



**APPROACH**



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# APPROACH SOLUTION MANUAL

[www.project-approach.eu](http://www.project-approach.eu)

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# 1. Introduction

APProach has been a **pilot project that wanted to support the EU mobile citizens in several pilot cities, using a Digital Ecosystem** but also with a programme of training and awareness for civil society, elected local leaders and civil society groups. It has a very innovative approach mixing big and smaller cities (Paris, Lisbon, Etterbeek – Brussels, Nea Smyrni, Vejle and Milan) and it included very relevant associate partners, being the cities of Warsaw and Amsterdam.

It is part of the **collective effort of all the partners involved to support European citizenship** and make sure that citizens of the European union could better settle in new cities where they had moved for job, study or personal reasons. Mobility is a key and pivotal element of the European Identity and create cohesion among European, that learn other languages and learn other cultures and society, while remaining with the Union.

The **inclusion of EU Mobile citizens regards several topics** identified by the partners and re-discussed in the course of the project like school enrolment, housing but also voting for the local and European elections.

The digital ecosystem, [www.project-approach.eu](http://www.project-approach.eu), Represented a key added value to the project even if it faced real difficulties (which language to use, what kind of information the municipalities were willing to present, timing for working together within the consortium).

The **pandemics heavily hit the project** which should have included a lot of meetings, training, and testing of the platform in person. Even if in theory a lot of activities could have transformed online, the possibility of working with the local authority's team in the very first period of the lockdown reduced really contacts. The municipalities were entirely mobilized on other fronts.

Despite difficulties, the project remains a great success and it has a **potential of being used and implemented both by the consortium partners and by the municipalities** that could be approached by ALDA and by other members of the projects.

This Solution material is presenting:

- The results and activities implemented by the project APProach
- The difficulties emerged and the mitigation mechanisms and solutions put in place by the partners both
  - In management of the project
  - In implementing the solution offered for improving the EUMCS in the cities

The solution manual is meant to be a guideline and a synthesis between the lessons learned of APProach for making sure that the possibility of sustainability are implemented within the consortium but also for the possibilities that new municipalities could start a similar experience.

The solutions offered are also based on the questions that emerged during the project's implementation. Some of them were already identified as key challenges in the drafting phases of the programme and some of them emergency totally unexpected and represent an interesting drive for improvement!

APProach was a success and managed to navigate in a very difficult time as for the pandemics, support several local and European elections campaign and gave the concrete possibility to EU mobile citizens to be more involved in the lives of their "new" hosting cities.

We can't forget to mention in this document going through the year 2020 and 2021, all the citizens of our European towns and friends, partners and members of ALDA that passed away and those who struggled during and after the lockdown. We went through the non-imaginable. The COVID 19 crises showed once again that the cities and local communities are the place of the resilience and mainly the place of services to citizens. Local authorities have constant wake up calls for addressing realities that they cannot avoid. We went through very difficult months, and all the partners of APProach were affected heavily, and they managed, even with difficulty, to deliver the expected results. The Community remained united, and it still is so.

## **2. A full vision of the implementation of the project APProach: how to include EU mobile citizens in our communities**

### **2.1 Overview on the activities undertaken by the partners of the APProach project**

The activities that the partners of the APProach project implemented were all aimed at facilitating the circulation of information and guidelines to promote the effective exercise of free movement rights of EU mobile citizens (EUMCs) living elsewhere in Europe, future mobile EU citizens and foreigners.

To do this, the partners of APProach deeply investigated the challenges faced by local authorities when welcoming EU mobile citizens and the needs and obstacle of EUMCs themselves.

In particular, the APProach project mainly focused on three different aspects of EU citizens' mobility namely, access to vote, school enrolment and active participation in welcoming cities' life.

The activities of APProach were divided in different Work Packages (WP), for a total of five Work Packages.

#### **Management and coordination of the project - Work Package 1**

The first one, so called "Management and Coordination of the Project" (WP1), involved several actions. To name a few, the partners needed to: ensure the efficient and effective day-to-day management of the project through coordination and fostering of teamwork among all the project partners; to facilitate efficient and effective communication and information-sharing among participants; to ensure the qualities of project deliverables and managing risks and more. In order to implement those actions, ALDA, who was in charge of WP1, foresaw regular meetings and discussion among partners with the aim of exchanging ideas, feedbacks, and identifying room for improvement. To have a better understanding of the overall situations of the project, ALDA communicated constantly with the partners both individually and at consortium level sessions.

One of the first challenges encountered during the project regarded this first work package. Several times ALDA found it difficult to communicate with some of the other partners. One solution to this issue could be to favor individual communication rather than consortium level meetings.

In addition, the difficulties caused to the coordination and management of the project were also due to the health and sanitary crisis caused by the COVID-19, which destabilised each partner and obliged the project to change path and adapt to the current situation.

Nonetheless, all the various meetings foreseen by the project have been implemented. The first kick-off meeting took place in Paris on July 4 & 5, 2018. This kick-off meeting was used by the partners to decide upon the common formats of documentation necessary for evaluation and to elaborate an Evaluation and Monitoring plan of the project.

This first event saw the participation of all the partners involved in the project, included the associated partners, namely the municipality of Amsterdam and the one of Warsaw. The second one took place in Milan from March 13 until March 15, 2019, while the Mid-Term meeting was held in Lisbon from July 10 until July 12, 2019. During this meeting, in agreement with all the partners, it was decided to develop a mobile-responsive digital eco-system instead of a mobile APP and website. The Mid-Term meeting saw the participation of all the partners and associated partners included the external IT company in charge of the development of the digital ecosystem (GMV). The Monitoring meeting took place in Nea Smyrni from November 20 until November 22, 2019. The last and final meeting of the project, due to the impact of COVID-19 was realised online on March 26<sup>th</sup> 2021. All the partners, except from the municipalities of Paris and Lisbon, were present in this last meeting.



*Kick off meeting in Paris*

## Focus groups and exchange of best practices – Work Package 2

The second Work Package, so-called “Focus Groups and exchange of best practices” consisted of a package of activities (organisations of focus groups) that each partner needed to implement simultaneously at the local level, under the methodological supervision of the municipality of Paris.

This Work Package was aimed at two parallel objectives. From a local authority perspective, it aimed at assessing the efficiency of provided services and challenges faced by each local authority welcoming EU mobile citizens and opening a space for exchange of best practices. On a citizens’ perspective it aimed at investigating the problems and challenges faced by EU mobile citizens in exercising their free movement rights.

The focus groups described by this Work Package were divided in two main categories, some of them were conducted during the development of the Digital Ecosystem and were aimed at its design. Others were conducted after the conclusion of the Digital Ecosystem and were aimed at evaluating and testing the APProach platform.

The first group contained a further differentiation, based on the target. Some focus groups were directed towards selected staff of each municipality and their aim was to discuss bureaucratic, linguistic and practical obstacles that municipalities’ staff have to face when interfacing with EU mobile citizens and to provide possible solutions. Some other focus groups were targeting EU mobile citizens and were aimed at discussing needs and priorities of EUMCs.

Regarding the focus groups implemented during the development of the Digital Ecosystem, the partners conducted a total of 9 focus groups targeting local authorities’ staff and 12 focus groups addressed towards EUMCs. Concerning the focus groups carried out to test and evaluate the Digital Ecosystem, they reached a total amount of 18. To better analyse the needs and the challenges encountered by both parties (local authorities and EUMCs) the focus groups were complemented by a survey.



*Focus group  
in Milan*

The results obtained by the survey and by the focus groups were shared during an exchange of best practices/international event which took place in Milan from March 23 until March 25, 2019. During this meeting, the associated partners (municipality of Amsterdam and municipality of Warsaw) provided an added value and an extremely useful contribution.



*Civil Society Focus group in Etterbeek*



Some difficulties encountered when conducting the focus groups regarded the number of participants. Despite some partners, such as the Belgian municipality of Etterbeek, built several synergies with organisations that shared the same values and missions of the APProach project, the number of participants remained relatively low. A possible solution to this issue could be to increase the cooperation between partners and external organisations, to increase the communication around the events using communication tools suitable for the targeted audiences. A further solution could be to ask for help to the other partners and enlarge the network.

The difficulties encountered concerning the participation numbers in the second part of the project was also due to the unprecedented sanitary crisis caused by COVID-19, which made impossible to carry out in-person meetings.

The focus groups and the results obtained by their implementation will be further explored in the next section, when tackling the Digital Ecosystem.

### **APP and online platform development – Work Package 3**

The third Work Package consisted in the development of a Digital Ecosystem, which can be considered the most important output of the APProach project. All the activities implemented within the different Work Packages are strictly connected to the Digital Ecosystem and the results obtained from their implementation made the development of the latter possible.

