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Cooperation for **youth** integration



Crossing Borders

 FICAT



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The migratory flows affecting the European Union, often accompanied by discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants, involve associations working with the young. This is because it is important to improve their networks to stimulate paths of active European citizenship and strengthen the inclusion of young people with a migrant background. Adopting this perspective, the Pio La Torre Study Center has promoted the project “Cooperation for youth integration”, funded by the Erasmus Plus program.

Pushed by common values, the partners have developed a concept of active European citizenship that also represents an inclusion tool to prevent and fight forms of discrimination and racism. The project includes a training activity addressed to both young participants and youth workers on common EU values, such as democracy, equality, pluralism, tolerance, and non-discrimination, as well as on active citizenship and integration policies of young people promoted by the EU. The young participants were then able to meet the European policy makers and visit the headquarters where those policies are promoted: they met both representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission in Brussels. The relevant activities took place at local level, which have seen young people involved as characters in the concept of active citizenship. Indeed, they shared the knowledge gained, first in the schools and then during the events involving local citizens and stakeholders.

The milestone of this project was an international research, carried out through 130 semi-structured interviews with young people on the topics of active citizenship and inclusion. One aspect coming from the interviews is that the concept of active citizenship and its practice are not clear, especially to young people with a migrant background. The project, therefore, partly filled this gap, but we need to keep working in this direction to make young people the main actors of a cultural change especially where civic culture is less widespread. These results were shared during an international event in Palermo, as part of the initiatives for the 41st anniversary of the killing of Pio La Torre and Rosario Di Salvo by mafia, in the presence of institutional representatives, journalists, students and NGOs. Promoting inclusion through the active citizenship also constitutes a tool to prevent deviance and, therefore, crime.

Beyond the strengthening the European identity of young people, the project has allowed partner organizations to increase both the local and European network and to develop the know-how necessary to deal with the challenges that an increasingly multicultural society presents. Greater international cooperation is important as well as both formal and non-formal education activities, necessary to promote civic involvement and inclusion.









Research interview on difficulties in exercising active citizenship encountered by young people with a family migration background.

As part of the 'Cooperation for youth integration' (Co4You) project, a research activity has been planned, aimed at understanding the difficulties in being active citizens dealing with young people with a family migration background. This activity is part of the project aimed at stimulating and developing active European citizenship and inclusion paths for young people with family migration experience and permanently settled in the various partner countries. 130 semi-structured interviews have been conducted among young people with a migration background (67) and young people without a migration background (63, control group), the former being residents in the partner countries (Denmark, Italy, Republic of North Macedonia, Spain) but coming from Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, Brazil, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Pakistan, Germany, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Guinea Conakry, Gambia, South Africa, Peru, Georgia, India, Egypt, Ecuador, Guinea, China, Bangladesh, Venezuela, Syria, Tunisia, Ghana, Romania, Nigeria, Mauritius. Seven items have been included in the interview, listed below.

1_ What does it mean for you to be an active citizen?

About the concept of active citizen, young people with a migration background feel an overlap between the idea of active citizenship and the idea of formal citizenship, as shown by the following quotations:

«So, in my opinion, an active citizen means being part of the country, that is feeling part of the own city. For example, since I come from a foreign family, having active citizenship allows me to be part of this country and to declare that I am Italian» (Int. n. 6_IT, 16 years old, Ghanaian).

«An active citizen is a person who contributes to society and citizenship. For example, taxes, buying a property too, [...]. That he has a company, perhaps» (Int. n. 19_ES, 22 years old, Peruvian).

Nevertheless, some of them believe that one can be an active citizen regardless of whether she/he is a formally recognized citizen:

«For me, being an active citizen means participating in intercultural activities, in activities that promote important things for the city. Working for the society is what active citizenship is for me. Participating for the growth of the society where you are because it doesn't matter if you have a document or don't have a document: you participate! Being a citizen is not just to have a paper and then to do nothing» (Int. n. 9_IT, 22 years old, Guinean).

