

# 2023 Annual Report

## Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine

18 December 2023

*The opinions expressed in this document are the responsibility of the author Dr. Kseniya Rubicondo, Coordinator of the Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine, and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.*

*This document is published as it was submitted to the secretariat.*

### Summary

In 2023, the Ukrainian Network of Intercultural Cities (ICC-UA) demonstrated unparalleled resilience and determination in the challenging context of ongoing conflict and critical situations affecting Ukrainian cities. Despite the challenges, ICC-UA members remained firm in their commitment to promoting inclusive communities, showing exceptional solidarity by hosting displaced persons and providing vital humanitarian aid.

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing war in Ukraine, our Network achieved significant milestones this year. We continued our fruitful partnership with the intercultural city of Stavanger, Norway, whose support facilitated various local intercultural initiatives addressing the most urgent needs in diverse ICC-UA communities. This collaboration also allowed our Network to have our first in-person Annual Meeting in four years, fully supported and hosted by Stavanger in September 2023.

Additionally, our members actively participated in international platforms such as Eurocities and Placemaking Europe, showcasing ICC-UA cities' innovative urban recovery and development strategies, emphasizing inclusivity and community engagement. Furthermore, legislative progress was made in Ukraine with the enactment of the Law on National Minorities, underlining the nation's dedication to intercultural values and diversity, with ICC-UA Network members actively contributing to its adoption.

### Network coordination

Throughout the year, ICC-UA members continued to pursue their commitment to intercultural engagement and innovative urban policies outlined in their Intercultural Strategies and Plans. Despite the adversities of war, they exhibited exceptional solidarity and mutual support.

Hosting displaced persons and delivering vital humanitarian aid, they showcased their enduring commitment to fostering inclusive communities.

Even in the face of disrupted infrastructure and communication, the ICC-UA Network convened multiple times online this year and once in presence. Actually, the Network was able had its first in-person Annual Meeting within the last four years fully supported and hosted by its partner, the ICC city of Stavanger, Norway.



The year 2023 marked significant progress for ICC-UA. The implementation of a range of local intercultural initiatives in our cities was

enabled by invaluable support of the ICC Stavanger. These initiatives addressed the challenges arising from the continuous internal displacement, emphasizing the ICC-UA cities' resilience and proactive approach. Thanks to ICC Lublin (Poland) and the NET-IDEA project led by ICEI, young representatives of all ICC-UA member cities joined the first EU Antirumours Youth Summit in Lublin and the Youth Congress in October this year. ICC-UA members also participated in the Media and Communication training offered by the Intercultural Cities Programme in Strasbourg.



Active participation in international platforms, such as Eurocities and Placemaking Europe, highlighted ICC-UA cities' innovative urban recovery and development strategies, focusing on inclusivity and community engagement. Partnerships with European counterparts advanced discussions on sustainable urban mobility, infrastructure development, and citizens' participation underscoring ICC-UA's commitment to international collaboration.

The pivotal "Rapid Recovery of Ukraine" forum in Luxembourg in January 2023, uniting ICC-UA members and diverse stakeholders, government officials, NGOs, and international organizations, marked a significant milestone.

Legislatively, Ukraine made progress with the adoption of the Law on National Minorities, underlining the nation's commitment to protecting diverse communities, with ICC-UA Network members actively advocating for minority rights and contributing to the Law's adoption through their impactful work. ICC-UA's advocacy for ethical journalism underscored the vital role of independent media during conflict.



Throughout the year, the ICC-UA national coordinator maintained continuous communication with ICC-UA member cities, mayors, deputies, department heads, administrators, civil society representatives, and local ICC coordinators. Simultaneously, she fostered connections with various authorities and stakeholders, international organizations and platforms, aiming to expand the Network's prospects for international partnerships and collaborative projects.

Effective cooperation was established between ICC-UA members and the Association of Ukrainian cities through regular meetings, discussions, and joint advancements. The coordinator also engaged with the Platform for National-Local Dialogue in Ukraine under the Council of Europe, informing the Platform about the ICC-UA's work in the country and exploring potential for future collaboration. Continuing in her role, the national coordinator actively facilitates interactions among ICC-UA members, ICC Global participants, and the ICC Programme secretariat. Over the course of the year, ICC-UA maintained a robust communication strategy, ensuring the Network's visibility via websites, social media platforms and regular reporting (quarterly updates, good practice sharing) to the ICC Programme.

## Activities and Communication

In the face of unprecedented challenges, the Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine stood strong, embodying the spirit of unity, resilience, and its dedication to intercultural values throughout the year 2023. The year was marked by a series of impactful initiatives that showcased the network's commitment to interculturalism and social solidarity.

### 1. Forging International Partnerships and Ensuring Essential Support

During the initial months of the year, ICC-UA's national coordinator engaged in strategic discussions with ICC Global members from Canada, Italy, Norway, and Poland, laying the groundwork for collaborative actions. Functional partnership was also established with the Ukrainian Associations in Luxembourg and Norway.

