

# INTERCULTURAL CITIES INDEX ANALYSIS 2023

*Building bridges, breaking walls*



**Diversity, Equality, Interaction**

**VAASA**

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VAASA  
INTERCULTURAL CITIES  
INDEX ANALYSIS  
2023

Council of Europe

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## INTRODUCTION

Intercultural Cities is a Council of Europe flagship programme. It seeks to explore the potential of an intercultural approach to integration in communities with culturally diverse populations. The cities participating in the programme are reviewing their governance, policies, discourse, and practices from an intercultural point of view.

In the past, this review has taken the form of narrative reports and city profiles – a form which was rich in content and detail. However, narrative reports alone were relatively weak as tools to monitor and communicate progress. Thus, an “Intercultural Cities Index” has been designed as a benchmarking tool for the cities taking part in the programme as well as for future participants.

While this report is being written (September 2023) 162 cities embraced the ICC programme and approach, and 125 (including Vaasa) have analysed their intercultural policies using the Intercultural Cities Index. The respective reports can be found [here](#).

Among these cities, 31 cities (including Vaasa) have less than 100,000 inhabitants and 37 (including Vaasa) have more less than 10% of foreign-born residents.

This document presents the results of the Intercultural Cities Index analysis for Vaasa, Finland, in 2023, and provides related intercultural policy conclusions and recommendations.

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## INTERCULTURAL CITY DEFINITION

The intercultural city has people with different nationalities, origins, languages or religions/beliefs. Political leaders and most citizens regard diversity positively, and as a resource. The city actively combats discrimination and adapts its governance, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population. The city has a strategy and tools to deal with diversity and cultural conflict and to enhance participation. It encourages greater mixing and interaction between diverse groups in the public spaces.

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## METHODOLOGY

The Intercultural Cities Index analysis is based on a questionnaire involving 86 questions (73 of which are mandatory) grouped in 12 indicators with three distinct types of data. Indicators have been weighed for relative importance. For each indicator, the participating cities can reach up to 100 points (which are consolidated for the general Intercultural Cities Index).

These indicators comprise the following (including the two new indicators in bold):

1. Commitment	
2. Intercultural lens	Education
3. Mediation and conflict resolution	Neighbourhoods
4. Language	Public services
5. Media and communication	Business and the labour market
6. International outlook	Cultural and social life
7. Intercultural intelligence and competence	Public space
8. Welcoming newcomers	
9. Leadership and citizenship	
10. Anti-discrimination	
<b>11. Participation</b>	
<b>12. Interaction</b>	

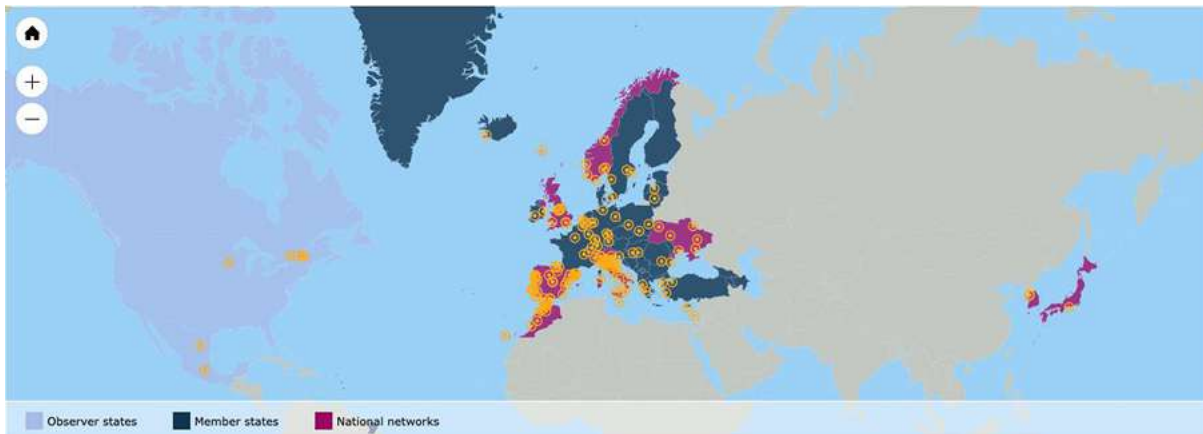
The comparison between cities is strictly indicative, given the large difference between cities in terms of historical development, type and scale of diversity, governance models and level of economic development. The comparison

is based on a set of formal criteria related to the intercultural approach in urban policies and intended **only as a tool for benchmarking/bench learning**, to motivate cities to learn from good practice.

Considering the above-mentioned differences between the cities and that a growing number of new cities willing to join the Intercultural Cities Index, it has been decided to compare the cities not only within the entire sample, but also according to specific criteria. Two of these have been singled out so far: the size (below 100,000 inhabitants; between 100,000 and 200,000; between 200,000 and 500,000; and above 500,000 inhabitants) and the percentage of foreign-born residents (lower than 10 per cent; between 10 and 15 per cent; between 15 and 20 per cent; and higher than 20 per cent). It is believed that this approach would allow for more valid and useful comparison, visual presentation, and filtering of the results.

So far, 41 cities have used the Intercultural Cities Index containing the new indicators in their evaluations, including Vaasa. Thus, the city will be compared to the entire sample for all the indicators, and to the new sample for the new indicators relating to participation and interaction.

According to the overall Intercultural Cities Index results, Vaasa has an aggregate Intercultural Cities Index result of 59 (out of 100 possible points). The details of this result will be explained below.<sup>1</sup>



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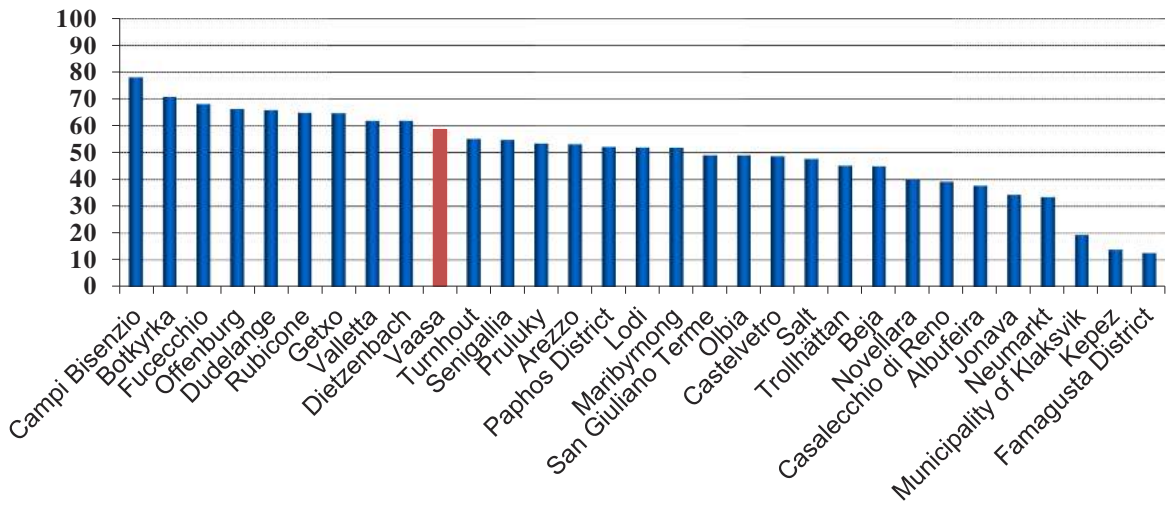
<sup>1</sup> The original Intercultural Cities Index contained 69 questions. The Intercultural Cities Index was updated in 2019, when additional questions were added, some questions were removed and completely new indicators were added (anti-discrimination, interaction and participation), resulting in the extended Intercultural Cities Index with 86 questions. As a main rule, the Intercultural Cities Index report applies the scoring from the original Intercultural Cities Index, to ensure the broadest possible comparison group in the global achievement rate.

In addition, the scoring from the extended Intercultural Cities Index is provided in an explanatory footnote for all indicators where it is relevant. This scoring encompasses the assessment of the questions of the original Intercultural Cities Index as well as the new questions of the extended Intercultural Cities Index for each specific indicator. The scoring of the original Intercultural Cities Index and extended Intercultural Cities Index for the same indicator may hence differ based on the differing number of questions. Finally, the indicators which are completely new to the extended Intercultural Cities Index only include the scoring from the extended Intercultural Cities Index. This scoring for these indicators hence shows directly in the text and not in a footnote.



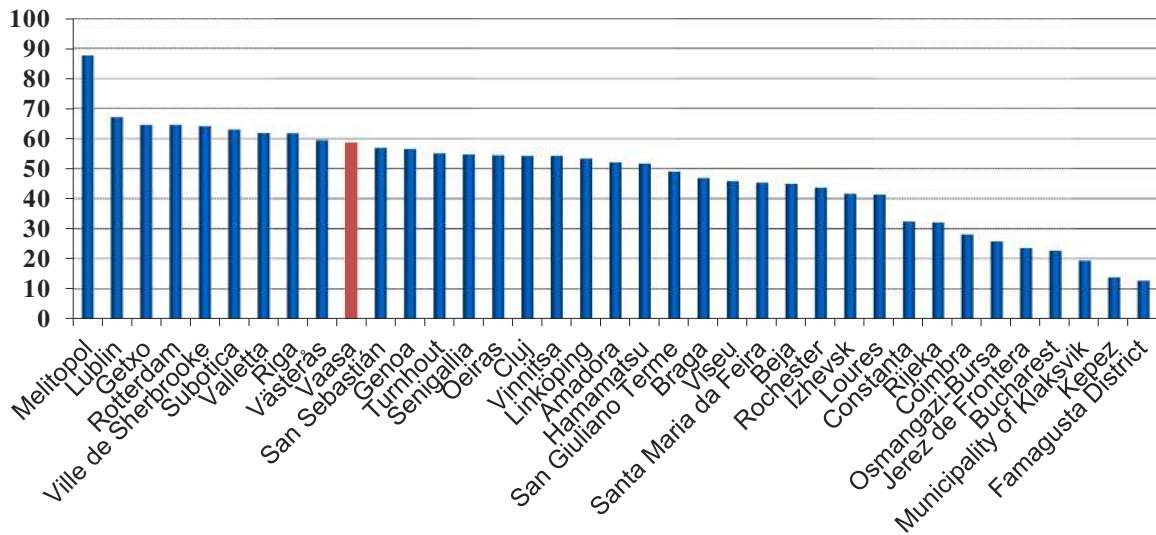
**Per inhabitants**

**Intercultural City Index (ICC)  
City sample (inhabitants < 100'000)**

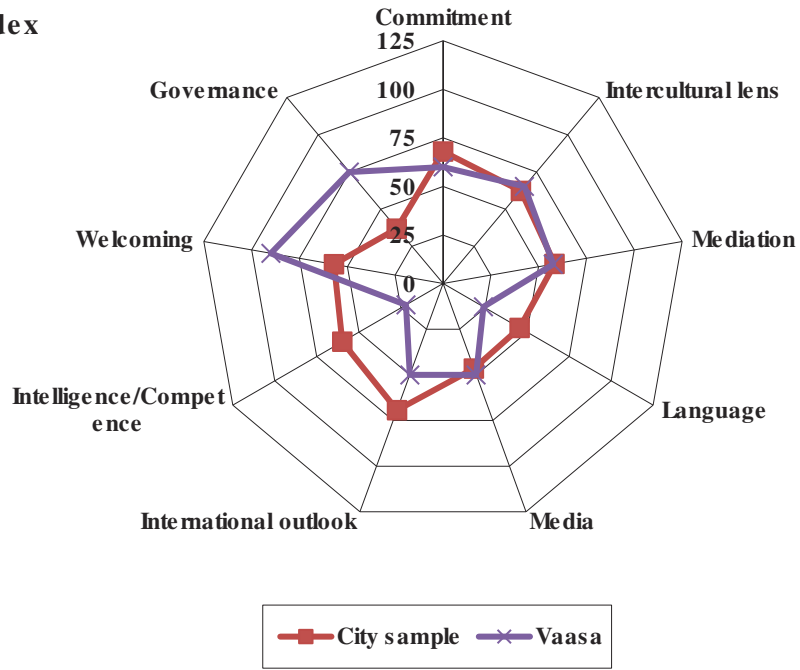


**Per diversity**

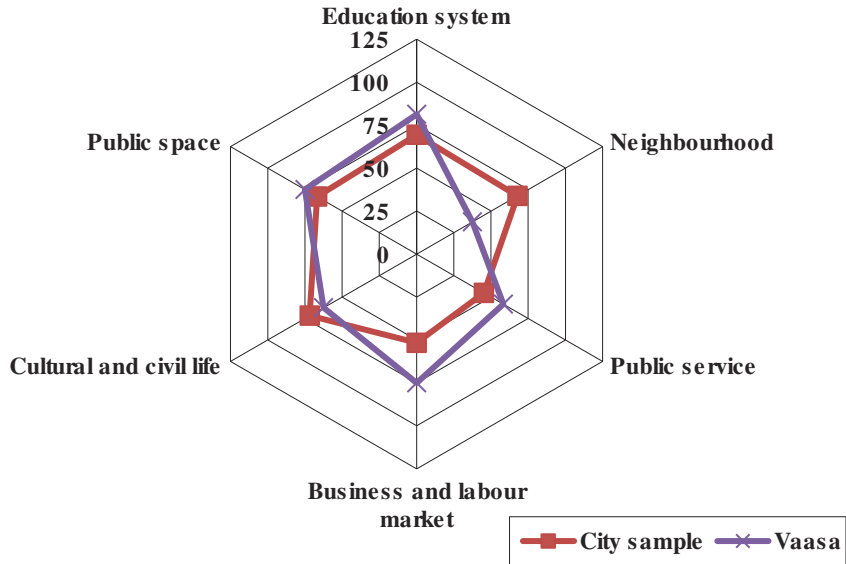
**Intercultural City Index (ICC)  
City sample (non-nationals/foreign borns < 10%)**



### Core Index

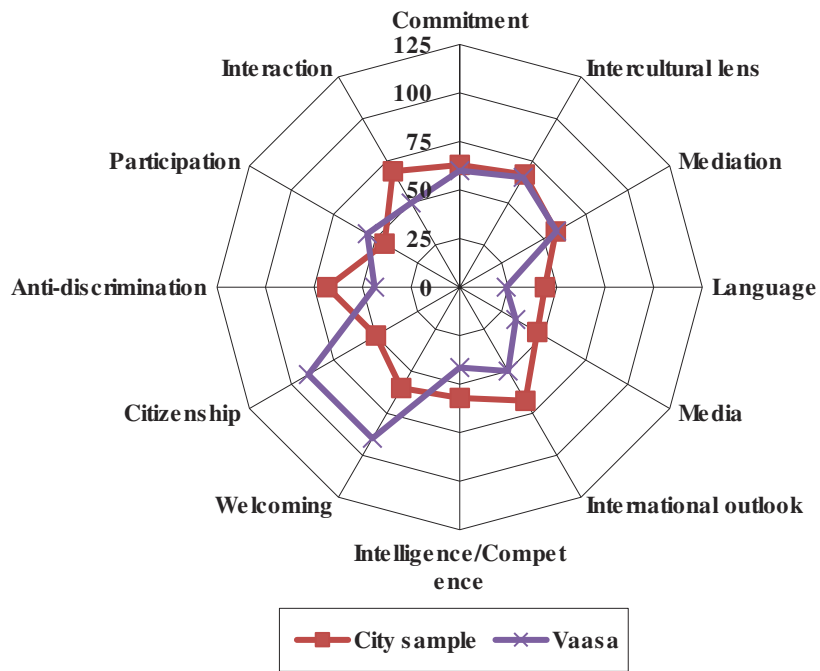


### Intercultural Lens with Core Index

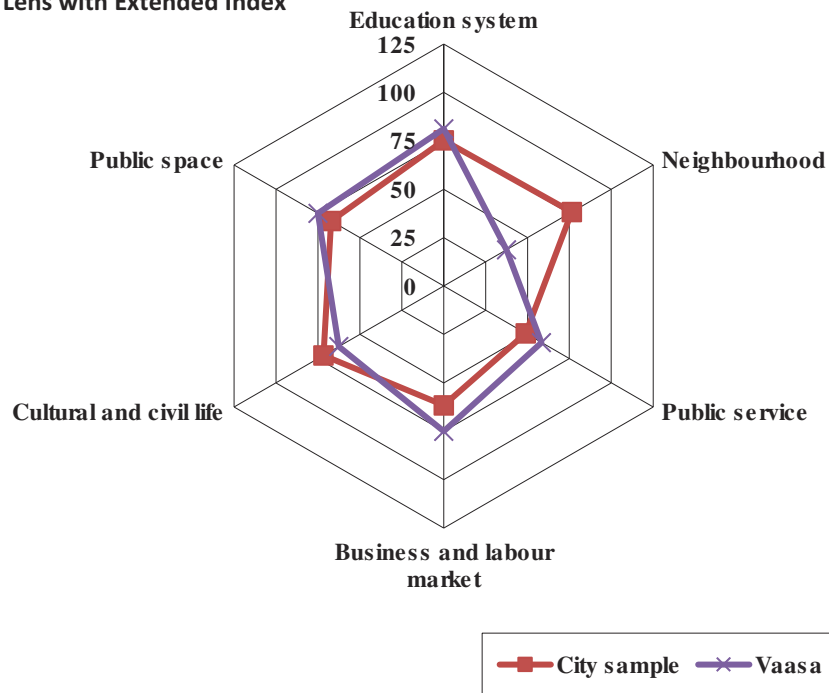




### Extended Index



### Intercultural Lens with Extended Index



## VAASA: AN OVERVIEW

Vaasa is a city on the west coast of Finland, and it is situated on the Gulf of Bothnia, which is part of the Baltic Sea. The city is known for its archipelago, with numerous islands and coastal areas (including the Kvarken Archipelago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Vaasa is the capital of the Ostrobothnia region and is home to several multinational companies and has a thriving export-oriented economy.

The city received its charter in 1606, during the reign of Charles IX of Sweden and is named after the Royal House of Vasa. The history of Vaasa can be traced to the early 14th century, when sailors from Norrland (Northern Sweden) across the sea landed on a forested land that was still an island. Because its sea connections, ship building and trade, especially tar trade, Vaasa flourished in the 17th century and most of the inhabitants earned their living from it. For most of its early history, Vaasa was under Swedish rule, and it played a significant role in the region as a trading and administrative centre. The first library in Finland was founded in Vaasa in 1794. During the Finnish War, fought between Sweden and Russia in 1808–1809, Vaasa was occupied by the Russian forces and in 1809 became part of the newly formed Grand Duchy of Finland within the Russian Empire. The first city of Vaasa, Old Vaasa, was destroyed in a fire in 1852 and could be found 7 km from the present city. The city was known as Nikolainkaupunki (literally meaning "city of Nicholas") in the years 1855–1917. In 1917, Finland gained independence from Russia, and Vaasa became part of the newly established Republic of Finland. During the Finnish Civil War, Vaasa was the capital of Finland from 29 January to 3 May 1918.

Vaasa is known for its strong emphasis on education and culture. It is home to the renowned Vaasa University, which attracts students and academics from around the world. The city hosts a variety of cultural events, including music festivals, art exhibitions, and theatre productions. The Vaasa City Library, with its striking modern design, is a hub for knowledge and culture.

The region surrounding Vaasa is an economic powerhouse in Finland, with a focus on technology and industry. The Vaasa Energy Cluster is a key player in the global energy sector, with numerous companies specializing in renewable energy and technology. The regional GDP (including Vaasa and the municipalities of Mustasaari, Vöyri, Laihia, Maalahti and Korsnäs) was 41,506.9€ per capita in 2020.

In 2023, Vaasa has a population of 67,792 (approximately 113,600 in the Vaasa sub-region) and is the regional capital of Ostrobothnia. The city is bilingual with 66.2% of the population speaking Finnish as their first language and 23.5% speaking Swedish (the surrounding Ostrobothnian municipalities such as Korsholm and Malax have a clear Swedish-speaking majority), making the city the most significant cultural centre for Swedish-Finns. The remaining 10.3% belong to foreign-language speaking population. The city of Vaasa recorded a total of 121 nationalities and 96 mother tongues (nationalities and languages of less than 10 people are also included).

Finland recognizes several minority linguistic and cultural groups., including the Swedish speaking community, but also the Roma, Russian (Old Russians), the Tatars, the Karelians Yiddish and Estonian. The law also provides special legal status to Sami people.

