

## PROMOTION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

**S**ocial inclusion has many definitions. The European Commission defines its aim as to prevent and eradicate poverty and exclusion and to promote the integration and participation of all into economic and social life (European Commission 2006). The Council of Europe traditionally uses the broader term “social cohesion”, which it defines as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing common goals by democratic means” (Council of Europe 2004). Social exclusion is often referred to in official documents and research literature and is defined by the European Commission as “a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities” (European Commission/European Council 2004).

— Within the context of these definitions, young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods often experience exclusion, isolation and segregation. This increases their experience of discrimination. These challenges need to be addressed by national, regional and local authorities. The following example from the Enter! project shows how proactive initiatives can tackle social exclusion through education.



**In the context of promoting the social inclusion of young people living in disadvantaged communities, the following measures are proposed:**

- ▶ recognise that all young people have a right to equal access to essential public amenities and public services, such as:
  - post offices;
  - public libraries;
  - community and youth work centres;
  - employment services;
  - ICTs;
  - public transport;
- ▶ reach out to the most isolated and disenfranchised young people in the most disadvantaged communities with information, access to non-formal education programmes and other opportunities for them to participate in, through, for example, “mobile youth work”;
- ▶ involve young people in strategy-development processes in their communities.



### **Youth in Free Initiative (RSL), Kukes region, Albania<sup>13</sup>**

— The Kukes region, north and north-east of Albania, includes three districts, Kukes, Has and Tropoja, with a population of 116 000 inhabitants. It is the poorest region in Albania and interventions are needed, not only to improve the economy of the region, but also to educate the wider population. Working with Kukes Municipality, this project was specifically directed at educating young people on human and social rights.

— As part of the project, a three-day training course for 30 young people living in low-income neighbourhoods was organised. The course addressed social exclusion issues and the promotion of social cohesion in the region, by targeting young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods through formal and non-formal education. In total, some 80 young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, teachers, students from the local university, journalists and social workers from the municipality were involved in the course.

— The social rights specifically addressed by the project included the rights to housing, education, employment and social protection. The main aim of the project was to provide knowledge and skills on these issues, so as to promote the social inclusion of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, by:

- ▶ increasing their knowledge of social rights and then using them as “multipliers” for educating the wider community about their rights and also preventing forms of discrimination that specifically affect young people;
- ▶ giving the participants access to information about social exclusion, including the European Social Charter (revised);
- ▶ helping them to understand better the principles for action to tackle social exclusion and to participate in local government initiatives on social exclusion.

— At the end of the project the young people prepared recommendations on local youth policies; these were presented to the local authorities with the hope that they would become part of the municipality’s policies and work on social rights. Based on the experiences shared during this project, some of the young people continued to be involved as facilitators, and five of them were selected to participate in summer internship programmes organised by RSL, in co-operation with Kukes Municipality.

13. More information at [www.rsl-al.org](http://www.rsl-al.org), accessed 10 June 2016.