



INTERCULTURAL CITIES

Membership criteria and procedures for accession

Cities can gain enormously from the entrepreneurship, variety of skills and creativity associated with cultural diversity, provided they adopt policies and practices that facilitate intercultural interaction and co-creation. The Council of Europe has analysed the experience of a range of cities across the continent which are managing diversity as an asset, rather than as a threat.

The collective input of these cities has shaped a unique concept to migrant/minority integration called [Intercultural integration](#). This concept is supported by [extensive research evidence](#) and a range of [international legal instruments](#). It was namely endorsed for the first time by [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)1 on intercultural integration](#), and further expanded by [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration](#). This policy model promotes a two-way process consisting of the effective, positive and sustainable management of diversity, through the active involvement of communities, organisations and businesses, on the basis of reciprocal and symmetrical recognition. Its implementation via a multilevel governance approach allows to coordinate actions of central, regional and local governments and authorities, as well as to involve civil society organisations through participatory processes for policy co-creation and co-operation in areas of shared competence or common interest.

The [Intercultural Cities \(ICC\) programme](#) supports local and regional authorities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural and intersectional lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realise the diversity advantage. The ICC programme proposes a set of analytical and practical tools to help local stakeholders through the various stages of the process¹.

Why joining Intercultural cities

Over 150 Cities across Europe and beyond (Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Republic of Korea, and the United States) are now embracing the principles of intercultural integration and using the ICC tools. Cities participating in the ICC programme enjoy the advice of leading international experts and privileged access to the ICC tools, and engage in intensive exchanges with other cities through thematic events and study visits. Moreover, member cities benefit from the international exposure and credibility of the Council of Europe.

The international ICC network, one of the main tools of the ICC programme, is most suitable for cities of at least 30 000 inhabitants with a significant level of diversity² (but smaller cities may be admitted too), whose leadership is strongly committed to making diversity an advantage in city-making and who are ready to invest political capital, time and resources in the implementation of the programme.

¹ See [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on intercultural integration](#)

² Including at least 5% foreign residents, foreign-born or people belonging to national minorities

How to join the network

Candidate cities first express official interest in joining the ICC programme (a letter or email by the Mayor or another high-level representative). Then the city and the Council of Europe sign a statement of intent which makes membership official. This is followed by the completion of the Intercultural Cities Index questionnaire to get the assessment of their policies through an analytical report on the results with examples of good practice from other cities. The analysis of the questionnaire and the preparation of the report require a minimum of 8 weeks.

Following this, an expert visit takes place (at least 1 expert and a Council of Europe representative) to meet city officials and a wide range of local stakeholders in order to confirm Intercultural Cities Index results and make an in-depth "diagnosis" of the city's achievements and needs in relation to intercultural policies and governance. The visit results in a report (intercultural profile) which is the basis of subsequent work with the city.

What do member cities do?

Following the accession process, member cities set up an intercultural support group and start the process of reviewing different urban policies from an intercultural perspective, re-shaping them and integrating them into a comprehensive policy strategy. Detailed guidelines for this process are provided in the [Step-by-step Guide to Building the Intercultural City](#).

The cities are encouraged to involve citizens broadly in the strategy development process, in identifying indicators for success, monitoring progress and implementation. A [methodological guide](#) for this work is available, as well as excellent moderators/advisers.

In order to support this process, the Council of Europe can provide experts and facilitators for the policy discussions within the city. To motivate and help city officials and other local stakeholders learn from the experience of other cities, it organises (and funds, including travel/subsistence for city delegates) thematic workshops and study visits. High-level meetings are also organised for the city leaders to exchange and manifest/reinforce their commitment.

What are the costs for member cities?

Members contribute 5000 € a year towards the administrative costs of the programme. The rest of the expenses (index analysis, expertise, international meetings and visits) are covered by the Council of Europe, within the limits of its available resources, for European cities. For non-European cities, the costs of expert visits (travel and subsistence of the CoE representative and the expert) and international travel for network events are also to be borne by the city.

Appendix I

An overview of activities and resources for participating cities

The successful cities of the future will be those best able to harness the talent and energy of their diverse citizens. A city can minimise the threats and maximise the potential of diversity by developing, negotiating and implementing a comprehensive strategy to realise its diversity advantage. The Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme helps cities to devise such strategies cutting across institutional silos and mobilising leaders, policy officers, professionals, businesses and civil society behind a new model of integration based on the mixing and interaction between people from different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds.