Vaasa region is one of Finland's most multilingual and international regions. The share of the international population in the Vaasa region has been rising rapidly during the 21st century. In 2022, foreign citizens in Vaasa were 4,812, meaning 7,08% of Vaasa's population, while the share of foreign citizens in the country is 5,82%. Of the total of foreign citizens living in Finland, 1.49% of them are in Vaasa. More than 7,300 inhabitants in Vaasa were born abroad (10,7% of Vaasa's inhabitants while 8,6% in all Finland), and a similar number of persons (7,200) have a foreign background and speak (7,000) foreign languages in the city.

In all Vaasa constituency, 10,472 foreign nationals were entitled to vote in the municipal elections, most of them (6,317) from non-EU or EFTA countries.

According to the Finnish Statistics, 2,350 people in Vaasa are EU nationals (3.5% over all the population and 48.8% of foreign residents). Foreign nationals residing in Vaasa come from Vietnam (258 people), Iraq (246 people), Somalia (226 people), Estonia (213 people), Bulgaria (188 people), Russia (183 people), Sweden (173

people), Syria (170 people), China (159 people), Iran (126 people), Afghanistan (123 people), India (119 people) and Nigeria (115 people), according to the Statistics Finland data for 2018.



Source: Statistics Finland. Data for 2022.

In Vaasa, there are currently 830 asylum seekers in the asylum reception centre, and 250 refugees. There are also people under the special support system for integration (for three years) according to the Finnish Integration Law. Around 1,600 inhabitants in the city have a humanitarian/refugee background. There are also unaccompanied minors in the city, with most of them arriving from Ukraine since the invasion in 2022. Many of them are placed in family group homes in the neighbouring municipality of Vöyri, where specific facilities exist.

There is no accurate information on undocumented people in the city, but according to the local Red Cross, there could be around 5-8 people. Most of these cases would be related to refused asylum applications.

It is worth mentioning that Vaasa has experienced relatively strong and accelerated immigration flows over the last 20 years, (foreign-language speakers increasing from 2.3% in 2000 to 10.4% in 2022). International crises have also influenced these flows; during the humanitarian crisis in 2015, many refugees from the Middle East arrived in Vaasa. In 2022, around 700 people from Ukraine have arrived in the city.

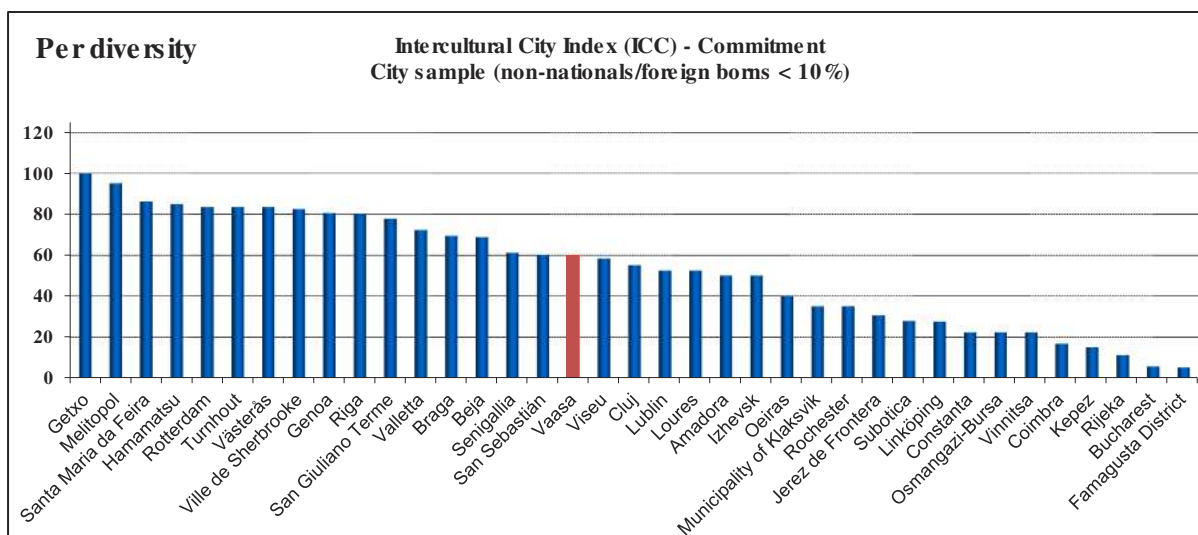
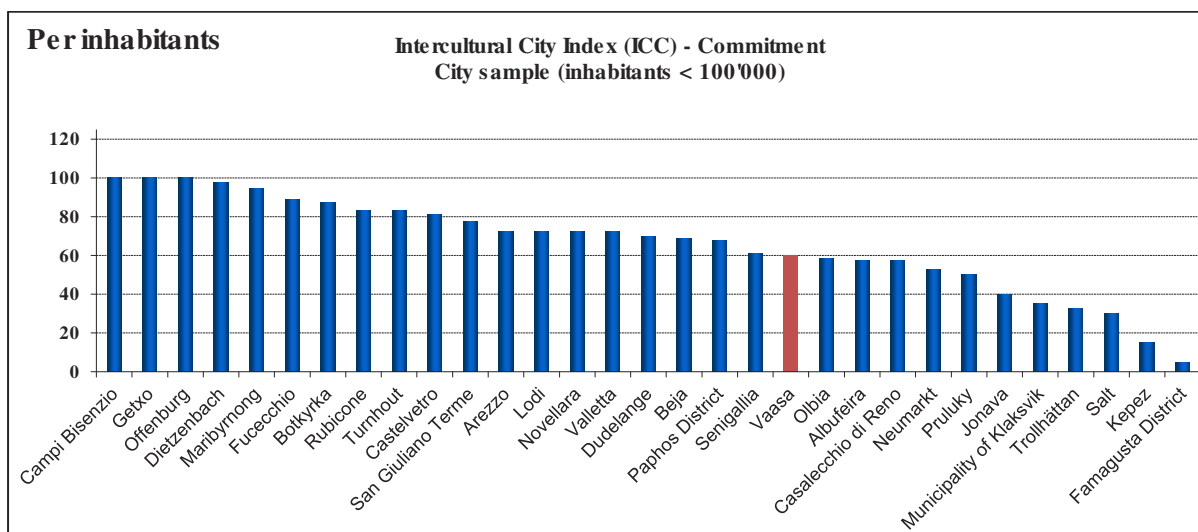
Finally, it is noteworthy that in 2010, the Finnish parliament approved the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) to support and promote integration and make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society. The purpose of the Act is to promote gender equality and non-discrimination and positive interaction between different population groups. The law has been under a comprehensive reform, which is expected to enter into force in January 2025. The reform aims to improve integration and strengthen the inclusion of immigrants in society, by facilitating the path of immigrants towards employment and improving the access of immigrant women and others outside the labour force to services. It also seeks to promote equality, wellbeing and good relations between population groups. Under the new act, municipalities will have a larger role in promoting integration, and municipalities will be responsible both for services related to promotion of integration and employment and skills development.



## COMMITMENT

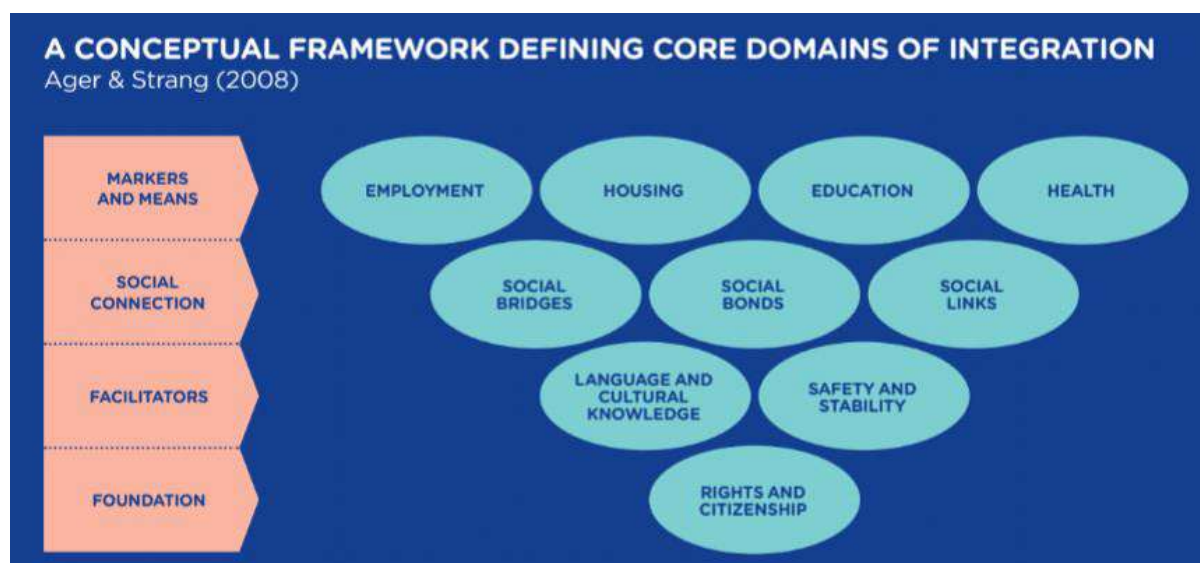
For intercultural inclusion to occur, city authorities need to send out a clear and well-publicised message emphasising their commitment to intercultural principles, i.e. diversity, equality and interaction. Ideally, most elected officials and senior policy officers will have a clear understanding of these core principles and their implications for policymaking. City authorities also need to initiate an institutional process to translate the principles of interculturality into concrete policies and actions. Most importantly, an intercultural city actively seeks to include residents of all nationalities, origins, languages, religions/beliefs, sexual orientations, and age groups in the policy-making process. The authorities also highlight and nurture any intercultural practices that may already exist in the city.

Vaasa achieved a rate of 60%, which is a bit lower than the city sample's achievement rate of 68%. There are references to and statements about Vaasa as an international and diverse city, and statements emphasizing the importance of diversity for innovation and economy. Nevertheless, the city does not have a common conceptual framework on what entails being an intercultural city.



In line with the Finnish Integration Act, Vaasa has an integration programme ([Kotouttamisohjelma](#)) required by law. The **Integration Programme 2023-2026** is developed by the Vaasa Multiculturalism Board and aims the city “to be a good home for everyone”. The integration programme does not describe existing services or structures, and mainly provides a conceptual framework for integration as a starting point (see below) to create a common understanding of the broader dimensions of integration. The goals of the integration programme are concrete actions, chosen and formulated in cooperation with different lines of business and representatives of organizations and associations whose work promotes and develops good integration. The integration programme contains seven

dimensions: work, living, education, health and wellbeing, social relations and contacts, services for the children and young people, and safety, and there are different working groups composed by professionals from different areas (education, employment, health, etc.). The programme includes an annual evaluation, the first one being expected in 2024. The Integration Programme is coordinated by the **Integration Unit** in the municipality, which has as main responsibility to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.



Vaasa has a global [City Strategy 2022-2025](#) which refers to the international character of the city, and its goals of being economically sustainable and attractive for all its citizens, also with the inspiration to have 100,000 inhabitants. The wellbeing of residents and the city is a goal that includes providing services considering the diversity of the population (including age, mobility, etc.) and promoting meeting points, community-oriented services and close cooperation with social actors among others. The city also has a [Participation Program 2021-2025](#) that emphasizes equality and interactivity among residents. The programme aims at engaging the inhabitants of Vaasa in decision making, including people with minority background. The city also generates polls towards the general population, mainly in Finnish, Swedish and English, including a yearly poll on **Happiness Indicator**.

Vaasa also has an **Equality and Non-Discrimination Programme 2022-2024** (available only in [Finnish](#) and Swedish) and a [Language Program](#), to guarantee the bilingualism of the city by providing quality multilingual services and language proficient staff. The Equality and Non-Discrimination board of the Ostrobothnian Region acknowledges every year individuals or businesses who have been working hard for equality and/or diversity. Finally, the city also has, required by law, an Advisory Board of Youth and an Advisory Board of Elderly. Vaasa has a Multicultural Board on voluntary basis.

None of the programs specifically mention the intercultural approach, and as such, there is no budget specifically allocated for the implementation of an intercultural strategy nor public statements on the topic. However, the core values of the intercultural integration model can be found in most of them.

A **website on the international dimension of Vaasa**, also linked to the diversity of origins of its inhabitants, is accessible in [English](#). The site provides information on the use of English in the city, as well as the recognised education centres, but it does not have a direct link to the integration programme.

It is worth mentioning that Vaasa is one of the Finnish cities participating in the **“Building an inclusive integration approach in Finland”** joint project, co-funded by the EU and CoE and implemented by the CoE. The project provides technical support to the implementation of inclusive integration policies based on the [Finnish Good Relations](#) concept and the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Integration model. It aims to improve community relations and to support better integration of migrants across society in areas such as participation, education, cultural and social life, urban planning, business, labour market, anti-discrimination, and multilingualism. The Good Relations Model, promoted by the Finnish Ministry of Justice, provides indicators for the comprehensive fostering of equality between people.



## Suggestions

Vaasa is making commendable efforts in their commitment to intercultural principles and policies. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in reinforcing the principles of the intercultural integration approach more explicitly in various local programs and plans. Introducing the intercultural approach in Vaasa could be quite straightforward, as it involves reinforcing the storytelling about its intercultural work, incorporating ideas already present in its programs such as equality and non-discrimination, good relations, interactivity, etc. Vaasa seldom references its intercultural commitments in official communications, and this could be easily addressed by reframing some of the current statements under the intercultural narrative.

While there is considerable attention paid to the international dimension of Vaasa and its capacity to attract talent and knowledge, the commitment to the intercultural approach should not be exclusively linked to the international dimension of the city. Intercultural integration is a challenge for all inhabitants in the city, regardless of their national origin.

Several cities have made important efforts to communicate their intercultural commitment. In Botkyrka (Sweden), for instance, the local [Strategy for an equal Botkyrka](#) approved in 2010 (and updated in different moments) contains both strategic orientations/priorities and an announcement about interculturality as a guiding direction for local community development. The work to implement the strategy is coordinated in a municipality-wide working group led by the Municipal Head Office, that includes responsible representatives of different departments. This transversal working group has drawn up the municipal-wide action plan to which all administrations must contribute. The Municipal Head Office also has funds dedicated to intercultural capacity building, data collection and knowledge development which are available to all departments.

Similarly, the Swiss city of Zurich has a set of Integration [Policy Targets of the City of Zurich 2022-2026](#). The city adopts a clear integration policy position, guided by fundamental human rights and promoting liberal values and solidarity. Specifically, the Integration Policy Targets includes, among others: (a) Enabling access. All residents benefit equally from the City of Zurich's offers and services. In particular, access for vulnerable groups is regularly reviewed and improved where necessary. The city provides information in various formats, in easily comprehensible German and in multiple languages, where practical. City communications reflect the population's diversity. Zurich promotes and welcomes diversity in its employees. (b) Increasing participation. Zurich's residents participate as much as possible in economic, political and social life. Civil society makes an active contribution to community life. Zurich ensures that children and young people growing up in the city are helped to achieve their individual potential and complete education or training. Zurich includes the population in its integration policy work. It expects residents to be committed to integration and to a good community life. The city welcomes and supports civic activities that highlight the diverse population and that help to bring people together, promote mutual understanding or support collective action. It considers voluntary commitment to be valuable and supports the associated potential for integration. The city is committed to the rights of foreign nationals to vote locally. (c) Cultivating a welcoming culture. All Zurich residents form part of society. Their personal lifestyles will be respected in accordance with applicable legislation. Zurich welcomes newcomers to the city and provides them with information about the key facilities and services and with useful guidance. On the basis of applicable law, Zurich is committed to the cultural and religious traditions that exist in the city remaining visible and being valued. The city is committed to combatting discrimination and racism.

To gain this result, the city administration has established an Integration Delegation, which mainly works on a strategic level. The Mayor of Zurich, the City Council (executive), the official writer (principal of the chancellery), head of the Asylum Organisation Zurich (AOZ) and representatives of various departments constitute the members of the Integration Delegation. The Integration Office is the branch office of the Integration Delegation, and is the competence centre for migration and integration, providing support and advise to all departments and providing provides human and financial resources for the implementation of integration projects and activities.

## THE CITY THROUGH AN INTERCULTURAL LENS

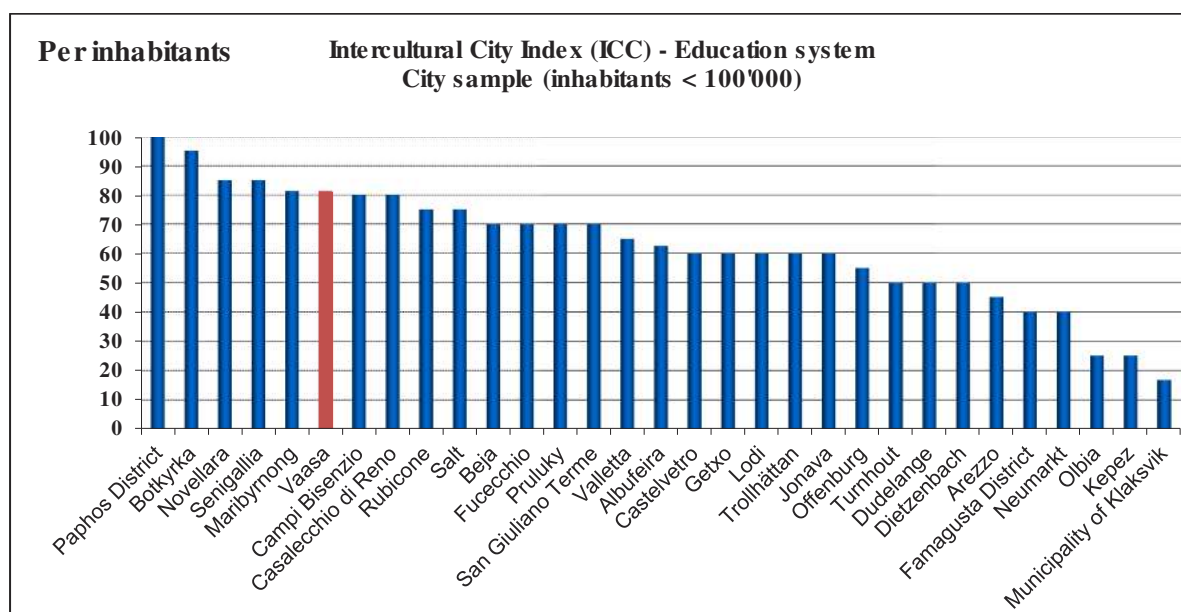
Although the formal functions cities and other local authorities assume vary considerably from one country to another, all cities have the primary responsibility for maintaining social cohesion and preserving the quality of life in the city. The policies designed to achieve these goals will therefore be re-conceived and re-configured in order to assure they provide adequate service to all residents regardless of their nationalities, origins, languages, religions/beliefs, sexual orientation and age group. This is most notably the case for policies concerning education, neighbourhoods, public services, business and the labour market, cultural and social life, and public space.

The overall rate of achievement of the urban policies of Vaasa, assessed as a whole through an "intercultural lens" is slightly higher to that of the model city. 65% of these objectives were achieved while the rate of achievement of the model city reaches to 62%.

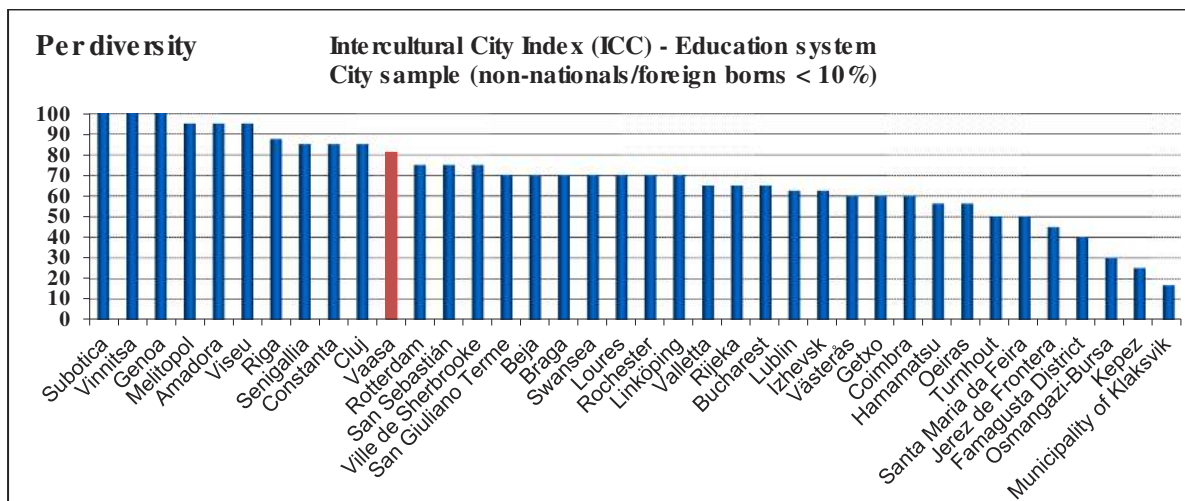
### EDUCATION

Formal education and extracurricular activities have a powerful influence on how children will perceive diversity as they grow up. Schools therefore have a strong potential to reinforce or, on the contrary, challenge prejudices and negative stereotyping. Although school programmes are defined primarily at the national or regional level, local schools can look at alternative and innovative ways of providing opportunities for children of different cultures to build trust and mutual respect, and create thereby favourable learning conditions for all pupils, irrespective of their nationalities, origins, languages, sexual orientation or gender identity, religions/beliefs. From the intercultural perspective, cultural and other diversities, including multilingualism are treated as positive opportunities and are nurtured accordingly. Intercultural schools also consider parents of pupils with migrant/minority backgrounds on an equal basis as other parents. They take steps to ensure that all parents overcome any reluctance they may have in engaging with the school and give them in this way the possibility of playing the educational role usually expected from parents.