«For me, an active citizen is a person who participates in the political life of the place where he is. He is also a supportive person. So, what do I mean by this? I mean that an active citizen is not only a person who pays taxes, not only a person or a Spanish one who votes for a political party, but also the immigrant who signs a petition in one of digital platforms to tell the government that there is something wrong in his/her city. And it is also the illegal immigrant who gets up in the morning and goes to work as a volunteer at the food bank or in an association. For me this is to be an active citizen» (Int. n. 3_ES, 25 years old, Cameroonian).

To the contrary, there is no overlap between the concept of active citizenship and formal citizenship among young people without a migration background. Moreover, most of them think that active citizenship is the organized participation for the common well-being and change:

«First of all, I can say that it means being involved in projects, i.e. I am interested in events happening in my city or outside the city. So, it is very important to be involved. Furthermore, it can also be done through the school, but also through other projects such as non-governmental organizations» (Int. n. 2_MK, 17 years old, Macedonian).

«For me, I think it would be to participate and learn about the politics of the country that affects us and participate in social movements that agree with your personal moral ideas and values» (Int. n. 31_ES, 24 years old, Spanish).

«For me, being an active citizen means being part of civil society organizations and believing in the causes we support through them» (Int. n. 23_DK, 18 years old, Danish).

«For me, an active citizen is a citizen who protects the common good [...] An active citizen also means participating in volunteering» (Int. n. 28_IT, 18 years old, Italian).

2_Can you tell us of any experience of active citizenship in which you were involved, or you have been supporting/ promoting?

Among young people with a migration background, there are several who do not have any active citizenship experience, especially in Barcelona and Palermo. In those territories where the civic activism of young people is more limited, the most common expressions of active

citizenship are connected to the exercise of political rights or demonstrations and protests, especially inside the schools and concerning the school life.

«Since I am only 20, there hasn't been an election to vote for yet. For me, this is my greatest duty as a citizen and I look forward to the day when I vote» (Int. n. 12_ES, 20 years old, Turkish).

«Until September, our school demonstrated from the Quattro Canti to the Politeama to have the structures renovated, to add boilers to our schools. But we have also demonstrated for peace, as far as the war in Ukraine is concerned, and we organized ourselves with the school» (Int. n. 3_IT, 18 years old, Nigerian).

In those territories with a greater intensity of civic activism, the experiences of active citizenship are mainly represented by the volunteering:

«[...] I volunteer as interpreter at the Red Cross reception. [...] So, I took the lead in forming a group to recognize people's needs and do something about it. We managed to get help from the Red Cross. We managed to create a beauty salon, a sewing shop, a cafe and most importantly a library. [...]» (Int. n. 5_DK, 19 years old, Afghan).

«I am involved in an association that deals with inclusion and I have been a member for two years. It is a non-governmental organization where we work on various projects, where we fight for our rights as young citizens» (Int. n. 6_MK, 19 years old, ROM-Egyptian).

Also, among young people without a migrant background the civic activism is more limited in the territories of Barcelona and Palermo. In the territories with less civic activism, the forms of active citizenship of young people are mostly linked to demonstrations/protests (sometimes in the school context), although there are also those connected to volunteering in various civil society associations or NGOs:

«Experiences of active citizenship that I have had... The truth is that I haven't done much more than going to demonstrations and demonstrating for my interests» (Int. n. 36_ES, 19 years old, Spanish).

«Since I was 15 I have always been an active citizen, as I have moved within student associations first and then politics of the city, being part of many associations and collectives [...]. But I have also taken part in many demonstrations for the fight against the pollution, the fight against organized crime» (Int. n. 30_IT, 18 years old, Italian).

In contrast to Palermo and Barcelona, civic activism both in Bitola and Copenhagen is more widespread and mainly characterized by forms of volunteering within civil society organizations:

«I have been a member of various organizations and been personally active in some human rights organizations» (Int. n. 22_DK 18 years old, Danish).

«I have been a member of a non-governmental organization that helps to educate young people about the protection of the environment, culture, natural heritage, healthy lifestyles, and renewable energy sources. I also support them as an NGO because the education of the young is very important in today's society» (Int. n. 28_IT, 22 years old, Macedonian).

