

Council of Europe Inter City Grants 2024

Young Ambassadors

Final Narrative Report



Young Ambassadors - Final narrative report

Inter-city grants 2024 - Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme

1. Summary

1.1. Why the Young Ambassadors project matters

The Young Ambassadors Project received funding from the Council of Europe's Inter City Grants in 2024, through the Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC). The project is a joint effort by two member cities of the ICC Programme, the City of Reykjavik and the City of Wroclaw. Both cities have evolved in the last 10 years, becoming more diverse, including in terms of origin, nationality, and religious beliefs. An intercultural society calls for changes in policy making for the community. The fundamental elements for intercultural societies are respect for diversity, equality, and meaningful intercultural interactions.

The Young Ambassadors Project focuses on young people of foreign origin in the two cities. Young people of foreign origin are often forgotten in public debate and action planning. Addressing the needs and concerns of young people of foreign origin is crucial for promoting inclusivity, diversity, and social cohesion within city communities. The Young Ambassadors project is intended to give these young individuals a voice and ensure that they are represented in decision-making processes, forums, and discussions.

1.2. Objectives

The objective of the project is to promote youth leadership, raise awareness among youngsters of foreign origin about the importance of being visible in public life, take space in public debate, and foster community engagement among young people. By providing a group of young people with training in human rights, communication, public speaking and creativity, we can provide them with the necessary tools to become the leaders of the future.

The project aims to recognize and celebrate the cultural backgrounds, traditions, and experiences of the participants. A part of the Young Ambassadors project includes a social media campaign which aims to reach young people in the city, regardless of their origin. In that way the project may also raise awareness among young people about human rights, democracy and the benefits of living in an intercultural city.

1.3. Results

The Young Ambassadors project took place in Reykjavik and Wroclaw during 2 ½ months, from mid-September until the end of November. It empowered and engaged young people of foreign origin by providing them with training in human rights, democracy, interculturalism and effective communication. While working with young people living in another city, the participants were able to put these new skills to the test during challenging work-shops. In the end, the participants made new friends, became more confident and learned about how diversity is an important asset for communities. Furthermore, they realised that despite their differences, they have more in common than they originally thought.

Both groups of Young Ambassadors were able to create a list of proposals to hand to their municipality or school. Politicians in Reykjavik became very interested by how committed these young people became towards creating new policies for young people in the city. Although the project ended in November, the Young Ambassadors in Reykjavik met with the Human Rights & Violence Prevention Council on the 12th. of December and joined the Intercultural council for a Christmas meal on the 18th of December on International migration day, to explain how they believe this project can make a difference for children and young people from a foreign background.

The project recognized the achievements of the Young Ambassadors through certificates in both Cities. To ensure sustainability, the project was well documented, outcomes registered as well as best practices and lessons learned.

Our participants claim that the project empowered them and made them feel like they could make a difference in their community. They now feel more at ease to speak out when they are faced with prejudice or discrimination, and they understand that they are an important part of their city.

2. Preparation of the project

2.1. Preparation meeting online between Reykjavik and Wroclaw

Two experts from Reykjavik met with three experts from Wroclaw on 28th of August 2024 to plan the launch of the project in the two cities. The two cities launched the Young Ambassadors project around the same time as public schools opened after the summer break.

In Reykjavik a website was launched advertising the project in Icelandic and English (<https://reykjavik.is/ungir-leidtogar>). Posters were put up in every public school in Reykjavik where students from ages 13-16 attend classes. Language teachers in Reykjavik who teach Icelandic to young people of foreign origin were asked to introduce the project to their students. Staff who work with people of foreign origin in the city were notified and asked to introduce the project to families and young people. Recreation centres were also notified (21st of August –26th of August).

The advertisement in Reykjavik explained that the project was intended for young people from the age of 13 to 16, of foreign origin and living in Reykjavik who wanted to learn more about human rights, democracy, prejudice and hate speech. Furthermore, participants would take part in workshops to boost their confidence and improve communication and leadership skills. The project would include a study trip to Wroclaw in Poland where participants would meet other young people and share their experiences and learn from each other. Applicants were asked to submit an answer to this question: „Why do you think voices of young people of foreign origin matter?” The aim was to keep the application process simple but at the same time to challenge young people and encourage them to express their point of view. The answers were used to select the participants.

In Wroclaw information about the project was spread on the wielokultury.wroclaw.pl page and the invitation was sent to two teachers from the Ambassadors of Dialogue (the City project for teachers engaged in intercultural dialogue). The participants were 13 pupils from two Wroclaw's secondary schools (schools nr. 15 and 16).

