

## INTERCULTURAL CITIES – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Making migrant integration work, enabling societies to prosper with diversity and build resilience to ethnic and religious conflict and violence, are major challenges of our time. European cities are growing more diverse than ever: refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and their families, foreign students and professionals make their cosmopolitan texture.

Yet, building on public anxieties generated by economic and geopolitical instability, xenophobic populism continues to fuel anti-immigrant rhetoric and a discourse based on divisions along identity lines which nourish growing opposition to the previously generally accepted principle of pluralism as a positive and desirable aspect for our societies.

Research shows that public policies and public opinion are inter-dependent and that countries with more inclusive integration policies have lower levels of perceived threat and, to some extent, lower levels of negative attitudes towards immigrants. Moreover, a recent study proves that intercultural integration policies help receiving societies to trust immigrants and see the benefits of immigration, leading to a better quality of life in diverse cities<sup>1</sup>.

The Council of Europe has developed, tested, and validated the intercultural integration approach to migrant integration and diversity management, by conjugating the human rights dimension (equal rights, duties and opportunities for all, dignity, and non-discrimination) and the social trust dimension (acknowledging diversity as positive factor for societal development, participation, interethnic mixing and positive interaction), as a way to create sense of belonging, foster pluralism, and a collective identity based on shared values.

Endorsed by [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)1 on intercultural integration](#), the intercultural integration 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. Since 2007, this approach forms the basis of the [Intercultural Cities programme \(ICC\)](#), which supports local authorities to design and implement inclusive integration policies.

The cornerstone of the ICC policy model is the concept of “Diversity Advantage”, i.e. the idea that diversity can be an asset for communities, organisations and businesses when managed with competence and in the spirit of inclusion. Intercultural integration policies are therefore devised

---

<sup>1</sup> See: [“How the Intercultural integration approach leads to a better quality of life in diverse cities”](#).

through an “intercultural lens”, i.e. taking into account people’s individual talents, skills and potential (rather than their vulnerability and basic needs), with a whole society approach<sup>2</sup>.

In practice, the key elements for the implementation of the intercultural policy model are:

- A framework of rights and responsibilities;
- Preparing all sides to change, communicating a vision of an open society built on common values;
- Fostering belonging and cultural reciprocity;
- Acknowledging cultural pluralism and the complexity of identities through leadership discourse and symbolic actions;
- Involving people of diverse origins in decision-making in public institutions, be they political, educational, social, economic or cultural;
- Empowering the places where cultures meet and hybridise;
- Fostering intercultural competence in public, private and civil-society organisations to empower them managing conflict positively, busting stereotypes and engaging in a debate about the impact and potential of diversity for societal development.

The ICC programme helps cities to:

- Minimising tensions and conflicts associated with ethno-cultural diversity;
- Setting 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;
- Breaking the walls between ethnic groups, building trust, and ensuring community cohesion;
- Making the public space and services accessible to all, ending the vicious circle of exclusion which goes hand in hand with ethnic segregation;
- Creating opportunities for deep interaction between people of different origins and backgrounds;
- Empowering intercultural innovators in public institutions and civil society;
- Building 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 programme uses a combination of evaluation tools, innovative methodologies, peer learning, and guidance to accompany local authorities implement their diversity management and migrant integration strategies and enable transfer of good practices and innovation.

The ICC Index is a benchmarking tool consisting of 83 indicators which allow to assess where a city stands in relation to intercultural integration, where effort should be focused in the future and which other cities can be a source of good practice in each policy areas. Experts’ visits are carried out to verify ICC Index results and review city governance and policies from an intercultural perspective, in view of producing recommendations.

Thematic policy development and vision-building events are regularly carried out to enable policy officers and elected officials gaining a deeper understanding of diversity-related challenges and developing targeted policy solutions. Study visits take place to “mentor” cities having excelled in a specific policy area to enable fellow cities learning from best practices. The annual meeting of ICC

---

<sup>2</sup> See the [Intercultural Cities Step-by-Step guide – Updated edition \(2019\)](#).

coordinators provides opportunities for exchange, networking, joint planning, and discussing strategic matters such as impact evaluation and sustainability of local intercultural strategies.

Specific methodological guides are also available in the field of 1) intercultural strategy implementation; 2) community policing; 3) anti-rumours strategies<sup>3</sup>; 4) participatory processes to map shared cultural heritage; 5) building diversity connectors for start-ups; 6) including migrants in emergency management<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, the ICC network is the global community of ICC members that works as a laboratory for policy innovation. It has a current membership of 140 cities, including cities in Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Republic of Korea, and the United States. There are active national networks of cities in Australia, Italy, Morocco, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

### **Intercultural Cities and GT-ADI-INT**

Across Europe, competences on immigration and integration policies at state, regional and local governments vary significantly. This complex institutional landscape reflects the transversal and interdisciplinary nature of integration and, at the same time, it makes it particularly challenging to conceive and implement coherent policies between the different policy areas and governance levels.

And yet, a strong case can be made in favour of co-ordinating national and local policies and aligning them towards a more inclusive approach. Because of their transversal nature, the elaboration of migrant and refugee inclusion policies would certainly benefit from greater consultation and coordination among all relevant stakeholders. Besides, their success ultimately depends on ensuring ownership and active engagement by state institutions, regional and local authorities, civil society, and the citizens.

Taking the above into account, 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 Minister.

In the past years, the Policy Lab has reviewed existing national and local integration strategies and promoted exchanges with policy officials from a limited number of Council of Europe member States and intercultural cities. It has based its work on relevant international standards and on the positive results of the intercultural integration approach at the local level. The work initiated by the Policy Lab will be continued and reinforced by GT-ADI-INT with the view to assist CDADI in steering the Council of Europe's intergovernmental work in the field of intercultural integration and positive diversity management policies.

---

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> See the "[Thematic resources](#)" on ICC website.