We will deeply explore the APProach platform in the next section.

### **Trainings – Work Package 4**

The fourth Work Package consisted in the development of different trainings aimed at promoting the Digital Ecosystem amongst all EU citizens present within the territories of the project.

The APProach project foresaw the implementation of trainings of different nature. The first groups or so-called “English trainings for Local Authority’s staff” had the aim of offering English courses to the municipality staff engaged in welcoming EU mobile citizens, a second group of trainings “Trainings for LAs” were aimed at presenting the Digital Ecosystem, at communicating about it and at explaining how to moderate and monitor content uploaded on the APProach platform by EU mobile citizens (included hate speech). Another group of trainings carried out by each partner was directed towards EU mobile citizens with the main aim of presenting the Digital Ecosystem and its functioning.

## Communication and Dissemination - Work Package 5

The last Work Package, also called “Communication and Dissemination”, had the objective of supporting the aims of the project, promoting the activities, and disseminating the results obtained. The communication around the project was divided in internal and external. The former was among the partners of the project and was carried out through informal and formal instruments. The external communication included several activities, to name a few: the creation of the corporate image of the project, the development of promotional materials (e.g. leaflets, brochures), the creation of a newsletter, the relation among partners, stakeholders and external organisations and many others.

The difficulties encountered by the consortium concerned both internal and external communication. Regarding the former, as mentioned above, there was a lack of communication among the partners themselves, with two of them being unattainable in the second part of the project. The solution to this problem could be an internal communication based more on individual/bilateral meetings rather than consortium level meetings.

Regarding the latter, external communication can be improved by expanding the network and creating more synergies between partners and external organisations and by identifying media outlets at the local, national and international level that specifically target the audience to which the project aims. To make external communication more effective, especially concerning leaflets, brochures etc., it would be better to use less text, very simple messages and more catchy images.

## 2.2 APProach Digital Ecosystem

The Digital Ecosystem gathers together all the activities implemented within the different Work Packages of the APProach project. This section will consist of an in-depth exploration of the Digital Ecosystem, going through its entire development process, from the idea that led to its creation, to its development, to its test and evaluation until its sustainability plan.

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, the creation of the Digital Ecosystem, corresponding to the third Work Package (WP3), can be considered the main focus and output of the APProach project.

The initial idea behind the Digital Ecosystem was to develop an APP and a respective online platform to gather step-by-step the guidelines and information to facilitate the effective exercise of free movement rights of EU citizens, future mobile citizens and foreigners.

The main objective behind the APP was to promote EU mobile citizens', future EUMCs' and foreigners' active participation in city of residence's life, in order to stimulate their interest in the city and also their active civic participation in elections and community decision-making. The content of the APP needed to be divided into three macro categories: school enrollment procedures, voting process and information about city life initiatives and events. The APP was thought to gather practical information and guidelines of each city involved in the project and it was initially conceived as a mix of up-down participative approaches, including sessions where EUMCs themselves were able to upload information regarding city initiatives and suggestions. The information uploaded needed to be reviewed and authorized by the municipality concerned.

The online platform instead should have been a web portal containing the same information of the app and a communication channel for EU mobile citizens to get in contact with the different municipalities.

The initial idea mentioned above was overturned during the Mid-Term event that took place in Lisbon from July 10 until July 12, 2019. During this meeting, all the partners of the APProach project in agreement with each other, decided to develop a mobile-responsive Digital Ecosystem instead of an APP and an online platform. The Mid-Term event saw the participation of all the partners, included the associated partners and the representants of the IT company chosen to develop the platform, GMV.

The IT company selected for the development of the APProach Digital Ecosystem was chosen in March 2019, through the publication of a Tender, an invitation to submit an application to deliver specific goods or services. Among several companies that applied, GMV was considered the more suitable for APProach in terms of experience, objectives and economic means.

The GMV company was supposed to be involved in the project not only for the design, development and management of the APProach digital ecosystem but also to support the planning of its participatory process, its evaluation process and the follow up.

The idea exposed in the tender was to develop a participatory Digital Ecosystem aimed at creating new direct communication channels between EUMCs and municipalities. It needed to be co-developed in cooperation with the co-applicants of APProach, with the civil servants' and EUMCs' active contribution, using a co-design approach and also including indicators that allow measuring the project's impact during and after its implementation.

The design of the APProach digital ecosystem needed to be user-friendly and to gather:

- Static and dynamic information and step-by-step guidelines about the cities involved and concerning three macro categories: school enrollment procedures, how to vote, city life initiatives and events
- Top-down and participative approaches including sections where EUMCs themselves were able to upload information and to allow user-generated content production
- Information sharing and connections among citizens, municipalities and stakeholders

The first operation in order to develop the Digital Ecosystem consisted in gathering the data to upload on the online platform.

As explained above, all the five Work Packages of the APProach project and their results converged in the creation of this Digital Ecosystem. The focus groups mentioned in the previous section (WP2) were carried out with the final goal of providing significant data to upload on the Digital Ecosystem. As briefly explained above, two different types of focus groups were conducted by each municipality to produce the APProach Digital Ecosystem. A part directed towards selected staff from each municipality, with the aim of having round table discussions to pinpoint bureaucratic, linguistic and practical obstacles that municipalities' staff have to face when interfering with EU mobile citizens and foreigners and provide possible solutions.

Regarding this first part, the partners of the APProach project conducted a total of 9 focus groups directed towards Local Authorities, for a total of 83 participants and one interview. The municipality of Etterbeek carried out two focus groups reaching different target groups such as universities, representatives of the European Commission, Civil Society organisations, International Organisations and more. The main challenges for local authorities identified by the meetings were:

- Providing official information in foreign languages
- Explaining the functioning of the Belgian electoral system
- Overcoming the lack of interest of EU mobile citizens for local politics
- Helping EU mobile citizens navigate the Belgian school system

- Difficulty for the municipality to reach EU mobile citizens through traditional channels
- Finding an effective method to give information to future EUMCs

The municipality of Milan also conducted a total of two focus groups targeting local authorities. However, the results were slightly different from the ones obtained by the municipality of Etterbeek. According to the Italian partner, the main difficulties encountered by the staff of local authorities when interfering with EU mobile citizens are the following:

- Lack of data on EU mobile citizens living in Milan
- Lack of data on EU mobile citizens' access to city services
- Lack of awareness by EU mobile citizens on benefits and rights related to residency status (healthcare, social security)
- Lack of welcoming desks in town for the EU mobile citizens
- Lack of accessibility: Municipality offices are disseminated around town
- Lack of user-friendliness: touch points mix physical and online experience
- Lack of EU mobile citizens dedicated campaigns

The Greek municipality of Nea Smyrni conducted two focus groups directed towards local authorities' staff with the aim of studying the challenges faced when welcoming EU mobile citizens concerning the free movement rights of EU citizens. The challenges discussed during the focus groups concerned especially the three macro areas of the Digital Ecosystem namely, access to vote, school enrollment and active participation of EU mobile citizens in Nea Smyrni's city life.

According to the results obtained:

- It is generally agreed that Greece has experienced an economic crisis which caused the emigration and social exclusion of hundreds of thousands of well-educated Greeks. Those who fled the country to live in another European nation usually have a higher employment rate than those residing in Greece. This economic crisis, which lasted from 2010 until 2018, caused the imposition of severity measures and cuts enacted by the government towards municipality staff, who exercise the relevant national, regional and European policies. These austerity measures also affected the staff working in the municipality of Nea Smyrni, who found themselves to be too few compared to the activities to be implemented within the municipality.
- The municipality's staff needs to have a better knowledge and use of the English language
- The municipality's staff needs to know how to manage technological equipment, digital tools, in order to be prepared to effectively interface with EU mobile citizens

During these two focus groups, the participants highlighted the willingness to create a Digital Ecosystem containing all the necessary information and the step-by-step guidelines to interface with EU mobile citizens.

A further focus group targeting local authorities was conducted by the municipality of Paris gathering 9 participants, and other two focus groups by the municipality of Vejle, one targeting local authorities and the other targeting different stakeholders.

According to the focus groups carried out, the staff working in the Danish municipality receives several questions from EU mobile citizens regarding school enrollment, asking for support in the process. Sometimes, the municipality staff struggles to answer and sends them to the most indicate person (for instance, a person in the school department). Regarding the participation of EU mobile citizens in the city life, the obstacles are not really related to the communication with the municipality itself. The challenges arise when the different groups of EU mobile citizens are not aware of the municipality services and do not get in contact with them.

Other issues faced by the Municipality of Vejle when interfacing with EU mobile citizens are the following:

- EU mobile citizens and foreigners find challenging to understand the rules regarding the electronic ID (nemiID), especially the group who does not speak English or German.
- Another problem concerns getting the right documents from their country of origin.