2.2. Forming two groups of Young Ambassadors

In Reykjavik the Young Ambassador Project was open for applications between 21st of August and 10th of September 2024. The project received 13 applications. On 11th of September eight participants were chosen to participate in the project. However, during the first two weeks of the project one participant left the group due to his participation in other youth activities.

Two applications were submitted after the end of the deadline and two came from young people living in other municipalities who therefore could not take part in the project. Everyone who applied received a reply and those who were not selected to participate were told that their application would be registered and that they might be invited to join a different project at another time. It was important to us from the beginning to recognize the effort these applicants put into their application, despite not being able to recruit more than eight Young Ambassadors.

The Reykjavik participants were as follows:

Six girls, one 13 years old, two 14 years old, one 15 years old and one who was almost 16 years old. There was one boy, 15 years old. The participants' origins were from Poland, Serbia, Italy, Austria and the Philippines.

The Wrocław participants were as follows:

Eight girls & four boys, aged 15-17 from: Ukraine, Russia, Saudi Arabia and France.

3. Working with the Young Ambassadors

3.1. Young Ambassadors in Reykjavik

In Reykjavik students from a foreign background receive Icelandic classes (Icelandic as a second language) but there is not much additional support. During the period of our project the Young Ambassadors received training in various subjects. In Reykjavik it was decided that we would select the appropriate training based on the interests of the participants, as well as which skills would be the most useful to young people to have a positive impact on society.

3.1.1 Human rights

The participants were introduced to human rights through several learning activities. We discussed the principal human rights concepts and how the history of human rights has evolved. The group learned about international human rights systems, conventions and treaties and how human rights are protected in Iceland. Each activity was linked to articles of the Universal Declaration of Human rights and the European Convention of human rights. These concepts were linked to current issues which the participants were aware of.

The aim of this session was to stimulate independent thinking and get our participants to work together.

3.1.2 Public speaking

The Reykjavik group received training from Dale Carnegie. The training included:

1. How to get out of your comfort zone.
2. Conversation techniques, specifically how to approach and get to know new people.
3. How to express your opinions and take part in group discussions.
4. How to earn trust and respect from others.

This training session was conducted with the trip to Wroclaw in mind. The Young Ambassadors were asked how they would greet the other group, how they would ask them about their interest and how they would share their own.

3.1.3 Democracy

Specialists from the Human Rights and Democracy office in Reykjavik City hall met with the group to teach them about democracy and how young people can make a difference.

3.1.4 Racism and social media

Anti-rasistar, a group of young people who aim to raise awareness about racism on social media, met with the group and talked about how they started their social media page and became active in the fight against racism. During this workshop the participants shared their experience of being a young person of foreign origin in Reykjavik and what they would change if given the chance.

In addition to telling the group about their work related to activism online the Anti rasistar spoke to the group about the importance of diversity in all kinds of discussions and different parts of society.

3.2. Young Ambassadors in Wroclaw

In Wroclaw over 10% of the population of pupils are of foreign origin. For foreign language pupils in Wroclaw schools there are 19 preparatory classes (17 in primary schools and 2 in the Secondary School No 15 in Wroclaw). Foreign-language students participate in: Polish as a foreign language lessons, Polish culture classes. Studying in the preparatory class provides quick mastery of the Polish language at a communicative level, integration with Polish students, getting to know the Polish school, preparation to continue regular school education.

Pupils take part in extracurricular activities such as trips, visits to museum, active lessons, visits to the cinema, theatre or opera and private tutoring. Each foreign-language student has a tutor (peer-to-peer education) where a student from the Polish-speaking class works with the student. This includes joint participation in school events and support for parents/caregivers.

The participants of the Young Ambassadors project were only small representation of pupils with migration experience. However, they all benefited from participating in the project – made new friends and had a space to develop communication and intercultural skills.

4 Visibility: Introducing the Young Ambassador Project

In Reykjavik a considerable effort was put into introducing the project to stakeholders and different offices within the city. We knew that in order to help our project grow and continue beyond what was included in our grant application we needed to let people know about it.

4.1 The Imagine Forum

The project manager along with three of our young participants introduced the project at the Imagine Forum, an annual peace conference in Reykjavik. This year's themes was "Bridging Divides - Fostering Dialogue for Peace".

This was a great opportunity to introduce the project to City officials, the University of Iceland, the Ministry for foreign affairs and international guests. We were also able to inform the audience about Reykjavik's participation in the Intercultural Cities Network.

Three of the Young Ambassadors from Reykjavik participated in the presentation and gave a short speech about why they joined this project and what outcomes they were hoping to see as a result of this initiative.

