

Citizenship matters:

The participation of young women and minorities in Euro-Med youth projects

**A training course for youth workers and youth leaders active within
Euro-Med youth projects**

Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt, 19-29 April 2004

Conclusions by the participants

The training seminar “Citizenship matters” was organised by the Council of Europe and the European Commission in cooperation with the Swedish Institute of Alexandria from the 19 to 29 April. It brought together 40 participants, trainers and resource persons from 20 European countries.

The training seminar addressed the situation and levels of participation of, and discrimination against, young women and minority youth in youth projects, as common challenges for all countries and societies in Europe and the Mediterranean area. These are also themes that often lend themselves to the creation of stereotypical and ethnocentric views among those involved in European and Mediterranean countries. One of the basic competencies of youth workers active in Euro-Med youth projects is should be the ability to address these issues with young people and with others involved in youth projects. In this way, the youth workers can be multipliers and support young people in their own learning processes on these matters.

In this framework, the seminar aimed at developing a common understanding about the challenges to the participation of women and minorities in youth projects and to identify educational principles to promote global citizenship of young people in Euro-Med projects.

Through an intensive programme of workshops and with the support of resource persons, the participants debated the issues in a Euro-Mediterranean perspective; develop ideas for further action and cooperation. They have also needs for inclusive policies and approaches in Euro-Med youth projects that take into account the specific needs of young women and minority groups within a common framework of human rights, human rights education and intercultural learning.

Some of the common challenges

- Some youth and minority groups have difficulties in cooperating with the state institutions because of lacking a legal status;
- The voice of the minorities is not heard by the institutions, they are often the subject of direct and indirect discrimination. Young people from a minority background suffer in their self-esteem, their sense of belonging and in their self-confidence, resulting often in a feeling of alienation and assimilation.

- Minority young people, including young women, are vulnerable to widespread forms of prejudice, racism and discrimination, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia.
- There is a general deficit in the representation of women and minorities at local, national, international level as well as in the decision-making processes.
- Human rights and human rights education are insufficiently present in education and in youth work. Young people need to learn about human rights as a basis for more just and humane societies.
- Religious minorities and other social minorities are, unfortunately, still a taboo in many societies.

Most of these challenges are common to European and Mediterranean countries alike although they may assume different dimensions and levels from one country to another. Generally, their perception is also influenced by prevailing forms of ethnocentrism and prejudice which make intercultural dialogue and cooperation difficult, albeit fundamental. We have considered three target groups for our recommendations: young people and youth work, youth organisations and youth policy institutions.

The role of youth work and young people

The duty of every person in the society is to participate in an active and responsible role, exercising their citizenship. This is also the case for young people, the present and the future of our societies. Voluntary youth work has a major role to play to promote democratic values based on human rights and access for all. The governmental policies have also a major role to play, notably in providing financial support and encouraging the development of educational and social programmes for and with young people, such as courses, conferences, leisure time activities and activities in favour of the community.

The development of youth in proper concept is the base of the society and nation success. *All* young people should be able to benefit from all the available support measures and policies in order to pursue their development and their future. Young people should also be supported in their aspirations and projects for human rights education and intercultural learning, such as:

- To organize non formal activities such as workshops, role play and open discussions
- To support the concept of voluntary work within young people through coordinating with youth organizations to host them after graduation.
- To organize intercultural activities such as Seminars, Study visits and job shadowing within the Euro-Med Youth Programmer
- To make open meetings that aim to raise parents' awareness for their children's problems and how to deal properly with these problems
- To promote the concept of decision making by young people through:
 - Students councils in schools
 - Youth organisations
 - Youth councils for those aged between 15-25
- To give young people space to see their needs and concerns reflected in and through the media

- To use different art and creation mechanisms to raise awareness and help to solve youth problems through theatre, music, and television and radio programmes
- Encourage the participation of youth with special needs in youth work
- To raise their awareness about the inclusions of young people with special needs, young women and young people from minorities.
- Youth workers and youth leaders, including volunteers, are essential multipliers and, as such, need to be supported in their social and professional role, through training opportunities and improvements in their social, legal and economic status.

The role of Youth organisations

Youth organisations must be encouraged to take seriously on board the matters of gender equality, women rights and minorities rights as matter of fundamental relevance for the well being of *all* young people in society. They should also:

- Train young people in order for them to develop new understanding of minorities and skills to deal with them.
- Integrate minority youth in their work and emphasise human rights including co-operation with different minorities.
- Overcome the separation between activities just for minorities and for the majority and design programs and be accessible for everyone.
- Develop strategies on projects management, funding, and realistic planning aimed at young women and other under-represented groups;
- To always consider the gender balance in their programs and attitudes.
- To foster cooperation with other youth organizations and institutional partners.
- To encourage participation within their organisation and not just through the programs.
- Promote direct exchanges to overcome distance to avoid misunderstandings and stereotypes in Euro-Mediterranean area.
- Lobby to the extent it is possible to public attitudes through the media and through education, especially formal education at early stages.
- Seek to involve parents of the young people.
- Be in ongoing contact with the youth of society and adapt their methods and structures to the young people lifestyles.

The role of local, national and European institutions

All the social and political institutions have an essential role to play in improving matters related to young women and young people from a minority background:

Support the establishment and development of non/governmental organisations and civil society initiatives from *all* minorities and young people.

Recognise the existence and role of different minorities in their territory (ethnic, national, religious, linguistic, social, etc.) and commit themselves for equality in human dignity of all;

Take seriously on board specific needs of minority groups, including those related to freedom of conscience and religion and to specific social needs (e.g. translation and interpretation needs);

- Condemn without reservation all forms of racism and racial discrimination, including Antisemitism, Islamophobia and religious discrimination.
- Adopt and implement policies for equality of opportunities in their institutions;
- Train their staff and officers on anti/discrimination matters.
- Work towards the abolition of the immigration restriction laws in order to overcome the contradiction of implementing participation in a context of criminalisation of immigration;
- Encourage and support communication with minorities and from minorities (e.g. opening the media to minority languages and concerns);
- Local authorities must actively involve minority groups in their consultations and decision-making processes
- To foresee budgets for human rights education in school and out of school education;
- To organise events and Open Discussion Forums to share experiences and promote cooperation among different organizations and minorities
- projects
- Training all staff on diversity\religions\minority and women issues and against Racism
- To organise campaigns, and support youth organizations in raising awareness for diversity and human rights;
- To have database of translators and interpreters in all institutions within easy reach
- To revising Job Application Forms so as to avoid discrimination on the basis of gender or ethnicity (e.g. leaving out gender\name);
- To create an active body or council where illegalized immigrants can address\express\articulate their views and concerns
- To implement the right of immigrants to political participation
- To demand the reflection of minorities in institutions within the society (percentage of minorities should be reflected in the organization)
- To stop public and private institutions from asking women questions about their family planning;
- Set up funds to support companies to help parents wishing to stay at home with their children.