SAY NO TO HATE SPEECH!
YOUNG PEOPLE EMPOWERED

11.08.16 – 31.12.16
CYPRUS

A project funded by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe
AEQUITAS

AEQUITAS is an NGO in Cyprus that works on promoting human rights education, intercultural education and citizenship education. More particularly, AEQUITAS holds that these three interrelated areas are necessary characteristics for a democratic, tolerant and just society. In this light, AEQUITAS provides Human Rights Education, Citizenship Education and Intercultural Education for children, youth and adults, educates competent authorities on issues pertaining to human rights, 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 our organisation, please visit www.aequitas-humanrights.org.

EUROPEAN YOUTH FOUNDATION

The pilot project was funded by the European Youth Foundation. The European Youth Foundation is a fund established in 1972 by the Council of Europe to provide financial support for European youth activities. It has an annual budget of approximately 3 million Euros. Since 1972, more than 300,000 young people, aged between 15 and 30, mostly from Member States, have benefitted directly from EYF-supported activities. Its purpose is to encourage co-operation among young people in Europe by providing financial support to such European youth activities which serve the promotion of peace, understanding and co-operation in a spirit of respect for the Council of Europe's fundamental values such as human rights, democracy, tolerance and solidarity.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Training Course for Young People (21-28th October 2016, Limassol, Cyprus)

In 2015, AEQUITAS carried out a Council of Europe project which was the first project in terms of size and duration to ‘bring’ the Council of Europe handbook on combatting hate speech online to formal and non-formal educators in Cyprus. As a first step, we introduced the handbook to this target group who have become multipliers of the handbook within their own organisations and settings. AEQUITAS firmly believed that the next step was to carry out a pilot project with young people who are not involved with formal or non-formal education as trainers, facilitators or
volunteers. This project sought to contribute to the combatting of hate speech, both online and offline, by developing the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the creation of a culture where young people are not victims, bystanders or perpetrators of hate speech. In this light, the participants of the pilot project developed their knowledge by considering hate speech, its meaning, causes, manifestations and effects on a micro (personal), meso (group) and macro (societal) level. Further, they advanced the skills necessary for the creation of the desired culture, such as critical thinking skills which are necessary when, for example, confronted with the current climate which exists in Cyprus where hate speech is being normalised in the public and private spheres. Further, they developed attitudes such as solidarity and acceptance which allowed for the creation of pluralistic societies. The above were achieved mainly through the implementation of human rights education activities, with a focus on activities from the new Council of Europe handbook on combatting hate speech online. The pilot project also incorporated the use of materials produced within the No Hate Speech Campaign. In relation to handbooks, although the focus of the project was on the new Council of Europe handbook, the project also included activities from other handbooks such as COMPASS, All Different All Equal and COMPANION as tools for developing awareness, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, of themes such as human rights and non-discrimination.
The project trained the participants on hate speech and endowed them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to take an active stance against this phenomenon but also to become active multipliers of the project learning outcomes within their own communities, educational settings, work places, families and more. In light of the above, this project contributed to tackling hate speech amongst young people by training fifteen such people on hate speech in its entirety.

Online Platform

http://www.notohatespeech.com/

In addition to the training course, the project developed an online platform (available in Greek and English) of resources and information on hate speech that can be used by young people and people working with young people. As well as information and resources, the platform also included an online chat service which ran from the 10th September 2016 – 31st December 2016. Please note that AEQUITAS is currently undertaking measures to find fresh funding to continue the running of the chat service. The aim of the chat service was to support victims of hate speech through basic psycho-education as well as supporting others, such as parents of victims, and providing persons with information including reporting procedures and ways in which to protect
themselves from online hate speech. The online chat service was only available to users from Cyprus as AEQUITAS is experienced in dealing with this issue only within the framework of Cyprus. The service was run by a clinical psychologist with experience in working with the provision of support through telephone lines. The platform was widely disseminated through mainstream and social media and through an event at the House of the European Union on the 12th September 2016 where key note speakers included Mr. Yiannis Yiannakis, Commissioner for Volunteerism and Non-Governmental Organisations, Dr. Fabienne Baider and Dr. Panagiotis Stavrinidis of the University of Cyprus, Mr. Willy Totoro, President of the Recognised Refugee Association in Cyprus and Mr. Giorgos Polykarpou, Vice-President of the Cyprus Youth Council.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project was to endow participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to take an active stance against hate speech online and offline and to provide support to victims of hate speech or persons assisting such victims. To achieve the overarching aim, there were three central objectives.
The first objective was to develop the participants’ knowledge on hate speech, its meanings, its forms and manifestations, its effects on a micro, meso and macro level and its impact on other interrelated phenomena such as the creation of stereotypes and, even, hate crime. As well as becoming aware of the theoretical and conceptual backdrops of hate speech, participants also looked at practical information such as support lines that can be conducted if they are victims of, for example, racist speech and where they can seek psycho-social support or report relevant incidents. Participants also developed skills, such as critical thinking skills and co-operative learning skills, mainly through the handbook activities, but also due to the general non-formal educational setting in which the project took place. Furthermore, a very central objective of the project was, in addition to the knowledge and skills of the participants, to develop the attitudes necessary for the creation of a culture of solidarity and pluralism in which there is no space for hate speech and other phenomena such as discrimination and xenophobia. Once again, such attitudes were particularly developed through handbook activities.

The second objective of the project was to empower participants to return to their own communities, families, work places, universities or colleges and more and disseminate the learning outcomes of the project thereto. In this light, one of the project days was dedicated to the new handbook activities and how to implement such activities so as to empower participants to do this within their own spheres. In relation to this objective, each participant chose a method, which he or she will carry out in his/her university or other, for the purposes of dissemination and multiplication.