4.2 Consultation platform concerning violence among children

The consultation platform was established in the spring of 2024 in response to an increase in violence among children in Reykjavik. Participants include the national police, the Reykjavik department of education, the Reykjavik department of Welfare along with representatives from student unions and treatment centres for young people. The young ambassador project was presented to the group on the 17th of May. The participants of the Consultation platform were very interested in this project since they have realised, as we have, that young people need more positive initiatives like this one. More importantly, one of the goals of Young Ambassadors is to inspire young people, regardless of their origin, to communicate with different groups in the city.

4.3 Reykjavik team for preventive measures

The prevention team for the City of Reykjavik meets once a month to discuss threats to the safety of children and young people in the City such as violence among young people, online violence, hate speech, sexual harassment and drug use. On October 3rd the group received a presentation about the Young Ambassador project.

5 Online campaign

A part of the Young Ambassador project was to teach the participants about how they could create an online campaign to reach other young people in the City. The group Anti rasistar met with the group to share how they became popular online and how they have been able to share positive content on social media. Anti rasistar is a group of four young women of foreign origin who decided to fight against racism in Iceland. They have hosted workshops, created a podcast and collaborated with other organizations. Their aim is to create dialog between different groups and educate people about racism.

The experts from the Human Rights and Democracy office created an account for the Young Ambassador Project on TikTok. Although the TikTok account did not become as active as we had hoped for, we will continue to use this platform to reach out to young people of foreign origin in Reykjavik.

6 Partnership between two cities

6.1 Online meeting between the Young Ambassadors of Reykjavik and Wroclaw

The two groups met online on the 29th of October. The aim of this meeting was for the two groups to get to know each other and break the ice before meeting in Wroclaw. The Young Ambassadors shared videos they had created, introducing their city and their schools. After this meeting both groups were excited to meet each other in person a week later.

6.2 Study visit to Wroclaw

The group from Reykjavik travelled along with the project manager and another expert to Wroclaw on 4th of November 2024. The trip lasted until the 8th of November 2024. Unfortunately, one of the Reykjavik participants was not able to make it which meant that we were 8 people traveling together from Reykjavik to Wroclaw; 6 participants and two project managers.

The visit from the Reykjavik group to Wroclaw was a chance for the two groups of young people to meet, discuss their shared experiences of being a young individual of foreign origin and learn from each other. For the experts from the two cities this was an opportunity to strengthen our cooperation and share what each city is doing to be a diverse and intercultural city.



6.2.1 Getting to know the Passage of Dialogue

On the first day we learned about Wroclaw as a tour guide walked around the city centre with us. After the tour, the Reykjavik group was introduced to the Passage of Dialogue in

Wrocław. The Passage of Dialogue is a city space for meetings and social activities in the heart of Wrocław, run by the Wrocław Center for Social Development. The residents are invited to participate in cultural and educational events. In the Passage of Dialogue is an information point and a space for educational activities for people newly arrived in Wrocław, as well as workshops, training activities and debates for everyone.

The aim of the Passage of Dialogue is to develop and constantly work on intercultural dialogue in the city. In the Passage of Dialogue there is space for workshops and training activities, a debate room intended for meetings of larger groups, as well as consultation stations where lawyers and social workers receive individuals who have recently moved to the city.

For their first workshop the Young Ambassadors participated in a game to get to know each other better. The participants were divided into smaller groups by numbers and answered various questions related to multiculturalism and human rights. The game encouraged them to co-operate and share what they had already learned on these topics.

6.2.2 *Us - You – Them* training

On the second day the Young Ambassadors were able to visit the Zoo in Wrocław and enjoy the nice weather together. After lunch the Young Ambassadors participated in a workshop called „Us-You-Them“, which was intended to introduce to the participants the idea of stereotypes, how they affect people and how our brain uses stereotypes to make life easier and to help us during difficult situations, but the other effect of stereotypes is that they can lead to discrimination. Stereotypes put big groups into a one simplified picture, and the participants got to share their ideas about stereotypes anonymously as the instructors helped them work them out how those ideas may be harmful.

The instructors also showed the participants how our world view is largely affected by where we grow up. To do this, the instructors showed the participants different maps of the world. The one people use in Iceland and in Poland is not the same as the one they use in Australia or China for example. The workshop was an effective way to get the participants engaged in the topic.



6.2.3 *Vision of an intercultural world*

On the last day the Young Ambassadors were asked to express their vision of an intercultural world. They answered questions like „What is most important to you in an intercultural world?“ and teach each other how to say „have a nice day“ in their native tongue. Everyone agreed that this workshop was their favourite as it gave the groups from Reykjavik and Wroclaw space to speak to each other freely, express their ideas and combine them together and imagine how they would like their city to become so everyone would feel welcome. At the end of the workshop each participant received a pencil case which they then customised for another participant in the group.