According to the focus groups conducted, the Vejle's staff sees a value in the creation of an online platform that can guide EU mobile citizens to the right information and the right place to ask for it. In addition, since the legislation is volatile, it's important to have a place where to gather in an easy way the most updated information on a certain issue.

The participants to the focus groups also underlined the need to have a digital place where information is not too detailed, because it's more frequent for it to become outdated.

The Danish municipality of Vejle complemented the focus groups by adding a telephone interview with two participants: one Italian person who was living in Vejle for two years and a half with its partner from Chile and a Portuguese PhD student.

According to the interviewed, one of the first difficulties encountered as a EUMCs, regarded the registration process and the CPR number, especially because they didn't find enough information on the website of the Vejle municipality. Concerning the "how to vote" process, the interviewed said that it is always a complicated procedure for a newcomer and that it would have been nice to have a place were easily find all the information related to this challenge. Finally, the interviewed talked about the social life in Vejle, saying that they are part of a very active expats group. However sometimes it can be very confusing to navigate all the possible events.

The municipality of Lisbon didn't implement any focus group with local authorities.

ALDA provided to the partners the terms of reference to recruit the local trainers, guidelines and an internal agenda to facilitate the implementation of the focus groups. ALDA also provided the templates to report on the results of the focus groups and the templates to conduct the focus groups.

The other package of focus groups that the partners implemented were directed towards EU mobile citizens, reaching a total amount of 12 focus groups implemented. These meetings were aimed at identifying needs and priorities of EU mobile citizens as well as understanding municipalities' shortage or lack of appropriate services.

The municipality of Etterbeek conducted 2 focus groups targeting EU mobile citizens, for a total of 14 participants among which, local-term residents, EU mobile citizens involved in local associations and active in initiatives organized by the municipality.

The discussion between participants identified some common challenges:

- Civil servants not speaking English
- Complexity and length of the residency registration process
- Complexity of kindergarten and school system; lack of places
- Difficulty to find the correct and useful information
- Lack of ownership of the social and political life
- Other challenges regarded topics like housing and health



*Focus group Etterbeek*

The success obtained by the Belgian municipality within the second Work Package of the APProach project is also due to the numerous synergies that Etterbeek constructed with several organisations that shared the same values and mission as the APProach project. For instance, with the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEOI), which sent to Etterbeek a list of key people to be invited to the APProach focus groups in Brussels. Or with Expats in Brussels, which took part in the APProach focus groups and informed their community about the project's initiatives through their communications tools.

The municipality of Milan conducted 3 focus groups directed towards EU mobile citizens, for a total of 60 participants, among which 28 stakeholders, 8 Erasmus students' groups (European Students Network, Garage Erasmus), 1 EU institution (European Parliament Liaison Office in Milan), 1 EU organization (Europe Direct) and 5 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

According to the results emerged by the implementation of the focus groups, the obstacles to EU mobile citizens living in Milan are the following:

- General sense of confusion (due to the lack of clear information)
- Lack of welcoming by the municipality to help citizens feel at home
- Unclear requirements and procedures to apply for residence
- Language barriers: information is not entirely in English and/or in any other European language (forms are usually in Italian)
- Complicated voter registration procedures
- Lack of information about pre-registration at public schools
- Lack of awareness about public services

Some key findings arose from the discussions among the participants are:

- Municipality of Milan provides fragmented and uncoordinated information on services provided
- EUMCs need easy-to-use information about rights and opportunities
- Official websites provided by the Municipality of Milan (e.g. [studyinmilan.it](http://studyinmilan.it) and [yesmilan.it](http://yesmilan.it)) are little known and used by the EUMCs community
- Internet and social media are the main not official channels of information for EU mobile citizens
- Providing clear information could have a positive impact on EUMCs engagement in city life

All the results obtained by the implementation of the focus groups by the Italian municipality confirmed the need to develop a Digital Ecosystem which provides to EU mobile citizens and foreigners clear and easy to access information in a single place, on the most challenging topics



for them. As emerged, these topics are the voting process, the welcoming aspect of the city, the enrollment process and more.

The Greek municipality of Nea Smyrni, conducted one focus group targeting EU mobile citizens on April 19, 2019, gathering a total of 12 participants.

The outcome of this focus group is similar to the one obtained by the municipalities previously explored, with the difference that most of the EU mobile citizens living in Nea Smyrni do not often look at the website of the municipality, especially because they do not recognize it as a source of interesting and useful news. In addition, a huge part of the respondents also said that they do not know how to use mobile or desktop devices.

Similarly to the participants of Etterbeek and Milan, one of the challenges encountered by the EU mobile citizens of this focus group, regarded the communication with the municipality's staff due to their low level of English. Furthermore, not visiting the website of Nea Smyrni, EU mobile citizens do not know how to register to vote, or how to access the correct information on the process. During the last elections, only three out of the twelve participants voted.

Concerning the enrollment to school process, this specific group didn't encounter many difficulties, especially because most of their children were born in Greece.

Lastly, another result is that the participants to the focus group are not very active in city life. However, they expressed their interest in being more informed on the different activities taking place in the city and in participating to the next elections.



*Focus group Nea Smyrni*



*Focus group Nea Smyrni*

The municipality of Vejle conducted a total of three focus groups targeting EU mobile citizens, gathering a total of 11 participants. However, additional input was given in written form by a few persons who could not attend the in-person meetings.

The results obtained from the implementation of these focus groups are explored below. Regarding the access to vote, the participants seemed to be aware of their right to vote in the European elections, thanks also to a letter from the State that they received in their electronic mailbox. However, most of them didn't register yet to vote. Focusing on local/municipal election, the situation seems to be more difficult: only half of the participants are aware of their rights regarding this type of elections. The obstacles encountered by them on this issue are:

- There seems to be not obstacles to the registration process to vote, however EU mobile citizens encounter some challenges concerning the awareness of their rights caused by the language spoken by the municipality's staff.

While there are no apparent problems with the school enrollment process, EU mobile citizens living in the Danish city face some obstacles in taking active part in the city life, especially if they are not involved in the Expats network, they find challenging where to find information on the different activities happening in Vejle.

In addition, as stated during the discussions, EU mobile citizens need to be very proactive to find clubs and associations since information on that is mostly in Danish. The language barrier seemed to be the greatest issue.

In general, internationals/EUMCs heavily rely on each other and on the information provided within their community. Part of the participants stated that they look at other users' comments as a source of information and recommendation.

Another issue concerned the difficulty to find all the necessary information in one place. One of the participants said "There is really no clarity, everything is floating in the air. You have to pick up bits of information from here and there".

As further evidenced also by the focus groups conducted by the municipality of Vejle, a Digital Ecosystem in multiple languages which gathers all the necessary information in one place regarding issues like access to vote, school enrollment and city life represented a solution to almost all of the challenges faced by EU mobile citizens.

Lisbon, conducted a focus group targeting EU mobile citizens, gathering a total 8 participants among which representatives from: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Junta de Freguesia de Arroios, Goethe Institute Lisboa, Instituto Cervantes Lisboa and Internations Expat Groups Lisboa.

Tackling the 'access to vote' issue, the participants showed good knowledge of their right to vote in the European elections. However, similarly to the answers obtained from the focus groups carried out by the municipality of Vejle, only a few of them knew that by having a legal residence permit they could also vote for the local and municipal elections.

Moving to the 'school enrollment process', EU mobile citizens are generally aware of the process of enrollment in a school. However, going into details, they lacked knowledge on the following points:

- Specific rules on how to enroll and who can enroll
- The availability of places
- The dimension of the classes
- The deadlines on the application process
- The selection criteria and more.

These answers highlighted a lack of clear information on the topic.

Focusing on 'active participation in the welcoming city's life', all the participants showed rather good knowledge on the existing cultural offer in Lisbon, and some of them stated that are directly involved in the production of some of these activities, such as art gallery exhibitions, art crafts ateliers and theater companies.

The municipality of Paris carried out one focus group targeting EU mobile citizens on February 19, 2019.

