



CISOMO II: Civil Society Solidarity Movement II

PROJECT NUMBER:
602046-CITIZ-1-2018-EL-CITIZ-CIV

D4.2 Greece's Solidarity Best Practices Compendium

www.cisomo.eu

Lead Organization:
Social Innovation and
Cohesion Institute



Co-funded by
the European Union



TABLE OF CONTENTS



• Introduction	03
• About the Social Innovation and Cohesion Institute	04
• Strategic Alignment with EU Values	05
• Migration Landscape in Greece	06
• Legal and Policy Frameworks	07
• Stakeholder Ecosystem	08
• Work Package 1, 4, 7, 11, 12 Overview	09
• Objectives of Work Packages	11
• The Greek Civil Society Landscape	13
• Pillar I – Empowerment through Civic Education and Capacity Building	14
• Case Study: Empowerment through Civic Education and Capacity Building in Practice	16
• Pillar II – Grassroots Engagement and Solidarity Networks	17
• From Local Voices to Public Dialogue	19
• Pillar III – Creative and Inclusive Civic Participation	20
• Volunteer Mobilization in Refugee Support	22
• Building Capacity Within Civil Society	23
• Practical Skills Acquired by Participants	24



INTRODUCTION

About CISOMO II

CISOMO II (Civil Society Solidarity Movement II) is a European project under the CERV programme aiming to empower civil society to strengthen solidarity with migrants and refugees through engagement, advocacy, and thematic living labs. By fostering inclusive dialogue and collaboration, the project promotes EU values of democracy, freedom, and integration.

Greece's Role in CISOMO II

Greece, through the Social Innovation and Cohesion Institute (Fifty-Fifty), serves as the coordinator of the CISOMO II project, leading its strategic planning, implementation, and overall management. It is responsible for designing the thematic living labs, overseeing capacity-building and training activities, managing communication and dissemination efforts, and ensuring quality control and risk management. Greece's leadership is grounded in its significant experience with migration and civil society engagement, positioning it as a key driver of the project's vision to promote solidarity, civic participation, and European democratic values.



ABOUT THE SOCIAL INNOVATION AND COHESION INSTITUTE

The Social Innovation and Cohesion Institute – Fifty-Fifty, headquartered in Thessaloniki, Greece, serves as the coordinating institution of the CISOMO II project, assuming a pivotal role in both its strategic oversight and operational implementation. With established expertise in social innovation, civic engagement, and non-formal education, the institute provides critical intellectual and managerial leadership.

Fifty-Fifty is primarily responsible for the design and execution of the project's Thematic Living Labs, which constitute a central methodological innovation aimed at fostering solidarity, intercultural dialogue, and community resilience. Furthermore, the institute leads the capacity-building dimension of the project, facilitating the development of skills and competencies among key stakeholders, including community leaders, volunteers, and civil society representatives. In parallel, it oversees the communication and dissemination framework, ensuring that the project's objectives, activities, and outcomes achieve wide visibility and contribute to broader European discourses on integration, democratic participation, and social cohesion.

Through its multifaceted contribution, Fifty-Fifty plays an essential role in advancing the project's mission, translating European values into concrete, context-sensitive actions across diverse national settings.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH EU VALUES

The work of Fifty-Fifty is firmly rooted in the core values of the European Union, such as human dignity, equality, freedom, and solidarity. Through its focus on civic engagement, inclusive dialogue, and community-based initiatives, the organization actively promotes access to civic rights and participation in democratic processes.

By fostering inclusive spaces and encouraging policy dialogue, Fifty-Fifty directly supports the principles of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and contributes to the objectives set out in the European Citizenship Report 2020. Its efforts are closely aligned with the EU's vision for a more democratic, equitable, and socially cohesive Europe, with particular emphasis on the empowerment and active inclusion of migrant and refugee communities.



MIGRATION LANDSCAPE IN GREECE

Greece plays a pivotal role in European migration due to its geographic location as a gateway to the EU. As of 2023, migrants made up about 7.2% of the population, with the majority being Third Country Nationals, especially from Albania. The country continues to receive a steady flow of asylum seekers, primarily from Afghanistan, Syria, and Pakistan, although application numbers slightly declined in 2023. Greece remains a key entry point for irregular migration, especially via the Eastern Mediterranean route, with islands such as Crete and Gavdos facing increasing arrivals. In response, the government has pledged greater support to these regions.