3_ Do you think it is important to be active citizen? Why?

Everybody interviewed - regardless of migration experience or not - acknowledges the importance of being an active citizen, as it represents the way to contribute to the improvement of the society where we live. Among young people with a migrant background, even if they overlap the concepts of active citizenship and formal citizenship, they recognise the worth of being an active citizen either as a tool of integration into the “host” country or as a “natural” effect of being a formal citizen:

«Yes, of course, because the active citizen must integrate into society and learn everything about society, local people, language, and respect the culture, make friends and why not a family one day. This is important in this country and wherever you go, it is very important to integrate into the society to live a normal life with these people in the country. [...] As an immigrant you have to integrate» (Int. n. 13_ES, 22 years old, Georgian).

«Well, definitely it is important because I think being an active citizen should be a fundamental part of every person's life. I am sorry I haven't developed this point in my life yet, but I think I would like to. For example, I am very sad because I still haven't been able to get citizenship despite having lived in Italy for 15 years. I speak more often Italian than Romanian [...]. I cannot even be an active citizen, as it is not allowed to me [...]» (Int. n. 1_IT, 18 years old, Romanian).

For many young people without a migration background, the importance of being an active citizen is connected with the responsibility for future generations, to allow them to find a better society:

«In my opinion it is very important because it is especially for the future generation, so as not to find the difficulties that we are facing now. Therefore, changing the world, which is not very nice for this generation now anyway» (Int. n. 28_IT, 18years old, Italian).

Someone underlines the role of the active citizenship as “watchdog” against strong powers:

«Yes, I think it is very important because otherwise there will be some powers - basically corporations - that will dominate the political organization and the economy. So, if we want to be free, we must be active citizens» (Int. n. 21_ES, 25 years old, Spanish).

Someone else emphasizes that being active citizens makes us critical, free from potential stereotyped representations offered by the media:

«[...] I think the mainstream media can create stigmatizing viewpoints about certain groups of people. Engaging in society allows you to have your own view of the world, to choose what to believe in and also what to support» (Int. n. 21_DK, 19 years old, Danish).

4_ Based on your personal experience in the area where you live, is it easy to be an active citizen? Why?

Palermo (Italy)

Both interviewee groups (young people with and without a migrant background) agree that it is not easy because of the widespread local culture which is not inclined to exercise active citizenship:

«I think it could be incredibly easy to be active citizens, that is I believe there are so many actions that could start from citizens that we could be active citizens [...] It is the indifference towards problems and even perhaps the tendency to give any responsibility to the authority [...] So, on the one hand it could be incredibly easy, but in fact there is indifference [...]» (Int. n. 13_ES, 22 years old, Georgian).

The commitment of local citizens in associations is recognized, but it is considered not enough:

«Generally speaking, here in Palermo there are those associations which do good, for example the City Angels which help the homeless, but they are a few» (Int. n. 16_IT, 18 years old, Brazilian).

Young people without a migration background also complain about a lack of dialogue with local institutions:

«No, it is not easy. Protesting, for example, is easy, but it is not easy to be listened to» (Int. n. 33_IT, 18 years old, Italian).

Bitola (Republic of North Macedonia)

Both young people with and without a migrant background in Bitola think that being an active citizen in that area is very easy:

«I think it is easy to be an active citizen because Bitola is a big town that deals with a lot of problems, but it also has a lot of people and organizations working to improve the living conditions in our town» (Int. n. 20_MK, 16 years old, Macedonian).

Young people with a migrant background also underline that participation in associations is open to all, regardless of nationality or other differences:

«I think that it is easy to be an active citizen in my area because we are all accepted regardless of ethnicity, gender, skin color and all kinds of differences. We are all equal and respect each other» (Int. n. 14_MK, 19 years old, ROM-Egyptian).

It is easy to be an active citizen also because of the social media:

«Through social media, any information is very accessible to us from anywhere. So, taking part in something is very accessible for us, we just need to want to» (Int. n. 24_MK, 18 years old, Macedonian).

