



# START POINT

Citizenship Learning in a Shifting Society

# POLICY PAPER

**Project Result 5**

2021-1-DE02-KA220-ADU-000026469



# TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
a. The Importance of Civil Engagement	1
b. The Objectives	2
<b>2.0. THE START POINT PROJECT</b>	<b>2</b>
a. The Results	2
b. The Summary Reports	3
<b>3.0. PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND BARRIERS</b>	<b>5</b>
a. The Challenge	5
b. The Main Barriers	5
<b>4.0. BEST PRACTICES IN ADULT EDUCATION</b>	<b>6</b>
a. Digital Partnership Platform - Finland	6
b. Actions for School and Social Inclusion DRASE - Cyprus	7
<b>5.0. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<b>8</b>
a. Recommendations for Policy Makers	8
b. Outlook for future development and potentials	9

## I.0. INTRODUCTION

The EU-funded project START POINT aims to support the development of young, marginalised adults between the ages of 20 and 30 through digital learning opportunities.

The following 6 organisations work together in the START POINT Project:

- CSI CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION LTD (Cyprus)
- Learning for Integration ry (Finland)
- InterAktion- Verein für ein interkulturelles Zusammenleben (Austria)
- Rightchallenge -Associação (Portugal)
- DRUSTVO ZA RAZVIJANJE PROSTOVOLJNEGA DELA NOVO MESTO (Slovenia)
- KulturLife gGmbH (Germany)

The project focuses on the development of personal and social responsibility among young adults. Adult education actors and social actors are qualified to teach people skills that are needed in civil society. The project aims to help the marginalised people to integrate into a changing and multicultural society, so that they in turn can support other people in the process of integration. Through their own social engagement, the disadvantaged adults' self-confidence and social skills are enhanced and they feel empowered in their role in society.

### a. The Importance of Civil Engagement

In a fast changing and highly globalised society, especially young people from socially vulnerable backgrounds feel disconnected and excluded from society. People with a migration or refugee background might face more barriers than others when integrating into society. Civil engagement in social projects, aid organisations, or volunteer programmes can help in two ways. First, participation in such programmes enables young adults to find their place in society and strengthen their understanding of democratic and civil society values. Second, it leads to these individuals being able to support other people in similar situations in the future. However, it needs to be considered that in all partner countries of this project, especially people with a high level of education are members of NGOs or non-profit organisations. People from lower social classes often lack access to these opportunities for social engagement. They lack the skills to participate, the knowledge about participation possibilities, the intrinsic motivation or they feel that they are not welcome in this social framework.

## b. The Objectives

The START POINT project and the participating partners therefore call for greater promotion of lifelong learning opportunities so that disadvantaged people can build their civic skills. By promoting a culture of lifelong learning, people's personal and social responsibility is strengthened and civic engagement in society is expanded.

For an inclusive and democratic society, civic engagement from all levels of society is of high importance. Political actors should therefore specifically promote and expand lifelong learning opportunities in terms of civic skills and engagement.

## 2.0. THE STARTPOINT PROJECT

During the 24 months of the implementation of the project, the consortium worked on 5 project results. Each of the project results was coordinated by a different partner and developed in cooperation with the other partners. The project results focused on providing a better understanding of the target group, creating digital learning materials on civic competences, developing interactive activities for adult educators and young adults etc. They were developed using different methodologies, such as desk and field research, non-formal education, digital education, local workshops, community participation and international training.

### a. The Results

The 5 project results are the following:

**Audit** - Report on needs analysis - which was developed by implementing desk and field research methods with the goal of identifying the weak points, gaps, flaws, and needs of the young adult's active citizenship competences. The audit was conducted in all the partner countries (Germany, Austria, Portugal, Cyprus, Slovenia, and Finland) and its findings will be presented later in this paper.

**Digital Citizenship** - Learning toolkit -. The goal was to build a digital citizenship toolkit to explore the topics of civic education and help marginalised young adults develop the skills they need to become engaged citizens and critical thinkers. At the same time the toolkit wanted to bring the materials as close to the young people as possible, by using different digital tools such as videos, presentations, quizzes, and infographics.

