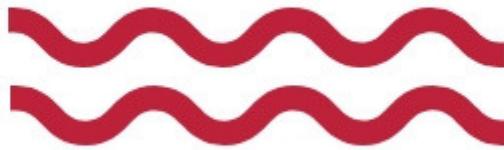


FINAL PUBLICATION

STRinGS



**SOLIDARITY TOWES RESPECT
IN GLOBAL SOCIETIES**



- 03** STRinGS Partnership
- 08** Presentation of the STRinGS Project
- 09** Activities
- 10** Results
- 11** Messages of the participants
- 12** STRinGS conclusive message
- 13** Citizens understanding of Europe
- 14** Europe for Citizens Programme

MUNICIPALITY OF VALLERANO

www.comune.vallerano.vt.it

Vallerano is in the Province of Viterbo (Lazio region), located at 60 kms to Rome and 13 kms to Viterbo, with a population of 2,568 inhabitants.

It is "ANCI Lazio-National Association of Italian Municipalities" member and thanks to this membership it had the chance to participate, as guest, in activities within the framework of lots of European projects and to be actively involved in promoting EU policies at local and at regional level.

Vallerano is active in the following priority areas:

- Information and assistance to its citizens;
- Preservation of the local interests to the national government;
- Cooperation with other towns and organisations both at national and at European level;
- Plan cultural events aimed to promote topics related to local administration tasks and to the European agenda;
- Participate, with own representatives, in institutional debates where decisions on local autonomies interests are discussed;
- Support services to stimulate civic participation and volunteering;
- Promote activities for democratic engagement to increase knowledge about EU policies;
- Plan cultural events.



MUNICIPALITY OF VILA NOVA DE CERVEIRA

www.cm-vncerveira.pt

The Municipality of Vila Nova de Cerveira is in the north-west peninsula, in the district of Viana do Castelo, and has got a population of 9,253 inhabitants.

The Municipality is part of the traditional public administrative state sector, at local level, developing its action pursuant to the law of local councils and other legislation applicable to the sector. Within the scope of the competencies and duties provided in the law, one of Cerveira Municipality's central objectives is to approach the public administration to its citizens.

The Municipality also leads, various activities within the scope of social responsibility in its community, as is exemplified by the social network, a platform which integrates more than fifty social organizations at local and regional level. Vila Nova de Cerveira also seeks to involve its citizens and to guarantee an effective participation of the community in local, regional, national and European matters.



MUNICIPALITY OF ONGA

www.onga.hu

Onga is placed in the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, 10 kms to Miskolc. Onga has always had a rural economy and its development started with the significant constructions began from the 1960s. Among others, a new school, kindergartens, medical centers, cultural houses, boardrooms, libraries were built. Today, cable-free drinking water, sewage, gas, telephone, cable television network has been upgraded, modernizing the public lighting, the sports ground and the institutions of the settlement. The Municipality is always committed to favour sustainable development and social and civic growth. In recent years, many citizens moved from Miskolc to Onga, 10 kms away, but immigrants came from many settlements in the county. Due to its favorable geographical location, good transport facilities, peaceful and balanced life of the settlement and, of course, the vicinity of Miskolc, Onga is one of the settlements that turned the agglomeration area of Miskolc into its favor.



MUNICIPALITY OF AGIA

www.dimosagias.gr

The Municipality of Agia is located in the region of Thessaly and it has a population of 14,121 inhabitants. The current form of the Municipality arose with the “Kallikratis” Program from the extension of the original municipality of Agia by the merger of the pre-existing municipalities of Lakereia, Evrimenon and Melivoia.

The main activities in its territory are agriculture and tourism and the organization consists of several departments and local councils which are responsible for the local administration of the area and its citizens.

The Administration areas are environment, tourism, financial development, sports, education, urbanization civil protection etc.



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
PREFECTURE OF LARISSA
MUNICIPALITY OF AGIA



BALKANU ZIEDS BALKANS FLOWERS

www.onga.hu

The Municipality of Agia is located in the region of Thessaly and it has a population of 14,121 inhabitants. The current form of the Municipality arose with the “Kallikratis” Program from the extension of the original municipality of Agia by the merger of the pre-existing municipalities of Lakereia, Evrimenon and Melivoia.

The main activities in its territory are agriculture and tourism and the organization consists of several departments and local councils which are responsible for the local administration of the area and its citizens.

The Administration areas are environment, tourism, financial development, sports, education, urbanization civil protection etc.



MUNICIPALITY OF DERYNEIA

www.deryneia.org.cy

Deryneia is located at the east side of Cyprus, 2 kms south of the city of Famagusta.

The population is 7500 inhabitants, including 1.000 immigrants living there, and it's a Municipality since 1994. Since the 1974 Turkish invasion the 75% of the village is in Northern Cyprus.