Vaasa achieved a rate of 81%, which is considerably higher than the city sample's achievement rate of 69%.







In Vaasa, as is the case throughout Finland, basic education is offered free of charge. The city has 13 Finnish-language and 5 Swedish-language basic schools, in addition to a few private schools and a state-run school. Compulsory education begins when a child turns seven and continues until the age of 18 or upon completion of an upper secondary qualification. Generally, children are enrolled in schools closest to their residence, potentially leading to varied representation of people with different languages or backgrounds in different areas of the city. While the municipality does not acknowledge segregation as a problem in the local school system, it is noteworthy that the bilingual system may segregate pupils based on their mother tongue.

Students lacking sufficient knowledge of Finnish or Swedish participate in a preparatory education for immigrants, typically lasting one calendar year. After completing this, pupils transfer to their local school. In basic education, pupils have the right to be taught in Finnish or Swedish as a second language, with immigrant background support. Students with an immigrant background are, where possible, provided with instruction in their mother tongue, and voluntary instruction in the mother tongue can be applied for by the guardian(s).

In January 2023, during roundtable discussions within The Good Relations project, residents of minority groups shared experiences of prejudices and marginalization in schools. The municipality recognizes potential variations in the quality and frequency of dialogue with minority parents across schools. To address this, most schools are making efforts to involve parents with migrant/minority backgrounds in school life. An initiative called "Family School," in collaboration with Vaasa's Family Centre, is set to launch for minority/migrant parents. This model aims to enhance cooperation with caretakers, provide information about the Finnish education system, and host weekly events for the whole family with multilingual tutors and expert visits. It also seeks to familiarize families with Vaasa and its activities and services (Vaasa Integration Programme).

Moreover, many schools in Vaasa conduct intercultural projects, particularly those associated with libraries offering books in different languages. Schools are accustomed to incorporating different cultures into everyday activities, and the city organizes morning and afternoon activities for eligible pupils in Grades 1 and 2, as well as for those in other grades who require special support.

### Suggestions

Vaasa showcases a commendable experience in education, championing an educational system that prioritizes equality, high standards, and student-centered learning. The city is actively working to enhance interculturalism, combat segregation, and foster an inclusive educational environment for students.

While it's acknowledged that in many schools, teachers may not always reflect the ethnic or cultural background of the students, Vaasa could explore opportunities to encourage more interaction between families. The Good Relations project presents an interesting avenue for such initiatives, aligning them with the CoE's intercultural integration approach.

Vaasa could consider the example of "[Ongi etorri eskolara](#)" ([Welcome to School](#)), promoted by the city of Donostia/San Sebastian (Spain). The project consists of appointing (volunteer) mentor families to help newcomer

families to be part of the local community. Usually, families have children in the same class so that the two-year programme of support can include both academic and extra-curricular activities. The interaction and exchange of cultures is crucial for the programme, but the main focus is the shared situation (parents with children at the same school and in the same classes). The programme has had positive impacts so far on teachers, classes, students and parents, while raising awareness about the diversity advantage for the overall population.

Similarly, in the German city of [Hamburg](#), more than 20 teachers at different schools participated in the pilot-project “Qualification for intercultural coordinators” in order to become intercultural change managers in their schools. They all work on intercultural school projects. Furthermore, about 200 teachers at different schools participated regularly in the “Intercultural Fair” of the department of intercultural education and are part of the intercultural “exchange forum” at the teacher training institute to get new ideas for intercultural projects in their schools.

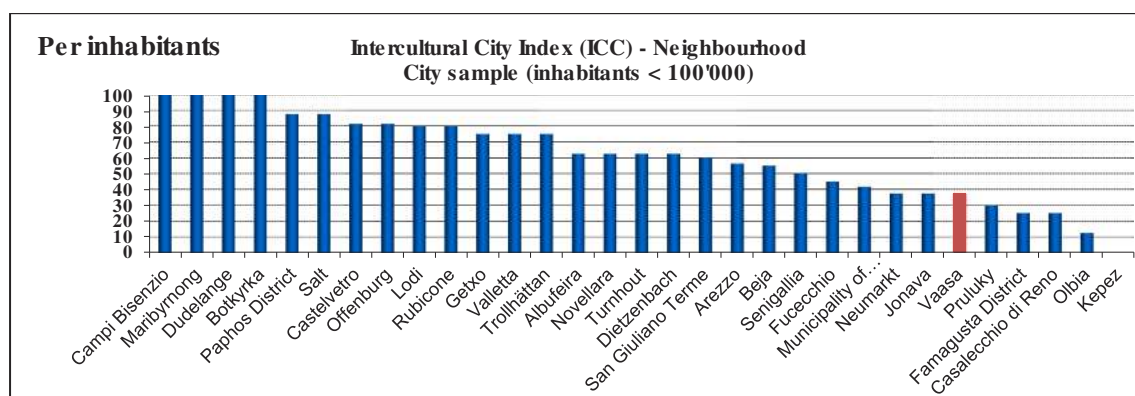
Moreover, in Salisbury (Australia), the city has developed the federal program “Community Hubs Australia”. Community hubs are welcoming places where migrant and refugee families, particularly mothers with young children, come to connect, share, and learn. Hubs bridge the gap between migrants and the wider community, they connect women with schools, with each other, and with organisations that can provide health, education, and settlement support. They provide a gateway and capacity building for migrant families to connect with each other and with mainstream communities in both formal and casual settings. Salisbury’s schools often carry out intercultural projects. Regular “Wellbeing Days” and “Multicultural Week” events foster opportunities for cultural expression, safety and confidence. An underlying outcome is that students are given the space to develop their understanding of culture, working together and be assured cultural safety to express themselves in a public setting.

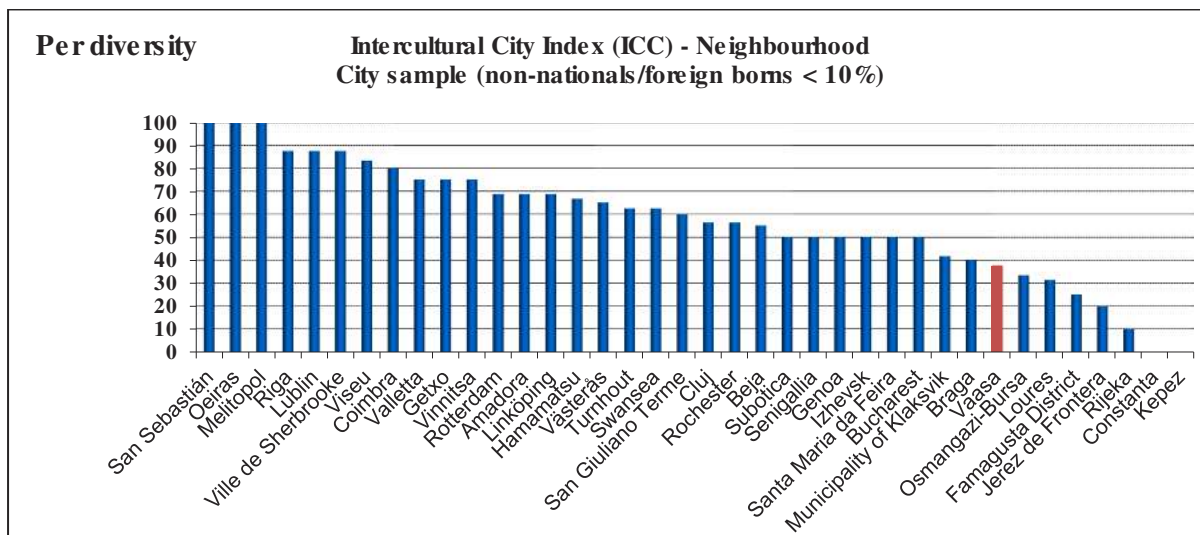
Lastly, ICC programme resources on education are also available [here](#).

## NEIGHBOURHOODS

*Within a city, districts, neighbourhoods, or other territorial sub-units, can be more or less culturally/ethnically diverse. People are indeed free to move and settle in the neighbourhood of their choice. To be intercultural, a city does not require a ‘perfect’ statistical mix of people in all neighbourhoods. It will however make sure that ethnic concentration in a neighbourhood does not convert into socio-cultural segregation and does not act as a barrier to the inward and outward flow of people, ideas and opportunities. In particular, the intercultural city ensures the same quality of public service delivery in all the neighbourhoods and plans public space, infrastructures, social, cultural and sport activities to encourage intercultural and socio-economic mixing and interaction.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 38%, which is considerably lower than the city sample’s achievement rate of 68%.





In Vaasa, few neighbourhoods are culturally or ethnically diverse, and the city has a policy to increase the diversity of neighbourhoods and to avoid ethnic concentration. In that sense, and in order to avoid socio-cultural segregation, the city is working in the suburbs, mainly focusing on built-up structures, housing, public services and recreation areas. Suburbs with social housing are being developed with the aim of mixing with other housing types and promoting a more diverse profile of inhabitants in the areas.

However, the city currently lacks specific actions to facilitate the meeting and interaction of residents between neighbourhoods or within the same neighbourhood. A noteworthy initiative is [“The happiest city in the world”](#), a game integrated into the city’s welfare planning efforts. In this game, players provide anonymous answers to questions about their well-being. The gathered information assists the municipality in developing services and updating the city’s welfare plan.

In the summer of 2023, Vaasa residents had the opportunity to contribute to the city’s well-being by participating in this online game. Game signs were strategically placed around town to encourage participation, and players were tasked with assisting the game’s characters with their problems. These characters were based on real data collected from Vaasa residents, each possessing a unique personality, interests, and challenges. Participants who completed the game were rewarded with a choice between a swimming pool ticket or a museum ticket.

### Suggestions

There is room for improvement regarding neighbourhoods by promoting and raising awareness about the entire city and fostering interaction among residents in different parts of the city.

In Reykjavik (Iceland), the city has launched the “My Neighbourhood initiative” which draws citizens into online discussions about how budgets are allocated at the micro-level. The city also encourages interaction between neighbourhoods and at the origin of this process has been the [Reykjavik City Library](#). Public libraries are an often-underestimated resource but with their branches as well as online facilities they can make real connections on the ground. The city library in Reykjavik has been an inspiration in this regard, with its commitment to interculturalism and the promotion of arts and creativity. The library is reported to hold regular events, in different parts of the city, that are designed for people of all origins. Further, the city’s cultural institutions are reported to aim to open their doors to a diverse group of guests and to be a venue for fellowship, creativity and interactive cultural dialogue through Roots and wings - The Reykjavik Department of Culture and Tourism’s policy on diverse culture in the city 2017–2020.

Vaasa could get also inspired by the experience of Sabadell (Spain) and its [Mescla’t \(Mix It Up\) project](#). This is a one-day festivity to celebrate the city’s diversity, fostering social inclusion and human rights. The programme of that day includes different activities in the public space: concerts, traditional music, various workshops, seminars, photo exhibitions, etc. In 2018, with the slogan ‘Sabadell, committed with the world’, the festivity added a gastronomic area with specialty dishes from different countries. Although it is led by the City Council, it is designed

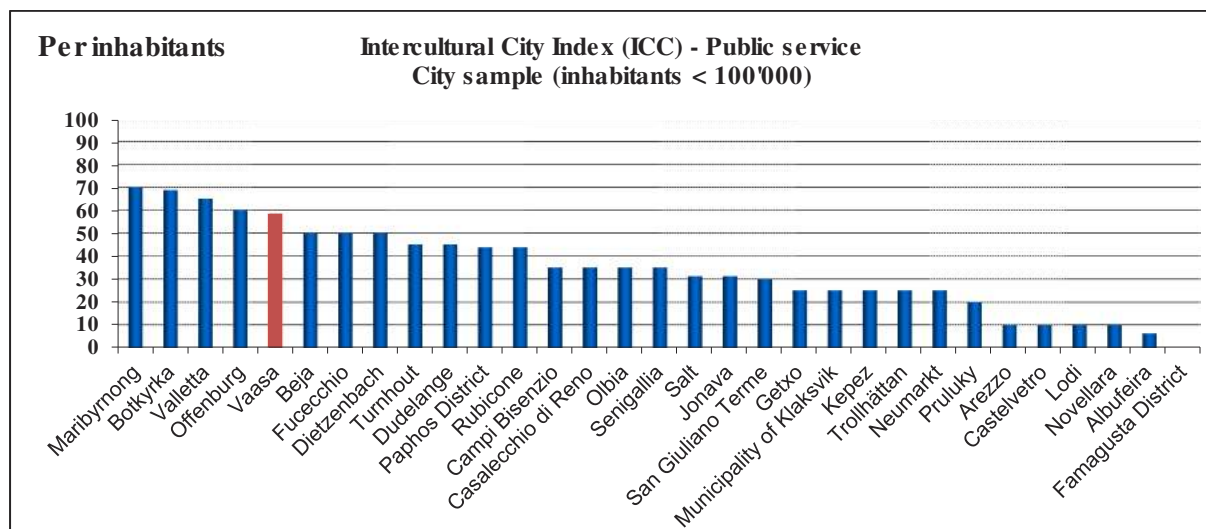
and developed with the organisations which are part of the different commissions of the Civil Rights and Gender Department: Gender, feminism and LGBTI; New citizenship; Religious diversity; Roma people; Youth; Solidarity and Cooperation. From April to October, some of the organisations meet up in the Mescla't organisation commission, to co-elaborate the programme. In November, this commission meets again to evaluate the action and propose improvements for the next edition. "Mescla't" is a unique opportunity to gather organisations and people with a committed programme with the rights of all the citizens and the equality in the public space. It is, then, a space where the City Council and the third sector organisations work together and raise awareness for equality respecting all differences. "Mescla't" is also useful for the organizations to meet in a common space and to know better each other, so they start collaborations that bring up different areas (for example, to implement projects together with a double purpose: gender and human rights, or LGTBI and cooperation).

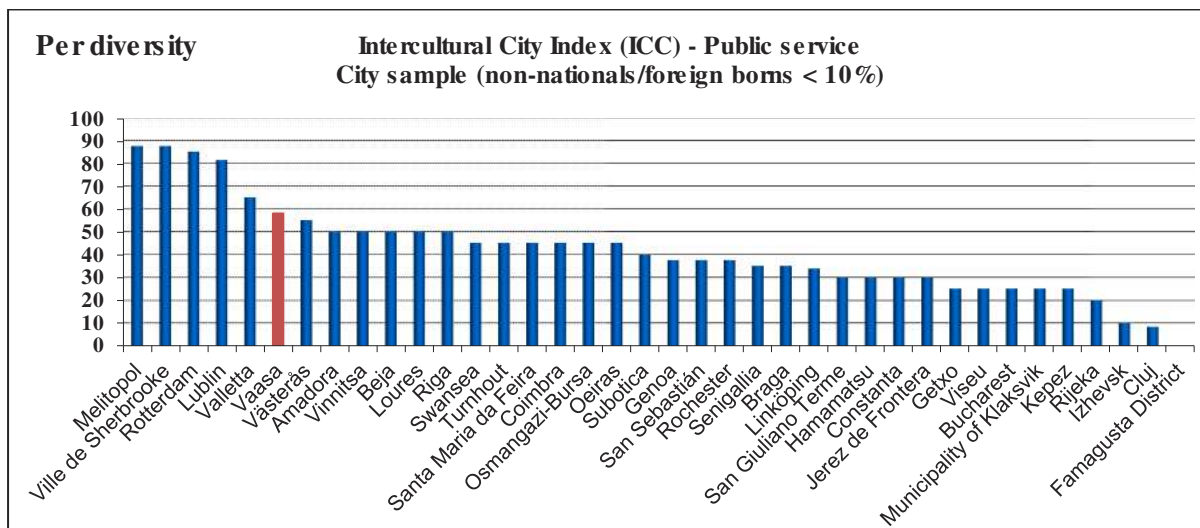
The [ICC study on managing gentrification](#) offers a range of strategies and examples of how to create inclusive public space, manage positively socio-cultural mixing, nurture sense of belonging and encourage diverse businesses to thrive.

## PUBLIC SERVICES

*As their very name implies, public services work for the benefit of the public as a whole. If the population is diverse, public services will be more efficient in delivering adequate benefits and information if city officers, at all levels of seniority, are as diverse as the population in general. This requires much more than simply ensuring equal opportunities to access public service employment. When taking action to encourage a diverse municipal workforce, an intercultural city acknowledges that a 'one size fits all' approach to public services and actions does not guarantee equal access to public benefits. The city also recognises that residents with migrant/minority backgrounds should never be treated as passive consumers of public benefits but can contribute actively by suggesting new ideas and innovative solutions to public problems.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 58%, which is higher than the city sample's achievement rate of 45%.





The municipality currently lacks available data on the migrant/minority background of public employees, but it does have a recruitment plan in place to ensure a fair and non-discriminatory hiring process. The overarching goal of Vaasa's personnel program is to become an attractive and diverse employer, with a specific focus on increasing the diversity of its personnel by actively recruiting individuals from various backgrounds and experiences. Although the [city aims to increase the diversity](#), it acknowledges that its full potential has not yet been realized. Anonymous recruitment is implemented within the city's hiring processes, which involves concealing applicants' personal information during the initial review process, helping to mitigate gender and age discrimination.

However, the city currently does not have initiatives in place to encourage a diverse workforce, intercultural mixing, or competences in the private sector.

Regarding services, the city takes into consideration the migrant/minority backgrounds of all residents when providing burial and funeral services, school meals, and healthcare services. The Department of Youth also offers special support for youth with minority backgrounds.

### Suggestions

Vaasa already has some good policies in the field of public services but could explore other initiatives. In [Oslo](#) (Norway), for instance, the city provides four out of the five services in the index which are tailored to the needs of the ethnic/cultural background of its citizens. The municipality offers funeral/burial services, specific sections, and times for women in sports facilities, as well as senior centres which provide activities and food catered to the needs of specific groups.

Vaasa could be inspired by the initiative promoted by Barcelona City Council (Spain). The municipality has recently approved a government measure to "[Advance towards interculturalism - Governance mechanisms and Instruments](#)" to promote the diversity of municipal human resources. This plan will include the leadership of the 'People and Development department' and the participation of trade unions. It will set specific quantitative targets for increasing the percentage of workers of diverse origins and backgrounds. In addition, the City Council has launched a call for 259 new vacancies to join the Guardia Urbana in which knowledge of Chinese, Arabic and Urdu, as well as English, will be considered. This is an important effort, so that the Guardia Urbana becomes increasingly like the society it wants to serve.