Subsequently, crucial support was extended by ICC cities such as Montreal and Lublin, enabling the procurement and delivery of electric generators to several Ukrainian cities. These generators became lifelines, providing warmth and safety to both residents and displaced persons in Ukrainian cities of Pavlohrad, Sumy, Lutsk, Odessa, and Vinnytsia. The creation of "Resistance Points" in public libraries and cultural centres offered refuge, facilitating social ties, intercultural interaction and mutual aid during the winter months.

### 2. Nurturing Hope Through Art, Dialogue and Community Empowerment Projects

ICC-UA cities unleashed the healing power of creativity and community engagement through diverse intercultural projects. Initiatives like the "Art-installations in City Public Space" in Lutsk provided therapeutic avenues for youth, emphasizing the value of diverse cultural heritage and unity among national minorities and internally displaced.



Pavlohrad's "Points of Goodness and Care" initiative facilitated city-wide engagement, offering art therapy courses, thematic readings, and musical discoveries, particularly focusing on youth from minority groups. Vinnytsia pioneered "My Inner Resources," a program offering psychological relief and professional skills training for youth, emphasizing inclusivity. Sumy's "Interculturalism in Public Space" events furthered intercultural dialogue, both face-to-face and online, celebrating diversity as part of the city's "Re-building Intercultural City" initiative.



Despite challenging circumstances, ICC-UA cities continued to create positive change. In Lutsk, for example, the "Easter Together" initiative resulted in vibrant art installations, symbolizing unity, resilience, and the collective hope for a peaceful future. Pavlohrad's ongoing "Places of Goodness and Care" project transformed libraries into places of learning, safety and joy, nurturing the emotional well-being of children, youth, and minorities.

Vinnytsia employed social theatre as a tool for dialogue and understanding, allowing displaced individuals to express their experiences, while promoting empathy and mutual support. Sumy's "Life Stories on Campus" event encouraged open discussions, bridging gaps between the city and international students, facilitating intercultural communication.



### 3. Building Sustainable Future: ICC-UA's Journey Towards Inclusivity and Innovation



The ICC-UA Network embarked on a transformative journey, advocating passionately for Ukraine's recovery, inspiring sustainable urban mobility and a greener future. In June, the national ICC-UA coordinator took center stage at the Eurocities #BUS2023 Urban Summit 2023, delivering a powerful presentation on intercultural innovation in Ukrainian ICC cities. She emphasized the remarkable resilience displayed by Ukrainian cities, demonstrating how their diverse communities had embraced the challenges of the current situation,

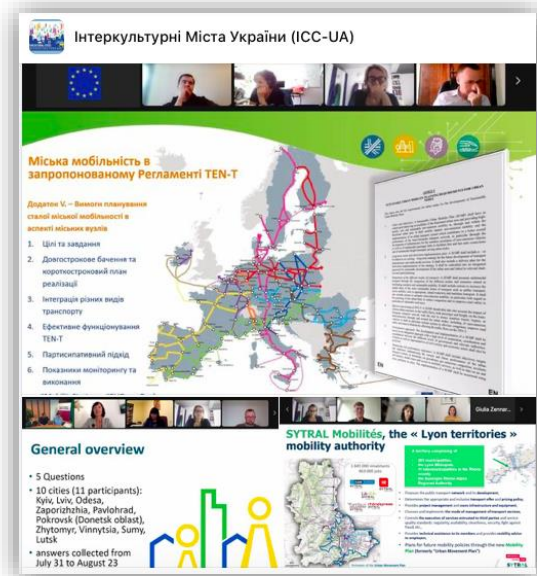
fostering bonds of interculturality, mutual care and support. This insightful contribution underlined the essential role played by intercultural values and social ties in building resilience and mutual support within the Ukrainian ICC network.



In September, Ukrainian ICC cities actively engaged in Sustainable Urban Mobility Seminar, as part of the knowledge exchange program for Sustainable City Development in Ukraine led by the European Cities Association, after having participated in a relevant Eurocities survey for municipalities. ICC-UA representatives joined forces with urban mobility professionals from across Europe, seeking to establish sustainable urban mobility practices, thus paving the way for a greener, more sustainable future for Ukrainian cities.

ICC-UA members continued to strengthen international partnerships, exemplified by the dynamic video conference between Mayor Luca Vecchi of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and Mayor Ivan Fedorov of Melitopol, Ukraine. This exchange highlighted shared intercultural identity and mutual socio-economic goals of the cities, sparking prospects for future collaborations in education, economics, and agriculture.

Amidst these developments, ICC-UA cities also delved into Placemaking initiatives, breathing life into marginalized areas and promoting community participation. The national coordinator's expert involvement and the city of Vinnytsia's active participation in Placemaking Europe events this year are the testaments of the Network's commitment to inclusivity and innovation.





