old[er] migration than the new*

> *European countries which recently joined the European Union, in the last 20 years.* (EU Migration Expert - Coventry).

Similarly, a Council Officer confirms that the Migration Team dedicates most of their resources to more in-need groups, such as refugees from Syria[128]:

> *If my job was only to extend the support of the Council given to Europeans, I would do it. But it's not really. It could be part of my job but, what I'm doing to European migrants is a small fraction of what I have to do daily to asylum seekers and refugees.* (Council Officer 3 - Coventry).

Even students, who by definition are just short-term residents and usually disinterested in the fate of a place where they live just 5-6 months a year for three years, seem to have a higher priority than EU migrants when it comes to promoting political participation:

> *A lot of it* [outreach campaigning for registering to vote] *tends to be around areas that are low in terms of registering to vote. I've focused particularly on trying to get the Council to change the way they register students. It's very difficult, because of the way the individual voter registration works, it's almost impossible to do it, but I wanted to try and make sure that we get as many students as we can registered.* (Councillor 1 - Coventry).

The same reasons used to explain not taking initiatives for the political inclusion of EU migrants (no stake in the community and political disengagement) do not seem to be problematic when it comes to students. Once again, a different degree of civic legitimacy motivates differential treatment between two groups of outsiders.

An interpretation for this apparent inconsistency is found in classic rational choice theory: because of their youth, students tend to align with left-wing parties, hence, to mobilise them politically is in Labour's self-interest. An immediate counter to this hypothesis is that at the local level Europeans represent an even bigger electoral constituency than off-site students, therefore engaging with them should be a higher priority for a local politician. However, it does not seem to be the case. In fact, both Coventry Councillors who participated in the research confirmed that they do not actively campaign with EU migrants because they do not see the point of it.

Like Coventry, Haringey is a local authority with a significant EU population that devoted resources to supporting Europeans during the EUSS application period. Despite that, a senior officer admitted the lack of Council's interest in EU migrants:

> *I don't think they* [residents from the EU] *have support in our Council.* (Council Officer 2 - Haringey).

[128] Just in 2022 Coventry received 1941 asylum-seekers. Source: Home Office (2023). *Immigration System Statistics: Year Ending March 2023*.

Existing integration projects are focused on helping refugees and groups from low- and middle-income countries, like the community organisation 'Living Under the Sun', which was born as a migrant-led spin-out of a Council project for migrant women and children under 5:

> *It was a women's project with children and under-fives, and they get to know each other. Out of that, it grew this project [Living Under the Sun]. Now she* [note of the researcher: with 'she', she means the current director of this community organisation] *runs a Community Cafe gardening, bees, honey. She's still doing ESOL, and everything else. So, now we have all the refugees going there, Syrians... whoever's happens to be the refugee group of the moment. So, the Afghans, and also the people who come off the boats* […] *There are lots of ethnic groups that might get grants, get funding, or a commission to provide a service. But I think those groups tend to be Caribbean and African* […] *We give them contracts to work with their local community. I think a lot of groups there are Black groups.* […] *Whether there are other groups, like the groups we're talking about from the EU, it's another matter and I don't know.* (Councillor 1 – Haringey).

Even this seasoned Councillor, who in the past worked very closely with foreign residents, is unable to mention a single partnership between the Council and EU migrant-led organisations, while she seems well aware of many other migrant groups receiving public funding. The Council has an ongoing partnership with PEEC of course, but the funding they provide is focused on EUSS support only, not on migrants' integration in general. The case of 'Living Under the Sun' is emblematic to show how, even in a Council that is migrant friendly and fiercely anti-Brexit, support for EU migrants is always conditioned to some kind of emergency (EUSS, Covid 19) that requires the intervention of the public authority. While there are no structural policies targeting EU migrants' economic, social and political integration, other third-nationals receive targeted funding and engagement regardless of the existence of a contingent and specific need for support.

The apparent lack of interest of local councils in engaging with EU migrants through community-based integration projects does not necessarily entail the perpetuation of the negative feedback loop hypothesized in the theoretical model. The results reveal how the picture is more nuanced and suggest that among Europeans the presence of ethnic and national associationism can have a mediation effect between the individual migrant and the institution that, in theory, can foster political participation. For example, in Haringey there is an Eastern European grassroots organisation, PEEC, that over the years has managed to build a trusted partnership with the Council and to receive public funding for helping EU migrants, Eastern Europeans in particular, to deal with legal, bureaucratic issues. PEEC has a similar story to the community organisation New Start 4 You in Coventry. Both organisations do play a role in promoting EU migrants' political participation by informing their 'customers' about their political rights and the importance of participating in local politics, despite having never received such mandate through the Council-funded projects they are part of. These results confirm that through the accruement of bonding social capital, ethnic associationism can play a role for promoting traditional forms of participation

such as voting (Nguyen Long, 2016), mitigating the lack of bridging social capital caused by the limited direct engagement with local institutions.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided preliminary evidence about the role of institutional actors' perceptions in affecting local POS for EU migrants in England. EU migrants are perceived as transient workers who, because of their transiency, are naturally disinterested in the management of their local community. In turn, they are not assigned the same level of 'civic legitimacy' that is given to migrants perceived as permanent. The political invisibility of EU communities contributes to reinforce this conception in councils' actors, which explain and justifies the lack of integration policies benefitting them, especially if compared to the efforts made to integrate non-EU communities. On the other hand, rather surprising results indicate that Brexit might represent an opportunity to break this negative loop that contributes to EU migrants' political marginalisation. It is worth reminding that, given the recency between Brexit and the interviews (most held between 2021 and 2022, immediately after the UK left the EU), these results are far from conclusive and can only suggest the possibility for a change in attitude of local authorities towards EU migrants.

In the next chapter I present other themes emerged from the interviews: 'neglect' and 'disengagement', which represent the effect of transiency, civic illegitimacy, and the consequent differential treatment on EU migrants.

Chapter 9 Neglect and Disengagement

9.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has highlighted how the perception that council actors have of EU migrants affects their decision-making. Because EU migrants are perceived as either well integrated in the community or belonging to closed and hard-to-reach groups, they are 'forgotten' when it comes to migrants' integration policies or political campaigning. Other migrant communities are instead kept in the radar of both politicians and council officers, although for opposite reasons: they are seen as either more in-need (e.g. asylum-seekers and refugees) or as permanent residents with a personal stake in the development of the local community (as opposed to transient EU mobile workers). The difference in perception induces a disparity of treatment, as EU migrants do not benefit from the same integration programmes implemented for non-EU migrants. As a result, because of negative interactions with the authorities (or lack of) EU migrants feel neglected (or even discriminated in some cases). As predicted in the initial theoretical framework, **Neglect** can lead to political **Disengagement**. In this chapter I provide evidence of these two themes constructed during the interviews and how the former influences the latter.

9.2 Neglect and Discrimination

From conversations with EU migrants and EU migrant experts, the perception that street-level bureaucrats discriminate, whether intentionally or not, against the most vulnerable groups of EU migrants when they try to access basic services is quite compelling:

> *Local authority officers are not at the level they should be, so people are struggling because they are declined support they actually should receive. Even benefits for example, I had situations where people who applied for Universal Credit because they lost the job, and they were told that they are not eligible because they are European citizens. And if they prove that they have certain status, the job centre plus advisor didn't know what that means, settled status, and you know, stuff like that. So I think...this makes that people are becoming frustrated and angry, and sometimes if they can't fight about their rights, they struggle a lot.* (EU migrant Expert – Coventry).

"Street-level bureaucrats", a role introduced in sociology by Lipsky (1980), despite their relatively low-rank within their public organisations can act as independent actors that hold a considerable

amount of agency and discretional power in front of 'non-voluntary clients', i.e. disadvantaged individuals who need street-level bureaucrats' support to exert their rights or access welfare programmes. In virtue of their role of gatekeepers of basic public services (policing, healthcare, education, welfare benefits, etc.) they have a great capacity to discriminate and heavily affect their 'clients' quality of life and future opportunities (*ibid*.). This asymmetric power relationship is fertile soil for discriminatory behaviours. There is a rich literature on the historically widespread racism in the provision of social security benefits in Britain (Craig, 2007) and the discrimination suffered by racial and ethnic minorities at the hands of public-facing government officials, either for incompetence, xenophobia, or blatant racism (Hudson et al., 2006). EU migrants in post-Brexit UK are no exception (Dwyer et al., 2019).

The EU migration expert I interviewed was well aware of how the feeling of injustice created by the incompetent and dismissive attitude of civil servants working in Job Centres Plus, who were not even aware of what a Settled Status means, generated in EU migrants feelings of frustration and anger, which are not conducive of political engagement (Mavee, 2015). In reality, the example provided by the participants is not reflective of the role of local officials in creating psychological antecedents of political apathy, as local authorities are not responsible for delivering Universal Credit (UC), which is an individual income-support benefit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions. Still, local councils are responsible for awarding Council Tax reductions to UC recipients and other major welfare benefits and social services, like housing, social care, special education needs, and household income support[129]. For many migrants, who might have a language barrier and/or lack familiarity with the welfare system and local bureaucracy, a helpful attitude and information in their first language can make the difference between being able to claim a benefit they are entitled to or missing opportunities to reduce their economic, social, and political marginalisation (Dwyer et al., 2019). In fact, recent evidence shows how street-level bureaucrats can even incentivise the political participation of their 'clients' (Davidovitz, 2024).

The Coventry City Council is an inclusive and migrant-friendly authority that over the last decade has set up several integration programmes for migrants. Some, like the now ended project 'My Friendly Cities' (2018-2021), implemented in partnership with other local authorities and charities in the West Midlands region, included information and support to navigate the complex world of welfare benefits, and how to exercise political rights. However, due to funder's restrictions none of these programmes were open to EU migrants. The problem is that even inclusive policies can have unintended consequences and lead to marginalisation. For example, the Coventry City

[129] Source: hse.gov.uk/services/localgovernment/services-activities.htm [accessed on 16/05/2024].

Council uses ethnic organisations like NewStart4You to deliver some of these services for migrants. The Haringey Borough Council does the same (e.g. with the Polish and Eastern European Christian Family Centre, PEEC).

Every year the Coventry City Council funds local migrant organisations to support hundreds of EU migrants who are experiencing hardships or have difficulties integrating in the host society. Although recurring to third parties allows the Council to deliver services that local administrations have no longer the capacity to deliver, these organisations often do not have the resources required to reach out to all potential beneficiaries of their services. As shown by both PEEC and NewStart4You, due to lack of resources the civil society organisations that supply migration services can just react to requests for help and support individuals who walk in their offices. As a result, many potential beneficiaries of welfare programmes are left depending on their own capacity to gather information and go through the application process. This situation creates an exclusionary dynamic, where migrants who have a certain level of education and/or social capital can seek help from NewStart4You if they need so, while others remain either unaware of their rights or uncapable to exercise them.

Even when there is direct interaction between migrants in need and council officers, the outcome is not necessarily better. EU migrant 5, who has extended professional experience in working with A8+A2 migrants in vulnerable situations, told me about the frustration and sense of hopelessness generated by the discriminatory behaviour of some council officers in Haringey and other London boroughs, where EU migrants were denied access to benefits, they are entitled to:

> *From personal experience working with Eastern Europeans, when they approach the councils […] the first thing was that they were sent away, they were never listened, they were not taken seriously. They were just being sent away. To make a homeless application at the Council for a foreigner the first reply was: 'No go away, you're not eligible'. Maybe other councils were different, but this is what I hear from the majority of the of the people that I have been working with. When I asked them: 'Did you go to the Council and made a homeless application?' They said: 'Yes, I went to the Council, but they didn't listen. They told me I'm not eligible, they told me to go away'*. (EU migrant 5 – Haringey).

Beyond discriminatory acts perpetuated at the hands of low-ranked bureaucrats (Dwyer et al., 2019; Fekjær et al., 2024; Moody & Portillo, 2011), having been the object of a smear campaign before and after the EU referendum also contributed to alienate EU migrants from local politics (Rzepnikowska, 2019; Sime & Behrens, 2023). Feelings of rejection and marginalisation created by Brexit are transferred from national to local politics, the closest political sphere and the only one for which EU migrants have suffrage rights. In some cases, the emotional drift provoked by the Brexit trauma severely damaged the bond that EU migrants developed with the local community. This effect can have a detrimental impact on political attitudes and behaviours, like in the case of EU migrant 2 in Portsmouth:

> *When I moved to the UK, I used to be more engaged with what is happening at local level, whereas in the past years, and I'm not sure whether it's because of me or Brexit, I've developed some sort of apathy towards politics when it comes to the UK* […] *I don't know whether this coincides with Brexit or not, but it's just I've started to be less and less engaged with what's happening locally* […] *There's been a certain discourse around immigrants in the past 10 years, and since Brexit this issue has become a big one. Yeah, that matters a lot because local politics is a continuation of the national one, right?* (EU migrant 2 – Portsmouth).

Brexit has represented an 'unsettling' event (Grabowska & Ryan, 2024) for many EU migrants who lived in the UK for several years, or even decades, and were fully embedded in the local society. In one night, the referendum demoted 4 million of people from privileged 'EU citizens' to tolerated migrants who needed to prove their right to stay in the country (Zontini & Genova, 2022). This sense of rejection and betrayal from the host society leads to political apathy and disengagement from civic activities (D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018). A Coventry EU migrant Expert confirmed the chilling effect of Brexit on local participation, and she roughly estimated the drop in voting turnout, based on her daily interactions with many EU migrants:

> *I think they are not as much engaged as before. I don't know really many people who are voting. Most of them are just not interested anymore. I feel like there's been a drop. I can't tell you an [exact] percentage, but approximately 25% or 30% was going to vote before [Brexit]. Now it's like 10, or 5%.* (EU Migration Expert – Coventry).

