



Granting Opportunities for Active Learning

Final publication



December 2011

Project co-financed by
the European Union
within the programme
"Europe for Citizens"



Europe for Citizens
Programme

Introduction

Immigration and immigrants participation represent vivid issues at the European level and affect citizens' daily life throughout the continent. Indeed numerous studies show that migrants are often less integrated in the civil society than nationals and have less opportunities to act as active citizens in their community life.

In that perspective, the project GOAL (Granting Opportunities for Active Learning) aims at promoting citizen participation in the construction of a tighter-knit, democratic, world-oriented and united Europe, tackling the challenge of immigration and emigration as opportunities to develop active citizenship and sense of ownership of the European Union, whilst enhancing tolerance, solidarity and mutual understanding.

The project presents a set of activities that grants citizens the chance to interact – both at the local and at the European level – and offers them the occasion to work together towards a common aim.

GOAL specific aim is to further improve the methodology of “citizens’ panels” adding the component of immigration. These panels are groups of ordinary citizens who would not have spontaneously participated in projects of a European nature and paying attention to involve people of different demographic, social and professional background. These groups meet regularly throughout the project to discuss matters of migration and submit recommendations on this issue to relevant political actors at local and European level.

GOAL foresees a set of activities, having an impact both at the local and at the European level. In one hand, citizens' panels were organized at local level allowing a participatory approach in which European citizens and immigrants develop opinion together. In the other hand, international meetings with partners were organized in order to exchange and draft recommendations based on their analysis of the local situation. These recommendations have been disseminated on local and international level among decision makers and civil society.

The partners of the project are civil society organizations, local and regional authorities and associations of local authorities coming from 6 different countries – old and new EU Member States and pre-accession countries - where immigration represents one of the most vivid issues on the agenda.

This publication aims at presenting the methodology of the project (in particular the methodology of citizens' panels) and its results which consist on recommendations for EU decision makers on the field of immigration in providing advice on ways and means to improve the situation of migrants in Europe.

The methodology of the project

1) General overview of citizens' panels

Definition

Based on a **participatory method** which aim at involving citizens in the different steps of the project, from its conception to the evaluation, citizens' panels are **groups of "ordinary citizens" who would not have spontaneously participated in projects of a European nature and paying attention to involve people of different demographic, social and professional background.**

Aims

Through a bottom-up approach and an innovative methodology, citizens' panels main objective is to tackle one of the major challenges of the European Union today, i.e. to bridge the gap between the European citizens and the European institutions.

They aim at encouraging citizens' active participation at European level and stimulate dialogue between European citizens and institutions.

The ultimate aim of the citizens' panels is to submit recommendations on the selected theme to EU institutions.

Methodology

Citizens' panels are characterised by an active interaction between all the actors involved (citizens, local authorities, EU Institutions), in order to encourage and support the active participation of citizens and to promote the dialogue between them and the Institutions of the EU.

IT methods and Tools, especially the free ones (blogs, facebook, etc) will be also promoted to encourage and facilitate interaction and participation. Media should also be involved.

Theme

A thematic approach is needed to better use the potentials of these activities and to assure interaction with decision-makers.

The main themes of citizens' panels should be selected among the most vivid ones having an impact on «ordinary citizens» at the European level.

Composition of citizens' panels

The expected number of participants involved in each local citizen panel is 40.

The panels should include a wide range of profiles and focus on the whole spectrum of society: volunteers, teachers, NGOs representatives, representatives of the sport sector, disadvantaged people, etc.

Selection of participants

Participants of the citizens' panels shall be selected in two different phases:

a) **Selection of citizens' panels activators**

Citizens panels activators are «leading citizens» selected by partners among civil society and local authorities representatives who are already active at the local level, from different walks of life; special attention should be given to the involvement of leading citizens of different demographic, social and professional background.

b) **Selection of participants of the citizens' panels**

Participants of citizens' panels are selected on voluntary basis.

Role of citizens' panels activators

Citizens' panels activators have a key role to play such as information providers, facilitators, motivators, bridges between local authorities, European institutions and citizens, communicators, resources persons.