Barcelona (Spain)

Both young people with and without a migrant background in Barcelona think that being an active citizen in the city is very easy as there are many associations:

«Yes, based on my experience, I would say it is easy to be an active citizen here in Spain. I speak from the point of view of an immigrant» (Int. n. 4_ES, 25 years old, Cameroonian).

«[...] speaking from my own experience, I think it is easy to be an active citizen as today there are many associations and organizations open to new people and proposals, where it is possible to build new debates and points of view» (Int. n. 28_ES, 19 years old, Spanish).

According to Spanish young people, being an active citizen in Barcelona is very easy also because it is a big city and the information on the initiatives is widespread also through internet:

«It is easy because we are in a city, and it is easier to get around. And it is easier to partner with people, participate in matters we support. But I think it is mainly because of the communication there is in the city. When you are further away or in towns further away from the city, it is harder to be active» (Int. n. 26_ES, 19 years old, Spanish).

Copenhagen (Denmark)

Both young people with and without a migrant background in Copenhagen think that being an active citizen in the city is very easy. Being or not being an active citizen depends mainly on the personal values and the balance among job and volunteering commitment:

«It depends on your personal values: if a person believes that there is something wrong with society that needs to be changed, then it is important to start from the individual level by being an active citizen. But first there must be a strong awareness of what to defend: an active citizen can only be active if motivated by beliefs and the will to change» (Int. n. 8_DK, 24 years old, Italian).

According to Danish young people, being an active citizen in Copenhagen is very easy also because it is a big city:

«It is easy to become an active citizen in a big city. I live in Copenhagen, and I am part of many organizations» (Int. n. 22_DK, 18 years old, Danish).

5_Given the core values that inspire the European Union, in which ones do you recognize yourself most and why? Are there any additional values that are important according to you?

Both young people with and without a migrant background agree that:

- EU values are not always concretely implemented;
- Equality is the value in which young people recognize themselves most and which they would like to be really implemented:

«I am puzzled about values such as equality, tolerance, and non-discrimination. This is because, even though I know there are serious people fighting for such values in their real terms (and I am with them), there are decision-makers within the EU and powerful actors who claim to uphold such values while not living by such principles. Rather, for the latter groups, migrants, non-whites, non-Christians, and uneducated people, for example, should not have the same rights as their counterparts. This is a paradox with respect to the so-called “fundamental values” of the EU (Int. n. 9_DK, 24 years old, Brazilian).

However, it is important that they are recognized at least on a formal level:

So, I absolutely recognize myself in these values. I think that, even with some criticism, managing everything is very complex. Nevertheless, Europe manages somehow to maintain these values because, if we look at the situations of other countries where totalitarian governments are still winning, Europe has actually made many steps forward compared to many other countries» (Int. n. 12_IT, 20 years old, Bengali).

Besides equality, tolerance and non-discrimination are the most important values for many of the young people with a migrant background:

«I would say more non-discrimination and tolerance. Even for irregular immigrants, these values are the closest to them and are the ones that speak to them the most» (Int. n. 1_ES, 20 years old, Colombian).

Responsibility and compassion are the values that young people with a migrant background suggest adding:

«I think that responsibility is extremely important. Responsibility is the key, especially when you accept your privileges and the history of colonization to understand where inequalities come from» Int. n. 3_DK, 23 years old, Spanish).

«[...] By working for non-discrimination and tolerance we can have a democratic society with equality. If I were to add one value it would be compassion which again ties in closely with the two values I have chosen above [...].» (Int. n. 11_DK, 23 years old, Pakistani).

Many young people without a migrant background think that:

- EU values are not always concretely implemented;
- Equality is the value that young people recognize themselves most and which they would like to be really implemented:

«Of course, I recognize myself with all these values, but I believe that they must be applied correctly. They must materialize in some actions or proposals that coincide with these values» (Int. n. 31_ES, 24 years old, Spanish).

Respect, transparency, honesty, and empathy are the values that young people without migrant background suggest adding:

«As an added value I could use the word respect and in fact I would swap it with tolerance, since I believe this is a word with negative connotations» (Int. n. 34_ES, 18 years old, Spanish).