This estimate is based on hundreds of conversations with EU migrants. Even though this is not a representative sample of the whole local EU population, this well-informed participant felt that the drop in political interest and participation produced by Brexit could not be dismissed, in line with recent findings on EU migrants' post-Brexit political behaviours (Siklodi, 2023).

Evidently, feelings of rejection from the receiving country do not favour political integration (Sime and Behrens, 2023). These interviews show how when the sense of othering and un-belonging fuelled by Brexit (Tyrrell et al., 2019; Sime et al., 2022) is not countered by a welcoming and supportive local authority, the risk of creating, or reinforcing, political apathy and disengagement increases.

EU migrant 3 from Coventry is convinced that if the Council informed the EU migrant population about their political rights and participation opportunities this would convince more Europeans to participate in local politics:

> *I think it would be useful [if the Council informed EU migrants]. If people had this knowledge, maybe they would participate more. And yeah…they would actually try to change their surroundings for better.* (EU migrant 3 – Coventry).

This consideration is extended beyond the mere act of voting. Most of EU migrants are almost completely unaware of how they can influence local policymaking, for example through public consultations:

> *I think that they should inform people. If they don't, it's probably because they think that people know. But I didn't know, for example. I actually have wondered myself when people posted about these consultations and things. Where do they get them from? Maybe they work for the Council?* (EU migrant 1 – Haringey)

And citizen panels (in Haringey and Torbay, where they exist, at least formally):

> *I think they should promote it more. So, for example, when they sent out these letters saying: 'Who lives here? Who needs to register to vote? How do you wish to register to vote? By the way we have this [Citizen panel]...feel free to register'.* (EU migrant 3 -Torbay).

In fact, the reason neither councils advertise their citizen panels is that at the time of the interview they were not active. In Torbay, the Viewpoint panel had existed for over a decade but has been long forgotten and has never produced a report. The current administration is planning to discontinue it and launch instead a new platform for citizen engagement that should include all participatory channels managed by the Council. In Haringey, the panel was created only in early 2020, but soon after its launch it was put on hold due to the Covid pandemic, even before the first wave of panellists was recruited.

The London's Borough's plan is still to make the panel as representative of the Haringey population as possible by using a large pool of participants, around 1900 residents. However, while in the recruitment survey participants had to declare their ethnicity, neither country of birth nor nationality were asked. While the survey offered residents born in the Caribbean, Africa, China or India (just to name the most common sending regions) with specific options to identify their ethnicity (e.g. 'Black-Caribbean'), for most EU migrants the only applicable category was the miscellaneous 'White Other', which does not provide any useful information to identify if they are EU-born residents, let alone where they came from. Because of this flaw in the design of the questionnaire, the Council cannot tell how many panellists come from Europe and their country of origin. Consequently, when the panel are finally working, it will not be possible to learn about their needs, views and demands.

To remedy to this statistical flaw, a Haringey Council Officer confirmed that they are committed to changing the demographic set of questions in all their surveys, in order to collect data that inform about the country of origin of the population:

> *We'll use representative or purposive sampling to make sure that either qualitative or quantitative research is representative. Now, obviously, we'll need to integrate that with the new equality monitoring framework, to collect data on a wider range of socio-demographic characteristics, so that we can also consider nationality, for example. There'll be a sampling quota framework that we use to recruit those, and nationality would be a key characteristic that we will recruit against.* (Council Officer 1 - Haringey).

Despite the intention to adopt a more granular approach in collecting demographic data, the senior Council Officer recognises that until now the Borough has neglected EU migrants. When I asked if the Council treated EU migrants like all other ethnic minorities, she replied:

> *Probably not. I think there is a lot of positive work, to address this going on and some of it is quite relatively recent. As I say, there is this programme of work about knowing our communities* […] *Obviously, a starting point is political participation and voter registration as a key issue, you are right to raise that. But then, more widely, the organizations understanding the need to engage with diverse groups will be progressed through the work that we're doing on equality monitoring, because one of the intentions there is to say...is to challenge people to move beyond talking about our BAME communities, to talking about a much more granular understanding of who our communities are and the issues affecting them* (Council Officer 1 - Haringey).

The Council Officer's aspiration for the Borough to 'move beyond' the BAME-centric approach common when dealing with inclusivity and equality is aligned with the position the UK government took on the accepted terminology to be used when referring to non-white British groups on official documents. The acronym BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) was discontinued by the Government in December 2021 because:

> [It] *emphasises certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and Black) and exclude others (mixed, other and white ethnic minority groups). The terms can also mask disparities between different ethnic groups and create misleading interpretations of data*.[130]

The Government's concern is that a sole identifier for Asian and Black citizens is problematic and can exclude or misrepresent the lived reality of all other ethnicities, which include all the Europeans, echoes the 'move beyond' BME attitude declared by the Council Officer. Indeed, most of the Council's effort in equality diversity and inclusion activities tends to communities previously referred to as BAME[131], which represent 27% of the residents, at the expenses of other groups like EU migrants.

A higher institutional focus on issues experienced by residents previously referred to as BAME responds to the fact that EU migrants, in vast majority 'white', are naturally non afflicted by the race-based marginalisation experienced by non-white minorities (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2012). In an ethnic ultra diverse context such as Haringey, one of the most multicultural authority in England[132], the 'whiteness' of most EU migrants becomes a strong enough reason to assume their social and economic homologation with the white British majority (Ryan, 2018).

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[130] Source: ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity [accessed on 17/05/2024].

[131] Since the term 'BAME' was discontinued by the British government, and disowned by many members of the community it represents, in the rest of the dissertation I use instead individuals/citizens/residents/people/communities 'previously referred to as BAME'.

[132] Haringey ranks 14th out of 333 English local authorities for diversity of the population. Source: urbanhealth.org.uk/insights/data/census-2021-how-ethnically-diverse-are-our-boroughs [accessed on 17/05/2024].

If the propensity to pay more attention on non-EU minorities than EU minorities can be expected in diverse councils like Haringey and Coventry, less predictable is the fact that the same institutional 'bias' was also identified in Portsmouth and Torbay, two localities with a much smaller presence of residents previously referred to as BAME. This finding suggests that size of ethnical minorities fails to explain the institutional attitude of local authority. A speculative explanation is that the collective consciousness of British local administrators, who are overwhelmingly white, sees white Europeans as indistinguishable from white British citizens (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2012), regardless of the ethnic composition of their authority.

The Haringey Council Officer also associated inclusion projects with external political efficacy and political participation:

> *I would hope that* [increase in political participation of Europeans]. *I guess my assumption is that people only participate in things [...] where they think they'll have an impact. So they need to see a demonstration of that potential impact.* (Council Officer 1 - Haringey).

The importance of external political efficacy is reiterated by the EU Migration Expert in Haringey, who believes that the Borough Council should intervene to show to EU migrants the effects of local political participation in their daily lives:

> *They could do something. For example, if we vote for Councillors, they should at least [raise] awareness and [advertise] the impact between voting and organising life in your area, so Council services.* (EU migrant Expert – Haringey).

In Portsmouth, both the Romanian migrants I interviewed had clear ideas about the importance for Eastern Europeans to feel part of the polity, a common desire often frustrated by the Council's lack of interest in creating a trust-based relationship with EU migrants. Because of her job, EU migrant 3 has daily interactions with multiple fellow Romanians, and she is fully aware of their most pressing issues when it comes to Council services. According to EU migrant 3, language barrier and attitude of the bureaucrats are the biggest obstacle that prevent many Romanians to engage with the Council:

> *I've a had quite a few people saying that their life would have been easier if the Portsmouth City Council would have made the effort to have a translator or a person who could simply translate what the Romanian would say. Otherwise, there are psychological consequences.* [Imagine] *there's a Romanian knocking at the door of Portsmouth City Council who is already a bit embarrassed that they can't speak the language* […] *They starts to say the words, and when the other person says something back, if they can't understand one, two, or three words, they're completely lost. Then they're pretty much like: 'Okay, thank you, bye, bye. I'm just going to go now', and the problem isn't solved. For* [the Council]*, it's perfect. Because the problem wasn't actually communicated. There's nothing that they can do* [because] *they're not aware of it.* (EU migrant 3 – Portsmouth).

Not being able to provide a translator for such a big community[133] is felt by Romanians to constitute a lack of care from the Council. Moreover, the unsuccessful interactions with the Council leave economic and social issues unsolved and further marginalise the migrants, who are then forced to recur to their own community to find a solution. EU migrant 2 strongly feels that the Council could and should do more to change this trend of self-isolation among Romanians in Portsmouth:

> *It would be great if the Council would do more on raising awareness about what channels of discussions are there. Telling people that you matter, particularly as immigrants. You pay taxes, therefore you're part of this community and you matter in terms of your responsibilities to the community, but also [in terms of] the rights that you have. I don't think there's a lot of things done when it comes to political education and civic education as an immigrant, and I am aware that this is something that needs to come from the individual as well, but […] more should be done in terms of [informing how] to get in contact with the Council and keep up to date with the latest [political] debates.* (EU migrant 2 – Portsmouth).

The participant's choice of words is particularly interesting. The Council's engagement is associated with the concept of 'mattering'. In sociology, 'mattering' is the importance of being significant to others (Lögdberg et al., 2024). In this context, mattering means being seen as members of the community who work, pay taxes, share collective responsibilities but also have rights. Conversely, the absence of engagement from the Council implies that Romanian migrants 'don't matter' to the local institution and, consequently, are not proper members of the community. This theme resonates particularly with the theoretical concept of *'civic illegitimacy*' explained in chapter 3. What interest should a resident who feels invisible have in investing time and energy in being an active citizen of Portsmouth? Sense of belonging and political efficacy are key factors supporting ethno-cultural minorities political participation (Lenard, 2006) and their absence among large national minorities in places like Coventry, Haringey and Portsmouth is likely to either prevent more Europeans becoming politically active or to drag those who have interest in influencing local politics towards disillusionment and political detachment. Another example of institutional neglect of EU migrants in Portsmouth is given by EU migrant 5. She believes that because of the cultural heterogeneity of the group, local political actors struggle to assign a party affiliation to EU migrants, and lose interest in them:

> *I think [the Council] forgot us. I'm going to say they forgot us. I don't think they actually realised that, because we all [come] from very different backgrounds, one can't really say who we will vote for* (EU migrant 5 - Portsmouth).

This argument resonates with a recent study on the political parties' impact on migrants' representation in Polish politics:

[133] 3124 residents, or 1.5% of the entire population, according to the 2021 Census. It's the largest foreign group of the city.

> [The political parties] *also perceive migrants as too small and diverse a group to solicit their support, stimulate their political participation, and offer them regular and structured channels of representation* (Pacześniak & Wincławska, 2024, p. 11).

EU communities are not 'small', but indeed are diverse culturally and socially (all social strata are represented and over 20 different nationalities), hence may not be seen by political agents as easy to target with an effective message, as pointed by EU migrant 5.

Paradoxically, the reason EU migrant 5 was feeling 'forgotten' is not because of lack of contacts with local parties, but because of an actual interaction she had with a Labour activist campaigning for the General Elections years prior to the interview. On that occasion she noticed how after the campaigner became dismissive of her after she discovered she was not entitled to vote, even though she still could vote Labour at the following local elections. Regardless of the activist's motive, EU migrant 5's perception of being neglected because of her nationality left a dent on her opinion of local parties. This feeling justifies a self-identification as outsiders of the polity, while those who 'matter' to the local government, the insiders, are British voters:

> *That's how I felt…that she didn't have time for me because I wasn't a real voter. So, I don't feel like I'm included in the whole...I don't think we are considered and there is a lot of us like that.* (EU migrant 5, Portsmouth).

The key indicators of political marginalisation found in this extract are 'That's how I felt' and 'I am not included'. Migrants' sense of mattering and belonging, both drivers of political participation, are not rational or cognitive processes, but feelings impacted by negative interactions with native citizens (Sime, Moskal and Tyrrell, 2020). Using the CLEAR framework developed by Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker (2006), both EU migrant 2 and EU migrant 5's political disengagement can be traced back to feeling ignored by the Council and the local political system (the '*asked to'* factor in the CLEAR framework). People engage with politics more easily when someone asks them to (Verba et al., 1995).

Interestingly, EU migrant 5 assigned this sense of exclusion from the polity to other EU migrants ('there is a lot of us like that'). Notwithstanding the validity of her claim about other EU migrants, this anecdote is useful to cast light on local political parties' attitude towards EU migrants, who, despite their right to vote, are not seen as a potential vote tank, in stark contrast to non-EU groups. Indeed, some of the local politicians I interviewed admitted that they are not interested in campaigning for EU voters, because they believe they are all disengaged from local politics, hence not worth the effort of campaigning with them. For example, a Labour Councillor in Portsmouth confirmed EU migrant 5's perception when explaining his party's limited engagement with Europeans:

> *Councillors are people who need to be elected and want to get re-elected, and want to get other people elected from our parties...I guess, almost inevitably, there's a greater incentive, or inclination, for us to listen more to the people who we think are going to vote and be engaged during that democratic process. Rightly or wrongly, I suspect that's probably a factor that plays around.* (Labour Councillor – Portsmouth).

If EU migrants are not engaged with local politics, the ensuing assumption is that they are probably also less likely to vote, thus have limited electoral value. Local politicians are then less motivated to engage with them during electoral campaigns. Both Coventry Councillors who participated in the research (a Conservative and a Labour) demonstrated the same reasoning of the Councillor in Portsmouth when they confirmed that they do not actively campaign with EU migrants because they do not see the point of it. They reported engagement activities in their capacity of representatives of their wards and electoral campaigning targeting other migrant communities that have had a strong presence in Coventry for decades, but they did not recall any focused effort in engaging with European groups. Older communities, like Indian and Bangladeshi, seem then to have a higher political salience than more recent migrant groups from Europe.