The ICC programme helps cities to:

- Minimise tensions and conflicts associated with ethno-cultural and social diversity;
- Set up a governance model empowering all members of the community, regardless of their origin or status, to develop their potential and contribute to local prosperity;
- Break the walls between groups, building trust, and ensuring community cohesion;
- Make the public space and services accessible to all, ending the vicious circle of exclusion which goes hand in hand with segregation;
- Create opportunities for deep interaction between people of different origins and backgrounds;
- Empower intercultural innovators in public institutions and civil society;
- Build positive political discourse and narratives to accompany public policies, celebrating the cosmopolitan fabric of today's societies, and encouraging a balanced approach to diversity in media for a positive perception of migrant and minority groups.

The ICC network provides expert and peer support to cities which chose to learn how to better manage diversity and benefit from the diversity advantage. It offers an internationally tested and validated methodology and a set of analytical and learning tools, as well as help with re-shaping city policies and services to make them more effective in a diverse context, and to engage citizens in building an understanding of their diversity as a competitive advantage.

Below is a set of examples of services and activities cities can benefit from. It should be noted, however, that the ICC programme works in a very open, flexible way, adapting to the needs and expectations of individual cities.

Initial analysis of the level of intercultural development through the Intercultural Cities index

The Intercultural Cities Index is a benchmarking tool consisting of 83 indicators which allows to assess where a city stands in relation to intercultural integration in the different policy and governance areas and measures progress over time; to indicate where efforts should be concentrated in the future and identify "good practice" cities and city learning clusters; and to communicate the level of achievement of each city in a visual and graphic way.

The tool involves a combination of facts: demographic data in particular (primarily quantitative); inputs: policies, structures (primarily qualitative); impacts: attitudes and behaviours (primarily qualitative).

Data is collected through a questionnaire to be completed by city officials. Additional information on structures, policies and actions is to be provided through the Policy assessment grid (several departments will need to be involved). The results are then processed by a research institute based in Switzerland (BAK Basel) and analysed by an expert team. The resulting report provides a series of recommendations as well as good practice examples for inspiration.

In principle, the first data collection takes place following a city's accession to the ICC programme and prior to the introductory expert visit (see below). Subsequent index assessments should be carried out at regular periods, ideally in intervals of 2-3 years.

Introductory expert visit

Following the initial diagnostic through the ICC Index, an independent expert and a member of the ICC secretariat visit new member cities to meet a wide range of stakeholders (politicians, key officials, civil society & trade union leaders, business & media professionals, faith leaders etc.) to assess their understanding of the intercultural approach and readiness to engage in the development of a local intercultural strategy. The visits results in a first review of city governance and policies from an intercultural perspective and a set of recommendations (intercultural profile).

Annual meetings of international ICC co-ordinators

The annual meetings are opportunities for an exchange between cities and experts on the Intercultural city concept and method, on specific issues and concerns, as well as for building bilateral and multilateral connections, imagining common initiatives, and discussing strategic matters such as impact evaluation and sustainability of local intercultural strategies.

Policy development and vision-building events

Thematic policy development and vision-building events are regularly carried out to enable policy officers and elected officials to gain a deeper understanding of diversity-related challenges and to develop targeted policy solutions. Specific areas of work, where challenges are identified by ICC coordinators in member cities, are also studied and assessed with the view to prepare policy guidance and practical methodologies that are compiled and disseminated in the form of [policy briefs](#), handbooks, and [online trainings](#). Specific methodological guides are for instance available in the field of 1) [building intercultural competence](#); 2) [alternative narratives and inclusive communication](#); 3) [sustainable and inclusive cities](#) and [preventing gentrification](#); 4) [preventing systemic discrimination](#); 5) [community policing](#); 6) [anti-rumours strategies](#)³; 7) [participatory processes to map shared cultural heritage](#); 8) [building diversity connectors for start-ups](#).

Study visits to other cities

The study visits represent the key peer learning pillar of the ICC programme. Study visits take place to “mentor” having excelled in a specific policy area to enable fellow cities learning from best practices . Visits can also take place to a fellow city which has compelling experience or advantage in an area which the member city seeks to develop or learn more about.

