Enhancing structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus

Assessment of needs for the implementation of intercultural integration policies in Cyprus by representatives of national institutions

March 2024

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Context

The "Enhancing structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus" is a 14-month project implemented by the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme, the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support, in partnership with the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus. The project aims to enhance structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus, building upon the achievements of the previous "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus" project.

Key objectives of the project include supporting Cyprus in strengthening the capacity of a new Deputy Ministry for Migration to develop a multilevel governance approach to intercultural integration policies which will improve horizontal and vertical coordination as outlined in the "Blueprint for multilevel governance of intercultural integration policies in the Republic of Cyprus"[1] with the aim to leading to an improved integration of migrants across society in areas such as participation, education, cultural and social life, business, labour market, anti-discrimination and multilingualism

The project aims to provide capacity building for relevant representatives of national and local levels, identified as focal points for integration, facilitating their contribution to the preparation of a national intercultural integration strategy and a monitoring and evaluation tool.

The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration states that "institutions and organisations should develop intercultural competences and attitudes among their staff, encouraging them to acquire the skills to enable constructive exchanges, dialogue and co-design based on shared values and goals"

Public officials operating in an intercultural society should be able to detect and respond comprehensively to the challenges posed by cultural differences and to modulate their approach accordingly. For public institutions, having an interculturally competent staff becomes even more relevant in the current geopolitical, health and climate contexts which highlight the importance of strong and sustainable diversity management policies to be able to respond to critical situations and emergencies.

While intercultural competence is developed on an individual basis, organising intercultural competence training for decision makers, public officials and other relevant stakeholders

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[1] Prepared under the previous project "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus" which was co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission.

enables the application of an intercultural lens to public policies and activities, promoting a more inclusive culture.

An introductory training course to intercultural competences was organised on 15-16 January 2024 for focal points for integration of national bodies as identified by the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior. Part of the training course was dedicated to a needs assessment which is a crucial first step in the context of enhancing structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus.

The concept of a "need" encapsulates the nuanced gap or discrepancy that exists between the current situation and the envisioned ideal state within a given context. This discrepancy serves as the impetus for a comprehensive exploration of requirements, encompassing not only tangible resources but also intangible factors such as societal expectations, environmental considerations, and individual aspirations.

In that sense, a "needs assessment" could help in:
- Identifying gaps and priorities: By understanding these gaps, policymakers can prioritise areas for intervention and allocate resources effectively.
- Tailoring interventions: A needs assessment enables stakeholders to tailor interventions to address specific local contexts, ensuring that initiatives are relevant and responsive to community needs.
- Resource allocation: Policymakers can prioritize initiatives that have the greatest potential impact, maximizing the effectiveness of available resources.
- Stakeholder engagement: By engaging community members, local organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, policymakers can ensure that interventions are informed by diverse perspectives and are more likely to be accepted and supported.
- Monitoring and evaluation: Needs assessments provide a baseline for monitoring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions over time.

A pre-training needs assessment survey was sent to the focal points which included representatives from: Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance; Deputy Ministry of Culture; Deputy Ministry of Tourism; Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights; Social Welfare Service, Union of Cyprus Communities; Pancyprian Federation of Labour; and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry; as well as two expert consultants from Cypriot Universities.

The results of the survey were presented and discussed with the representatives who then split into working groups to discuss the results, the current challenges to intercultural integration in Cyprus and to propose possible training and policy solutions.

1. Survey Analysis

The pre-training needs assessment survey was conducted to gather comprehensive insights from various focal points, with a primary focus on identifying training needs related to intercultural competencies. This assessment aimed at thoroughly understanding the diverse requirements and challenges faced by stakeholders involved in intercultural integration efforts in Cyprus. The main outcomes of this assessment[2] include:

i. Understanding the context

This is crucial because it provides essential information for making informed decisions and tailoring approaches to specific situations. Understanding the context allows individuals to build stronger relationships and solve problems effectively.

In that sense, most participants demonstrated a strong awareness of the significance of understanding and appreciating diversity within their context. They recognised the value of acknowledging and embracing various forms of diversity, and they showed a high level of comfort and proficiency in collaborating with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Most of them are accustomed to engaging with individuals from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds in their professional context, with particular emphasis on interactions with migrants, refugees, and religious groups.

Finally, all participants exhibited a high level of comfort when interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds (average rating 4.38 out of 5).

Figure 1. Understanding the context

Are you familiar with the cultural diversity within the community you serve in your professional capacity?
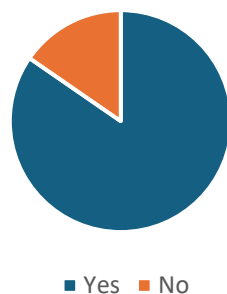
How comfortable do you feel when working with individuals from different cultural backgrounds?

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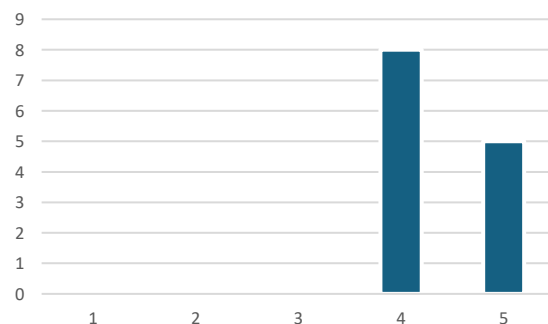
[2] This assessment has been done with a sample of 13 responses.

Identify individuals from diverse social-cultural backgrounds with whom you engage in your professional context.