All the focus groups previously mentioned were complemented by two surveys conducted by ALDA. One directed towards EU mobile citizens and another one targeting social and economic actors and citizens. The former intended to facilitate the reception and involvement of EU mobile citizens in their welcoming cities and it was directed towards identifying the difficulties and information gaps preventing these citizens from engaging in their host communities. Among the numerous questions asked, the answers gathered by the following ones were extremely precious for the development of the APProach Digital Ecosystem:

1. When you want to find information about local life, administrative procedures and civil rights, what sources do you use the most?
2. How would you qualify the language skills of the local authorities' staffers to communicate with foreigners? (Speaking of English, for instance)

3. What type of information is more relevant for you to receive from local authorities when integrating into another country?
  1. The website of the municipality is the main source of information for more than 50% of the respondents. It is an assurance of reliability and of trust.
  2. In general, the most selected answer is 'insufficient'. This result shows the need to have local authorities trained to welcome foreigners, especially in English. When EUMCs are moving to a new country, they don't often speak the national language.
  3. According to the respondents, the voting rights are not considered as the more relevant information for EUMCs to receive from local authorities when integrating into another country. This is mostly due to the fact that citizens are not aware that they have the right to vote in another European country. The priorities for EUMCs when coming to another country are: **1. Registration as a resident** **2. Social security and health** **3. Housing.**

These answers helped the partners of the APProach project to better identify which topics to tackle when designing the Digital Ecosystem and made them aware of the need of making available the platform in different languages.

In addition, the first answer corresponded to a confirmation on the fact that the Digital Platform, being developed by municipalities and being strictly connected to the website of the municipalities, would have been considered by EUMCs as a reliable and trustful source of information.

The second survey can be divided into two sub-surveys. One targeting social and economic actors like Civil Society Organisations and one targeting citizens. These surveys were conducted after the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis.

They consisted of an investigation on the use of digital tools by economic and social actors/citizens and how this use changed during and after the sanitary crisis caused by COVID-19. The survey was aimed at understanding how the use of a digital tools such as the APProach platform changed during and after the pandemic, since the COVID-19 crisis affected everyone and challenged every citizen to change their private and professional life.

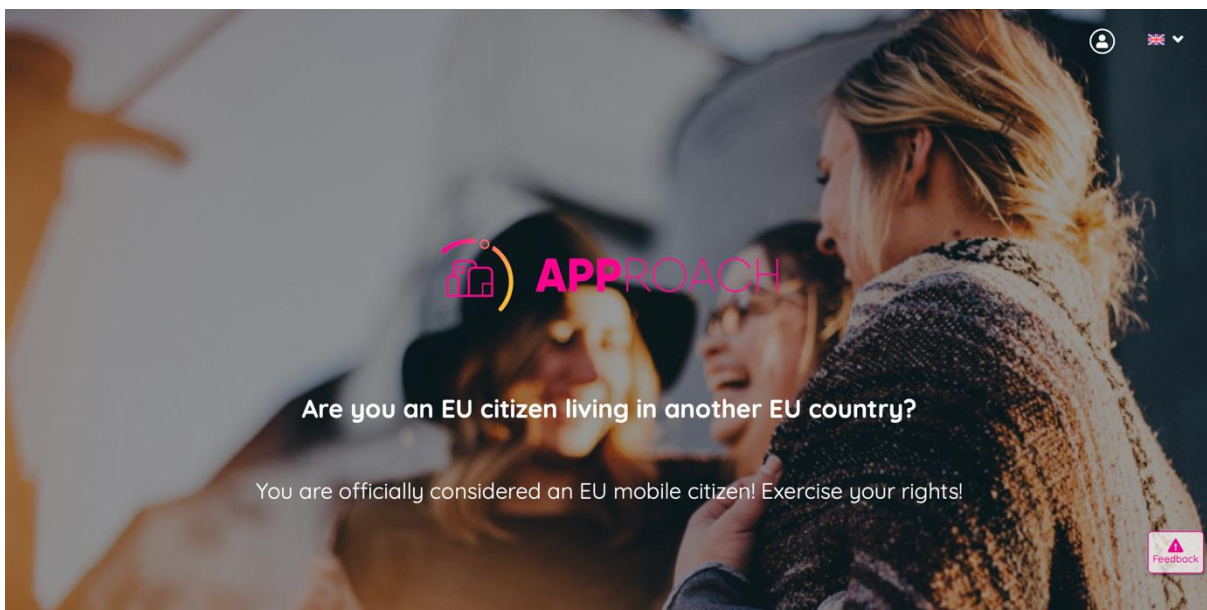
The unprecedented crisis caused by COVID-19 extremely destabilised the project itself and its partners. However, they tried to find, through these surveys, a further perspective on how to look at the APProach Digital Ecosystem, a tool on the frontline to enable everyone to stay connected with the municipalities without feeling left alone, to stay informed, to receive updates on the situation and so on.

To summarise, the focus groups and the survey(s) carried out provided data for the content of the APProach Digital Ecosystem and guidelines on its architecture. From one side, they helped

identifying the most important and challenging areas both for local authorities and EU mobile citizens. From another, they provided solutions on how to better design the platform to provide an answer to these challenges and develop an online platform who is useful for everyone and easily accessible to everyone. In addition, during every focus group, the participants reiterated the willingness and need to have a digital place containing all the necessary information and the step-by-step guidelines to help them access the information in the fastest and easiest way possible. All the results gathered during these activities were at the very foundation of the development of the APProach Digital Ecosystem.

With these premises, the [APProach Digital Ecosystem](#) started to take shape.

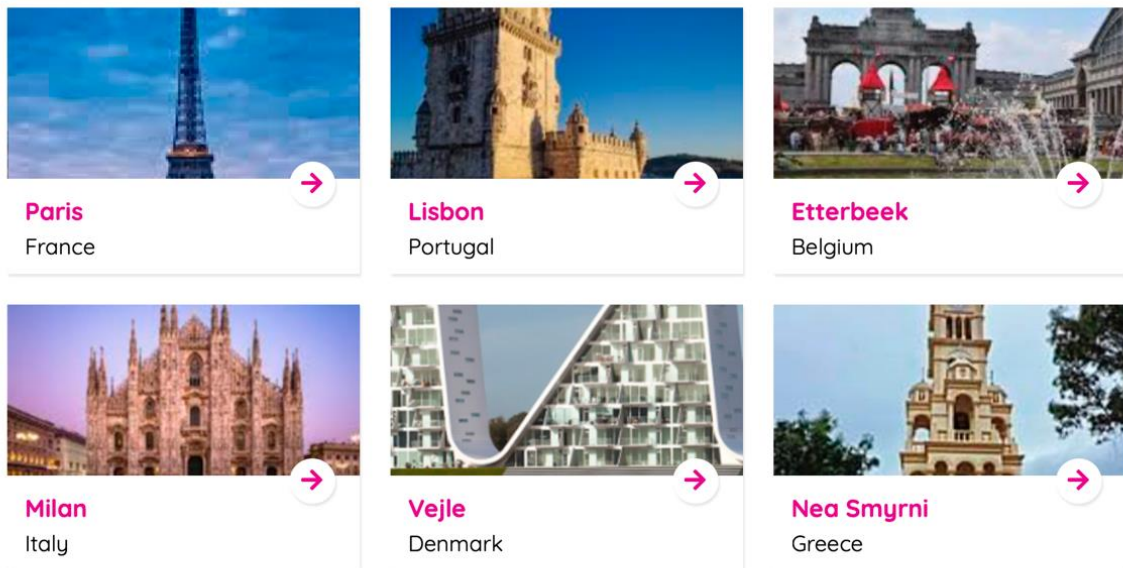
The Digital Ecosystem includes several participative functionalities, among which a user-friendly official digital channel for the new citizens in town. This digital channel provides information on rights, procedures and opportunities to EU mobile citizens. It is thought and designed to be trustful and reliable.



The APProach platform also provides interaction between users and contents, in order to maximise the user experience.

The home page contains a short description of the APProach project, a social wall where social media posts appear and, at the bottom, all the links to the different landing pages of each municipality involved in the project.

## In which partner city are you located?



### *Landing pages for municipality*

Each partner and associated partner have a landing page containing information on the following topics:

1. Voting System
2. School Enrollment
3. Civic Engagement
4. Social Life
5. Getting Started

The topics chosen were based on the requests expressed by the EU mobile citizens during the implementation of the focus groups. In addition, each landing page is available in English and in the language of the municipality selected.

The content of each category has been provided by each municipality, thus is trustful and reliable and it is constantly updated in order not to have outdated news.

After having gathered the data and produced the architecture and design of the Digital Ecosystem, the partners of the APProach project carried out some focus groups to test and evaluate the Digital Ecosystem and adjust it according to the feedback received. The focus groups conducted were attended by different audiences according to the municipality which

implemented them. Three meetings, for a total of 19 participants, were directed towards local authorities, one implemented by the municipality of Etterbeek, and two by Milan.

A total of five meetings had EU mobile citizens as participants, for a total of 34 people. One was conducted by the municipality of Vejle, one by Nea Smyrni, two by Milan and the last one by Lisbon. Finally, two test focus groups had a mixed audience (local authorities + EU mobile citizens) and they were implemented by Paris and Etterbeek.

Despite the differences among the participants, the structure of the test focus groups was similar in every meeting.