Assistance with intercultural strategy development

Expert advice will be provided (from a distance or on the spot) whenever the city requires it in the process of development of its intercultural strategy. In some cases, the “experts” could also be integration officers of ICC co-ordinators from fellow cities which have significant experience and understanding of the issue (peer mentoring). In particular, assistance will be provided with developing indicators to monitor the strategy, as well as to identify specific results which will increase the overall community well-being, and the way of

³ This methodology focuses on eliminating the root causes of discrimination. It involves mapping and dismantling diversity-related prejudice and rumours that lay the foundations of discriminatory and racist attitudes.

measuring success (based on the methodology of results-based accountability, designed and tested by the ICC programme with the help of experts from the Washington Center for the Study of Social Policy).

Official presentation of the Intercultural city strategy to the local community

Once the strategy has been validated by the relevant city offices and political bodies, a public presentation of the strategy to the media and the community can take place to highlight and celebrate the achievement; a high-level Council of Europe official can be present to give an international dimension to the event; the media networks of the Council of Europe will be happy to publicise the event.

Managing public perceptions of diversity and busting negative myths

Successful intercultural strategies require changes in the mind-set, attitudes and behaviour of both migrants and receiving communities. Building trust and a feeling of belonging to a pluralistic community with shared fundamental principles is key to achieving cohesion. The difficulty of gaining access to reliable information or grasp the real impact (both negative and positive) of migration on communities is a major obstacle in achieving this goal, and people often tend to form their views on the basis of “myths” or stereotypes.

The “Anti-rumour methodology” has been developed precisely to counter diversity-related prejudices and rumours that hamper positive interaction lay the foundations of discriminatory and racist attitudes. The Anti-rumour methodology promoted by the ICC programme, and understood as a public policy, is composed of a number of elements: identifying major rumours existing in a city; collecting objective data and also emotional arguments to dismantle false rumours; creating an anti-rumour network of local actors from civil society; empowering and training “anti-rumour agents”; and designing and implementing anti-rumour campaigns to raise awareness.

Strategic development and policy innovation

One of the crucial challenges that both cities and states need to address in the coming years is the development of an effective framework for dialogue and co-action between local, regional, national and European authorities in order to ensure that migrant inclusion policies at all levels reinforce each other. The underlying principles of intercultural integration (equality, diversity, interaction, within an overarching human rights framework) take inclusive integration beyond anti-discrimination and require active intervention by public authorities. There is much that can be achieved at the local level but at the national level some enabling conditions (legal and policy frameworks) need to be in place. To this end, in November 2017 the ICC programme launched the Inclusive Integration Policy Lab, an initiative to promote co-operation and enable transfer of innovation, policy co-ordination and consistency among local, regional and national authorities in the field of migrant integration. The secondary goal was to encourage national and - whenever appropriate - regional authorities, to adopt an intercultural approach to migrant and refugee integration, as already recommended by the Committee of Ministers.

Since January 2020, the work initiated by the Policy Lab has been taken over and reinforced by the [Committee of Experts on intercultural integration of migrants \(ADI-INT\)](#) (formerly [Working Group on Intercultural Integration](#)), a multilevel structure mandated to assist the Council of Europe [Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion \(CDADI\)](#) in steering intergovernmental work in the field of intercultural integration and positive diversity management policies.

Council of Europe member states have made a strong case in favour of co-ordinating national, regional and local policies and aligning them towards a more inclusive approach, by adopting [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration](#). The Recommendation aims to support member States in improving the elaboration and transversal implementation of migrant and refugee inclusion policies through greater consultation and coordination among all relevant stakeholders. Besides, the success of those policies ultimately depends on ensuring ownership and active engagement by

state institutions, regional and local authorities, civil society, and the citizens. In addition, the [Model Framework for an intercultural integration strategy for the national level](#), adopted by the CDADI, serves as a practical tool for public officials in charge of the implementation of the Recommendation.

The adoption of the above standard and guidelines– both co-drafted by representatives of national and local authorities – will have a positive and challenging impact on the ICC programme. Its tools, methodologies and activities will now have to contribute to the multilevel implementation of those newly codified standards on intercultural integration.