**Community Learning Programme** - The objective of this result is addressing facilitators who are potential change agents in the community and would promote a community-led social development. It is directed to adult educators, social workers, teachers, tutors, mentors that are working with marginalised adults/refugees, migrants, or other communities. The materials were divided into 4 modules: citizenship, identity, and culture; Intercultural dialogue and Social and community action.

**Local Participation Projects** - This project result aimed to develop local participatory projects that will involve the young, disadvantaged adults and involve them directly in activities, workshops, and events where they can learn how to better participate in the local communities and be part of it. A series of 3 Local participation projects was developed in each of the partner countries over a period of 8 months.

**Political Action Plan** - it aims to develop operational and policy recommendations based on the analysis of the results of the transnational project, for decision and policymakers in the adult education field.

All the project results will be presented in the partner countries during a multiplier event called Citizenship Learning Hubs gathering at least 30 participants from the target groups. A final conference will take place in Germany which will mark the closing of the project and will focus on engaging adult educators, social workers, political NGOs, cultural organisations, and vocational education centres encouraging further use of the resources developed.

## b. The Summary Reports

As it was mentioned in the chapter before, the Start Point audit was carried out across all partner countries and its primary objective was to pinpoint areas of vulnerability, deficiencies, shortcomings, and requirements concerning the promotion of citizenship competencies and educational resources within local communities. The study actively engaged community members and associations, culminating in a comprehensive report detailing the approaches, resources, and insights related to the citizenship learning initiatives targeting disadvantaged adults in each respective country.

**Slovenia:** Findings in Slovenia had shown that most integration initiatives are carried out by NGOs and that there are different flows within the system of integration. The main obstacles in motivating participants to be active citizens were found in the lack of leaders, availability, resources, motivation and educated people, as well as language barriers and lack of activities in smaller towns and villages.

**Finland:** Overall, in Finland, young people are interested in politics and are generally participating in politics, even though being more present in the social media debates than in the official voting. On the other hand, studies show that education background corresponds with civic participation, so for example young migrants with a lower education background have a lower level of participation than native Finns. The main obstacles to promote knowledge and participation to the target group are the lack of resources, motivation, training programs and tutors.

**Germany:** In Germany, the main factors that determine being an active citizen or not are the level of education, the income, and the interest in self-realisation of the individual. Regarding existing initiatives on integration, the target group doesn't feel addressed or understood, as they don't feel that their reality of life is being represented adequately. The main obstacles seem to be a lack of resources, training programmes, tutors, and a lack of socialisation with the rest of the population.

**Austria:** According to Mipex, Austria has one of the lowest scores in Europe regarding integration being classified as "temporary integration". The integration process in Austria is mostly unilateral directed towards the immigrants and not a two way process also involving the local population. The main obstacles to promote good initiatives are lack of accessibility due to lack of language skills in the local language, as well as motivation and training programs. The same reasons appear also on the top list for the access to information. The target group is not able to inform itself properly due to the lack of language skills or poor language skills, as well as low interaction with the local population.

**Portugal:** For Portugal, the data is showing that the way of participation is changing, and young people have developed an interest in political participation through online means, volunteering, campaigns, petitions, and activism. However, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are facing obstacles due to language barriers, cultural differences, economic and geographical barriers.

**Cyprus:** In Cyprus, there is not an overall strong culture of adult education and most of the active participation programmes and initiatives are directed towards children and youngsters (under 18+). The NGOs are the only ones that are working towards bridging this gap. The main barriers that the target group is facing seem to have to do with isolation from the main population through lack of access to technology, language, and resources.

## 3.0. PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND BARRIERS

As the former chapter described barriers specifically to marginalised groups in each partner country, this section aims to analyse the factors for a lack of involvement of young adults, especially from those of marginalised backgrounds, in democratic and civic life in a broader sense. The main barriers contributing to this lack of participation will be identified, providing a solid basis for the development of effective policies to address this issue.