«All values are important. I believe that meeting others with an open mind and without bias or bad intentions is crucial for strong relationships. And having a democracy where everyone's opinions are heard is important because then everyone thrives. I also think empathy is an important trait; putting yourself in someone else's shoes helps you to understand yourself» (Int. n. 16_DK, 20 years old, Danish).

6_What do you think the institutions (municipality, region, state, European Union) and associations (NGO/civil society) should do for you to feel and be an active European citizen?

Both young people with and without a migrant background have indicated the school as the best place for training and raising awareness on active citizenship and for making real the values inspiring the EU politics. Although they require different kinds of support to the institutions, they also agree that is the initiative of each person to play a fundamental role in the active citizenship. To be an active citizen, he/she has to be aware of what is happening in the society and involve other citizens to make change happen.

Young people with a migration background ask the institutions to make the process for acquiring the citizenship easier:

«First of all, they should recognize the status of citizen to everyone [...]. We who are foreigners, who live here in Italy, have to wait until we turn 18-19 years old (ed. to get Italian citizenship). This is honestly a bit annoying for us immigrants. So, in my opinion, to improve in being active citizens, the government should help us to obtain citizenship right away: you are Italian and you deserve this. And it also should treat us like everyone else because, even if I come from abroad, I am Italian, I go to school here, I was born here. I behave like an Italian and I always respect the rules: in my opinion, this is what we citizens should do» (Int. n. 6_IT, 16 years old, Ghanaian).

Young people with a migration background ask the institutions for greater empathy in understanding the reasons that prompted immigrants to live in EU:

Well, I think that they should understand us immigrants, because [...] almost everyone comes here to study and improve his/herself;

we don't come here to sit and watch. All of us, the majority of immigrants, come here to work and to try to improve ourselves. Just like me, I have a son and I want to raise him. I want to give him values and opportunities. I want to help him in his education, that is why we are here» (Int. n. 11_ES, 22 years old, Peruvian).

Institutions should make the integration process of immigrants easier and make them feel part of the community:

«I think they should start by trying to integrate people into the country and make them feel at home» (Int. n. 1_DK, 20 years old, Turkish).

«The institutions should work much more with us young people, so that it becomes clear to them that we are a voice and not an echo» (Int. n. 15_MK, 24 years old, ROM-Egyptian).

Many young people without a migrant background ask the institutions to invest more on the school to promote active citizenship. For them, school is not just an education place, but also a place where to spread information and to encourage the critical thinking.

«In my opinion, public institutions should give more opportunities to become an active citizen, starting from the first years of school and throughout the educational system. In this way, from an early age we would internalize this idea» (Int. n. 20_ES, 19 years old, Spanish).

«I think it is necessary for students to become familiar with what it means to be an active citizen from an early age. Thus the number of people who know the values of that territory will increase» (Int. n. 21_MK, 18 years old, Macedonian).

«Institutions should be more active in involving young people to support their challenges. They should go to schools and promote their challenges, so that young people can be actively interested and involved in» (Int. n. 22_DK, 18 years old, Danish).

Institutions are also asked for more transparency in their work and in the communication of the results of their actions, as well as for greater willingness to listen to needs and proposals from citizens to make themselves more credible at citizens' eyes:

«[...] Giving accurate information and being completely sincere [...] In a way, falsehood leads us citizens, who should be active, not to trust the institutions» (Int. n. 25_IT 19 years old, Italian).

«What institutions should first do is to build trust among citizens so they can be sure their voice will be heard» (Int. n. 20_MK, 16 years old, Macedonian).

However, they are also asked to provide more resources and opportunities to associations and are invited to collaborate with NGOs:

«I believe that, in order to increase the number of active citizens, institutions must provide proper resources and opportunities for the different associations. In other words, they should offer them the possibility of growing and organizing themselves. Concerning the associations, I believe that communication and their ability to be heard are essential to encourage citizen participation» (Int. n. 28_ES, 19 years old, Spanish).