Category	Value
Roma and/or Other National Minorities	4
Religious Groups	6
Migrants/Refugees	10
LGBTQ+	4
No	2

ii.   Understanding of intercultural competences

Intercultural competences refer to the skills, attitudes, and behaviours that enable individuals to effectively interact and communicate across different cultural contexts. Intercultural competences enco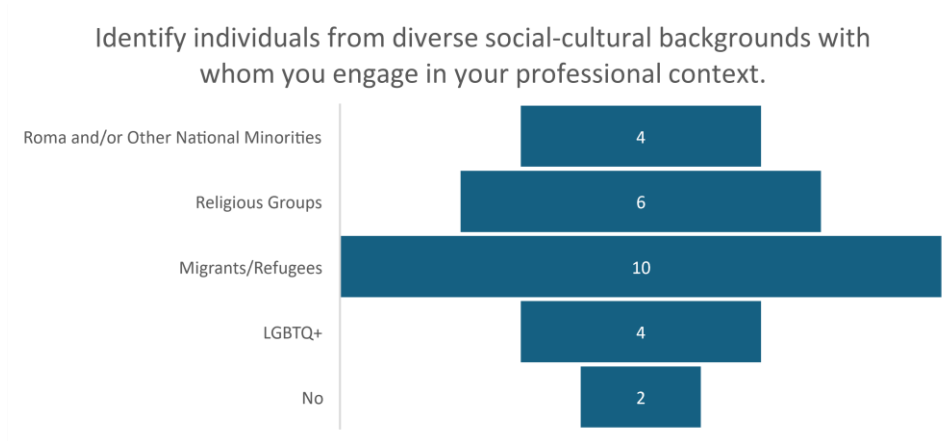mpass a range of skills, including intercultural communication, empathy, cultural awareness, adaptability, openness to new experiences, and conflict resolution.

Participants understood intercultural competences as a fusion of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviours, underscoring the significance of "intercultural competences" as abilities. Some of the opinions collected defined intercultural competences as:

> *"All the skills and knowledge necessary for a person to live, work and function in a diverse environment".*

> *"Being interculturally competent means being able to think, behave and act in a multicultural environment".*

> *"Intercultural competences refer to the ability and efficacy to communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds".*

> *"It is the ability to implement appropriate and effective policies and measures to deal, work, communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, taking also advantage of the challenges and opportunities offered".*

Figure 2. Intercultural competences in your own words

Furthermore, most participants considered themselves to possess a good understanding of intercultural competences.

Figure 3. How would you rate your current knowledge of intercultural competences?
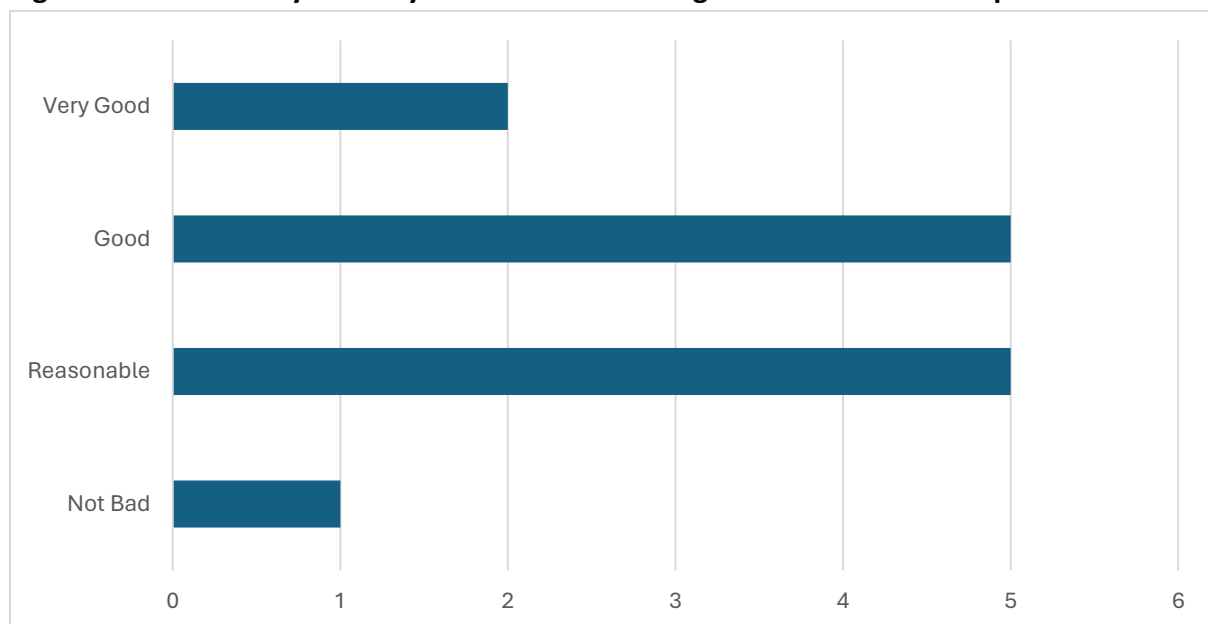
Finally, when addressing which are the most crucial skills or knowledge required for policymakers to navigate intercultural challenges: cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness and understanding, interpersonal relationship building, and inclusive policy design are the most mentioned. That implies there is a need for individual competences but also for institutional commitment to apply the intercultural approach.