The third objective was the development of the online platform which was the concrete output of the project. The two objectives of the platform were, firstly, to provide psycho-social support to victims and others, such as their parents, through the online chat system but also to provide general information on issues such as protecting oneself from online hate speech and the procedure for reporting such speech to those requiring it. By providing this service, it not only empowered victims and raised awareness on the issue of hate speech but also tackled underreporting. Underreporting has been recognised by institutions such as the Cyprus
Ombudsperson and the European Commission as a major issue in the realm of both hate speech and hate crime. Secondly, the platform contains information and an array of important legal, policy and educational resources (predominantly Council of Europe handbooks) on the issue of hate speech which can be used by professionals such as youth workers, educators, lawyers, social workers and more, when working in the sphere of hate speech.

METHODOLOGY

*Online Platform*

For the platform, we incorporated opinions of young people on the design, information used, structure and other details of the platform as ascertained through two focus groups with young members of AEQUITAS (aged 18-30).

*Training Course*
The participants were introduced to human rights, as it is through this lens that hate speech was looked at. This was the foundational framework of the course. After this was established, participants developed their knowledge on interrelated topics such as free expression and hate speech. Once they grasped the key concepts, they further developed their knowledge with more emphasis being placed on skills and attitudes through human rights education activities from Council of Europe handbooks. It is imperative to note that, after they had been introduced to key themes, they also had two days to spend on underlining phenomena of hate speech such as racism and homophobia which are central to a well-rounded understanding of hate speech. Participants also became aware of their role as young people to disseminate the messages of this project through activities from Council of Europe handbooks. They were briefly introduced to the design and objective of such activities and had an opportunity to implement activities from the Council of Europe for each other. This is important as we wanted participants to take something with them for purposes of disseminating the learning outcomes of the project in their own communities. Throughout the process, there were recurring themes such as the cultivation of a human rights culture and the importance of active and responsible participation and citizenship as well as the central role of youth in society. The learning process was evaluated on a daily basis so that any necessary alterations to methodologies and activities were made in time. There was a final evaluation of the project at the end of the course during which the aspirations and hopes that were set out on the first day were examined for purposes of ascertaining whether they had been achieved. Throughout the training course, solidarity-based working methods were adopted within an interactive, participatory environment. This approach contributed to the process of non-formal learning as it was voluntary, learner-centred and, in this light, the course was a microcosm of active citizenship and participation. The organisers examined the profile of each participant beforehand and, upon arrival, discussed the hopes, aspirations and fears of each with regards to the course. In this light, we sought to ensure that the activities were closely linked to their needs, expectations and interests. An array of different activities were implemented throughout the training course, such as power point presentations, on issues such as human rights and hate speech, with an expert talk from Dr. Aristotelis Constantinides of the Law School of the University of Cyprus as well as activities from Council of Europe handbooks such as the Manual for Combatting Hate Speech online, COMPASS, All Different All Equal and Companion. Council of
Europe handbook activities, in themselves, are learner-centred with active participation being a key theme. During the debates, discussions and workshops, methods such as wall magazines and co-operative group work as well as other techniques for supporting effective learning, were implemented in order to ensure that participants were playing an active role. There were also short sessions with the president of the Association of Recognized Refugees in Cyprus and a transgender person, representing the LGBTI community, who both spoke about their experiences and the effects of hate speech on themselves and their communities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
In relation to knowledge, participants learnt what hate speech is by looking at the national legal definition of hate speech as well as the definition offered by international and European institutions and NGOs. The aim of perusing all the definitions was to gain an idea on what meanings are attached to hate speech, what the differences are between these meanings and how such differences affect the regulation of hate speech and punishment of perpetrators. Although laws were considered in this sphere, the spirit rather than the latter of each law was
looked at so as to avoid complication. Further, participants discovered the reasons for the rise in hate speech in Cyprus as well as in Europe, more generally, looking at themes such as the financial crisis, the arrival of refugees and the terrorist attacks which have led to a rise in Islamophobia. They considered the ways in which hate speech is manifested online and offline and the psychosocial effects hate speech has on a micro, meso and macro level. The skills that were acquired were those incorporated in human rights education activities such as organisational skills, cooperative group work skills and creative skills. Very importantly, participants were able to develop their critical thinking skills which are central to tackling hate speech. Critical thinking skills were particularly important in the realm of hate speech given the normalisation of such speech in Cyprus in the public and private spheres. Such normalisation often prevents persons from realising the dire effects of such speech and from being able actively to think in a critical manner about the information being received. Moreover, the general depiction of target groups, such as migrants, in the media has created a general climate of hostility and scapegoating. This normalisation, once again, often stands in the way of critical thinking in relation to the information contained in, for example, relevant articles. Further, participants developed attitudes necessary for the creation of a human rights culture marked by characteristics such as pluralism and solidarity rather than stereotypes and discrimination. Such attitudes, including those of acceptance, non-discrimination and solidarity, marked the foundations of this project whilst they were also pursued through the human rights educational activities that were implemented. Moreover, the platform that was developed allows its users to develop their knowledge on hate speech, its meaning, the way it can be manifested and its effects, through the material and information provided, therein, and provides persons working with young people with access to valuable resources, such as Council of Europe handbooks, for purposes of combatting hate speech. Also, it has allowed users in Cyprus to access free support, whether that be psychological support or information on hate speech for purposes of, for example, empowering them to deal with a particular incident.
Contact:
For more information on the project, contact Natalie Alkiviadou at nalkiviadou@aequitas-humanrights.org or on +357 25 582333.