



Good practice developed by the ICC-UA Network

September 2016

Melitopol, Vinnitsa and Sumy

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Diversity Governance (Intercultural commitment/ public statement; preparation or implementation of a new intercultural integration strategy; etc.)

One of the highlights of the ICC-UA network 's activities in 2016 is the implementation of the Intercultural Plan 2015-2020 by Melitopol, a city in Azov region in South-Eastern Ukraine. The Plan was indeed a grass-root initiative that started from voluntary after-work gatherings of ordinary citizens and activists back in 2014. In a few weeks these gatherings grew into the 'all-city project' to which the city administration, representatives of its various departments, civil society organizations, religious confessions, minority groups, IDPs, entrepreneurs, media and educators joined. Five focus groups of local partners and stakeholders worked 6 weeks together to elaborate a detailed action plan, assign responsibilities, and organize step-by-step implementation of the city strategy.

The Plan was approved in 2015 and officially published by Melitopol City Hall in 2016. As of today, it is the first and the only Intercultural City Plan in Ukraine. Its key points include the vision and the values of intercultural integration in the current political and economic context of the city and the region, the scope and structure of such integration, and the list of thematic areas on which the city is planning to concentrate its efforts within the years to come. The five thematic areas include intercultural awareness, education and communication (focus, directions, events); city social, economic and political development through the 'intercultural lens'; community participation and engagement; culture, art, and sport; urban space planning; welcoming newcomers (refugees, immigrants), cultural and religious expression; international and interregional consciousness (incl. tourism and heritage).

A special review meeting was held in Melitopol City Hall in June 2016 to report on the most recent developments. A Coordination Group – including the city Mayor, local leaders and activists – was established to monitor the progress along the five priority areas of the Plan in 2016 http://mlt.gov.ua/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10104&Itemid=382



In 2016, the major developments have happened in the following areas of the Plan:

1. *Intercultural awareness, education and communication*

The "Melitopol Jewish community" (an NGO) with the support of the city hall has opened a youth camp "Mosaic" in 2016. The camp features a special program for children focused on the development of intercultural communication skills via active participation in relevant courses and community events, visits to minority group organizations and cultural institutions.

There are some prospects to expand this project beyond the summer time by adding different groups of participants, changing its summer location, etc. and to continue to explain the principles of tolerance and respect to other cultures to the young people and to stimulate their intercultural communication and interaction.

2. *Urban space planning*

Opening of the public Square of Sliven: after the reconstruction, an old public garden in Melitopol was transformed into the Ukrainian-Bulgarian square of friendship becoming one of the intercultural symbols of the city. Today, the square bears the name of a Bulgarian twin-city Sliven, and the flags of Sliven and Melitopol have been raised on the square honoring these relations. A similar initiative has been implemented in Sliven: Melitopol square has been established in the Bulgarian city.

The Intercultural Street: One of the central streets (and according to Melitopolers, one of the longest ones) of the city has been officially named *Intercultural* on May 19, 2016 as a result of the so-called process of 'de-communization' in Ukraine (when the names of the streets and public places inherited from the soviet times were changed). Following a number of community debates and discussions, the new street name *Intercultural* has been approved. This initiative is considered by Melitopolers as a symbol of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

3. *City social, economic and political development through the 'intercultural lens'*

Inclusive Access to Employment (see relevant section of this report below).

4. *Community participation and engagement*

IDPs engagement and empowerment (see relevant section of this report below).

"The implementation of intercultural city strategy allows us not only to recognize the uniqueness of our city as a historically multi-ethnic place but also to become an integral and natural part of the development process of the common European urban space," says the mayor of Melitopol Sergiy Minko.



Welcoming policies and social integration

Sumy

A new Roma Community Center opened in Sumy (Baranovka neighbourhood) on August 26, 2016. The center aims to address the pressing issues of Roma people and to become a center of training for the establishment of local Roma youth organizations. The opening of the center was a logical continuation of the "Strengthening the institutional capacity of Roma NGOs in Sumy" project implemented by Sumy regional public organization "Regional Studies Fund" and supported by the city and the International Fund "Renaissance".

The center will provide free services and consultations for Roma community on the legislative requirements (e.g. obtaining Ukrainian nationality), education, social assistance and norms, medical services, and assist them in establishing public organizations for youth.