Figure 4. In your opinion, what skills or knowledge are crucial for public policy professionals to navigate intercultural challenges? (Select all that apply)

	Skill/Knowledge	Count
🔵	Cross-cultural communication	12
🟠	Empathy and sensitivity	10
🟢	Cultural awareness and understanding	12
🔴	Language proficiency in relevant cultural contexts	5
🟣	Conflict resolution in diverse settings	7
🟤	Inclusive policy design	11
🟣	Community engagement and participation	8
⚫	Intercultural relationship building across cultures	11
🟡	Cultural competency training	8
🔵	Knowledge of diverse cultural norms and values	10
🔵	Ability to adapt policies to diverse cultural contexts	9
🟠	Collaboration with diverse stakeholders	8
🟢	Understanding of historical and social contexts	8
🔴	Cultural competence in data collection and analysis	4
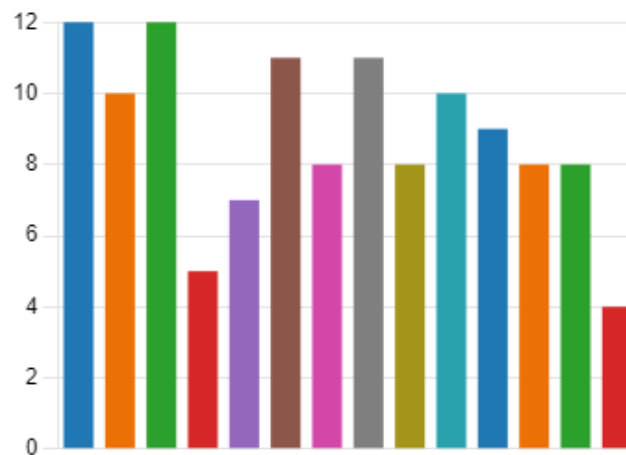
Moreover, these skills and knowledge need to be expanded to the rest of the public administration officials and employees and thus ensure that across hierarchical levels of administration people understand and work according to the principles of intercultural integration. Therefore, it could be argued that consistent efforts and directed attention to intercultural competence across sectors is of paramount importance to reach and promote social integration within the Cypriot society.

Acknowledging the importance of public policies addressing diversity in Cyprus is crucial for the development of national tools in this regard.

In that sense, all respondents, except one, agree on the need for public policies addressing diversity issues in Cyprus. Similarly, most of them agree with the importance of intercultural competences for the effectiveness of public policies.

Figure 5. How important do you think intercultural competences are for the effectiveness of public policies?

Not important at all	0
Not very important	0
Neutral	2
Important	1
Very important	10

When questioned about the importance of intercultural competences, respondents agreed on their significance, especially in schools, the provision of public services, and social interactions.

Figure 6. In your opinion, how important are intercultural competences for:
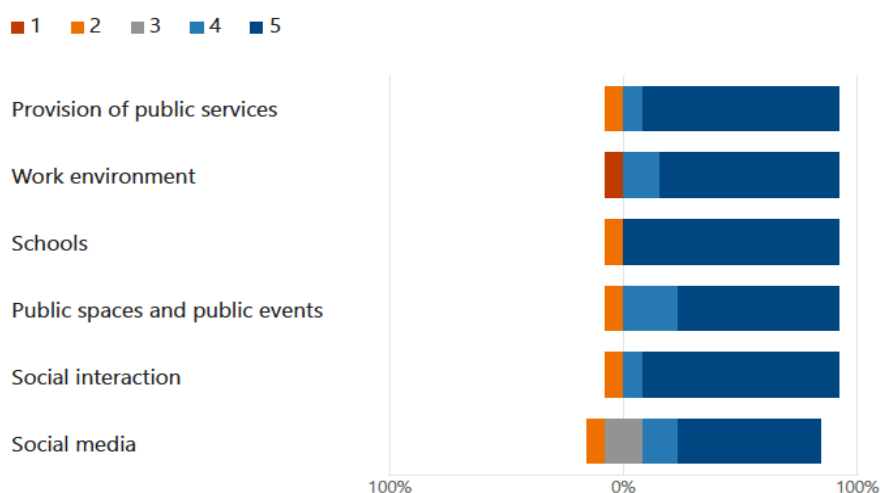
On another note, when asked about the extent to which they believe their current department or area addresses the needs of culturally diverse populations in its policies, most respondents agree that the work is well done. However, when asked about the impacts of these policies in promoting intercultural inclusivity and understanding, most respondents agree that there is significant room for improvement. This could identify a policy-implementation gap, where

policy design is well developed while its implementation may be deficient. Furthermore, it also highlights the need for a more coherent policy framework to promoter cultural inclusivity and understanding.

Figure 7. Development and impact of public policies on addressing diverse population needs.

22. **How well do you think your current organisation addresses the needs of culturally diverse populations in its policies?**

- Not well at all 1
- Not so well 1
- Neutral 2
- Well 9
- Very well 0

23. **How effective do you think current public policies are in promoting cultural inclusivity and understanding?**

- Not effective at all 0
- Not very effective 8
- Neutral 4
- Effective 1
- Very effective 0

iv.   Tools for intercultural public policies

To enhance public policies addressing integration and diversity challenges, the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities programme offers a range of tools encompassing analysis, implementation, and evaluation. Identifying which tools could be beneficial in each country is crucial for developing targeted public actions.

In this context, the needs assessment survey identified different steps that could be taken to better address cultural diversity in different public policies. Training and policy revision are the most mentioned in this context.

