

Economic policies in isolation won't lead to growth in Europe

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A study led by Dr Bryony Hoskins at the University of Southampton for the European Commission (EC) has warned of the dangers of concentrating solely on economic policies to create growth in European countries.

The report Participatory Citizenship in the [European Union](#) funded by a €274,996 grant from the EC examines how and to what extent, people in Europe actively take part in society, communities and politics, and identifies any barriers to this.

Lead researcher from Southampton, Dr Bryony Hoskins says, "In the current harsh economic climate across Europe there has been a loss of trust in political leaders and a move towards more extremist parties. It is important for people, especially the young and unemployed, to have their voices heard in the political decision making to mitigate this.

"The study maps the state of play on levels of citizen engagement, and identifies policies and practices to facilitate this across Europe to help find effective strategies to encourage people to get involved."

The research, carried out in collaboration with eight partner institutions in seven European countries¹ was based on the analysis of data on current policies and practices from each of the 27 member states in the European Union (EU), interviews with key experts, and data from existing European and international studies.*

Results have shown that in relation to the economic crisis and creating growth – participatory citizenship, economic competitiveness and social cohesion are interrelated and reinforce each other. The report recommends that strategies are needed to encourage people to get more involved in communities, politics and decision making, at both national level in EU countries, and more locally within individual countries.

The report makes these key recommendations:

- To place an emphasis on learning citizenship, both in schools and outside of school. The study shows people who vote and take an interest in politics and decision-making are usually engaged in diverse forms of learning at different levels.
- To target disadvantaged groups most at risk of unemployment and exclusion and achieve this through engagement in schools; vocational education or training; and youth work.
- The EC should provide long-term strategic and sustainable funding for projects; non-governmental organisations; and programmes encouraging participatory citizenship (to counter those being cut due to the financial crisis).
- Encourage collaboration and partnerships between different types of organisations, such as schools, local authorities, youth groups, charities and businesses.
- Explore the use of new social media to enable wider participation in decision-making by providing more interactive forums for the exchange of information between citizens and politicians.

Barriers and key challenges to participatory citizenship were identified as:

- A lack of trust in politicians.
- The challenge of creating a dialogue between politicians and the public.

- A decline in participatory citizenship generally as a policy priority.
- The need to meet the challenges of the globalised economy; climate change; an ageing population; and an enlarged EU.

The full report, Participatory Citizenship in the European Union, can be found on the European Union website at

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news-events/news/29052012_en.htm

Provided by University of Southampton

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