This narrative appears quite entrenched in council actors. When I asked about the level of political engagement of EU migrants arrived in Coventry after the 2004 EU enlargement, the Conservative Councillor said that A8 and A2 Europeans in particular are 'harder to engage with, but, as they spend more time here, they can be more open', but then used the example of the Indian community to illustrate this statement. According to the Councillor, Indian nationals have only recently started voting in local elections because of direct campaigning from members of his party. This anecdote shows how focused attention from local political elites can increase political participation in migrant groups, in line with Michon and Vermeulen's findings (2013). However, the Councillor attributed the apparent low engagement of European communities only to their relatively recent presence in the city and not to a lack of effort from the Council and local political parties. He did not consider how the successful engagement of Indian voters occurred because of their targeted political campaigning could indeed be replicated with some EU groups. On the other hand, his Labour colleague reported that through door knocking he had noticed occasional interest in local elections from Eastern Europeans, but that in general 'they're not very interested', so his/her efforts to engage with migrants are directed towards other groups.

Two considerations can be drawn out of the Coventry politicians' behaviour: 1. There is a cross-party bias that prevent EU migrants to be seen as potential voters, despite EU migrants showing potential for engagement 2. To engage with EU migrants is seen as a waste of party resources. The second argument is motivated by the goal to maximise the outcome of campaigning and engaging with the public, in line with rational choice theory (Scott, 2000). The first argument does not seem rational though, as both politicians gave examples that imply EU migrants indeed are a

potential vote bank all parties should want to secure for electoral gains. I argue that the reason for this behaviour lies somewhere else, namely in the perceived self-sufficiency of Eastern Europeans and full integration of Western Europeans, and the presumed transiency of both I highlighted in chapter 8.

An alternative explanation on why local parties would not run after EU migrants' vote is that they fear British voters would punish them at the next elections (Buta & Gherghina, 2023; Fieldhouse & Sobolewska, 2013). To disregard minorities becomes then a strategy adopted to avoid paying an electoral penalty from the majority of the public (Pacześniak & Wincławska, 2024). In an overwhelmingly pro-Brexit community like Torbay this explanation is plausible, and in line with the findings reported in chapter 6: i.e. policy choices of local political actors related to Brexit tend to be coherent with the local results of the EU referendum. Conversely, this premise does not apply to a strongly Remain local authority like Haringey, where indeed there have been attempts from the opposition party, the Lib.-Dems (no other party is represented in the Council) to engage with EU migrants., who have been successful[134].

Moreover, the apparent scarce electoral interest is part of a broader rejection of EU migrants within the local political opportunity structure. For example, as seen in the previous chapter, when the Torbay Council decided to create a bipartisan and multi-ethnic panel to investigate ethnic discrimination inside and outside the Council, not only no EU migrants were not part of the panel (as opposed to representatives of previously known BAME groups) but none of them was even interviewed during the hearings.

Not surprisingly, the perception of being ignored by the Council emerges quite strongly from interviews to EU migrants living in the coastal town:

> *The Torbay Council tend to be very good at hiding everything and don't engage with their citizens whatsoever if they can avoid it. It is unfortunately my impression of them.* (EU migrant 4 – Torbay).

For some, this is not a feeling of targeted discrimination, as they deem the Council not to care about none of its residents, not just EU migrants. EU migrant 2 confirms this, when I asked her if she thought the Council cared about EU migrants:

> *They don't even care about the English people, to be honest.* (EU migrant 7 – Torbay).

A similar view is held in Haringey by EU migrant 1, who seems deeply disillusioned about the attention her local authority pays to its residents, regardless of their nationality:

[134] In the 2018 and 2022 Borough Council elections, the Lib.-Dem. managed to consecutively elect an Italian citizen in the Alexadra ward.

> *The Haringey Council only cares about money. Nothing else. It doesn't care about people at all, it doesn't matter. I don't think it matters if there are Europeans or whatever.* (EU migrant Ana – Haringey).

Comparable accounts are also found in Portsmouth and Coventry, where neglect towards Europeans is coupled to the idea that the disconnection of council actors from their citizenry is blind to the colour of their passports. In all four cases, several interviews to EU migrants and EU migration experts contained declarations of mistrust of political institutions and of politicians decoupled from the birthplace of the participant, in line with the overall sense of unresponsiveness and self-servitude of governments felt by citizens in most advanced democracies (OECD, 2020). EU migrants seem not immune to anti-politics sentiment, often fuelled by previous negative experiences in their countries of origin. This is type of attitude is not surprising, as migrants feel disillusionment and apathy towards host country politics more than native citizens (Diehl & Blohm, 2001).

Yet, to some extent Torbay diverges from the other three authorities. The Council seems to have a narrow and insular vision focused on local residents and British pensioners, which at times evolves in an explicit phobia of all those not indigenous to the Bay. For example, EU migrant 4 thinks that the hate of the outsider is a political reality in Torbay, which in his view explains why there are no EU migrants represented in the Council:

> *I'm not aware of any [EU migrants] having ever run for Council in this town. I mean, not that people shouldn't, but I think they'd have a hard time doing it, potentially, because […] there's a charming lady on the Council, […] a Councillor, who managed to start making xenophobic comments online, just because somebody from outside of this county dared to have an opinion on what people do in Torbay, which I found it was quite astonishing and makes me wonder what would happen if somebody who's not actually from this country dared to have an opinion in front of her.* (EU migrant 4 – Torbay).

Clearly, feeling attacked and marginalised because they are outsiders of the community by a member of the majority in the Council undermine trust in the local government and sense of belonging to the polity (Sime et al., 2020; Sime & Behrens, 2023). EU migrant 4 also feels that EU communities are neglected by the Council, despite their longstanding presence and their relatively large size:

> *In Torbay there's not much engagement from [the Council] with anyone at all. They wouldn't try and engage with European communities, I think. There's been absolutely no attempt of it* […] *But, the communities they do have here and have had for decades, a very large Polish community for instance, they haven't been wanting to do anything for whatsoever.* (EU migrant 4 – Torbay).

Even the party that at the national level has identified the most with the anti-Brexit movement, the Lib.-Dems., at the local level fails to convey the same attention to EU migrants' rights. The inconsistency between the national rhetoric and the absence of any support for Europeans in

Torbay, at time of the interview administrated by a LibDems/Independents coalition, did not go unnoticed in participants who are politically active, like EU migrant 3:

> *Not even the from Lib Dem candidate, I remember, there wasn't any mention of European people. There was a mention of Brexit, of course, because the Lib Dem party was the only party that was truly against Brexit. But it was more...well it was a while ago now, but I remember thinking there was no mention. I don't think they even mentioned it. It was more about economics, and relationships with Europe. I don't remember reading* […] *I am pretty sure there was no mention of European citizens' rights.* (EU migrant 3 – Torbay).

Throughout the interviews with EU migrants some expressed the desire to receive more migrant-specific information and guidance from the Council, including on their political rights. It seldom was an explicit thought, nor did it seem a highly salient issue for the participant, as it often came after a probing question rather than spontaneously. This is likely to be a consequence of the self-selection of the participants: most were active voters, hence not needing further information; some were oblivious of EU migrants' political rights in the UK and could not ask about something they ignored the existence (you don't know what you don't know), and others simply uninterested in local politics. Partially confirming the early socialisation theory (Zingher & Thomas, 2012), among disengaged participants those from Southern and Eastern Europe also expressed very low appreciation and trust in local governments in their own country of origin, so their expectations in terms of policy offer and citizens' engagement in the UK was informed by negative past experiences occurring abroad, making it difficult for them to imagine their local authority performing better and to formulate demands accordingly. Nevertheless, when digging beyond the surface it emerged quite clearly that in all three cases (informed, disinformed, disengaged) the participants felt neglected by the Council and/or local parties.

9.3 Alternative Views

Not all interviewees thought that EU migrants are neglected by their local authorities. Some acknowledged that their Council tried to reach out to their communities and make the support of the institution felt. One of them is EU migrant 4 from Coventry, who is aware of the partnership between NewStart4You and the Council to implement integration and support programmes for Europeans:

> *The Council allows us to do events here, and they are really supportive to be honest. They asked the director of the charity to help them with some Council stuff, like with the Settled Status, and other stuff. Other projects that we work on are also supported by the City Council.* (EU migrant 4 – Coventry).

In the same city, EU migrant 3 appreciates the value of the free translation services the Council offers to all migrants who struggle with English. This type of supports makes them feel welcomed:

> *When I first arrived, I wanted to register to get access to healthcare. So I just registered in Job Centre. Even though I could communicate, my English wasn't perfect. I could communicate quite freely without the help of any translator, but they arranged for one anyway. I bet it's quite pricey for them to do that. It was very inclusive, and I felt very welcome, in a way* (EU migrant 3 – Coventry).

I gathered similar evidence of positive views of the Council in another 'migrant-friendly' authority, Haringey:

> *I can give you an example of a client that I had in the Borough […]. In his case I think that the Council was quite good. They linked him with Connected Communities. They helped him as much as they could, considering his language was limited. They tried to support him, which was nice.* (EU migrant 5 – Haringey).

Because of her job as caseworker for a charity, EU migrant 5 interacted on behalf of the clients with many Borough support services in North London, including her own, Haringey. Although the experiences with street-level council officers are often not that positive, as reported in the previous section, there have been cases where the Haringey's Migration Team made her think that they really cared about the migrant's wellbeing. In Portsmouth, the Council guarantees language support to all children in school who are non-native speakers. EU migrant 6 is one of the translators hired by the Council for French speaking pupils:

> *The school sent me over there to do training about children with an additional language...I don't know if all councils are the same, but I feel in Portsmouth there's a lot of support. (*EU migrant 6 – Portsmouth).

What she is referring to is an important service that in the long-term can contribute to improve the economic and social integration of migrants, as foreign children with language support are likely to perform better at school. First-generation migrant parents can be positively impressed by the level of care provided by the Council to their children and, as a result, develop a sense of belonging in the local community and trust in public institutions. If sustained over time, these feelings have the potential to drive political participation. Another French participant, also based in Portsmouth, remembered trying to take part in a public consultation about the future of the city, a rare case of an interviewee involved in a participatory event promoted by the Council:

> *It was a very interesting idea, their vision on Portsmouth in the future. They were looking for people from all diverse backgrounds, so different origins, nationalities, age groups, activities, and stuff. That was a quite fabulous idea. I did apply and I didn't get in, and I don't know what happened since then, actually. I don't know if anything came out of that, but it was pre-pandemic, about three years ago. It was a good idea, but I don't know what happened.* (EU migrant 5 - Portsmouth).

Migrant 5's words '('I don't know if anything came out of that…I don't know what happened') let transpire the fact that the lack of transparency about the outcome of the consultation may have prevented this inclusive democratic exercise to become a reason for this EU migrant to follow local politics more closely. As posited in the CLEAR framework (Lowndes et al., 2006), to have

long lasting effects public engagement must be based on clear feedback that make feel the citizens heard and their demands considered (the 'R' of the acronym: 'Responded To').

In Torbay, the Council did not include EU migrants in their enquiry over institutional racism. The lack of EU migrants voices is not because the Council was completely dismissive of their to hear experiences as Torbay residents. They did try to have a Polish resident as a representative of the Europeans in the panel, but that person rejected the offer. This individual had been selected to be part of the anti-racism panel as a spokesperson for Polish nationals because her job puts her in close and constant contact with the Polish community. One hand the Council acknowledged the importance of hearing from the bigger foreign communities in town, but on the other they did not put much effort in trying to find another representative, or someone to interview at the very least. Given the size of the Polish community, or more broadly of all EU communities, they could have found someone else to represent the largest non-British group in Torbay, increase the validity of the report, and make EU migrants feel relevant and protected by their own Council. The panel chair chose not to, apparently for lack of knowledge of EU communities and of their leaders, which speak volumes about the poor quality of the relationship between the local authority and its EU migrants. Nevertheless, EU migrant 2 is convinced that the institutional attitude towards EU migrants is changing in a positive way, and their commitment to fighting the anti-Covid vaccine hesitancy within the Polish community is proof of it:

> [The Council] *said that within the Polish community there was a lower intake of the vaccination, so they got in touch with me, they invited me to their meetings, and they asked me if I knew of possible reasons why some of Polish people don't want to be vaccinated. They wanted to hear my voice, they wanted me to tell [them] what is happening, how they can help, and how they can encourage people to get vaccinated. I don't know about other councils in the UK, but the Torbay Council is definitely shifting its mind.* (EU migrant 2 – Torbay).

In this case, the leading role of the Polish representative in the door-to-door campaigning enhanced the power of persuasion of the message (Barton et al., 2014; O'Mara-Eves et al., 2015). The message on COVID could have been coupled with other message on EU migrant rights, including political rights, but the opportunity was missed. Torbay is not the only case where communication strategies targeting EU migrants were implemented. In Haringey, the Lib.-Dem. party proactively supported the Council during the EUSS application period by distributing 1000s of leaflets to inform EU migrants that every European was requested to apply, regardless of age or years spent in the UK. Quite remarkably, even when councils implement a support programme for EU migrants, like in Torbay, Coventry and in Haringey, they do not include information and promotion of electoral rights, which could have been easily added at no extra cost, showing how their participation is not part of the political agenda, or part of an administrative plans executed independently by officers of these local authorities.