Figure 8. In your opinion, what steps should your organisation take to better address cultural diversity in public policies? (Select all that apply)

🔵	Training	10
🟠	Policy Revision	5
🟢	Increased Diversity in Staff	2
🔴	Other	1
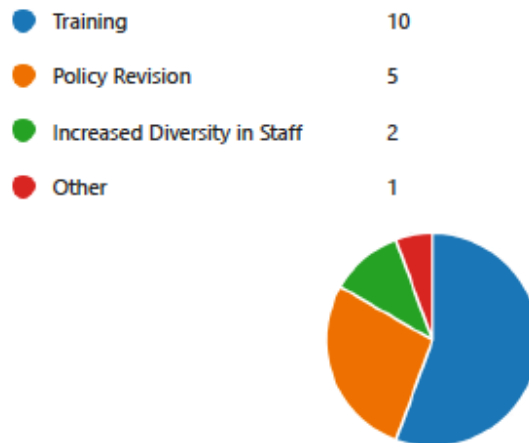
Complementary resources that could be understood as crucial for boosting intercultural competences in different public services include the idea of cultural advisory support and dedicated cultural competency training programmes.

Figure 9. What specific resources or support do you feel are lacking in your current work environment to enhance intercultural competences?

🔵	Dedicated Cultural Competency Training Programs	9
🟠	Multilingual Resources	4
🟢	Workshops	6
🔴	Cross-Cultural Collaboration Platforms	7
🟣	Cultural Advisory Support	10
🟤	Diversity in Leadership and Workforce	5

As a result, many respondents indicated that workshops and training programmes, along with tools for assessing the impact of policies on diverse groups, are the most beneficial resources for improving intercultural competences in public policies. Additionally, advisory groups focused on interculturalism, integration, or anti-racism are also regarded as valuable tools for strengthening the intercultural approach in public policies.

Figure 10. Are there any tools or resources that you believe would enhance the intercultural competences of public policy professionals? (Select all that apply)

🔵	Manuals and guidelines	6
🟠	Workshops and training programs	10
🟢	Online courses	9
🔴	Tools for assessing the impact of policies on diverse groups	10
🟣	Community Platforms	8
🟤	Advisory Groups (on interculturality, anti-racism, etc.)	9
🔴	Other	1
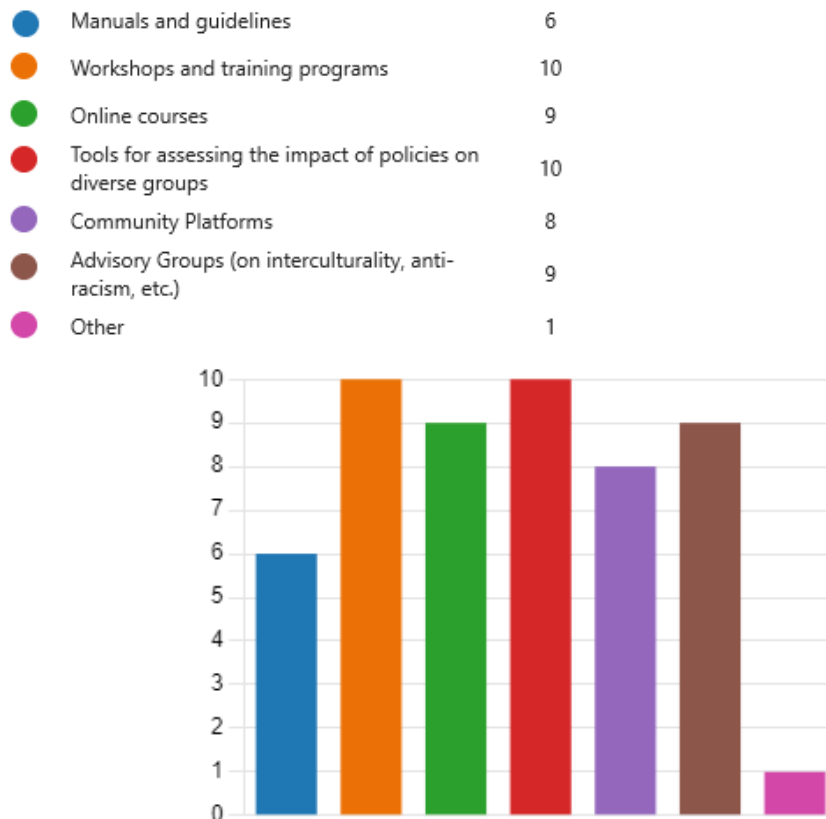
v.   Needs of training in intercultural competences

Identifying training in intercultural competences as a key element to better develop public policies for managing integration and diversity is crucial to make progress in this area.

As noted in the previous analysis, training in intercultural competences has been identified as one of the key elements to improve intercultural public policies. In this regard, while the majority of respondents have not received specific training on intercultural competences (8), some have received such training (5). This finding leads to consider the need to establish and include intercultural competences as a main field of training.

Figure 11. Have you received any formal training on intercultural competences in the context of public policies?

● Yes	5
● No	8
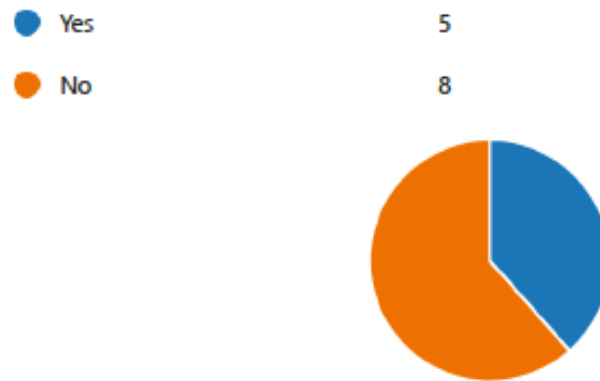
In any case, most respondents think that it should be mandatory for public policy professionals to undergo formal training in intercultural competences. Certain professionals, including those directly interacting with the general public such as city officers, police officers, policymakers, professionals in education and media actors are identified as priority groups for receiving this training.