As there are no direct actions aimed at encouraging a more diverse workforce in the private sector, Vaasa may be interested in an initiative in Leeds in the UK that maps diversity in employment. The [Leeds](#) City Region Diversity Dashboard is a project by the Leeds Inclusive Anchors Network made up of the city's largest (mainly) public sector employers. They come together and focus on areas where they can make a difference for people as an employer, through procurement, through service delivery or as a civic partner. The dashboard shows the number of people employed by the eight employers according to different diversity indicators, including: age, if people are carers, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic factors and sexuality. The dashboard uses an agreed diversity



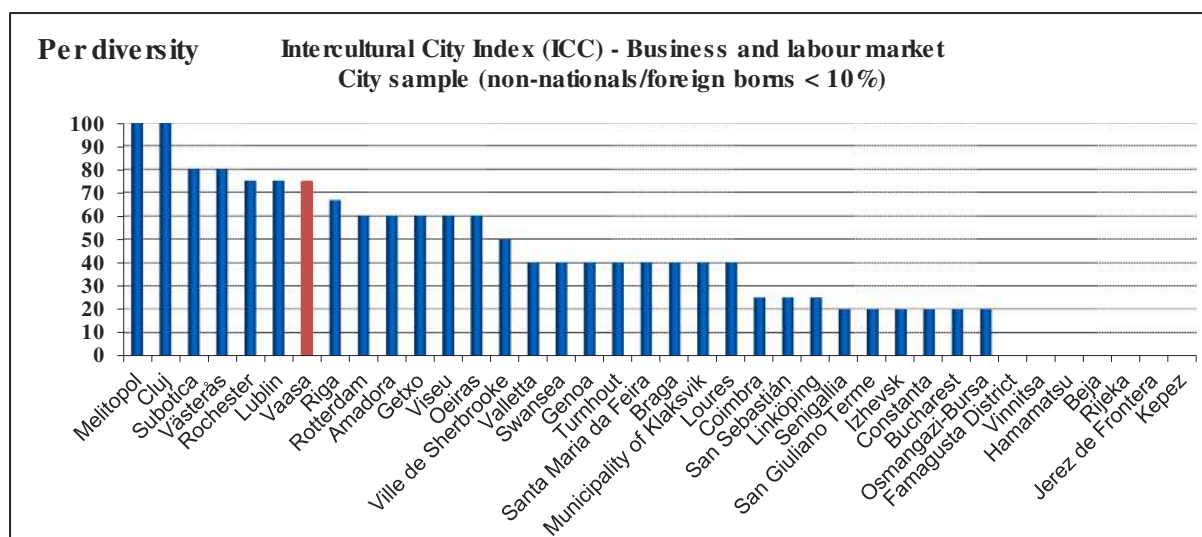
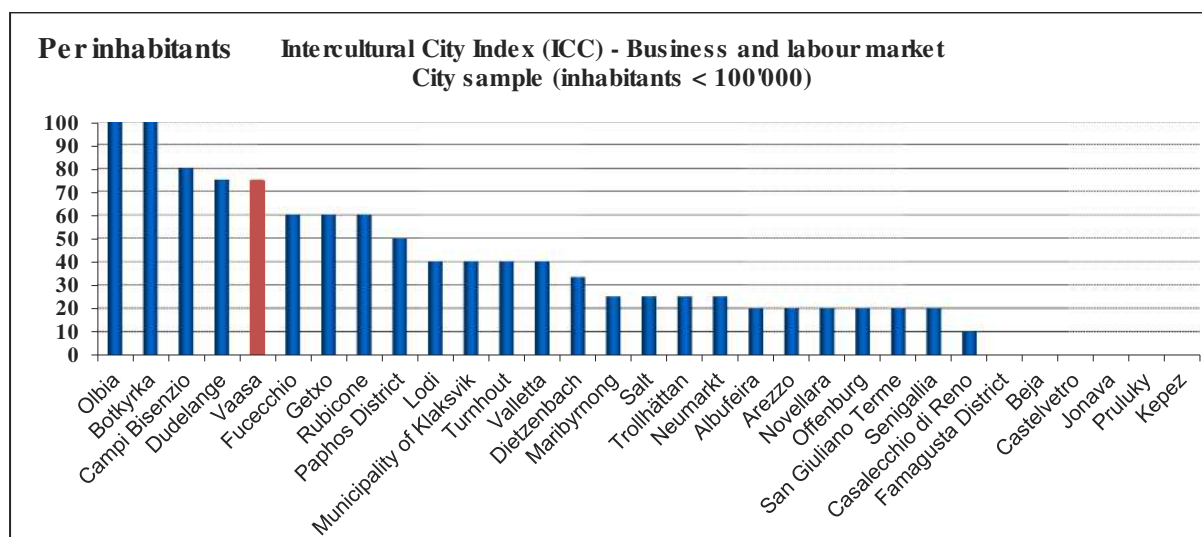
data standard that uses current data collected by the network members, but also tries to map characteristics to existing national standards as much as possible so that comparisons can be made with national data sets.

ICC programme resources on public and community services are available [here](#).

## BUSINESS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Access to the public sector labour markets is often restricted by national or regional legislation. When this is the case, the private sector may provide an easier route for people with migrant or diverse backgrounds to engage in economic activity. As a result, private companies and activities tend to offer much more diverse working environments than the public sector. Research has also proved that it is cultural diversity in private companies, and not homogeneity, which fosters creativity and innovation. By constantly highlighting the diversity advantage in business, and partnering with their chambers of commerce and entrepreneurs, cities can influence how diversity is perceived in the private sector in such diverse sectors as shops, clubs, restaurants, industry, technical services and science.

Vaasa achieved a rate of 75%, which is considerably higher than the city sample's achievement rate of 52%.



**VASEK** is a regional **business and development company** owned by the municipalities in the Vaasa region. A part of VASEK is Vaasa Region Enterprise Agency Startia. Startia helps people set up their own business. Business guidance is provided in Finnish, Swedish and English. Nearly 20% of the customers have a minority background that are introduced and helped in how to start a business in Finland. Startia is part of the national Agency that consist of 30 Agencies that covers over 80% of the Finnish population. Actions are taken to raise awareness about

entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship as an alternative to employment, integration and to raise awareness about and to exclude discrimination on the labour market. Another significant organization promoting and supporting entrepreneurs in general is Suomen Yrittäjät that is an interest and service organization for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from around entire Finland and their owners.

Vaasa takes different actions to encourage businesses from ethnic minorities to move beyond the ethnic economy and enter the mainstream economy and higher value-added sectors. For example, the city is doing it by mapping and understanding existing gaps and challenges in the development of migrant entrepreneurship; by publicly recognising the role of migrants as entrepreneurs and highlighting their contribution to the local economy; by inviting migrant entrepreneurs to business events; by facilitating the inclusion of migrant entrepreneurs in mainstream business and professional networks; and by removing existing obstacles for migrant-owned businesses in bidding for contracts among others.

The city has also taken actions to encourage 'business districts/incubators' and to involve an adequate percentage entrepreneur with migrant/minority backgrounds. In that sense, the city itself has no incubators as such for businesses but supports different private initiatives. Through the University of Vaasa and the University of Applied Sciences (VAMK), the city supports the "West Coast Startup". Their mission is to help students and staff to start a new business. Hanken School of Economics situated in Helsinki and Vaasa has Hanken Business Lab, an incubator aiming to help Startups, scale-ups, non-profit organizations, and individuals. [Business Lead](#) aims to help international students start businesses most of them from the Vaasa region.

There is no local normative to facilitate the procurement of goods and services in favour of companies with an intercultural inclusion/diversity strategy.

### Suggestions

Although Vaasa has very high achievements in this field, it is always useful to learn from the experience of others.

In [Camden](#) (United Kingdom), the city shows inspiring practices, related in particular to encouraging businesses and residents from ethnic minorities to move beyond the ethnic economy and enter the mainstream economy and higher value-added sectors. These initiatives target among others under-served communities, aspiring entrepreneurs, pupils, and private-sector enterprises, and consist in partnerships with community-level actors, incubators, and neighbouring local authorities, as well as in grants and contract opportunities and awareness-raising.

Cartagena (Spain) could be also an inspiring example. The city has an [Agency for Local Development and Employment \(ADLE\)](#), which promotes the local economy, employment, and local development. The agency works to help the groups with the greatest difficulties to access the labour market through adequate and adapted job placement, as freelancers or working for an employer. Through the agency, the city offers a business and employment advisory service that informs citizens about the requirements to apply for a work permit, for both freelancers and those who wish to be employed by others, to facilitate their inclusion in the labour market. Moreover, through the ADLE business growth project, the city offers a consultancy service for local companies established in their municipality, including immigrant companies that can, through the consultancy, participate in new forms of business management and network with the rest to promote services and products. In addition, social clauses have been included in the City Council tender procedure that promotes the inclusion of companies with social responsibility working with the groups with the largest challenges in accessing the labour market.

ICC programme resources on business and employment are available [here](#).

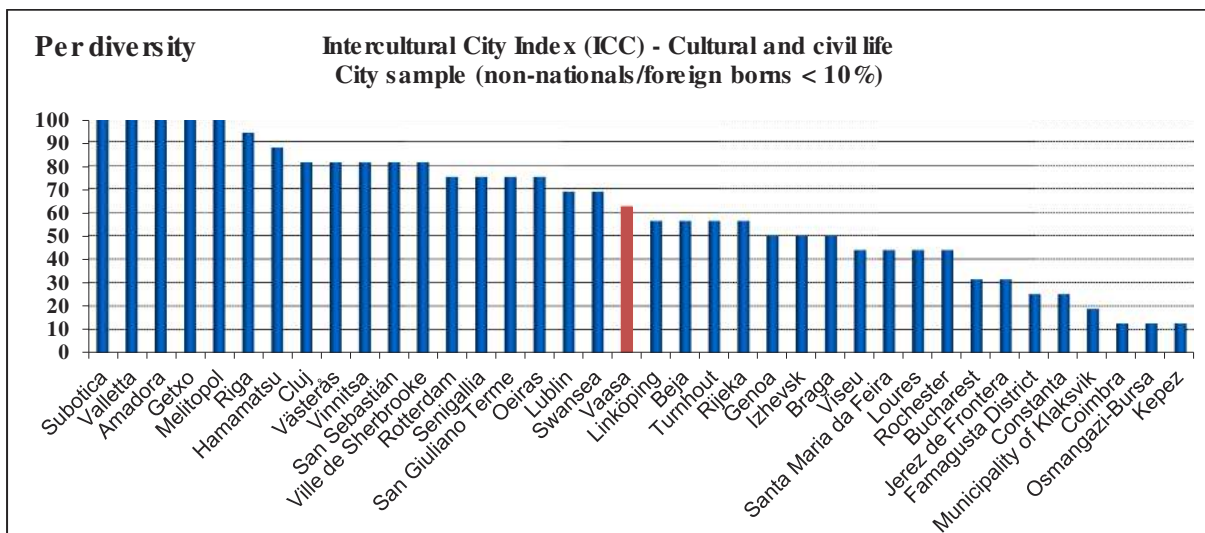
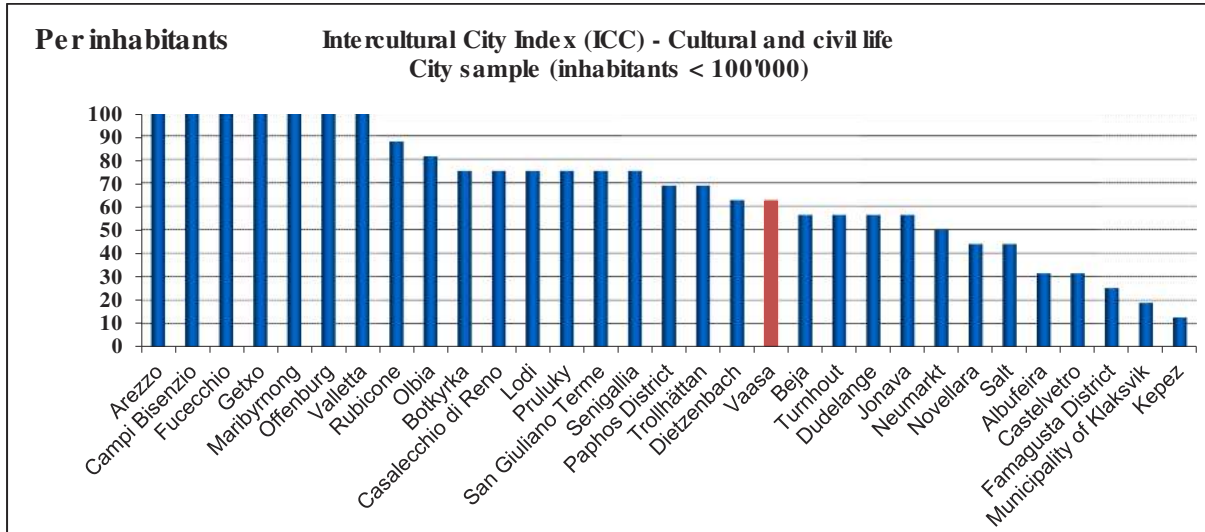
## **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL LIFE**

*Whereas people living in a city may have different migrant/minority or other backgrounds, they very often share the same interests and satisfaction when engaging in leisure activities, especially in the fields of arts, culture and sports. Such activities are sometimes structured along ethnic lines. That is quite understandable when they aim to*



preserve folklore traditions or the language and history of countries of origin. What is problematic is when cross-cultural leisure activities are organised along ethnic lines, for example when a football team only accepts players from one ethnic group. The intercultural city can encourage cultural openness through its own activities and by introducing intercultural criteria when allocating resources to artistic, cultural and sports organisations.

Vaasa achieved a rate of 63% in cultural and civil life, which is slightly lower than the city sample's achievement rate of 72%.



Cultural and civil life is well supported by the municipality but there is still some room for improvement. Vaasa sometimes uses interculturalism as a criterion when allocating funds to associations and local initiatives. Special attention is granted to funding initiatives (and urban interventions) in a suburban neighbourhood in the city. The project 'Us, living in/with Vaasa' promotes gatherings and events to create spaces for learning more about Vaasa, sharing memories and emotions, and hanging out with people from different backgrounds and generations around a table filled with food.

Vaasa regularly organizes events and activities to encourage people to meet and interact, like the initiatives at the public library as mentioned before. Similarly, the local museums have developed activities and events in this sense. [Vaasa 400](#) is a permanent exhibition to explain Vaasa history to people from all over the world and see the similarities with their own cultures.

Occasionally, the city encourages cultural organisations to deal with intercultural relations in their productions. The [Festival of Emotions](#) is an art project between pupils in Finnish and Greek schools. The festival is a pedagogical tool, especially in schools, and offers free events for local families with children, such as theatre performances, music, visual arts, storytelling, and workshops.

Although considering it, the city has not yet organised public debates nor campaigns to talk about diversity and living together.

### Suggestions

Vaasa could take inspiration from other cities, particularly given the prominence of cultural infrastructures such as libraries and museums in the city.

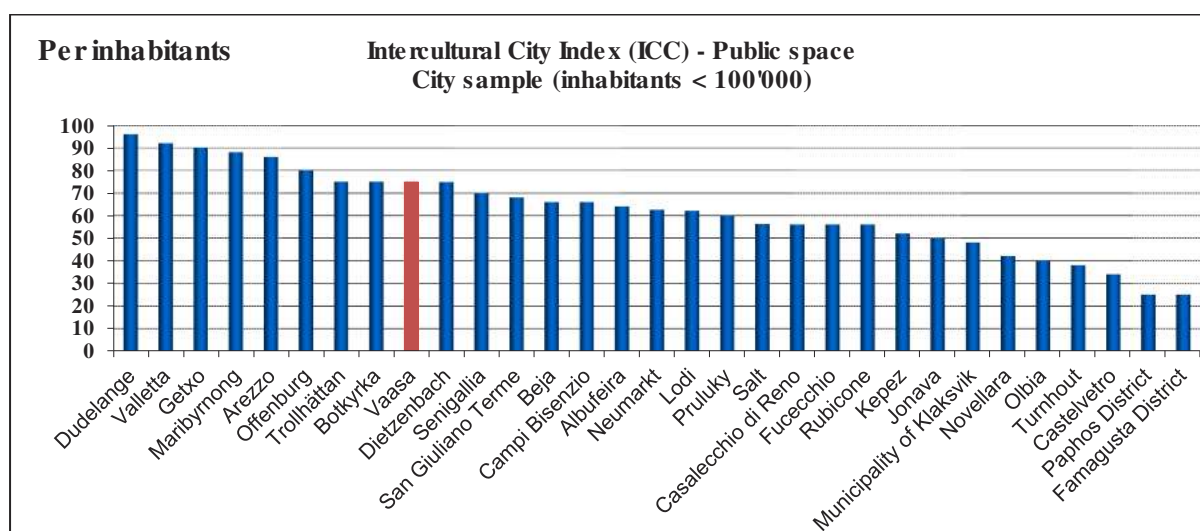
In Bergen (Norway) was created in 2004 the Kaleidoscope festival ([Fargespill](#)). The initiative produces stage performances with children and youngsters between the ages of 7 and 25 from all over the world. The performances are based on the cultural treasures the participants bring with them, such as traditional songs, dance moves and rhythms from their upbringing or heritage. The musical expressions are merged in medleys, with Norwegian folk traditions or expressions from modern youth culture. The performances are elevated by professional musicians, choreographers, instructors, sound- and light designers. The Fargespill-method is resource-oriented where everyone has something to contribute.

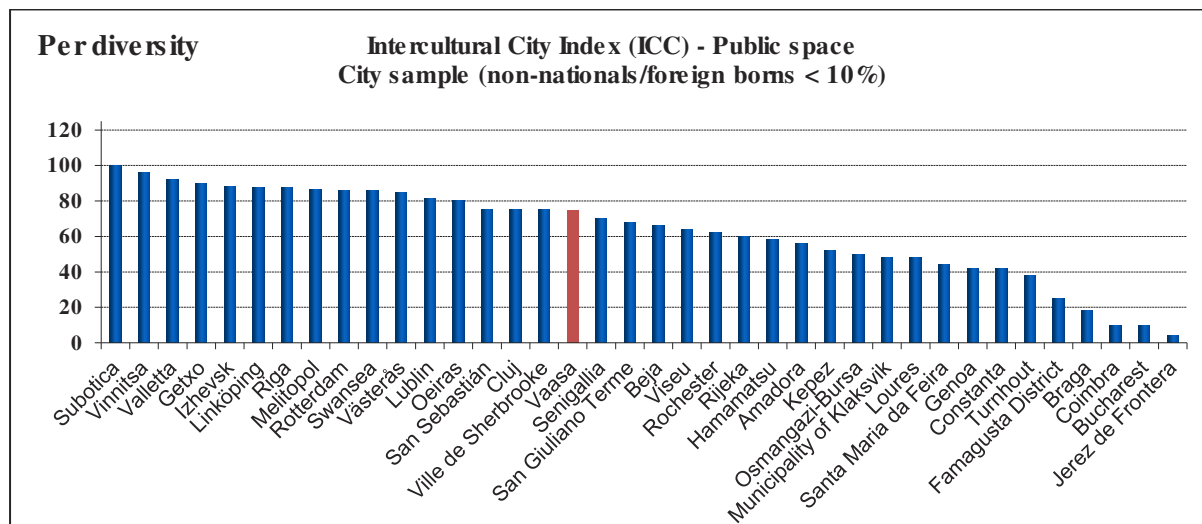
In Tenerife (Spain), most of the activities are developed through an insular strategy called "[Juntos en la misma dirección](#)" (Together in the same direction). With different working groups, the initiative organises a wide variety of activities on an ongoing basis (at least once a week), in which different profiles are invited to participate. Youth and children have an especial participation in the different activities organised, from community lunches, anti-rumours actions, etc. Furthermore, the intercultural perspective is part of the assessment criteria in different calls for proposals promoted by the Cabildo.

## **PUBLIC SPACE**

*Public spaces (streets, squares, parks, etc.) and facilities (public buildings, day centres, schools, health centres, etc.) are places which most citizens are obliged to use. They offer the possibility of meeting people of different nationalities, origins, languages, religions/beliefs, sexual orientations and age groups. For encounters between diverse people to actually occur, such spaces and facilities should be designed and animated in a way that all residents feel comfortable when using them. Conversely badly-managed spaces can become places of suspicion and fear of the "other". When this is the case, the intercultural city actively engages with all the people concerned, firstly to understand the local context from their perspective, and secondly to identify solutions largely support by them.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 75%, which is slightly higher than the city sample's achievement rate of 67.





Vaasa takes action to encourage meaningful intercultural mixing and interaction in public space. The city promotes and encourages intercultural initiatives in libraries, museums, and public parks. For instance, the public library has a project called “**Minun Kieleni**” (My language) which aims to motivate people and families of minority background to visit the libraries and at the same time borrow books in their own language. The museums have had exhibitions trying to show the similarities in background of different cultures. Within several projects, the city has recruited people of minority background to execute parts of them.

The city may take advantage of playgrounds like the Onkilahti one, where different activities could be done to facilitate interaction and mixing between the inhabitants of the city.

Vaasa does not have a formal commitment to consider the diversity of the population in urban planning. Some buildings have been renovated to facilitate the access for elderly people and people with reduced mobility. In the Local Plan for 2040, seven open debates will be organized to get the inputs of the inhabitants. One of them will be in English for people who do not talk Swedish or Finnish.

