

Europe Matters

A “Communicating Europe” Project run by ATD Ireland

The project ‘Europe Matters’ was designed to raise awareness about the current dialogue on the future of Europe in deprived communities, and to highlight the opportunity to become an active European citizen in the upcoming European Elections in June 2019.



The project consisted of a number of public meetings with members of deprived communities within Dublin’s North Inner City and Ballymun. During these meetings, questions were asked as to the importance of European Institutions, and how the European Parliament and other key European Institutions operate.

People had the opportunity to share their opinions, voicing both their concerns, and their praise, for various elements of European Union structures.

By supporting members of deprived communities within Dublin to debate issues relating to Europe that hold significance for them, they had the opportunity to engage as active citizens of Europe.

In addition to this, from December 2018 to February 2019, participants also had the opportunity to be active European Citizens by preparing and joining an Irish Delegation attending the European People's University at the European Parliament, prior to the European Elections.

What did the Participants Say?

As aforementioned, many topics were covered throughout the course of the various discussions. However, the first question posed to participants at the outset was:

Does Europe Matter to You?

In answer to this question, there were an **array of responses**. Some were negative:

- “It’s more dangerous than useful because we don’t really understand it.”
- “For many people who face struggles in their daily lives, Europe is the last thing they think about.”
- “There is a huge lack of information about what Europe does, and what impact (both positive and negative) it has on our daily lives as EU citizens.”

Despite this, there were some who praised Europe:

- “Europe is stronger together.”
- “For reasons of identity, shared history, culture, past conflicts, Irish diaspora.”
- “E.U. provides legal protection.”
- “It’s handy to have a common currency... it’s a good thing to be able to travel freely within the EU.”



What Did We Learn?



From our first 'Europe Matters' meeting with deprived groups, important requests emerged about wanting to understand:

- What the different European Institutions are?
- How they work?
- Why they do this work?
- Who represents us in Europe?
- Where do they come from?
- How did they get into this position?

In the following meetings we discovered what we get from the EU, such as:

- The common currency;
- Freedom of movement;
- Access to different funding;
- Peace across the continent.

Additionally, time was spent outlining:

- What the different European institutions do;
- Who works in these places;
- Where they are located;
- Why there are differences in the prices of goods throughout Europe.

When we met MEP Lynn Boylan

Members of both ATD Ireland and the North West Inner City Training and Development Project (NWICTDP) had the opportunity to meet with one of Ireland's European representatives, Lynn Boylan. In this meeting questions were asked about her work and the work of the European Parliament.

She took time to explain why she believes that the European Union is still an important, worthwhile exercise, while acknowledging that it requires change and improvement. Her belief is that **Europe offers us important opportunities to learn from each other**. Member states can look to good practices in other member states, and work collectively, as part of a supportive community, to emulate this policy or practice throughout the Union, for the betterment of all citizens.

She told us about her work, as one of Ireland's 11 MEP's, informing us of what constituencies she and each of the other representatives are elected to serve. She also spoke about her own personal teams, one in Dublin and the other in Brussels, and described her routine of flying to Brussels on Tuesdays for parliamentary sessions, and then returning to Dublin on Thursdays to continue working in Ireland.



Participants also informed her of the difficulties which they regularly face when trying to register to vote, but Lynn stressed the importance of persevering in this activity. She described **how voting puts incomparable pressure on elected representatives to take their constituents specific issues on board** and work towards addressing them.