Figure 12. Needs of training in intercultural competences

15. **Do you believe that public policy professionals should be required to undergo formal training on intercultural competences?**

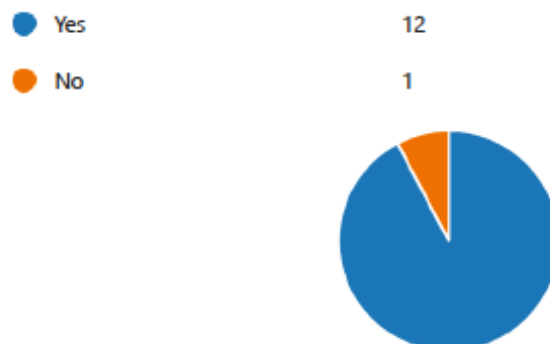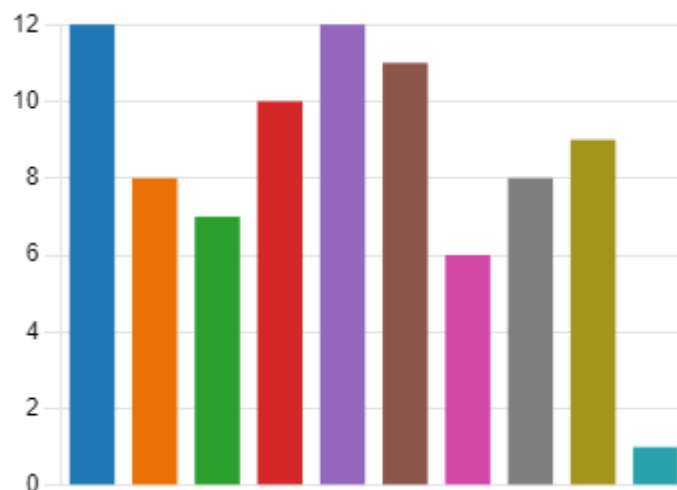|	
● Yes	12
● No	1

Figure 13. In your experience, which groups are most in need of training in intercultural competences?

🔵	City officers providing direct services to people from diverse backgrounds	12
🟠	City officers from all departments	8
🟢	Health operators	7
🔴	Professionals in education (teachers, workers in centres, etc.)	10
🟣	Police officers	12
🟤	National/regional/local decision-makers	11
🟣	Employers of NGOs	6
⚫	Staff of private entities contracted by public authorities	8
🟡	Media and communication actors	9
🔵	Other	1

vi.   Limits and challenges

Identifying limits and challenges is a crucial aspect of needs assessments, as it allows for the recognition of potential obstacles to be addressed and questions to be raised. Identifying these limitations could help to find solutions and formulate changes.

In this context, most respondents pinpoint political commitment as a significant limitation in providing intercultural training, alongside a lack of interest and insufficient political leadership. This suggests that technical actors anticipate clear directives from politicians and policymakers regarding the importance of intercultural training.

Figure 134. What limitations or obstacles can you see in providing intercultural training?

🔵	Budget	4
🟠	Expertise	5
🟢	Lack of interest	8
🔴	Lack of political leadership	7
🟣	Lack of political commitment	10
🟤	Lack of technical commitment	2
🟣	Other	0
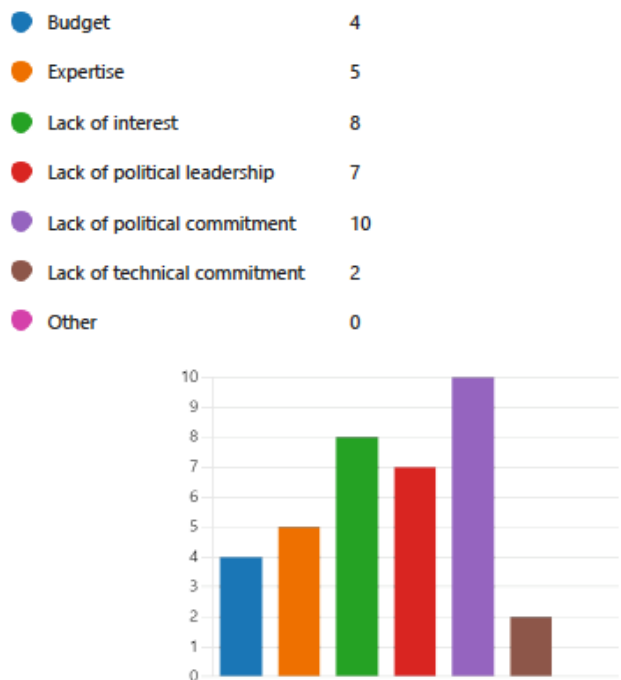
More related to their daily work, half of the respondents have faced communication barriers due to cultural differences while half of them have not. Languages barriers are the most concerning challenge when trying to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Figure 145. Communication barriers due to cultural differences

19. **Have you ever faced communication barriers due to cultural differences while implementing public policies?**

🔵	Yes	7
🟠	No	6
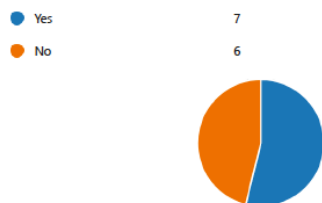
20. **What specific challenges, if any, do you face when communicating public policies to individuals from different cultural backgrounds?**

13
Responses

Latest Responses
"N/A"
"language, different culture and religion"
"lack of information in language they understand, difficulties ..."