A significant legislative development came in December 2023, when Greece passed a law granting residence and work permits to undocumented migrants who could demonstrate ongoing employment—potentially benefiting over 30,000 individuals and addressing labor shortages. However, Greece also faces human rights criticisms, including allegations of pushbacks at sea and poor conditions in reception centers. These issues have drawn attention from organizations such as Frontex and international human rights groups.

While there are ongoing efforts to integrate migrants—such as through education and employment access—social inclusion and public acceptance remain challenging, especially in the face of economic pressures and shifting public attitudes.



LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Greece's migration and asylum policies are shaped by both national legislation and its obligations under European Union law. Key national laws include Law 3907/2011, which established the Asylum and First Reception Services, and Law 4375/2016, which aligned Greece's asylum system with EU standards. The most recent, Law 5038/2023, focuses on updating residence and integration provisions for third-country nationals.

As a member of the EU, Greece operates within the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), including regulations like the Dublin Regulation, which dictates the responsibilities of member states in processing asylum claims. The European Commission and Task Force for Migration Management support Greece in implementing migration policy, particularly at the borders. In December 2023, Greece passed a law granting residence and work permits to undocumented migrants with proven employment, aiming to address labor shortages and reduce exploitation.

Despite these developments, Greece faces ongoing human rights challenges, including allegations of pushbacks and inadequate reception conditions—issues that have attracted scrutiny from organizations such as Frontex and international observers.

STAKEHOLDER ECOSYSTEM

Greece's migration management involves a broad and collaborative stakeholder ecosystem, comprising government authorities, international organizations, NGOs, and civil society actors.

The central government actor is the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, which oversees asylum processes, reception, and integration. Key departments include the Asylum Service, Reception and Identification Service, and General Secretariat for Migration Policy. In 2024, Greece also launched a Task Force on Integration with EU support to strengthen migrant inclusion. International organizations such as the UNHCR, IOM, and Frontex are actively involved, offering protection, voluntary return programs, and border management assistance.

Numerous NGOs and grassroots organizations play essential roles in service provision, legal aid, and advocacy. Prominent actors include Caritas Hellas, IRC Hellas, and Equal Rights Beyond Borders. However, recent regulatory changes have posed challenges for NGOs, including stricter registration requirements.

Despite these collaborative efforts, the ecosystem faces ongoing human rights concerns, particularly around alleged pushbacks and treatment of asylum seekers—issues currently under scrutiny by the EU and international watchdogs.

WORK PACKAGE 1,4,7,11,12 OVERVIEW

Work Package 1: Project Launching Event - Lead: Fifty-Fifty | Duration: Months 1–2

This work package initiated the project through an online launching event that introduced the project's vision, goals, and structure to stakeholders. It aimed to clarify roles and responsibilities, establish communication protocols, and set the foundation for effective coordination and cooperation among all partners.

Work Package 4: Study Visit in Greece - Lead: Fifty-Fifty | Duration: Months 7–8

This WP focused on exploring Greece's grassroots networks and community resilience through a study visit. It aimed to inspire participants to apply these practices locally, promote collaboration with grassroots actors, and develop the “Greece's Solidarity Best Practices Compendium” to capture transferable models of civic engagement and solidarity-driven support systems.





Work Package 7: Solidarity-Oriented Citizens' Online Forum - Lead: Fifty-Fifty | Duration: Months 13–14

- WP7 created an interactive online platform for citizens to share ideas and collaborate on community resilience strategies. It emphasized solidarity, mutual support, and social cohesion, culminating in artistic outputs such as the CISOMO II Artistic Collage, which visually captured collective civic commitments.

Work Package 11: Citizens United Collaborative Living Lab - Lead: Fifty-Fifty | Duration: Months 21–22

- This WP brought together the project's three theoretical pillars—empowerment, advocacy, and resilience—into a comprehensive Living Lab. It empowered citizens through workshops and initiatives, promoted intergroup collaboration, and mobilized stakeholders for policy advocacy to foster long-term community resilience.

Work Package 12: Closing Citizens' Festival - Lead: Fifty-Fifty | Duration: Months 23–24

- The final WP hosted a celebratory event marking the culmination of CISOMO II. It fostered European identity, civic participation, and reflected on the project's achievements. The festival brought together citizens and stakeholders to celebrate solidarity, evaluate impact, and sustain momentum beyond the project's lifecycle

OBJECTIVES OF WORK PACKAGES

Work Package 1 – Project Launching Event: The objective of this work package is to formally initiate the CISOMO II project by convening all consortium partners and stakeholders. It aims to ensure a shared understanding of the project's strategic vision, operational framework, and expected outcomes. Additionally, it establishes foundational communication structures, assigns roles and responsibilities, and facilitates the initial alignment of the consortium toward the project's overarching goals.

