

## Civic Observers for Health and Environment: Initiative for Responsibility and Sustainability COHEIRS

### Third Local Thematic Workshop “Active citizenship for a healthy life”

Vlore, Albania

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The **Center for Research, Cooperation and Development**-CRCD in collaboration with the Association of Local Democracy Agencies-ALDA, together with 15 civil society organizations from the European Union and from countries who are on the road to membership, implemented a new initiative of civic participation on the issues related to health and environment. The Project “Civic Observers for Health and Environment: Initiative for Responsibility and Sustainability (COHEIRS)” aims for the implementation of precautionary principles, as detailed in Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (EU), through the establishment of citizen panels focused on two components, **health** and **environment**.

Through the duration of the project, three local thematic workshops were organized and the topics of the discussion were quite extensive. For each of them, the citizens gave their opinions and their recommendations.

### ➤ **Green spaces in the city, the reality and challenges**

#### *Monitoring from civic observers*

Even though the green spaces are very important for the well-being of a healthy social life and for the physical and psychological development of everyone; they are few in number, not well maintained and don't have the proper infrastructure to be utilized by the target groups.

#### *Recommendations*

1. The local government should consider increasing the number of green spaces and recreational areas, as well as improve their equipment with the proper infrastructure for senior citizens and for children in different neighborhoods of the city.

2. The Local Government Unit and Regional Environmental Agency should respect the norms of urbanization in accordance with the green spaces in the city, by controlling strictly the implementation of the construction projects and not forgetting the recreational areas around the buildings.
3. Also, it is necessary to continue with different campaigns to raise awareness among the citizens for a healthy environment.

➤ **Sport facilities are necessary to our well-being**

*Monitoring from civic observers*

The education institutions and the citizens are not aware of the importance of sport activities for social and health well-being. Also, it is noticed an increased consumption of unhealthy products from children, a passive attitude and not participating in physical activities outside of school.

Senior citizens in particular need more exercise to help keep them healthy as they age but this currently is not happening.

*Recommendations*

4. To invest in awareness and education of citizens for the importance of an active life that helps in physical and social development;
5. To provide free use of the gyms in public schools for citizens and children in the afternoon hours.;
6. To develop a local policy named “Sports help with mental and physical health” with focus on creating the facilities for more sports activities, including gyms, parks, green spaces and recreational areas. The collaboration with the private sector should be an important component for the implementation of the local policy.

➤ **Healthiness and the Environment**

*Monitoring from civic observers*

The environmental problems are known as the most important issues related to health in the city of Vlora. The burning of urban waste is a concern that citizens have always raised, as shown by the annual reports published by the Department of Public Health in Vlora.

*Recommendations*

7. To raise awareness among citizens to reduce the source of pollution from cars, to keep the city clean and to inform them directly of the risk posed by pollution;

8. Mutual institutional collaboration with specific facts, initiated by the local government.

➤ **Air and water quality**

*Monitoring from civic observers*

The citizens identified the problems associated with air and drinking water. The increased amount of urbanization and the lack of the trees have a significant impact on air quality which is confirmed by the Institute of Public Health. Also, another problem monitored from civic observers is the pollution that is present on local beaches as a result of malfunctioning of the wastewater cleaning plant.

*Recommendations*

9. To raise awareness among citizens to reduce pollution from cars, to keep the city clean and to inform them directly of the risks posed by pollution;
10. The situation related to: level of polluted air, contaminated areas, indicators of water quality etc. should become transparent from the institutions that monitor the environment through different assets of public information;
11. The local government should continuously inform the population through the information office and media.

➤ **Urban waste and pollution in the environment**

*Monitoring from civic observers*

The situation related to urban waste is critical. Waste is collected in dumping sites near the city in an inappropriate place and burnt near populated areas. The smoke and stench of burning waste is a concern for the inhabitants and cause different respiratory problems.

*Recommendations*

12. The construction of a landfill away from residential areas;
13. Create awareness with local authorities for drafting and implementing local policies that must be implemented, even if contracting firms need to be used;
14. To minimize the use of plastic, paper and metal that require a long time to degrade;
15. Penalties and sanctions for violators.

➤ **Local policies and citizen opinions in regards to organizational structures**

*Monitoring from civic observers*

- Lack of transparency in the communication with local authorities related to environment, urban waste and green spaces.
- Lack of transparency in the management of funds
- Lack of local policies for the treatment of waste and wastewater

- Abuse of water resources and no policies for including these resources in urban planning.

### *Recommendations*

16. Formalizing civic observers in monitoring the environmental and health indicators and making a cooperation agreement with local authorities;
17. Updated information on the website of local authorities to help disseminate information to citizens;
18. Massive use of democratic tools such as referendums, petitions, questionnaires related to important issues of decision-making that affect directly the quality of citizens' life;
19. Organizing awareness campaigns on issues of common interest and open meeting with citizens on the consequences of environmental pollution.

### ➤ **Social education improve co-existence in the community**

#### *Monitoring from civic observers*

Citizens noted negligence in environmental education and the dissemination of incomplete information about the importance of living in a healthy environment. There are no initiatives from local authorities in providing messaging and models for "pro-environment" activities. Although the school textbooks provide information to protect the environment, mention of implementation is usually not present.

### *Recommendations*

20. To increase the collaboration between environmental NGOs and local authorities in organizing environmental days and giving civic educational messages on how to protect the environment.