FINAL REPORT

‘COMBATTING RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION’

YOUTH EXCHANGE

6-13th FEBRUARY 2016, LIMASSOL, CYPRUS
General Overview
This project brought together 25 young people and their leaders from Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Slovakia and Romania to explore the issue of religious discrimination and consider ways in which young people can play an active stance in combatting it. The project lasted eight days (including travel days) and took place in Limassol, Cyprus.

Who we are
AEQUITAS is an NGO in Cyprus that works on promoting human rights education, intercultural education and citizenship education. In this light, AEQUITAS provides Human Rights Education, Citizenship Education and Intercultural Education for children, youth and adults, empowers marginalised communities and individuals to know and uphold their rights, carries out awareness-raising campaigns on a variety of human rights issues and encourages Human Rights Debate and Education. For more information on AEQUITAS please visit www.aequitas-humanrights.org.

ERASMUS +
Erasmus+ is the new European Programme for Education Training, Youth and Sports for the period 2014-2020.

Partners
AEQUITAS (Cyprus)
INPLANET (Greece)
GEYC (Romania)
PECO (Italy)
CARPE DIEM (Slovakia)
Project Objectives
The objectives of the youth exchange were to enable participants to explore the phenomenon of religious discrimination, gain the ability to recognise discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices directed against particular religious groups, understand the role of youth in combatting religious discrimination and acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence to challenge such phenomena within their own communities and organisations. The exchange promoted respect, understanding and appreciation of religious diversity and allowed participants to embrace the values necessary for a human rights culture, such as non-discrimination, human dignity, equality and tolerance. Moreover, the project allowed participants to embrace the universality of rights, regardless of religious group, and become inspired and empowered to be advocates of the rights and freedoms of actual and potential victims of religious discrimination with a view to establishing a more inclusive and just Europe. Moreover, through the project design and the solidarity-based, learner centred approach adopted, participants developed competences such as group working, organisational and critical thinking skills. As a result, this project sought to address the issue of religious discrimination which is a rising phenomenon in Europe today and placed youth at the epicentre of the change that is required to ensure a democratic and tolerant Europe. Moreover, young people are often at the forefront of religious discrimination in all its forms either as victims, bystanders or perpetrators and must thus be empowered to remove themselves from such frameworks as victims or perpetrators and in all cases take an active stance against it.

Motivation
Religious discrimination is a pressing issue for Europe today which, as noted by institutions such as the European Network against Racism, is witnessing a rise in incidents of religious discrimination. Within the European Union, one can see a rise in Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and even Christianophobia. Religions are often considered by society to be linked with phenomena such as terrorism and extremism which has led to an increase in Islamophobic sentiments in Europe as well as the more general sentiment of distrust and fear felt and expressed towards Muslim migrants of the EU. As such, we see a complicated framework through which religious discrimination is growing and is putting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the victims at risk. In this light, the project sought to educate participants to be able to separate religion and the rights of religious groups from any other phenomena that are tainting today's world and also to inspire and empower them to take an active stance against religious discrimination as the participating organisations believe that youth plays a big role to this end.
Methodology

The project objectives were achieved by adopting a non-formal learning approach and implementing activities from Council of Europe handbooks such as COMPASS, COMPANION and All Different All Equal. Participatory activities such as team games, role play, group discussions and wall magazines as well as cooperative group work permitted participants to be at the epicentre of the course. Participants explored the notions of Islamophobia, Christianophobia and anti-Semitism through workshops conducted by expert speakers. There was also an 'Intercultural Afternoon' during which participants explored the notion of intercultural learning and dialogue in creative ways, understood the importance of intercultural dialogue in combatting religious discrimination and discovered means and methods they can implement to promote intercultural dialogue in their own environments and communities. During this session, they also explored interreligious dialogue. There was also a 'Europe Morning' during which participants learnt about the history and founding principles of the European Union and understood its institutions' role in tackling religious discrimination. This was carried out by a representative from the Europe Direct Office, Paphos.
Learning Outcomes

Human Rights Education and the interrelated tools of Intercultural education and Citizenship Education, which constituted the educational foundation of this project promoted the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for a human rights culture where human rights are understood, respected and advocated for. It is from this realm that the particular outcomes of this project emanated.

In relation to knowledge, participants understood the meaning of freedom of religion and belief and explored the rights of religious minorities in Europe. Against this backdrop, the participants considered the meaning of religious discrimination as this can be discerned from international and European documents and laws.
Further, they considered ways in which religious discrimination is manifested and the vehicles through which this occurs, looking at the private and public domain. They looked at actual case studies so as to ensure a coherent understanding of the issue being dealt with. This enabled them to distinguish religious discrimination if they ever come across it. They also considered world phenomena such as terrorism, extremism, globalisation and immigration which adversely result in the creation of stereotypes and hate towards particular ethnic groups, which subsequently leads to religious discrimination in the public and private sphere, with this discussion being placed within the broader context of an increasingly intolerant Europe. Also, they critically discussed and examined contemporary debates pertaining to religious freedom and potential religious discrimination such as the banning of the hijab, the burqa and the cross in public spaces. As such, the exchange allowed participants to understand the concept of religious discrimination on theoretical, contextual and conceptual bases and understand ways in which they can take an active stance against it. More particularly, they placed this phenomenon within a human rights framework, realising why it fundamentally results in the breach of human rights and freedoms. They also improved their knowledge on the functioning of the European Union as a body which promotes and protects minority rights and does not tolerate religious discrimination and also understood the significance of inter-religious dialogue and intercultural dialogue as necessary tools for a contemporary multi-religious Europe.

In relation to skills, participants developed a wide variety of skills as promoted through non-formal education more generally. They developed organisational and cooperative group work skills as the participants were at the epicentre of the solidarity based activities which were conducted as part of a group rather than individually. They advanced their critical thinking skills as they considered stereotypes and prejudices that exist in relation to particular religious groups. They developed their self confidence which was prompted through the solidarity, learner centred activities as well as active listening during structured debates and discussions where participants listened and responded to different, sometimes conflicting, arguments. They managed all this by adopting a positive approach to conflict, addressing it in a peaceful and tolerant manner. By cooperating with other countries for this project and through activities such as the intercultural learning day and the intercultural evenings, participants also developed their ability to interact with other cultures, namely their intercultural skills.

The development of attitudes necessary for a human rights culture lies at the heart of any human rights education activity. More particularly, participants advanced their sense of solidarity towards victims of religious discrimination. They also became endowed with a sense of justice and active citizenship to take a stance in the protection and promotion of victims’ rights and the combat of religious discrimination more generally. By exploring the above issues and being endowed with such attitudes, participants created a sense
of responsibility in relation to his or her actions, taking care not to transcend within the realm of religious discrimination. Moreover, by understanding the damaging effects of religious discrimination, participants were endowed with a sense of human dignity of all irrespective of differences. In sum, a very central objective of the exchange was the cultivation of attitudes and values including, but not limited to, the respect for religious diversity, human rights, solidarity, non-discrimination, tolerance and active citizenship.

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