

## 250,000 volunteer to get European vote out

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News

The European parliament is pulling out all the stops with a campaign to get people to vote in the upcoming EU elections.



[thistimeinvoting.eu](http://thistimeinvoting.eu)



*Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

Tens of thousands of “volunteers” have come together to help raise awareness of the upcoming European elections.

Some 250,000 EU citizens have agreed to support efforts, spearheaded by the European parliament, to get people out to vote in the 23-26 May elections.

In the last election five years ago, turnout was just over 42 per cent, which continued a downward trend since the first direct elections were held back in 1979.

To buck this trend, parliament has mounted a multi-million-euro awareness raising drive called ‘This Time I’m Voting’ to persuade people to participate.

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As part of the campaign, volunteers have been enlisted to spread the message about the importance of voting in each EU member state.

Some of these volunteers converged on the parliament on Wednesday for a seminar, the latest in a series of similar events being run by the institution as it gears up for the election itself.

Speaking at the event, a parliament spokesman said that when the volunteer scheme was launched in June last year, the aim was to recruit 5000 people who were prepared to give their time, free of charge, to help boost interest in an election that is often overlooked.

The spokesman said, “The number involved has mushroomed to 250,000 and it is rising by an average of 17 per cent every month. The interest has been amazing and shows, we think, the increased interest in these elections.”

One volunteer, 17-year-old Estonian Martina Kukk, said, “Helping with the campaign makes me feel like being part of something bigger: it gives me the opportunity to challenge myself more and doing something for the community.”

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**Estonian campaign volunteer Martina Kukk**

Another volunteer, German Jonas Spiegel, explained what he has done to disseminate information about the campaign, saying, “We built a local group of young people in Saxony. We have organised events in cooperation with others like a big picnic in the park with some speakers. We will also have some info stands at my university and in my city. The week before the election we will spread EU flags around towns in the streets and shops.”

Croatian student Adrijana Nikitovic, aged 22, said, “As a volunteer for the elections I have been organising workshops for Erasmus students on how they can vote as expats in Croatia. My plan is also to focus on motivating first time voters since I found early in my education the importance of voting. On election day itself my idea is to organise events on student campuses to remind students to take part in the elections.”

Danish volunteer Cecilie Sinding said, “I have worked on the campaign mainly through the European Youth organisation where I have organised and promoted events.”

The two-day get-together of volunteers this week is part of a rolling programme. After the Easter break, a short video will be shown in cinemas and on TV slots all over Europe, again reminding the public about the elections.

Journalists from across Europe also attended the seminar, which concludes on Wednesday, as they, according to parliament, are also seen as playing a vital role in making people aware of the value of voting next month.

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Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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