Furthermore, the efficacy of Council's interventions targeting EU migrants are limited by the use of migrant organisations and front-line services, which are more familiar and trusted by EU migrants compared to Council's bureaucrats, for their delivery to the intended recipients. The filter created by the third parties delivering the services reduces the visibility of the local authority in front of the end-users and hides its role as designer and funder of the programme, thus curbing the trust-building effect and political interest generated by the perception of an inclusive and caring institution. In this regard, a worker at NewStart4You confirmed that most of the people that require their services are not aware that the support they received is made possible by Coventry City Council, either by funding them through their own budget, or by channelling external grants (e.g. those still coming from the European Social Fund). The unwanted consequence of the limited institutional visibility is that even in the case of long-term partnerships with community-based organisations, which include financial support, co-designing, and implementation of activities targeting migrant groups, the role of the Council might not be noted by the local EU population. This perception is also confirmed by Council Officer 2, who believe that the average EU migrant is not aware of the support available through them thanks to the Coventry City Council. In the other local authority that actively helped EU migrants during the EUSS application period, Haringey, even the presence of an extremely popular local politician, the Labour MP David Lamy, elected in Tottenham, overshadows the role of the Council in providing basic services to small ethnic and migrant businesses, including those ran by Europeans.

Beside examples of institutional outreach, in the previous section I argued that in all the four councils considered in this study the local branches of the major political parties have shown little interest in engaging with EU migrants, even less in campaigning for their votes, because Europeans are perceived as completely disengaged from local politics, hence not worth the effort (see also chapter 8). However, there is not a clear consensus on this finding. Observational and interviews data provided diverging insights. For example, in Haringey a sitting Lib.-Dem. Councillor born in Italy was elected in the 2018 and 2022 elections. Her presence in the Council shows that it is possible for Europeans to be elected by white British residents (the majority in her electoral ward). Still in Haringey, a Councillor told me that in the build-up to the 2022 local elections the Lib.-Dems ran a campaign to inform/remind EU migrants that they can vote at local level, and that a German-born Lib.-Dems MEP also campaigned in London to convince EU migrants to vote in Mayoral and Borough elections. A similar information campaign occurred in Portsmouth, where the Labour party ran a mail campaign related to suffrage rights:

> *I know that in the past, for example, we have sent a specific letter to EU voters that targeted them, specifically in terms of encouraging people to vote and reminding people that they had the right to vote, even post Brexit et cetera. I'm not sure we ever really got much kind of feedback or engagement following that.* (Labour Councillor – Portsmouth).

This excerpt of interview shows a prominent member of the party who is aware of a past large political campaign aimed at EU migrants but has no recollection of its results. Considering that local parties always try to keep track of potential voters, it seems unusual that the Labour party invested significant resources to run a large campaign and then did not do any analysis of the benefits (or lack of) for the organisation. This amnesia about the effect of mailing all Europeans in town might be a sign of the low electoral priority of the target group, a conscious/subconscious bias of the Councillor about EU migrants' political relevance, or even an answer prompted by a social desirability bias (the participant wanting to look inclusive towards EU migrants) and the mailing might have never happened. Unfortunately, I was not able to corroborate the factuality of this claim.

Still in Portsmouth, a French citizen I interviewed was a Labour candidate a few years ago, but was not elected. In Torbay, a Lib.-Dem. Councillor, member of the party, claimed that his party sent 'mail outs and stuff like that to EU migrants'. It is worth noting that no other interviewees recalled such campaign, so it is possible that the answer was prompted by a social desirability bias, and it is factually inaccurate. These facts prove that occasionally at least two of the main British parties tried to involve European voters. However, when considering the size of EU communities and their electoral potential in all the four councils, the prevailing attitude of local parties towards EU migrants still appears to be of general indifference.

Summarising, the interviews indicates then that the support EU migrants receive does not necessarily translates into increasing their trust in the local government. One of the causes seems to be the lack of positive direct interactions between the migrant and the institution, as well as the low awareness of the institution's role, as a funder and/or as a facilitator, in fostering EU migrants' integration process.

9.4 Political Disengagement

In the previous chapters I have argued that empirical evidence suggests that Europeans are in general disengaged from local politics. The qualitative data I collected depict EU migrants as mostly disinterested in engaging with their councils, due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of what the local government does, among other cultural, social, and political reasons. These findings are supported by quantitative indicators such as the low registration rate in the electoral roll, the almost inexistent representation of EU migrants in both tiers of local governments in England, and a few case studies that point towards a lower turnout in local elections (see chapter 1 for a review of the evidence).

This apparent political apathy does not regard just voting or running for Council: EU migrants, intended as an aggregation of 27 different national communities, seem unable to formulate demands to their local administrators through any of the 'invited' or 'invented' spaces of political participation available at the local level. All participants confirmed the perception that EU migrants are disinformed, disillusioned and ultimately disconnected from local politics. council officers in all four authorities have no doubts in this regard:

> *We have got a significant number of Polish people, Romanian people, and then smaller groups of other EU nationalities in Coventry. We've very much regarded those people as coming into work. They work, they work hard, and in many ways, we've not seen lots of engagement from those people*. (Council Officer 1 - Coventry).

As expected, Eastern Europeans appear to be those mostly alienated from local politics. As described in the theme 'Transiency', the Council Officer believes that since they have 'coming into work', then the implication is that they are not interested in engaging with the Council, which is why, according to this participant, they do not engage. The same understanding of A8 and A2 migrants found in Coventry is repeated in Haringey:

> *Only a fifth of Romanians were on the electoral register. Whereas a lot more...two thirds of French were. Polish, it was kind of half, and I guess that's interesting, because they're often considered as Eastern Europeans, but they did arrive before Romanians and Bulgarians. So, I'd say there's not necessarily voter engagement from new people, and that could be a combination of things as well, in that Haringey is very much a kind of new arrivals Borough. So people come for temporary work, or they come and then they move off to settle elsewhere.* (Council Officer 2 - Haringey).

In Portsmouth, neither of the two senior Council Officers I interviewed, both with competence over local democracy and community engagement (although in different areas) was able to recall any form of relationship between EU communities and the Council, despite the considerable number of EU migrants, especially from A8+A2 countries. As for Torbay, when I asked if the Council had an open dialogue with representatives of the Polish community (the largest nationality in town after the British one) the Council officer replied that there is none, because the focus of the Council is to engage with elderly residents and there are not enough resources to work with other demographics.

Equally, politicians do not see the same level of willingness to engage from EU communities than other non-EU migrant groups:

> *Especially our more newly arrived EU migrants, I wonder how connected they feel with the Council, with what we're doing, and what's taking place. I think we have all sort of sets of the community where we could do more and I think your EU migrants probably is one, especially the newer arrivals, cause I think some of the older perhaps feel more connected […] I knock on a lot of doors, and a lot of people...I'll be blunt…with Eastern European names, they say they're not registered to vote.* (Councillor 2 - Haringey).

In Coventry, EU communities are regarded as 'hard-to-reach', despite the fact that is no record of significant attempts to reach out to them. The same happens in Portsmouth, where EU communities are less visible and organised than some non-EU minorities, but their role in the city's economy is evident and council actors are fully aware of their presence and size:

> *What I'm setting myself as a mission is to try and actually improve engagement with harder-to-reach communities, and one of them will be EU. The Bangladeshi community associations, who have an obvious presence, they organise events, invite people along, try to promote their culture and also promote [their] involvement within Portsmouth civic life, etc. I don't really see the same happening with European nationalities. It's not something that necessarily comes across your radar.* (Councillor 2 – Portsmouth).

The visible and engaged Bangladeshi community in this case is used to reinforce the disengagement of Europeans. In Torbay, even a Polish Council officer was not able to mobilise their fellow countrypeople to attend a meeting purposedly organised to talk about minorities' issues:

> *I think we still have an Officer who looks after minorities. I've been to one [meeting] some years ago, I think he was Polish, but about only three people turned up.* (Councillor 2 – Torbay).

The disappointing outcomes of these attempts to involve EU migrants in local politics are evidence of a schism between local governments and EU minorities. The same scenario unfolds through interviews with EU migration experts and EU migrants, who seems disillusioned and detached from their councils, and believe other EU migrants feel the same. This is true in particular for A8 and A2 migrants, who arrived in the UK with a baggage of disappointment about politics acquired in their countries of origin:

> [EU migrants] *are fed up with political parties and stuff like that from their countries...and they have this attitude [when] they move to the UK. They just carry on with this attitude until they learn something more about the local community* […] *I know about Poland, but it's the same about Romanian people, Bulgarians...when I talk with them, they don't believe in politics.* (EU Migration Expert – Coventry).

We know from empirical literature that the political culture experienced in the country of birth is considered a predictor of political and civic attitudes of migrants in the hosting country (Aleksynska, 2011). The longer migrants are exposed to government inefficacy, waste of public resources, corruption, and suppression of basic democratic principles, as in most accession states, the more the political integration in the hosting country becomes difficult (Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants, 2002). In Portsmouth, this seems to be the case among the Romanian community, the largest foreign group residing in the port city:

> *If you're accustomed to a very corrupt government in your own country, you're going to come here and you're going to be like: 'You're not going to be any better, are you?' If you come with that trauma and low expectations, you are just sitting in your bubble, and you're not engaging and you're not involved with anything. […] I think the expectations are so low, that anything, anything at all, that would be positive and to their concern here, would be absolutely amazing.*

> *But again, I realised during the interview that there isn't something that it is addressed directly to EU migrants, not locally* […]*, locally definitely not.* (EU migrant 3 - Portsmouth).

The most interesting insight from this excerpt of the interview is the affirmation that, because of the extreme low expectations about politics A8+A2 migrants take to the UK, it would take very little effort from the Council to make them feel part of the polity and more invested in participating in the decisions that affect all members of the local community. Yet, this 'little' effort is perceived as inexistent by Romanians.

When I asked EU migrant 1 if receiving communications from the Haringey Borough Council targeting EU migrants would motivate her to get more politically active, beyond just voting in local elections, she agreed that it probably would, because she would feel no longer an outsider ('left out'):

> *I think I would, yes. If there were more European citizens like me...because when...if I go in a group where it's just British people, I don't mean to say that they make me feel left out, they don't, but I do feel left out if I'm in a group of just a massive amount of British people compared to people that are not British. So, I feel a bit lonely […] you feel like my voice doesn't have the same value as theirs. If there were more people like me there, I think it would encourage me to go more to participate more and to speak more, maybe.* (EU migrant 1 – Haringey).

The key driver for participation in this case is seeing other EU migrants involved in local politics, which is similar to what occurred to EU migrant 3, who became politically active in Haringey because an Italian friend active in the local Labour party showed her that it was possible to be 'accepted' by British-born party members:

> *In a way, I was facilitated, because my best friend, who was a Labour party activist and also Italian, so...let's say that for me it was maybe more normal to see a European person involved in local politics, whereas for other people, if they are not used to it, maybe it can seem that it is not something for them*. (EU migrant 3 - Haringey Council).

For many 'outsiders', such as non-UK born residents, the lack of engagement with the Council means it is impossible to learn about the local political system and to develop the trust-based bond with the local government that can lead to political participation:

> *I wouldn't take the risk of giving them a hand, already the Torbay Council is quite invisible. I don't know, an actual face!* […] *I don't know whom to go to! […] I don't even know who's the Leader of the Council. I cannot give you a name* [of someone who] *works at the Council.* (EU migrant 7 – Torbay).

A solution to this reciprocal lack of awareness and understanding between EU migrants and their Council could be descriptive representation. Feeling represented in the Council by someone with comparable life experiences would reduce the sense of exclusion felt by EU migrant 7:

> *Somebody who is in my shoes or has been in my shoes can relate to me better than a person who has always been living here will make me listen. I don't know if it would make me vote, but I'd pay more attention. I would be paying more attention to politics and to what this*

> *person has to say, I like to think. Actually, if I feel represented, I'd be keener to take part into* [local politics]. (EU migrant 7 – Torbay).

Similar views are expressed by EU migrant 3 in Portsmouth:

> *First of all, they've never experienced what we've experienced. They can't empathise on that level and, to be fair, at this point, I'm not really sure that they even want to, or if they actually care enough.* (EU migrant 3 – Portsmouth).

Indirectly, EU migrant 3 is advocating for having EU migrants sitting in the Council to represent EU migrants' interests. 14 other EU participants across all categories (EU migrants, Councillors, Officers and EU Migration Experts) and three councils share the belief that seeing more fellow Europeans campaigning for the Council and being elected would draw more of them into the local political arena. Strangely, no participant in Coventry made any reference to the importance of the representation of EU migrants in the City Council. Only a resident from Italy made an explicit mention, but in negative terms, to state that 'it would not change anything'. Several empirical studies have evidenced how descriptive representation is an effective strategy to increase minorities' political participation more than policy alignment or level of public spending (Scholten & Van Ostaijen, 2018; Stout, 2018). Candidates who come from an ethnic or a national minority are perceived by non-native voters as the only ones who can effectively represent their interests, because they are assumed to have had similar life-experiences, which give them a higher empathy and understanding of their needs. EU migrant 3's words fully confirm these findings.

The conundrum is that, in order to achieve political representation, political participation must come first. Minorities' representatives need politically activated communities to be elected, but communities get mobilised by descriptive representation, i.e. a member of their community elected in the Council. It is a catch 22 scenario that need an external intervening factor to be broken, like a Council's intervention, political parties' interest, or a charismatic member of the community who is a political activist. For example, Council Officer 1 told me how in Haringey the Kurds community mobilised because of the political activism of a single member of the community. Another typical case of migrants' mobilisation is the London Borough of Lambeth, home to the Portuguese-speaking community centre and nicknamed 'Little Portugal', the largest Portuguese population in Britain[135]. According to a former Council Officer and to the former Labour local campaign manager, once the party found a Portuguese candidate, Cllr. Diogo Costa, the community rallied behind him and got him elected in the 2022 elections. In this latest case

[135] According to the 2021 Census 2.2% of the Lambeth population is Portuguese, equal to 7,012 people. This is the highest concentration of Portuguese nationals in a single local authority in the UK. Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/internationalmigrationenglandandwales/census2021 [accessed on 11/06/2024].

the role of the Labour party was fundamental in mobilising the Portuguese community by selecting a Portuguese candidate.