7_What does inclusion mean for you? How should inclusion be achieved?

The idea of inclusion among the two groups of young people is almost the same. The interviewees use words like 'equality', 'not discrimination', 'respect for diversity' to describe inclusion (≠ integration):

«For me, inclusion is that each citizen can have his/her own autonomy and develop him/herself in the world with the same opportunities. I believe we have been creating the path of inclusion, but there is still a long way to go. And well, on the other hand, I also think it is essential that there is an inclusive perspective in education from an early age, when we start to believe – according to stereotypes – that we are better than others» (Int. n. 25_ES 25 years old, Spanish).

Referring to a multicultural context, the concept of inclusion of the young people interviewed recognizes equal worth to all cultures, beyond any ethnocentric vision:

I think that cultures are different, that is obvious. Obviously, the Italian culture is different from my culture, but I have always loved both and they are both wonderful in my opinion. So, there is not a culture more important than another one. I think it is nice to know more cultures, other people [...].» (Int. n. 4_IT, 18 years old, Mauritian).

Some different words to describe "inclusion" among the two groups express the different experiences/perspectives of each group of young people. Young people with a migrant background use words like "service available to all", "more than tolerance", "welcoming",

“prejudice”, “empathy”, words expressing the position of whom, living in a ‘host’ country, has to suffer the native people’s choice of including them in the community or not.

«Inclusion comes from having no prejudice based on the differences people have. So, inclusion is not to have prejudices towards other people and to include those people who are different [...] Because prejudices create barriers between people. These barriers do not allow people to get to know each other’s cultures» (Int. n. 5_IT, 16 years old, French-Tunisian).

«For me inclusion is not simply tolerance, but it is having completely equal opportunities with everyone and having all the rights that have been granted to another person. In this regard, inclusion should be achieved through tireless efforts by all people involved in the process» (Int. n. 15_ES, 21 years old, Turkish).

«For me inclusion means that all people living in a place can enjoy the same things as local people. It means services available to all, open-minded, opportunities. It can only be achieved, for me, if we are aware that no one person can pose a threat to your status quo» (Int. n. 10_DK, 25 years old, Greek).

Young people without a migrant background often represent inclusion as a condition in which the individual is pro-active in public life and he/she is able to involve other citizens. This idea, therefore, overlaps with the idea of active citizenship:

«Inclusion is about being active and involving everyone in public life» (Int. n. 26_DK, 18 years old, Danish).

«For me, inclusion means being involved. In my view, inclusion will be achieved by promoting local organizations and helping people to participate in them» (Int. n. 29_MK, 17 years old, Macedonian).

«Inclusion means allowing something new to be part of something already created. The way to achieve this goal is that people who have created something open themselves to new knowledge, while people who want to know more about something already created have the option to do that» (Int. n. 22_MK, 22 years old, Spanish).

Recommendations from the results of the research interview for partner organizations and institutions

- It needs to continue working with young people with a migration background to make them understand the real meaning of active citizenship and its practice, regardless of obtaining the 'formal' citizenship or not.
- It needs to continue working with both young people with and without a migration background to stimulate their participation in the different forms of active citizenship. It needs to make these young people the main actors of a cultural change, especially where the culture of civic activism is less widespread.
- Although active citizenship is a tool to facilitate the inclusion of people with a migrant background, it is necessary to make young immigrants understand how being an active citizen can have a widespread impact and not just on their current condition.
- The ease or otherwise of being active citizens, in addition to being linked to the condition of immigrant/non-immigrant, also depends on the culture of civic activism of a territory. It needs to keep working with young people, especially where the culture of civic activism is weak (Palermo, Barcelona).
- Institutions are asked for a bigger commitment in implementing values that lead to EU action/policies. At the same time, it is necessary to keep working with a bottom-up approach to promote these values effectively.
- It is necessary to enhance the work with young people in and with the school as it is a privileged place for the strengthening of active citizenship, thanks also to the cooperation with civil society associations. Such commitment means a greater allocation of resources both in schools and in associations for a more effective impact.