The city does not have areas in which people feel unwelcome or unsafe; nevertheless, Vaasa municipality is paying special attention to the areas in which social housing is predominant to improve wellbeing of all inhabitants. This is part of the [City Strategy 2022-2025](#) which includes as a goal the wellbeing of residents in the city and the promotion of meeting points, community-oriented services and close cooperation with social actors among others.

### Suggestions

Cities are encouraged to strengthen policies and actions to support a public space for all. Vaasa has already taken several steps to increase the accessibility of the public space and could draw further inspiration from other local practices.

In [Auckland](#) (New Zealand), when proposing an urban change, the Auckland Council partners with appropriate community organisations to engage with the communities affected. In 2017, the Council included the communities of South Auckland in an 'integrated area plan' to prepare for future development in the area. The engagement strategy included: gathering feedback at local community events, shopping malls, train stations and other hubs; utilising an 'All Our Ideas' web platform (championed by a local youth council); running public workshop sessions (world-cafe style). A key objective of this engagement strategy was to challenge the norm of community engagement and create effective ways to reach out to different ethnicities, age groups and communities in the area that typically do not engage or participate in a council-lead planning process. The Council received over 5000 pieces of feedback from the community, of which more than a third were submitted by Māori residents and half from people aged below 34 years.

In the area of urban renewal, [Montreal](#) (Canada) has a universal design guide for new buildings and the extension, renovation and maintenance of existing city buildings; a universal design policy supplements regulations that include technical criteria to be met when designing or refurbishing buildings or public spaces. Following the entry

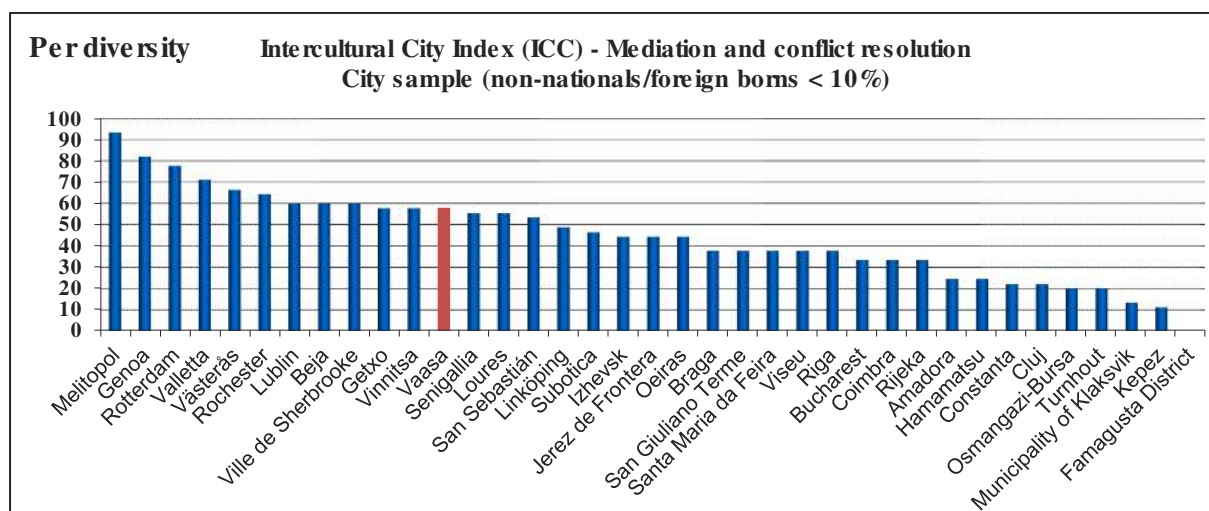
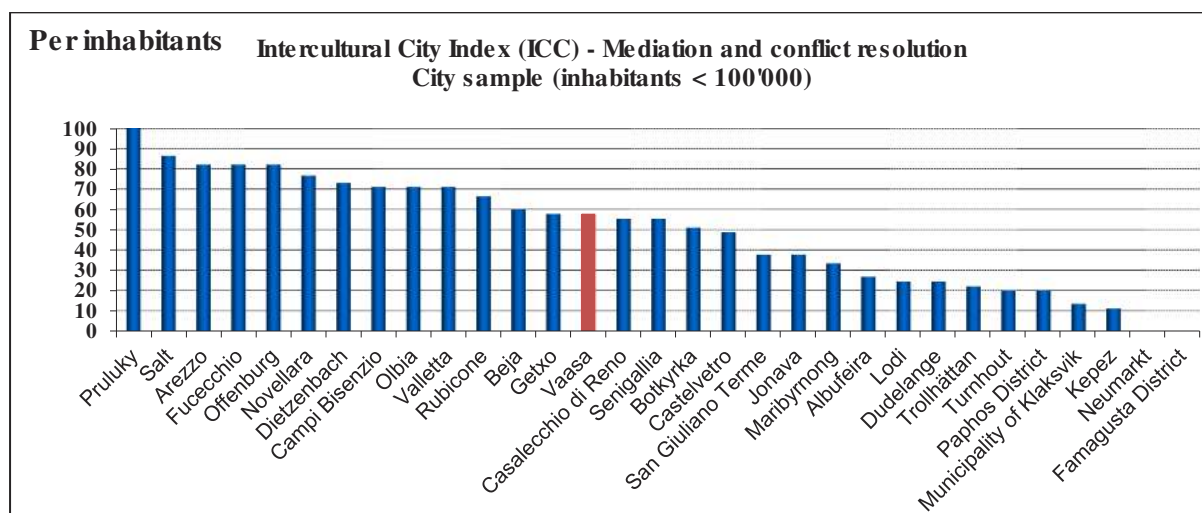
into force of these instruments, the city has, for instance, worked on standardising the design of public spaces so as to make it easier for people who do not speak French or have intellectual or visual impairments to find their way about; it provides family changing/locker rooms accessible to everyone (persons with reduced mobility, assisted by a person of the opposite sex, prams, LGBTQ +); it provides level or gently sloping routes for persons with reduced mobility, prams, delivery workers, staff with cleaning/maintenance equipment; and it also provides new short, direct routes and resting places for elderly people and short or overweight people, convalescents or people with other mobility issues.

ICC programme resources on housing, public spaces and urban planning are available [here](#).

## MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*In diverse societies there is always the potential for misunderstanding and conflict over values, behaviour or resources. In cities, where people with different cultural backgrounds and socio-economic statuses live together in close proximity, such tensions are natural and indeed part of everyday life. Instead of denying, ignoring, or repressing conflict, the intercultural city seeks to anticipate, identify, address and resolve issues to the satisfaction of all protagonists without compromising the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The intercultural city views conflict as a normal feature of free, dynamic and communicative communities and sees the very process of conflict mediation and resolution as an opportunity for innovation and sustainable social cohesion.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 58%, which is the same rate of the city sample's achievement of 58%.



Vaasa works with a regional mediation service funded with State funds. The Ostrobothnia Mediation Office provides mediation services for 23 municipalities in the region, all free of charge. Mediation cases come frequently from the police. The city provides intercultural mediation in the city administration for general purposes.

The city has a generalist municipal service which deals with religious conflicts among others. Some conflicts connected to religion could be reported to the police as hate crimes.

### Suggestions

There is room to improve on intercultural mediation. If the municipality is interested in expanding its work in this area, the case of Cascais (Portugal) can be an interesting example, where the “[EDUCA](#)” project is implemented. The initiative is formed by a group of immigrant and / or immigrant descendent mediators providing training and support to develop mediation in the educational context. These mediators are interlocutors in the pupil/school/guardian triangle and a source for signalling specific individualised interventions. Schools feel that they have a quality resource: availability to play with students in the playground, management of emerging conflicts among students, identification and signalling of problem situations. The partners committed to the practice include the creation of a consortium which plays a central role in helping to break down prejudices about some families by trying other ways of approaching problem situations.

In Reggio Emilia (Italy), the [Centro per la Mediazioni dei Conflitti](#) (Centre for Social Conflict Mediation) identifies and support the mediation of conflicts in a network perspective (municipal police, Carabinieri, State Police, ASL, Social Services, URP, schools, voluntary associations, etc.) achieving greater integration of initiatives and projects that are located in the locality. It is particularly skilled in the integration of foreigners and locals, for example in the use of common spaces, noise, pets, private gardens; presence of animals; air pollution, informal groups of young people: and other uses of public space.

In Sabadell (Spain) has some good examples of how to increase understanding of different religions and to work together to promote tolerance. The [map of the diversity of beliefs in Sabadell](#) shows all the spiritual, religious, or non-religious and humanistic traditions present in the city. There is information such as places of worship when they meet, how to contact them, etc. The map is a tool to bring them closer together and to encourage them to set up common projects. For the last ten years there has also been an Open day for worship centres to promote knowledge of religious diversity and freedom of conscience when there are guided tours and open doors to various worship centres in the city.

ICC programme resources on intercultural competence and mediation are available [here](#).

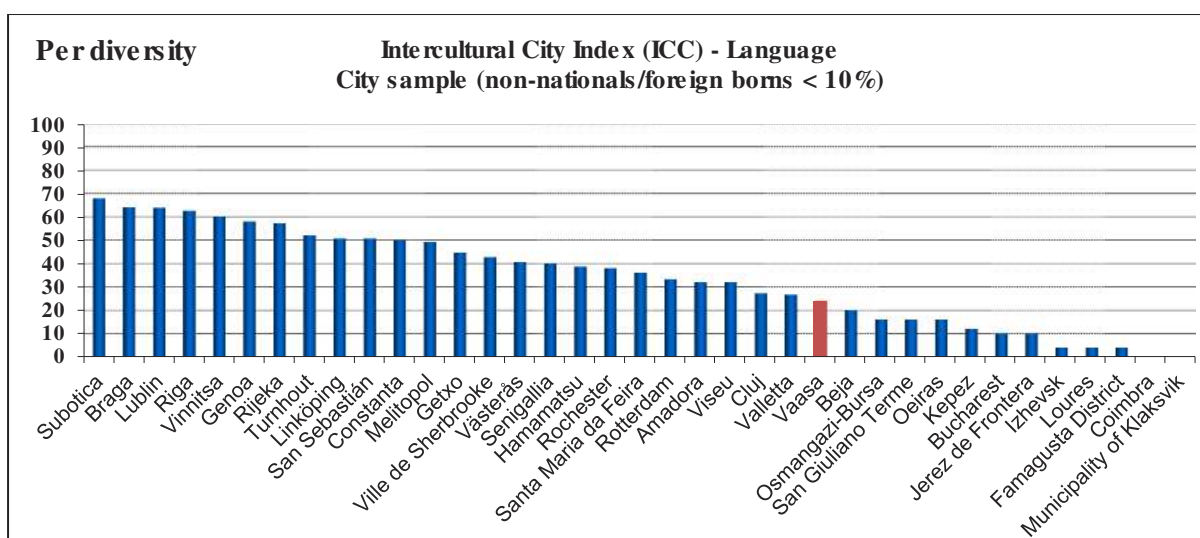
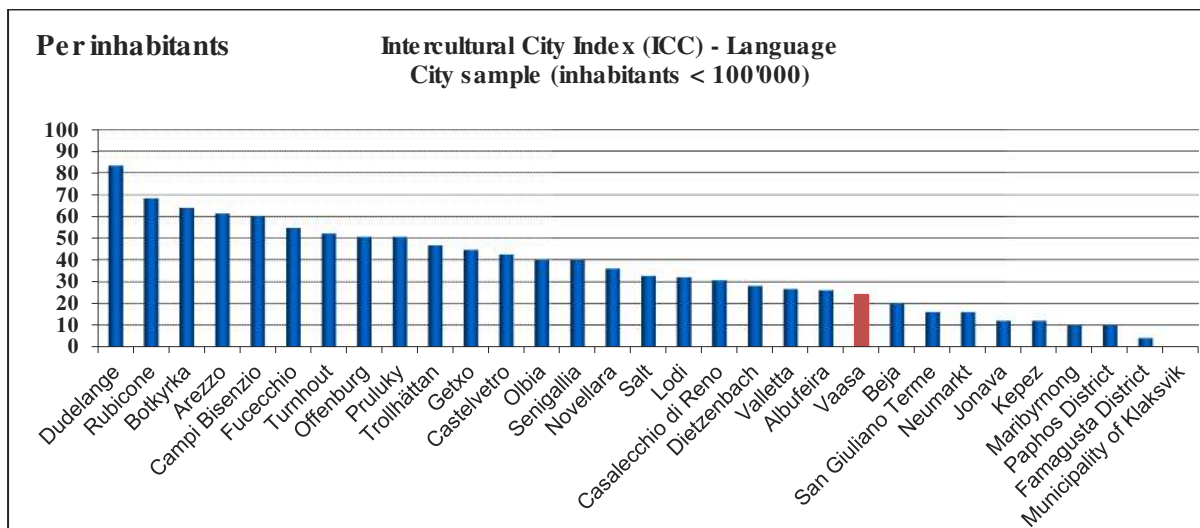
## **LANGUAGE**

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*The provision of courses and other facilities for people with migrant backgrounds to learn the receiving country's language(s) is important to ensure social and economic integration. It does however need to be supplemented with activities which highlight the value of other languages, and enable people with migrant origins not only to preserve and transmit their languages to their children and other members of the community, but also to take pride in them as a heritage enriching the local community. An intercultural city promotes multilingualism as a resource for education, business, tourism, cultural life, etc. It underlines the value of all languages present in the city, for instance by giving opportunities to diverse language speakers to express themselves in their mother tongue in public and at cultural events and by promoting all events that offer opportunities for linguistic exchanges and mixing.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 24%, which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of 46%.





Vaasa is a bilingual city in which Finnish and Swedish are part of the daily life. English is also used in different communication contexts and initiatives and seems like the usual language to address non-national residents. Although non-national mother languages could be learned under specific circumstances (see Education), they are not usually used in public communications and local services.

Occasionally, Vaasa schools have organized language clubs such as Russian, Italian, French, or German to uphold children’s mother language skills and give their parents a possibility to socialize with each other.

The city provides specific language training in the official languages for groups hard-to-reach. Different languages courses have been organised for stay at home women and unemployed persons from minority or migrant background, in collaboration with the Vaasa’ institutes and the local Employment Office.

Finally, the Vaasa City Adult Education organise “Languages cafés” on Fridays for minority languages – these are open events where anyone can come and practice a language of use your own language freely. Different tables for Spanish, German or Italian can be found in these sessions, depending on the participants.

Vaasa does not facilitate the awareness-raising of migrant languages in the city, and it does not support initiatives seeking to give a positive image of migrant/minority languages.

### Suggestions

Vaasa could be interested in improving language provision, including more languages (besides English) in the local services and communications.

The experience of Barcelona (Spain) could be interesting for that. The [Barcelona Centre for Linguistic Normalization](#) (CLN) welcomes over 17,000 students from 127 different countries. The classes are an active

example of diversity and the respect of difference. The CNL has adopted intercultural dialogue as one of the strategic values of its educational project. New arrivals are acquainted with the characteristic traits of Catalan culture, from the position of exchange, plurality, interaction, and the hybridisation of culture. Activities include a programme to furnish skills to people from immigrant groups to be “qualified disseminators” of their languages of origin and provide them the tools to promote the teaching of the languages of origin amongst immigrant groups; promoting and providing support to the different programmes of language pairs that exist in the city, both in the exchange of Catalan as well as in the languages of origin of immigrants; and promoting the Espai Llengua i Cultura (Space for Language and Culture) as a reference for the dissemination of cultural activities in Catalan amongst students who are learning it and as a space for intercultural stimulation.

In Lisbon (Portugal), the city and the Portuguese Ministry of Health have partnered with local NGOs and hospitals to create manuals about [health in several languages](#). The leaflets were designed in partnership with local groups of migrants that were able to raise the most pressing topics to discuss including for example pregnancy, birth and STD control and diabetes. The manual further included images to describe each subject. Mediators from the designated communities were hired to moderate conversations with local groups, develop the texts and translate them and the process of developing the manuals was participatory.

[Ansan](#) City offers Korean language education for non-nationals. The city itself runs Korean language education programmes while commissioning private organisations to complete the offer. There is a course in preparation for the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), which is considered a necessity for non-nationals to find a job in Korea, and a social integration programme as a compulsory course to acquire Korean nationality. With the view of helping intercultural children and youth retain their mother tongue, Ansan also offers mother tongue classes primarily centring on Russian. In addition, to help locals understand interculturality and acquire language proficiency, the city runs a range of other foreign language education courses (English, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc.). The city also publishes quarterly newsletters to inform residents of updates related to their daily lives. Published in eight languages (Korean, English, Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Nepalese, and Cambodian), the newsletter’s circulation is around 40,000 copies a year. The city also publishes a guide to life and legal affairs in the Republic of Korea for non-nationals in eight languages, 5,000 copies annually. A local TV programme, entitled Wongok-dong Neighbourhood Meeting, is produced six times a year and representatives from different countries are invited.

ICC programme resources on multilingualism are available [here](#).

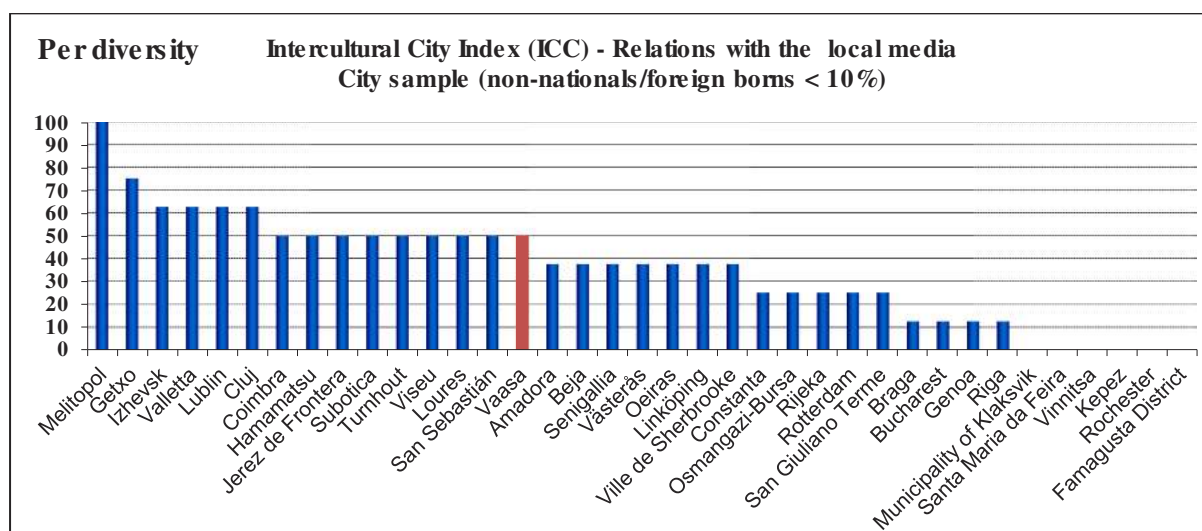
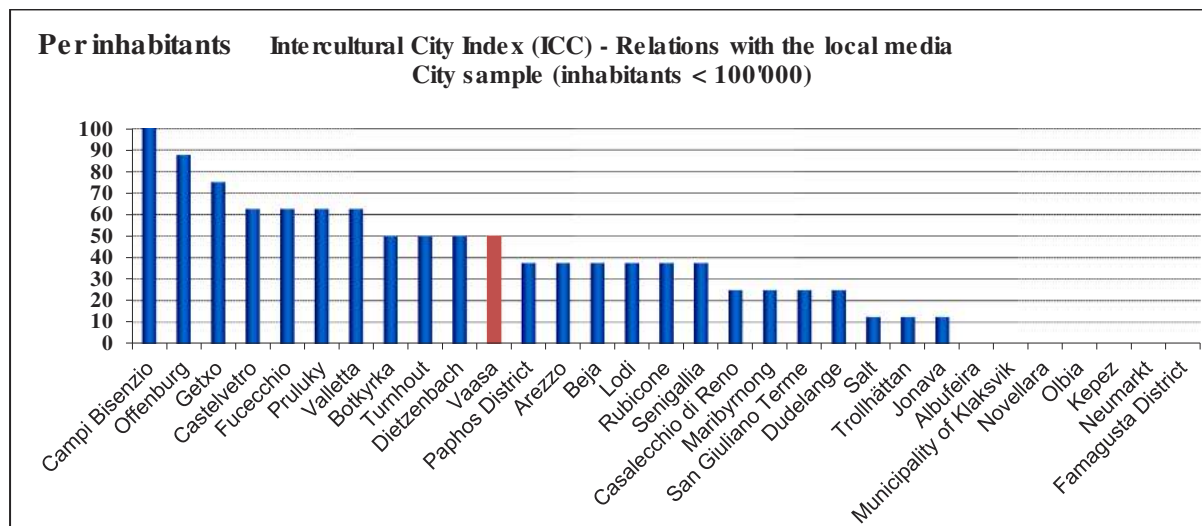
## **MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**

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*Traditional and social media have a very powerful influence on attitudes towards cultural diversity and other diversities. Much of the information people access is generated by international newsgroups, national media, or by private persons in the case of social media. Nevertheless, there is still much the city authorities can do to achieve a climate of public opinion more conducive to positive intercultural relations. In its communication, an intercultural city constantly highlights the positive contribution of people with migrant/minority backgrounds to the social, cultural and economic development of the city. More importantly, the city partners with local media agencies so that they purvey a similar message and cover events occurring in the city in an objective and unbiased way.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 50%, which is slightly higher than the city sample’s achievement rate of 47%.





Vaasa has a communication strategy to improve the visibility and image of people with migrant/minority background in local communication tools. Through official communication (videos, photos, and press releases), the city has a strong emphasis on visualizing Vaasa as an international and multicultural city. The city's Communication Department, whenever is possible, makes sure using photos that also shows people with migrant/minority backgrounds.

The city does not provide support for advocacy, media training or mentorship for journalists with migrant/minority background and does not monitor in which way traditional local/national media portray people with minority/migrant backgrounds. The city does not engage with local media when they portray people through negative stereotypes.

### Suggestions

Vaasa may be interested in developing a more comprehensive media strategy address to raise awareness on interculturalism and diversity, including at monitoring how social and traditional media portray those with a migrant or minority background.

In the Basque city of [Bilbao](#) (Spain), the municipal communication office develops the communication strategy of the Municipal Citizenship and Diversity Plan, organising communication of the strategic milestones of Bilbao City Council's intercultural action. Communication is made through press conferences and releases, as well as through social networks with specific intercultural content, where publications related to this content are made. Bilbao City Council provides support to different media projects, promoted by journalists with a migrant background through grants such is the TV channel from the 'Emigrados sin Fronteras' association and Candela Radio. The city also has an [ant-irumours initiative](#) that has been providing training and developing actions to fight against prejudices and to improve social cohesion for the last 10 years.

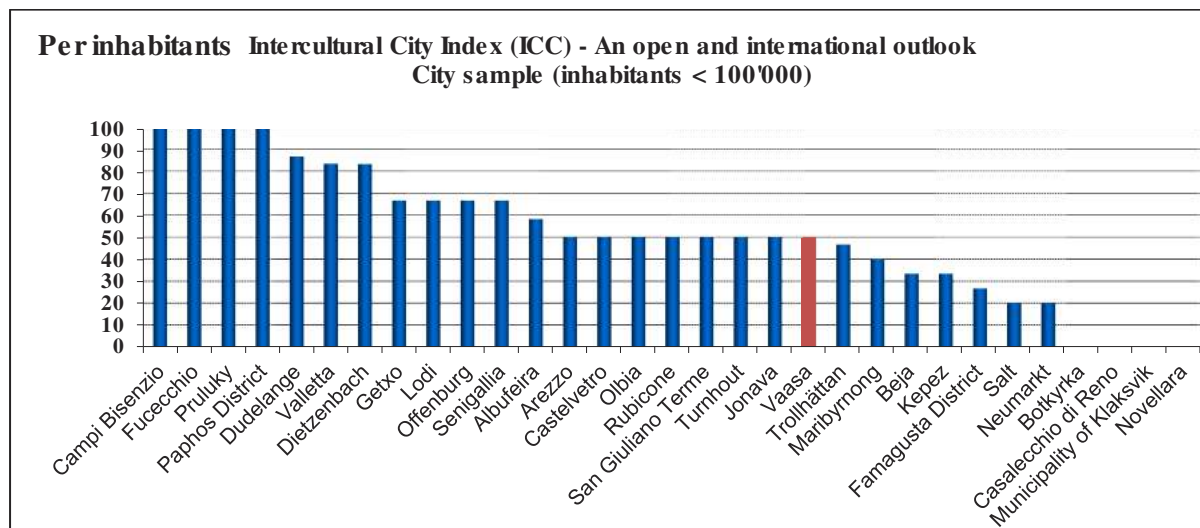
[Camden](#) (London borough, UK) is active in this field. Camden Council has a communication strategy to improve the visibility and image of people with migrant/minority backgrounds in the local media and the communication department is instructed to highlight diversity as an advantage regularly and in various types of communication. One of Camden's defining features is its diversity and the Council's central mission is to ensure 'no-one gets left behind' and this implies that it focuses on communication projects that give visibility to people of all backgrounds. The Council also actively seeks to promote Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic<sup>2</sup> leaders, by supporting its cabinet councillors, Youth members of parliament and community leaders by using them as spokespeople for key issues facing the borough. Regarding media monitoring, the Council itself monitors the way in which traditional local and/or national media, as well as social media, portray people with migrant/minority backgrounds.

ICC programme resources on communication and public awareness are available [here](#).

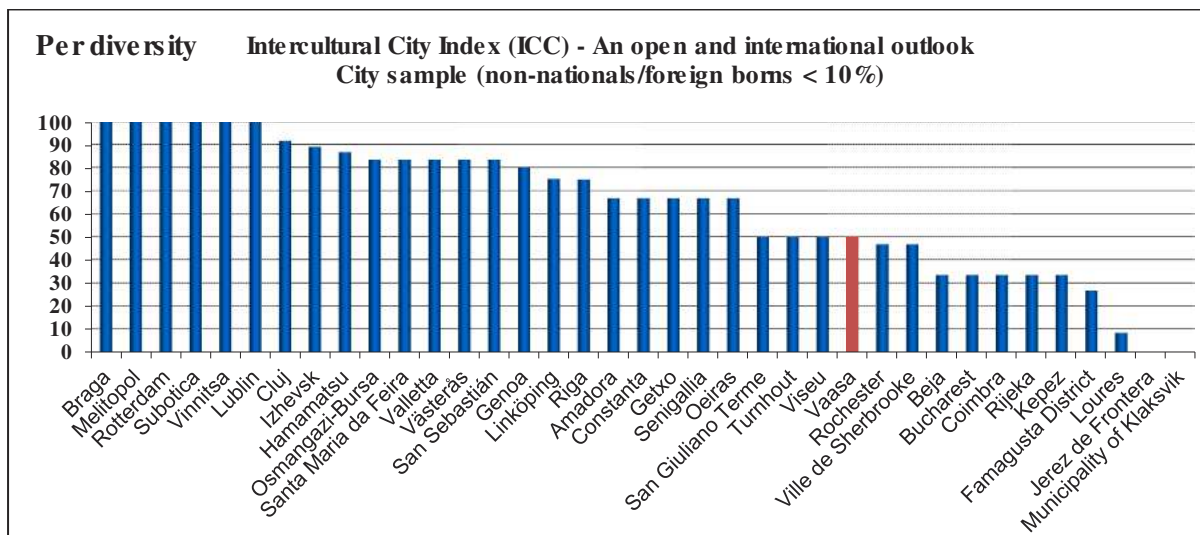
## INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

*Although cities have little or no competence in foreign policy, they can actively seek to make connections in other countries to develop business relations, exchange knowledge and know-how, encourage tourism, or simply acknowledge the ties the city may have elsewhere. An intercultural city actively encourages interactions with the outside world and in particular with the cities, regions or countries of origin of its inhabitants.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 50, which is lower than the city sample's achievement rate of 69%.



<sup>2</sup> Reference terms specifically used in the UK context. This footnote is also applicable for the rest of the document, each time these reference terms are used.



Vaasa has a global **City Strategy 2022-2025** which refers to the international character of the city, and its goals of being economically sustainable and attractive for all its citizens. Furthermore, the city has an international programme, although it is considered somewhat outdated, with the following goals:

- Strengthening international competitiveness, ie cooperating internationally with areas crucial for Vaasa's business life;
- Increasing the amount of external funding, ie taking part in more international projects;
- Increasing the expertise within the city organization, ie promoting staff to go abroad on a shorter exchange called Job-shadow for 2-4 weeks;
- Contributing to the prosperity and internationality of our citizens through a successful integration and having a sound infrastructure;
- Strengthening the city's image and attractiveness internationally.

In addition, Vaasa also enhances its network of twinning-cities and since December 2023, the city had a partnership agreement with the Ukrainian city of Kherson. The partnership will focus on sustainable development, youth, education and science, culture and sports, as well as city administration and democracy. The city is also working in a joint strategy with the Swedish city of Umeå.

As a city with an important university life, Vaasa has a programme called "**Vaasa international talents**", funded by the city and jointly coordinated by the universities, helping students into working life. All international students, both exchange and degree students will get a comprehensive "Welcome to Vaasa" lecture, when the universities arranged arrival information for new students in the fall and spring.

The adult education centre also provides courses for non-nationals about the local history, and a spouse program has been developed.

The city does not develop business relations with countries or cities of origin of its diaspora groups.

### Suggestions

Vaasa could reinforce its role as a multicultural and welcoming city by improving its international outlook. Some examples from other ICC cities could be inspirational in doing that.

In Manchester (UK), the City Council has a long standing and sustainable approach to developing international relations which aim to support the broader social, economic and environmental objectives of the city. That includes, for example, the work with Wuhan in China to develop a joint economic collaboration study which led to the appointment of a Manchester Officer within the British Consulate General in Wuhan. This post works on a range of projects on behalf of Manchester City Council, Manchester's universities, cultural institutions and local business

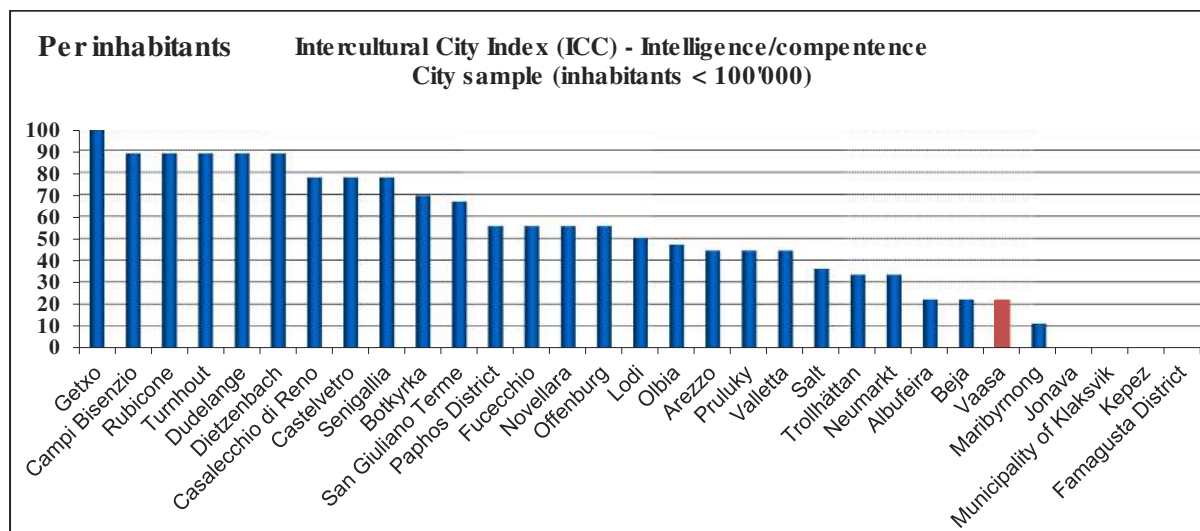
community. The Council provides a specific budget to the international policy. The city reaches out to foreign students and other young people arriving through exchange programmes. Finally, Manchester City Council works closely with the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, MIDAS, Department for International Trade, the Manchester China Forum, the Manchester India Partnership and local Consulates to progress business relations with key countries and cities. This includes establishing joint programmes for international visits where the Council deliver presentations or host meetings with senior political and business representatives.

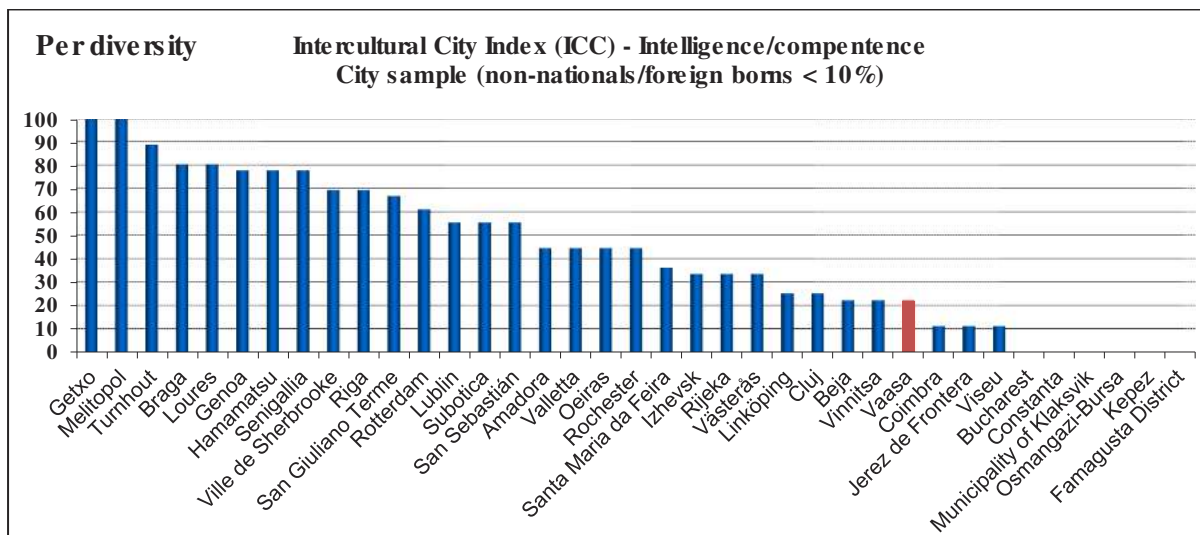
In the Portuguese city of [Santa Maria da Feira](#), diversity and migration are perceived as a window to explore new opportunities and new markets. For this reason, the municipality is planning the launch of an online platform that will link local business owners of all backgrounds with the Portuguese diaspora and with the countries of origin of local immigrants. The launch of this platform is the culmination of several initiatives that reach out through business partnerships. The municipality has in fact regular business exchanges with Kenitra, in Morocco. The partnership, made possible thanks to the presence of Moroccan nationals in Santa Maria da Feira, started with a visit by a Kenitra delegation in 2012. Since then, many protocols between the two municipalities have been signed, in addition to the private sector business relations established.

## INTERCULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND COMPETENCE

*Nobody can be an expert in all the languages and cultures that coexist in contemporary cities. Yet, in an intercultural city, officials have an intercultural “mind-set” which enables them to detect cultural differences and modulate their responses accordingly. Intercultural intelligence and competence require a specific know-how when dealing with unfamiliar situations and not an in-depth and often elusive knowledge of all cultures. Such sensitivity and self-confidence are not commonly-seen. It is a technical skill which can be acquired through training and practice. In an intercultural city, the authorities view such skills as equally important and essential to the good functioning of the city as the other professional and technical skills usually expected from public employees.*

Vaasa achieved a rate of 22%, which is considerably lower than the city sample’s achievement rate of 60%.





Vaasa does not have statistical or qualitative information about diversity and intercultural relations. The city aims to do it in a near future, especially because the city has the goal to have a population of 100,000 inhabitants, in a context in where Finnish speaking population is decreasing, and Swedish speakers and non-national languages speakers are increasing.

The city does not carry out surveys that include questions about the public perception of migrants or minorities. In any case, via the yearly Happiness Questionnaire is open to all Vaasa's inhabitants, including those of them who have a minority or migrant backgrounds. The questionnaire is distributed through different channels and counts with the voluntary participation of the Vaasa inhabitants. Last year, the questionnaire received 12,59 answers (of population 68,000) and 30 of minority background (out of around 7,000).

Vaasa promotes the intercultural competences of its officials and staff through training course, interdisciplinary seminars, and networks.

### Suggestions

Despite the lower scoring for this indicator, Vaasa could easily improve its intercultural work in this area. In that sense, it could be interesting to examine the tools developed in Botkyrka (Sweden). In this city, municipal administrations are obliged to report every year on how their activities comply with the municipality's Equality Strategy, which includes a clear section on interculturalism. This is regulated by the municipality's steering document '[Strategy for an equal Botkyrka](#)' and '[Guidelines for an equal administration](#)'. Similarly, over the years, the city has been recurring investments in courses on interculturality aimed at civil servants and politicians. Recently, for example, the HR unit under the Municipal Head Office organised a course for its employees where they were trained to review their work from a norm-critical anti-racist perspective.

Regarding intercultural training, it could be interesting to check different experiences. [Montreal](#) (Canada) has developed and provided an interesting training initiative on intercultural communication in the workplace. This explores obstacles to efficient intercultural communication in the workplace; how people perceive others and themselves in an intercultural setting; cultural diversity in the workplace and the factors behind certain behaviours; and develops skills and attitudes which foster co-operation. A reference document on intercultural skills is also being developed. Likewise, the [Inclusive Auckland Framework](#) developed in the Australian city of Auckland includes a focus on promoting intercultural competence to create inclusive workplaces and to enable leadership for inclusion. This includes anti-racism workshops and eLearning resources on unconscious bias. Finally, [Reykjavik](#) (Iceland) has designed a specific training course for city employees to prevent misunderstandings in a diverse workplace and to open up a dialogue about discrimination, equality, prejudice, and stereotypes. All city departments are targeted. It is specifically workplace oriented in its focus.

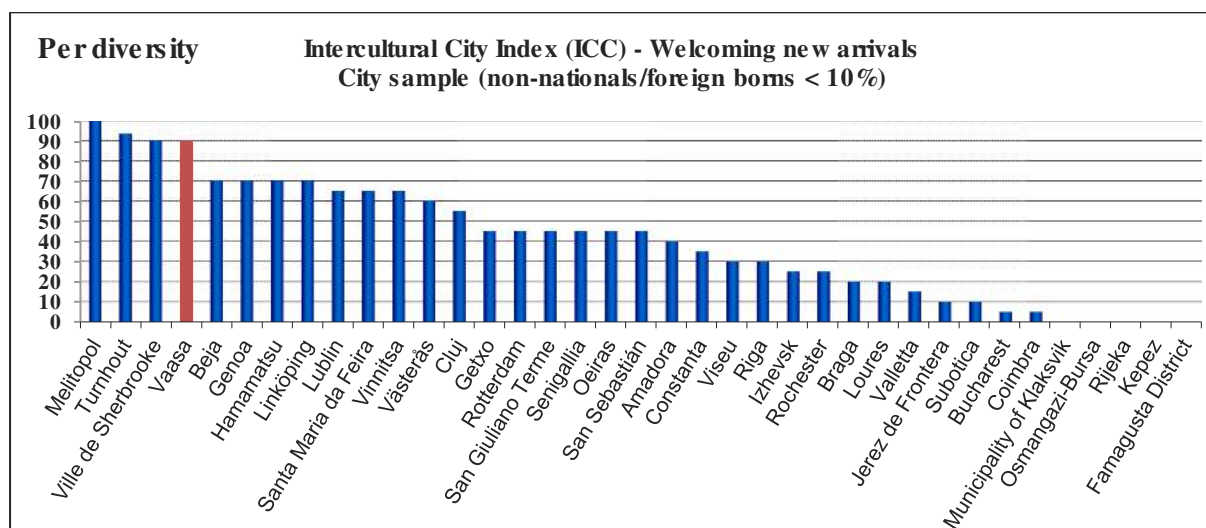
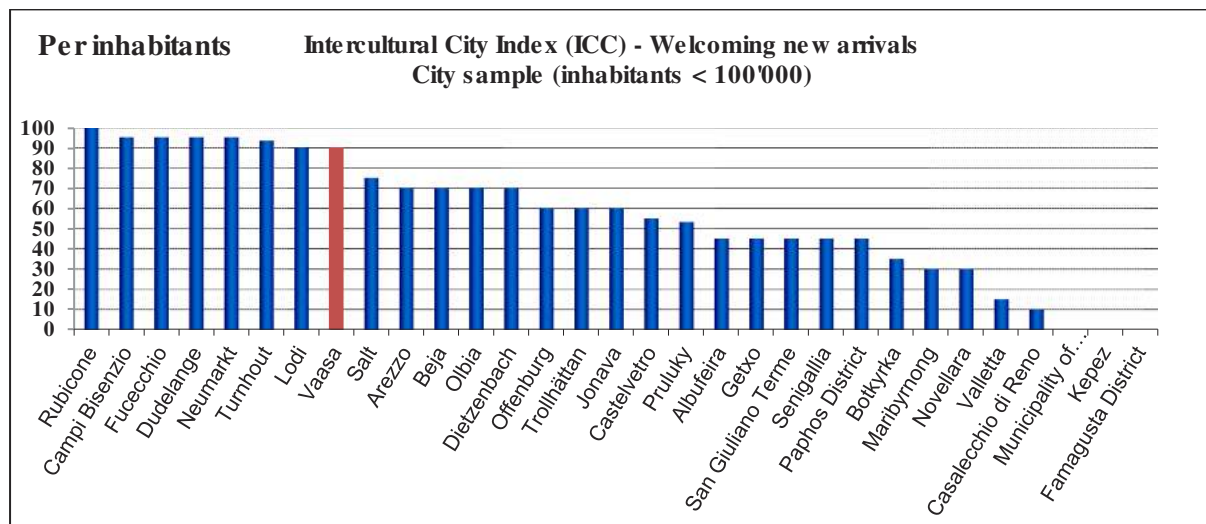
ICC programme resources on intercultural competence are also available [here](#).

