



CISOMO II: Civil Society Solidarity Movement II

PROJECT NUMBER: 101148054

**Advocacy and Empowerment Action Guide
Strengthening Civil Engagement and Advocacy
for Migrant and Refugee Communities**

**Lead Organization:
ENHI**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

• About CISOMO II	03
• Purpose of the Advocacy Toolbox	04
• Why Advocacy matters	05
• The CISOMO II approach to advocacy	06
• What is advocacy	07
• Why advocacy matters	08
• Advocacy and active citizenship	09
• Active Citizenship & Steps to advocacy	10
• Advocacy in Practice in CISOMO II	14
• Key takeaways and conclusion	15



INTRODUCTION

About CISOMO II

The CISOMO II project (Citizens' Solidarity in Motion) was developed in response to the growing need to strengthen solidarity, social inclusion, democratic participation, and active citizenship across Europe. In an increasingly diverse and interconnected society, migrants, refugees, and vulnerable groups continue to face barriers to participation in social, economic, and political life. At the same time, local communities are challenged to develop inclusive approaches that promote mutual understanding, social cohesion, and respect for fundamental rights.

CISOMO II brings together civil society organisations, local authorities, educational institutions, community stakeholders, migrants, refugees, and citizens from different European countries with the shared objective of fostering solidarity-based societies where every individual has the opportunity to contribute, participate, and be heard. Through thematic Living Labs, stakeholder consultations, awareness-raising activities, capacity-building initiatives, and transnational events, the project has created opportunities for meaningful dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and the exchange of experiences and good practices.



Civil Engagement and Advocacy in Europe

Civil engagement refers to the active participation of individuals and communities in the social, civic, and democratic life of society. It encompasses a wide range of activities through which citizens contribute to the well-being of their communities, influence public decision-making, and promote positive social change. These activities may include volunteering, participating in public consultations, engaging in community initiatives, joining civil society organisations, advocating for policy reforms, or contributing to local and European dialogue.

Within the European Union, civil engagement is recognised as a cornerstone of democratic governance. Active participation enables citizens to express their views, influence public policies, and contribute to the development of inclusive, resilient, and cohesive societies. It also strengthens trust between citizens and public institutions while fostering transparency, accountability, and social responsibility.

For migrants and refugees, civil engagement represents an important pathway towards integration and empowerment. Beyond accessing essential services, meaningful participation enables individuals to become active members of their host communities, contribute their knowledge and experiences, and help shape policies that affect their lives. Participation also strengthens a sense of belonging and encourages mutual understanding between newcomers and local communities.

The Role of Advocacy in Strengthening Democracy

Advocacy is one of the most effective forms of civic participation. It involves raising awareness about community needs, promoting constructive dialogue, influencing policies, and encouraging decision-makers to adopt solutions that improve the lives of individuals and communities.

Effective advocacy is based on collaboration rather than confrontation. It seeks to build partnerships between citizens, civil society organisations, public authorities, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to identify common challenges and develop practical, sustainable solutions.

Advocacy may take many forms, including:

- Organising public awareness campaigns;
- Participating in consultations and policy discussions;
- Developing evidence-based recommendations;
- Engaging with local and national authorities;
- Sharing personal experiences and community perspectives;
- Building partnerships between civil society and public institutions;
- Promoting inclusive public dialogue and intercultural understanding.

When grounded in evidence, collaboration, and respect for democratic values, advocacy contributes to stronger institutions and more responsive public policies.

Civil Society as a Driver of Inclusion

Civil society organisations play a fundamental role in promoting social inclusion, protecting fundamental rights, and supporting democratic participation. They often serve as a bridge between citizens and public institutions by identifying community needs, delivering services, facilitating dialogue, and representing the interests of vulnerable groups.

For migrant and refugee communities, civil society organisations frequently provide the first opportunities for participation through language courses, legal assistance, cultural activities, volunteering opportunities, mentoring programmes, and community initiatives. These organisations also help individuals develop leadership skills, build social networks, and gain confidence to participate in public life.

The CISOMO II project demonstrated the important contribution of civil society organisations in creating safe and inclusive environments where migrants, refugees, citizens, and local stakeholders could exchange experiences, discuss common challenges, and jointly develop recommendations for more inclusive communities.

Empowerment through Participation

Empowerment is closely linked to participation. Individuals become empowered when they have access to information, opportunities to develop new skills, confidence to express their opinions, and meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

For migrant and refugee communities, empowerment involves more than integration into the labour market or access to services. It also includes participation in community initiatives, leadership opportunities, civic education, volunteering, and engagement in democratic processes.

Empowered communities are better equipped to identify challenges, advocate for their needs, collaborate with institutions, and contribute to the development of resilient and inclusive societies. This approach shifts migrants and refugees from being viewed solely as beneficiaries of support to becoming active contributors and partners in community development.

The CISOMO II Perspective

The discussions held during the Round Table in Sweden reinforced the idea that effective advocacy begins with listening, collaboration, and mutual learning. Participants recognised that strengthening migrant participation requires long-term cooperation between public authorities, civil society organisations, educational institutions, community leaders, and migrant communities themselves.

Rather than focusing solely on policy change, participants emphasised the importance of building local capacities, encouraging active citizenship, strengthening community leadership, and creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue. These principles form the foundation of the Advocacy and Empowerment Action Guide and provide practical direction for stakeholders seeking to promote inclusion, democratic participation, and solidarity across Europe.