Deryneia has agricultural land around it and is one of the red villages so called from the red soil. Potatoes are widely grown but Deryneia is famous for its strawberries and holds a biennial Cypriot Strawberry Festival, held in May at the football ground of Anagennisi Deryneia.

Its key activities are:

- Carry out actions with European towns;
- Plan seminars on topics related to migration and euroscepticism;
- Participate in institutional debates where decisions on local autonomies interests are discussed;
- Promote activities for democratic and civic engagement to increase knowledge on EU social policies;
- Support services to stimulate new forms of local civic participation;
- Plan cultural and tourist events.



PRESENTATION OF THE STRINGS PROJECT

Objectives, priorities and main features of the Project

The Partners strongly believe that in this conjuncture between economic, social and humanitarian crisis it is important to create a positive environment for the engagement of young people in civic participation and to promote a sense of solidarity among EU members. That's why, it is considered extremely important to let young people gain awareness of the Union policy-making process and of the importance of active civic and democratic participation.

STRINGS main objective is to debate on Euroscepticism, in particular among young citizens, because it is important to reflect on what leads the youth to follow propagandas that refuse the European Union and it is vital to promote new opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement at Union level.

General objective of the "Europe for Citizens" 2014-2020 Programme targeted by STRINGS:

To foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level.

Specific aims of the Programme targeted by STRINGS:

Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy making-process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level.

Priorities of the Programme targeted by STRINGS:

- Debating the future of Europe and challenging Euroscepticism;
- Solidarity in times of crisis.

Main features:

- Use of innovative active listening methods to avoid passiveness and lack of interest;
- Seminars and workshops with experts in EU policies, programmes and policy-making processes, to give to the participants the right tools for an active societal and democratic engagement at EU level;
- Use of ICTs to share information and outcomes;
- Exchange of best practices on Euroscepticism, solidarity, participatory democracy, sense of ownership to the EU, intercultural dialogue and equal access);
- Volunteering as expression of active citizenship;
- Promotion of town-twinings and collaborative partnerships;
- Signature of the "Friendship and Cooperation Agreement" among all the Partners.

ACTIVITIES OF THE STRINGS PROJECT

Description of the carried out activities

STRinGS is a positive experience of networking among countries united by the will to discuss strategic topics for their communities. It was the continuation of previous experiences of best practice exchanges and now the discussion was enlarged to enrich the debate on solidarity. Its activities have seen the innovative contribution coming from the cooperation with different levels of organisations and volunteering associations matched with the expertise coming from the Team of Experts and the Local Teams. These human resources assured proper quality management and implementation of the STRinGS activities, that can be summed up as follows:

- 1) Theoric activities (conferences, workshops, seminars, debates to exchange best practices and offer new tools for the dissemination and visibility of STRinGS and of the Programme during the Local Simultaneous Meetings);
- 2) Theoric activities (final conference, conclusive ceremony and signature of the “Friendship and Cooperation Agreement” during the International Event in Vallerano-IT);
- 3) Practical activities (specific visits to local NGOs, cultural tours, role games, use of ICTs and performing media, during the International Event in Vallerano-IT, to involve all the participants and the communities in the reflection on the main themes of the Project).
- 4) Dissemination of the objectives and results;
- 5) Follow-up (promotion of STRinGS at least for 5 years after its end).

Particular attention was given to the involvement of hard to reach groups/Euro-sceptics, third-country nationals residing in the Partner Towns and disadvantaged people (due to cultural, economic and social problems) to foster integration, solidarity, intercultural dialogue and gender balance.

The activities were all planned to respond to the aims and objectives of STRinGS and of the “Europe for Citizens” 2014-2020 Programme and to assure the deepest involvement of all the participants. All the activities were also planned to keep the participants focused on the selected themes and features, using a bottom-up approach.

RESULTS

The achievements of STRinGS

The results achieved by STRinGS are the following ones:

- Active participants' intercultural engagement in all the activities;
- Improvement of the participants' media literacy and critical thinking;
- Fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding;
- Improvement of the knowledge about EU policies/programmes;
- Sharing of strategies to be opposed to racist propagandas;
- Exchange of best practices on solidarity and social inclusion strategies and policies;
- Major involvement of third-country nationals in volunteering and civic participation;
- Development of mutual comprehension among the participants and of a dialectical way of debating hard to face subjects;
- Overcoming of stereotypes and disgregative propagandas;
- Promotion of peace and well-being of the Europeans;
- Involvement of national and international authorities;
- Promotion of the knowledge of the EU's common history and values;
- Signature of the "Friendship and Cooperation Agreement";
- Promotion of the involvement of citizens in the EU policy-making process;
- Production of the final publication containing information on STRinGS, the conclusions on the themes discussed and the presentation of the "Europe for Citizens" Programme;
- Planning of future twinning exchanges among the Partners;
- Planning of a future project proposal to be submitted within the next available deadline.