Work Package 4 – Study Visit in Greece : This work package is designed to deepen participants' engagement with grassroots solidarity practices through a structured study visit in Greece. The primary objective is to expose participants to exemplary models of community resilience and civic innovation, thereby equipping them with transferrable skills and strategies that can be replicated or adapted within their local contexts. The visit contributes to mutual learning and fosters transnational solidarity networks.

Work Package 7 – Solidarity-Oriented Citizens' Online Forum
The core objective of WP7 is to develop a participatory digital platform that facilitates dialogue among European citizens on themes related to solidarity, resilience, and civic responsibility. also intended to serve as a reflective space, consolidating lessons learned and reinforcing the project's commitment to sustained civic participation beyond its formal conclusion.

This online forum functions as a space for inclusive interaction, collaborative learning, and the co-creation of artistic and civic expressions, ultimately contributing to a collective understanding of European identity and social cohesion.

Work Package 11 – Citizens United Collaborative Living Lab: This work package integrates the project's central theoretical pillars—empowerment, advocacy, and resilience—into a unified collaborative Living Lab. Its objective is to foster co-creative processes that enable citizens, civil society actors, and institutional stakeholders to engage in transformative practices. WP11 supports bottom-up initiatives, encourages policy dialogue, and enhances the long-term sustainability of civic engagement frameworks within the European context.

Work Package 12 – Closing Citizens' Festival : The final work package aims to synthesize and showcase the cumulative achievements of CISOMO II. Through a high-visibility public event, it seeks to promote European solidarity, strengthen civic identity, and celebrate the contributions of all stakeholders. The festival is





THE GREEK CIVIL SOCIETY LANDSCAPE

Greece's civil society has evolved significantly, especially since the early 2000s. Historically overshadowed by political institutions, the sector gained momentum during the 2009 economic crisis, when civil society organizations (CSOs) and informal groups stepped in to fill gaps left by a retreating welfare state. This period marked a rise in volunteerism and grassroots mobilization.

Today, Greek CSOs contribute meaningfully to the economy, generating around €3 billion (1.6% of GDP) and supporting over 88,000 jobs. Volunteering alone accounts for an estimated €357 million in value. Despite these contributions, the sector faces regulatory challenges, particularly strict oversight of NGOs involved in migration-related work, raising concerns about civic space and operational freedom.

Ultimately Greek civil society has become a resilient and vital actor in social development, though its continued growth depends on a supportive and enabling environment.

PILLAR I – EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CIVIC EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Fifty-Fifty places a strong emphasis on empowering individuals and communities—particularly marginalized groups—through non-formal education, training, and participatory learning. This is evident in work packages such as WP1, WP4, and WP11, where participants acquire practical skills, leadership capabilities, and tools to engage in democratic life. Capacity building is not only about knowledge transfer but about enabling sustained civic action and inclusion.