7 Putting forward the Ideas of young people

The Young Ambassadors of Reykjavik submitted a proposal to the City Council. The proposal was a list of suggestions which could improve the experience of young people of foreign origin in Icelandic primary schools.

Both groups from Wroclaw (secondary school no. 15 & no. 16) are going to use the ideas during the preparation of the events in the future, e.g. Young Intercultural Forum which takes place Dec. 4th in Wroclaw.

8 Lessons learned

In Reykjavik the project received 13 applications, four from boys and nine from girls. It was clear that most of the applicants had put time and effort into applying. We could not have been happier with the group of participants that we selected. However, we would have liked to see applications from young people with a refugee background since it would have been valuable to hear about their experience of being a young person in our city. Furthermore, we only received four applications from boys, one of which came three days after the application deadline expired and the participants had already been chosen, and one which came from a boy from another municipality.

In hindsight advertising the project with posters and on social media may not have been enough. Although the experts from the Human rights and Democracy Office spoke to a few teachers and youth workers about the project, a limited time frame meant that most of our effort went into putting up posters and advertisement on social media. If we were to repeat the Young Ambassador Project in Reykjavik next year, a part of our work would be to contact all

teachers of this age group in the city and ask them to speak directly to the students who they suspect would be interested in applying. Considering how visible the posters should have been we suspect that young people are hesitant to apply for a project they do not recognise. A conversation with a teacher who they trust would have been encouraging.

We soon realised that in order to create a project that would survive beyond the time period included in the grant, we needed to add a second project manager in Reykjavik. We should also have planned for more help with our social media campaign. Originally, we suspected that a social media campaign would be a hit with the participants as they would enjoy creating content about what we were learning, especially during the study trip to Wroclaw. However, to respect the General Data Protection Regulation as well as city policies on the use of personal data, we wanted to ensure that both our participants and their parents had given their consent regarding any distribution of photos or videos online. Since most of our participants did not give their consent to this distribution the content which we could share online was very limited. We were not prepared to launch a campaign online without the participation of our young people. While the content shared online remained limited, we were able to reach out to young people in the city and we will continue to do so if the Young Ambassadors Project continues next year.

It is clear from this project that young people of foreign origin in our cities want to make a difference if given the chance. There is interest in such projects among young people and they are willing to participate and connect with other pupils from all over the world. Both cities learned a great deal from this first initiative.

9 Looking forward

The Young Ambassador Project received much praise from the very beginning of our work. The local politicians in Reykjavik were interested in hearing the ideas of the young people. The participants themselves told us that they would be interested in meeting with future participants of the project and to continue working with us to empower young people of foreign origin in Reykjavik. What we need to do at this point is to plan how the Young Ambassadors project can continue beyond November 2024. Among the ideas that we have discussed is to cooperate with grass root organisations in our cities. Another option would be to organise monthly meetings with a bigger group of young people. These meetings would be open to any young person interested in learning about human rights, democracy and the benefits of being an intercultural city. However, this means that we would not be able to organise a study trip for the Young Ambassadors which was an incredible learning experience for everyone involved. Another idea would be to reach out to schools and work with one or two school at a time. That way we would get teachers involved in the whole process which in turn would encourage more students to join. One thing is certain, the staff of the Human Rights and Democracy office in Reykjavik is excited to continue working with young people of foreign origin in the future.

10 Conclusion

The project was incredibly successful. Each of our participants became fully engaged in every part of this experience. Together these young people learned about human rights, democracy, prejudice and discrimination, but more importantly they learned to listen to each

other despite their differences and were able to find common ground during each of our meetings.

The Reykjavik Young Ambassadors were able to submit their ideas to the City politicians through a list of proposals. The young people agreed that furthering human rights education in Icelandic schools would be a great step moving forward. Material on human rights could be used in conjunction with other subjects or issues without further adding to the workload of our teachers. In Wroclaw the young participants will bring what they learned back to their class-rooms. They intend to share what they learned with other students so that this work can result in more intercultural exchange programmes in the future.

The Young people who participated in this project are more confident in themselves and their abilities to make a difference in their city. The ideas of these young people, which they handed on to their municipalities or schools, will hopefully result in some positive changes in the two cities. Both Reykjavik and Wroclaw are interested in staying in touch and continue to share new ideas and possibly work together again in order to empower young people of foreign origin in the two cities. What we have learned from this joint effort will help us support young people in our cities and create a more intercultural environment for young people.