MESSAGES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Key messages left by the participants in the STRinGS Project

- Adelio Gregori (Mayor of Vallerano-Italy, Applicant Organisation): “I am glad to have had the opportunity to set up the meeting in our beautiful city during the “Chestnut Festival”. This international event allowed us to emerge and to make our voices be heard at European level. I hope that this occasion will also be considered as a thrust for other small communities like ours to take part in European projects in the near future. It is necessary to carry on actions leaned towards our future and the future of our young generation” .
- Cristina Melo Pereira (Vila Nova de Cerveira-Portugal, associated partner): “STRinGS was fundamental for us to start a deep reflection on EU based themes. During the meetings, we had the opportunity to listen to different opinions and gather suggestions from every participant. STRinGS made me aware of the fact that there are many potential solutions to the problems in our society and the best way to face them is to set a fertile ground to share points of view among different communities”.
- Vasileios Valarys (Agia-Greece, associated partner): “We are taking part in European projects from a long time and this occasion was a very fruitful one because it enhanced solidarity feelings among our community first and among the participants then”.
- Orsolya Péchy (Onga-Hungary, associated partner): “At the end of STRinGS, I realised that the first objective was reached and that it was a strong base to allow the pursuit of the second one. I am very glad to have taken part in it and I hope there will be more occasions to share opinions and thoughts like this one”.
- Katerina Žiga (Balkanu Zieds-Latvia, associated partner): “I will never forget what this Project gave me: I recognize that thanks to it I had the chance to start many friendship bonds that surely will lead to many occasions to stay together and keep on sharing points of view. I hope that this will bring to take up favourable actions towards the future of the Union”.
- Marianna Andreou (Deryneia-Cyprus, associated partner): “Solidarity connects us and breaks down barriers when we unite to nurture the best in us and help each other succeed”.

STRINGS CONCLUSIVE MESSAGE

Final message agreed upon by all the participants in STRINGS

Lately, the criticism towards the European Union has increased. One of the causes can be seen in the rise of nationalistic politics. It obviously represents a barrier in the integration issue. The only thing that is clear is that young people represent the Future of Europe.

In particular, our century is a particular one and this is due to a spread of communication tools such as Internet, social media, and mobile phones. This leads to a higher possibility to share opinions on the one hand, but to a spread of negative propagandas on the other.

The latter is the biggest problem, because nowadays it is much easier for a young to be conditioned by someone else. It is essential that young people learn more about politics and that they take an aware position. It is necessary to understand that the youth generation in the EU today is the leader of tomorrow.



CITIZENS UNDERSTANDING OF EUROPE

Improvement of citizens' knowledge about EU

The activities foreseen during the implementation of the STRinGS Project helped achieving a very good level of citizens' understanding of the EU. A practical example was the presentation of the "Europe for Citizens" 2014-2020 Programme during the conference held in Vallerano (Italy) on October 2018, with the aim to improve people's understanding of the EU and to increase democratic participation at EU level through the opportunity to accede to European funds. The local teams of experts collaborated with the Municipality of Vallerano, on a voluntary basis, to explain, using a bottom-up approach, all the aspects referring to the Programme. The participants were stimulated to start a debate for future opportunities within the framework of European Programmes, with the specific will to set up a future project idea.

All the participants gave their specific support and point of view on the next priorities to be chosen (EU rights and youth councils), working together in a long term perspective.

Another activity that increased cooperation and the citizens' understanding of the EU was the writing of the "Friendship and Cooperation Agreement" signed during an official ceremony held in Vallerano. Guided by expert volunteers, they selected the priority areas and the way and means to carry out the cooperation. The following priority areas were selected:

- Solidarity in times of crisis;
- Foster European citizenship and improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level;
- Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy making process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level;
- Culture and exchange of best practices;
- Debate on the Future of Europe;
- Sustainable development;
- Economic development and tourism;
- Transport and urban mobility.

They also decided the means to carry out this cooperation:

- Exchange of information;
- Technical consultations;
- Arrangement of seminars, meetings, conferences, workshops and symposia;
- Transfer of know-how and experiences;
- Experts exchange.

THE EUROPE FOR CITIZENS PROGRAMME

Quick introduction to the Europe For Citizens Programme

Encouraging and facilitating citizens' wider involvement in the European Union and what it stands for, is of great importance! This ranges from the need to increase their participation in current affairs to the need of ensuring a broader understanding of the history of the European Union (hereinafter "Union") and its origins in the aftermath of two World Wars. With decisions and policies needed on issues ranging from economic growth, security and Europe's role in the world, it is now more important than ever for citizens to take part in discussions and help shape policies. In this context, the "Europe for Citizens" Programme adopted for the period 2014-2020 is an important instrument aimed at getting the Union's 500 million inhabitants to play a greater part in the development of the Union.

