

The project
« REFORM - Retelling the European Future – Opportunity for Rural Municipalities to decrease the impact of Euroscepticism at local level - Nr. 615485-CITIZ-1-2019-2-HU-CITIZ-NT»
was funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens"

Applicable to the Strand 2 – Measure 2.2 "Networks of Towns"

This Network of Towns project gave us the opportunity to bring together 27 rural municipalities from all parts of the European Union sharing the same concerns about the rise of Euroscepticism among inhabitants at both institutional and civic levels.

REFORM is our answer to that problem. The title speaks for itself – reforms are needed to remain united and build a strong and improved EU for the future.

The project aimed at decreasing the level of Euroscepticism at the local level, strengthening democratic engagement, encouraging volunteering, and helping in building the future European society.

Within two years participants gained knowledge on the institutions of the EU, its benefits, common values, history, and different cultures, but they learnt from each other and helped one another understand and tackle Euroscepticism.

The project was carried out in the form of a "university" believing that only education can aid in making changes/reforms in the world.

We organised three Seminars (in The Netherlands, Hungary, and Latvia) with one third of the partners involved, where the participants challenged Europe's current problems, two Summer Academies (in Croatia and Spain) and a Closing Conference (in Romania) with all the partners involved, where participants had the opportunity to share their experience and good practices about the main topics.

We kept in mind the concept of cost efficiency to improve the quality of the whole project as all the participants stayed with host families instead of in hotels. They got a real insight into the locals' lifestyle – this kind of interaction enabled participants to meet, learn from each other, get to know and respect each other, and each other's way of living better. This action greatly contributed to the success of the project, it deepened and intensified the cooperation of towns, municipalities and individuals as well.

The total of 597 participants were directly involved and mobilised across Europe. The number of those indirectly involved was bigger than expected. More than 170 host families participated in 6 meetings providing housing to participants meaning that more than 2200 Europeans were indirectly involved.

6 events have been carried out within this project:

Event 1 - Seminar in The Netherlands

Participation: The event involved 77 citizens, including 4 participants from the town of Lasse (Austria), 4 participants from the town of Bievre (Belgium), 4 participants from the town of Svoge (Bulgaria), 1 participant from the town of Tisno (Croatia), 4 participants from the town of Lefkara (Cyprus), 4 participants from the town of Naestved (Denmark), 1 participant from the town of Nagycenk (Hungary), 4 participants from the town of Cashel (Ireland), 4 participants from the town of Bucine (Italy), 4 participants from the town of Troisvierges (Luxembourg), 4 participants from the town of Samuel (Portugal), 4 participants from the town of Ibanesti (Romania), 5 participants from the town of Ockelbo (Sweden), 30 participants from the town of Esch (The Netherlands).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **ESCH, The Netherlands**, from 25/05/2022 to 30/05/2022.

Short description:

Main topic of this meeting was migration as the cause of intolerance and growing rates of Euroscepticism and how we can all live together and turn this situation into an advantage by learning from each other.

The aim was to focus on understanding and combating the stigmatisation of migrants and minority groups, to learn how to integrate refugees into society, and to promote citizenship and integration in the EU through discussions, excursions. Thanks to informal learning methods (debates, group discussions and brainstorming) participants could deepen their knowledge about multiculturalism, immigrants' integration, and solidarity.

During the lecture by a local association, participants could collect ideas, solutions and learn how other rural citizens can make an act of solidarity at the local level. Through a local volunteer action, participants wrote welcoming letters to Ukrainian refugees, and they had a chance to hand over those messages and meet and talk to refugees and immigrants. Listening to their stories and spending time with them, brought the delegates a real-life experience and made them understand each other better and helped promote solidarity.

During this meeting participants learned about the White paper on the future of Europe and the 5 scenarios were discussed and the participants' opinion about the future of Europe was debated.

Through several local and cultural activities, participants were able to expand their knowledge about the EU and its countries and different cultural and linguistic diversity. They took part in the famous Beer Pump Festival in Esch and a small fair was organised providing participants with the opportunity to present their country's culture and culinary specialities and exchange books, photographs, etc. They played traditional Dutch games together which helped them get to know each other better and enhanced the intercultural dialogue between them.

The Culture Café activity gave the delegates an opportunity to learn about the Dutch lifestyle, Dutch habits, local legends and gastronomy. An interesting activity was the Storytelling during which participants learned about the local history, i.e. about the liberation of the area after WW2 directly from a local historian. Learning about the local history, the stories of people's lives allowed people to understand each other better and helped them learn from the past mistakes to avoid repeating them in the future.