On-demand activities and support

The ICC programme also provides expertise and support on-demand in the following fields:

- **Intercultural Competence (training):** Competent public officials in an optimal intercultural city should be able to understand and respond to the presence of cultural differences, and modulate their approach accordingly rather than to seek to impose one mode of behaviour upon all situations. Such sensitivity and self-confidence in unfamiliar situations is a skill which can be acquired through expert training and it must become as important to the officials as their specific profession and technical skills. For this reason, a discussion should be encouraged, focusing on concepts like discrimination, ethnicity, bias, social norms and standards, gender system, interculturality, equality, culture, power, human rights, segregation, social equality, to support municipal staff in appropriating a general knowledge about the sorts of issues arising in diverse societies, holding receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contact with diverse others, as well as realizing the potential of the diversity advantage. The ICC programme has developed a series of [tools and guidance](#) relating on intercultural competence.
- **Alternative narratives and inclusive communication (training):** Migration and diversity are currently central components of the public debate in Europe on issues of culture, social cohesion and identity. They stir emotion, inflame opinion and attract political controversy with equal measure, presenting those who see strength in the inclusive and intercultural future of cities with unique challenges. Communicating this positive vision of cities, requires a media skill-set that combines engaging, optimistic and timely messaging, with a strong understanding and command of data and research. Focused communication of this type is even more crucial during a crisis, which can place city officials in the eye of a media and political storm and put at risk years of community trust-building and solidarity. ICC provides training during which participants engage in discussions and practical exercises in order to share ideas and best practice for successful communication. The programme has issued [guidance and an online training](#) on alternative narratives and inclusive communication.
- **Diversity in Business (tools):** The project ‘Diversity in the Economy and Local Integration’ (DELI), supported by the European Union and involving ten Intercultural cities confirmed the validity of the ‘diversity advantage’ in the economic and business sphere: diverse team, enterprises and communities have strong economic powers and strategic potential in terms of productivity, creativity, problem-solving and innovation. A number of principles for supporting migrant enterprise in the context of pursuing intercultural integration was established and paved the way to other pilot projects focusing on fostering migrant entrepreneurship and business innovation through diversity. In particular, an assessment tool – the Diversity in Business Rating Tool - has been developed monitoring the economic potential of workforce diversity in specific companies to inspire and encourage them to diversify their staff. A blueprint for diversity connectors for start-ups was also developed, following a sound analysis of how incubators and co-working spaces encourage business connections and partnerships between entrepreneurs of diverse origins and work with cities,

incubators, funders and other stakeholders. In 2021, several ICC member cities were supported by the programme through inter-city grants which allowed them to work together, innovate and produce useful guidance on [diversity and inclusion in the business sphere](#).

- **Community Development (workshops and training):** Fostering citizen’s engagement and community empowerment through innovative approaches to better face the daily challenges of more diverse urban areas is a common challenge shared by many cities. Furthermore, the process of community engagement itself is not neutral in its impact, as it can either act to confirm or reinforce social and cultural divisions, by engaging with “leaders” or “gatekeepers”, or it can undermine and resolve them. The mapping of the practical experiences implemented in many European cities that are committed with the intercultural framework, revealed a great diversity of approaches and methodologies. There is obviously no “unique way” to work in order to promote community empowerment and intercultural relations at local level, but there is a need for actively establishing dialogue and debate, as well as confrontation with and understanding of difference, mediation and resolution, mutual learning and empathy.
- **Systemic discrimination (guidance and training):** Identifying and preventing systemic discrimination in their own organisation and beyond is key for the intercultural city. Systemic discrimination involves the procedures, routines and organisational culture of any organisation that, often without intent, contribute to less favourable outcomes for minority groups than for the majority of the population, from the organisation’s policies, programmes, employment, and services. It can operate across the full spectrum of employment, income, education, health, housing, culture, policing, public infrastructure, and beyond. Systemic discrimination cannot be tackled on a once-off basis, it requires sustained attention from and initiative by organisations. The ICC Programme is providing guidance on identifying and preventing systemic discrimination based on good practices identified by a wide range of cities in the programme. Since 2022, the programme is further strengthening action in this area by focusing on the importance of data and evidence. A manual and online training tool will be developed to help ICC members to effectively mobilise data and evidence in combating systemic discrimination.