



# EVALUATION REPORT

## FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION USING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

*PeerAct Project*

OWNING  
BE ABLE

PEERACT PROJECT

# Evaluation Report

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FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING  
ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION USING  
COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

A GOOD  
WORKSPACE

ENOUGH  
MONEY TO  
BUY HEALTHY  
FOOD

PARKS AND/OR  
NATURE  
100 €

TRANSPORT  
100 €

## **Main author**

Barbara Santibañez, European Institute of Education and Social Policy (EIESP)

PeerAct project partners (that supported the evaluation process by providing information and helping to organise the focus groups and interviews)

## **Full partners**

European Peer Training Organisation - BELGIUM

Ofensiva Tinerilor - ROMANIA

Youth on the Move - ROMANIA

Par - Respostas Sociais - PORTUGAL

Humanitas - SLOVENIA

Volunteers Centre Skopje - REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Pomoc Deci - SERBIA

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*"I think it's fair to say that a lot of things can change when you face the outside world. This is what PeerAct was for me; an opportunity to truly self-reflect, understand, and shift...it forced me to step out of my comfort zone, challenge myself and take action in a way I would have never thought to achieve before"*

## Executive Summary

This report on the "Framework for promoting anti-bias education using collaborative communities" provides the results from the evaluation conducted for the PeerAct project and makes a series of recommendations on future development of the programme. Elements to consider as the programme is adapted to other local contexts are also suggested.

The impetus for the PeerAct project was the perceived upward trend in discrimination and intolerance among youth based on religion, gender, ethnicity, race, disability, or sexual orientation or of simply not fitting the social norms. The partner countries (North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia) proposed an intervention based on a sequential anti-bias education peer training programme, with the aim of helping young participants to acquire the necessary knowledge and develop skills and attitudes to identify and challenge prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in their own contexts. The sequential programme follows a three-stage training process, so that peer trainers (who are typically young people with no/little training experience) develop the competences needed to facilitate workshops with young people in their local communities. The three distinctive stages are: a **Thematic Awareness Training (TAT)**; a **Train the Trainer (TTT)** training; and a **Peers to Pro** training. In between stages, peer trainers were required to implement a series of **local workshops** involving young people in their own communities. The purpose was to give peer trainers the opportunity to test their facilitation competences using the AWOD™ methodology.

The PeerAct project engaged partner organisations, (future) peer trainers, and participants to the local workshops throughout project implementation. The **peer trainers** recruited to take part in the PeerAct project were young people from the five participant countries (North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia). They ranged in age from 14 to 30 years old, and with a few exceptions, between 30 and 40 years old. **Participants** were the young people who took part in the local workshops organised by the peer trainers at two points in the project timeline. **Partner organisations** from Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans included two organisations from Romania, one in Slovenia, one in Serbia, and one in North Macedonia. These were in charge of preparing and delivering the trainings for peer trainers; providing logistical and content support to the peer trainers during the upscaling phase (local workshops); and mentoring the peer trainers throughout the duration of the PeerAct project.

The report is organised as follows:

**Section 1** provides a description of the PeerAct project, including its aims and objectives and main actors. The aims and objectives of this evaluation are also explained at the end of this section.

**Section 2** sets out the research design and data collection methods used for this evaluation. Limitations to the interpretation of data collected are also discussed.

**Section 3** presents the findings of this evaluation, organised around four main themes: 1) knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed by peer trainers and participants; 2) contextual variables that shaped the learning experience; 3) challenges encountered during the upscaling phase by peer trainers and partner organisations; and 4) content and methods of the project (including feedback from peer trainers and participants). A key finding is that peer trainers had a positive outlook about their learning experiences, including knowledge acquisition and skill development related to combatting discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. As for participants in the local workshops, their feedback about their experiences in both the first and second round of workshops was positive overall. In all five partner countries a large majority of respondents (more than 80%) to the post-workshop evaluations demonstrated an improved understanding about how discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes influence their own perceptions of other people, as well as how to identify and act upon them.

**Section 4** outlines key suggestions for future projects that would like to follow the PeerAct approach for implementation in their own contexts. These include suggestions to:

- **Manage participants' expectations and adapt along the way:** although their learning objectives were fulfilled, several peer trainers voiced their concerns about the unmet expectations when it came to organising the long local workshops within the timeline and the means allocated. Future projects should prepare in advance a clear communication and follow-up plan that anticipates potential setbacks and how to overcome them.
- **Strive for diversity starting with the recruitment process:** some peer trainers indicated that having a shared background with other participants was reassuring, but also limited the possibilities of having richer discussions. Considering the rural vs urban divide it's important for future projects to ensure that young people from smaller cities (outside the capital) can take part in these learning experiences as well.
- **Keep an eye on and give stronger support to younger peers:** younger peer trainers usually need more support to understand and navigate the contents and resources of the mobilities (in comparison to older trainers). Participants should be better grouped according to their age starting at the recruitment phase, so that they have the opportunity to learn about the same topics but at an adapted pace. Moreover, younger peer trainers should be included in the development of child-friendly language for the implementation of the local workshops.
- **Think intersectionally:** ensuring that an intersectional perspective is crucial from the inception of the project and throughout the different phases, including a revision of materials

and contents to reflect this perspective. Peer trainers should have access to resources in their own languages (other than English) to help them better understand and adapt the activities and to prevent potential issues of ethnocentrism, gender discrimination, outdated cultural notions (e.g. referring to the Inuit people as “Eskimos”). Adaptability of certain activities for participants with physical disabilities need also to be considered.

- **Take context into account in order to make the learning experience relevant:** Context can shape people’s learning experiences in more than one way. Socio-political dynamics, language issues, and the level of development of the non-formal education sector are some of the most important aspects to consider when preparing the implementation of similar projects. Ensuring that targets for the number of participants are appropriate for the local context would help ensure that the targets for the workshop recruitment and participation are realistic.
- **Prepare peer trainers to handle conflict:** Throughout the project, peer trainers emphasised that a good facilitator should possess conflict management skills to address potential differences with their colleagues and/or the group of participants. Therefore, conflict management skills should be covered *before* the long local workshops. This is important for peer trainers as they develop competences to guide participants to express their opinions in a way that is not offensive to others.
- **Involve teachers and other networks in the learning experience:** Cooperation with stakeholders outside of the project consortium - such as teachers and school principals - was a key challenge. Even though in some cases teachers were involved as the main connection for recruitment of peer trainers, they were not directly involved in the project implementation nor the learning experience. Partner organisations unanimously indicated that closer cooperation with teachers would be beneficial in similar future projects.

Finally, the Annexes section presents a series of case studies (5) of peer trainers that participated in the PeerAct project, illustrating the diversity of profiles that were brought together by partner organisations.







# 1. Project Description

## 1.1. About PeerAct

The impetus for PeerAct was the perceived upward trend in discrimination and intolerance based on religion, gender, ethnicity, race, disability, or sexual orientation or simply not fitting the social norms among youth in the partner countries (North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia). In the countries involved in the PeerAct project, there are considerable rates of bullying among students (in terms of students who have been bullied and those who have bullied others at school). The numbers provided by the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children study conducted by the World Health Organisation (World Health Organization, 2016) illustrate this situation in four of the participating countries (Table 1). Additionally, the report “Violence in Serbian schools – Bullying and beyond” (United Nations, 2015) reported that in Serbia 42% of students bully their peers, while 44% of students declared being victims of bullying.

Table 1: Rates of bullying among students in participating countries (WHO, 2016)

Country	13-year-olds who have been bullied at school (at least two or three times a month)	13-year-olds who have bullied others at school (at least two or three times a month)	15-year-olds who have been bullied at school (at least two or three times a month)	15-year-olds who have bullied others at school (at least two or three times a month)
North Macedonia	27%	26%	20%	22%
Portugal	41%	34%	34%	26%
Romania	39%	46%	30%	44%
Slovenia	25%	30%	17%	26%

The proposed intervention –implemented at a local level to combat exclusion and discrimination against different groups is based on a sequential anti-bias education peer training programme, with the aim of helping young participants to acquire the necessary knowledge and develop skills and attitudes to identify and challenge prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in their own contexts. The sequential training programme follows a three-stage process, allowing peer trainers (who are typically young people with no/little training experience) to develop the competences needed to facilitate workshops with young people in their local communities. The three distinctive stages are:

1. **Thematic Awareness Training (TAT)** – a 5-day initial training for youth and youth workers, tackling the training topics. This training uses the AWOD™ methodology to stimulate the acquisition of social competences and understanding of fundamental values of non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity, and equality. Following this first training, peer trainers were able to deliver short workshops (6 hour-format) online and in-person.

2. **Train the Trainer (TTT)**– a 5-day training for peer trainers who attended a TAT and wished to improve their facilitation skills so that they could replicate the process in their local environment, i.e., by facilitating thematic workshops on the topic, using the AWOD™ methodology. After this second training, peer trainers were able to deliver long format workshops in-person (20 hours spanning over 3 to 5 days).
3. **Peers to Pro** – a 5-day training for peer trainers who attended a TTT and wished to earn certification as “trainers of trainers”. This allowed the peer trainers themselves to become programme multipliers at local level as they created their own local network of facilitators.

In between trainings, peer trainers were required to implement a series of **local workshops** involving young people in their own communities. The purpose was to give peer trainers the opportunity to test their facilitation competences using the AWOD™ methodology. The first local workshops between the TAT and TTT were implemented as 6-hour workshops, with 542 participants (exceeding the target for 400 participants as set out in the tender offer). Subsequently, peer trainers were required to facilitate long-format workshops (20 hours) in their own communities, before attending the final activity (Peers to Pro) in Brussels, Belgium, at the end of August 2022.

Peer trainers also were able to choose whether to develop their competences further by getting involved in all three trainings, or simply to participate in the first two if they didn't seek to obtain certification as junior trainers.

## 1.2. Why peer training?



The peer-to-peer and experiential learning approach goes beyond the typical "youth-worker to youngster"/"teacher to student" approaches more typically found in non-formal and formal education related to anti-bias education. The foundation of this approach is the "A world of difference – AWOD™" training programme of the "A world of Difference Institute", which fosters values such as non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity and equality. The programme uses interactive methods such as simulations, small and large groups discussions, role-plays, and dramatisations that generate experiences to help participants to reflect and draw conclusions about the ways in which differences impact their daily lives.

The PeerAct project brings the AWOD™ training programme to new contexts and communities in Europe. Certified peer-trainers from different European countries act as role-models for their new peers. Peer trainers also have access to a certification process based on the training and local workshops, ensuring that all new learners are trained by persons who have a proven track record of driving change in their communities. In a nutshell, PeerAct aimed to scale-up the AWOD™ programme in Europe.

The non-formal approach proposed within PeerAct follows the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle<sup>1</sup> which includes a structured experience for participant engagement, followed by reflection on the experience. This becomes the basis on which participants draw conclusions about the topic discussed and take action in their own daily lives. In addition, the model developed by Louise Derman-Sparks for anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010) informs the specific areas in which PeerAct seeks to generate change. The learning process of the PeerAct project is therefore structured as a learning journey with several steps, as outlined in the Manual for Peer Trainers developed by EPTO Foundation:

- Building the foundation
- [Exploring] Identity, culture and diversity
- Examining prejudice
- Confronting prejudice
- Taking social action
- Closing and evaluation



### 1.3. Who was involved?

The PeerAct project engaged partner organisations, (future) peer trainers, and participants in the local workshops throughout the project implementation. The different actors and their roles are defined below.

- Peer trainers:** young people from the five participant countries (North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia) were recruited to take part in the PeerAct project. They ranged in age from 14 to 30 years old, and with a few exceptions, between 30 and 40 years old. Some peer trainers had previous experience with non-formal education initiatives (in particular from Portugal and Slovenia). Other peer trainers said that it was the first time participating in a project like this; some of them had experience with Erasmus+ projects but not with these topics in particular. There were also several peer trainers who had experience volunteering in non-governmental or student organisations, such as national student councils, the Red Cross, etc (see the case studies in the Annexes). Substantively, they had addressed issues in areas related to LGBTQI+ rights, refugees, and environmental causes, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kolb (2014), experiential learning “is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (...) First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second is that knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms. Finally, to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa” (Kolb, 2014, p. 49-50)

Most of the participants in the 20 to 30-year-old age group are following career paths in the social sciences and humanities (e.g. law, psychology, sociology, political sciences, literature, etc.) and the health professions (e.g. medicine, occupational therapy, etc.).

- b. **Participants:** in this report, participants are understood as the young people that took part in the local workshops organised by the peer trainers at two points in the project timeline. In the first round (6-hour workshops), most of these short workshops were hosted online, due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. A majority of participants in the local workshops identified as female, within the 14-19 years old age group (see Table 2). In some cases (e.g. North Macedonia and Serbia), this age group was predominant with over 90% representation. Interestingly, in Slovenia over a half of the respondents were at least 20 years old. When it comes to disability status, it's worth mentioning the variation of responses received; if the percentages are taken at face value, this is a good indicator that the local workshops managed to reach out to young people with disabilities, who are underrepresented in peer training activities.

