

VOICE-EU

Valuing Opportunities for Inclusive Civic Engagement in Europe

2024-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000254384

Report - "EU Citizenship Seminar"

The "EU Citizenship" Seminar marked a significant milestone in the VOICE-EU initiative, taking place on March 27-28, 2025, at the YMCA Thessaloniki (X.A.N.Θ) facilities on Nikolaou Germanou 1. This collaborative event, organized in partnership with our partner organizations timedducation from Italy and MedioCubo from Spain, was designed to enhance citizens' understanding of both national and European institutions, emphasizing their practical impact on daily life and fostering informed civic participation.

The seminar successfully brought together a diverse group of participants, creating a learning environment. Through carefully structured interactive sessions, including quizzes and theoretical presentations, participants gained valuable insights into European citizenship, institutional frameworks, and the decision-making processes that shape the European Union's policies.

The program's design effectively balanced theoretical knowledge with activities, covering crucial topics ranging from citizens' rights and democracy to environmental sustainability, sports, and migration policies. This comprehensive approach ensured participants remained engaged while developing a deeper understanding of their role in the European community.

As part of a broader international initiative, the Thessaloniki seminar was conducted in synchronization with partner organizations across Europe, each hosting similar events in their respective locations. This coordinated effort not only enriched the local participants' experience but also contributed to building a broader network of informed and engaged European citizens, strengthening the foundations for active participation in the EU's future development.

March 27th 2025 – EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The first day of the seminar began at 16:30 with participant registration and introductory activities at the YMCA Thessaloniki facilities. This initial phase of our seminar focused on creating a welcoming and inclusive learning environment while establishing the foundational framework for the session. We aimed to efficiently process participant registration while introducing them to the seminar's scope and anticipated learning outcomes. This opening segment was designed to help participants feel comfortable and prepared for the learning experience ahead.

From 17:00 to 18:00, the seminar featured a quiz session focused on national and European institutional bodies. This interactive segment aimed to evaluate participants' existing knowledge of EU and national institutions while identifying areas where additional clarification may be needed. The use of this segment exemplified the program's commitment to engaging, non-formal education methods.

Through this activity, participants tested and expanded their knowledge of EU institutions. The friendly and engaging atmosphere made complex institutional concepts more accessible and enjoyable to learn, encouraging active participation from all attendees.

Following a brief coffee break from 18:00 to 18:15, the seminar continued with its cornerstone presentation from 18:15 to 19:00. This comprehensive session delved into the structure, operation, and key roles of national and European institutional bodies. The presentation particularly emphasized how institutional decisions directly impact citizens' daily lives, making abstract concepts tangible and relevant to participants' experiences.

The presentation session effectively broke down complex institutional frameworks, explaining the relationships between various EU bodies and their decision-making processes. Participants gained clear insights into how European governance functions at both macro and micro levels, with special attention to practical implications for citizens.

The day concluded with an engaging and interactive discussion between our team and the attendees and conclusions session from 19:00 to 19:30, where participants had the opportunity to engage in open dialogue, ask questions, and share their perspectives on the topics covered. This interactive wrap-up session reinforced learning outcomes while encouraging critical thinking about European citizenship and institutional roles.

Throughout the afternoon's first day of the seminar, the combination of interactive learning methods and open discussion created an effective learning environment that maintained high levels of engagement while delivering substantial content about European institutions and citizenship.

March 28th 2025 – EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The second day of the seminar, held on March 28, 2025, focused on an in-depth exploration of EU policies and their practical impact on citizens' lives. The day began at 11:30 with registration and a brief introduction, building upon the foundations established in the previous day's session.

From 12:00 to 13:00, the first segment of presentations concentrated on two fundamental aspects of EU policy: Citizens' Rights and Democracy, and Environment and Sustainability. The session effectively outlined the core rights of European citizens, including freedom of movement, work and study opportunities across member states, and democratic participation. Special attention was given to environmental policies, including the European Green Deal and the EU's commitment to addressing climate change through sustainable development initiatives.

Following a brief coffee break from 13:00 to 13:15, which provided participants an opportunity to network and discuss, the program continued with its second set of policy presentations from 13:15 to 14:15. This segment covered two additional crucial policy areas:

Sports and Migration & Security. The sports policy discussion highlighted the EU's role in promoting social inclusion and community development through athletic programs, while the migration and security segment addressed the complex challenges and solutions in managing European borders while protecting human rights.