#### 4. Empowering Youth and Embracing Interculturality

A significant milestone was achieved through the First European Antirumours Youth Summit and Youth Congress hosted by Lublin, Poland. Young representatives from all ICC-UA cities, supported by Lublin City Council and the international partners of the NET-IDEA (Network of European Cities for Interculturalism, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination) project led by ICEI (Istituto Cooperazione Economica Internazionale, Italy), shared ideas, built networks, and celebrated diversity. The project partnership includes the Spanish and Portuguese Intercultural Cities Network, the Swedish Interkulturella Städer Sverige Intercultural Organization agility and anti-discrimination, ICC cities of Erlangen (Germany) and Lublin (Poland).



ICC-UA's participation in international events, such as the International Conference dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Roma genocide in Krakow, highlighted the Network's commitment to intercultural understanding.



## 5. Unwavering Dedication to Interculturalism amidst Challenges

In these challenging times, the Ukrainian Network stays committed to intercultural values diligently working towards shaping a more inclusive and peaceful society, fostering unity, upholding human rights, promoting mutual understanding, and advancing intercultural competencies. The intercultural city of Sumy, exemplifying this unwavering spirit, has placed interculturalism at the forefront of a lifelong learning initiative. The educational program "For the Development of an Intercultural City" designed by Sumy State University in partnership with Sumy City Council and the NGO "Lifelong Learning Centre" stands as a testament to Ukraine's resilience. The program, containing a series of courses on interculturalism, is part of the Jean Monnet project supported by the Erasmus+.

During the final course of the year on December 15, the ICC-UA national coordinator delved into the mission, functionalities, and good practices of the Intercultural Cities, sharing invaluable insights with the diverse participants. This interactive session provided a platform for engaging discussions, allowing participants, including members of the general public, educators, students, and public service professionals from various parts of Ukraine, to share their perspectives and experiences.

In the face of challenges, ICC-UA Cities remain resolute, advocating interculturalism as a vital force for unity and understanding. Together, we are paving the way for a brighter, peaceful, and more intercultural future.

ICC-UA's journey in 2023 exemplified the transformative power of unity, determination, compassion, and interculturality. By embracing diversity, fostering dialogue, and creating impactful initiatives, the Network is not only weathering the storm of its current geopolitical situation but is emerging stronger, embodying the true essence of intercultural values and resilience. As we move forward, the ICC-UA cities continue to inspire the world, demonstrating that intercultural values are not just ideals but the cornerstone of a harmonious and peaceful society.



## Conclusions and Next Steps

In 2023, the cities of the Intercultural Cities Network of Ukraine (ICC-UA) faced unparalleled challenges, navigating the harsh realities of war with unwavering unity and a steadfast commitment to interculturality. Despite the war-torn environment, Ukrainian cities demonstrated exceptional resilience, embracing the principles of intercultural inclusion and integration.<sup>1</sup> The Network's commitment to intercultural values is evident in its innovative initiatives, emphasizing unity, understanding, and collaboration. Their active engagement with international partners, participation in seminars, and advocacy for intercultural dialogue even in times of adversity showcased their dedication to intercultural values and human principles.

An essential factor in ICC-UA's success this year was the invaluable support and partnership with Stavanger, a city that not only symbolized solidarity but actively supported the implementation of ICC-UA's local initiatives and hosted the Network's first in-person Annual

<sup>1</sup> More details on ICC-UA implemented activities in 2023 can be found in the quarterly reports of the national coordinator on the ICC-UA Network page of the ICC Programme/Council of Europe website.

Meeting in four years. This collaboration is a testament to the power of intercultural cooperation, proving that communities could thrive amidst adversity when bound by shared values and a spirit of inclusivity and support. Moreover, through initiatives like the First European Antirumours Youth Summit and collaborations with European and international counterparts, ICC-UA demonstrated that intercultural values are not just ideals but the cornerstone of a harmonious society and a more inclusive future.

Looking ahead, ICC-Ukraine members recognize that the conditions and needs of their diverse populations in the context of war significantly differ from those of other ICC cities and networks. It is of paramount importance that ICC-UA member cities are not left alone to overcome the unique challenges they face. As proud members of the ICC Programme of the Council of Europe, they need strong, direct, and continued support from the ICC Global and the Council of Europe.

Ukrainian ICC cities have played a pivotal role in promoting intercultural values and missions in Ukraine, serving as essential bridges through which European values and principles have reached post-Soviet Ukraine. Maintaining the integrity of these bridges is vital. The ICC-UA Network appeals for support to be provided in the form of targeted grants, characterized by simplified structures and application processes. Alternatively, active involvement in international initiatives, where Ukrainian cities can serve as project/program partners, would be instrumental.

Partnering with other ICC members stands as the most stable and essential option for Ukrainian cities. These collaborations not only fortify them against the challenges of war but also sustain their intercultural commitment, proficiency, and spirit, ensuring their long-term self-reliance. Together, with the unwavering support of the ICC Global and the Council of Europe, they will continue to build a brighter, inclusive European future for all, transcending the trials of the present day.

#StandWithUkraine