Role of partners

Partners have a fundamental role to play to support and facilitate the setting-up and the work of the citizens' panels (logistics, advice, etc). The lead partner will coordinate the whole programme, promoting international events.

Citizens' panels and Politicians

Politicians and elected representatives may be involved in the process and in citizens' panels meetings as resource persons. The framework and aims of their interventions and contributions should be clearly defined and their participation encouraged.

Citizens' panels and EU institutions

Representatives from EU institutions shall be informed and invited to participate both in local and transnational activities, in order to allow citizens to directly interact with them.

Functioning of the citizens' panels

A neutral place should be found for the meeting:

- municipalities may provide their meeting rooms
- educational institutions
- NGO sites

Meetings should preferably take place during the week-ends or in the evening (Tuesday-Thursday) to reach the highest number of people.

Transnational activities

Transnational activities are of special importance for the citizens' panels. They represent both an incentive to take part in local activities and an opportunity to exchange views and opinions with other citizens' panels from other countries.

They give a real European dimension to the work of the panels and allow the drafting of joint recommendations to EU institutions, starting from those drafted at the local level.

2) GOAL: an implementation of the methodology of Citizens' panels on the field of immigration

The project GOAL uses the methodology of citizens' panels and applies it in the field of immigration and more specifically the situation of migrants in European countries.

Twelve citizens' panels with 2 citizens' panel activators each were organized in six different countries. Each panel involved directly around 30 participants. Participants were selected in two different phases: the selection of "leading citizens" which acted as activators and the selection of participants of the citizens' panels. In this project, a special attention was given to involve both European citizens and immigrants in order to develop opinion together.

The action foreseen 9 steps, with an impact both at the local and at the European level. Following the partnership building phase and the selection of the theme, the process was planned as follows:

1. Training for citizens' panels activators

This training was held in Strasbourg on March 8th to 10th, 2011 and was split in 2 phases: firstly training to provide participants information, knowledge, skills and competencies to act as "citizens panels activators" at local level; and secondly sharing a common understanding of citizens panel, defining its characteristics and functioning, focusing on immigration component.

2. Set-up of local citizens' panels

Twelve local citizens' panels were set up in six different countries. At local level, each partner, in strict cooperation with the activators, promoted a process aiming at setting-up the local citizens panels focused on a selected theme. The kind of activities (workshops, presentations, intercultural activities, etc.) realized were directly decided at local level, taking into consideration the local environments and backgrounds. This step also aimed at selecting participants for citizens' panels.

3. Local workshops

Twelve Local Workshops promoted by the Citizens Panels were organized and aimed at granting an unbiased platform where citizens and other stakeholders gather information, debate, collect individual and collective opinions, formulate their views and draft them in the form of recommendations for policy makers at the European level in the field of immigration.

4. International meeting of citizens' panels

This meeting was held in Kastoria on June 17th to 19th, 2011. All partners presented the results of their panels. On the basis of the recommendations elaborated in the panels,

four working groups discussed issues with the aim of providing first recommendations that can then be amended and approved in future panels' meetings.

5. Open days

Each partner promoted one-day open event which aimed at providing information on the addressed topic through workshops, debates, informative sessions; collecting opinions through ad-hoc questionnaires; drafting recommendation in working groups; organizing intercultural activities, promoting integration and cooperation of all citizens at the local level with a specific focus on immigrants.

6. Production phase

The production phase aimed at finalizing the recommendations to be submitted both to the local and regional decision makers and to the European ones.

7. International final workshop

The third international workshop intitled "Improving the situation of immigrants-citizens and experts debate" was held in Bucharest, on 12th and 13th November 2011. It was the occasion to present the panels' recommendations to the participants - professionals in migration matters and concerned citizens – and policy makers. All participants debated about the recommendations in particular and migration matters in general in three workshops on the topics of intercultural dialogue, political participation and access to services and the labour market.