### **WELCOMING NEWCOMERS**



People arriving in a city for an extended stay, whatever their circumstances (expats, migrant workers, spouses, refugees, unaccompanied minors, retired persons, etc.), are likely find themselves disorientated. The less familiar they are with the new environment, the more support they will need to feel comfortable and confident enough to start building a new social and professional network. The way in which the city coordinates and effectively delivers various support measures strongly conditions their capacity to integrate or, conversely, their tendency to remain confined to a cultural “ghetto”. This also depends to a great degree on whether the rest of the city’s population is open to the idea of welcoming newcomers in their capacity as residents and citizens or, on the contrary, is accustomed to viewing newcomers as outsiders who pose a potential threat. Again, it is the message the authorities convey on diversity, in communication or through concrete actions, that determines to a certain degree attitudes towards newcomers.

Vaasa achieved a rate of 90%, which is considerably higher than the city sample’s achievement rate of 57%.



The city of Vaasa sends a welcoming letter to all newcomers. The letter is in Finnish Swedish and English and entails information about the city, including the whereabouts of the [Welcome Office](#), general information about the city, transport and other public services. The Welcome Office provides advice and help with official paperwork and applications; immigration matters; health and care services; housing; leisure activities; working; education and training; government services and the Finnish society/ language courses. The working language of the Office are Finnish, Swedish, English, Ukrainian and Russian. Through this Office, the city could provide welcome support for particular groups of newcomers such as family members, refugees, etc., or indicate them where to find it (Asylum Centre for asylum seekers; welcome sessions for international students; etc.). It seems that reaching the Welcome Office could be a bit difficult.

Vaasa offers different welcome services through its **Integration Unit**. The Unit provides guidance and counselling for individuals and families granted international protection and those who have got a positive decision to the asylum application. Other services include individual and group counselling. The Unit's main focus is on supporting individuals and families in different everyday life challenges, strengthening the customer's knowledge and understanding about the Finnish society, and encouraging the customer's own management skills. The Unit cooperates with different actors to jointly prepare new practices and models, which set out how integration is to be planned, delivered, and monitored in the area.

It is worth to mention that the services are mainly offer to quota refugees and also individuals/families who have been granted international protection who are in Vaasa. The decision of accepting quota-refugees rests with the city council, and an appropriate contract with Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment is signed by the major.

Four times a year, the city organises open lectures (Welcome to Vaasa) where anyone is welcome to participate and receive information about Vaasa as a place to live, some of the services, etc.

### Suggestions

Vaasa already holds welcoming events for new citizens and provides particular welcoming support for refugees, students and unaccompanied minors who arrive at the city. The Welcome Office and the Integration Unit provides a lot of information and support for the newcomers. Nevertheless, it could be always inspiring to discover what other cities are doing in this area.

The Portuguese city of [Amadora](#), with the Portuguese Network of Intercultural Cities (RPCI), has developed an app called Portugal Incoming. The app launched in 2019 is a major practical contribution to the integration of migrants in Portugal, bringing all relevant information on how to navigate the Portuguese services and bureaucracy, as well as access to information about cultural and social events into one place. The app is constantly updated and is available in a number of languages. The information has also been gathered into a guide. In addition, a guide for practitioners on how to conduct welcoming sessions has been developed, together with a matrix for the creation of municipal integration plans and strategies.

In 2019, [Leeds](#) (UK) started a 15-month Community Connector project which aimed to support new migrants to connect with local services and existing community networks through building bridges that encourage participation and independence. This project also added value to wider programs of work by providing a better understanding of culture of place and community cohesion. The project successfully recruited five Community Connectors who have lived experience, they added value to the wider team by providing skills, knowledge, experience and a range of languages to support vulnerable migrant households. The project exceeded the target of 100 households and reached 250. This engagement was the result of such an initiative being able to bridge the gap and overcome barriers for those households. This has also resulted in savings to the council through effectively responding to the needs of vulnerable migrant households during the pandemic.

[Neumarkt](#) (Germany) offers an annual reception and all newcomers are invited four times per year. Welcome packs and the reception address all aspects of city life including sustainability, fair trade and integration. Surveys are conducted for feedback as to why people move to Neumarkt and the city enjoys hearing the stories of new arrivals. Information materials are also provided to newcomers including flyers on the community centre; free time offers; the city newsletter with all the programmes at the community centre; school and education information; and the sustainability strategy. There is also information on support for older newcomers from the Genial/genius club who help older people live for longer in their own house. After the reception there is a 1.5-hour tour of the town and a small meeting in the Bürgerhaus with snacks.

The [island of Tenerife](#) have created a welcome guide for children called ¡Hola!. The guide has created by the children working group (Amiguitos y Amiguitas) of the Together in the Same Direction programme, and it has included the participation of different actors and institution in the island.

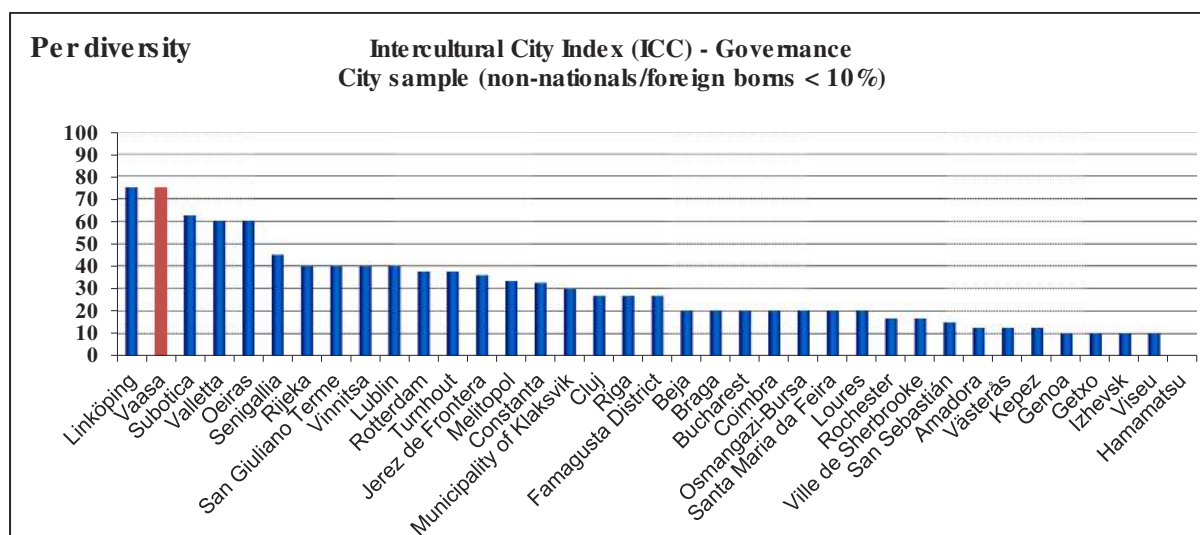
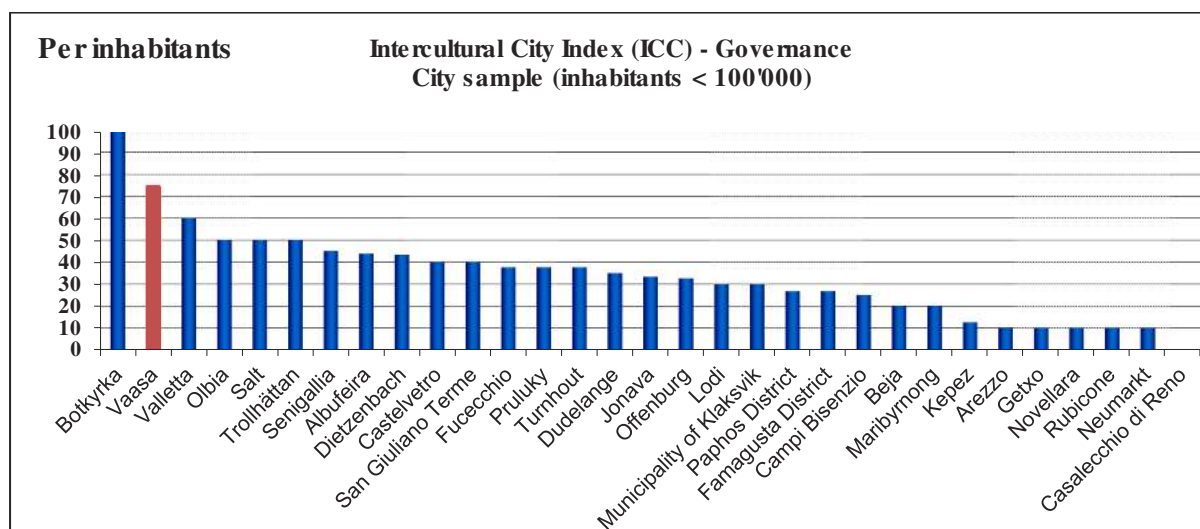
ICC programme resources on refugees and welcoming policies are also available [here](#).



## LEADERSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP

The most powerful and far-reaching action a city can take to be more intercultural is to open up democratic representation and decision-making to all residents of the city irrespective of their origin, nationality or residence status. Formal political rights at the local level are determined nationally or at the regional level in some federal states. Nonetheless, there is much that a city council can do to influence the way in which diverse groups interact and co-operate around the allocation of power and resources. An intercultural city strives to include all residents in the policy-making process and ensures thereby that public services are provided according to their diverse needs and not according to their cultural or political proximity to public decision-makers.

Vaasa achieved a rate of 75, which is considerably higher than the city sample's achievement rate of 37.



Vaasa is developing a strong work in the governance (leadership and citizenship) area. According to the Finnish law, people who reside in a municipality could vote and stand as candidate in local elections after two years of residence. EU and EFTA nationals could stand as candidates in the local elections if they have live 51 days previous to the elections in the municipality. At this moment, there are elected members of the Vaasa' City Council that are foreign-born or have dual nationality.

The city has a consultative body to advise the municipal government on diversity and integration matters. The **Multiculturalism Board** is an advisory body and has as its tasks are:

- To initiate, give motions and make statements on the integration services of the city. The development of the services to promote the integration and wellbeing of the immigrants and on two-way integration;

- To promote mutual and cross-administrative liaison work between authorities as well as dialogue and cooperation with immigrants and organizations representing them;
- To follow up the integration program together with other key stakeholders;
- To organize information and advice related to these questions;
- To submit an annual report on its activities and;
- Other tasks given to the board by the municipality

The board has 13 member - six are Council political representatives, three city officials with special knowledge (Head of Integration Unit, of Welcome Office, of Asylum Centre) and four are representatives of minorities/migrants. The Board works mainly in Finnish and Swedish, but English would be introduced as a working language according to the Integration Programme.

Vaasa does not have any standard for representation with people with migrant/minority backgrounds in mandatory boards supervising schools or other public services.

The city occasionally takes initiatives to encourage people with migrant/minority background to engage in political life. The Integration Programme 2023-2026 includes awareness raising campaigns about how to vote in the 2025 municipal elections. In the last elections, information (and debates) in English were promoted. The **Youth Board** is also engaged in these actions.

Finally, the city has a website called "[It is easy to be an Influencer](#)" on the City of Vaasa, where they are different ways to participate in the civic and political life of the city. Many of the subjects existing on Finnish and Swedish are yet to be translated, but there is general information about the advisory boards, how to prepare an initiative for the City Council, how to apply for funding associations, how to make ethic complaints, etc.

### Suggestions

Vaasa has a good score in this field, but the work of others can always provide inspiration to take forward new initiatives.

An example to draw inspiration from is the Multicultural Ambassadors' Program (MAP) developed in [Ballarat](#) (Australia). It has established to provide leadership within the migrant community, by encouraging minorities to participate in the political life of the city. The programme aims to enhance community awareness while fostering social cohesion and mutual acceptance.

It is also interesting to mention how [Bradford](#) (UK) has developed its Intercultural Strategy: Together for Stronger Communities 2018-2023). The strategy and its action plan have resulted after a important consultation process, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods (board tables, focus groups, online surveys, vox pops, interviews, etc.). The Stronger Communities Together strategy's team manage an innovation fund that will solicit proposals for innovative and collaborative projects in the area of integration and interculturalism in the broadest sense (i.e., including all forms of social integration - e.g., intergenerational, economic, sexual and disability). These funds will be allocated through participatory budgeting. Additionally, as a way to specifically address the challenge of representation at the higher level, Bradford launched the initiative "Council's Future Leaders Experience". This is a yearlong programme of learning, development, skills, shadowing, mentoring and networking for 20-40 employees at all levels within the organisation and beyond.

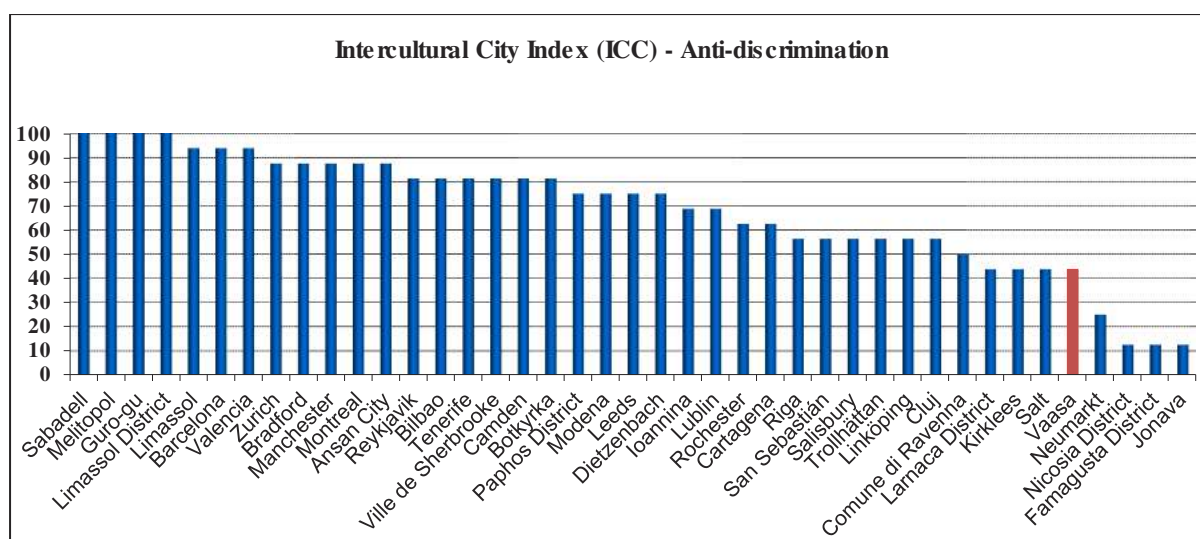
ICC programme resources on political and public participation are also available [here](#).

## **ANTI-DISCRIMINATION**

*Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, intolerance against certain religious groups, gender discrimination, prejudice and ethnocentrism, are all conducive to discriminatory attitudes and practices. They often subsist in people's minds despite laws proscribing discrimination against persons or groups of persons on grounds of race, colour, language, religion, nationality, national/ethnic origin or sexual orientation. An intercultural city assures every effort is made to ensure non-discrimination in all of its policies, programmes and activities. The city works in partnership with civil society organisations and other institutions that combat discrimination and offer support and reparation to victims.*

It also communicates widely on the risks discrimination presents for social cohesion, quality of life and the local economy.

Indicators on anti-discrimination have been included in the Intercultural Cities Index in 2019. The data collected so far is not yet relevant for statistical purposes. So far, 41 cities have replied to this new Intercultural Cities Index chapter. Vaasa rate of achievement in the field of anti-discrimination is 44%.



Vaasa has a [Equality and Non-Discrimination Programme](#) (in Finnish) to work on these questions. Vaasa does not carry out systematic reviews of all municipal rules and regulations to identify mechanisms that may discriminate residents. The service that advises and supports victims of discrimination is at regional/national level, and the city does not provide financial or logistical support to civil society organisations that advise and support victims of discrimination.

The city does not monitor or research the character or the extent of discrimination in the city. In 2021, and before the Equality and Non-Discrimination Programme, a questionnaire was done in the city. The poll was not widely answered by inhabitants but there was indication that 20% of the people answering had been victims of discrimination – mainly due to language or ethnic background.

Occasionally, the city runs anti-discrimination campaigns or raise awareness on discrimination. In 2022, Vaasa participated in the campaign [“Olen Antirasisti”](#) (I’m an antiracist) led by the national government.

Vaasa participates in a national network organised by the Ministry of Justice, [ETNO](#), which aims to implement the government program against racism and the Good Relations initiative. In 2023, and as part of the Good Relations Framework, an open dialogue was organised between local authorities and minority/migrant inhabitants. The list of issues showed different concerns on attitudes, interaction, and participation as well as on the feeling of safety.

### Suggestions

Vaasa has room for improvement in the anti-discrimination area. The work done in the framework of ETNO and the Good Relations initiative could help in fighting discrimination and promoting equal treatment.

In 2018, in [Dublin](#) (Ireland) conducted an Equality Review and Action Plan in its provision of social housing supports and homelessness services on the ground of racial or ethnic origin. It followed up with the preparation of an Equality Action Plan in 2019 to implement the recommendations made as part of the review. An equality review involved an examination of policy, plans, procedures, and practices in an organisation. It aimed to assess the extent to which discrimination and harassment are prevented, diversity is acknowledged and accommodated, and equality is promoted and achieved in the work and operations of an organisation. Recommendations were made on foot of the review to support the preparation of an equality action plan to improve the performance of an organisation in these areas. The initiative drew from the Irish Human Rights Equality and Human Rights Act 2014 that requires

public bodies to have regard, in all their functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights of staff, service-users, and policy beneficiaries.

[Sabadell](#) (Spain) provides information and protection to victims of ethnic and racial discrimination through the Civil Rights Office. Besides the attention to victims and management of discrimination cases, the Office also trains and raises awareness of the rights and duties recognised in the city. Another body, the Living Together Commission, made up of municipal and political parties' representatives, third-sector organisations, and the police, monitors and intervenes in cases of aggression or discrimination due to xenophobia, racism or homophobia. The city also counts on the municipal Ombudsman.

In [Geneva](#) (Switzerland) exists the "Complaints of Discrimination" initiative. The city funds and works with the Centre – Écoute contre le Racisme (C-ECR), which defends, advises, and assists people affected by racism. It can provide support to those who might experience discrimination from the services of the city. It can provide anonymised statistical information on the issues of racism and discrimination for the city. The C-ECR can, with the permission of the person involved, contact the City of Geneva, through the Project Manager for Diversity, to seek to resolve issues of discrimination that might arise in the operations of the city. The City of Geneva, again through the Project Manager for Diversity, can refer citizens who have experienced racism to the C-ECR.

In [Swansea](#) (United Kingdom), the Think Project, an educational programme aimed at individuals with a higher risk of far-right extremism, implemented in the framework of three-day courses, participants were encouraged to discuss and reflect on diversity issues and their own attitudes and views, engaging in open dialogue as well as experiential learning. The Think Project employed a non-criminalising approach, listening to their concerns and exploring the experience and information underlying their negative attitudes. After the course, participants were encouraged to engage in intercultural interaction. The project has proven to be able to transform young peoples' worldviews and thinking about diversity and societal change.