These examples integrate a recent comparative studies of 11 Western democracies about the positive effect of migrant candidates on migrants' voting turnout (Geese, 2023). Therefore, the absence of EU migrants in local councils can be the result of the loop *no participation → no representation → no participation*, destined to last until an institutional entity (a Council or a political party) or a strong political entrepreneur emerges to break it. None of the four councils I analysed ever committed to foster EU migrants' political participation, despite the sizeable EU communities they host [136] and the supportive and migrant-friendly institutional cultures existing in Haringey and Coventry (and Portsmouth to a smaller degree).

9.5 Conclusion

The evidence illustrated in this chapter suggests that community engagement initiatives started by the Council can give EU migrants the critical level of political visibility required to induce more participation and long-term political integration. It seems though that this institutional input is often lacking, so the occasional increase of EU migrants' political participation at the local level is left to contextual factors such as the supply-demand structure of the local political system, i.e. the opportunistic strategies of political parties that determine non-native candidates' recruitment and campaigning choices (supply-side) or the emergence of politically ambitious leaders able to mobilise their communities (demand-side) (Hay, 2007; Vintila et al., 2024).

In conclusion, this chapter has confirmed that in England EU migrants are disengaged from local politics. The qualitative data I co-created with the participants corroborated the empirical evidence collected at the national level. The interviews have also revealed how the neglect of council actors towards EU migrants, whom I believe it is not an exaggeration to call 'the forgotten migrants', contribute to the political disengagement found in these communities, in particular from 'new' EU members states. In the next chapter, I discuss the research results across the four case studies and how they fit into the theoretical framework I introduced in chapter 3.

[136] In absolute terms (3.3%), Torbay does not have a large presence of EU migrants, but in relative terms EU migrants are more numerous than any other ethnic minority, including non-white British-born citizens.

Chapter 10 Discussion of the Results

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the outcomes of the thematic analysis of interviews and of the document analysis. While the two elements of the POS I considered to select the case studies (openness of public authorities and general policies towards EU migrants) did not produce the expected variations across the four councils studied in this research, the analysis of primary data still provided interesting insights into the role of the local political context in stimulating or deterring EU migrants' political participation. In light of these results, I reviewed the initial theoretical framework proposed in chapter 3 and elaborated an improved version of the causal process that, together with individual characteristics, determine the level of EU migrants' integration in local politics. Although council actors' perceptions shape EU migrants' low civic legitimacy and justify political neglect, unexpectedly the after-Brexit weakened legal status of oldcomers and newcomers from the EU might induce a change in the way local authorities see EU migrants and facilitate their political integration.

10.2 Small-n Comparison Findings

The two factors I initially considered thought would impact on the political participation of EU migrants in England, seem not to play a significant role in determining how Europeans understand and interact with local politics in their place of stay. Adapting the POS framework elaborated by Morales and Giugni (2011), my working hypothesis was that a local authority supporting EU migrants and open to citizens' participation would have incentivised their political participation. It follows that, in absence of these institutional stimuli, a lesser propension to participate should have been noted in the participants.

Local governments that integrate citizens in the policymaking process increase political trust in public institutions (Swaner, 2017; Volodin, 2019). Political trust is an important precursor of political participation, because it 'is needed to resolve the collective action dilemma in any purposive group' (Fennema and Tillie, 2004, p. 86). By enabling residents to have a voice and keep decision-makers accountable, local governments become a 'hotbed for civic engagement and social trust' (*ibid.*, p. 86). On this basis, prior to the investigation I argued that opening additional avenues for bottom-up participation, like citizen panels, would increase political trust and civic engagement. Furthermore, we know that councils that implement inclusive policies for specific migrant groups strengthen their sense of belonging to the community (Belval et al., 2023). In

turns, feelings of belonging to a place and to the community of people who live there also positively condition migrants' civic and political participation (Sime and Behrens, 2023).

On these premises, each case study was selected as a typical instance of a quadrant in a bi-dimensional representation of local governments' attitude towards EU migrants' political integration. The two dimensions were based on the openness to citizens' engagement in the local policymaking process (Participatory Inclusiveness), and on the level of support to EU migrants during the EUSS period (Institutional Support to EU migrants). While both Coventry and Haringey ranked top of the EU migrants Support Scale (level 5), Haringey was also identified as a local government willing to include their citizenry in policymaking through non-statutory participatory channels, in this case a Citizens' panel. Coventry, on the contrary, scored low in Participatory Inclusiveness, due to the absence of a Citizens' panel. Portsmouth and Torbay did not implement policies meant to help Europeans with their EUSS application and ranked at the bottom of the EU migrant Support Scale. However, in terms of Participatory Inclusiveness, Torbay had a statistically representative Citizens' panel (on paper at least), and was situated in a different square of the table to Portsmouth, which never had a Citizens' panel.

Table 13 Representation of cases along the two selection criteria

Participatory Inclusiveness		**Institutional Support to EU migrants**	
		High	Low
	High	**Haringey**, 264k people, 45k EU migrants, 17.1% of tot.	**Torbay**, 139k people, 4.6k EU migrants, 3.3% of tot.
	Low	**Coventry**, 345k people, 31k EU migrants, 9% of tot.	**Portsmouth**,208k people, 14k EU migrants, 6.7% of tot.

My theoretical expectation was to find signs of higher political engagement of EU migrants in Haringey than Coventry, Torbay and, lastly, Portsmouth, the city that provided neither administrative assistance to EU migrants during the EUSS period, nor did it show openness towards bottom-up forms of democratic participation.

First, the results evidenced how featuring a Citizens' panel accessible through the Council's website does not necessarily entail higher participatory inclusiveness than councils that do not have such a tool. In fact, at the time of data creation (2020-2022), both councils with a Citizens' panel (Haringey, and Torbay) for distinct reasons did not make use of it. In Torbay, the panel has existed for over 10 years but never produced any input to policymaking. In 2022, the Council was

planning to discontinue it and replace it with a more comprehensive citizen engagement portal. Conversely, in Haringey, the Citizens' panel was launched in 2020, but it was immediately halted by the Covid-19 crisis. As of 2022, Haringey was planning to restart the selection of the first wave of panellists. Despite the temporary failure of their citizen panels, both councils still intend to enhance the residents' capacity to influence policy proposals. However, at the time of writing (2024), no action in this direction has been implemented.

Furthermore, the interviews clearly outlined how EU migrants are scarcely informed about ways to participate in local politics besides voting (and sometimes not even voting). Only a handful of participants across the four councils were aware of the existence of public consultations and online petitions or contacted the Council or their Councillors to advocate for a specific policy. This result is not surprising, as previous reports from EU migrants' rights organisations show that many EU migrants are not aware that they can vote or stand in local elections (Bulat and Dzhingozyan, 2020; Gergs and Bulat, 2020; Hammoud-Gallego et al., 2021). Even council actors were not always fully aware of the participatory offer of their institution, and some reported an extremely low response from the general public to Council-led engagement initiatives (in Portsmouth and Torbay). These findings suggest that in general these measures are either tokenistic or just responses to statutory requirements, in line with a well-established body of work (Gilman, 2022; Zadra, 2020). It is then possible to conclude that it is unlikely that this dimension can have a significative impact on the level of political participation of EU migrants[137].

As for the level of institutional support to EU migrants, the councils that helped their EU migrants during the EUSS application period, Haringey and Coventry, did not show any proclivity to get their EU migrants more engaged in local politics. Their political commitment seems to be limited to meeting contingent and urgent needs of the European population, like the EUSS and anti-Covid vaccination sentiments. None of the migrant organisations used to deliver these programmes were asked to also raise awareness about EU migrants' political rights, despite the clear opportunity, at no additional cost, to reach out to vulnerable Europeans who are usually considered 'hard to reach' and are likely to be unaware about their opportunities to participate in politics.

In all four councils, policies aimed at guaranteeing the economic, social, and political integration of migrants are reserved to non-EU groups and asylum-seekers. Reports on migrants' inclusion

[137] An alternative explanation is that there are not good indicators of participatory inclusiveness available at a local level and the one used in this thesis has low internal validity. I believe though that the effort of not only implementing a permanent citizen advisory body, but also to make as descriptively representative of the population as possible is a good tell of attempting political inclusion of all residents, at least on paper. Future research on further similar cases will help to clarify whether this operationalisation of political inclusion is fit for purpose or not.

(e.g. the report on racism of the Torbay Council), free language courses, life skills and employability training, ad-hoc electoral canvassing, formal and informal partnerships with migrants' associations and electoral campaigning target non-EU migrant groups only. Even symbolic acts of inclusion, such as officially participating in the celebration of foreign national days, or singing national anthems of local migrant communities during plenary sessions of the Council, are (with rare exceptions) reserved only to non-EU national groups.

When local councils do target specifically EU migrants is for one-off emergency interventions (such as the EUSS or the Covid19 pandemic) rather planned migrants integration programmes, the outcome of these policies does not seem to increase social trust and political engagement. Because of the cut in central government grants (49% from 2010 to 2018, Eckersley and Tobin, 2019), local authorities can barely deploy resources to meet their statutory obligations. In order to deliver additional services to specific sub-sets of the population they must then rely on third parties, like front-line services (schools, GP surgeries, etc.), foundations, charities, and ethnic organisations. In case of migrants, external organisations present the additional advantage of increasing the outreach and the efficacy of the programmes they implement. Often the third sector achieve better results than local governments' personnel due to pre-existing relationships and linguistic or cultural closeness with the service users (Netto et al., 2001, 2012). For example, this was the case for NewStart4You in Coventry, PEEC in Haringey and Healthwatch Devon in Torbay. Healthwatch partnered with the Torbay Council to run a targeted Covid-19 vaccination campaign among Eastern Europeans, to increase their intake of the vaccine. The Council chose them primarily because they are the official NHS' customers association, but also because in 2021 they employed a Polish national to help with translating campaign messages from English to Polish. For Council's officers, having a member of the Polish community working with Healthwatch increased their capacity to reach more of her fellow countrypeople and to convey a more convincing message.

This engagement strategy was efficient in reaching individuals in need during the EUSS period and the Covid crisis, but seems to have failed to build trust with the more vulnerable groups of EU migrants. Even when they directly benefitted from Council's policies, the institution's role as funder of the programme and managing organisation remained masked by grassroot organisations that interacted with the migrants on the ground, hence attenuating the trust-building effect of these initiatives. In addition, utilising third parties for delivering support services is an inclusive practice that hides an exclusionary side, as these Council's sub-contractors often do not have the capacity to reach all potential beneficiaries. Small charities like PEEC or NewStart4You do not have the resources nor the know-how to run city-wide campaigns and tend to operate only on a walk-in basis. As a result of this limitation, EU migrants who were unaware

about the work of these organisations, or were unable to reach them, ended up being excluded from Council's support programmes they could have benefitted from.

In conclusion, I could not find noticeable differences between the four local authorities I examined in this work. Based on the qualitative evidence collected through interviews and document analysis, neither the institutional attitude towards bottom-up participation or the level of support to EU migrants seem to play a significative role in influencing their political participation. Furthermore, I contend that the higher average SES, education, and social integration of EU15 migrants (Felbo-Kolding et al., 2019; R. King & Pratsinakis, 2020; Wadsworth et al., 2016), which are exogenous to the local context and tend not to vary across England, combined with their loose national in-group ties, determine individual political behaviours regardless of any of the contextual factors considered above. Conversely, the higher internal cohesiveness of A8+A2 communities and the more developed formal and informal transnational networks, together with a lower average SES, language barriers, and a widespread mistrust in political institutions, favours the accumulation of bonding social capital, which is usually not conducive of political participation in the host country (Morales and Pilati, 2011). As chapter 8 shows, both EU15 and A8+A2 groups (although for opposite reasons) tend not to develop those long-term and trust-based relationships with public authorities that would normally incentivise traditional forms of political participation, such as voting, party activism and standing in elections.

Notwithstanding the absence of empirical evidence supporting the posited effects of the local contextual differences on EU migrants' political behaviours, the analysis of the qualitative data also revealed a series of themes, consistent across the four cases, which have implications for the initial theoretical model I proposed in chapter 3.

10.3 Improved Theoretical Model

In chapter 3, I introduced a theoretical model based on the POS framework developed by Morales and Giugni (2011) and an adaptation to political integration of Klarenbeek's migrants' legitimacy theory (2021).

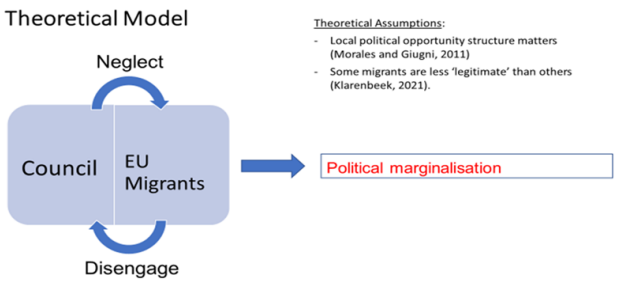

Figure 6 Reminding the Initial Theoretical Model

The two main theoretical assumptions underpinning the model are:

1. English local councils assign to non-EU migrants a higher 'civic legitimacy' than EU migrants, due to the latter's perceived transiency, voluntary isolation from the community, and assumed political disengagement.

2. Local political structures differentiate their policy approach and engagement strategies depending on the country of origin of the migrant communities, which put EU migrants at a disadvantage in comparison to non-EU groups.

Building on these assumptions, I derived a causal mechanism explaining the political marginalisation of EU migrants: institutional neglect generates a negative feedback loop, in which neglected migrants keep or increase their level of political disengagement, hence reinforcing council's actors' perception of their low interest in local politics and, in turn, justifying the differential treatment (see chapter 3 for more details on the hypothesised causal mechanism).

The data analysis developed in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 partially supports the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 and allows for a revised and improved version of the model.