8. Final publication

A booklet was drafted with contributions of partners on the methodology foreseen in the citizens' panels.

9. Evaluation and follow-up

These panels differ very largely (participating groups, frequency of meetings, number of participants). Whereas several partners succeeded in involving relevant groups of migrants, others organised "panels" that consisted mainly of representatives of local authorities or regular citizens. Some partners had problems in finding enough participants with a migrational background (despite appropriate activators).

Some partners reported that the migrants involved expressed willingness to cooperate with institutions but finally a dialogue was fruitful. In-depth discussions were possible in most of panels.

The partners considered that making relevant recommendations is a good way to influence decision makers.

Most partners expressed the wish to create a network of organizations/institutions that are willing to further cooperate in the field of participatory mechanism dealing with immigration, considering the vivid interest in the topic of the addressed countries and to continue to work using this methodology of citizens' panels as a tool for further actions.

The results of the project: recommendations by the Citizens' Panels on how to improve the situation of migrants in Europe

Groups of citizens from different European countries met in 2011 to discuss the effects of migration on their local communities and draw up recommendations to make the best of the situation. These citizens' panels united immigrants, representatives of local authorities and other stakeholders as well as regular citizens. Organised in six European countries touched by different migration movements, the panels jointly discussed and refined their recommendations.

The following propositions to improve the situation of migrants in Europe and draw full benefit from their potential are the result of these discussions.

The propositions are structured according to different fields in which action is considered particularly necessary:

1. **Intercultural Dialogue**
2. **Administrative Procedures**
3. **Labour Market**
4. **Political Participation**
5. **Housing**

In each of the fields, the panels have identified problems, objectives and recommendations how to reach the objectives.

1. Intercultural Dialogue

Successful intercultural dialogue is a crosscutting issue when it comes to the integration of migrants. It is a precondition for their acceptance by the local population and a peaceful and fruitful coexistence.

Problem I:

Language is often a barrier to intercultural communication.

Objective:

Make instrumental communication possible.

Recommendations:

- Make sure that immigrants have the opportunity to learn the local language by providing free language courses.
- Provide free language training for officials dealing with the target group.
- Popularise international languages among the local population (esp. English).

Problem II:

There is a lack of positive identity and community feeling. Interculturality is seen as a necessity, not as a chance.

Objectives:

- **Build European identity together, in theory and in citizens mind.**
- **Bring citizens to consider diversity as a value and opportunity rather than a problem so as to enrich all.**

Recommendations:

- Keep supporting or start supporting activities of intercultural communication (positive examples: festivals of poetry, songs, dance, photos, food etc.; debates on topics of common interest such as ecology).
- Build a common perception of European history including the contribution by the migrants.
- Create a Council of Associations of Foreign Citizens.
- Officially recognize the profession of Intercultural Mediator.
- Involve Intercultural Mediators in all official interactions between immigrants and authorities/other local organisations.
- Provide intercultural training for teaching professions.
- Put a special focus on civic education in primary and secondary schools as well as in life-long learning courses, which should be extended.
- Make sure that second generation migrants can be taught in their mother tongue.
- Encourage the creation of immigrant newspapers and links with the mainstream press.
- Foster interaction between migrant communities.

Problem III:

Immigrants are persistently marginalised.

Objective:

Consider foreign citizens as active participants in the local and national community.

Recommendations:

- Involve foreign citizens in the decision-making process of the local community (development planning, design and implementation of decisions).
- Pursue the activities proposed under item 4/"Political Participation".

2. Administrative procedures

Problem:

The access to health and social services is often not sufficiently guaranteed for migrants. There is a lack of information about laws both by the migrants and the authorities.

Objectives:

- **Reduce the complexity of topical legal texts.**
- **Improve information about laws in order to provide a clearer picture for**

administrators, immigrants and citizens of the host country.