It is important to note that some of the participants are directly concerned by the negative effects of discrimination in their community due to their ethnic background, sexual orientation and gender expression, religious affiliation, class, etc. Only a few indicated that they were taught about tolerance from a very young age.

*Table 2: Respondents' distribution by categories (short local workshops)*

Partner countries	Sex	Age	Long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (Y/N)
Portugal (62 respondents)	52% identified as female 47% identified as male 1.6% indicated "Other"	82.3% were 14-19 years old 16% were 20-25 years old 1.6% were 26-30 years old	15% said Yes 82.3% said No 3.2% said Maybe
Slovenia (25 respondents)	80% identified as female 20% identified as male	8% were 13 years old 28% were 14-19 years old 40% were 20-25 years old 24% were 26-30 years old	12% said Yes 64% said No 12% said Maybe
North Macedonia (96 respondents)	69% identified as female 29% identified as male 2% identified as non-binary	94% were 14-19 years old 5% were 20-25 years old	6% said Yes 80% said No 12% said Maybe
Romania (11 respondents)	91% identified as female 9% identified as male	82% were 14-19 years old 18% were 20-25 years old	64% said No 36% said Maybe
Romania (45 respondents)	60% identified as female 40% identified as male	76% were 14-19 years old 24% were 20-25 years old	13% said Yes 78% said No 9% said Maybe
Serbia (99 respondents)	74% identified as female 26% identified as male	3% were under 14 91% were 14-19 years old 5.1% were 20-25 years old 1% were above 35	12% said Yes 79% said No 8% said Maybe

In the second round of local workshops (20-hour), which brought together prior and new participants to the 6-hours local workshops, a change in terms of the balance of the sex and age of the participants was observed in some countries (i.e. Portugal and Romania) where the majority of participants identified as male, within the 14-19 year-olds (see Table 3). The second round of local workshops extended over 3 to 5 days due to the length requirement (20 hours) and were hosted in person (except for two workshops that took place online).

In North Macedonia and Slovenia two-third of the respondents identified as female, while in Serbia they accounted for 72.5% of the respondents. In some cases (e.g. Portugal and Romania), 100% of the respondents were between 14 and 19 years of age. Again, in Slovenia over a half of the respondents were at least 20 years old. When it comes to disability status, similar percentages as during the short local workshops was observed, indicating that the local workshops may have managed to reach out to a frequently marginalised group – i.e. young people with disabilities.

*Table 3: Respondents' distribution by categories (long local workshops) as of October 2022*

Partner countries	Sex	Age	Long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (Y/N)
Portugal (16 respondents)	37% identified as female 63% identified as male	100% were 14-19 years old	18.8% said Yes 81.3% said No
Slovenia (63 respondents)	65% identified as female 33.3% identified as male 1.7% identified as "All pronouns"	49.2% were 14-19 years old 31.7% were 20-25 years old 15.9% were 26-30 years old 3.2% were 30 or older	12.7% said Yes 81% said No 6.3% said Maybe
North Macedonia (185 respondents)	68.1% identified as female 30.3% identified as male 1.6% identified as non-binary, queer or genderfluid	85.4% were 14-19 years old 11.4% were 20-25 years old 3.2% were younger than 14 or older than 25	7% said Yes 80.5% said No 12.4% said Maybe
Romania (132 respondents)	31.1% identified as female 44.7% identified as male 23.4% identified as "Other" 0.8% identified as non-binary	100% were 14-19 years old	6.1% said Yes 84.8% said No 9.1% said Maybe
Serbia (236 respondents)	72.5% identified as female 25.4% identified as male 2.1% identified as other, including a transgender woman	11.4% were under 14 72.5% were 14-19 years old 10.6% were 20-25 years old 4.2% were 26-30 years old 1.3% were over 30 years old	6.4% said Yes 78.8% said No 14.8% said Maybe

- c. **Partner organisations:** Partner organisations from Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans included two organisations from Romania (one based in Arad and one in Ramnicu Valcea); one in Slovenia (based in Ljubljana); one in Serbia (based in Belgrade); and one in North Macedonia (based in Skopje). The project partner organisations managing the TAT, TTT, and P2P were in charge of the following tasks: preparing and delivering the trainings

for peer trainers; providing logistical and content support to the peer trainers during the upscaling phase (local workshops); and mentoring the peer trainers throughout the duration of the PeerAct project.

Initially, three countries from Western Europe (Belgium, Portugal, and Spain) were to take part in PeerAct, but due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, only the Belgian and the Portuguese partners remained in the project.

The European Institute of Education and Social Policy, also a project partner, was in charge of the formative and summative evaluations of the overall project. Their role was to analyse the workshop results, including achieved learning outcomes related to social, civic, and intercultural competences.

This evaluation report is the final output of the evaluation process. It includes recommendations on future developments for the programme and a short “How to?” guide for adapting this project to other local contexts.



#### **1.4. Aims and objectives of the Project**

The aim of PeerAct was to enhance the acquisition of social competences, including fundamental values of non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity, and equality among 1,000 youngsters from 5 European countries. Implementation of the AWOD™ training programme across the five European countries within the EPTO peer training and certification process was at the core of the project.

The theory of change underlying the PeerAct project was that by involving young people in the workshops that use the AWOD™ programme’s anti-bias methodology, the peer training would foster the knowledge and understanding of fundamental values (non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity, and equality) among at least 70% of the participants. This target percentage is based on the results obtained by the EPTO’s Thematic Awareness Training programmes in the last couple of years that show that more than 70% of the participants to these trainings decided to be actively engaged in their communities on combating discrimination.

The expected outcomes developed at the inception of PeerAct were that at least 70% of participants involved would:

- know and understand better the concepts of stereotyping and discrimination
- be able to recognise their own prejudices and stereotypes
- be more aware of the effects of prejudice and discrimination on individuals and groups
- develop empathy, critical thinking, and communication skills
- develop their medial literacy and be less influenced by fake messages promoted by the media
- show an open attitude and acceptance towards diversity in their environments
- show an open attitude towards the multi-cultural dimension of Europe and its citizens’ diverse origins

- be able to engage in an on-going self-examination of their role in perpetuating or confronting intolerance
- know the different roles people can take in confronting prejudice
- be able to identify personal and group actions for creating an inclusive environment

**It appears that these outcomes will be achieved over the long term, based on data collected before and after each activity among peer trainers and participants to the local workshops (e.g. surveys, focus groups, and interviews).**

The specific objectives of the PeerAct programme were:

- O1. To equip 1,300 young people from 5 European countries with necessary social and civic competences with the values of non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity and equality.
- O2. To provide 70 young people from 5 European countries with the competences and certification necessary to facilitate the training process.
- O3. To develop a framework for cooperation (a “How To?” guide) that will allow other organisations interested in this non-formal learning process to use a similar collaborative approach when designing and implementing anti-bias education programmes.

The specific objectives O1 and O2 were established keeping in mind a ‘multiplier’ approach – as illustrated on Table 4.

*Table 4: Specific objectives O1 and O2 by target numbers*

Target group	Total number	Details
Young people aged 14 – 30	1,300 people	1,300 pax in upscaling phase: each partner organisation to implement 10 workshops of 20 hours for at least 18 participants.
Peer Trainers	70 people	10+ peer trainers per country.

By the time this report was written (October 2022), almost 1,500 youngsters had been reached through the PeerAct project (1,438 people), including peer trainers who completed one or more trainings of the three-stage training process and participants to the local workshops. According to the results presented in this report, it appears that the project achieved the target numbers established for O1, while for O2 only 45 peer trainers finalised the three-stage training process and obtained certification (64% of the total number expected).

As for the expected outcomes, more than 70% of participants involved in the PeerAct project appear to have developed the knowledge and understanding of fundamental values (non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity, and equality). These findings are based on the feedback shared by peer trainers and participants, where they indicated an improved understanding of how discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes influence their own perceptions about other people. Data collected before and after each activity among peer trainers and participants to the local workshops using pre- and post-questionnaires, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews allowed to identify this improvement.

## 1.5. Aims of this evaluation

In line with the objectives stated above, the monitoring and evaluation plan for PeerAct included both formative and summative purposes. The formative purpose looked into the process of implementing PeerAct, taking into consideration the feedback gathered throughout the duration of the project using qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and written reports.

The formative evaluation conducted for the PeerAct project in April-May 2022 involved analysing the data collected at the first two trainings (TAT and TTT), as well as in the first round of local workshops. The evaluation was intended to support improvements during the project period. The key areas suggested for further improvement were:

- More attention to the terms (discrimination, prejudices, and stereotypes) to allow peer trainers to better understand the key concepts associated with the project
- Partner organisations were recommended to provide further support for peer trainers to improve their skills as facilitators, in particular related to public speaking, time management, and acquiring more self-confidence
- Ensuring an intersectional approach was crucial to the training process considering diversity in terms of age, sex, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, etc.
- Emphasizing the ways in which young people can identify the negative effects that stereotypes have on other people was an important aspect for participants in the local workshops.

Data collected after the final training of peer trainers (P2P) suggest that some of these recommendations were addressed in the last training conducted in Brussels in August 2022. In particular, the training was adapted in order to place stronger emphasis on the terms associated with discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. In future similar projects, partners should plan to dedicate time and resources to mid-course adjustments as part of the formative evaluation.

This final, summative evaluation focuses on what peer trainers and participants to the local workshops learned in relation to the topics of the PeerAct project – i.e. discrimination, prejudices, and stereotypes, and whether the project has succeeded in generating an attitude change among the young participants. In order to evaluate the progress made by peer trainers and participants, data collection was based on quantitative and qualitative data collection methods such as questionnaires before and after each activity, as well as focus groups and interviews at several points during the project period.

The next sections of this report provide a detailed account of the results from the formative and summative evaluations and offers a series of recommendations on future developments for the programme and possibilities for adapting it to other local contexts.





## 2. Research Design

The monitoring and evaluation framework developed for PeerAct relies on a predominantly qualitative research design, as is reflected in the data collection methods chosen. The aim was to capture as accurately as possible the progression of the peer trainers throughout their non-formal experiential learning journey.

The research design guiding the evaluation process was developed keeping in mind the theory of change behind the PeerAct project: by involving young people in the workshops using the AWOD anti-bias methodology, PeerAct would foster the knowledge and understanding of fundamental values (non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity, and equality) among at least 70% of them.

The following data collection methods were used.

- **Questionnaires:** short questionnaires were administered to peer trainers and participants to collect information about their perceptions regarding their knowledge, skills, and attitudes about discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. Open-ended questions included: 1) what peer trainers learned during the training; 2) content and methodology of the training; and 3) sessions they appreciated the most and the least. The questionnaires were submitted before and after the mobilities and the local workshops in English, but partner organisations provided translated versions into the local languages. In each of the five countries, the workshops were delivered in the national language.
- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with the peer trainers who attended the TTT and the P2P mobilities and included questions about 1) the training topics; 2) their perceptions about changes in their knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes; 3) things that had positively influenced their learning experience; 4) things that had gone less well during their learning experience; and 5) their experience as facilitators in the local workshops.
- **Study visits:** these were organised in four communities where the 20-hour local workshops took place. The study visits allowed observation of the different local contexts and of the onsite workshops. Descriptive and reflexive notes on the ongoing activities were taken.
- **Focus groups** were conducted with participants as part of the study visits and following the local workshops. Peer trainers who delivered the workshops took part in separate focus groups. During the last mobility (P2P), peer trainers also had the opportunity to take part in a focus group addressing the same questions as the workshop participants, but from their point of view as peer trainers. . Focus groups were conducted in English, but simultaneous interpretation was provided by partner organisations in North Macedonia and Romania so that participants could express themselves in their preferred language.
- **Written post-workshop reports** were provided by peer trainers after each local workshop they had facilitated. In addition, partner organisations were consulted in written form to collect feedback about the following topics: 1) aspects of the PeerAct project that were

easy/difficult to manage; 2) their experience working with peer trainers to organise the local workshops; 3) their relationship with the peer trainers; and 4) their views on the replicability of this project.

Table 5 provides an overview of the data collected at each activity organised within the PeerAct project.