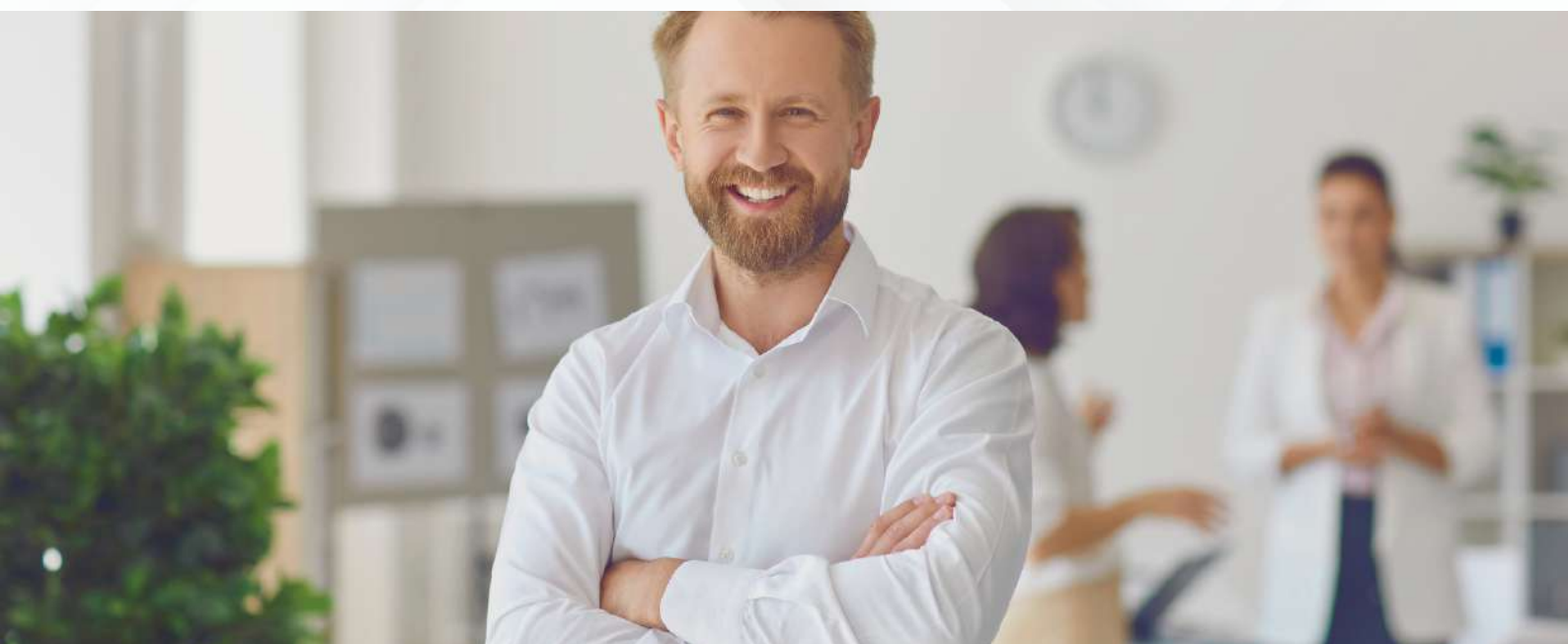
The strategic emphasis on civic education and capacity building has gained prominence as a foundational approach to enhancing the role of civil society and reinforcing democratic engagement. Within this context, targeted interventions have been developed to address structural weaknesses, improve organizational effectiveness, and foster a culture of participatory governance.

Key among these efforts are initiatives led by philanthropic and institutional actors that offer tailored support to civil society organizations (CSOs). These programs typically include structured training, mentorship, and organizational development tools aimed at strengthening internal governance mechanisms, expanding advocacy capabilities, and maximizing social impact. Challenges but also to shape inclusive democratic futures.

Simultaneously, broader capacity-building frameworks have incorporated both offline and digital methodologies—such as workshops, self-assessment platforms, and e-learning environments—to promote continuous learning and professional growth among civil society actors.

Youth empowerment has emerged as a critical pillar within this ecosystem. Initiatives centered on democratic literacy, sustainability, and active citizenship seek to cultivate the next generation of civic leaders and embed democratic values at the grassroots level.

Moreover, the formation of thematic networks aligned with global policy frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, has encouraged collaboration across sectors and institutional boundaries. These networks serve as platforms for knowledge exchange, policy advocacy, and constructive engagement with public authorities.



CASE STUDY: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CIVIC EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN PRACTICE

In recent years, Greece has made notable progress in strengthening its civil society through targeted initiatives focused on civic education and organizational capacity building. These efforts have been especially critical in the aftermath of the economic crisis and during the refugee emergency, when civil society actors stepped in to fill significant gaps in public services and social support.

One of the most impactful contributors has been the Bodossaki Foundation, whose initiatives such as the BUILD Programme and Social Dynamo have provided comprehensive support to grassroots organizations. Through structured mentoring, training, and access to expert networks, these programs have helped improve internal governance, advocacy skills, and long-term sustainability of civil society organizations.

The Active Citizens Fund, co-financed by the EEA Grants, has expanded these efforts at a national level, delivering practical workshops, self-assessment tools, and e-learning resources aimed at professionalizing and empowering NGOs across Greece. At the same time, youth-focused projects like the nEU Citizenship initiative have been instrumental in engaging younger generations.

These programs have offered civic education, democratic literacy, and project development training, inspiring youth-led community actions and cultivating a new generation of civic-minded leaders. Collectively, these initiatives have strengthened the structural foundations of civil society in Greece, enhanced the capacity of organizations to engage in policy dialogue, and empowered individuals—especially youth and marginalized groups—to participate meaningfully in democratic life.

