Increased cross-border experiences are driving Europeanisation, particularly among those with a lower level of education, say EU-funded researchers. From having a friend in another European country to online shopping, people around the continent are developing a European mindset. This, in turn, means greater European integration.

The EUCROSS project mapped Europeans’ cross-national experiences and sought to measure ‘transnationalism’. While this term is often used in reference to migrants, “the European project is making everyone transnational to some extent,” says project coordinator Ettore Recchi, based at Italy’s University of Chieti-Pescara during EUCROSS.

The project was designed to find out whether these experiences contribute to a European identity, “a ‘we’ feeling”. If people identify themselves with Europe, this makes for a more unified, integrated Europe rather than a sum of different nations and nationalities following national interests as a primary goal, Recchi explains.

EUCROSS assessed identification with Europe, support for the EU, solidarity with other Europeans and cosmopolitanism.

Talking transnationalism

To understand the link between experiences and mindsets, the EUCROSS team carried out telephone interviews with 6,000 randomly selected members of the general public in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain and the UK. These were followed by face-to-face interviews with 2,500 migrants of Romanian and Turkish origin living in these six countries.

Romanians are, proportionately, the largest group of migrants within the EU, explains Recchi, while Turks make up the largest community of non-EU citizens living in the EU.
The project found a much stronger feeling of Europeanness among Romanian than Turkish migrants, but also found similarities: “Attachment to Europe depends for both groups on not having experienced discrimination,” says Recchi. If they have been victims of discrimination, there is a tendency for the migrants to distance themselves from the concept of ‘Europe’.

**The importance of experience**

The team found that cross-border experiences – such as living or travelling in Europe or knowing someone in or from another European country – all contribute to a European identity. And the number of people with such experiences is quite high – 54 % of those surveyed (migrants not included) were familiar with another European country, while 17% have lived in one.

“I think this is huge,” says Recchi. “It shows that Europe is becoming part of people's horizons.”

**Democratising Europeanness**

“Education counts for a lot” in explaining differences between social groups, says Recchi. Highly educated people tend to be more pro-Europe, but they are also more likely to seize the opportunities created by the single market.

But interestingly, cross-border experiences have an even greater impact on creating a sense of Europeanness among persons with a lower level of education than among the more educated. Transnational experiences therefore play an important role in democratising the sense of belonging to Europe, says Recchi.

Overall, physical and personal (e.g. friends in another country) cross-border experiences were found to have more of an impact than virtual or impersonal experiences. And as physical experiences are so influential, this finding makes a strong case for encouraging intra-European mobility among more disadvantaged Europeans, says Recchi.

And Recchi has another recommendation for policymakers: don’t be too obsessed with European identity.

The EUCROSS project found cross-border experiences have led to a widespread sense of living in a multicultural and borderless society. “This is more important and forward-looking than declaring oneself European,” says Recchi.

Instead of focusing on creating an identity, policymakers should defend mobility, which, in the long run, will pay off in terms of social integration.

EUCROSS finished in June 2014, but the team is continuing to exploit its findings and rich data through scholarly articles.

**See also:**
CORDIS [3]

**Project:**
The Europeanisation of Everyday Life: Cross-Border Practices and Transnational Identities among EU and Third-Country Citizens

**Project Acronym:**
EUCROSS

**Project website:**