

## Press Release

According to Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>), 3.6 million people immigrated to or within the EU in 2006. A significant group within this population are persons from EU Member States immigrating to a Member State not their own. Cyprus saw approximately 23 000 immigrants in 2011, with 13 000 coming from other EU nations. The increasingly open boarder brought forward by Cyprus' entrance into the European Union, and the ever-growing movement of people enabled by travel and communication technology as well as a drive amongst younger generations to seek higher levels of employment opportunities and life experiences, have all contributed to the mobility of people across its boarders.

Ethnic diversity and multiculturalism bring with them, opportunities for cultural exchange, increased learning and growth, tolerance and acceptance, and sharing of values amongst diverse populations. However, there is also the darker side of communities with immigrant populations. As economies dip, as seen in Cyprus in recent times, jobs once seen as undesirable amongst the local population become necessary opportunities when unemployment reaches all time highs. Immigrants once applauded for taking on the role of domestic help, service industry employee and agricultural worker are seen as 'stealing' jobs from the now unemployed nationals. There is racism, scape-goating, intolerance, inequality, gender imbalance, unequal employment opportunities and cultural ethnocentrism to name but a few of the negative attitudes that pass back and forth between groups who see themselves as different, without shared values or identity. It is in attempt to move away from these negative tendencies and towards the goals of the positive that AKTI's project, INTERACT, focuses its goals.

INTERACT: Inclusion Through Environmental Activities (Decision No 2013 - 2474/001-001), is a European for Citizens EU funded project that utilizes the common ground of environmental consciousness to bring together multiple stakeholders from different ethnic, social, political, religious, economic, racial, and age backgrounds.

Running from October 2013 through to March 2015 and involving a partnership with GSI: Gruppi di Solidarieta Internazionale Italia in Italy, INTERACT uses information, educational, discussion and skill based workshops to encourage dialogue, discovery of shared interests and the creation of a common European identity. In addition to workshops, events and activities will also be programmed with a focus on engaging women and children, some of the most vulnerable populations, immigrant and national, to participate. Composting and community gardening activities, graffiti competitions, and theatre based events will be used to draw involvement from the marginalized members of our society to encourage their integration into a positive, strong and vibrant sense of place.

A need for increased awareness, protection and involvement in our responsibility as stewards of the world and environment around us demands involvement from many levels of society. As such, stakeholder workshops will be organized to involve NGO's, press, and local and national authorities on the exchange of knowledge and experiences for increased integration as a means to involve European citizens in their communities.

For more information and specific dates on INTERACT project or to contact us please see our website at: [www.akti.org.cy](http://www.akti.org.cy)

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