The day concluded with a final discussion and conclusions session from 14:15 to 14:30, where participants engaged in meaningful dialogue about the presented topics. This interactive closing segment allowed attendees to share their perspectives, ask questions, and reflect on how these EU policies directly affect their daily lives.

Throughout the day, the presentation format maintained an informative yet engaging approach, encouraging active participation and open discussion. While our seminar didn't manage to host external guest speakers, the comprehensive coverage of EU policies and programs provided participants with valuable insights into the Union's role in shaping various aspects of citizens' lives.

The session successfully achieved its objectives of increasing awareness about EU policies and their practical implications, fostering understanding of European initiatives, and encouraging civic engagement. Participant feedback indicated strong appreciation for the clear, structured approach to complex policy topics and the opportunity for interactive learning and discussion.

Results Achieved

At the conclusion of both seminar days, participants were invited to complete a digital post workshop survey via a QR code-linked Google Form. This modern approach to data collection enabled immediate and efficient gathering of participants' impressions and learning outcomes assessment. The responses collected demonstrated an impressive acquisition of knowledge regarding the EU institutions and policies.

The two-day seminar achieved significant results, both in terms of individual learning and collective impact. The key outcomes can be summarized as follows:

ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

Survey responses indicated that participants gained comprehensive knowledge about European institutional structures and their interaction with national policies. Many participants reported their increase in understanding of how the EU institutions work and how they affect their daily lives.

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE OF EU POLICIES

The program's structure allowed for thorough exploration of various EU policy areas, which our participants in our feedback session found particularly valuable for their understanding of the topics covered.

SUCCESSFUL INTERACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The quiz sessions proved highly effective. Participants particularly appreciated the dynamic approach to learning complex institutional concepts. The combination of digital engagement and face-to-face discussions created an accessible and engaging learning environment covering all knowledge levels, without any feeling of discrimination to people with lower knowledge capacity.

EFFECTIVE LEARNING METHODOLOGY

The combination of theoretical knowledge with practical examples and interactive discussions, made participants feel more comfortable discussing and question when they didn't understand something throughout the workshop. They mentioned us that they appreciated that through our presentations complex topics were made accessible and easy to understand.

POSITIVE IMPACT ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

According to the post survey form results, the seminar successfully informed participants about EU institutions, many noted the increase in their knowledge for the European Union and both its actions and the impact in daily lives of the EU citizens. Another thing that was noticeable is that through our dialogue many of the participants expressed interest in following and participate in future European initiatives.

ENHANCED PEER LEARNING AND NETWORKING

Group discussions and networking opportunities were given to participants during breaks and of course through interactive dialogue during the workshop.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The seminar's success in engaging younger participants, demonstrated the potential for modernizing civic education and creating a youth more active and informed and engaged about EU matters that affect their daily lives.

Conclusions

The seminar successfully achieved its primary objective of enhancing citizens' awareness about the European Union and its institutions, promoting active reflection on the rights and opportunities stemming from European citizenship. Through an innovative educational approach combining interactive quizzes, theoretical presentations, and open discussions, the initiative effectively engaged participants while maintaining their interest and active participation throughout both days.

The implementation of participatory methodologies – particularly the integration of digital tools for the quiz session and survey feedback, along with opportunities for discussion – made the experience both informative and educational, transforming complex institutional concepts into accessible knowledge. The post-workshop survey responses confirmed a big alteration in the existing knowledge of participants.

A notable outcome was participants' expressed desire in participating in EU future initiatives, while many attendees showed interest in further and in deep understanding of European governance, rights of EU Citizens, and the impact of everything discussed in their daily lives.

The seminar served not only as an educational framework but also as a mean of creating active citizenship, fostering meaningful dialogue among participants and contributing to a stronger understanding of democratic principles and civic participation.

The overall results were highly positive: the combination of comprehensive content delivery and dynamic learning methods created an accessible and engaging experience that created interest in European affairs. The informal yet structured approach enhanced learning

effectiveness, particularly among younger participants. The foundations established during these two days at YMCA Thessaloniki represent a promising starting point for future initiatives aimed at strengthening European civic engagement and fostering a more connected and participatory European community in the region.

This seminar, as part of the broader VOICE-EU project, demonstrated the effectiveness of local initiatives in building stronger connections between citizens and European institutions, while highlighting the importance of continued civic education and engagement in shaping the future of European democracy.