Every test focus group was divided in three sessions: User Research (Collective Empathy Maps), Usability Tests (Assigned Tasks) and Brain Storming (Guided Debate).

The first activity had the main objective to know better the user by creating a collective empathy map. The empathy map gives to the developers of the digital platform a more concrete vision of the users' needs, their vision about a specific topic, where they collect the information and how they act. This session it is extremely important to create a satisfactory user experience, since knowing your user can guarantee a personalized and accurate experience. During this first session, the participants focused on three areas: Voting System, School Enrollment and Civic Engagement.

The second session, so called 'Usability Test', was aimed at evaluating the usability of the sections of the web. During this part, the participants had a task to be performed and they needed to navigate the digital platform in order to implement it.

The last session consisted of a brainstorm among the participants regarding their experience while testing the platform and their feedback on it.

The results obtained by the implementation of these focus groups helped the partners of the APProach project and GMV, the IT company chosen for its development, to structure the Digital Ecosystem in the best possible way and to modify it according to the participants' feedback.

The APProach platform represents the main achievement reached by the partners of the project.

Regarding its usability, a very important aspect to mention is the organisation of trainings. The trainings, included in the fourth Work Package of the APProach project were of two types: some aimed at teaching how to use the Digital Ecosystem and others, so called 'English trainings' were carried out in order to ameliorate the level of the English language of the municipal staff. The latter was extremely important to make the communication between EU mobile citizens and municipalities' staff easier, and to put the staff in the position of being able to use the Digital Ecosystem and explain its usage to EU mobile citizens and foreigners.



The Municipality of Etterbeek conducted a total of two English courses, one directed towards street agents in charge of public cleanliness and another one targeting welcome desk agents. In addition, the Belgian municipality also provided two English training books to welcome desk agents.

The municipality of Milan developed a “Welcome guide” on Milan services for EU mobile citizens plus several multilingual information kits and materials concerning the local vote rights.

The Greek municipality of Nea Smyrni implemented two English trainings, one for local authorities’ staff with an English level B2 and another for a more advanced level.



*English training implemented by Nea Smyrni*

The municipality of Vejle, considering the high level of English generally spoken by its staff, developed an [online training](#) available for all the present and future staff members of the Danish municipality. In addition, VIFIN, Resource Centre for Integration at the Vejle municipality, created a special [online English course](#) for Local Authorities/frontline staff who deal with newcomers. The course consists of 10 lessons, and it takes approximately 1.5 – 2 hours per lesson. It does not require a login; due to this it can be freely accessed. Finally, the municipality of Vejle also produced a [video training](#) about the APProach digital ecosystem entitled “Webinar for Administrators”. This video, of the length of 10 minutes, provides an in-depth explanation of what the APProach digital ecosystem is and how to use it. These tools have been extremely useful for all the length of the APProach project and will continue to be valuable for all the present and future staff of the Vejle Municipality.

Unfortunately, after some time that the Digital Ecosystem was online and accessible by everyone, the partners of the project encountered a difficulty. From March 22, 2022, until June

13, 2022, the platform was down due to contractual reasons. ALDA, leader of the APProach project, immediately activated to restore its functions and contacted several times GMV, the IT company in charge of its management. After endless communication and several letters, the Digital Ecosystem was available again.

The challenges encountered by the unavailability of the digital platform were numerous, but thanks to the persistence of ALDA and of the partners of the APProach project, all the work done was not lost.

## 2.3 Future directions

The life of the Digital Ecosystem does not end with the APProach project. The Digital Ecosystem was thought to be a reliable and trustful place where easily find clear information and step-by-step guidelines that help current and future EU mobile citizens during their stay in another country. It was designed in a simple but effective manner, aimed at being used by people of all ages, despite their level of digital skills.

In addition, the precious inputs gathered during the development of the APProach Digital Ecosystem, allowed the municipalities to ameliorate their websites, and sometimes even merge it with the APProach platform.

For instance, following the guidelines of the APProach project and of the very accessible structure of this Digital Ecosystem, the municipality of Etterbeek, as part of the APProach project, decided to launch a complete reshuffling of their [municipal website](#), with a user-friendly approach giving direct access from the home page to pages especially dedicated to EU mobile citizens. This new municipal website contains 240 pages, of which 45 pages specially dedicated to EU mobile citizens.

Thanks to the main lessons learned from the APProach project the pages of Etterbeek new municipal website dedicated to foreign citizens have the following features:

- The website it's not dependent on an external host, to a operational problems. Thus, the municipality is in control of the access to the website and on its content. Therefore, the pages are easily editable and adaptable to the needs of foreign citizens.
- By hosting the content on the Etterbeek municipality website, the users consider it more reliable.
- Etterbeek identified many topics which interest EU mobile citizens and foreigners. The new website includes 48 different topics among which registration, vote, citizenship, jobs, mobility, urban planning and much more.
- The webpages of this new website are not targeting only EU mobile citizens, but also foreigners at large, who often face the same challenges of the former.

The European project APProach made the creation of this website possible, facilitating the access to information to thousands of people that are currently living in Etterbeek or that are planning to come living in this municipality. The APProach Digital Ecosystem and the new website of the municipality of Etterbeek are two closely linked and inseparable systems.

Similarly to the municipality of Etterbeek even if on a smaller scale, the municipality of Vejle decided to merge the APProach digital ecosystem with the VFIN website by creating a [landing page](#) where the APProach project and its objectives are presented in a clear and concise manner. This landing page is both in English and Danish.

Even the municipality of Nea Smyrni transformed the precious inputs gathered by the development of the APProach Digital Ecosystem into concrete and valuable changes, which made their website more easily accessible.

To conclude, despite the several difficulties encountered during the journey including the unprecedented health crisis caused by COVID-19, the APProach Digital Ecosystem is an extremely valuable platform, resulted by all the actions undertaken by the partners within the different Work Packages.

Given the success achieved, the APProach Digital Ecosystem can be taken as a great example for smaller municipalities which would like to create a similar tool and help EU mobile citizens and foreigners to get acquainted with the procedure and rules of the city they are living in.

### 3. Question and answers: how to make it possible

The project Approach had the ambition to support a new and improved model of integration of European Mobile Citizens through a digital application, an *APP*, and other instruments. The particularity of the whole process was the co-creation of such a *APP* with the participation of the whole the consortium members. At the end, and rather quickly, all partners opted for a digital ecosystem, being very accessible for mobiles. Several issues were raised during the implementation that were points of strength and weaknesses in terms of feasibility and efficiency of the instrument proposed.

The following part of the documents is analyzing some key questions that were posed by the consortium partners and the way they have been answered to and addressed. Through these Q&As, potential interested cities that want to use the Platform, could be better aware of the whole picture for a safer and more efficient decision on the implementation.

Some of these questions are focused on technicalities of the Platform and analyze how and why we passed from an *APP* to a digital ecosystem and how this was co-created and implemented, both the programme, the design and more.

**The Solution material is strictly connected to the Sustainability Plan proposed within the project. They both represent instruments for the prosecution and dissemination of the action.**

### 3.1. Is the IT instrument useful for a better EU mobile integration?

Digitalisation and digital tools have a predominant role in our everyday life, wherever we carry on our life. However, the incidence of the use of digital tools and platforms increases significantly if we live a country different from our country of origin.

This is the reason behind the whole idea of the APProach project: creating a digital tool to facilitate the everyday life of European Mobile Citizens.

While the primary idea was to develop a digital application – APP – for smartphones, this plan has gradually shifted into the creation of a digital ecosystem. Indeed, this change finds its reason in the fact that a digital ecosystem is much more accessible than a APP: it is easier to access, real content can be shared on social media (instead of a simple APP preview), it does not require any download (often the fact of having to download material can be a deterrent for the final user, who may prefer not to overcharge the mobile's memory with unknown content) and it can be easily found through search engines.

Of course, the digital ecosystem was supposed to be as mobile friendly as possible, just like a smartphone APP.

All in all, this choice proved to be successful: the APProach digital ecosystem has been gaining more and more trust by European Mobile Citizens, proved by the growing number of visitors. Last but not least, a digital ecosystem is also much cheaper to maintain, so a valuable choice in view of a longer sustainability of the project and the platform itself.

The effectiveness of such an IT tool has been deemed so powerful to the point that the municipality of Etterbeek decided to convert its municipal website according to the project APProach's guidelines and the lessons learned thanks to the project and the several focus groups organised.

Thus, Etterbeek decided to launch a complete reshuffling of their [municipal website](#), with a user-friendly approach giving direct access from the home page to pages especially dedicated to European mobile citizens. This new website contains 240 pages, of which 45 pages specially dedicated to EU mobile citizens.