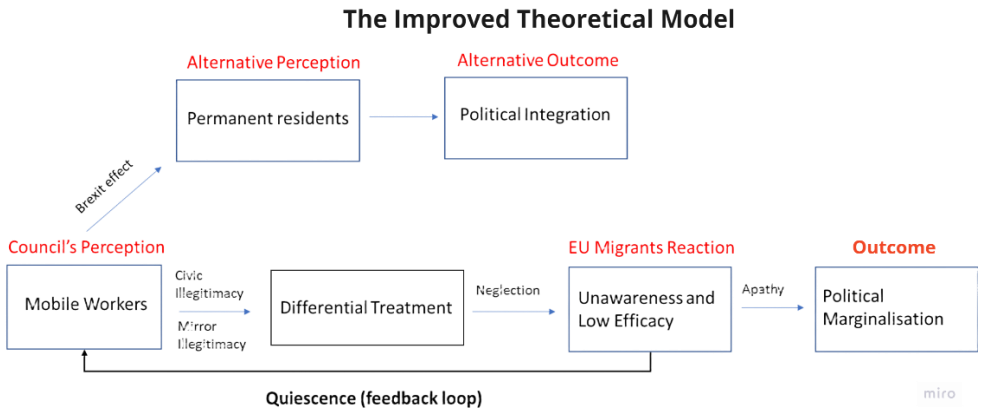

Figure 7 The Improved Theoretical Model

If the initial theoretical model presented a simple reinforcement loop based on mutual perceptions between local authority and EU migrants, the improved version, reviewed according to the findings described in the previous chapters, depicts a more complex and multi-layered causal process. The revised model still leads to politically marginalised EU migrants, but also offers a more positive alternative outcome, thanks to the effect of Brexit: a renewed perception of EU migrants as long-term stayers that them on par with non-EU communities and make them worth the same treatment and political attention (see section.8.3)

10.3.1 Misconceptions about EU migrants

Because of the broad but superficial and deterministic nature of large-n comparative analyses (Ebbinghaus, 2006; Rohlfing, 2013; Sartori, 1991), a WCA of 341 English local governments could not provide insightful explanations of the causal mechanisms that would bring actors with different roles and different aims within the Council (cabinet members, opposition members, council officers) to perceive Europeans as politically disengaged and to adjust their decision-making accordingly. Therefore, to complement the WCA findings, the small-n qualitative part of this research investigated how council actors' perceptions and views about migrants influence their attitudes and decision-making. The results are represented visually in figure 6.

Both council officers and Councillors from all four cases seem to have little understanding of the social and economic reality of their EU migrants (with some valuable exception, such as Councillor 2 in Haringey, a second-generation migrant from Portugal), and tend to fill knowledge gaps using anecdotes and national stereotypes (e.g. 'Polish people are hardworking'). Because of their limited knowledge about EU migrants, council actors often share unverified perceptions that orientate their policymaking and administrative decisions.

The most impactful generalisation is that Europeans are mobile workers who, because of their inherent transiency, do not have the same stake in the future of the city as older migrant communities (e.g. from the Commonwealth) have, or are not in-need and motivated to settle permanently as much as (recently arrived) refugees. This perception is used to explain the view, factually correct, that EU migrants tend not to engage with the Council. EU migrants are assumed not to communicate their political demands because not they do develop sense of attachment to places where they only temporarily live. EU migrants' disinterest in local politics serves as justification for councils' self-serving decision not to engage with them. In short, as hypothesised in chapter 3, EU migrants do not have the same 'civic legitimacy' of non-EU migrants.

10.3.2 The Political Invisibility of EU migrants

Another crucial factor that contributes to councils' disregard of EU migrants is their social and political invisibility. The fact the EU communities are not seen or heard as much as other foreign minorities corroborates politicians' and bureaucrats' prejudgments about their goals, needs, political behaviours, and ultimately their perceived civic legitimacy. The invisibility is fuelled by weak levels of engagement with the Council through advocacy and networking (as opposed to individual and occasional interactions).

EU15 and A8+A2 national communities have different formal and informal levels of self-organisation (see chapter 7). Europeans from 'old' EU member states (EU15) are just loosely connected with each other, and mostly on social media, but enjoy important level of integration in the host society due to cultural proximity with the English and an average SES higher than A8+A2 migrants. From the Council's perspective, EU15 migrants blend-in seamlessly with UK-born residents, to the point that they cease to be considered migrants and become 'mobile citizens'. Because of their invisibility, they are presumed not in-need of particular attention from public authorities.

A8+A2 migrants, on the other hand, show a stronger tendency to bond with fellow countrypeople and to support each other through online and offline networks, as well as to have a visible presence in the economic and social/cultural landscape of the place where they reside. However, they seem to project onto council actors an image of closed and hard-to-reach communities, possibly because of the lack of community representatives advocating for their interest in institutional settings. In this case, physical visibility does not entail political visibility. The lack of self-organisation or advocacy of most EU migrants determines their invisibility outside their national community and determine how outsiders infer their political attitudes and behaviours.

In short, council's actors' perceptions of EU migrants are diametrically opposed. While EU15 migrants are unseen and assumed to be perfectly integrated in the host society and not to have specific issues or needs, A8+A2 migrants are a tangible but silent presence, expected to sort their issues within their own communities, and reluctant to participate in the democratic life of their place of residence. Remarkably, these opposite views merge into a single understanding of all EU migrants, believed by council actors to be residents who do not need nor want Council's help.

The substantive implications of this phenomenon are impactful. Because there are no European voices interacting with policymakers and administrators, mutual misconceptions remain unchallenged and free to shape political decisions and institutional practices detrimental to European migrants.

10.3.3 Perceptions Determine Civic Legitimacy

While conducting the data analysis I noticed how the aggregation of subjective views about foreign residents by policy-makers (Councillors) and policy-implementers (council officers) prompted a natural comparison between migrant groups, which in turn determined a hierarchy of 'civic legitimacy' built upon three criteria. In all three categories EU migrants come after asylum-seekers and/or Commonwealth citizens, the two other main cohorts of foreigners mentioned in the interviews. The criteria are: **1. perceived need; 2. perceived stake in the community; 3.**

perceived political/communitarian gain. The table below summarises the quality of council actors' judgments detected for each group of migrants along these three criteria.

Table 14 Council actors' perception of migrants

	Asylum-seekers	Commonwealth migrants	EU migrants
Perceived need	+	+	-
Perceived stake in the community	+	+	-
Perceived gain	-	+	-

'*Perceived need*' indicates the perception that migrants need support from the Council for meeting basic living conditions and integration services (e.g. housing and ESOL courses). Whereas asylum-seekers are always perceived in need, (due to the fact that they are individuals running from wars and/or political persecutions), and communities from Commonwealth countries (or non-EU groups in general) are often seen as deprived and not well integrated in the host society, EU migrants were never described as populations needing Council's support, aside for contingent and group-specific situations like the EUSS and the Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

'*Perceived stake in the community*' illustrates the belief that migrants who see their place of stay as their permanent home are expected to have self-interest in its improvement and a fair stake in its prosperity.

The last type of perception, '*perceived electoral/communitarian gain*' is linked to both perceived need and perceived stake in the community. If a foreign community is felt as engaged politically, then its members are thought to be more likely to vote or to participate in the civic life of the community (if engaged). This does not apply to asylum seekers, who have no suffrage rights. As for EU migrants, since they are never seen in need or having a stake in the community, they are assumed to be naturally disengaged, thus not valuable target voters during electoral campaigns and for Council's initiatives. Commonwealth citizens are seen as more likely to vote and to engage with the Council because of their longer presence in the UK and their perceived higher embeddedness in the British society. In addition, they enjoy the advantage of having suffrage rights in national elections (just like Irish citizens). Because they can also vote in the much more coveted General Elections, their strategic value as electors doubles.

10.3.4 Mirror Illegitimacy

Surprisingly, several EU migrants interviewed for this research shared the same view about EU migrants' civic illegitimacy expressed by council actors (a phenomenon I termed 'mirror illegitimacy'). Despite not being prompted by leading questions, they spontaneously expressed the feeling of being perennial guests in the UK, even if they spent decades in the country. Because they felt as guests in their own city, they concluded that they have no right in interfering with democratic decisions taken by native residents, although they live, work, and pay taxes in the same Council.

I found examples of this belief in all four councils, which suggest that this sort of 'impostor syndrome' is not an isolated case, but a widespread sentiment of non-belonging in the place of stay that fuel political disengagement. Lara, executive director of the migrant' rights advocacy 'The Migration Democracy Project', confirmed that this feeling of unworthiness to meddle with local politics because just temporary guest is widespread among EU migrants in London. However, the interviews did not reveal why these EU migrants struggle to develop a sense of place identity, no matter how long they have lived in the country. A speculative hypothesis is that having enjoyed freedom of movement for most of their time in the UK, and to some extent still enjoying it if granted a settled status, some EU migrants never lost their 'mobile citizens' attitude and consequently never felt belonging in their place of residence, as they could have left at any time they wanted while keeping the freedom to come back. Ironically, this explanation matches the main reason institutional actors tend to neglect EU migrants. Alternatively, or perhaps overlapping, the lack of belonging might be generated/heightened by the process of 'dis-embedding' provoked by Brexit (Ryan, 2018; Zontini & Genova, 2022). EU15 migrants, who were more attached to the 'liquidity' of their migration and to the freedom of movement are now struggling to redefine their identity as migrants, instead of citizens, in a post-Brexit UK (Genova & Zontini, 2020). Others, such as A2 migrants, who are used to economic crises and political disappointments in their countries of origin, are less affected by feeling of betrayals and loss of identity (*ibid*.).

What we already know that sense of belonging and place identity correlates positively with political participation (Devadason, 2011; Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Voicu and Comşa, 2014). Conversely, it is possible to argue that mirror illegitimacy reinforces civic illegitimacy's detrimental effect on political participation constructed by council actors. On this basis, and in line with the concept of discourse opportunities for migrants' political integration developed by Cinalli and Giugni (2011, 2013), I contend that symbolic acts of inclusion for EU migrants performed by local institutions could be used to counter the disfranchising effect of political neglect. By

acknowledging in an official context their importance for the local community and their place in the collective identity of the city/town, local authorities would boost EU migrants' sense of belonging and build trust in public institutions.

An example of discourse openness is recounted in interviews with by Council's representatives in Portsmouth and in Torbay, where the Council publicly celebrates events linked to sizeable minorities of residents. Such celebrations are regular events on the Council's agenda for several non-EU communities and for other minoritised groups such as the LGTBQ+ community. The participants reported that these form of symbolic inclusivity had the effect strengthening the relationship between the Council and these communities and increasing their members' political engagement. The same practice could be easily applied to EU migrants .

10.3.5 Political Representation Fosters Civic Legitimacy

Another stimulus to EU migrants' civic legitimacy (emerged from the analysis of the data) is having members of national communities as party activists, candidates and, above all, elected representatives. Non-EU migrant groups are represented in all three of the four local governments examined (several in Haringey and Coventry, one Councillor recently elected in Portsmouth). The only exception is Torbay, which, as of 2023, had none. Torbay is also the local authority with the lowest percentage of non-native residents, so the lack of foreign Councillors is not totally unexpected. Nevertheless, in 2019 Torbay's resident elected for the first time a Black Councillor, a pivotal moment symbolising an important political shift for a place with an elderly population overwhelmingly white British and traditionally conservative. The election of a representative of an ethnic minority signifies a slow, but significant, opening to diversity in the local POS. This is a positive sign for EU migrants too:

> *Representation may also provide an important point of access for marginalized groups, providing them with a less intimidating channel through which to engage with elected representatives, and to let their preferences be known on a quotidian basis, outside of periodic elections.* (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011, p. 5)

By seeing minoritised groups represented in the Council, more EU migrants might be encouraged to engage politically. Furthermore, a local POS open to diversity creates more opportunities for 'political entrepreneurs' from the EU to be elected in the Council, reversing the feedback loop presented in chapter 3, from decreasing to increasing participation.

Elected representatives embody the existing ties between minorities and their local government. Descriptive representation gives migrants a sense of empowerment, more trust in the political system's fairness and the hope for a more migrant-friendly political agenda, hence fostering their willingness to engage with politics (Bird, Saalfeld and Wüst, 2011). For local parties, elected

representatives born abroad often become living tokens of the fact that their communities are politically active and the gatekeeper to new vote markets, which in turn incentivise them to try to recruit more members of minorities (Bird, Saalfeld and Wüst, 2011; Geese, 2023). As found in Haringey with the Kurdish and Turkish communities, in Portsmouth with Pakistani and African communities, and in Torbay after the first ever African-descendent Councillor was elected in 2019, but also in Lambeth with the mobilisation of the large Portuguese community, the election of non-British and/or non-white individuals raised the political profile of these minoritised groups. Lara, from the CSO *The Migration Democracy Project*, who has dual Brazilian and Italian citizenships and was herself elected Councillor in the Borough of Hounslow, noted how many Europeans and South Americans not only voted for her because of her double nationality, but in some cases were mobilised to register to vote for the first time, a clear sign of the powerful pull factor of descriptive representation on migrants.

However, Europeans are less politically represented than other minorities. In the absence of reliable statistics, anecdotal evidence points to the fact that nationwide EU migrants very rarely run for office compared to the size of their national communities (Gergs and Bulat, 2020). Three out of four case studies presented in this thesis are no exception to this rule. The only anomaly of this small sample is Haringey, where in 2023 an Italian and a Greek citizens had a seat in the Council's assembly. Still, considering the numerical and historical relevance of European migrants in the Borough, EU Councillors are an oddity rather than a rule. Quite exemplary in this sense is the fact that both Labour Councillors I interviewed were not even aware that they had an Italian-born colleague. The Italian Councillor was not even invited alongside other non-British Councillors to a series of public meetings organised by the Borough that promoted running in local elections among residents who are not politically active (among which are the vast majority of EU migrants). Because of her nationality and her vast social network, she could have attracted to these events a large audience of EU migrants. A clear sign of the disinterest of the current political leadership in having more Europeans represented in the Council. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that these examples of disinterest and neglect of EU migrants occurred in the most multicultural and with the largest EU minority of all the four cases, further evidence of the neglect of EU migrants that tend to reinforce their political marginalisation, which I discuss in the next section.