PILLAR II: GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT AND SOLIDARITY NETWORKS

A second pillar is the focus on community-based solidarity and grassroots networking. Through immersive experiences like the study visit in Greece (WP4) and participatory Living Labs (WP11), Fifty-Fifty promotes bottom-up solutions, local resilience, and transnational collaboration. The organization values solidarity as a practice, not just a principle—encouraging citizens to act collectively in addressing social challenges.

Over the past decade, Greece has experienced a significant rise in grassroots engagement and solidarity-based networks, particularly as responses to the dual pressures of economic austerity and the refugee crisis. These community-led initiatives have emerged as critical alternatives to weakened state services, offering practical support while fostering inclusive and democratic participation for social resilience and democratic renewal in Greece.

Examples such as Social Kitchens, which provide free meals to vulnerable populations, and self-organized refugee housing squats in neighborhoods like Exarcheia in Athens, demonstrate how local communities mobilize around principles of mutual aid and collective action. These efforts often operate through open assemblies, emphasizing horizontal governance, self-management, and solidarity as everyday practice rather than abstract ideology.

Organizations like Solidarity for All have played a coordinating role, supporting local groups through technical assistance, resource sharing, and advocacy. Similarly, cooperatives such as VIO.ME., a worker-run factory in Thessaloniki, illustrate how grassroots economic models can promote sustainability and labor empowerment.

Together, these networks reflect a vibrant civil society ecosystem that not only addresses urgent social needs but also challenges dominant narratives of individualism and top-down governance. They exemplify how solidarity, when rooted in community practice, can serve as a powerful to



FROM LOCAL VOICES TO PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Greece has witnessed a growing shift from localized civic action to broader public dialogue, driven largely by grassroots movements, civil society organizations (CSOs), and institutional initiatives aimed at deepening democratic participation. Particularly in response to economic austerity and migration-related challenges, citizens have mobilized at the community level to articulate social demands and influence policy discourse.

Prominent examples include the “I Don’t Pay” movement, which transformed personal grievances about public service cuts into a collective political statement, and participatory urban initiatives in Thessaloniki, where citizens have contributed directly to debates on urban development and governance. These cases illustrate how bottom-up engagement can function as a catalyst for policy responsiveness and community-based problem solving.

Supporting this transformation are institutional actors such as the Bodossaki Foundation, which actively promotes structured public consultation and strengthens CSO capacities to engage in policy processes. Simultaneously, youth engagement platforms like the Youth Parliament, organized by the Hellenic Parliament, have expanded the space for political participation among younger generations, fostering democratic literacy and intergenerational dialogue. Nonetheless, structural barriers to inclusive participation remain.

As noted in recent policy reports, there is a need for more transparent, consistent, and inclusive mechanisms for public consultation—particularly in legislative processes. Recommendations include regular dialogue forums with civil society, clear participation criteria, and adequate timelines for stakeholder input.

Ultimately the Greek experience demonstrates the potential of local civic initiatives to evolve into impactful contributions to public dialogue, provided they are supported by institutional frameworks that value participatory governance, inclusion, and accountability.

PILLAR III – CREATIVE AND INCLUSIVE CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Fifty-Fifty innovatively integrates creativity and inclusion into civic participation, as seen in WP7 and WP12. By engaging citizens in artistic expressions, digital forums, and public festivals, the organization expands the notion of civic engagement beyond traditional activism. This pillar includes fostering European identity, intercultural dialogue, and expressive citizenship, making participation accessible, diverse, and resonant.

In Greece, civic participation has increasingly been reimaged through creative and inclusive cultural initiatives that extend beyond traditional activism. These efforts use art, dialogue, and public engagement to foster social cohesion and democratic reflection.

The Athens Biennale has played a key role by transforming public spaces—like the former Stock Exchange—into modern agoras for artistic expression and civic discourse. Similarly, Onassis Stegi has become a cultural hub where contemporary art intersects with pressing political and social issues, offering performances and discussions that explore democracy, rights, and identity.

The Animasyros International Animation Festival promotes inclusion through free workshops and screenings that tackle social themes, making civic dialogue accessible to a wide audience. Meanwhile, State of Concept Athens provides a platform for critical engagement with issues like human rights and social justice through art exhibitions and public talks.