A survey was taken to ask participants' opinion about the EU in general and specific questions were addressed to ask them about the topic of immigration. We asked how often they interact with immigrants and if they supported their country's government offering financial support to the EU to help refugees.

We collected 112 surveys, 15 questions were filled with 1680 answers.

Event 2 – Summer Academy in Spain

The event involved 149 citizens, including 4 participants from the town of Lasse (Austria), 4 participants from the town of Bievre (Belgium), 4 participants from the town of Svoge (Bulgaria), 5 participants from the town of Tisno (Croatia), 4 participants from the town of Stary Poddvorov (Czechia), 4 participants from the town of Naestved (Denmark), 4 participants from the town of Polva (Estonia), 5 participants from the town of Cissé (France), 4 participants from the town of Hepstedt (Germany), 2 participants from the town of Kolindros (Greece), 5 participants from the town of Nagycenk (Hungary), 4 participants from the town of Cashel (Ireland), 4 participants from the town of Bucine (Italy), 4 participants from the town of Kandava (Latvia), 4 participants from the town of Zagare (Lithuania), 4 participants from the town of Troisvierges (Luxembourg), 5 participants from the town of Nadur (Malta), 4 participants from the town of Strzyzow (Poland), 4 participants from the town of Samuel (Portugal), 4 participants from the town of Ibanesti (Romania), 50 participants from the town of Bienvenida (Spain), 5 participants from the town of Ockelbo (Sweden), 8 participants from the town of Esch (The Netherlands), 4 participants from the town of Desborough (UK).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **BIENVENIDA, Spain**, from 14/07/2022 to 18/07/2022.

Short description:

This event focused on the following topic: Fake news as the problem of using the media as the tool for spreading Euroscepticism and undermining the European institutions and all the benefits of the EU membership.

By organising a series of different activities (workshop, lecture, role play activity) about fake news participants were to gain new analytical skills, and ability to handle offline as well as online propaganda, misinformation, and fake news. During the group discussion about the question “How can fake news become a seed of Euroscepticism?” participants discussed the topic and got an insight of the list of the most prominent European fake news portals, and they were encouraged to educate others not to share fake news and to think twice before sharing something. The aim of the event was also to offer European citizens a new type of experience of intercultural learning and enable them to see the European Union as an integral part of their own historical, social, cultural, and political environment and realise the benefits we have.

During the meeting workshops participants got familiar with the White paper on the future of Europe and the 5 scenarios. They had a discussion and a negative brainstorming session about the future of rural Europe and they also tried to find solutions and best practices.

A Culinary Evening was held where each country brought their national food and drink specialities and participants could taste all the delicacies from 24 European countries. Each municipality presented the cultural identity of its country through national cuisine and costumes as an intercultural dialog.

Important activity was the Storytelling, the Spanish edition of “Don't Repeat, Retell” about the local events that happened during the civil war 1936 – 39 performed by an ancestor of a survivor and a local expert about the fight for democracy against dictatorship. Participants visited the local cemetery together and gained knowledge about European history from a local perspective to get an understanding of the history that we have in common and its impact on the countries.

During the four-days-long event the participants learned the basics of Spanish language in the Language Café to foster the importance of European language diversity and enhance the intercultural dialogue.

Delegates got to know the Spanish lifestyle by staying with host families, taking part in flamenco workshops and several other local cultural activities. They took part in a voluntary action, together in teamwork they renovated and painted the fence of the old European Welcome Park which was an inspiring action where the delegates created something long lasting together.

Participants filled a survey with general questions about EU benefits, their trust level in the EU and their online and news consumption habits. Regarding the main topic we addressed questions about fake news too, e.g. “Have you ever been fooled by fake news thinking it's real news?”.

We collected 274 surveys with 14 questions filled with 3836 answers.

Event 3 – Seminar in Hungary

Participation: The event involved 70 citizens, including 4 participants from the town of Lasse (Austria), 2 participants from the town of Tisno (Croatia), 4 participants from the town of Stary Poddvorov (Czechia), 4 participants from the town of Polva (Estonia), 4 participants from the town of Hepstedt (Germany), 30 participants from the town of Nagycenk (Hungary), 4 participants from the town of Kandava (Latvia), 4 participants from the town of Medzev (Slovakia), 4 participants from the town of Bienvenida (Spain), 4 participants from the town of Ockelbo (Sweden), 2 participants from the town of Esch (The Netherlands), 4 participants from the town of Desborough (UK).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **NAGYCENK, Hungary**, from 22/09/2022 to 25/09/2022.