10.3.6 Neglect

Lastly, the results of this research confirmed the differential treatment of pre-Brexit mobile workers by public authorities compared to other non-European groups already discussed in the literature (Bruzelius, 2020). At the national level, the political neglect of EU migrants was particularly evident during the EUSS application period. The analysis of programmes in support of

EUSS applicants presented in chapter 5 demonstrates how the majority of English local authorities neglected their EU migrants, especially those among the most vulnerable categories (low-income households, lone elderly, homeless, etc.) who needed help to claim their right to stay in the UK.

Undoubtedly, budget constraints resulting from austerity policies severely limited the range of non-statutory expenses a local government can sustain, but for EUSS support ad-hoc government grants were available to public entities and non-profit organisations, and Coventry is a case in point. I argue that a plausible reason for forgetting EU migrants in an historical moment of need is found in their perceived lack of political engagement. In line with my theoretical model and the median voter theory (Congleton, 2008), risk-adverse bureaucrats and election-driven politicians would not see the 'utility' in supporting EU migrants as much as more engaged foreign communities, even more so in local authorities where the majority voted Leave and the Council could risk an electoral backlash.

The findings of the small-n comparative analysis corroborate these results and indicate that the level of perceived civic legitimacy of a group of foreign residents is used by local policymakers and bureaucrats to justify the scoping of migration policies, the selection of target groups for public engagement, and the planning of electoral activities. Accounts from council actors suggest that the higher the perceived civic legitimacy of migrants, the stronger the institutional commitment to integrate those communities economically, socially, and politically. Because pre-Brexit EU migrants tend to be perceived as disengaged temporary residents, as opposed to in-need and permanent asylum-seekers and Commonwealth citizens, then local governments and local parties are inclined to focus resources and energies for social, political, and economic integration towards non-EU groups only, creating a de-facto two-tier system that disadvantages EU migrants.

10.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed to what extent the evidence did, or did not, confirm the existence of a reinforcing loop that strengthen EU migrants' political marginalisation at the local level, as hypothesised by the Initial Theoretical Model (Chapter 3). The emergence of unforeseen themes emerged from the data analysis, such as the 'Brexit Effect' and the 'Mirror Illegitimacy' themes, has increased the fitting of the theoretical model with empirical data, de facto generating an 'Improved Theoretical Model'. Overall, the results confirmed the existence of a mutual feedback between local councils and EU migrants, based mainly on biased perceptions and political quiescence. This negative loop tends to suppress political participation, in line with the initial expectations.

In some EU migrants, this phenomenon is enhanced by their self-identification as transient residents, a perfect, and surprising, mirror of the views held by council's actors (*the mirror illegitimacy*). Unexpectedly, a shift in perspectives seems on the horizon, as Brexit might counter the negative feedback and increase EU migrants political engagement at the local level (*the Brexit effect*).

The next chapter, the last of the thesis, summarises the results and underscores the important implications of these findings, but also the limitations of the study. I propose a research agenda to solidify the reliability of the results and broaden their generalisability. The thesis ends with key policy recommendations to local policymakers for a better political integration of EU migrants.

Chapter 11 Conclusions

11.1 Summary of the Key Findings

In this thesis I demonstrated how perceptions of EU migrants determine their perceived civic legitimacy and influence policymaking and institutional engagement strategies at local level in England. This situation results in the political neglect of Europeans, which I argued induce disengagement and, in turn, marginalise them politically. Surprisingly, the interviews highlighted how some EU migrants also believe in their civic illegitimacy, mirroring council actors' views. Counterintuitively, Brexit might provide an alternative outcome to this feedback process, favouring the thought that political integration of current and future EU migrants in England might be a consequence of Brexit. I named this finding, the 'Brexit effect' (see section 8.4).

The initial theoretical framework (chapter 3), built upon Morales and Giugni's POS model for migrants (2011) and Klarenbeek's 'civic illegitimacy' (2021), posited a negative feedback loop between council actors and EU migrants, which determined the latter's political marginalisation at the local level in England: council actors perceived EU migrants' disengagement and lack of place identity feed EU migrants' perceived neglect by council actors, which in turn fuel the Council actor's perception of EU migrants' disengagement, hence closing the loop.

The data creation occurred in two main phases: initially I made a series of qualitative and quantitative observations of the websites of all 341 English local authorities[138], to determine their openness to participatory democracy and inclusivity, by looking at the presence and the characteristics of citizen panels. Then I looked into the support that local councils gave to EU migrants during the application period of the EUSS, to determine what was the institutional attitude towards EU-born residents. To select the four cases I proposed that councils with a higher propension to include EU migrants in participatory bodies and that designed ad-hoc programmes to support them should show signs of higher EU migrants' political participation. The web content analysis allowed me to rank all local governments according these two dimensions: **Participatory Inclusiveness** and **Institutional Support to EU migrants**, and to then select four councils using a 2X2 high and low values table.

[138] Due to a series of mergers in 2021 and 2022, the total number of English local authorities decreased since my data creation, from 341 to 317. Source: local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/communications-support/digital-councils/social-media/go-further/a-z-councils-online [accessed on 02/06/2024].

Thanks to the comparative nature of the study, meaningful inferences can be made regarding the role of local governments on EU migrants' political participation through their level of democratic inclusivity and support to the EU population. By applying the logic of Mill's method of differences (Savolainen, 1994) I suggest that the consistency of the emerging themes across the four councils implies that Participatory Inclusiveness and Institutional Support to EU migrants play only a marginal, if not null, role.

These results alone do not undermine the premises of POS theory. Although both the 'Support to EU Migrants' and 'Participatory Inclusiveness' variables are seemingly irrelevant in determining the outcome (the level of EU migrants' political participation), the results show that the lack of perceivable effects is favoured by mediating factors that are not considered by the two POS models (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wust, 2011; Morales & Giugni, 2011) I used as building blocks for the theoretical framework. For 'Support to EU Migrants', the emerging mediating factor is the visibility of the of the support to the target public, while for 'Participatory Inclusiveness' is the political meaningfulness of democratic innovations.

As for the former, the reason EU migrants do not seem to react differently to different political opportunity structures lies in the role of actors that are charged by the Council of implementing support programmes. Intermediary agents like civil society organisations delivering *ad-hoc* programmes for migrants, such as EUSS support and anti-Covid vaccination campaigns, severely reduces the public visibility of the institution that designed and/or funded the intervention. I posit that the customer-facing role of front-line and third parties organisations reduced the visibility of local councils as the public bodies enabling and coordinating the support received by in-need EU migrants. The resulting EU migrants' lack of awareness of the Council' key role in helping them prevented them from increasing their trust in local government and from developing a sense of belonging in the local community. Additionally, the limited capacity of third-party entities to reach all EU migrants needing EUSS-related support may have left out a significative part of potential beneficiaries, hence further hampering the positive effects on political participation of group-targeted policies.

The mediating factor impacting 'Participatory Inclusiveness' is the intended purpose of participatory instruments councils make available to their citizenry. Window-dressing initiatives meant to modernise governance systems only on the surface for opportunistic reasons have at best no impacts whatsoever on political efficacy and trust in democratic institutions of the public, and, at worse, a negative net-effect (Gilman, 2022; Iusmen & Boswell, 2017; Zadra, 2020). This study is a case in point of the irrelevance of democratic innovations when they are not supported by political will. Neither of the two citizen panels I analysed, in Torbay and Haringey, had ever

worked at the time of the interviews (2021-2022), for quite distinct reasons. Because the panels were not used, no effect on EU migrants could be ascertained. Within the scope of this research, the absence of evidence in favour or against citizen panels means that it is not possible to make any deduction about the role of 'Participatory Inclusiveness' in influencing EU migrants' political behaviours.

The research has also shown how councils' attitude seems to suit Klarenbeek's critique of the 'two-way' integration theory (2021), which see migrants as 'outsiders' who must earn their moral right to become an integrated part of the hosting society as 'insiders'. Before Brexit, EU migrants were regarded as outsiders, free to come and go as they pleased, and, as such, who did not prove their commitment to the UK and, consequently, unworthy of being considered proper members of the polity. Furthermore, council actors tend to interpret Europeans' lack of political demands at group level as the absence of specific problems and needs rather than an important gap in understanding the needs of a relevant minority that requires an institutional response. The idea that some Europeans might just be voiceless, rather than willingly disengaged, never surfaced during the interviews.

11.2 Some Potential Good News: The Brexit Silver Lining

All considered, the outlook does not seem positive. According to social capital theory (Morales and Pilati, 2011), the low bridging (and bonding for EU15 nationals) social capital of EU communities detected in all four local authorities suggest that in England the political mobilisation of Europeans at local level is unlikely to happen in a spontaneous and bottom-up fashion, unless triggered by a major threat to citizenship rights, as happened after Brexit on the national scale (Brändle, Galpin and Trenz, 2018; Vathi and Trandafoiu, 2022).

Not all is lost though, as the results unexpectedly present a positive aspect. By erasing freedom of movement, EU migrants lost any legal privilege with respect to other migrant groups. Some council actors hinted to the fact that, in this new scenario, by remaining in the country, or by arriving in spite of Brexit, EU migrants are proving their right to be regarded as rightful members of the polity. Their argument is that if EU migrants stay in the UK after having been *de facto* rejected by their native neighbours through a national referendum, or come to the country despite the legal obstacles they were not subject to just few years ago (hence proving their intention to stay in the UK long-term), they would gain the same level of civic legitimacy that council actors associate with non-EU migrants. council actors would no longer see EU migrants as transient and politically illegitimate, but as permanent residents with a stake in their place of residence. The improved civic status should make EU migrants entitled to the same level of

institutional engagement and support to integration received by British residents and non-EU migrant groups, thus breaking the disengagement cycle explained in the Improved Theoretical Model proposed in chapter 10. It is not unrealistic then to expect that in the coming years the political integration of EU migrants might come from a change in perspective of 'insiders' of the local political system rather than from actual EU migrants' behavioural changes.

11.3 Limitations of the Study and Future Research Agenda

This study has a series of limitations. First of all, the results are mostly based on the analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and qualitative document analysis. In addition, the comparative analysis is based on a small sample of four case studies. As such, the conclusions I reached cannot be extended beyond the four cases . Yet, they still provide political participation scholars with solid evidence and a series of useful insights about the role of institutional actors in determining EU migrants political behaviours that should guide future works on this topic.

Secondly, although the interviews were recorded throughout a lengthy period, from 2021 to 2023, this is a cross-sectional research, as no participant was interviewed for a second time after a given interval of time to observe differences in perceptions and behaviours. A cross-sectional study like this one cannot capture how the perceptions that guide participants' choices and opinions evolve in time and they change because of macropolitical events like Brexit.

Brexit, which largely revolved around the legitimacy of EU migrants as rightful members of the British national community, is still a recent event. Research on its the impact on EU migrants' life and their relationship with politics is still in its infancy. Future studies should investigate in particular if the increased civic legitimacy of EU migrants granted by the loss of legal privileges, hinted by some council actors, is an ephemeral consequence of Brexit's recency, or is a lasting effect that will change the local political opportunity structures of EU migrants, and, in turn, increase their political participation.

Nevertheless, this paper contributed to fill an important gap in the academic literature about migrants' political participation and represent a good starting point to develop a much more comprehensive understanding of structural determinants of political participations of foreign-born groups coming from different countries and political cultures. The 27 national communities composing the miscellaneous group I called 'EU migrants' throughout this thesis represent an important and understudied minority in the UK, whose lack of access to national politics and low levels of political participation create both normative and substantive issues.

Pre-Brexit EU migrants in the UK experienced a significative loss of rights (freedom of movement above all) and yet keep partial political rights. Differently from pre-Brexit EU migrants, EU migrants arrived after 2020 must pass through the legal and administrative hurdles that all non-EU migrants always experienced after arriving in the UK. Because of their unique condition of members of the same migrant population (in some cases even co-nationals) who have opposite immigration statuses, pre-Brexit and post-Brexit EU migrants are a perfect case study to understand how the sudden loss of well-established rights impact oldcomers and newcomers' political, economic and social incorporation in the host country. More longitudinal studies should investigate if post-Brexit EU migrants, who must overcome all hurdles to immigration created by the current UK Immigration Law, develop a sense of belonging or keep self-identifying as 'guests' even without enjoying the freedom of movement conceded to their predecessors before 2021.

Another interesting outcome of this study is the apparent lack of noticeable differences in political behaviours among EU-born respondents across the four councils. These results suggest that the other variables applied for the case selection, geographic location and size of the EU community, do not to affect their political participation at local level. A speculative explanation for this finding is that the ubiquitous low saliency of local politics, and the consequent low media coverage, would affect the non-native population as much as it impacts native residents, but more focused studies are needed to better understand this preliminary finding.

In this thesis I just scratched the surface of this topic, which deserves to be further developed and better understood. Nationwide large-n quantitative surveys are needed to test the theoretical framework I described in chapter 10, while more qualitative research should probe further the main themes emerged in this high-level work and search for empirical evidence of differential treatment and political neglect in other places in Britain. Local authorities in devolved nations could be studied to see if different legislative and cultural arrangement within the same country can produced different outcomes. Finally, comparative researchers should investigate beyond the UK to see if the lack of belonging experienced by EU migrants in the UK is experienced by EU migrants in new and old members states, and, if yes, how it impacts their engagement with local authorities.

