

Summary of the CIVEX project: Exclusion from civic engagement of a diverse older population: Features, experiences, and policy implications

In Europe's ageing societies, ensuring healthy and active ageing remains a significant challenge for both older individuals and society as a whole. Older adults are at risk of social exclusion across key life domains, including material resources, social relations, access to services, community integration, and civic engagement. Although social exclusion in later life is an important area for research and policy, substantial gaps in knowledge persist, particularly concerning older adults' exclusion from multidimensional civic engagement.

CIVEX aimed to address these gaps by investigating the features of exclusion from multidimensional civic engagement among older adults and identifying evidence-based policy responses. This interdisciplinary research project combined fundamental research with societal impact and encompassed four European countries: Belgium, Finland, Spain, and Sweden. The overarching aim of CIVEX was to examine, for the first time, exclusion from multidimensional forms of civic engagement in later life. CIVEX focused on five key objectives related to the civic engagement of a diverse older population: 1) micro-level variables, emphasizing diversity and intersectionality; 2) meso-level variables; and 3) macro-level drivers of exclusion; exploring how neighbourhoods, communities, and welfare state regimes influence civic engagement; 4) lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion from civic engagement of inclusion and exclusion among potentially marginalized older adults; and 5) life-course perspective, assessing how earlier life conditions and key life stages impact later civic engagement opportunities. To achieve these objectives, CIVEX employed an innovative mixed-methods approach, using a convergent parallel design to compare, relate, and complement quantitative and qualitative data.

CIVEX's findings can be summarized in **four key areas**:

1) Civic engagement is multidimensional: The project revealed the various ways older adults contribute to their communities beyond formal volunteering, including associational membership, informal helping behaviours, political participation, and digital civic engagement. Some of these areas are less explored in existing literature. This diversity underlines the importance of recognizing all forms of civic engagement as equally valuable. Whether formal volunteering, associational membership, informal helping, political participation or even digital engagement, every activity matters to society's fabric. No single form should be prioritized over others.

2) Contextualisation: CIVEX highlighted the complex influences on multidimensional civic engagement from micro, meso, and macro contexts. While previous research has focused more on individual resources and motivations (micro level), CIVEX expanded understanding by illustrating the impact of meso-level factors (e.g physical and social environments) and macro-level influences (e.g welfare expenditure) on civic engagement in later life; contextual factors show to either enhance or hinder older adults' capacity to contribute to their communities.

3) Take a life-course perspective: CIVEX underscored how life events and transitions earlier in life affect late-life civic engagement. Through life-story interviews CIVEX explored the dynamics of civic engagement across the life course and its influence on later engagement trajectories.

4) Embrace diversity in older populations: CIVEX examined the challenges faced by potentially at-risk groups of older adults, highlighting the features, experiences and trajectories of multidimensional civic engagement among older people who receive formal social/health care at home, older people living in residential aged care facilities, older people from diverse migrant backgrounds, and older people living in socially disadvantaged urban areas. Older people in precarious situations face distinct challenges that shape their ability to participate.