*Table 5: Data collected throughout the project by activity*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Data collected</b>
Thematic Awareness Training (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on knowledge and/or attitude change</li> <li>• Pre-activity questionnaire</li> <li>• Post-activity questionnaire</li> </ul>
Local Workshops – First Round (Six hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written reports from peer trainers after the workshop was delivered</li> <li>• For participants to the workshops: pre- and post-workshop questionnaires focusing on knowledge and attitude change.</li> </ul>
Train the Trainer (Struga, North Macedonia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with peer trainers</li> <li>• Post-activity questionnaire</li> <li>• Products generated by peer trainers (e.g. testimonials at the end of the mobility).</li> </ul>
Local Workshops – Second Round (20 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study visits to three partner countries (North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia).</li> <li>• Observations conducted onsite during the study visits</li> <li>• Focus groups conducted with the peer trainers after the workshops were delivered</li> <li>• Focus groups conducted with participants to the workshops</li> <li>• Written reports from peer trainers after the workshop was delivered</li> <li>• For participants to the workshops: pre- and post-workshop questionnaires focusing on knowledge and attitude change.</li> </ul>
Consultation with partner organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written questionnaire addressing the following topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The project</li> <li>○ The local workshops</li> <li>○ Relationship with the peer trainers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Peers to Pro (Brussels, Belgium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with peer trainers</li> <li>• Focus groups with peer trainers</li> <li>• Post-activity questionnaire</li> <li>• Products generated by peer trainers (e.g. testimonials at the end of the mobility).</li> </ul>

Additional mobilities were organised in January 2022 (online TAT) and in March 2022 (onsite TTT in Struga, North Macedonia). Data were collected for the online TAT (pre- and post-training) through the online surveys, as was done at the local workshops conducted between October 2021 and March 2022. However, qualitative data were not collected at the second TTT organised in Struga in March

2022 due to time constraints related to the data collection process established within the project timeline. Table 6 shows the number of peer trainers who took part in the three mobilities, the number of participants in the local workshops organised in each partner country, and the number of respondents to the questionnaires administered during the activities. It is worth noting that these numbers reflect the data collected through to the first week of October 2022, so participants to the 20-hour local workshops organised after that date were not taken into consideration.

*Table 6: Number of participants to activities by number of respondents to the questionnaires*

<b>Mobility</b>	<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>Number of respondents to the questionnaires</b>
TAT	96 pax (Target: 70 people)	Pre-training: 15 pax (15% of participants) Post-training: 60 pax (63% of participants)
6-hour local workshops	542 pax (Target: 400 people)	Pre-workshop: 338 pax (61% of participants) Post-workshop: 243 pax (44% of participants)
TTT	65 pax	Post-training: 45 pax (69% of participants)
20-hour local workshops	800 pax	Pre-training: 614 pax (77% of participants) Post-training: 501pax (63% of participants)
P2P	45 pax	Post-training: 40 pax (89% of participants)

There are some limitations to consider about the interpretation of the data collected. First, data collected throughout the mobilities are self-reported and based on the perceptions of the participants on their own knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. The concerns about self-reporting were addressed by including open-ended questions in the online questionnaires, in order to collect qualitative data that could further support the choices indicated in the closed questions.

Another concern is that participants in the PeerAct project were, for the most part, non-native English speakers, in particular those who took part in the local workshops organised by the peer trainers. Although the purpose of the data collection process was explained by the lead trainers from PeerAct, it wasn't possible to explore the potential differences in terms of interpretation of concepts such as discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping. We sought to address this issue by conducting in-person semi-structured interviews with the peer trainers, but due to the limited amount of time and resources, it wasn't possible to do the same with the participants in each local workshop delivered in the partner countries.

A key assumption for this evaluation has been that participants willingly volunteered to take part in the data collection process to provide information about their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, and that they did so truthfully. This means that at the time of gathering, data collected were representative of the participants' perceptions. In order to ensure that their responses reflected their own views, besides the evaluation questionnaires administered pre- and post-online TAT, data collected included through in-person interviews at the TTT and P2P and during the study visits conducted in May-July 2022.



### 3. Findings

The findings presented in this section are organised around the main themes identified during the data collection and analysis. First, a brief overview of the motivations and expectations of peer trainers and participants in the local workshops is provided to better understand the background of the young people taking part in this project. Then, the four themes discussed address the following areas: 1) knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed by peer trainers and participants; 2) contextual variables that shaped the learning experience; 3) challenges encountered during the upscaling phase; and 4) content and methods of the project (including feedback from peer trainers and participants). These themes were drawn from data collected at the different mobilities (online TAT, TTT, and P2P), the local workshops (short and long), the study visits, and the written consultation with partners.

#### *Motivations and expectations of peer trainers and participants*

When the peer trainers started their journey in 2021, most of them had more or less the same expectations about the project: meeting new people, making new friends, and acquiring specific knowledge and skills to confront discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. There were a few who didn't have any particular expectations in the beginning, but then realised that the journey exceeded by far any idea they could have had – it was “life changing” in their own words (see case studies in the Annexes section).

By the first onsite mobility in North Macedonia (the TTT), some of the peer trainers wanted to learn more about how to handle certain situations of discrimination, and in particular develop further their socioemotional skills to work with other people: “I would like to better manage people’s emotions” and “I want to make people feel comfortable” were two of the most common statements shared during the interviews conducted in Struga. Also, for a number of them becoming a junior peer trainer and leading a long-format workshop were clear objectives to achieve by the end of the project.

Similar to the peer trainers, the participants in the local workshops showed a great interest in “meeting new people” and “having fun”. Most of them expressed the intention to “learn something new” rather than learning specifically about the topics of the workshop, and many of them had no expectations at all (or didn't know what to expect). Interestingly, participants in the local workshops wanted to acquire very specific competences related to coexistence and acceptance, such as becoming more socially aware, having the opportunity to leave their comfort zone, learning from other people, becoming more empathetic, and improving their social/soft skills. See Box 1 for some examples of statements shared by participants before the local workshops.

*Box 1: Examples of statements shared by participants before the local workshops*

Serbia

- I hope that I'll hear plethora of real-life examples where discrimination is visibly clear and shown. The stories are the most efficient way to remember something later on.
- I'd like to identify if there are some "hidden" beliefs I have to unpack and that I can work on.

North Macedonia

- I hope to learn about the effect that stereotypes can have on societies and people and how we can learn to fight against our own prejudices. I also want to learn about the causes of stereotypes through culture and beliefs.
- My expectation is that this project will help me define the concept of stereotype into my own language, as well as help enlighten my world view and become aware of the biases I have that I am not aware of.

Slovenia

- Recognising own stereotypical thinking more. How to deal with it? How to act when somebody says discriminating things (without knowing)?
- I guess I'm expecting creative work directed towards social issues that need to be solved like discrimination of minorities.

Portugal

- I hope to leave the workshop as a better person and more sensitive to certain topics.

Another significant finding was that younger participants' motivations (e.g. high school students) motivations for joining the local workshops were aligned with the peer trainers' motivations. However, some of the participants were high school students who took part in a local workshop because they were sent by their teachers or their school principal. In these cases, they declared that in the beginning they were not very motivated, but after the first day of activities "they got interested and decided to stay".

For participants older than 18 years old (including university students and professionals), their motivations to join the workshop were not necessarily the same as their younger peers. As observed in one of the focus groups organised in Serbia, older participants expressed an interest in knowing more about "what young people were thinking" due to their professional background (e.g. social workers, journalists, etc.), and how this knowledge could help them in their own work.

### 3.1. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes development

By the end of the project, **peer trainers had a positive outlook about their learning experiences, including knowledge acquisition and skill development related to combatting discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes.** In the beginning, the findings from the post-training evaluation of the first mobility (TAT) showed that further emphasis was needed for them to better understand the terms associated with the key concepts of the project. Moreover, the results from the post-training evaluation of the online TAT and feedback collected during the second mobility (TTT) in Struga showed that indeed, participants had started to acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes in relation to the objectives set for the PeerAct project. A majority of the peer trainers indicated that the first onsite mobility (TTT) was crucial for acquiring more specific knowledge about the topics of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype.

#### *Knowledge acquisition*

Data collected in later stages of the project – namely the study visits in partner countries and the final mobility in Brussels (P2P) confirmed the positive trend identified above. The interviews with peer trainers during the study visits and the P2P mobility provided in-depth insights on the **knowledge** they acquired throughout the project. Peer trainers specifically highlighted key concepts and the impact it had on them, such as *Kolb's experiential learning, non-formal education, and positive discrimination.* Some observations were that *“non-formal education is more useful for addressing these topics because there is more effort from people”*; *“we all have prejudices, but we are not all aware...I didn't know about positive discrimination before the training”*, and *“in becoming more aware about these issues and the language used to talk about them I feel less alone now.”*

Overall, participants in the local workshops provided positive feedback about their experiences in both the first and second round of workshops. In all five partner countries, a large majority of respondents (more than 80%) to the post-workshop evaluations demonstrated an improved understanding about how discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes influence their own perceptions about other people, as well as how to identify and act upon them. A similar trend was observed with regards to recognising stereotypes in their own social circles and identifying the negative effects that stereotypes have on other people. When it comes to the knowledge they gained at the local workshops, participants expressed how the new definitions and concepts they had learnt had effected the way they see/understand other people and themselves (“I might not appreciate what other people do, but I understand”; “I am realising my own stereotypes”; “Now I understand I'm not always right”; “I got out of my comfort zone”; “I knew not everyone thinks the same way, but I became more patient”). For some others, it was about confirming some beliefs they had about other people, including their peers (“It was frustrating because I disagreed with my classmates in the workshop”). And for a few, it was about realising that similar experiences are lived across different contexts; as one participant in one of the post-workshop focus groups put it, “we are like a puzzle; if one piece is missing it's not right.”

It's worth noting that in the case of older participants (20 and above) their prior knowledge of topics such as discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes could help explain their initial interest in applying

to the project. Most of them expressed that discrimination based on religion, sexual orientation, gender expression, class, etc. has a negative impact in their own communities (see case studies in the Annexes section). A majority of them highlighted that homophobia, LGBTQI-phobia, and anti-Roma sentiments were the most pressing issues in their communities of origin.

### *Skills and attitudes*

In terms of **skills and attitudes**, while some peer trainers highlighted organisational and communication skills (e.g. time management and public speaking), most of them emphasised how the project had helped them to develop competences in three main areas: **critical thinking, socioemotional skills, and personal agency**. *Getting out of their comfort zone* was a key term that emerged during the interviews and focus groups organised with the peer trainers at the TTT, the study visits, and the P2P mobility, as well as *seeing how (they) have evolved and how their peers have evolved* throughout the project. It's worth noting that peer trainers underlined that "a lot had changed" for them since the beginning of the project, including a *change in perspective and awareness* about themselves. Some of the changes mentioned by peer trainers related to increased self-esteem; more self-reflection about their own prejudices and stereotypes and moving "from participant to facilitator", which also involved an attitude change (see case studies in the Annexes section). Box 2 presents some of the insights shared by peer trainers reflecting these three main areas.

*Box 2: Examples of statements shared by peer trainers regarding critical thinking, socioemotional, and personal agency*

#### **Critical thinking**

- "The project opened a lot of thinking in my head...I now pay more attention to the little things"
- "Now I realise that not everything is wrong...I feel more empathy towards others"

#### **Socioemotional**

- "I moved from bystander to confronter"
- "I now want to help myself as well, not just others"
- "This has been an opportunity to create my own opinions, and to realise things about myself"
- "A lot of growth and increased self-confidence"
- "I questioned myself as a facilitator...I realised that to work as a facilitator I have to give up my ego"

#### **Agency**

- "I see the urgency of taking action about these issues"
- "I think these issues are present, but we don't talk about it in society"
- "We are not acknowledging our own prejudices in general even though everyone has them"
- "I feel more motivated (to act) because I see that others are too"
- "I want to unlearn (prejudices) through education"
- "I want to plant the seeds for an attitude change"

- “Relating training topics with real life will make it easier to interact and take action back home”

These findings are supported by the observations shared by individuals in the partner organisations regarding attitude changes they perceived among peer trainers. Besides an increased knowledge of the topics, all partners signified that the main changes observed among the peer trainers were related to 1) more self-confidence to speak in public and in their facilitation skills; 2) more responsibility towards their role as facilitators; and 3) willingness to engage further in similar projects and increased motivation to take action. As a staff member of the Slovenian partner shared

*Four peer trainers became more involved in our work and joined our pool of trainers of global education. One peer trainer did a 3-months long internship with us after showing incredible devotion and interest for youth work and topics of PeerAct project (...) One participant went through tough interpersonal changes when it came to privileges and understanding her own. We supported her with additional non-formal meetings (Written response to the Partners’ Consultation, Slovenia).*

With regards to **skills and attitudes specific to their role as facilitators**, peer trainers indicated that by the end of the second round of local workshops they felt *more confident* and *more empathetic* because they knew “how a participant may feel.” Moreover, some of them declared that their self-awareness about their own facilitation skills had increased when preparing and facilitating a workshop (the 20-hour workshop). In their written reports after the long workshops, a majority of the peer trainers stated that they had felt “confident” and “relaxed” during the implementation of the activity, in spite of some nervousness at the beginning (“I felt under pressure a bit, to satisfy the needs of the participants. I wanted them to be glad that they came”). Some of them also shared the stress they felt because they didn’t have a co-facilitator during the activity:

*This time was much more stressful, due to the fact that I was the only facilitator, and the workshop itself was much longer with a much bigger number of participants than before. I checked in with the participants at the end of every day to see if they had any suggestions, likes or dislikes about how I handled certain situations (for example, how I handled explaining activities, or some of the technical difficulties that occurred) and the feedback that they gave back was very reassuring and it was also a component that gave me more confidence as I moved forward with the workshop (Peer Trainer post-workshop written report, North Macedonia).*