Recommendations:

- Increase competences of civil servants through compulsory training on laws and intercultural dialogue to improve services; this training should follow a single standard.
- Disseminate correct and precise information in the national language and those spoken by the main immigrant communities.
- Organise promotional campaigns on health prevention and sanitary issues.
- Increase migrants awareness of their rights and provide them with information through info points and media campaigns.
- Support presence of cultural mediators in all networks of health and social services.
- Directly involve migrants in public policies and decision making that concern them.
- Increase communication between institutions dealing with migration issues.
- Sustain the main actors of the local community more (NGOs, specific professions and institutions) and increase networking between relevant stakeholders.

3. Labour Market

Problem:

Immigrants are often discriminated in the search for a job and in their work place due to factors such as language skills, racism, lack of recognition of professional skills, right to work and lack of information.

Objectives:

- **Diminish negative discrimination of immigrants on the labour market.**
- **Encourage the recognition of immigrants' skills.**

Recommendations:

- Facilitation of the procedures to be regularised and take up a legal job.
- Facilitate the recognition of qualifications acquired in another country.
- Information about the labour market should be easily accessible to migrants.
- Authorities should be more flexible in providing the necessary documents to take up a job or become self-employed.
- Civil society should lobby more to have a stronger impact on authorities and the community.
- Create new job opportunities
- Encourage cooperation between all types of actors involved with the labour market: employers, social services, authorities and civil society organisations e.g. to fight black work and neo-slavery.
- Pursue the recommendations mentioned under "Intercultural Dialogue", especially language courses.

4. Political Participation

Problem:

Although immigrants contribute to socio-economic life of their host communities, they are excluded from official decision-making processes.

Objective:

Enable immigrants to participate actively in the political life of their host community.

Recommendations:

- Change legislation to provide immigrants with the right to active vote on local level.
Conditions proposed by the panels:
 - Set minimum duration of stay in host country (e.g. 3 years)
 - Social and cultural stability (knowledge of local language; children enrolled in school)
 - Financial independence from the host state (stable employment).
- Create the post of Ombudsman for Migrant Issues.
- Harmonise legislations of EU member states concerning the conditions for political participation.
- Creation of institutionalised, consultative local councils of non-voting immigrants, whose members should be elected with a regular voting system managed by recognized immigrants' associations.
- Increase the use of participatory democracy methodologies (consultations, thematic tables, meeting opportunities, etc.) by opening them to immigrants.

5. Housing

Problem:

Immigrants are discriminated in the access to housing for reasons such as racism and differing attitudes toward maintenance of houses and apartments. Concerning this last point, there is a large ignorance on both sides.

Objective:

Make citizens of the host country and immigrants aware of these problems.

Recommendations:

- Pursue activities encouraging intercultural dialogue focusing on housing attitudes.
- Reserve a certain percentage of unused public buildings for migrants.
- Facilitate administrative procedures and the access to information about them (cf. item 2 "Administrative Procedures").
- Pursue anti-ghettoisation activities.
- Build an information system for monitoring housing supply and demand encounter, in order to reveal discriminations in prices and contracts.

Partners

Association of Local Democracy Agencies (Strasbourg, France; lead partner)

www.alda-europe.eu

NGO Horizont (Gjirokaster, Albania)

www.horizont-albania.weebly.com

National Forum Alternatives, Practice, Initiatives (Plovdiv, Bulgaria)

www.apiplovdiv.tripod.com

Regional Association of Municipalities Central Stara Planina (Gabrovo, Bulgaria)

www.rso-csp.org

Active Creative and Reforming Organisation (Kastoria, Greece)

Qvorum - European Institute for Participative Democracy (Bucharest, Romania)

www.qvorum.ro

Regional Association of Rural Development (Gorj, Romania)

www.ardr.ro

Municipality of Reggio Emilia (Italy)

www.comune.re.it

Association Learning Cities (Bari, Italy)

www.learningcities.it

Region Apulia (Italy)

www.europuglia.it

Local Democracy Agency Albania (Shkoder)

Coalition of Youth Organisations SEGA (Skopje, Republic of Macedonia)

www.sega.org.mk

Municipality of Berovo (Republic of Macedonia)

www.opstinaberovo.gov.mk



HORIZONT

