

The Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Commission

Compiled by CSC staff from the website of the European Commission

The aim of this programme is to bring Europe closer to its citizens and to enable them to participate fully in the European construction. Through this programme, citizens have the opportunity to be involved in transnational exchanges and cooperation activities, contributing to developing a sense of belonging to common European ideals and encouraging the process of European integration.

It should be noted that "Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship" is also included among the aims of the EU's Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020).

The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is responsible for the management of certain parts of the EU's Culture programmes under supervision from its parent Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM of the European Commission).

The programme "Europe for citizens" with a total budget of EUR 215 millions started on 1 January 2007 and ends on 31 December 2013.

It supports four main types of actions:

- Action 1 - Active Citizens for Europe: involving citizens either through activities linked to town-twinning or through other kinds of citizens' projects.
- Action 2 - Active civil society in Europe: targeted to civil society organisations either through structural support on the basis of their European level work programme or through support to projects.
- Action 3 - Together for Europe: including high visibility events, studies and information tools.
- Action 4 - Active European Remembrance: support to projects aiming at preserving the sites and archives associated with deportations as well as the commemorating of victims of Nazism and Stalinism.

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Direct beneficiaries of grants

The Programme is open to all stakeholders promoting active European citizenship. For example:

- local authorities and organisations
- European public policy research organisations (think-tanks)
- citizens' groups
- civil society organisations
- non-governmental organisations
- trade unions
- educational institutions
- organisations active in the field of voluntary work
- organisations active in the field of amateur sport, etc.

Target group

The Programme is targeting 'European' citizens, which includes for the purpose of this Programme citizens of EU-Member States, citizens of other participating countries as well as legal residents in the participating countries.

Citizenship Programme 2007-2013

This programme supports a wide range of activities and organisations promoting "active European citizenship", especially the involvement of citizens and civil society organisations in the process of European integration.

The **general objectives** of the Europe for Citizens Programme are to contribute to:

- giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe, which is democratic and world-oriented, united in and enriched through its cultural diversity, thus developing citizenship of the European Union;
- developing a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture;
- fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens;
- enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens respecting and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, while contributing to intercultural dialogue.

The Programme has the following **specific objectives**, which shall be implemented on a transnational basis:

- bringing together people from local communities across Europe to share and exchange experiences, opinions and values, to learn from history and to build for the future;

- fostering action, debate and reflection related to European citizenship and democracy, shared values, common history and culture through cooperation within civil society organisations at European level;
- bringing Europe closer to its citizens by promoting Europe's values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past;
- encouraging interaction between citizens and civil society organisations from all participating countries, contributing to intercultural dialogue and bringing to the fore both Europe's diversity and unity, with particular attention to activities aimed at developing closer ties between citizens from Member States of the European Union as constituted on 30 April 2004 and those from Member States which have acceded since that date.
- Under this Programme, priority is given to certain themes of particular relevance for the development of an active European citizenship. The setting up of themes will also encourage synergies between projects working on the same issue and will ensure greater visibility and impact of the supported activities and of the Programme in general. Applicants under this Programme are invited to address in their projects one or more of these priority themes.
- However, the Programme remains open to innovative, bottom-up projects, which do not fall within these priority themes. Some of the themes will be relevant for the whole period of the Programme and will therefore have a permanent character. However, the way these issues are being tackled will depend on specific events or developments in the field. Therefore, a permanent priority can also give indications on aspects on which emphasis will be put in a given period.

Permanent themes

Priority will be given under this Programme to the following themes:

Future of the European Union and its basic values

The important and rapid changes of the European Union make it necessary to engage citizens and civil society organizations in a deep, long lasting reflection on the future of Europe. This has been recognized in 2005 by the Heads of State and Government, which decided a reflection pause on the future of Europe after the ratification process of the Constitution was suspended. To support this reflection, the Commission proposed the Plan D to strengthen dialogue, debate and democracy in Europe. The Europe for Citizens Programme is an important tool in this context. It can be used to set up a structured dialogue in societies in view "of fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens" as mentioned in the Programme objectives.

Vision of the future of the European Union is by definition linked to its basic values. This permanent priority includes therefore also dialogue and actions related to basic values such as human rights, tolerance, solidarity and fight against racism and xenophobia. This permanent theme will be nourished by the developments in the process of European integration.

Active European Citizenship: participation and democracy in Europe

The concept of Active European Citizenship lies at the heart of this Programme. There is a need for further reflection on this concept of Active European Citizenship as well as

need for development of tools and models adapted to citizens' active participation in the construction of Europe at all levels. Therefore, the issues of active European Citizenship, participation and democracy are a permanent priority of this Programme. These issues will therefore be tackled by studies and reflections as well as by projects involving citizens and civil society organizations.

Inter-cultural dialogue

The successive enlargements of the European Union, the increased mobility resulting from the single market, the migration flows, old and new, are increasing interactions between European citizens. Consequently, they should be able to fulfil their potential in a more solidarity based society. Promoting participation of each citizen in intercultural dialogue through the structured co-operation with civil society is fundamental to creating a European identity and enhancing the various aspects of belonging to a community. European citizens should be aware of the importance of developing active European citizenship which is open to the world, respects cultural diversity and is based on the common values of the European Union.

People's well-being in Europe: employment, social cohesion and sustainable development

The European societies are changing rapidly. For example issues like globalisation, transition towards a knowledge based economy, demographic developments, immigration, increasing individualism are recurrent challenges. In this context, the European Union has adopted a clear strategy for facing these challenges: the "Lisbon agenda" has set the following target for the EU: to become the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world. The Europe for Citizens Programme will encourage actions dealing with these issues, giving a European perspective to people's everyday life experience and demonstrating how the EU can improve their well-being in an evolving environment.

Impact of EU policies in societies

The Programme has as an objective to bring Europe closer to its citizens. A very important aspect in this exercise is to raise citizens' awareness of the results achieved through European policies and actions in various policy fields.

Organisations which are based on a strong, pan-European membership and which are focused on specific issues belong to the stakeholders of this Programme. They are well placed for engaging their members and their audiences in projects or reflections on the concrete impact of EU policies in their field of interest. The Programme should therefore encourage actions, which provide citizens with opportunities to recognize, debate, assess and build opinions on these achievements

Horizontal features of the Europe for Citizens Programme

Project promoters are invited to take into consideration the following important, horizontal features while implementing their projects within the Europe for Citizens Programme.

European values

For citizens to give their full support to European integration and to develop their sense of belonging to the European Union, it is important to bring common European values, history and culture to the fore. Freedom, democracy and respect for human rights, cultural diversity, tolerance and solidarity belong to those values. Project promoters are invited to consider how those values can be reflected in their projects. Specific attention should be paid to the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Informal learning for active European citizenship

The Commission has identified ten key competences that every citizen should acquire. The interpersonal, intercultural and social competences as well as civic competence belong to them [COM(2005)548 final].

These competences are defined as follows: they cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.

The Europe for Citizens Programme provides important opportunities for citizens to acquire skills and competences, in a European context, through informal and non-formal learning. For example, by preparing and participating in a multinational town twinning citizens' meeting, citizens will develop new skills for interacting with people coming from different countries or horizons. Through the involvement in a citizens' panel at European level, citizens will develop their understanding of European issues and will probably be willing to participate more actively in democratic decision-making at all levels.

Volunteering - expression of active European citizenship

Volunteering is an essential element in active citizenship: by giving one's time for the benefit of others, volunteers service their community and play an active role in society. They develop the sense of belonging to a community thereby also gaining ownership. Volunteering is therefore a particularly powerful means to develop citizens' commitment to their society and to its political life. Civil society organisations, associations of a European general interest, town twinning associations and other participating organisations often rely on volunteer work to carry out and to develop their activities. Therefore, particular attention is paid within this Programme to the promotion of volunteering.

Transnationality and local dimension

Active European Citizenship can only be concretely experienced in an environment which goes beyond a national vision. Transnationality represents therefore an important feature of this Programme, which can be expressed in different ways:

- The theme of the project can be transnational by tackling an issue from a European perspective or by comparing different national points of view. Such a transnational theme can be implemented by giving the floor directly to persons from different national backgrounds or to people having an original, transnational point of view on the issue.
- The transnationality can also derive from the nature of the project promoters: the project can indeed be developed and implemented through the cooperation of a number of partner organisations, coming from different participating countries.
- Transnationality can also be achieved by ensuring that the project is targeted directly to a public in, or from, different countries or by disseminating the results of the project across borders, thereby reaching indirectly a European audience.

Project promoters are encouraged to strengthen the transnational dimension of their project, possibly by combining the above mentioned characteristics. This transnational dimension should be accompanied by a strong local dimension. In order to help bridging the gap between them and the European Union, it is particularly important that projects or activities supported by this Programme reach citizens in their everyday life, on issues that are of relevance to them.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

The European Commission committed itself to promoting cultural and linguistic diversity through different initiatives and Programmes. The Europe for Citizens Programme can contribute to achieving those objectives by bringing European citizens of different nationalities and different languages together and by giving them the opportunity to participate in common activities. Participation in such a project should raise awareness on the richness of the cultural and linguistic environment in Europe. It should also promote mutual understanding and tolerance, thereby contributing to the development of a respectful, dynamic and multifaceted European identity. Project promoters are invited to present in their application how their project will tackle these issues.

Cross-fertilisation

This Programme has clear and coherent objectives, which are to be achieved through different, complementary actions. These actions address different types of organisations. Synergies and wider multiplier effect can be achieved through the cooperation of those various types of organizations within this Programme. For example, a town twinning conference addressing a social issue could benefit from the participation of local associations working in the field. A think tank could cooperate with a European NGO to implement new methods of citizens' participation. An association in charge of a memorial of the deportations could associate citizens from twinned towns to a commemoration. The potential of so called 'cross-fertilisation' is very important. Therefore, projects involving different kinds of organisations deserve special attention.

How to apply

Project promoters interested in setting up a project must complete the relevant application forms and follow the application procedures which are described on the website of the Programme. See http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/how-to-participate/doc485_en.htm

Compliance with formal and quality criteria and with the objectives, as well as the priorities of the Europe for Citizens Programme and its Actions, are the basis for each grant award decision. Applications are processed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency Executive Agency (EACEA).