Changes in the peer trainers’ self-perception following the first round of local workshops (6 hours) centred on two main aspects. On the one hand, the peer trainers’ knowledge about discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes had increased in the second mobility (TTT) and this made them feel confident about explaining these topics to the participants in the local workshops (“I was able to give better examples and elaborate more on many topics, even though the definitions haven’t changed, and I knew them before and now”). On the other hand, their organisational skills were tested because they had to manage the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the long workshops (see case studies in the Annexes section). While for the short workshops they felt “a bit insecure”, “excited”, and “inspired” to host a short activity for six hours, in the long workshops they felt “a different type of stress”, as two peer trainers explained:



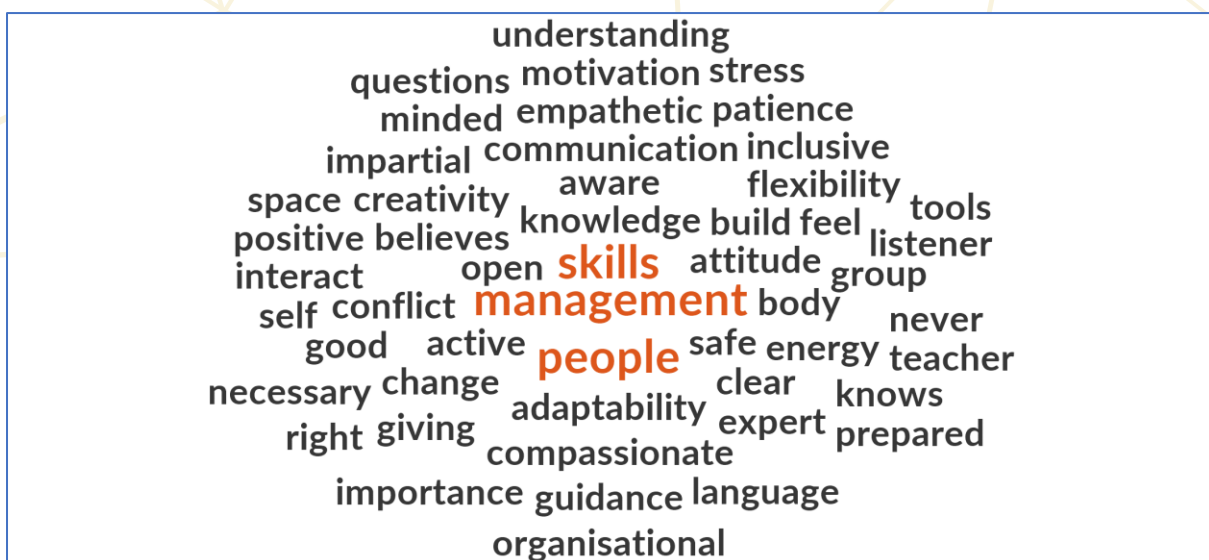
*In the first workshop, I was only stressed about my activity leading skills, but this time I felt stress for the technical aspects of managing the workshop, more-so than my activity leading abilities. The difference was definitely in the fact that I had to learn to manage the technical parts of the workshop, whilst leading the activities without the help of an assistant (Peer Trainer post-workshop written report, North Macedonia).*

*Through my experience with this topic, I realised that I need to be much more careful about how I handle and lead these discussions because of their sensitive nature. I think the main difference is in how I handled communication with the participants and the format of the workshop overall (...) I felt that it was necessary to make sure the participants knew that communication was always open, in order to have them feel secure in their time spent in the workshop. I made sure to make more time for certain activities, in order to give the participants a chance to really stomach everything. One example of a more intense emotional reaction that participants had was to the "Guided Visualization on Immigration" activity. A couple of the participants felt the need for more time to sit with their feelings, in order for them to discuss them with the group and go through the process of debriefing afterwards (Peer Trainer Report, North Macedonia).*

Another important aspect that influenced changes in their perceptions was the fact that almost all the long workshops were hosted in person, while some of the short workshops were held online because of the restrictions imposed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. In only in few cases the long workshops were hosted online, due to the impossibility of finding dates that would be convenient for participants (they were in the middle of school exams in the May-June period and attending an onsite workshop was not a possibility).

Throughout the data collection process, peer trainers were consulted at several points in time about their views on what knowledge, skills, and attitudes a facilitator working with these topics should have. The key competences of a good facilitator are highlighted in Figure 1, illustrating these results in a word cloud using data collected at the TTT, the study visits, and finally, at the P2P. Words in the colour red (*skills, management, people*) indicate those that were more frequently mentioned:

Figure 1: Key competences of a good facilitator, according to peer trainers

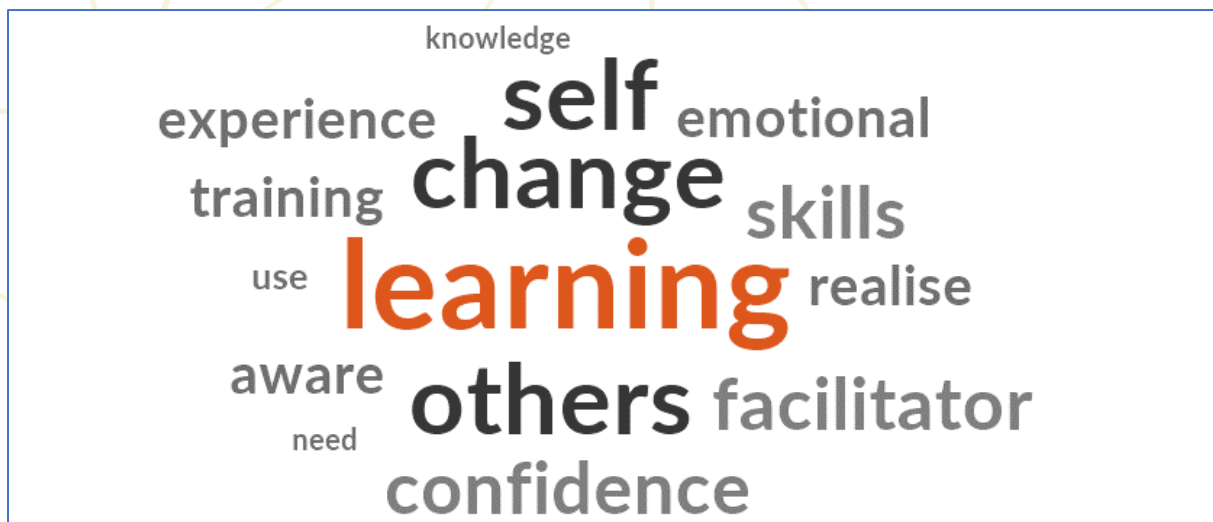


Local workshop participants' perceptions of the skills and attitudes they developed were less clear-cut. While a significant majority (more than 80%) agreed with the statement "I am now more interested in promoting an open attitude towards diversity in my community", there were also respondents who didn't know or didn't agree with the statement (about 10% of the respondents). Data collected at the focus groups which were organised as part of the study visits partly confirms this result among high school students, who manifested an interest in changing some aspects of their behaviour – e.g. "how I understand other people", "be more tolerant to other people's opinions", "be more respectful", "I feel more confident in sharing my views", but not necessarily with regards to taking further action at a collective level in their communities.

For older participants (i.e. university students and professionals), some raised questions about "the activist dilemma", meaning that even though it was great to meet other open-minded people during the workshop, but they would also like to reach out to people that "are not so open or interested" in the topic of discrimination.

A word frequency analysis of the data collected among peer trainers and participants with regards to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they learned. Figure 2 illustrates the results of this analysis on a word cloud. Larger words in the colours red and black (*self, change, learning, others*) indicate those more frequently mentioned:

Figure 2: Word Cloud. Source: Author's own



### 3.2. Contextual factors

Context-specific factors such as **the socio-political context, the language, and the restrictions associated to the COVID-19 pandemic** influenced the ways in which the implementation of the project unfolded in each partner country.



## Socio-political context

When asked about the **socio-political context** and the influence it might have had in their work with young people, partners from North Macedonia, Portugal, and Romania pointed to the prevailing stereotypes in their societies with regards to “sensitive topics”, in particular related to people’s views about ethnic, sexual, and religious diversity. As one of the partners noted, “the upbringing, social circles, and environment have posed a challenge into attracting people to the workshops and in some ways getting through to them on these topics.” Another partner pointed to the “family background” in which young participants have grown up, which has shaped their openness to difference. “Dealing with a conservative culture” was a common point for most partners, and a key aspect guiding their work as an organisation in the non-formal education sector. Nonetheless, the positive perception about having peer trainers willing to open up and engage in the learning experience offered by PeerAct was seen as “a marker that the young generation is changing and there is a new and different grasp about the realities of our society.” Data collected during the peer trainer interviews appears to confirm these perceptions (see case studies in the Annexes section). The insights shared by peer trainers about their own contexts included the following issues:

- Fear of change in their society (Serbia)
- Influence of religion and the church on discriminatory beliefs and attitudes (Romania, Serbia)
- Need for more awareness about ethnic diversity (North Macedonia, Serbia)
- Role of social media in disseminating fake news, propaganda, and hate speech (all countries)
- Need for more actions at school to create an inclusive environment (all countries)
- Effects of discrimination and prejudice on mental health, self-confidence, self-image, and trust among young people (all countries).

Observation data collected during the study visits in **North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia** also helped to situate the socio-political context in which the local workshops were taking place. In **Skopje (North Macedonia)**, one of the peer trainers shared that there are “two main institutions” in the Macedonian society: family (and in particular, elders) and political parties. According to the peer trainers, most of the deep-rooted stereotypes in society come from older generations and are transmitted at home. As for the latter, political parties have a considerable influence due to their control over the media and the fact that many people get jobs through their political affiliation. However, the peer trainers also believe that “newer generations are more open-minded, and that are willing to change things for the better in Macedonia”, reinforcing the positive perception from partner organisations about the role of peer trainers.

In **Romania**, observations conducted in **Arad** and **Ramnicu Valcea** provided an interesting overview of the two sides of the same coin. In Arad, a city in the West of Romania near the border with Hungary, some of the workshops were hosted in a public secondary school in a “sketchy part of town” (as described by one of the peer trainers) where most of the participants are enrolled. For the peer trainers organising the workshop at the time of the study visit, this is a “conflicted” school – meaning that “most of the students are at risk of early drop out and teachers leave the classroom crying”. It is worth noting that the peer trainers were surprised to see the participants show up, because summer break had already started when the workshops took place. Moreover, by the second and third day the peer trainers were glad to see that the participants not only came back, but also were engaged in the

activities. They acknowledged they had “their own prejudices” about the school and the participants, but in the end, it went better than they expected: “It turns out that they are very self-aware”, one of them stated (see case studies in the Annexes section).

In Ramnicu Valcea, a small city in the south of Romania, both the setting and the group of participants were different than what was observed in Arad. The workshop organised took place in the public library – a modern and well-equipped structure where often cultural activities are often organised. The building is near the city centre and it’s accessible to everyone. The workshop took place in the afternoon and all the registered participants showed up. This was expected by the partner organisation, as these are young people that often participate in European projects and exchanges.

Much as in North Macedonia, family also has a strong influence on young people’s beliefs; however, according to some of the Romanian peer trainers, religion (i.e. Orthodox Christian) plays an even more influential role in Romania: “It is a controversial topic”, one of them shared, “because if you’re not Orthodox, they will have prejudices against you.” Another peer trainer emphasized that people listen more to the priest and the church, “and the church is mixed in politics, although there is a law separating it from the state.” One of them jokingly shared an example of how people in some places in Romania still consult with the priest instead of seeing a doctor.

Participants’ responses to the pre-workshop questionnaires administered in North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia offer an overall picture of the data on specific religious affiliation. While in North Macedonia only 51% of respondents (out of 185) indicated being Orthodox, in Romania and Serbia about two thirds declared this affiliation. The participants identifying as Muslim represented a sizable percentage in North Macedonia (23%) and only 10% in Serbia.

In **Serbia**, one of the partner countries with the largest number of workshop participants, the study visits were conducted in **Belgrade** (the capital) although the workshops were also delivered in Vranje, a city in the south of the country. The Serbian context is similar to North Macedonia and Romania in terms of the influence that religion and the Orthodox church following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and during the Balkan wars in the 1990s and 2000s through the “politicization of religion” (Ivekovic, 2002). Even though some the youngest peer trainers in the local workshops weren’t born at the time of the wars, they were aware of the influence that the political debate could have on their views regarding prejudices and stereotypes.

The workshops in Serbia were organised primarily by young peer trainers, but several adult trainers (who acted as mentors to younger trainers) were also undertaking peer trainer certification path through the PeerAct project. This favoured the recruitment of older participants, including university students and professionals from the socio-educational sector (e.g. social workers). In Belgrade, the spaces for the local workshops were provided by non-governmental entities (the Human Rights House and the Endzio Hub), contacted through the partner organisation upscaling the PeerAct project in Serbia. The fact that the workshops were held in this type of setting might have contributed to the recruitment of young participants already interested or involved in non-formal education or volunteering activities. Moreover, some of the peer trainers were actively involved in advocacy for children and young people’s rights (e.g. children’s parliament) before joining the PeerAct project, which most likely provided them access to a wide network of potential participants (see case studies in the Annexes section).