Short description:

The central theme of the meeting in Hungary, as indicated by the topic "Promotion of the advantages of EU membership as the only path to recognition by Eurosceptics" revolved around discussing, learning about, and debating the achievements, tangible benefits, and the future of the EU. During the debate called “How can we, rural European citizens, reshape the European Future?” participants engaged in discussions about the current situation in local rural communities. Working collaboratively in teams, they identified potential tools and mechanisms that could alter perspectives and reduce the level of Euroscepticism.

Through a workshop activity participants got familiar with the White paper on the future of Europe and the 5 scenarios. They had a discussion about the future of rural Europe with the focus on the future generations. It is a main issue in rural areas and participants discussed how to keep the youth in rural areas, how to improve the living conditions, etc. During the Storytelling workshop the participants visited the Pan-European Picnic place where a peace demonstration was held on the Austrian-Hungarian border near Sopron, Hungary on 19 August 1989. They learned about this historical event which is the symbol of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. They could share their own stories from that era, they learned about our common European history, real solidarity and universal peace. During these four days spent in a Hungarian village, participants got a chance to get familiar with Hungarian language, habits and cuisine and by taking part in the interactive actionbound game organised around the area of Nagycenk combining outdoor activity, teambuilding and having fun they learned about teamwork and were encouraged to overcome their communication barriers and strengthen the tolerance and mutual understanding.

Participation in the local Harvest Festival and Parade was an excellent way to deepen their knowledge about culture and customs of other nations.

Participants completed a survey addressing Euroscepticism and the benefits of EU membership, additionally topic related (focusing on future generations of the youth) questions on how "Your community involves young people in decisions that impact the community's future?" and other similar topics were asked.

We had 108 surveys with 15 questions filled and 1620 questions answered.

Event 4 – Seminar in Latvia

Participation: The event involved 67 citizens, including 4 participants from the town of Bievre (**Belgium**), 5 participants from the town of Tisno (**Croatia**), 4 participants from the town of Cissé (**France**), 5 participants from the town of Nagycenk (**Hungary**), 30 participants from the town of Kandava (**Latvia**), 5 participants from the town of Zagare (**Lithuania**), 5 participants from the town of Nadur (**Malta**), 4 participants from the town of Strzyzow (**Poland**), 5 participants from the town of Esch (**The Netherlands**).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **KANDAVA, Latvia**, from 13/04/2023 to 16/04/2023.

Short description:

The main topic of the fifth event of the Reform project was "Raising awareness of EU institutions and the decision-making process, with the purpose of bringing these institutions closer to citizens." Through various activities, we promoted active citizenship to support justice, human rights, democracy, co-responsibility, equity, and sustainable development at both local and European levels.

The group discussion, titled "How to understand each cog in the EU machine?" allowed participants to exchange their views, opinions, and ideas in face-to-face situations on the topic. During the workshop "Your voice can be heard too!", delegates learned about the importance of European elections, what these elections entail, and how they function. In an interactive role-play game, a small election was held, enabling them to grasp the entire process through hands-on participation.

Participants discussed the challenges and opportunities ordinary people from rural areas of the EU are facing, with the overarching question, "Do we have the same benefits of EU membership?" The program aimed to listen to citizens' voices in order to learn from each other and collect best practices. A debate provided participants with insights into the White Paper on the future of Europe and included an interactive discussion in an informal, relaxed environment about rural European opinions.

Through various outdoor activities, they were introduced to Kandava and Latvian habits and cuisine. They visited the music school and attended a lecture about the bird species living in Kandava. Each participating country placed a birdhouse in Kandava's birch tree park.

Under the theme "A New Way to Unity - The Baltic Way - Human Chain," participants, together with local volunteers, commemorated the famous event that contributed to the Baltic states' independence from the Soviet Union. They learned about this globally renowned historical event and, during the Storytelling workshop, received a lecture on Latvian history and how the Baltic states regained independence from the USSR.

The Rural EU Market organised during this event served as the ideal platform for all delegates to showcase their countries and municipalities with food and small brochures. The event also provided delegates with the opportunity to learn traditional Latvian dances, promoting cultural diversity and deepening their understanding of Latvian heritage.

Participants immersed themselves in the traditional way of life in the Kurzeme region by participating in a series of local activities, including rye bread preparation, visiting the Indani Traditional Farmstead, canvas painting, and making black pottery. They also visited the elderly home alongside the Mayor and local volunteers, bringing snacks to senior citizens and engaging in meaningful conversations.

Furthermore, participants completed a survey about their opinions regarding Euroscepticism and the benefits of the EU, addressing questions such as "What are the three most significant outcomes of the EU?"

We received 110 surveys with 11 questions each, resulting in 1210 questions answered.

Event 5 – Summer Academy in Croatia

Participation: The event involved 84 citizens, including 4 participants from the town of Lasseo (**Austria**), 2 participants from the town of Bievre (**Belgium**), 2 participants from the town of Svoge (**Bulgaria**), 30 participants from the town of Tisno (**Croatia**), 3 participants from the town of Stary Poddvorov (**Czechia**), 2 participants from the town of Naestved (**Denmark**), 2 participants from the town of Polva (**Estonia**), 2 participants from the town of Cissé (**France**), 2 participants from the town of Hepstedt (**Germany**), 5 participants from the town of Nagycenk (**Hungary**), 2 participants from the town of Cashel (**Ireland**), 3 participants from the town of Kandava (**Latvia**), 2 participants from the town of Zagare (**Lithuania**), 2 participants from the town of Troisvierges (**Luxembourg**), 2 participants from the town of Nadur (**Malta**), 2 participants from the town of Strzyzow (**Poland**), 2 participants from

the town of Samuel (**Portugal**), 2 participants from the town of Ibanesti (**Romania**), 2 participants from the town of Medzev (**Slovakia**), 2 participants from the town of Bienvenida (**Spain**), 2 participants from the town of Ockelbo (**Sweden**), 3 participants from the town of Esch (**The Netherlands**), 4 participants from the town of Desborough (**UK**).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **TISNO, Croatia**, from 26/05/2023 to 31/05/2023.

Short description:

This meeting revolved around the main theme: "Intercultural dialogue with a focus on discussing common history, aiming to identify historical reasons for Euroscepticism. What structural and short-term factors contribute to fueling Euroscepticism?"

Participants had a debate, a formal discussion with the help of a facilitator, on the topics "A way to the future: Leaving the past in the past" and "Can reshaping the history affect the present?". They learned about the reasons and historical roots of current Euroscepticism in different parts of Europe and Croatia. Another workshop, "What makes us Europeans? Passing to European citizenship," allowed participants to discuss the problems and opportunities concerning ordinary people in rural areas. Throughout various activities such as training sessions, interactive workshops, and volunteer initiatives, delegates gained valuable insights into teamwork and the significance of addressing crucial European issues. These experiences challenged them to overcome communication barriers, ultimately reinforcing tolerance and mutual understanding. Participants explored the villages by taking part in an interactive treasure hunt game in small groups, guided by local volunteers. This activity required participants to collaborate, solving challenges together and gaining insights into local customs and the unique aspects of coastal living in Croatia. It not only bolstered group cohesion but also facilitated intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, an organised debate centred on the White Paper on the future of Europe provided participants with the platform for an interactive discussion about their visions for the future of Europe. The primary objectives of the event were to foster debate on Europe's future, challenge Euroscepticism, and offer European participants a novel intercultural experience, promoting a positive outlook on the future of the continent.

A total of 22 countries participated in the creative session named "Tokens of our history – tickets for our future". As part of this initiative, a small free library was constructed to house European books contributed by the representatives of the project partners attending the meeting. Inside the library building, a Storytelling event took place where participants had the unique opportunity to learn about Croatia's Homeland War from an actual survivor, writer, and polyhistor. These personal experiences deeply engaged the participants, helping them appreciate the significance of understanding both local and European history. During the Culinary Evening, all attendees had the chance to embark on a culinary journey through Europe. Each country presented its national food and drink specialties, offering a taste of their cultural identity through their cuisine. The highlights of the evening included a light show on the sails of traditional wooden boats and traditional Croatian dance performances commemorating Croatia's 10th anniversary in the EU.

Participants also took part in a survey addressing Euroscepticism at the local level and the perceived benefits of the EU. In an effort to better understand their personal sentiments towards the EU, one of the survey questions inquired, "What does the EU mean to you personally?" In total, we received 110 surveys, each comprising 11 questions, resulting in 1210 questions answered.

Event 6 – Summer Academy and Closing Conference in Romania

Participation: The event involved 150 citizens, including 4 participants from the town of Lasse (**Austria**), 4 participants from the town of Bievre (**Belgium**), 4 participants from the town of Svoge (**Bulgaria**), 5 participants from the town of Tisno (**Croatia**), 4 participants from the town of Stary Poddvorov (**Czechia**), 4 participants from the town of Naestved (**Denmark**), 4 participants from the town of Polva (**Estonia**), 4 participants from the town of Kannus (**Finland**), 4 participants from the town of Cissé (**France**), 4 participants from the town of Hepstedt (**Germany**), 5 participants from the town of Nagycenk (**Hungary**), 4 participants from the town of Cashel (**Ireland**), 4 participants from the town of Bucine (**Italy**), 4 participants from the town of Kandava (**Latvia**), 4 participants from the town of Zagare (**Lithuania**), 4 participants from the town of Troisvierges (**Luxembourg**), 4 participants from the town of Nadur (**Malta**), 4 participants from the town of Strzyzow (**Poland**), 4 participants from the town of Samuel (**Portugal**), 50 participants from the town of Ibanesti (**Romania**), 4 participants from the town of Medzev (**Slovakia**), 4 participants from the town of Bienvenida (**Spain**), 4 participants from the town of Ocklebo (**Sweden**), 6 participants from the town of Esch (**The Netherlands**), 4 participants from the town of Desborough (**UK**).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **IBANESTI, Romania** from 06/07/2023 to 10/07/2023.

Short description:

The primary aim of the event was to define all the outcomes collected throughout the project, summarising the various events and good practices, all under the overarching theme of " Promotion of advantages of the EU membership as the only way for them being recognized by Eurosceptics."

In order to promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, a roundtable discussion was held to delve into the Future of Europe, specifically within rural areas, from various angles. The discussion focused on examining the potential impacts of technology, immigration, and climate change on rural European life over the next 30 years. Participants engaged in a debate titled "What has the EU ever done for you?" This session provided them with an informal setting to come together and examine, discuss, and debate upon this topic. In a workshop activity, participants learned about the White Paper on the future of Europe, encompassing the five scenarios that had been discussed during the preceding five meetings. The conclusions drawn and the opinions of the participants regarding the future of rural Europe were presented as a Joint decision.

A creative session named "Colorful Europe – a big mosaic of diversities" involved the creation and presentation of a photo exhibition. This exhibition showcased photos taken over the course of the two-year project and was displayed at Lapusna Camp. The results of surveys conducted during the past meetings over the last two years were compiled and presented. In total, 714 answer sheets were gathered from a diverse group of respondents, including rural citizens, participants, host families, and local residents. These responses were meticulously analysed and categorised across various domains and topics. A presentation of the results of the REFORM project culminated in the launch of a comic book. Throughout the two-year project period, participants encountered various challenges within the EU and collaboratively devised solutions. These collective experiences and solutions were then used as the basis for the comic book named "Rury."

As part of the "Taste the difference, make a difference!" initiative, participants immersed themselves in the traditional way of life in the Targu Mures region by engaging in a series of local activities. These activities encompassed folklore dancing, sampling Romanian cuisine, visiting a violin factory and museum, as well as exploring hunting castles, among others. In a captivating Storytelling event, participants gained insights into the Ceausescu regime and local historical events, deepening their understanding of the region's history. A significant highlight was the inauguration of a large monument located in the centre of Ibanesti. It serves as a powerful symbol of the enduring commitment shared among our project partners. It prominently displays the names of partner municipalities and indicates the distances from the centre of Ibanesti, showcasing the strong bond between them.

A Culinary Evening where each participating country showcased its national culinary treasures, inviting participants to savour the diverse flavours of Europe took place. This delightful experience allowed municipalities to present their cultural identities through traditional cuisine and costumes, fostering intercultural dialogue. The individuals engaged in the project emerged with a markedly positive and open-minded outlook on EU-related topics, gaining a deeper understanding of both similarities and differences among nations. The project succeeded in heightening local awareness regarding civil and democratic participation, contributing to the development of a contemporary and future European society.

In collaboration with the pre-existing umbrella association and the established network, the promotion of EU values will persist, while the shared good practices mentioned will stand as positive examples for all communities dealing with Euroscepticism. These outcomes were comprehensively presented to delegates, encompassing almost every project partner and local participant.

Conclusions and guidelines were formed for the final brochure of the project.

For further information on the project and its results, please visit: <https://reform.nagycentk.hu/>