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Etterbeek's experience is one of the proofs of the functionality and effectiveness of the so-called "*APProach method*" to the extent that Etterbeek wanted to exploit the whole potential of this tool by integrating the process and the method directly to its own website, without necessarily having to go through the APProach digital ecosystem<sup>1</sup>.

In sum, thanks to the project partner's experiences, we can state that the IT instrument is definitely useful to support the integration of European Mobile Citizens, being digital channels the source of reference for most citizens, especially mobile ones, when they need to find information. This increases in situations of poor knowledge of the external environment, just like European Mobile Citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite this, please note that the APProach digital ecosystem ([www.project-approach.eu](http://www.project-approach.eu)) yet gathers all relevant information concerning the municipality of Etterbeek.

## 3.2. Can we address all EU mobile citizens in one language?

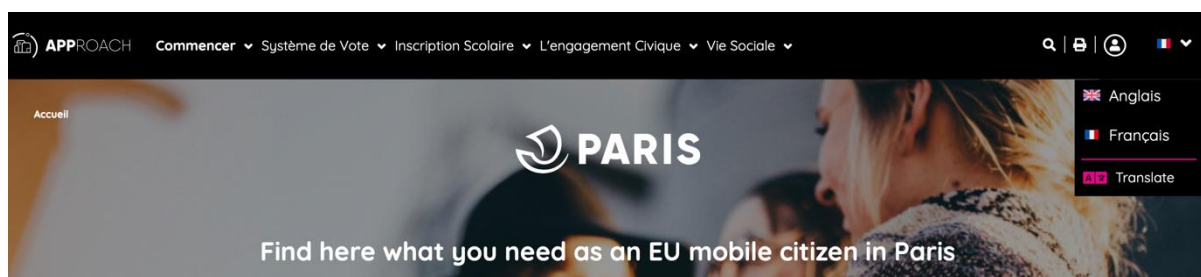
Despite English is considered the vehicular language par excellence, almost everywhere in the World, it is not possible to state that it is possible to address all European Mobile Citizens in one language.

Before the development and the construction of the APProach digital ecosystem, a deep reflection had been carried out by all project partners concerning the language issue.

The focus groups which took place before the development of the platform have also been very useful to this purpose. Indeed, they served to raise the matter of the language both among local authorities' representatives and among European Mobile Citizens.

The main result emerged from such discussion was that surely an English translation would help the most part of European Mobile Citizens in accessing relevant information. On the other hand, limiting the language accessibility to English would likely raise barriers for others.

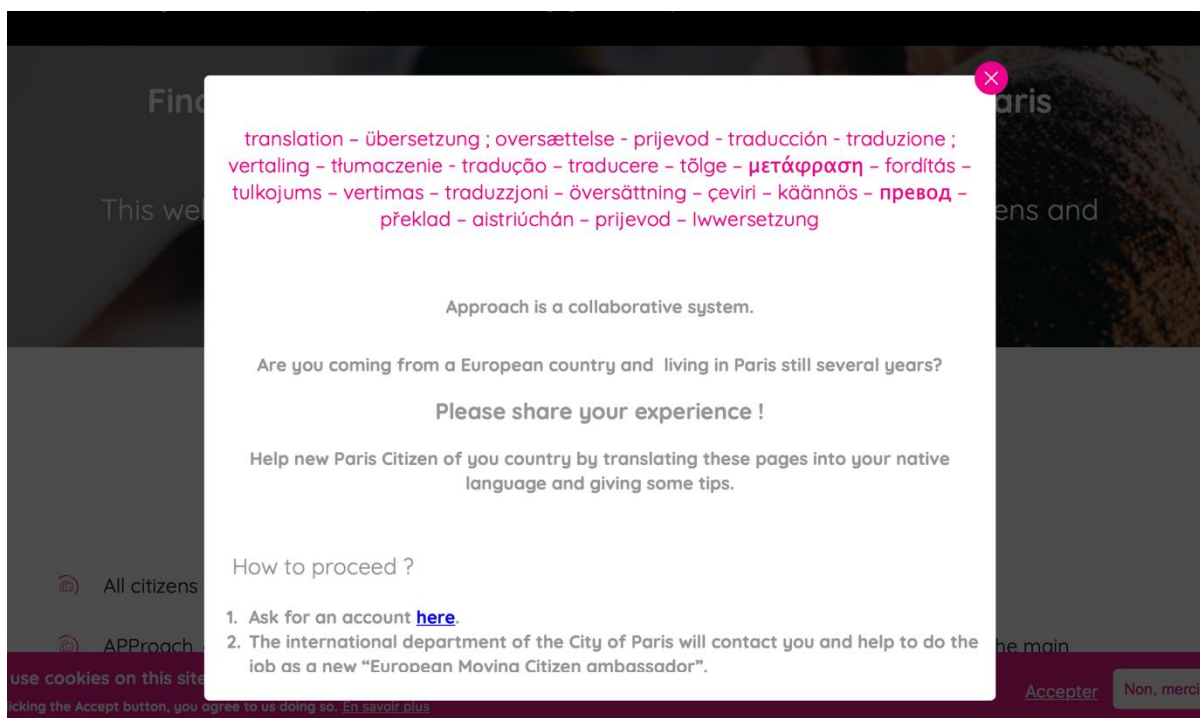
In light of this, the final choice, which sought to accommodate most needs, was to set English as the main language of the APProach digital ecosystem. More specifically, each partner municipality had to provide its content material in both English and its local language. In this way, the APProach digital ecosystem would contain accurate information with an exact translation into 2 key languages for the European Mobile Citizen concerned: the language of his/her country of residence and the vehicular English.



Furthermore, to get around this kind of language limitation, an innovative translation system has been elaborated by project partners: a collaborative translation tool which lets all users to contribute to an improved accessibility of the digital ecosystem. Indeed, every user can provide the translation of one or more pages into an additional language by taking contact with the platform's manager, who in turn will upload the new translation online.

Until now, no negative feedbacks have been received concerning the translation or language accessibility of the platform, proving that this innovative choice was quite a good one.





Taking once again the Etterbeek municipality as example, in the reshuffling of its website, specifically designed to be EUMCs’ friendly, it was decided to make it available in the Belgium’s official languages, French and Dutch, and in English for all other foreigner users.



Due to some reasons the municipality opted not to integrate in its website the google translate tool, but to keep English as vehicular language for all foreigners, choice which suggests that, if no other solution is available, English language always represents the best choice when comes to EUMCs’ integration.

### 3.3. Are the topics selected by APProach useful?

The choice of the targeted topics selected to be the pillars of the APProach digital ecosystem was the core of a deep reflexion from all partners involved.

The goal was to include in the platform all relevant information for European Mobile Citizens, without replicating the big – maybe too big – amount of information present in the original website of the municipalities.

The topics selected, namely getting started, voting system, school enrolment, civic participation and social life emerged as the unavoidable areas of interest for every European Mobile Citizen. Probably, not every EUMC will forcedly need to consult all these sections – i.e. if the European mobile citizen does not have any child to enrol in school – but at least 3 of them should appear as a must to conduct a life abroad.

The choice of pillars was also conducted through a reasoning through two main core questions: *“Which are the European mobile citizens’ duties? And which are their rights?”*

In fact, the project consortium, in this phase accompanied by the IT company as well, agreed that a useful platform for the integration of European Mobile Citizens should help them exercise their rights, on one side, as well as support them in complying with their duties, on the other. The following scheme, drafted during the phase of consultation, illustrates the above-mentioned reasoning:

*Content may be assessed along two main directories:*

- *RIGHTS: What a EU mobile citizen is entitled to in his town of residence, and how to grant those rights.*
  - *Democratic rights*
    - *voting to EU parliament elections*
    - *voting to their own national elections*
    - *voting to local elections*
    - *petitioning*
    - *public consultations*
    - *participatory budget*
    - *local referendum*
    - *hiring by the local administration*
    - *public calls on local projects*
    - *(...)*
  - *Digital services*
    - *Bureaucracy*
    - *School enrolment*
    - *Tax payment*

- (...)
  
- *DUTIES: What a EU mobile citizen has the duty to do in his town of residence, and how to comply.*
  - *Bureaucracy*
  - *School enrolment*
  - *Tax payment*
  - *(...)*

Many times, the project consortium asked itself if other pillars should be included. This question was also posed during the focus groups to both municipalities' representatives and European mobile citizens. Yet, the above-mentioned topics emerged in all cases as the most relevant ones.

Moreover, the logic behind this choice is also to be found in the function of the Approach digital ecosystem itself. Indeed, the IT platform had to be clear and easy to use and to understand. An excess of information would have resulted in a growing confusion and the European mobile citizen would have risked to get lost among not-so-relevant information.

In addition, the APProach platform needed to differentiate itself from the websites of the municipalities involved. If the platform would contain all same information of other websites, its utility and peculiarity would disappear.