5 respondents (38%) answered **Language** for this question.

law and the culture   regards to this matter   culture and re
culture of Cyprus culture   communications difficulties
                                                    Difficulty ı
attitudes and beliefs obligations **Language**
                                                    Language barrier
Stereotypes difficulties in access   rules   information in language
RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS racist attitudes different culture public authorities

Finally, it should be noted that concerning the instruments and actions perceived by respondents as most effective in enhancing the intercultural approach in public policies, the

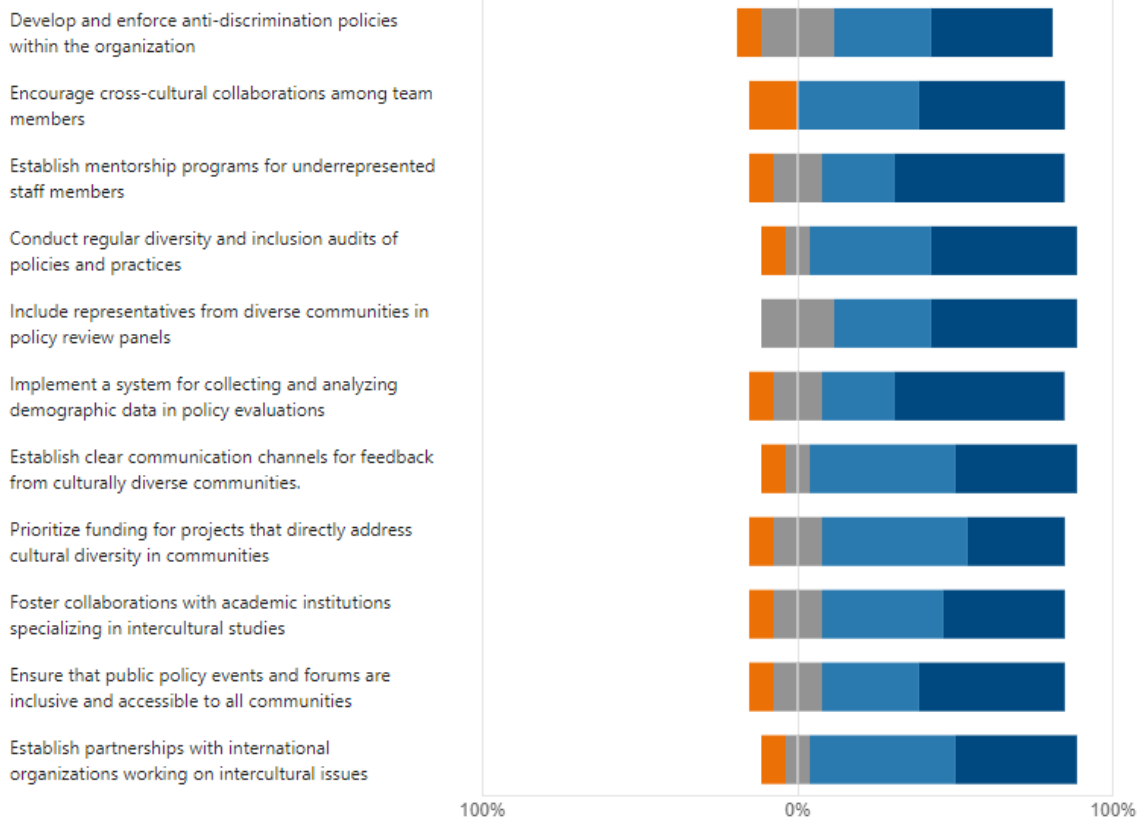translation of key policy documents into multiple languages emerges as the most preferred proposal. Additionally, other suggested actions include: implementing mandatory intercultural competences training for all staff members; including representatives from diverse communities in policy review panels;   conducting regular cultural sensitivity workshops for policymakers; establishing mentorship programmes for underrepresented staff members; conducting regular diversity and inclusion audits of policies and practices; and implementing a system for collecting and analysing demographic data in policy evaluations.

Figure 16. How do you perceive the effectiveness of these instruments/actions in enhancing the intercultural approach within public policies?

Develop and enforce anti-discrimination policies within the organization

Encourage cross-cultural collaborations among team members

Establish mentorship programs for underrepresented staff members

Conduct regular diversity and inclusion audits of policies and practices

Include representatives from diverse communities in policy review panels

Implement a system for collecting and analyzing demographic data in policy evaluations

Establish clear communication channels for feedback from culturally diverse communities.

Prioritize funding for projects that directly address cultural diversity in communities

Foster collaborations with academic institutions specializing in intercultural studies

Ensure that public policy events and forums are inclusive and accessible to all communities

Establish partnerships with international organizations working on intercultural issues

100%   0%   100%

(On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents not very effective and 5 represents very effective)