### a. The Challenge

The lack of involvement of youth and young adults in democratic and civic life presents a significant challenge to the development and sustainability of an inclusive and participatory society. Many young people feel excluded and disconnected from power and decision-making structures. This problem is exacerbated among young people who come from underprivileged backgrounds. This results in a lack of genuine representation of their voices and needs, as well as a loss of diversity and enriching perspectives in policy making.

### b. The Main Barriers

**Inequality of access and opportunities:** Young people from marginalised backgrounds face structural disadvantages, such as lack of access to quality education, employment opportunities and adequate infrastructure. This lack of equal access hinders their ability to actively participate in democratic and civic life.

**Lack of representation and meaningful participation:** The absence of young people in positions of power and influence in political and civic spheres creates a representation gap. Young people often feel alienated and demotivated when they cannot see their own experiences and needs reflected in public policies and decisions.

**Misinformation and insufficient civic Education:** Lack of knowledge about democratic processes, civic and political rights contribute to the disengagement of young people. The lack of adequate civic education in schools and educational institutions restricts young people's understanding of their role in democratic and civic life.

**Stigma and discrimination:** Young people from underprivileged backgrounds, such as ethnic minorities or low-income communities, often face stigma and discrimination, which can discourage their participation in democratic and civic life.

**Lack of meaningful participation opportunities:** The lack of effective channels for youth participation undermines their motivation and engagement. The lack of inclusive

spaces for discussion, lack of representation in political structures and absence of mechanisms for expressing their opinions and ideas all contribute to young people's lack of involvement.

We can, therefore, conclude that there are several barriers that contribute to the lack of involvement of youth in democratic and civic life. It is crucial to address these barriers in a comprehensive and systematic way to promote the inclusion and full participation of young people in decisions that affect their own lives and the future of society as a whole. Policies aimed at overcoming these barriers should aim to create equitable opportunities, strengthen civic education, promote inclusive representation, and establish meaningful channels for youth participation.

## 4.0. BEST PRACTISES IN ADULT EDUCATION

To overcome the barriers described in the chapter above and to strengthen the inclusion of especially vulnerable youth in the society and their engagement in civic activities, we are presenting some best practices from different project countries. Even though the project partners collected many examples of projects supporting inclusion and civic engagement, we have chosen two initiatives from Finland and Cyprus, as they present practical and wide-spanning measures to meet these goals.

### a. Digital Partnership Platform - Finland

The Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment launched a digital 'Partnership Platform' for its integration partnership programme. The Partnership Platform is an interactive, digital, and collaborative workspace for the operators, experts, stakeholders, and networks working in the fields of immigrant integration, immigration and the reception of refugees. The platform is an important step towards the development of a more active and collaborative integration programme network. The programme is based on open dialogue that aims to challenge existing ways of thinking, ultimately producing new information, practices and operations and enabling Finnish professionals from many sectors to combine their knowledge.

The digital workspace for registered members provides a safe community space for online cooperation. The target groups of interested and registered members are women, men, children and young people, older people/pensioners, refugees, and others residing in Finland on humanitarian grounds, migrants, and people with a disability. Themes of their



work include culture, wellbeing of the environment and nature, integration, gender equality, anti-racism and equality, prevention of exclusion, promotion of wellbeing and health/healthcare/ rehabilitation, promotion of inclusion, development of competence, hobbies/physical exercise, housing/residential environment, promotion of employment, and religious activities.

(Read more: <https://kotoutuminen.fi/en/partnership-platform>)

The benefits of the digital platform are that it is an easy way to find and form cooperation partners and possibilities, which is a crucial issue even in high welfare countries, as government funding is limited, and many cuts are being made. Therefore, it is vital to provide opportunities, training, and support to marginalised youth via cooperation projects between municipalities and NGOs and other third-sector organisations. By combining resources, it is possible to organise training, advice, volunteering options and other support to help young people solve their problems and guide them towards working life.

## **b. Actions for School and Social Inclusion DRASE - Cyprus**

The DRASE project is a large-scale project co-financed by the European Social Fund (85%) and the Republic of Cyprus (15%), and a good example of the use of resources from the Cohesion Policy Funds absorbed by the Republic of Cyprus. The main purpose of the DRASE program is to reduce the negative impact of the economic crisis on education and students and to address the acute problems and challenges that the Cypriot education system will have to face in the coming years. The objectives of the project are to support the population of Cyprus that falls below the poverty line, to support the economically weaker sections of the population and the socially excluded, to improve the learning outcomes of third-country nationals, and to reduce delinquency in the school environment.

(Read more: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=3621>)

The DRASE project is a good example of social projects that can make a significant impact on the lives of many young people – in this project, as many as 100 schools were involved. Its practical aspect is its biggest strength, as the practical measures implemented in schools within the scope of the project have helped a significant number of young people with concrete support measures, helping them better integrate into society and supporting them in getting a better education and work opportunities in the future. It also serves as a great example of cooperation between a European funding body and local government operations.

## 5.0. RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

### a. Recommendations for Policy Makers

Providing effective citizenship education to young, underserved adults is crucial for fostering civic engagement, promoting social inclusion, and empowering individuals to participate meaningfully in their communities. Below are some recommendations for policy makers in the education sector to consider:

**Collaboration with Community Organisations:** Educational institutions, social actors, facilitators of change and adult educators could partner with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community centres, and grassroots organisations that already work closely with underserved adults. These organisations can provide valuable insights and support to design and delivery of programs, training, events etc. They can also promote the involvement of young adults in volunteering and other activities.

**Soft Skills Development:** Communication, critical thinking, negotiation, and conflict resolution are some of the soft skills that would empower and incorporate citizens - especially disadvantaged individuals - so they can engage effectively in public discussions. Interactive trainings and workshops, as well as roleplay in educational contexts (both formal and non-formal) could be a very effective way going forward.

**Mentorship and Role Models:** Connect young adults with mentors or role models from similar backgrounds who can share their experiences and inspire them to become active citizens and adopt an activist outlook. If face-to-face interaction is difficult, the connection can be made through social media, video calls, presentations etc.

**Experiential Learning:** Educational institutions could arrange visits to local government institutions, community events, and other civic spaces to give participants first hand exposure to the workings of democracy. Within these visits, they can also arrange Q&A sessions with elected officials, organise debates, discussions, and mock elections to foster the understanding of diverse perspectives and the importance of respectful discourse.

**Long-Term Support:** Citizenship education is an ongoing process. Provide follow-up sessions, networking opportunities, and resources to continue participants' engagement beyond the initial program/training/workshop.

The contribution of education policymakers can be crucial to the development of well-informed, engaged, and responsible citizens who actively participate in their communities and contribute positively to society. No one should feel excluded, whatever their background. However, each community has its own unique dynamics, so these recommendations should be adapted to the specific needs and context of the target population.

## **b. Outlook for future development and potentials**

The modern world is no longer as traditionally oriented as our ancestors' world may have been. The rapid development of technology has opened a vast sea of new opportunities, a whole new way of looking at what "society" means and uncovered the vividness of the intermingling of different cultures and nationalities. We may have sometimes feared the arrival of foreign cultures on our territories, but it is time we started to realise the enormous potential that the mixing of cultures can mean for us.

Migrants bring a wealth of untapped potential to traditional societies. As individuals who have crossed geographical and cultural boundaries, they often possess a unique set of skills, perspectives, and experiences that can greatly enrich their new communities. Here are a few key potentials of migrants in traditional societies:

**Cultural Diversity:** Migrants introduce diverse traditions, languages, and cuisines, fostering a more vibrant and multicultural society. This cultural exchange can lead to greater tolerance, understanding, and appreciation of different ways of life.

**Economic Contribution:** Migrants often fill labour gaps in traditional societies, contributing to economic growth. Their willingness to take on jobs that may be less attractive to locals can help stimulate local industries and businesses.

**Innovation:** Migrants bring fresh ideas and innovative solutions that may not have been previously considered in traditional societies. Their diverse perspectives can lead to new approaches to problem-solving and creativity.

**Social Cohesion:** While initially seen as outsiders, migrants can also serve as bridges between different communities. Over time, they can help build stronger social bonds by connecting people from various backgrounds and fostering a sense of unity.

**Education and Skill Transfer:** Migrants may possess unique skills and knowledge that can be shared with the local population. This can enhance educational opportunities and the overall skill level within the society.

**Civic Engagement:** Migrants who become part of traditional societies often engage actively in community life, volunteering, and local governance. Their participation can bring fresh perspectives to decision-making processes.

**Global Connections:** Migrants often maintain strong ties to their countries of origin, opening doors for cultural exchanges, trade, and international collaboration that can benefit the traditional society.

In conclusion, migrants are not only a valuable resource but also a source of vitality and dynamism in traditional societies. Embracing their potential and creating inclusive environments can lead to a more prosperous and harmonious coexistence between newcomers and established communities.

#### **WHAT MORE COULD BE DONE IN THE FUTURE TO FACILITATE THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF DISADVANTAGED ADULTS?**

During the project, we realised that a large part of the problems encountered in integrating disadvantaged adults into society is due to, or at least related to, a lack of understanding of their situation. While the general population may find it easier to empathise with the difficulties of someone who has, for example, left their country and is trying to make a life for themselves elsewhere, it is usually the policy makers - the people who have the most influence over how integration takes place and what kind of help is available to the disadvantaged - who are most distant from the world of those for whom the policies they decide are intended.

Bridging the gap between policymakers and migrants is essential to ensure that the needed policies are informed, empathetic, and effective. Here are some ideas to help policymakers better understand and perceive the realities of migrants:

**Connecting Events:** Policymakers, NGOs and other organisations could organise special events where policymakers are invited to spend a few days in the company of a group of disadvantaged adults from our target group. They could organise events where these people introduce themselves, tell their stories of how they came to the respective country, describe their difficulties, express their wishes, and reveal their plans for their new home country. The goal should be to let political representatives feel their plight and empathise with their story, to start seeing them as real people and stories and not just numbers on a piece of paper.

**Cultural Sensitivity Trainings:** Implement mandatory cultural sensitivity training for policymakers and government officials. This training should focus on understanding the diverse cultures, backgrounds, and challenges of migrants.

**Engage Migrant Representatives:** Establish regular dialogues and consultations with representatives from migrant communities. These representatives can provide valuable insights and act as intermediaries between policymakers and migrants.

**Community Liaison Officers:** Appoint community liaison officers within government agencies to serve as direct points of contact for migrants. These officers should be fluent in the languages spoken by the migrant communities they serve and be well-versed in their unique needs.

**Diverse Task Forces and Committees:** Include migrants and their advocates in policy development task forces and advisory committees. This ensures that the perspectives of migrants are integrated into the policymaking process.

**Language Access:** Provide translated materials and interpreter services at government offices, healthcare facilities, and schools to ensure that migrants can access essential services and communicate effectively with officials.

**Data Collection and Research:** Invest in comprehensive data collection and research on migrant populations. This data can help policymakers make informed decisions and tailor policies to address specific needs.

**Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the general population about the contributions and challenges faced by migrants. This can help reduce stereotypes and biases.

**Migrant Advisory Councils:** Establish Migrant Advisory Councils composed of migrant leaders, academics, and advocates. These councils can review and advise on proposed policies, ensuring they align with the realities of migrant communities.

**Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Make government services and information more accessible to migrants. This includes simplifying bureaucratic processes and providing resources in multiple languages.

**Integration Programs:** Develop integration programs that offer language classes, job training, and cultural orientation to migrants. These programs can facilitate their integration into society, making it easier for them to communicate with policymakers.

**Regular Town Hall Meetings:** Organise town hall meetings where policymakers can directly interact with migrant communities. This provides a platform for open dialogue and allows policymakers to hear concerns and suggestions firsthand.

**Peer Mentorship Programs:** Create peer mentorship programs that connect newly arrived migrants with established migrants who can guide them through the integration process and share their experiences with policymakers.

**Policy Impact Assessments:** Implement rigorous impact assessments for policies related to migrants to understand their real-world consequences and make necessary adjustments.



Citizenship Learning in a Shifting Society