### 3.4 Does the project increased participation to local elections or European Elections? Lessons learned?

Being one of the 5 pillars of the platform, it is very interesting to study how the project APPROach contributed to supporting the participation of European Mobile Citizens in local elections in the targeted municipalities.

A valuable example is given by the experience of the municipality of Milan, which capitalised the experience and the tools developed by APPROach to conduct two electoral campaigns.

The first one, in 2019, was the campaign for the European Parliament Elections in 2019. Even if only a year after the beginning of the project, the objective of this campaign was to stimulate the participation of European Mobile Citizens in town. The second campaign was the one for the local administrative elections 2021 – after the official conclusion of the project.

Both campaigns were conceived to exploit at its finest the tools and techniques implemented for the project APPROach. Thus, they represented a substantial help in engaging European Mobile Citizens living in Milan. Moreover, the Municipality undertook a more specific enquiry to reach not only citizens directly, but to also to connect to relevant stakeholders and potential hub of EUMCs. Among these, they managed to involve Consulates of European Countries, citizens' associations, relocation agencies, law firms and other key actors of the private sector. Furthermore, a specific focus was put on the young voters, so that the Municipality tried to

enforce precise communication actions in Schools, Universities and carry out campaigns to reach to Erasmus students' networks and other expats in the city – particularly relevant for the 2019 EU Parliament elections.

Concerning the 2021 campaign for local administrative elections, the Municipality of Milan was able to **use the results of APPROach to implement an original campaign targeting European Mobile Citizens** living in Milan, to raise awareness on their right to register and vote or be voted for the local administrative elections. This specific action titled **“Siamo Europei e Votiamo a Milano”** (*We are Europeans and we vote in Milan*) was carried out in cooperation with **GaragErasmus**, a professional network managed by Erasmus



generation and dedicated to the promotion of social initiatives. This campaign included the presentation and dissemination of toolkits, a social media campaign and the engagement of volunteers/ambassadors coordinated by GaragErasmus, as well as the organization of local pop-up events.



This crossed action, in coordination with local associations and targeted institutions proved to be successful, as reported from the municipality of Milan.

Indeed, the participative approach demonstrated its effectiveness: the sole action of the municipality is not enough to generate the cascade effect of participation which, to the contrary, in partnership with community organisations closer to the target audience, especially youth, was guaranteed.

Another winning element of the campaigns was the involvement of ambassadors through specific messages disseminated in posters and postcards. This action probably conveyed a sense of community to European Mobile Citizens in Milan, through the testimony of people sharing a similar story and committed to actively participate and contribute in their local context.

### 3.5 Who can join the APProach platform?

In line with the whole reasoning behind the project APProach, the digital ecosystem may be joined by different stakeholders.

First of all, citizens - European Mobile Citizens. The platform is specially conceived to be receptive to European foreign nationals. Thus, by clicking on the person-shaped icon on the top-right corner of the platform's landing page, all interested citizens can create a personal account and start a customised experience through the services offered by the digital ecosystem.



In their personal area, users will be able to directly display, without having to look for it, all relevant information and news on what is going on in their city of preference – of course among the municipalities affiliated to the platform.

The other key stakeholder – and participant – of the APProach platform is the Municipality. At the moment, 8 are the municipalities present in the digital ecosystem: Etterbeek, Milan, Paris, Lisbon, Vejle, Nea Smyrni, Warsaw and Amsterdam.

Since the success of the platform lays directly in the interaction and synergy between municipalities and European Mobile Citizens, an increasing involvement of municipalities is foreseen. Indeed, such a development of the digital ecosystem would be beneficial for fully reaching the project's goals and it would also guarantee a stable and flourishing sustainability of the platform itself.

In principle, all municipalities willing to develop a stronger interaction with European mobile citizens living in their territory are welcome to join the ecosystem. Of course, commitment and perseverance are required, since the platform needs to guarantee to provide constantly up-to-date information.

Once the whole consortium agreed on a broadening of the platform, from a technical point of view, new Municipalities wishing to join the digital ecosystem should first gathering all relevant information about the 5 key sections of the digital ecosystem and translate them into English. Once this step is fulfilled, the municipality will have to organise the information according to an excel template, following specific guidelines provided by the project-leader, ALDA. Then, they will be able to correctly upload it into a specific section of the platform. Indeed, for every new municipality joining the ecosystem a personal profile will be created by ALDA to allow them to upload all the material online.

It is important to underline that the platform is not conceived to exclusively host municipalities having a big population. To the contrary, also smaller cities could find the APProach digital ecosystem useful to support the integration and the participation of their European mobile citizens.

In this respect, an interesting experience would be to evaluate the result obtained thanks to the platform by a middle/small sized municipality, in terms of participation and engagement.

### 3.6 Does the project increase the sense of European identity of participants?

The European Union is defined as an “*economic and political union between 27 European countries*”<sup>2</sup>. The European Union is also, and mostly, a community made by the people living and residing in all the member countries.

This idea of “community” is the core element laying at the foundation of the whole APProach digital ecosystem. The platform, in fact, acting like a bridge between municipalities and citizens, wants – and should, in this way - also to increase the sense of European citizenship, at all levels. Even more when targeting European mobile citizens: while it is much easier to feel included within our place of origin, a sense of belonging is even stronger and more valuable when it comes from an external environment, i.e. a host city.

This matter frequently emerged during the focus groups organised before and after the development of the APProach digital ecosystem. From the one hand, local authorities’ representatives were well aware of the potential, in term of integration and shared identity, that a well-designed platform could bring with it. On the other hand, European mobile citizens involved in other focus groups expressed their wish and need of such a project, to make them feel more comfortable and welcome in the host community.

Indeed, the sense of common identity is frequently developed through participative initiatives: favouring the collaboration of different actors is useful to tear down walls and build trust and confidence.

Moreover, if the European Union is often perceived by the citizen as an institution, the Approach digital ecosystem is just aimed at decreasing distance and fostering dialogue between citizens and institutions – the municipalities.

The experience of Etterbeek confirms this theory. The municipality, in fact, capitalised the experience of APProach and gave birth to an internal community which is growing stronger and stronger, promoting cooperation, integration and sense of belonging.

This initiative, called “*In Etterbeek*”, a Council of European and non-European residents, which consist of a permanent assembly of 48 foreign residents involved in the future of the municipality.

Thanks to the lessons learned from the APProach project, the “in Etterbeek” assembly has been created with the following characteristics:

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<sup>2</sup> “The European Union – What it is and what it does”, European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, April 2021. Online factsheet available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en>



- The recruitment method of the members of “In Etterbeek” has been formatted in order to make the assembly long-lasting, representative and transparent. The members have been recruited on the basis of a call for expressions and interest sent by personalised letter in early 2021 to all households in Etterbeek with foreigners (approximately 15,000 letter).
- The format of “In Etterbeek” meetings is diverse. The plenary meetings focus on practical and concrete topics. The members of the assembly debate local issues, advise the authorities on actions to be taken and guide the choice of activities and projects proposed by the municipality, bearing in mind the final aim, which consists in meeting the needs of foreign residents
- “In Etterbeek” gives a prominent place to EU mobile citizens (36%of the population), but it is also open to all non- Belgians (almost 50% of the inhabitants of Etterbeek).

“In Etterbeek” is a great example of the lessons learned can be capitalised by the municipalities, and further develop to guarantee inclusion and participation at an ever-growing level.

### 3.7 How is the IT platform completed also by other local actions to make it known and supported?

Similarly to the utilization of the APProach digital ecosystem which needs to be interactive and participated by different stakeholders, the dissemination of the platform needs as well the support of different actors and actions in order to be adequately exploited and valorized.

In the APProach experience, several are the examples of successful joint actions aimed to give a boost to the platform's – visibility.

For example, during the European Parliament Election of 2019, a key factor for a satisfactory participation of European Mobile Citizens to the vote was given by the synergies established by the municipality with the Consulates of European Countries in the city, citizens' associations, relocation agencies, law firms, expats' communities, and Erasmus groups. All these networks, institutions and associations greatly contributed to make the APProach platform known among their networks, clients and/or associates.

Another winning cooperation, established by the Municipality of Milan, was the one with the local association "GaragErasmus", with the goal of raising awareness and local administrative election in Milan, in 2021. GaragErasmus is a professional network managed by Erasmus generation and dedicated to the promotion of social initiatives. The joint campaign included the presentation and dissemination of toolkits, a social media campaign and the engagement of volunteers/ambassadors coordinated by GaragErasmus, as well as the organization of local pop-up events.