Key Lessons from the Sweden Round Table

The second Round Table, entitled "Moderated Discussion on Building on the Foundations of Civil Engagement and Advocacy", brought together representatives of civil society organisations, policymakers, community leaders, migrant advocates, and project partners to explore how advocacy can strengthen the inclusion, participation, and empowerment of migrant and refugee communities across Europe.

Building upon the experiences and findings of the previous study visit, participants reflected on current challenges, exchanged good practices, and discussed practical strategies for improving civic participation and strengthening cooperation between institutions and communities. The discussions highlighted that successful advocacy requires collaboration, trust, evidence-based decision-making, and the active involvement of migrants themselves.

The following sections summarise the key lessons that emerged during the Round Table.



Building on Previous Experiences

Participants recognised that effective advocacy is built upon continuous learning and the exchange of experiences between organisations, institutions, and communities. The previous study visit provided valuable examples of local initiatives supporting migrant integration, community participation, and social inclusion, which served as the starting point for deeper discussions during the Round Table.

A common conclusion was that successful practices should not remain isolated examples but should be adapted and transferred across different European contexts. Strengthening transnational cooperation allows organisations to learn from one another, avoid duplication of efforts, and develop more innovative and sustainable solutions.

Advocacy Requires Collaboration

One of the strongest messages emerging from the discussions was that advocacy cannot be achieved by a single organisation or institution acting alone. Meaningful and sustainable change depends on cooperation between civil society organisations, municipalities, educational institutions, migrant associations, volunteers, and policymakers.

Participants stressed the importance of establishing long-term partnerships based on trust, transparency, and shared responsibility. Such cooperation enables stakeholders to identify common priorities, coordinate actions, and develop joint recommendations that better respond to the needs of migrant communities.

The Round Table also highlighted that involving migrants and refugees as equal partners in advocacy processes leads to more relevant and effective outcomes. Their lived experiences provide valuable insights that can inform policies, improve services, and strengthen community resilience.

The Importance of Community-Led Advocacy

Another key lesson was the value of community-led advocacy. Rather than speaking on behalf of migrant communities, participants emphasised the importance of creating opportunities for migrants and refugees to represent themselves, share their experiences, and actively contribute to decision-making processes.

Community-led advocacy promotes ownership, increases confidence, and strengthens leadership within migrant communities. It also contributes to more inclusive democratic processes by ensuring that policies are informed by the perspectives of those most directly affected.

Participants agreed that empowering community members with knowledge, communication skills, and opportunities for participation is essential for creating long-term and sustainable change.

Influencing Policies through Evidence

The Round Table discussions reinforced the importance of evidence-based advocacy. While personal experiences are powerful tools for raising awareness, combining these experiences with research findings, community consultations, and good practices strengthens the credibility of advocacy efforts.

Participants exchanged examples of successful advocacy initiatives where collaboration between civil society organisations and public authorities had contributed to improvements in local integration policies and community services.

The discussions highlighted several elements that increase the effectiveness of advocacy:

- collecting reliable evidence and community feedback;
- developing clear and realistic policy recommendations;
- maintaining regular dialogue with decision-makers;
- building broad partnerships across sectors; and
- communicating recommendations in a constructive and solution-oriented manner.

Empowering Communities through Participation

A recurring theme throughout the Round Table was that participation is both a right and a tool for empowerment. Participants agreed that migrants and refugees should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to discussions that affect their communities rather than being viewed solely as beneficiaries of support.

Examples shared during the discussions demonstrated that participation can take many forms, including volunteering, community consultations, local initiatives, advisory groups, educational activities, and cooperation with municipalities. These opportunities not only strengthen democratic engagement but also build confidence, social networks, and a stronger sense of belonging.

The discussions also emphasised the importance of supporting youth, women, and other underrepresented groups, ensuring that diverse voices are included in advocacy processes.

From Dialogue to Action

The Sweden Round Table concluded that dialogue is only the first step towards meaningful change. Lasting impact requires translating discussions into concrete actions, practical partnerships, and long-term commitments.

Participants identified several priorities for future action, including:

- strengthening cooperation between civil society organisations and public authorities;
- increasing opportunities for migrant participation in local decision-making;
- promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding;
- supporting leadership development within migrant communities;
- encouraging evidence-based advocacy and policy dialogue; and
- expanding transnational cooperation to exchange good practices and innovative approaches.

These priorities provide the foundation for the recommendations and practical actions presented in the following chapters of this Action Guide. They reflect the shared commitment of the CISOMO II partnership to promote solidarity, active citizenship, democratic participation, and the meaningful inclusion of migrants and refugees across Europe.

Key Takeaways

Effective advocacy combines evidence, planning, collaboration, and action. By identifying issues, gathering information, engaging stakeholders, and developing clear strategies, migrant and refugee advocates can become powerful agents of positive change within their communities.

The experiences generated through CISOMO II demonstrate that meaningful change often begins with dialogue, participation, and the willingness of individuals to work together towards common goals. With the right tools and preparation, advocacy can contribute to stronger democratic participation, greater social inclusion, and more resilient communities across Europe.

Conclusion

Advocacy plays a vital role in promoting inclusion, participation, and equal opportunities within diverse societies. For migrants and refugees, advocacy is not only a means of addressing challenges and barriers but also a pathway towards active citizenship, empowerment, and meaningful engagement in community life. By ensuring that diverse voices are heard and represented, advocacy contributes to stronger democratic processes, greater social cohesion, and more resilient communities.

The CISOMO II project demonstrated the importance of creating spaces where citizens, migrants, refugees, civil society organisations, educators, and public authorities can engage in dialogue, exchange experiences, and collaboratively identify solutions to common challenges.



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