At the European level, cultural participation is recognized as a driver of democratic engagement. Studies from the European Commission show that regular involvement in the arts correlates with higher levels of civic activity and community participation.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how Greece effectively integrates creativity and inclusivity into civic life, using culture as a powerful tool to amplify voices, spark dialogue, and deepen democratic engagement.

VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION IN REFUGEE SUPPORT

Volunteer mobilization has been a vital component of Greece's response to the refugee crisis, particularly during the peak years of 2015–2016. As government systems were overwhelmed by mass arrivals, thousands of local and international volunteers stepped in to provide essential services such as food, shelter, medical care, and legal support—especially on frontline islands like Lesbos.

Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and are driven by motivations ranging from humanitarian compassion to political solidarity. Despite their positive impact, challenges have emerged, including concerns about uncoordinated efforts and the need for adequate training. These have led to increased government regulation of volunteer activities.

Several key organizations have structured and sustained volunteer efforts, including the Hellenic Rescue Team, Starfish Foundation, and Open Cultural Center, each contributing significantly to humanitarian aid and refugee integration.

Essentially volunteer mobilization in Greece has not only met urgent needs but also cultivated a stronger culture of civic engagement and solidarity, though ongoing efforts are needed to ensure coordination, impact, and sustainability.

BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

Capacity building has become a key priority for strengthening Greek civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly in the wake of economic and migration crises. Leading this effort are organizations like the Bodossaki Foundation, which runs several targeted initiatives such as the BUILD, PREVENT, and Gender Equality programmes. These offer tailored training, mentoring, coaching, and small-scale grants to enhance organizational effectiveness, leadership skills, and social impact.

The Active Citizens Fund complements these efforts through nationwide workshops, online self-assessment tools, and e-learning platforms aimed at improving project planning, funding access, and professional development.

At the policy level, Law 4873/2021 introduced a regulatory framework that includes a public CSO registry and a special register to promote transparency, accountability, and access to public funding. Despite progress, challenges remain, particularly in areas like organizational sustainability, cross-border collaboration, and professionalization. Continued support, including EU investment and long-term infrastructure for knowledge sharing, is essential for building a resilient and impactful civil society in Greece.

PRACTICAL SKILLS ACQUIRED BY PARTICIPANTS

Work Package 1 – Project Launching Event

Participants acquired foundational project management and coordination skills, including understanding of transnational collaboration processes, role distribution, and stakeholder communication. The event also enhanced participants' familiarity with EU project structures and participatory governance frameworks.

Work Package 4 – Study Visit in Greece

Participants gained hands-on skills in grassroots engagement, disaster preparedness, sustainability practices, and community resilience-building. The immersive experience also helped develop competencies in solidarity networking, intercultural dialogue, and best practice transfer, enabling them to initiate or strengthen community-based initiatives in their local contexts.

Work Package 7 – Solidarity-Oriented Citizens' Online Forum

This WP equipped participants with digital literacy, online community facilitation, and collaborative problem-solving skills. Through interactive discussions and creative output (e.g., the CISOMO II Artistic Collage), citizens also practiced expressive communication and civic storytelling in a digital environment, fostering a culture of social cohesion and mutual support.

Work Package 11 – Citizens United Collaborative Living Lab
Participants developed advanced competencies in civic empowerment, advocacy strategies, and community-led resilience planning. They engaged in co-creation activities, cross-sector dialogue, and policy feedback mechanisms—strengthening their capacity for participatory governance, social innovation, and collaborative leadership.

Work Package 12 – Closing Citizens' Festival

This culminating event reinforced practical skills in public engagement, event co-organization, and civic reflection. It provided opportunities for participants to evaluate outcomes, share experiences, and articulate personal and collective commitments to solidarity, European identity, and active citizenship

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

A core added value of the Study Visit was the opportunity for cross-cultural exchange. Participants from diverse national and professional backgrounds engaged in structured dialogue and informal reflection, fostering mutual understanding. Encounters with local refugee and migrant leaders further deepened empathy and insight. These interactions built a foundation for ongoing collaboration and European solidarity, strengthening the collective capacity for inclusive civic action.



CIVIL SOCIETY SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

CISOMO II: Civil Society Solidarity Movement II

PROJECT NUMBER:
602046-CITIZ-1-2018-EL-CITIZ-CIV

D4.2 Greece's Solidarity Best Practices Compendium

www.cisomo.eu



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.