

NON-DISCRIMINATION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Active citizenship is about engagement, participation in society and valuing contributions made by individuals, whether they are employed or outside the traditional workforce. In practical terms, this engagement and participation may mean membership of a resident's association or political party or lobby group, volunteering to help out in a local sports club, caring for a family member or neighbour, or simply being active and caring about the local neighbourhood, the environment as well as larger global and national issues (Taskforce on Active Citizenship 2007).

— Therefore, active citizenship means being aware of, and caring about, the welfare of fellow citizens, recognising that we live as members of communities and depend on others in our daily lives. Being an active citizen might include:

- ▶ supporting and becoming involved in different types of voluntary and community activities;
- ▶ respecting and listening to those with different views from our own;
- ▶ playing our part in making decisions on issues that affect us and others, in particular by participating in the democratic process;
- ▶ respecting ethnic and cultural diversity and being open to change (ibid.).

— Unfortunately, many young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods do not have the opportunity to “engage” as full citizens in society. This form of social exclusion and discrimination should be addressed, in particular by public representatives at all levels of government. For democracy to be effective, young people need to be encouraged to become active citizens and, therefore, to be involved in the societal, political and economic decisions that affect their lives.

— An Enter! project based in Strasbourg demonstrates how young people living in disadvantaged communities can be helped to become active citizens.



The Enter! recommendation calls for measures to promote social cohesion and positive relations between people of diverse backgrounds and suggests the following actions to involve young people as active citizens in their communities:

- ▶ acknowledge that there are specific groups of young people that are vulnerable to discrimination and stigmatisation, and take explicit measures to tackle their problems;
- ▶ actively support young people and their organisations in developing projects and ideas that improve relationships among people living in their local community, including initiatives:
 - to tackle negative attitudes towards neighbours from different social and cultural backgrounds;
 - to promote access to social and human rights and social inclusion;
- ▶ provide funding for project development, project management and access to local facilities;
- ▶ support projects that include young people who are socially excluded;
- ▶ make information about local opportunities available to young people through different channels, such as social media and notice boards in public buildings (e.g. schools, libraries, youth centres);



Association Migration Solidarité et Échanges pour le Développement (AMSED), Strasbourg, France¹⁵

— The project Take the Chance and Overcome the Gap was designed to raise the awareness of young people living in the disadvantaged suburb of Hautepierre, Strasbourg about education, social inclusion, non-discrimination and intercultural learning opportunities. It increased the self-esteem of the participating young people and informed them about local policies that would help them access their social rights and also be involved in opportunities at the international level, such as training courses, youth exchanges and work camps. Moreover, the project aimed to change the perception of young people in their communities.

— A number of meetings and workshops were held with the participants, who were aged between 17 and 30 and came from the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Meinau, Cronembourg, Bischheim, Gare and Esplanade. Representatives of the local authorities, as well as social and youth workers in Strasbourg, also participated.

— The young people had a high level of early school drop-out and high unemployment, and those who were at work were generally on precarious employment contracts. Most of them also had an immigrant background, which added to the levels of discrimination they faced and contributed to their social exclusion on different levels.

— The participants became more aware of local and national policies and schemes available to them to access social rights. They also had the opportunity to be involved in a number of international activities, such as involvement in different training courses and in short-term volunteering abroad, which helped to develop and strengthen their competences, skills and knowledge.

15. More information at www.amsed.fr, accessed 10 June 2016.

- ▶ increase investment in youth work and youth organisations that run activities to promote active citizenship, social cohesion and dialogue between young people from different social and cultural backgrounds;
- ▶ ensure that public buildings are accessible to young people with disabilities. The principle for Universal Design should be used as the accepted standard.¹⁶

16. More information at <http://cambridgehomes.com/why-cambridge/universal-design-concept>, accessed 10 June 2016.