Figure 17. How do you perceive the effectiveness of these instruments/actions in enhancing the intercultural approach within public policies? (on average)
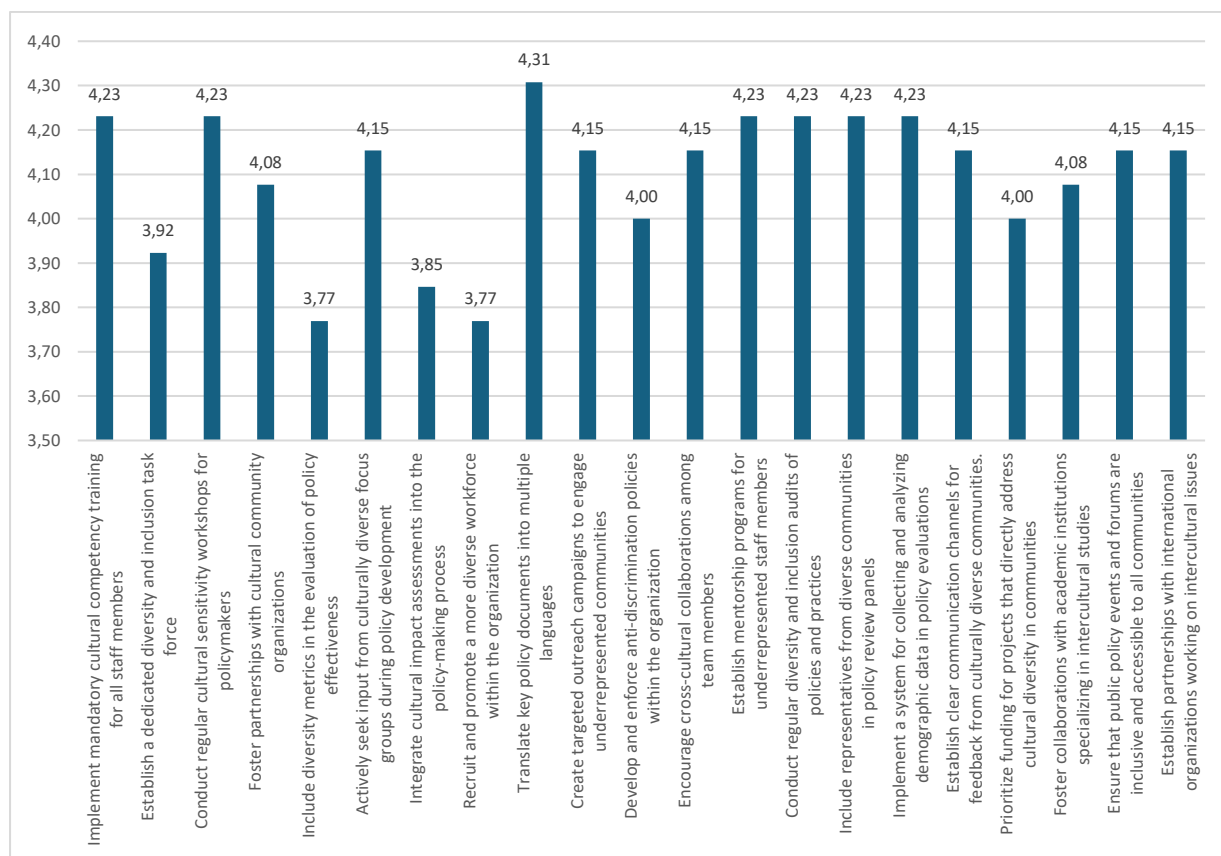

These responses provided a solid starting point for identifying next steps and advancing recommendations within the framework of this project.

2. Recommendations and next steps

Based on the analysis of the respondents and the findings from the surveys, the following recommendations and next steps could be proposed for the "Enhancing Structures and Policies for Intercultural Integration in Cyprus" project:

- **Defining the contents of the Intercultural Integration Strategy.** This process entails outlining the specific goals, objectives, and actions of the strategy, as well as identifying the key stakeholders and resources required for its implementation. The "Blueprint for multilevel governance of intercultural integration policies in the Republic of Cyprus"[3] serves as a detailed roadmap, outlining the steps and timelines for executing the strategy effectively. Additionally, establishing a calendar ensures that

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[3] Prepared under the previous project "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus" which was co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission.

the strategy's activities are organised and scheduled in a systematic manner, allowing for efficient coordination and monitoring of progress.

⇒ Conduct cultural assessments: Engage with experts or consultants to conduct thorough cultural assessments and contextual analyses to understand the specific socio-cultural dynamics and needs within the community.

⇒ Develop and implement a communication plan to accompany the process of the intercultural strategy and to strengthen its links with different stakeholders.

⇒ Increased synergies between ministries national bodies through the identification of focal points

⇒ Creation of working groups of focal points with specific issues (such as access to health care, including mental health, eradication of FGM, access to employment for migrant women wearing headscarves).

- **Reinforcing political commitment and leadership.** To advance intercultural integration in Cyprus, it seems imperative to foster clear political commitment and leadership. This entails advocating for prioritisation of intercultural integration within governmental agendas. Establishing a task force or working group dedicated to supervising and guiding intercultural integration initiatives at the governmental level could provide essential support and coordination in this goal. Including other actors at different levels could also enrich this context.

⇒ The role of the current group of Focal Points for integration should be clarified, and a working agenda should be established to advance the development of the intercultural strategy.

⇒ Further engage with policymakers and advocate for explicit political commitment and leadership to prioritise diversity and inclusion in public policy agendas.

⇒ Engage community leaders within local communities (such as mayors and their deputies) to be supported in implementing intercultural initiatives in their municipalities.

⇒ Engage civil society organisations to better include migrants and refugees as service users by understanding their background and specific needs.

- **Using Intercultural Tools.** To refine and prioritize the contents of the intercultural strategy, it will be helpful to use the "Model Framework for an intercultural integration strategy at the national level". While the Intercultural Cities Index is useful at local level, exploring a set of indicators based on established frameworks such as those by the European Commission, OECD Indicators on Integration, MIPEX, and other relevant initiatives could facilitate the evaluation and monitoring of the strategy. This approach will enable a comprehensive assessment of the strategy's effectiveness and progress

towards intercultural integration goals. Other training courses, guides and manuals available from the ICC should be explored.