In all three partner countries visited, the debates around certain topics (gender equality, recognition of rights for the LGBTQI+ community, religious views, ethnic diversity, etc.) were heated; participants in the local workshops wanted to have their say about these issues and for peer trainers this was taken as “a good sign” – it meant that they were “filling a gap” by talking about discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes, which is something that they have identified in formal education. Interestingly, this perception appears to be confirmed by the participants’ views regarding their own awareness on how different social norms influence them: in North Macedonia and Romania, about one third of the participants to the local workshops didn’t know or didn’t agree with this statement (“I am aware how different social norms and traditions in my community influence my perception about other people”); in Serbia, this trend was even stronger as more than one third (36%) of participants to the local workshops didn’t know or didn’t agree with the statement provided. In comparison, the post-workshop questionnaires reflect a significant change in this trend: in all three countries, more than 80% of respondents declared having learned more about how different social norms and traditions influence their perception of other people.



### Language

A second context-specific factor that emerged from the analysis of data collected is the importance of **language** – specially with regards to inclusiveness and accessibility. The terminology associated to the topics of the PeerAct project – i.e. discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype – provides clear definitions in English that were used as the common language during the project mobilities. Also, the manual provided by EPTO to all peer trainers during the TTT was the main resource and was available only in English. Only the Serbian partner organisation managed to translate the full manual to the local language by the time the local workshops started. As for other national languages, peer trainers translated the activities they would use in the local workshops with the support of the partner organisations (see case studies in the Annexes section).

Partners as well as peer trainers shared their experience with using this terminology in English and in translating terms to their native language, with more or less success in certain cases. For instance, in Latin languages “they/them” used in plural are either feminine or masculine, so in Portugal the use of “they/them” was a difficult task because of the absence of any gender-neutral pronouns. According to the partner organisation, this difficulty served as an opportunity “to spark the discussion” with the peer trainers and the participants.

In Slovenia, the main language difficulty for the partner organisation and the peer trainers was that participants in the local workshops “did not differentiate between terms such as discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype, no matter of the language.” This obstacle was overcome through specialised workshops organised by the partner organisation, where they explained and tried out the methodology of “Pyramid of hate” in Slovenian language. Besides, the peer trainers received additional materials in Slovenian and were offered individual consulting with a staff person specialised in the topic of discrimination as well as being a certified EPTO trainer. Some peer trainers shared their experience in conducting the local workshops in their language, and the main issue they identified was in knowing whether the participants fully understood the concepts: “Certain terms don't exist in

Slovenian – like, there is no difference between learning and studying – and sometimes you don't have the specific term that would be most appropriate to talk about these issues.”

In Serbia, besides the translated EPTO manual the partner organisation made sure that young peer trainers always had an adult as a “support person” in case psychological support was needed; this was confirmed during the observations conducted in Belgrade as part of the study visits, where younger peer trainers were accompanied by a staff member from the partner organisation during their workshops. Another interesting observation was that some concepts such as “safe space” don't exist in Serbian, so the peer trainers and the participants referred to it in English throughout the workshop. It appeared that the participants grasped the concept and used it in their daily life as well; the downside of situations like this one is that, for participants whose level of English is not advanced enough, their understanding of the concepts used during the workshop might get lost in translation.

Partners from North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia translated the evaluation questionnaires administered to the participants in the local workshops. This was a necessary step to ensure that pre- and post-activity data were available for the monitoring and evaluation activities. Moreover, during the study visits in the three countries mentioned, partner organisations provided support with simultaneous interpretation for the focus groups which were organised onsite. Although this wasn't a planned step in the process, it was definitely helpful in ensuring data collection for the evaluation ran smoothly; participants who did not feel confident speaking in English could express their views in their native language, ensuring that their voices were heard, and their perspectives taken into consideration.



### *COVID-19 pandemic*

The outbreak of a worldwide pandemic in the first semester of 2020 was a clear setback for the non-formal education sector in general and for the launch of the PeerAct project specifically. Severe restrictions were put in place across countries, including travel bans, social gatherings and other in-person activities, etc. Given that non-formal education relies heavily on face-to-face interaction and group activities, the COVID-19 pandemic was a hard blow. For the PeerAct project it was no exception: the start of the project implementation was delayed by almost a year, and the first mobility (TAT) had to be delivered online.

At the time the first TAT took place (July – August 2021), there were still significant restrictions on in-person meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, an important number of peer trainers were attending school/university classes online as well, which meant that many of them suffered from “Zoom fatigue.” Nonetheless, a majority of them considered the online training as one of the most important moments in their PeerAct journey, because it was when they “started learning new things and developing new skills”; it exceeded their expectations “compared to other online sessions they were having at the time”; and most importantly, it helped them to socialise in the midst of the pandemic.

For partner organisations involved in PeerAct, the ongoing pandemic was identified as the key challenge to implementing the international and local activities. In some cases (e.g. North Macedonia and Portugal) the collaboration with local schools and organisations was affected by the restrictions. Another challenge was the impossibility of organising in person activities due to the lack of spaces that

would welcome large groups of people, as it was reported by the Portuguese partner. Moreover, as several partners highlighted the delayed project kick-off meant also that young participants were forced to wait for a long while before actually being active in the project, which decreased motivation and interest among some of them in the first stages.

However, for two partner organisations the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt well into 2022. As reported by the Portuguese partner, the impact of the pandemic was observed in a persistent lack of spaces for implementing projects for young people: “Some of our activities became more challenging to implement and schools or other common youth places were more difficult to access than before.” The direct consequence was that it was increasingly difficult to accommodate larger groups of participants, which delayed even further the completion of the different project phases for the Portuguese partner.

A similar experience was reported by the Slovenian partner organisation, which observed a drop in the peer trainers’ involvement in contrast with the pre-pandemic period: “before [the] pandemic the interest for PeerAct activities, especially participation as PeerAct trainers, was higher already when we started collecting applications.” Based on their observations, the Slovenian partner reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected young people in two ways: on the one hand, poor mental health among youth had affected their motivation and ability to engage with mobilities; on the other, when restrictions were lifted many projects restarted and there was a sudden increase of opportunities for young people. This was also the case in three other projects they have undertaken in the last couple of years.

The Slovenian partner also reached out to two other youth organisations based in Ljubljana (Voluntariat and Nefiks) to enquire about their experiences with youth participation in the aftermath of the end of the pandemic-related restrictions. Both organisations shared their perceptions of youth participation: in the past two years, there has been a decrease in participation, in particular in trainings and long-term projects. Moreover, young people seem to be interested in activities that do not require additional commitment – e.g. attending several mobilities as part of the same project – and prefer to participate in activities that take place over several consecutive days, rather than spread out over several weeks.



### 3.3. Challenges to upscaling (local workshops)

Besides the difficulties stemming from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, partner organisations and peer trainers identified other important challenges that influenced the upscaling phase, during which the local workshops which were held after the first and second mobilities (TAT and TTT). These challenges are related to 1) the recruitment of participants for the local workshops; 2) challenges specifically affecting peer trainers in delivering the workshops; and 3) challenges that affected partner organisations during the implementation of the local workshops.

#### *Recruitment of participants*

Partner organisations and peer trainers unanimously stated that **recruiting participants for the local workshops (in particular for the 20-hour workshops) was the most challenging aspect**, due to several

factors such as the adjusted timeline of the PeerAct project, the recruitment process, and preventing participants' dropout (see case studies in the Annexes section). The PeerAct project had to readjust its timeline due to the COVID-19 restrictions, starting about a year later than planned. The late start meant that the second round of local workshops would have to take place throughout Spring and Summer 2022, which for partner organisations and peer trainers was less than ideal. As one of the partner organisations explained

*Organising 20-hour local workshops was a bit tricky because everyone was waiting for springtime and then the school obligations were more intense – both peer trainers and potential participants were very busy, so they all had to make an extra effort to make things work (Written response to the Partners' Consultation, Serbia).*

School obligations and final examinations made it "impractical" to hold a workshop over three or four consecutive days, because it required participants to get special authorisations at school to attend the activities during the weekdays. Some partners (e.g. in Romania and Serbia) overcame this issue by directly partnering with the schools and/or head teachers of the participants so as to ensure that the workshops took place in the afternoon outside of school hours. However, all partner organisations and a majority of peer trainers declared it was challenging to schedule the local workshops before the end of the academic year.

Partner organisations also indicated that recruiting the target number of participants (between 18 and 20 people each time) for the 20-hour local workshops took significant time. Partner organisations relied primarily on word-of-mouth in their personal networks, local organisations, youth centres, schools, and universities to advertise the workshops. They also used social media, newsletters, posters, and flyers – but direct communication was the most effective recruitment method. These observations were shared also by peer trainers, a majority of whom stated that word of mouth was their preferred recruitment method, followed by social media advertising and posters/flyers at their schools or faculties.

Participant dropout was another factor that made the recruitment process particularly challenging. Among partner organisations, managing last-minute withdrawals was an important issue to handle especially in the second round of local workshops. For partner organisations in Portugal and Slovenia withdrawals from peer trainers and participants prompted the cancellation or postponement of the 20-hour local workshops and delayed the upscaling phase even further. In these two specific cases, the upscaling phase was extended until October 2022, so that peer trainers could complete their required number of 20-hour local workshops after the last mobility in Brussels (P2P).

Last-minute dropouts influenced the peer trainers' perception about their capacity to stay motivated; as one peer trainer wrote in her post-workshop report, preparing the local workshop was "nerve wracking and overall difficult" due to the difficulties in recruiting participants. It's worth noting that the recruitment process was also, to a certain extent, a source of stress for the peer trainers. As noted by a member of the Slovenian partner organisation, this was "especially because it did not bring a result, no matter of the amount of work they put into it." In these cases, the support from the partner organisations was crucial to overcome the challenge of recruiting participants; according to what the Slovenian partner reported, it was "a great learning experience for all of the peer trainers; in a sense



they got a feeling and insight how and what is needed to implement an event and also what are the local realities when it comes to participation.” This perception was confirmed by the feedback collected among peer trainers; as shared by some of them during the study visits, they understood the meaning of voluntary participation in non-formal education because “participants should want to be there, otherwise is difficult to engage them.”

### *Challenges specific to peer trainers*

In addition to the complications stemming from the recruitment of participants for their local workshops, **peer trainers pointed out other challenges they had to deal with, which were no less important, as listed below:**

- **Staying focused in spite of personal issues:** A number of peer trainers found that it was difficult to maintain their focus and energy throughout the whole activity. In the case of younger peer trainers (below 16 years old), they felt the need for more support in order to understand and navigate the process; other peer trainers shared that their introverted or more reserved nature made them question whether they were contributing enough as facilitators. Several peer trainers also explained that they had felt “off their game” at times due to personal difficulties (e.g. problems at home or at work, stressful times at school or university, etc.). In all these cases, peer trainers managed to overcome setbacks either on their own or with the help of their co-facilitators and partner organisations.
- **Uneven motivation and engagement of participants:** When asked about the main difficulties they had to face during the 20-hour local workshops, a majority of peer trainers shared their concerns about 1) getting the participants to “open up”; 2) getting the participants to “reflect more deeply”; and 3) keeping the attention of participants over the duration of the activity. Peer trainers addressed these concerns during the local workshops, thus showing the acquisition of facilitation skills and the confidence they had developed in their own competences. Below are two examples shared by peer trainers on how they addressed the challenges related to participants’ motivation and engagement:

*Sometimes it was hard to help them reflect more deeply about the subjects, even changing questions and giving examples, but in general, all the discussions were very rich. There were moments in which their attention dropped a lot and we had to be more assertive or use other strategies, especially with a group of 3 participants who tended to debate each other and get distracted from the group discussion, but it went well (Peer Trainers from Portugal).*

*On the first day, we faced a lack of concentration among the participants, but with the help of energizer and closer approach with the participants, we reduced it to a minimum (Peer Trainer from Serbia).*

- **Ensuring that the workshops offered a truly inclusive space:** some of the peer trainers pointed out it was a challenge to take into address take into consideration aspects related to the diversity of the group in terms of ethnic background, age, gender, religious affiliation, disability status, etc. They also commented on the ways in which they addressed the situation with the help of their co-facilitators and the participants themselves. Some concrete examples were shared in their written reports, as described below:

*[Another challenge] was to adapt the activities to the student who uses the wheelchair, as we realize most of the more dynamic activities are designed for people who move easily, so we had to adapt or be his helper. But as the others are already used to this student and treat him very kindly, they were also helping him all the time (Peer Trainers from Portugal).*

*One participant had a different ethnicity and didn't fully understand the spoken form of the Macedonian language. Despite being challenging as it is, it didn't bother me to explain the rationale and to repeat everything I say in English. But when it comes to people sharing perspectives, opinions, even though some of them did repeat themselves in English, not everyone was able to express themselves in English as well (Peer Trainer from North Macedonia)*

*We had few participants from marginalised groups, so we had to be really careful when leading the discussion (Peer Trainer from Serbia).*

These examples clearly show that after the first two mobilities, peer trainers had started to become more aware of the knowledge and skills they needed to work with diverse groups, and the importance of adapting their attitude to the challenges that came up during the local workshops.

- **Other organisational/logistical setbacks:** one of the key points cited was how hard it was to get a venue and pick a date for the 20-hour local workshops, a concern they shared with the partner organisations. Also, when preparing the agenda for the workshops they realised that some contents had to be adapted to the age group of their participants, which they did with the help of their mentors from the partner organisations. During the delivery of the workshops, a common challenge was to keep track of time, so that they could fit the activities within the assigned timeslots on the agenda. Nonetheless, peer trainers considered these setbacks “part of their learning process” to become facilitators by the end of the project.

### *Challenges specific to partner organisations*

Several partners noted that the **lack of support from local networks** had a rather negative impact on organisational aspects – such as finding a venue to hold the workshops. This was due mainly to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Section 3.2.) along with the duration of the workshops (20 hours spread over three to five days). As noted by the Slovenian partner, the feedback from other organisations in the non-formal education sector was not so positive because “a 20-hour long

workshop is quite a long commitment for youth considering [their] mental state ...after zoom schooling in the last two years.” The Portuguese partner reported a similar experience: the first impression was that their local network would be supportive of initiatives like PeerAct, but they found out that it was very hard for them to mobilise the usual target group for the workshops held by peer trainers. According to both the Portuguese and Slovenian partners, this situation is far from being an exception:

*After evaluating the situation and trying to understand the problem better, we were able to realize that other youth organizations were facing similar problems in Portugal. The implementation of these workshops became more challenging, especially because the length of each workshop - 20h - no organization, youth centre or school had the capacity to dedicate this amount of time to receive them (Report from Portugal).*



### 3.4. Content and methods

The findings for this section have been drawn from data collected among peer trainers and participants throughout the mobilities and the local workshops and have been organised around three main topics: the relationship between peer trainers and partner organisations; the feedback from peer trainers about the online and onsite mobilities; and the feedback from participants about the local workshops.

#### *Relationship between peer trainers and partner organisations*

For peer trainers, the relationships established with partner organisations played a significant role in their learning experience. Besides the support from their family and friends, and in some cases, from their teachers, **peer trainers indicated that the support they received from the main trainers of the PeerAct project had a positive influence in their learning experience.** In some cases, peer trainers joined the project because they knew the main trainers from previous projects (see case studies in the Annexes section).

The importance of this relationship was also highlighted by partner organisations. When consulted about the connection they had established with peer trainers and how they worked with them throughout the project, partner organisations described the ways in which they managed the communication flow. In most cases, a project manager from the partner organisation would also have a role as a main trainer in the PeerAct project mobilities. They also supported the peer trainers in the organisation, preparation, and evaluation of the local workshop implementation, as well as providing them with debriefing opportunities after the mobilities (TAT and TTT). As described by the Portuguese partner:

*For the local workshops we have been and still are supporting the peer trainers during the whole process. From preparation before their departure to the trainings, to supporting them on preparing the drafts of the workshop plans and finding the right places to deliver the*

*workshops. We try to let them be as empowered as possible and mostly have a role of support (Written report, Partner's Consultation, Portugal).*

The increased responsibility that peer trainers had during the second round of local workshops required constant communication. Moreover, as noted by one of the Romanian partners, this responsibility meant also “treating them as professionals and equals.” The fact that some of the peer trainers were already knowledgeable in these topics also helped to ensure smooth communication and teamwork. For peer trainers who didn't have prior knowledge about the topics, the Slovenian partner provided support by staff specialised in the field of non-discrimination if needed.

### *Content and methods: feedback from peer trainers*

Findings for this final evaluation report confirm the results presented in the formative evaluation from May 2022. Generally speaking, the peer trainers involved in the PeerAct project were greatly satisfied with the learning experience. Most of them indicated that through the different mobilities (TAT, TTT, and P2P) **they learnt more about: 1) themselves, 2) what it takes to become a facilitator, and 3) how to confront and dismantle systems of oppression rooted in discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes in their own communities.**

Some of the main concerns expressed by the peer trainers in the beginning of the project were related to the skills they needed to become better trainers/facilitators, in particular related to organisational, conflict management, and communication skills. In the written reports submitted by peer trainers after the first round of local workshops peer trainers communicated that they had a clear interest in improving their skills as facilitators, in particular related to public speaking and acquiring more self-confidence. In the written reports submitted after the second round of local workshops, peer trainers indicated that they had developed said skills and noticed a change in their learning progression.

When it comes to **the content, methods, and approach of the PeerAct project that worked well**, peer trainers highlighted three specific moments that were the most important in their learning experience, as shown on Box 4.

#### *Box 4: Most important moments in the peer trainers' learning experience*

**1) Online TAT:** peer trainers highlighted the online TAT as “an example of what an online learning experience should be”, in spite of the challenges encountered during the online mobility. During the TAT, partners involved in the PeerAct project had to adapt and migrate the schedule of activities to an online environment. At the time when the training took place (July – August 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic still imposed major restrictions to in-person meetings. Moreover, a majority of the peer trainers were attending school/university classes online as well, which meant that many of them suffered from “Zoom fatigue.”

Peer trainers had a positive view of their learning experience online and appreciated the engagement of the other participants, even though it was an online activity spanning over five/six days. According to the feedback provided by the peer trainers, there were three aspects that made this online training effective: 1) the use of interactive methods and tools (e.g.

Mentimeter, Jamboard) throughout the whole process; 2) the energy of the lead trainers, even though it wasn't necessarily easy to maintain; and 3) having the opportunity to "meet" their peers, through small group discussions and informal moments that were offered during the online training.

**2) The onsite TTT in North Macedonia:** it was the first in-person mobility as part of the PeerAct project. The use of Kolb's experiential learning concept as the basis for understanding their role as peer trainers was highly appreciated ("it was eye-opening"). Peer trainers particularly liked 1) putting themselves in someone else's shoes; 2) reflecting on their own needs and other people's needs in situations of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes; and 3) being able to get to know their peers through activities in small groups, while improving their active listening skills. Also, meeting in person and having the opportunity to socialise with their peers was crucial because they "deeply understood the mechanism of working with young people." The TTT was for many of them the starting point for developing new skills such as time management, interpersonal communication, public speaking, conflict resolution, etc. A highly emotional moment for some of them, the TTT also provided a safe space to look inwards and question themselves as facilitators – as one participant shared, that's when she realised that "there were many things that I needed to change about the ways I relate to others." Having this safe space was essential for some attitude changes to operate: as some of the peer trainers shared during the study visits, it made them more accepting of opinions from other people ("before I'd always get in the way and say what I think first"); increased their self-confidence ("I got the chance to connect with a more confident and carefree part of myself"); and helped them reconnect with their "activist roots" ("We were called trainers and the whole programme became more serious", "I managed to gather a huge amount of information that I later used in my day-to-day experiences and in my local workshops").

**3) Local workshops:** for peer trainers, facilitating a local workshop at two points in time meant they were moving from "participants to facilitators." Even though they faced numerous challenges (see the previous section) and at times, found it to be "exhausting", they perceived a clear change in their skills and attitudes and had to get out of their comfort zone – as one peer trainer explained, "to work as a facilitator you have to give up your ego." The long local workshops (20 hours) organised after the TTT in North Macedonia put to the test their organisational skills due to challenges of recruitment of participants and logistics (e.g. finding a venue, catering, advertising, etc.). At the same time, it was also the moment when they realised their self-esteem was higher and their public speaking skills had increased ("doing a workshop, even if online, improved my self-esteem"; "I became more confident in my facilitation skills, also more empathetic because I know how a participant may feel"). Third, for some of them it was also a moment to reflect on their own prejudices and stereotypes because they realised there's "still have some work to do" on themselves, being confronted to the diversity of their group of participants. And fourth, a majority of the peer trainers (with a couple of exceptions) signified that smooth teamwork with their co-facilitator was one of the main success factors for delivering the workshop. Below are some statements from peer trainers' reflecting on what went well in the 20-hour local workshop:

*We think we created a very powerful agenda that was intense but also very logical and flexible, so the participants could feel the flow of the workshop. Our connection with the students was also very good, because we created a good balance between being vulnerable and close, but also firm and assertive when needed. It was incredible how we noticed the change in attitude of some students along the workshop, and how they became more open, more reflective, empathetic, and united. It was an interesting group, as we had students with multiple experiences – immigrants, black community, obese, Roma community, wheelchair user, living in low-income families, and we believe we managed to create a safe space in which everyone felt welcomed and comfortable to express themselves and also to challenge some ideas (Peer Trainers from Portugal)*

*[What worked was] supporting and learning from each other, providing and offering feedbacks, being open to improvements and connecting the group and with the group (minimising the hierarchical distance) my teamwork and that participants were so excited and active (Peer Trainer from Slovenia).*

*The cooperativeness, patience and understanding from the participants. I thought that due to working alone on this I would have difficulty holding the workshop together, however the participants turned out to be much more cooperative and understanding of my situation, and so they were much more patient and willing to work together. There was a lot of good back and forth communication between us which in the end made the experience much easier and more enjoyable for everyone (Peer Trainer from North Macedonia).*

**Regarding areas for improvement,** peer trainers provided feedback about specific aspects of their learning experience, as follows:

- **Specific activities from the Manual:** Although a majority of peer trainers appreciated most of the activities they had at the online and onsite mobilities, there were strong opinions regarding specific activities from the Manual provided by EPTO. One of the most discussed activities – that came up in the interviews and focus groups at different points in time – is the Four Quadrants, that prompts a discussion about the different roles people can play in situations of discrimination (i.e. victim, perpetrator, bystander, or confronter). For peer trainers, it was equally the most and least liked activity during the online TAT. Most of them felt it helped them to identify the different roles they have played/can play with regards to discrimination.

At the local workshops, peer trainers were confronted with the difficulty of explaining the roles in this activity due to the fact that certain words didn't exist in their native language (e.g. in Portuguese and Romanian the concept of "perpetrator" doesn't exist, and proxy terms such as "aggressor" are used). Others explained that this activity was difficult to implement because people were not that open to share their experience with other participants (see case studies in the Annexes section).

Moreover, several peer trainers pointed out that some contents for the onsite mobilities (drawn from the Manual provided by EPTO) should be updated in order to include newer concepts and definitions related to people's sexual orientation, disability status, ethnic background, among other categories. As one peer trainer shared, "it made me a bit angry because some activities with binaries [man/woman] are not as useful for new facilitators."

- **The team of trainers:** Generally, peer trainers appreciated the team of trainers they worked with at the different mobilities online and onsite. However, after the online TAT peer trainers pointed out the low proportion of female trainers. This was an important point included in the formative evaluation in May 2022, in particular because a majority of the peer trainers identified as female. For the last mobility (P2P), this issue had been addressed. But at this specific mobility, another issue emerged: the fact that the two main trainers were new to the group of peer trainers was unsettling for some, while others thought it would be beneficial. During the interviews and the focus groups conducted at the P2P activity, a few peer trainers expressed that "a change of trainers after such a long time was a bit confusing" and "because it's a long-term project it would have been more productive to have some of the ones we know because there is already a bond." Nonetheless, most of the peer trainers appreciated having new trainers because "each trainer brings something new", it was "challenging in a new way" and the facilitation styles were "more suited to this last phase."
- **Communication flow:** In spite partner organisations' communication and follow up strategies, the fact that the PeerAct project started in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the peer trainers' perception of the communication dynamics established with partner organisations. Since the restrictions related to the pandemic would change often, there were "down times" during which there was little interaction. This issue emerged in the conversations with peer trainers throughout the duration of the project, and although the partner organisations had put in place different strategies to support peer trainers along the way, there were some moments in which the latter felt that "communication from the partners was not there or [there was] not a clear leadership from the organisation." For some peer trainers, this issue turned into a source of stress in particular around the time they had to organise the 20-hour local workshops.

### *Content and methods: feedback from participants*

Among the things that participants particularly appreciated, a key aspect during the local workshops was **having a safe space to share their views and beliefs without being judged**. On the other hand, additional things that participants appreciated the most during the long workshops gravitated towards the quality of trainers – described as *good listeners, patient, kind, well-prepared, professional, punctual, and having positive attitude* – and the opportunity of learning about themselves and from other people. A second aspect highly appreciated during the short and long workshops was the opportunity to learn about new topics/concepts, which was one of the main expectations participants noted in the pre-workshop evaluations. A third element was that the possibility of getting to know

people from different backgrounds to share new perspectives, make new friends, and learn about other cultures was widely valued. Finally, most participants evaluated settings where the long local workshops took place positively, especially because they had privacy to work and were provided with materials, refreshments, and food. See Box 5 for some examples of statements shared by participants after the local workshops.

*Box 5: Examples of things participants appreciated most of the local workshops*

**Serbia**

- The commitment of our professor, who sincerely wants to help in better development, I appreciate the fact that many come to socialize and most importantly to express their opinion on the topics we cover.
- Open discussions, multitude of workshops and exercises to better understand our position in the world and the world around us, learning how to differentiate certain types of people and how to better yourself.

**Romania**

- That everyone was open as much as possible; that I was integrated in the group regardless of my personality; that I communicated better with other people than usual.
- I really appreciated that everyone was listened to, that we were asked for our opinion and the interactive way the activities were carried.
- No one really talks to us about these things, also the teachers always think we are bad children, and they never try to talk and understand us.

**Macedonia**

- First time participating on a workshop and left me an amazing example of what a workshop should be like it was fun and creative, got time to speak and everyone had a chance to express their thoughts.
- The exercises that we did and how they opened our eyes about everything, the people with who I was and the atmosphere.
- The wealth of knowledge and insight into stereotypes we have gained through this workshop, and the atmosphere in it.
- Seeing other people's perspectives, the honesty about their stereotypes, talking and comparing stereotypes.

When asked about the **things that participants appreciated the least**, in both short and long workshops one of the key issues mentioned was the way in which other participants behaved – e.g. “I didn't like the way in which other people expressed their opinion”, “other participants weren't as engaged in the workshop”, etc. Since the short workshops were the first in-person experience that peer trainers had to put in practice what they had learnt online during the TAT, the chances for peer trainers to manage the group dynamics were lower than after the second mobility (the TTT in Struga) because they hadn't had the facilitator's skills modules. The first series of local workshops were sort



of a ‘crash test’ for putting themselves in the shoes of a peer trainer, and in some cases, this happened online (due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic). Indeed, the fact that some of the local workshops were delivered online might have contributed to the perception of other participants “not being engaged.”

As for the long workshops, besides the occasional lack of engagement, there were some common statements across partner countries related to 1) the lack of diversity among participants, and 2) the fact that some participants shared discriminatory views on specific topics. Some participants stated that they were supposed “to be open to diversity, not to indirectly attack people, making some persons feel uncomfortable” and that “although I understand that there are people with different opinions, at some moments those opinions cause a bit too much of a disagreement.” In the study visits, we observed that some activities in which participants had to openly take a stance (in particular the “Value Line” and “Here I Stand” activities) prompted debates regarding tolerance to sexual, religious, and political diversity, which peer trainers tried to handle to the best of their ability – sometimes unsuccessfully according to the feedback collected among participants; as one participant declared, “we didn’t like to be treated like children”.

A second issue that participants pointed out was related to time management and the setting where the long workshops took place. Participants felt they didn’t have enough time for discussion, especially during activities that tackled sensitive topics (“they were strong topics that really need more time to be talked about so I would maybe talk and discuss about these topics on all three days with shorter periods of time”), which in some cases affected their perception about the peer trainer’s time management skills. Further, given that the long workshops took place between May and July 2022, the high temperatures registered across Europe in that period affected the peer trainer’s capacity to find a space with the adequate infrastructure.

**It's worth noting that many participants in the first round of local workshops already wanted to engage with the topics (discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype) in order to learn how to combat discrimination in their own realities (e.g. defined themselves as "activists").** In this sense, there is a self-selection bias to account for, at least in comparison to the second round of local workshops held between May-October 2022, where the target number of participants for recruitment increased and therefore, it was necessary to reach out to young people outside of the groups peer trainers’ most typically reach out.



## 4. Implications for similar projects in anti-bias education

The following recommendations aim at helping future projects that would like to follow the PeerAct approach for implementation in their own contexts.



### 4.1. Manage participants' expectations and adapt along the way

Although their learning expectations were fulfilled, several peer trainers voiced their concerns about the unmet prospects when it came to organising the long local workshops within the timeline and the means allocated. As one peer trainer shared, “I knew it would be exhausting but didn't think it would be unrealistic...I expected more organisation for the implementation of local workshops.” In spite of the follow up strategies put in place by partner organisations, peer trainers felt there were some “down times” that affected to a certain extent their motivation to organise the long local workshops.

#### *Recommendations*

- Future projects should prepare in advance a clear communication and follow-up plan that anticipates potential setbacks and how to overcome them (e.g. travel restrictions, timeline delays, etc.).
- Reorganise the original phases of the PeerAct project so that the onsite mobilities (i.e. TAT, TTT, and P2P) take place closer to each other so that peer trainers don't get the feeling that they are being “let down.”
- In case the trainers' team changes throughout the project period, it is essential to gradually introduce the new trainers by providing opportunities to develop a level of trust and comfort with the peer trainers.



## 4.2. Strive for diversity starting at the recruitment process

Some peer trainers indicated that having a shared background – such as volunteering experience in the field of non-formal education – was reassuring, but also limited the possibility of “having a deeper discussion [if there was more diversity].” The fact that at times it felt as if they were “preaching to the choir” made them reflect on the need to find new ways of involving young people. As some peer trainers shared, word of mouth worked as a recruitment method in rural areas or small towns, but in larger cities more needs to be done to reach out of the “non-formal education bubble”, either through targeted marketing or digital means.

### *Recommendation*

- Considering the rural vs urban divide, in future projects it’s important to ensure that young people from smaller cities (outside the capital) can take part in these learning experiences as well.



## 4.3. Keep an eye on and give stronger support to younger peers

A second issue to consider is that younger peer trainers usually need more support to understand and navigate the contents and resources of the mobilities (in comparison to older trainers). This is an important point as it influences the way in which they perceive their skills to facilitate workshops in their local communities.

### *Recommendation*

- As suggested by one of the youngest peer trainers, participants “should be better grouped according to the topics adapted to their age” starting at the recruitment phase, so that they have the opportunity to learn about the same topics but at an adapted pace. Moreover, younger peer trainers should be included in the development of child-friendly language for the implementation of the local workshops.



## 4.4. Think intersectionally

Another important point is ensuring that an intersectional perspective is applied from the inception of the project throughout the different phases, including a revision of materials and contents. As discussed in the findings section, in some local languages there weren’t exact translations of key concepts related to the main topics of the project (i.e. discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype).

## Recommendations

- Ensuring that peer trainers have access to resources in their own languages (other than English) will help them better understand and adapt the activities they have to implement and helps prevent potential issues of ethnocentrism.
- Review the contents and materials used to address the following issues:
  - Gender as a binary and not as a spectrum, which for many people may seem outdated and, in some cases, offensive (e.g. activity “Ideal Man/Ideal Woman)
  - Outdated cultural notions (e.g. calling “Eskimo” the Inuit people)
  - Adaptability of certain activities for participants with physical disabilities (e.g. standing in line, moving across the room quickly, etc.)
- Monitoring and evaluation methods should integrate an intersectional perspective in the protocols and methods used to collect data. Keeping in mind that young people not necessarily have access to equipment – e.g. a smartphone, a laptop, or an internet connection – is therefore crucial to ensure that the adequate protocols and methods to collect data are in place throughout the project.



### 4.5. Take context into account to make the learning experience relevant

Context can shape people’s learning experiences in more than one way. Socio-political dynamics, language issues, and the level of development of the non-formal education sector are some of the most important aspects to consider when preparing the implementation of similar projects.

## Recommendations

- Develop realistic targets for the number of participants according to the local context (e.g. size of the country/local community, status of the non-formal education sector, reach of the partner organisation, etc.). This would ensure that the targets for the workshops are realistic in terms of recruitment for the activity.
- Consider shortening the long workshops. Peer trainers and partner organisations confirmed that 20 hours was too long due to two main factors: for some partner organisations it was harder to find a venue. In addition, one of the main challenges in was finding participants who would commit to taking part in a 3-to-4-day activity. This is particularly true at the end of the academic year, when young people are taking exams for school/university.
- A potential alternative is to co-create a programme with a school that extends over six months to cover the same content but at a slower pace. This would require that the non-formal approach stays at the heart of the programme cycle, which could be difficult to ensure if not all the school actors are involved (i.e. school principals, teachers, students, and parents).

- Consider the relevance of certain contents or methods for specific contexts. As observed during the study visits, some activities of the Manual (e.g. “Value Line”, “Here I Stand”) were not as pertinent for the participants in the local workshops because of the social, economic, and political dynamics in which they have grown up, as discussed in point 4.2 of the findings section. Instead, value-based activities that require the use of statements of preference (e.g. “I agree/disagree”, “I prefer”, etc.) could offer alternative statements depending on the context, according to the relevance of issues related to sex, gender, ethnic background, religion, class, etc.



#### 4.6. Prepare peer trainers to handle conflict

Throughout the project, peer trainers emphasized that a good facilitator should possess conflict management skills to address potential differences with their colleagues and/or the group of participants. For them, the sensitive nature of the topics of the workshop (i.e. discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype) meant that they had to communicate effectively and be prepared to handle heated discussions.

##### *Recommendations*

- Reorganise the content of the mobilities within the project so that conflict management skills are covered *before* the long local workshops.
- Support the development of competences that allow peer trainers to guide participants to express their opinions in a way that is not offensive to others, keeping in mind that there might still be moments in which conflict will be inevitable.
- Include more activities related to the development of self-esteem in the contents of the project. The latter was elicited by many peer trainers that declared to have “an introverted nature” as a way of strengthening their self-confidence and therefore to be able to handle controversy in an effective manner.



#### 4.7. Involve teachers and other networks in the learning experience

A key issue was cooperating with stakeholders outside of the project consortium such as teachers and school principals. Even though in some cases teachers were involved as the main connection to recruit peer trainers, they were not directly involved in the project implementation nor the learning experience. Partner organisations unanimously indicated that a closer cooperation with teachers would be beneficial in similar future projects.

## *Recommendations*

- Involve teachers as participants in the mobilities and/or the local workshops so that also develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to introduce these topics in formal education.
- Involve other organisations, institutions, and schools at the beginning of the project so it can reach to more stakeholders as well as more young people.
- Work with schools or established groups of young people and raise awareness about the importance of the local workshops and the benefits they can bring to the participants.





## 5. Annexes

### 5.1. Case Studies

*"I can't see an end to this. It had such a great impact on me" – Paul (Romania)*

**A day in Paul's life** starts by waking up very early to get ready for school. Now in his final high school year, Paul is preparing for his university entrance examination to follow a medical career. This means that every afternoon, he has to take supplementary classes for two hours to strengthen his knowledge in maths, biology, and chemistry. Paul wants to help people – "it comes from my grandmother", he says – and for him medicine combines both natural sciences and the social work aspect.

Helping other people seems to be an important part of Paul's life: he volunteers in the Red Cross giving first aid and during the COVID-19 pandemic he volunteered at a vaccination centre. Also, as a member of the student council of his county in Romania he advocates to address problems of bullying and discrimination at school. The student council tries to design programmes for children to understand these problems and help them confront them.

Before becoming a peer trainer, he didn't know about the partner organisation implementing the PeerAct project (Ofensiva Tinerilor). It was a teacher who was supporting his work in the student council that told him about this project. Today, he helps the partner organisation to reach out to students by organising workshops about discrimination in the schools of his city. At an individual level, Paul started to focus more on the situation of Hungarian and Slovakian minorities at school; using the awareness he gained in the project he tries to improve the work of the student council with these minorities.

**When it comes to his views on discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes**, Paul confessed that he has felt discriminated, but indirectly. One of the most important concerns he shared about his role as peer trainer was related to talking about homophobia in the workshops, because he fears that he will become subject to discrimination from participants. Before starting the project, Paul wouldn't really open up about his sexual orientation, because in his context is not an easy thing to do. In the end, a sense of personal agency took over this fear: "this project helped me to feel like I was doing something", he shared.

**The most important moments of the PeerAct project for Paul** were the online training, the first in-person training in North Macedonia, and the long local workshops. The training in North Macedonia was essential for him to start developing new skills; every conversation he had was an opportunity for learning, and he felt that he had an opportunity for introspection as well. He could recognise his own mistakes, and the training gave him the skills to explain to other people how to do the same:

“First of all you have to educate yourself, so that you are safe; if you're not healthy and safe you cannot help others.”

**For the local workshops,** Paul did the first ones in Romanian to make sure that participants understood the key concepts. The partner organisation helped him with the translation of the materials. This was the first time Paul facilitated workshops on the topic of discrimination. He recalls a wide difference between groups: for the first one, “participants didn't have too many expectations, but it was extraordinary as a learning experience.” The second group was not that open, and he recognised that he had made some mistakes in his facilitator role. He also noticed his own prejudices: the first group of participants came from a VET high school, and he “didn't expect much from them”, though in the end they were the ones that engaged the most in the activities. The most difficult part of doing the local workshops was that, according to Paul, “most of the students don't want to learn, they want to fulfil the system's requirements and get good grades.” When it comes to doing something only for personal development it's difficult because “you need someone standing behind you with a stick and when the stick disappears, they are not interested anymore.”

**In terms of lessons learned,** Paul emphasized the importance of respecting voluntary participation in these types of activities: “the long workshops were requested by the school, so participants didn't necessarily want to be there...I wouldn't do that again because it breaks one of the main principles of non-formal education (voluntary participation).” A second important lesson for Paul was recognising that he still has some prejudices and assumptions when he goes to specific places or when he works with some groups of participants. At the same time, Paul saw that the kids he had less expectations from were the ones that were most engaged, and this surprised him. They don't respond to the requirements of the formal education system, but they worked well in a non-formal environment: “I couldn't do a workshop at my own school because it's a posh one, and kids feel superior (as in, no one can teach them anything new).”



*"I learnt more about acceptance from other participants" – Nenad (Serbia)*

**A day in Nenad's life** is usually shared between her university classes and her part-time job in the real estate sector. A 20-year-old interested in politics, Nenad has several years of experience in the non-formal education sector as a participant and a facilitator with children and teenagers. Based in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, Nenad joined the PeerAct project first and foremost to become a



certified trainer, in an effort to create future opportunities for her in non-formal education with young people.

Nenad's starting in peer education was brought by a rather difficult situation – at age 14 she found herself in need of legal support and the partner organisation implementing the PeerAct project (Pomoc Deci) provided her with the help she required. Afterwards, Nenad got involved in the organisation's activities in peer learning, either participating or facilitating workshops on topics related to bullying, discrimination, and child participation. Therefore, joining the PeerAct project was for Nenad “a way of getting not a *formal* training but some sort of training to do it [peer education] better and to be more efficient.” It was one of the mentors from the partner organisation who asked her to join the PeerAct project so as to fine-tune her facilitation skills.

**When it comes to her views on discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes,** Nenad's past experiences made her realise at a very young age the effects bullying and discrimination can have on young people. Moreover, her awareness about the Serbian socio-political context and the recent past conflicts with neighbouring countries from former Yugoslavia have made her realise the extent of to which stereotypes are engrained in her society: “you can't generalise about millions of people, but in our culture it's a lot like that – for instance, if you're from Serbia you're supposed not to like Croatians and vice versa.”

**The most important moment of the PeerAct project for Nenad** was going to Struga, North Macedonia, because she “learnt about the small things that really make a difference” such as ensuring accessibility for all learners to the workshop materials and what to do if a participant “melts down.” This point was an important question to address for Nenad, because of previous experiences during which she had to handle difficult situations on her own without feeling confident enough. Even though she didn't feel that her knowledge increased considerably, she strengthened her facilitation skills and now feels “better equipped to be a trainer in terms of organisational and conflict management skills.”

**For the local workshops,** Nenad invited her friends for the first round of workshops that lasted six hours in total. She says it was “very easy to do”, mostly because she already knew the participants and the topics of the workshop: “they were respectful and helpful, and we had deeper conversations with them.” However, she didn't feel as comfortable with the second round of workshops, that were longer and took place near the end of the school year in Serbia. For her it was clear that it would be exhausting to co-facilitate workshops for 20 participants at a time, but she didn't think it would be “unrealistic.” This feeling came from the difficulties in organising and implementing the workshop, but also due to the not-so-diverse group of participants: “they were almost all on the same page because they share the same background...it could have been a deeper discussion if there was more diversity.” Nonetheless, she noticed the difference between delivering workshops in big cities and small towns to children and young people; for her, participants in big cities are less interested (specially in Belgrade and Novi Sad) because they get many more opportunities to participate in activities for young people, to go everywhere they want. Conversely, young people from smaller cities usually “show up and engage [in the workshops] because they have this opportunity maybe twice a year.”

**In terms of lessons learned,** Nenad emphasized how important is to be able to see the little details: “Something I wasn’t even thinking about before is to pay attention to small things – from how big my writing on the whiteboard should be, to other more important stuff.” Another significant take away was understanding that sometimes it’s better to “plant little seeds of doubts” instead of telling other people they are wrong, an attitude that requires considerable patience and open mindedness according to Nenad. For her taking action is even more crucial today, because being open minded it’s not enough: “we should encourage people to speak up, to call for help, to do something...you don't have to get in a physical fight, but you have to do something when you see any sort of discrimination or violence.”



*"We are persons with beliefs and I have to put myself in an equal position - not taking knowledge for granted." – Irene (Portugal)*

**A day in Irene's life** is divided between her role as a project manager in a Portuguese NGO working with young people in Lisbon and the time she spends with her partner, family, and friends. However, for Irene having a moment to be with herself it's paramount to process what she has experienced during the day.

Before joining the PeerAct project, Irene had never participated in a similar experience. Since she works for a non-governmental organisation in the field of education, she wanted to learn more about anti-bias education and to gain more experience with non-formal education (she wasn't really familiar with this field before the training). For her, the PeerAct project fits both in her work and her personal life. She wanted to develop facilitation skills, but also pursued this learning experience as part of her personal development: "when you are in this kind of training, you also discover things about yourself...in my case, I wanted to understand how I can relate to other people as well as their behaviour."

**When it comes to her views on discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes**, Irene thinks that now she is more aware about discriminatory behaviours from other people. However, reacting to these behaviours is different because she always questions how useful her intervention would be.

**The most important moments of the PeerAct project for Irene** were the training in Struga and the local workshops. In Struga, she felt that to a certain extent she would not be able to facilitate activities alone, but anyways found the confidence to do it. Another skill that she developed and that she considers fundamental in the field of anti-bias education is critical thinking, in particular to pay better attention to what is being said: "We are persons with beliefs, opinions, and I have to put myself in an equal position - not taking knowledge for granted." Even though she identifies as a rather introverted person, she enjoyed the process of facilitating workshops for young people and helping them understand the effects of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes.

**For the local workshops**, one activity Irene found a bit difficult to facilitate was the Four Quadrants, because the participants had a bit of difficulty in identifying examples of situations in which they had been a victim, a perpetrator, a bystander, or a confronter. For her, more time was needed to "dig deeper" and get the participants to understand the different roles they can play in a situation of discrimination. Irene shared that she felt more at ease facilitating the workshops in her native language (Portuguese), even though there were some issues in translating some specific concepts such as "perpetrator" in her language. Nonetheless, she received positive feedback from the participants to her workshops, and even wanted more opportunities like that at school.

**In terms of lessons learned**, Irene was a little bit worried about the fact she's a rather introverted person. This made her feel sometimes as if her contribution to the group was not on top because she felt uncomfortable about opening up. For here, there is a barrier between herself and the world, which sometimes is also related to her confidence in speaking a foreign language (in this case, English). However, Irene is clearly enthusiastic about putting in practice what she has learnt "in

theory” as a facilitator. In the future, she would really like to be a trainer, especially because non-formal education “really matches” her personality.

*“No matter how small the groups are, it’s important to do the work” – Elliot (North Macedonia)*

**A day in Elliot’s life** while he was taking part in the PeerAct project was split between his high school in Skopje and his afternoon English lessons. Today, Elliot is in his first year of university following a career in medical studies, but he still enjoys watching tv shows and hanging out with friends like any other teenager of his age.

Elliot found out about the PeerAct project through social media. He follows VCS (the partner organisation from North Macedonia) on Instagram, and one day saw the call for applications to become a peer trainer. This opportunity piqued his interest: it seemed an interesting experience and it was the first Erasmus project in which he would participate. In the beginning he was a bit “sceptical” about the project in itself, mostly because he felt socially awkward. However, once he started getting more involved in the trainings and other activities of the project, he could feel that the awkwardness started to diminish, and a more confident Elliot was taking over.

**When it comes to his views on discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes,** Elliot believes that the most effective action against discrimination and prejudice is getting together with likeminded people. He believes in the “power of the collective” which for him are stronger than the individual-level actions. Also, Elliot used to feel like the “odd one out.” For him, putting up walls was part of how he would relate to others, because he thought that “showing vulnerability was dangerous.” However, when he realised that collective action was an effective way to combat discrimination, he started to open up a little bit more. He felt that he’s “not alone in this fight” after joining the PeerAct project.

**The most important moment of the PeerAct project for Elliot** was the training in Struga (North Macedonia), because he “started to feel more confident” about himself and the way he relates to the world. Also, this training allowed him to see that his own beliefs were not “wrong”, and this gave him additional encouragement to continue his involvement in the PeerAct project.

**For the local workshops,** Elliot thought that holding local workshops in his own language (Macedonian) would be easier, but he felt that sometimes people “don’t want to hear” about these topics. But for him the effects of discrimination and prejudice in society make it worthwhile to do this kind of initiatives: “no matter how small the groups are, it’s important to do the work. The change begins with yourself.” By the time the long local workshops took place, Elliot felt much more confident about his facilitation skills and his capacity to speak in public and lead a debate. He saw himself as someone capable of creating a safe space for other people to share and open up.

**In terms of lessons learned,** Elliot says that a year ago, he wouldn't have been able to confront a situation of discrimination, but then he understood that "there's strength in showing vulnerability." This year as a peer trainer helped him to learn “how to give people the benefit of

the doubt”; now he understands that there is nothing inherently different or wrong with him, and that he was rather like a “bird in a cage” because he was missing external references to understand what he was going through. Today, he has a more optimistic outlook, and sees himself as “a person who is trying to let the universe surprise him.” His future plans include continuing doing workshops as a peer trainer, because he feels like he has "a moral obligation to make other people live (experience) something like this".



*“As a facilitator, I’m a gardener that is there to help others flourish” – Zenaida (Romania)*

**A day in Zenaida's life** is mostly dedicated to her studies in linguistics and spending time on her own or with friends. Growing up in a small village in Romania, she appreciated the good sides of her community, but she was also aware of the lack of open mindedness. This awareness made Zenaida a bit frustrated when she was younger because she wanted to interact with other people and to see more diversity around; however, most of the people she grew up with “stuck to their comfort zone.”

Zenaida started her non-formal education path by volunteering in activities with kids at a high school first, and then, by taking part in an Erasmus project. She met Sergiu, one of the main trainers of the PeerAct project (“a big figure in my life”) who invited her to participate in non-formal learning activities. The idea of becoming a trainer was “so natural” for Zenaida, but she firmly believes that having a mentorship figure is key to embark in such a path.

Zenaida has always been interested in education, so she wants to continue doing activities in non-formal education. She sees education as a “pleasant thing when you're teaching people that want to be taught.” However, she thinks that sometimes it feels that some people are “a bit superficial” and she questions if it's worth putting the work as a facilitator: “There are some people that just want to socialise and go to new places, that makes me feel uneasy.” This is why she isn't sure whether she wants to become a facilitator for Erasmus projects or go into other type of initiatives.

**When it comes to her views on discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes**, Zenaida has seen the effects of discrimination and prejudice in her own community: “this is visible in the way Roma people are segregated.” She realised in her conversations with other participants that discrimination it's not just about “being left out”, but a more complex phenomenon. Talking about context and experiences she feels more aware of what she can do now to take action – for instance, paying more attention to what is happening around her in her own community.

**The most important moments of the PeerAct project for Zenaida**, she appreciated the moments in which she had time for herself to reflect on her learning process and also to learn specific skills. In the beginning of her learning journey, she was decided to develop her public speaking and time management skills, which is something that she managed to do to a certain extent. Zenaida thinks that she still needs to improve herself, specifically to further improve her time management and generally her organisation skills. However, she also thinks she grew up as a person throughout the experience in the project, and it's quite satisfied of her own learning journey.

**For the local workshops**, Zenaida worked mostly with high schoolers. She felt that she had to adapt to her audience and sometimes this meant shortening the activities in order not to lose the engagement from participants. She felt that time management was a bit of an issue during the first local workshops, mostly because it was related to the engagement (or lack thereof) participants. By the time she facilitated the long workshops, she was much more confident in her role, which reflected on the dedication she put to find a venue, translate the activities in Romanian, and adapt to the availability of the participants' group.

**In terms of lessons learned,** for Zenaida the PeerAct project generated a major personal questioning. She saw her participation in this project as a journey: "you always find a new version of yourself (in the training)". By the end of her learning experience, she shared how she noticed her attitude change, and the skills she had developed further. Zenaida wants to become a teacher and participating in non-formal education initiatives helps her to have all the perspectives on the table. For her, action should be taken at the school-level and at the community-level. She is convinced that education is the key to get through to people in a powerful way: "I really love education, I have so much hope in it, and it would be great if people were excited to see a different point of view even if you don't agree with it."





## 6. References

### *Dates and locations – fieldwork*

#### **Interviews**

11 – 17 October 2021: Struga, North Macedonia (20 peer trainers)  
20 November – 22 December 2021: online (7 peer trainers)  
26 May – 4 June 2022: Belgrade, Serbia (4 peer trainers)  
20 – 26 June 2022: Arad and Ramnicu Valcea, Romania (6 peer trainers)  
4 – 8 July 2022: Skopje, North Macedonia (2 peer trainers)  
18 July 2022: online (2 peer trainers)  
24 – 31 August 2022: Brussels, Belgium (4 peer trainers)

#### **Focus Groups**

26 May – 4 June 2022: Belgrade, Serbia  
20 – 26 June 2022: Arad and Ramnicu Valcea, Romania  
4 – 8 July 2022: Skopje, North Macedonia  
24 – 31 August 2022: Brussels, Belgium

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# PeerAct

Upscaling peer-to-peer anti-bias education for promoting common values



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