11.4 Main Findings and Implications

The most interesting and innovative findings of this study are the 'Brexit Effect' and the 'Mirror Illegitimacy'. While other results emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews confirm some expectations derived from the POS theory, namely the negative effect of the lack of institutional engagement and of policy neglect, these two insights, not predicted by the Initial

Theoretical Framework, are important new knowledge that has not been reported in the literature before. These results also have the potential to generate significative changes in the relationship between local authorities and their EU migrants. The 'mirror illegitimacy' theme illustrates the sentiment of 'perennial guests' affecting pre-Brexit EU migrants, even after several years in England. This peculiar feeling is tightly linked with the 'liquidity' of intra-EU migration and the different embedment of EU migrants in the host society (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018). Both elements are consequences of the freedom of movement guaranteed by EU treaties (Ranta & Nancheva, 2019; Ryan, 2018). Mirror illegitimacy has a knock-down effect on political interest, and, consequently, political participation. By throwing light to this phenomenon, this study allows local administrators to induce a positive spin to the mirroring effect by treating them as full member of their polity.

Interestingly, this change of perspective might come from the other main finding of this doctorate, the Brexit effect'. The acquisition of 'civic legitimacy' improves the political incorporation of both pre- and post-Brexit EU migrants. In the eye of council actors, post-Brexit migrants would gain legitimacy because of their willingness to be a long-lasting part of the local community, proven by the willingness to overcome legal and administrative barrier to immigrate in place since 2021. On the other hand, pre-Brexit migrants would be rewarded for not leaving the country in spite of the Brexit-related challenges to their legal, economic and social status. The prize for their loyalty is gaining civic legitimacy and, as a result, becoming members of the club of 'deserving' migrants (Fekjær et al., 2024; Ratzmann, 2021) . Both narratives implicate that EU migrants have finally demonstrated to the local authorities their commitment to their communities.

This rhetoric opens the door for EU migrants' inclusion in Council-run integration and welfare programmes, now that they are seen as full members of the local *demos*, suggests an increasing interest from public institutions and local parties in engaging them. If these changes take place in most of English local authorities, in the middle to long term it is realistic to expect a higher level of political participation and representation of EU migrants. These implications are remarkable: the political incorporation of millions of EU migrants could not only affect local democracy, but have a spillover effect on the national political arena and change the dynamics of Westminster politics.

From a scholar perspective, my doctoral research has progressed the fields of political participation and migration studies by introducing important theoretical concepts, like the 'Brexit Effect' and the 'Mirror Illegitimacy', and by showing the existence at the local level of a feedback loop based on institutions and migrants perception of each other that is detrimental to EU migrants' political integration.

The value of this study goes beyond achieving a better understanding of EU migrants' integration in local democracy, and embraces broader societal issues. Structural constraints to political participation and civic engagement, based on the underlying 'insiders-outsiders' adversarial power dynamic, evidenced by Klarenbeek in her critique of the two-way integration approach (2021), can be found in different marginalised groups, not only based on nationality, but also on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation (LGBTQI+ communities) and disabilities (Caravantes, 2021; Connelly et al., 2024; Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; Willis et al., 2023).

Systems of explicit, or implicit, political oppression may be ubiquitous, but are all context-dependent. At every level of governance, either sub-national, national, or supranational, there are no political, social and economic frameworks that are exactly the same (Wenzelburger & Jensen, 2022). Revealing the specific political opportunities structures of each is therefore extremely important for addressing pockets of political marginalisation, which, as we know, concur to poverty and social injustices (D. Brady et al., 2016; Gilman, 2022; UK Coalition Against Poverty, 2000).

11.5 Recommendations to Council Actors

I want to conclude this thesis with four policy recommendations for council actors based on the research findings, to help facilitate the political integration of EU migrants at the local level:

1. Inform EU migrants about their political rights in England. People cannot exercise rights they are not aware to have (Brady et al., 1995). The lack of knowledge about political rights is a major obstacle to participation when it comes to EU migrants (Gergs & Bulat, 2020). As emerged talking to all four EU migration experts, many EU migrants are not even aware of the fact that they are still entitled to vote and stand in local elections, even after Brexit. This seems to be true especially among A8+A2 citizens. Whereas political apathy is a choice for native citizens, migrants often arrive in the host country completely unaware of their rights, assuming that as foreigners they do not enjoy political rights. A simple but effective information campaign, which could be associated to other campaigns and/or to the annual electoral register canvassing to reduce the costs, can have an immediate and tangible effect on electoral turnout and on the representation of EU migrants in local parties and in Council assemblies.

2. As multiple participants have pointed out during the interviews, EU migrants often feel disregarded by local authorities. To avoid the feeling on neglect, a primary cause of

disengagement from local politics, councils must increase their visibility with EU migrants and create links with EU communities through *ad-hoc* initiatives. It is of paramount importance to enhance the role of the public institution as funder, sponsor, partner, or coordinator of integration programmes addressed to migrants, especially when third parties deliver them. Lack of awareness about the role of the Council when it is not the delivering body can curb the positive effect on political engagement created by policy interventions that increase integration and the quality of life of the migrants. Policy designers should be mindful of the risk of exclusion that the outsourcing of integration and migrant support programmes entails: if the organisation delivering the service to the end-users has not the human and/or capital resources required to map the potential beneficiaries and reach them through outreach initiatives, then the public institution should intervene to ensure that the whole target group is aware of the support and able to access it. If only a minoritarian part of the potential recipients has access to the information, or the cognitive and language capacity to understand it and the social and economic capital to benefit from it, then no growth of familiarity and trust with the local government can be expected.

3. There should not be differential treatment between EU migrants and other foreign groups. Needs analysis based on anecdotal evidence or stereotypical characterisations ('Eastern Europeans are hardworking people', 'EU 15 citizens are fully integrated and do not need help'), even when mostly reflecting the social reality, are not only ethically questionable, prone to produce ineffective policies based on incomplete and/or inaccurate assessments, but are also going to nourish the feedback loop that increase EU migrants' marginalisation. council actors should move away from the distinction between migrants worthy of political engagement and in-need of support and migrants, like the EU migrants, with 'no civic legitimacy' who don't deserve to be targeted by integration programmes and awareness raising campaigns.

4. Political discourse influence behaviours and legitimise group demands as much as policy interventions and institutional openness (Cinalli & Giugni, 2011, 2013). Discursive and symbolic activities in the public sphere can go a long way into increasing EU migrants' place identity and sense of belonging. In all four local authorities examined in this research, the Council regularly celebrates anniversary of historical events and national days of ethnic, religious, national and other minorities, but the same does not happen for EU national groups, even when they represent the largest migrant communities in town. These symbolic actions help to create more cohesive local communities, and establish

important bridges between public institutions and foreign-born residents. Political actors should include Europeans in symbolic recognitions of the importance of minorities for the local community. By doing so, with time Europeans should recognise that the Council also 'care' about them, and, in response, become more interested in local politics. This process should eventually lead to higher political participation.

Given the primary data I created and analysed, I am confident that, if implemented, these policy recommendations for local decision-makers in England allow EU migrants and council actors to know each other better and improve their mutual relationship. In time, these changes will lead to an increase of political participation among EU migrants.

Appendix A WCA Database and Case Selection Process

Michele Zadra Thesis_Annex B_WCA Database

Appendix B Interview Guides

B.1 EU Migrants

A semi-structured interview to an EU migrant living in England might follow these interview guide questions:

Personal information and integration with the migrants' community

1. What is your country of birth?
2. How long and where have you been living in the UK?
3. What is your occupation?
4. Are you an active member of a migrants' community? Do you know/have close relationships with other migrants from EU countries? If yes, how?
5. Do you use social media to keep in touch with other migrants living in the same town/city? Why yes/no?

Relationship with the Council

6. How do you interact with the District/Borough/City/County Council? For what reasons?
7. Do you use the Council's website? To do what?
8. After the Brexit referendum, have you ever sought information regarding your status in UK through the Council's website?
9. Do you believe your Council is supportive of EU migrants? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Political Participation

Country of birth politics

1. Do you keep yourself informed about the politics of your country of birth? How? If not, why not?
2. Do you vote regularly in your country of birth? If not, why not?
3. Do you participate the politics of your country of birth in other ways different from voting? Which ones? E.g. membership/financial support to political parties, political activist groups, NGOs, attending protests, manifestations or political meetings. If not, why not?
4. Do you participate in the politics of your country of birth using the Internet? If yes, how? E.g. social media, Email to politicians, online fora, e-petitions, e-consultations. If not, why not?

UK politics

5. Do you follow British politics? How? If not, why not?
6. Do you vote regularly in the UK? For what election do you vote (general, local, European)? If not, why not?
7. Do you participate in *British* politics in ways other than voting? Which ones? E.g. protesting, membership/financial support to political parties, political activist groups, NGOs, taking part to public meetings or debates. If not, why not?

8. Do you participate in British politics using the Internet? If yes, how? E.g. social media, Email to politicians, online fora, e-petitions, e-consultations? If not, why not?

Local politics

9. Do you follow local politics? How? If not, why not?
10. Do you participate in local politics in ways other than voting? Why yes/no? If yes, which ones? E.g. protesting, membership/financial support to political parties, political activist groups, NGOs, taking part to public meetings or debates, social media, internet forums.
11. Do you participate in local politics using the Internet? If yes, how? E.g. social media, Email to politicians, online fora, e-petitions, e-consultations? If not, why not?

Online Participation and Local Politics

12. Do you use the Council's website to express your views on local issues or to try to influence a Council's decision? If yes, using which channels (e-consultations, e-petitions, councils' social media channels, others)?
13. Are you aware there is a Citizen panel run by the Council? If yes, how did you become aware of the Citizen panel? Are/have you been a member? If not, would you become a member? Why yes/no?
14. Do you believe the Internet can be used to promote EU migrants' interests at national and/or local level? Why yes/no? If yes, how?

EU Migrants and Political Participation

15. Do you know another EU migrant who is politically active (e.g. is an elected member, has ran for office, vote regularly, has a party membership, attend protests/manifestations) at national or local level? If not, why?
16. Do you know another EU migrant who is a member of the Citizen panel? If not, why?
17. Do you believe your national community in your city/town is well organised for advocating in favour of community members' rights and for defending their interest with the Council? If yes, how? Using what offline and online channels? If not, why not in your opinion?
18. Are you aware of other EU migrants' groups politically well organised/politically active? If yes, which ones and how do they engage with local politics? Do they use the Internet?
19. Do you believe some migrant communities are politically better organised and/or more active than yours/others? If so, why?
20. Do you believe that the political culture and democratic tradition of your country of origin influence the way you and your fellow countrypeople and countrywomen participate (or don't) in politics? Do you notice the same in people coming from other EU countries? Why yes/no?

END OF THE INTERVIEW TO AN EU MIGRANT LIVING IN ENGLAND

B.2 Council Actors

A semi-structured interview to a Councillor or a Council officer of an English municipality consist of the following interview guide questions:

Participatory Democracy and E-Democracy

1. Is the organisation culture of the Council favourable to participatory democracy and co-decision mechanisms in policymaking? Why yes/not? If yes, is there any difference between engaging offline and engaging online for the Council?
2. Is the local political environment favourable to participatory democracy and co-decision mechanisms in policymaking? Why yes/not? Is there any difference between offline and online? Why yes/not?
3. If politician - what is your party's position on participatory democracy, at national and/or local level? Why?
4. If politician - what is your party's position on e-Democracy, at national and/or local level? Why?
5. What is your position on participatory democracy? Why?
6. What is your position on e-Democracy? Why?
7. Do the Council's bureaucrats influence the level of participation and/or inclusiveness of online and offline forms of citizen engagement? Why yes/not? If yes, how?
8. In your opinion, what role is e-Democracy going to have in the near future (5 to 10 years) of your city/town?

Citizen panel

9. When and how the Citizen panel was established? Who promoted the initiative?
10. What was your role in the establishment of the Citizen panel?
11. What is your role in managing the Citizen panel?
12. Why do you believe your Council has a Citizen panel?
13. What are the major benefits and weaknesses of a Citizen panel?
14. What is your view on the Citizen panel? Does it work?
15. Is the Citizen panel part of a bigger digital engagement plan? Why yes/not? If yes, how?
16. What other online tools for engaging citizens in the decision-making process are available on the Council's website? What is the added value, or the limits, of a Citizen panel compared to them for you?
17. Is the Citizen panel being actively promoted among the residentx? If yes, how? Does it attract any interest? If not, why is that in your opinion?
18. Does the Citizen panel mirror the composition of the population, in terms of age, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and nationality? Why yes/not?
19. If yes, how does the Council maintain the representativeness of the panel?
20. Is the Council doing anything to make sure migrants' minorities are accurately represented in the Citizen panel? Why yes/no?
21. As far as you know, are EU migrants fairly represented and/or active within the Citizen panel? If not, why?
22. Do you believe a Citizen panel should always mirror the composition of the wider population? Why yes/no?

Migrants' communities and local politics

23. Are there one or more migrants' communities from the EU that engage/collaborate with the Council? Which doesn't? Why they do or don't in your opinion?
24. Which migrant community from the EU is more/less able to influence local politics? Why is that in your opinion?
25. Do you believe EU migrants should vote at all elections, including general elections? Why yes/not?
26. Do you believe it is important that EU migrants' views are accurately represented in the management of the city/town?
27. If yes, do you think this principle apply to e-Democracy tools too?
28. Do you think the Council should do more to engage EU migrants' communities? If so, how?
29. Should the Internet have a primary role in engaging EU migrants' communities? If not, why?
30. In your opinion, how is the relationship between the Council and EU migrants' communities going to evolve in the next 5-10 years, especially in light of Brexit? Will EU migrants be more/less/equally politically engaged? Why?

END OF THE INTERVIEW TO A COUNCILLOR OR A COUNCIL OFFICER

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