By funding schemes and activities in which citizens can participate, the Programme is promoting Europe's shared history and values and fostering a sense of ownership for how the Union develops. Under the overall aim of bringing the Union closer to citizens, the general objectives are to:

- Contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history and diversity;
- Foster European citizenship and improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level.

Specific objectives shall be pursued on a transnational level, or with a European dimension:

- Raise awareness of remembrance, common history and values and the Union's aim that is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples by stimulating debate, reflection and development of networks;
- Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy making-process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level.

Annual priorities of the "Europe for Citizens" Programme

In line with the general objectives of the Programme, some annual priorities are defined by the European Commission after consultation of the Programme Committee. Applicants are encouraged to develop projects in line with the objectives of the Programme and targeting the annual priorities.

The priorities are:

- Debating the future of Europe and challenging Euroscepticism;
- Solidarity in times of crisis;
- Fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding and combatting the stigmatisation of migrants and minority groups
- European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

The "Europe for Citizens" Programme is founded over some general features, that focus on its main objective that is to promote an active and inclusive European Citizenship:

- Equal access: the “Europe for Citizens” Programme should be accessible to all European citizens without any form of discrimination on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. Particular attention should be given to hard-to-reach groups and special attention should be paid to the balanced integration and participation of citizens and civil society into transnational projects and activities taking into account the multilingual character of the Union and the need to include underrepresented groups;
- Transnationality and local dimension: European Citizenship can be best experienced in an environment which goes beyond a national vision. Transnationality can be expressed in different ways:
 - + By tackling an issue from a European perspective;
 - + By critically comparing different national points of view;
 - + The project can be developed and implemented through the cooperation of a number of partner organisations coming from different participating countries;
 - + By ensuring that the project is targeted directly to a public from different countries;
 - + By disseminating the results of the project across borders.
- Intercultural dialogue: The European Commission committed itself to promote intercultural dialogue by bringing European citizens of different nationalities and different languages together and by giving them the opportunity to participate in common activities, so to:
 - + Raise awareness on the richness of the cultural and linguistic environment in Europe;
 - + Promote mutual understanding and tolerance;
 - + Develop a respectful, dynamic and multifaceted European identity.
- Volunteering: 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 and 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 volunteering work to carry out and to develop their activities.

The Programme is implemented through 2 Strands and a horizontal Action:

- Strand 1 - European remembrance: Raise awareness of remembrance, common history and values and the Union's aim. This Strand supports activities that invite to reflection on European cultural diversity and on common values in the broadest sense. In this context, it aims to finance projects reflecting on causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe's modern history (specially, but not exclusively, Nazism that led to the Holocaust, Fascism, Stalinism and totalitarian communist regimes) and to commemorate the victims of their crimes. The Strand also encompasses activities concerning other defining moments and reference points in recent European history. In particular, it will give preference to actions which encourage tolerance, mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue and reconciliation.
- Strand 2 - Democratic engagement and civic participation: Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level. This strand supports activities that cover civic participation in the broadest sense, with a particular focus on activities directly linked to Union policies, with a view to concretely participate in the Union policy-making process in areas related to the objectives of the Programme.

These measures are part of this Strand:

- **Town Twinning:** Aims at supporting projects bringing together a wide range of citizens from twinned towns around topics in line with the objectives of the Programme.
- **Networks of Towns:** Municipalities and associations working together on a common theme in a long-term perspective may wish to develop networks of towns to make their cooperation more sustainable. Networking between municipalities on issues of common interest appears to be an important means for enabling the exchange of good practices. Networks of Towns are expected to integrate a range of activities around subjects of common interest and to have defined target groups for which the selected themes are particularly relevant, involving community members active in the subject area. The Networks must also serve as a basis for future initiatives and actions among the towns involved.
- **Civil Society Projects:** This measure aims at supporting projects promoted by transnational partnerships and networks directly involving citizens. Those projects gather citizens from different horizons, in activities directly linked to Union policies, with a view to give them an opportunity to concretely participate in the Union policy-making process in areas related to the objectives of the Programme. It must include these kind of activities:
 - Promotion of societal engagement and solidarity;
 - Making the link to the European political agenda and policy making process;
 - Gathering of opinions of the citizens on a specific topic to be yearly defined;
 - Volunteering activities promoting solidarity among Union citizens and beyond.



STRinGS was co- funded by the EUROPE FOR CITIZENS PROGRAMME

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained

Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union



https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens_en