Not only associations, but valuable partnerships were also established with other European projects. Among them, the municipality of Etterbeek and ALDA joined forces with *CRISCO - Crossroad of Regions*, a project aimed at fostering involvement of all citizens in local life to improve social cohesion. Differently from APProach, CRISCO does not follow a "community-based" approach but a "land-based" approach, targeting the local population as a whole, with a diversified demographic profile. Thus, both aiming at supporting inclusion and participation, the two projects' consortia started exchange good practices and contacts in order to amplify each other's action. This cooperation culminated into the organisation of an event, a conference which took place in Etterbeek to promote and disseminate the APProach digital ecosystem and discuss around the topic of integration of European mobile citizens and social inclusion. This event was very useful to increase the visibility of both projects and, for APProach, to enter the CRISCO's network of town.

Other local actions implemented by the municipality of Etterbeek were taken thanks to the synergy with the project "*Carrefour des Régions*" (*Crossroad of regions*), which foresees the re-activation of the listed 'Hap' site in Etterbeek – a hub dedicated to socio-cultural activities to showcase the diversity of cultures, knowledges and traditions of the regions and countries of the world represented by the cosmopolite population in the area. The

restoration/establishment of such an initiative resulted important for our APProach project as well, since it created aggregation and community among foreigners and locals in Etterbeek, thus helping the dissemination of the project., its platform and the integration of the local population.

With no doubts, local actions and events were a key factor in the broad spreading of the APProach platform among a wider and new public. For this reason, also ALDA tried to organise as many actions as possible to present the APProach digital ecosystem to potential interested citizens. Among them, in cooperation with Milan, APProach was showcased during the Milano Digital Week, Italy's most important fully digital event on digital tools, digital transition and evolution.

Moreover, ALDA included dissemination actions and events related to raise awareness on the IT platform among its members and networks during its General Assembly in 2021 – 3 eventful days during which ALDA presented its pillar actions and outputs to its audience.

## 3.8 What are the task and role of the local authorities? How to mobilize them?

Local authorities cover an essential role in both the inclusion of foreign, European mobile citizens and in ensuring a good coverage of the APProach digital ecosystem.

Being the municipalities the interlocutor of EU mobile citizens, it comes by itself that not only they play a key role in this regard, but also that have the bigger responsibility when it comes to the integration of people within their city.

Thus, all municipalities have clear and fundamental tasks to carry on towards European Mobile Citizens. Among these, they have to guarantee a good circulation of information and need to make sure that information is broadly accessible to EUMCs with any kind of difficulties. For instance, it would be beneficial to this end that all municipalities have an accessible website, with several functions in order to meet the citizen's need. In general, Website accessibility standards break down to four basic principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust<sup>3</sup>.

Perceivable, because information must be presented to users in ways they can perceive; for instance, providing audible content, including captions and other alternatives for multimedia, text alternatives for non-text content, and so on.

Operable, since the interface should not require interaction that a user cannot perform, reason why a website should be completely functionable also from a keyboard.

Understandable, cause Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable.

And robust, since its content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.

This being said, what citizens, especially European Mobile Citizens expect from their host city goes beyond this. For instance, Municipalities should work in order to create opportunities for aggregation and inclusion, for example through public events specifically targeting topics of general interests, not only for locals, public lunches and dinners to favour integration through food, that which par excellence differentiates and unites more than anything else, and so on.

Of course, for a local administration is not an easy task.

A possible solution to facilitate and systemize this task could be if another "umbrella institution" would deliver guidelines for municipalities, which should be mandatory for all

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.accessibility.works/blog/2022-ada-wcag-website-accessibility-standards-requirements/>

municipalities to include in the agenda of the respective city. For instance, such a role could be covered by the Council of Europe, or by the Commission itself.

### 3.9. What are the tasks and role of civil society?

#### How to mobilize them?

Just like municipalities, civil society as well has important tasks in order to make the social and civic life of a community lively and appealing.

Being the pillar of the APProach project – and in general of the most part of projects carried on by ALDA and the partner municipalities – citizens should be willing to play an active role in their city, supporting and joining local initiatives.

From a general perspective, civil society associations can provide both immediate relief and long-term transformative change when comes to the social and civic lives. Indeed, they usually act pushed by fundamental community values, such as accountability and inclusiveness. Civil society actors are often the ones more active at a ground level in the society, engaged in concrete actions providing and fueling solidarity mechanisms and promoting participation.

Civil society has also the privilege, and great responsibility, of being able to influence decision-making, directly engaging in service delivery and challenging prejudice<sup>4</sup>.

From their side, civil society organizations and associations should favor the aggregation of European Mobile Citizens, similarly to what we suggested for municipalities.

The difference is that usually initiatives organized by associations, more or less formally, have a bigger success than the more institutional ones proposed by municipalities. For this reason, a great opportunity of cohesion would be generated if a more frequent cooperation and a solid dialogue would exist between municipalities and civil society organizations. These stakeholders should not consider as separate entities, but they should act in cooperation to stimulate the participation of a wider sphere of the society.

In fact, civil society plays a key role when comes to excluded or marginalized groups: they can be core drivers of change by representing the interests of a specific group, contributing thus to its integration in the society. On the same line, civil society may also play an important role in supporting institutions, or other specific projects, in identifying the profile of excluded groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Houtzager, P. P. (2003). Introduction: From Polycentrism to the Polity. In Houtzager, P. P., & Moore, M. (Eds.), *Changing Paths: International Development and the New Politics of Inclusion*. University of Michigan Press.

However, very often civil society actors don't have the means to concretely act and get organised in an effective way. For this reason, the synergy with different stakeholders and institutions could be extremely beneficial and bring tangible results.

Another possibility would be for associations and organisations to be more involved in the world of European projects' management. Indeed, thanks to European project they can, on one side valorise and capitalise their project, finally making it possible for the good of the whole community, and specifically vulnerable groups. On the other side, joining a varied and international partnership is the perfect occasion to get to know different associations from all over Europe, which can share valuable experience in a selected field and represent potential strategic partners for joint, future actions.

### 3.10 Can we work on training activities with local authorities and civil society? Advantages and difficulties of both groups

As tested and demonstrated by the APProach project, training activities may be extremely beneficial for both local authorities and civil society actors.

In fact, selected training activities may provide soft or hard skills needed to solve situations, correctly interact with different stakeholders, etc.

Taking the example of Nea Smyrni, the municipality organised a series of English language training to the municipal staff more exposed to contacts with European Mobile Citizens. Such course proved to be extremely effective and produced a notable increase of the quality of work for the municipal staff. The improvement was so sound that the Municipality of Nea Smyrni decided to replicate it and make it an essential part of the training given to its staff.

On the other side, also the focus groups involving European Mobile Citizens gave positive results in terms of participation and results.

Considering the organisation and involvement to training of local authorities' representatives from one side, and civil society from the other, advantages and difficulties are to be found in both scenarios.

Sure thing, it is much easier to find and involve participants from the municipal staff, since the training is thus part of the work. While, for civil society to reach a consistent number of attendants is much more challenging, because this is based on the solely motivation and interest of citizens.

On the other hand, being one's own choice, is more likely that the level of motivation of civil society participants is much higher than the respective municipal staff involved.

## 4. Conclusions

The experience of the project APProach surely taught the whole consortium the importance of valorising all components of the community, in order to better reach to common goals, improve the well-being of the whole society, develop the concept, and the feeling, of European citizenship and increase inclusion – all this thanks to a participative APProach.

In today's society, considered the weight technology has for each of us, it is impossible thinking about a tool to stimulate participation and awareness that doesn't imply surfing on the web, using a smartphone or another IT tool.

For this reason, the first lesson learned by the APProach project was the utility of digital tools for the good of communities all around Europe. The APProach Digital Ecosystem provided a safe and clear source where European Mobile Citizens could find reliable information and better exercise their rights and fulfil their duties.

The past 3 years of joint work among international organisations, associations and municipalities coming from different Countries, having different priorities and social contexts, with no doubt taught a lot to each of the partners involved.

Moreover, the participative approach used during all project's phases served to make Municipal staff understand the huge results which are possible to reach when all parts of community are involved into a decision-making process.

After such a long, and tortuous journey – we should not forget that among others, the project partners had to figure out, all at once, how to carry on such a demanding project during a worldwide pandemic – it is fundamental now to continue the efforts started and go further.

What all APProach partners want at this stage, is to continue using and feeding the digital ecosystem with always up-to-date news concerning, for example, timing and procedures for school enrolment in each city, information on the next elections, and so on.

In parallel, the project consortium will start working to enlarge the APProach platform and make the number of municipalities involved grow. In this way, the APProach experience won't remain only the successful experience of a pilot project. But it will become the seed for a new growing digital entity and a new *modus-operandi* for the involvement and dialogue with European Mobile Citizens all around Europe.



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**APPROACH**



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