⇒ Examine how existing ICC tools could be utilized to develop the National Intercultural Strategy and identify which tools would be most beneficial.

⇒ Translate key documents: Allocate resources or seek funding to translate key policy documents and informational materials into multiple languages to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for diverse populations.

⇒ Organisation of a framework contract to create a pool of qualified interpreters and translators available for ministries to simplify access, ensure quality and cost-effectiveness.

⇒ Define a communication plan to address intercultural communication challenges and barriers, including fighting stereotypes.

⇒ Simplification of communications about administrative procedures, expert advice on website design to improve access and more investment in increased digitalisation of procedures.

- **Inclusive Policy Checking**. Guarantee that policy development processes are inclusive and reflective of the diverse communities in Cyprus. This involves actively incorporating perspectives from minority groups and marginalised communities into the formulation and decision-making stages of policy development.

⇒ The "Model Framework for an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level. Intercultural Integration Strategies: Managing Diversity as an Opportunity" and the "Intercultural checklist" could be used to assess the inclusiveness of specific public policies or actions.

⇒ Mainstreaming of intercultural approach to all policies, similar to gender mainstreaming.

- **Fortifying Capacity Building**. To foster intercultural integration, it is essential to allocate resources and funding towards initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness and understanding among diverse communities. This includes investing in education and awareness campaigns, cultural exchange programmes, and community-building activities that promote mutual respect and appreciation for cultural diversity. Additionally, capacity-building efforts should be prioritized to strengthen the infrastructure and institutions involved in promoting intercultural integration. This may involve providing training and support to government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community leaders to effectively address the needs of diverse populations and foster inclusive environments.

$\Rightarrow$ Identify target groups to participate in capacity-building processes, with a particular focus on individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

$\Rightarrow$ Develop skills assessment tools for refugees to be completed during their 9-month waiting period, to help with integration into the work force, but which could be open to anyone with a work visa.

$\Rightarrow$ Language and culture programme could be developed to ease integration into society.

$\Rightarrow$ Organize workshops and forums: Plan and facilitate workshops, focus groups, or community forums where stakeholders can share insights, experiences, and knowledge related to diversity and inclusion within their respective contexts.

- **Strengthening Intercultural Competences**. To strengthen intercultural competences, it is essential to develop and implement comprehensive training programmes tailored for various sectors, including public officials, educators, healthcare professionals, and other key stakeholders. These programmes should focus on enhancing understanding and proficiency in navigating diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, establishing mentorship programmes will provide ongoing support and guidance for individuals to apply intercultural competences effectively in their respective fields, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth in intercultural communication and collaboration.

$\Rightarrow$ The inclusion of formal training on intercultural competences for public staff (and other professionals working in public services) should be integrated into the Intercultural Strategy.

$\Rightarrow$ The promotion of training on intercultural competences for NGOs working in integration, living together and anti-racism issues.

$\Rightarrow$ Develop tailored training programmes: Collaborate with intercultural experts or training providers to design and develop customized training programmes focused on key intercultural competences, tailored to the specific needs of public policy professionals.

$\Rightarrow$ Allocate funding and resources to enable professionals to access specialized intercultural competency training programmes tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities.

$\Rightarrow$ Implement mentorship programmes: Establish mentorship programmes within the organization or in partnership with external organizations to pair individuals with experienced mentors who can provide guidance and support in navigating intercultural challenges effectively.

$\Rightarrow$ Engage with public and private universities to offer intercultural competence training to their student community.

- **Broadening Community Engagement.** To promote intercultural integration in Cyprus, it is crucial to facilitate community engagement initiatives that encourage dialogue and collaboration among diverse communities. Additionally, organizing outreach programmes plays a vital role in raising awareness about the significance of intercultural integration. These programmes aim to educate the public about the benefits of embracing cultural diversity and promote mutual understanding among different cultural groups.

  ⇒ Ensure representation from diverse communities in policy development and decision-making processes through the establishment of advisory boards, task forces, or consultative bodies.

- **Investing in Research and Data Collection**. Supporting research initiatives is crucial to gather comprehensive data and insights on intercultural dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in Cyprus. By investing in research, policymakers and stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of the complex intercultural landscape within the country. By incorporating research findings into decision-making processes, the Strategy can develop targeted interventions and policies that address the specific needs and aspirations of its diverse population.

  ⇒ Explore the creation of an Indicators Platform based on Civil Registry and Migration Department which will gather data across sectors and fields and produce of course all the necessary reports for policy making.

- **Improving Monitoring and Evaluation**. Establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential to track the progress and impact of intercultural integration initiatives and actions. By systematically monitoring these initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders can gain valuable insights into their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. By conducting thorough evaluations, the Strategy can ensure that its intercultural integration efforts are aligned with its goals and objectives and make informed decisions on how to best allocate resources, ensure sustainability of interventions and strategies and adjust them as needed.

  ⇒ Develop and implement mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of implemented interventions and strategies in promoting intercultural understanding and diversity.
  ⇒ Collect and analyse stakeholder feedback, evaluation results, and key performance indicators to refine strategies, make necessary adjustments, and implement additional recommendations to further advance intercultural goals in policy development.

The development of these recommendations will be coordinated by the "Enhancing Structures and Policies for Intercultural Integration in Cyprus" project where possible in the project life-time and the follow-up provided by the project partners in the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus.