

Work package 3 Joint Event summary

Name of the Event: Joint event to improve capacities of civil servants and youngsters to reinforce participation.

Date of the Event: February 16-17, 2023

Location of the Event: Kekava, Latvia

Format: In-situ

Sponsoring Partner: Kekava, Latvia

Number of Persons Attending: 54 attendees in situ (Torino present via Zoom).

REACT's joint event to 'improve capacities of civil servants and youngsters to reinforce participation' was held on 16th February 2023 at the Youth Centre of Kekava, Latvia. The event started with a visit and encouraging words of support from Mr. Juris Žilko, Chairman of Kekava Municipality Council. Partners of the REACT project welcomed the opportunity to use Kekava's Youth Centre as a venue allowing for buzzing, interactive and collaborative discussions around local practices mitigating the collateral effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of young people.

Partners worked together to illustrate in detail local approaches. An overview of the interventions showed that, while overlapping themes could be identified across different fields of action, youth mental health support and services aimed at strengthening psychological and emotional resilience vary. Strategies turned around 6 policy fields: psychological counselling, sports, youth voluntarism, leisure, information and digitalization.

The discussions proved invaluable to gain some very useful feedback on the schemes. Partners agreed that European countries must continue to support youngsters with concrete interventions. Opportunities to re-engage and participate in the community, dedicated support services and inclusion of those most vulnerable must continue to be at the core of our efforts, even though the worst effects of the pandemic seem to be gone. In this light, the measures implemented during the pandemic should be continued in the long term during 'normal' times to ensure effective support.

Ms. Mudīte Juhna, Secretary General of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) and Ms. Agnese Rubene, Consultant of the EU CERV programme within the Latvian Ministry of Culture, were also invited to join the discussions and provide their expertise and European perspective on the topic to the exchanges. LARG is an active member of European networks and organizations of local governments, such as the European Committee of the Regions, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE). Having a diversified group of participants and presenters was key to creating a dynamic knowledge-sharing environment adding value to the learning experience.

The seminar was streamed also online. It provided for a possibility to engage actively in the discussions also to those project partners who could not participate in the event in person. Our special thanks are extended to youngsters from different nationalities participating and supporting the event by providing essential recounts of their experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This work package concluded with a visit to the Adolescent Resource Centre in Riga on the 17th of February where REACT partners had the opportunity to gain further knowledge on adolescents' perspectives regarding the effects of the pandemic on their mental health and well-being.