Inclusive access to employment

Melitopol

Melitopol entrepreneurs have also joined the city in its intercultural policy implementation by taking responsibility for creating jobs for immigrants and providing them with training. One of the priorities of this trend is to prepare projects in support of SMEs created by the young people, representatives of ethnic minorities and/or IDPs. Along these lines, the "Committee for the Future - Solidarity and Responsibility", an NGO, with the support of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), has opened the first business incubator in Melitopol on July 22 this year.

Among the main challenges there are the variety of the participants, the difference of their professional profiles/disciplines and the levels of educational training. Yet, once the 'common business project' is established for a small group, it is easier for the incubator organizers to meet the needs of the participants (groups) and help them with particular skills they need to launch their independent business activity.

Business and diversity – Cooperation with the private sector

Melitopol

The association of "The New Locals" was established in Melitopol last year by the refugees and newly displaced people from the eastern part of Ukraine. After that, the association proposed to the local authorities to participate in the city's life, e.g. by helping with fruits and vegetables harvesting in the area. The latter was accepted, and as a result, the refugees got working places and salaries (improved financial sustainability) to support their independent living.



Mediation and conflict prevention and resolution (including anti-radicalisation, anti-rumours)

Sumy: Preventing intolerance

Nowadays one of the tasks of the Department of Education and Science of the Sumy city is to help the IDPs' schoolchildren adapt to the new environment. Each school in Sumy has psychologists and social educators who assist children and their parents of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the adaptation process and help them cooperate and interact with the people around them.

First of all, the school workers (psychologists and social educators) provide children and parents with the so called "road map" that contains the information about organizations where adults can receive legal and social assistance. Second, two times a year psychologists conduct separate surveys with kids and their parents in order to find out/monitor potential issues of intolerance, bad rumors, and/or radicalization and to assess the level of children's adaptation in the classroom.

The specialists also consult parents in private, arrange seminars with the elements of training on how to help their children adapt to the new environments - school, city, society. Tailored seminars for teachers are also organized to enable them to observe and assess the status of a child, diagnose the situations that may negatively affect him/her, and to find the ways to help schoolchildren during the period of adaptation or in case of any identified issues.

Other areas

1. Community participation and engagement

It is noteworthy that sustainable inclusion of the IDPs in the everyday life of the ICC-UA cities - Vinnitsa, Sumy and Melitopol – is an ongoing practice. Often enough, the initiatives come out from the IDPs directly or in the discussions/exchanges with local volunteers, activists and then are supported by the local authorities and/or associations. Obviously, such initiatives do not only address the issue of IDPs employment, their needs for social integration and inclusion, they also regard the IDPs as resourceful individuals capable of contributing fully and effectively to the life of their new city.

Melitopol

The association of "The New Locals" was established in Melitopol last year by the refugees and newly displaced people from the eastern part of Ukraine. The association started to cooperate with the city undertaking a social role.

One of the "New Locals" activists – Ms. Marina Lyakh – who is a lawyer by profession has launched a Facebook page «New Locals of Melitopol» <https://www.facebook.com/groups/234253943616194/> and became the chairperson of Melitopol IDPs volunteer group "Patriot", showing a great example of social integration of IDPs in the social life of the city.



Vinnitsa

Nikolaj, an IDP from Lugansk, is an embroidery master. Since his arrival to Vinnitsa in 2015, Nikolaj was constantly seeking an opportunity to continue to 'live his passion'. His enquiries and interaction with the people in local community, in a library, resulted in an opportunity for him to start an embroidery atelier for locals. As a result, the atelier meets weekly in the library and gathers more and more interested participants. Beyond a small financial remuneration, which of course makes Nikolaj's life more independent, the 'stereotypes' breaking' is also happening during the atelier hours (exchanges, discussions) which contributes to the 'social sustainability' of the city.

2. Encouragement and recognition of cultural identity/diversity

Sumy

The "Ranking our Culture Actors" initiative in Sumy is aimed to rate the input of the culture actors of different ethnic background to the social life of the city. The project is a joint initiative of the city administration together with some NGOs, a local newspaper 'Panorama', and the culture-and-art centre 'Sobor'. Every year, the culture's actors from Sumy are proposed for rating - which takes place publicly via newspaper, - and the top ten are rewarded every year. Artists and writers with Armenian, Jewish, Russian cultural background and from Roma community have been recently rewarded.