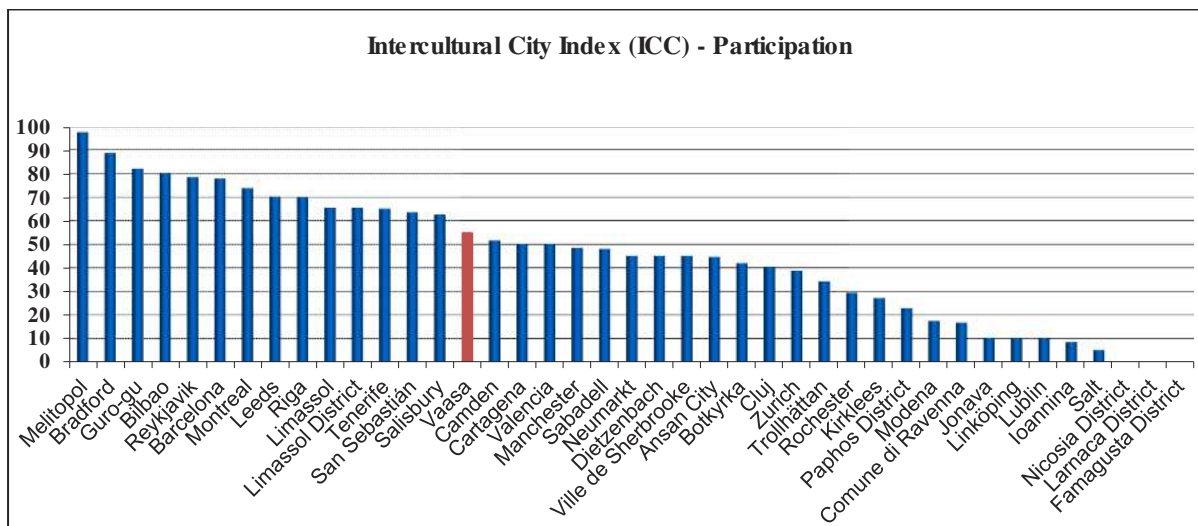
ICC programme resources on systemic discrimination are also available [here](#) and resources on anti-rumours are available [here](#).

## **PARTICIPATION**

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*Inclusion, power-sharing and participation are the golden keys of intercultural policy-making. A range of studies have demonstrated that inclusive integration policies produce better outcomes in terms of social cohesion, trust in the administration, safety, quality of services, welfare, good governance and economic growth. People with different backgrounds and experiences can bring innovative solutions to common challenges, as well as anticipate problems that might arise. Conversely, when people encounter barriers to participation, or otherwise choose intentionally not to participate, they may, passively, withdraw from social and public life or choose, actively, to live outside prevailing social customs and law. An intercultural city actively seeks the participation of all residents in the various decision-making processes that affect life in the city. By doing so, it increases support, and thereby the sustainability of local policies, while at the same significantly reducing the economic costs of social exclusion and instability.*

Indicators on participation have been included in the Intercultural Cities Index in 2019. The data collected so far is not yet relevant for statistical purposes. So far, 41 cities have replied to this new Intercultural Cities Index chapter. Vaasa's rate of achievement in the field of participation is 55%.



Vaasa has a [Participation Program 2021-2025](#) that emphasizes equality and interactivity among residents. The programme aims at engaging the inhabitants of Vaasa in decision making, including people with minority background. The city also generates polls towards the general population, mainly in Finnish, Swedish and English, including a yearly poll on **Happiness Indicator**.

There is no comprehensive integration strategy in the city, and the Integration Programme has not adopted with an extensive consultation process including people with migrant/minority backgrounds. Nevertheless, the programme had been developed with some extend of consultation. The Integration Programme has seven working groups to deal with aspects such as Safety, Education, Employment, Social-life and Networks, Health and Welfare and one on Children and Youth. There were also eight working groups which represented ethnic/minority organisations. The Multiculturalism Board was overseeing the process and finally adopting the Programme before it was sent to the City Council to be adopted in February 2023.

Vaasa has introduced participatory mechanisms to enable all city residents to participate in the decision-making process. The aforementioned “Participation Program” introduces some of the mechanisms mentioned above for inhabitants of Vaasa, such as participatory budgeting and also organizing of a digital feedback platform. The programme does not specifically emphasize intercultural dialogue, but the digital feedback platform will soon be available in English also. There are also roundtables and workshops for the inhabitants of Vaasa to be able to make their voice heard on issues concerning them for instance city planning.

There is no available data on the participation of city residents with migrant/minority backgrounds. As a future action, the Participation Program aims to use social sustainable development and democracy (SDG) indicators for measuring inhabitants’ participation. The migrant and minority participation in local voting is monitored by the ETNO network.

Vaasa does not take actions to ensure that residents with migrant/minority backgrounds are fairly represented in key institutions or organisations. In any case, following the Finnish law stipulates that in any political body the representation men/women need to be at least 40% to 60%.

### Suggestions

Comprehensive monitoring of the participation of residents with migrant/minority backgrounds in the decision-making processes is key to design better strategies to overcome barriers to participation. While acknowledging the difficulties in doing so, an approach could be to start by conducting minor research in particular areas of the city.

Under the Public Official Election Act of the Republic of Korea, only Korean nationals aged 25 or older may run for a local election. Those with foreign nationality are not allowed to be a candidate although they are entitled to vote in local elections three years after the acquisition of permanent residency. People with foreign nationality are entitled to take part in political parties. This means they can be actively engaged in political activities in the nation’s leading parties, for example as part of their multicultural committees, special committees for Koryo-saram, and



special committees for migrants' human rights, among others. At the city level, the [Ansan City](#) Ordinance on Non-nationals and Multicultural Families Support provides for the operation of a non-national's Council. The council advises many different support projects and advocates on behalf of non-nationals. Currently the council consists of 19 members that represent China, Uzbekistan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Mongolia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Cambodia. Ansan City also runs a non-nationals Monitoring Group. This is not a compulsory committee to supervise public services, but its roles include: to understand developments and trends among non-nationals, collect their voices, survey the city's administration for non-nationals, and make recommendations for improvement. Currently the group consists of 33 people representing Mongolia, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Russia, Cambodia, Thailand, Japan, and Nepal.

The city of [Bradford](#) (United Kingdom) has developed a project called "Citizen Coin Bradford" as part of the "Stronger Communities Partnership's Strategy and Delivery plan" as one of its goals to increase civic participation. This means getting more people from all backgrounds to connect with others, participate in civic life and get involved in their own communities through local activities. The Citizen Coin scheme enables people to earn digital discount coins when undertaking social value activities, such as volunteering, that they can then use to get discounts off goods and services. Those earning the digital discount coin can also choose to donate their coins to other people and organisations. Bradford is using pioneering technology to involve all its citizens in the opportunities that the city and district offers. Through an app-based technology, the Citizen Coin scheme rewards people for doing social good, connects local voluntary organisations with their neighbourhoods, and communities with businesses, just when the local economy needs it most. Bradford believes in the power of sharing kindness, creating a culture where people help each other to feel safe, get along, get involved and get on. The project is 'holistic'; underpinning the Council plan by promoting better skills, creating more good jobs and better health. It supports the community to ensure they create safe, strong, active communities, whilst helping the local economy to grow, sustainably.

In addition, the city of Leeds (United Kingdom) has implemented the [Leeds Citizens Panel](#), to ensure broad consultation and engagement in co-design involving people with diverse backgrounds in policy formulation. The panel enables the city to engage with diverse groups when considering proposals which have a wider impact on the communities. The city has over 3000 online members and 600 offline members who engage both via survey and face-to-face consultation. To ensure representation, the city measures the demographics of participants. One example is the development of the domestic violence communication and engagement strategy, where the city worked with the organisation Voluntary Action Leeds to meet the gaps in consultation. The organisation used their links with local community organisations to ensure the city enabled these groups to voice their concerns. This the city highlights, led to a community approach to the development of the strategy, including the co-designing of publicity materials.

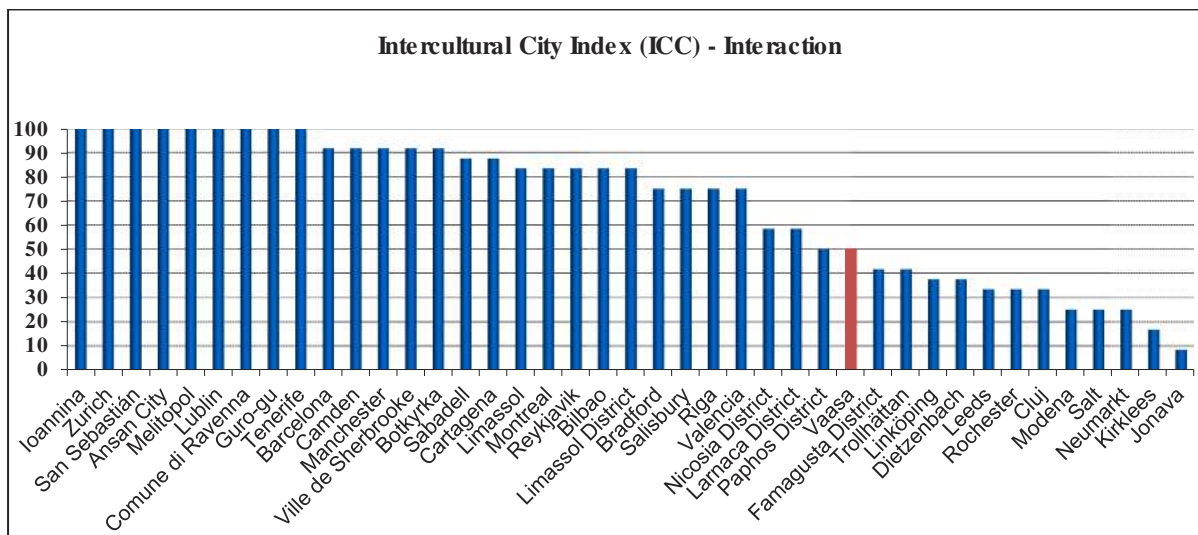
ICC programme resources on political and public participation are also available [here](#).

## INTERACTION

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*Interaction between people of all kinds is what gives the intercultural city its distinctive value. Identity is not 'given' in a passive sense, but something which is 'enacted' and defined through interaction. In spite of protective laws, prejudice and discrimination can thrive where there is segregation or a lack of contact and dialogue between people. There is ample evidence to prove that, under certain conditions, the more contact people with different backgrounds and lifestyles have with each other, the less likely they are to think and behave in prejudicial ways. Therefore, an intercultural city develops, in partnership with other organisations, a range of policies and actions to encourage more mixing and interaction between diverse groups.*

Indicators on interaction have been included in the Intercultural Cities Index in 2019. The data collected so far is not yet relevant for statistical purposes. So far, 41 cities have replied to this new Intercultural Cities Index chapter. Vaasa's rate of achievement in the field of interaction is 50%.



Vaasa does have a database of civil society and grassroots organisations that work in intercultural inclusion topics, although is incomplete and not regularly updated. The Participation Programme includes a general list of civil society entities, and the Welcome Office has an unofficial list of stakeholders and professionals working with them in inclusion and integration topics.

The city collaborates in a non-organised nor regular way with different civil society and grassroots organisations working in intercultural inclusion. The Welcome Office has an online platform with more than 200 email addresses from agencies, actors and organisations whom in one way or another are active in fields concerned by integration or intercultural inclusion. The platform serves as a hub where find out what is going on and also to share information. There was a Circle of Resources (Resurssirengas) to share information, and the Welcome Office aims to revive the group at some point.

Teachers in elementary schools receive intercultural training regularly. In any case, some experiences could be improved as some comments on discrimination and prejudices were found in the roundtables developed in 2023 following the Good Relations Framework.

### Suggestions

Vaasa has some good practices in the field of interaction, as it is part of the Good Relations Framework. Nevertheless, the city has room for improvement, and other cities examples could be inspirational.

In [Reykjavik](#) (Iceland), the municipality has a database of all the associations relevant to intercultural interaction operating in the city. Its Human Rights and Democracy Office collaborates on issues of inclusion with organisations such as ProjektPolska and the Muslim Cultural Centre.

The city of [Sherbrooke](#) (Canada) lists in its organization directory all the organizations that work in sport, culture and life community, including those who work with the immigrant population. The guide to welcoming people immigrants in Sherbrooke also lists the resources that allow newly arrived people to quickly integrate into their new ecosystem. In order to collaborate with civil society organizations and local associations working in the various areas concerned with intercultural inclusion, Sherbrooke launched in 2019, via its Sherbrooke Health program, the immigration consultation body ICI Sherbrooke. This instance brings together all the organizations that intervene directly or indirectly in the ecosystem of immigrants who settle on the territory. The city also sits on the body and several meetings are held regularly to not only maintain the mobilization of partners, but also implement structuring projects to the community.

Also in Canada, [Montreal](#) uses public spaces as tools for positive interaction. Through intercultural events and initiatives geared towards integration, Montreal helps to ensure mixing between residents. Every year for the past five years, under a partnership with the Quartier des spectacles entertainment district, the city has run an open-air event called “Les Jardins Gamelin” designed to encourage living together in public spaces through an extensive cultural programme. In addition, as part of cultural trail activities, the city runs a tour of Montreal Island from an

indigenous perspective, consisting of a bus tour in which participants visit various neighbourhoods to find out about the history of Indigenous peoples in urban areas down through the centuries. Lastly, Montreal sets particular store by citizen participation in identifying problems, designing policies and assessing their impact. Montreal Public Consultation Office (OCPM) is an independent organisation whose task is to carry out public consultation assignments entrusted to it by Montreal city council or executive committee. These primarily involve urban and land-use planning projects under municipal jurisdiction but may also include any project submitted by the executive committee or city council. The office also has the task of proposing rules to ensure implementation of credible, transparent and effective consultation mechanisms.












ICC programme resources on anti-rumours are also available [here](#) and resources on intercultural competence and mediation are available [here](#).

## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Vaasa's aggregate Intercultural Cities Index achievement rate was 58. This is the first step of Vaasa on its intercultural journey. Vaasa achieved particularly high scores in several areas, with lower achievements sometimes due to the lack of intercultural approach in its policymaking. There is room for improvement from the intercultural perspective, but it is also true that Vaasa has several programmes and policies that could be easily understood and (re)framed as intercultural actions.






The following table gives more information on what Vaasa does well and areas it could learn more from the experience of other cities.

<b>COMMITMENT</b>	✓	Vaasa has an Integration Unit to address the needs of the refugee population, along with various plans and programs aimed at combating discrimination, promoting linguistic diversity, and facilitating participation in policymaking.
	✗	Despite these efforts, Vaasa currently lacks an intercultural approach in its policymaking and seldom references its intercultural commitments in official communications. There is a need to establish a comprehensive understanding across all city bodies and sectors regarding the responsibility of all services (and their leadership) in implementing intercultural integration/inclusion and fostering good relations in Vaasa. Introducing intercultural storytelling could seamlessly incorporate several of the existing programs and plans within the city.
<b>EDUCATION</b>	✓	Vaasa does not face a clear problem of segregation in schools, children in primary schools generally come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In basic education, pupils have the right to be taught in Finnish or Swedish as a second language, and they receive support for their immigrant backgrounds. Pupils with an immigrant background are, whenever possible, provided with instruction in their mother tongue. Most schools actively engage in intercultural projects, and they are accustomed to acknowledging different cultures in everyday activities.
	✗	To enhance inclusivity, Vaasa could work towards ensuring that teachers' ethnic or cultural backgrounds better reflect those of their students and encourage stronger connections between schools and students in the city.
<b>NEIGHBOURHOODS</b>	✓	Vaasa is actively working to enhance the diversity of neighbourhoods and prevent ethnic concentration. Utilizing the Happiness Indicator, the city gathers information to inform the development of services and update the city's welfare plan.
	✗	Vaasa may consider strategies to ensure a balanced mix of housing forms in various areas, with special attention to suburbs. Additionally, the city could organize activities to promote social mixing and establish meeting places in each municipal district.
<b>PUBLIC SERVICES</b>	✓	The municipality has a recruitment plan in place to ensure a fair and non-discriminatory recruitment process. It offers a broad spectrum of services, including burial services for different religions, hospitals, and school services tailored to individuals from minority or migrant backgrounds.

		Vaasa could consider strengthening its recruitment plan to become an even more attractive and diverse employer. Additionally, it may explore more direct efforts to encourage diversity in the private sector workforce.
<b>BUSINESS AND THE LABOUR MARKET</b>		In Vaasa, a regional organization actively encourages businesses from ethnic minorities to integrate into the mainstream economy. The city has also taken steps to promote 'business districts/incubators' and ensure an appropriate percentage of entrepreneurs with migrant/minority backgrounds.
		However, there is currently no local normative framework in place to facilitate the procurement of goods and services in favor of companies with an intercultural inclusion/diversity strategy.
<b>CULTURAL AND SOCIAL LIFE</b>		Vaasa supports cultural and social life. Grants are awarded to organizations that are inclusive and open to collaboration with everyone, with occasional consideration of interculturalism as a criterion when allocating funds. Additionally, Vaasa consistently organizes events and activities to actively encourage people to meet and interact.
		Vaasa does not organise public debates or campaigns about cultural diversity and living together.
<b>PUBLIC SPACE</b>		Vaasa takes proactive measures to encourage meaningful intercultural mixing and interaction in public spaces. The city promotes and supports intercultural initiatives in libraries, museums, and public parks. The municipality pays special attention to areas where social housing is predominant, aiming to enhance the well-being of all inhabitants.
		Vaasa does not have a formal commitment to consider the diversity of the population in urban planning and/or while designing public spaces.
<b>MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION</b>		Vaasa collaborates with a regional mediation service funded by State funds. The city offers intercultural mediation within the city administration for various purposes. Additionally, Vaasa has a generalist municipal service that addresses issues such as religious conflicts.
		The city could explore expanding its mediation and conflict resolution efforts to specialized institutions, including hospitals, youth clubs, retirement homes, and within the municipality itself. Furthermore, it could consider broadening the scope of initiatives already implemented in schools, as well as collaborating with the police and social services.
<b>LANGUAGE</b>		Vaasa is a bilingual city where Finnish and Swedish are integral parts of daily life. English is also commonly used in various communications and initiatives, serving as the typical language for addressing non-national residents. The city offers specific language training in the official languages for hard-to-reach groups. Non-national languages can be learned under specific circumstances.
		Vaasa does not actively promote awareness of migrant languages in the city, and it does not support initiatives aimed at creating a positive image of migrant/minority languages. Non-official languages are largely absent from public communications, and the use of English as a language to communicate with non-official language speakers diminishes the prominence of other mother languages.



<p><b>MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION</b></p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✗</p>	<p>The city places a strong emphasis on visualizing Vaasa as an international and multicultural city. It has implemented a communication strategy to enhance the visibility and image of people with migrant/minority backgrounds in local communication tools.</p> <p>The city does not currently offer support for advocacy, media training, or mentorship for journalists with migrant/minority backgrounds. Additionally, there is no monitoring of the ways in which traditional local/national media portray people with minority/migrant backgrounds. The city also does not actively engage with local media when negative stereotypes are employed in the portrayal of individuals from minority/migrant backgrounds.</p>
<p><b>INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK</b></p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✗</p>	<p>Vaasa has a Global City Strategy for 2022-2025 that emphasizes the international character of the city and outlines goals for economic sustainability and attractiveness for all citizens. The city also maintains a network of twinning cities and implements specific programs to welcome international students.</p> <p>Vaasa currently lacks an explicit and sustainable policy to encourage international cooperation in economic, scientific, cultural, or other areas. Furthermore, the city does not actively seek to develop business relations with countries/cities of origin of its diaspora groups.</p>
<p><b>INTERCULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND COMPETENCE</b></p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✗</p>	<p>The yearly Happiness Questionnaire is open to all of Vaasa's inhabitants, including those with minority or migrant backgrounds. The city actively promotes the intercultural competences of its officials and staff through training courses, interdisciplinary seminars, and networks.</p> <p>Vaasa could ensure that data about diversity and intercultural relations are mainstreamed to inform the city's policy formation. Additionally, the city could employ diverse methods to enhance the intercultural competence of its staff.</p>
<p><b>WELCOMING NEWCOMERS</b></p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✗</p>	<p>The Welcome Office provides general information and support for newcomers. The Integration Unit undertakes welcoming activities, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers. The city sends a welcoming letter to all newcomers, and four times a year, it organizes open lectures to welcome newcomers.</p> <p>Vaasa could diversify its approach to welcoming newcomers and consider activities beyond service provision. Welcoming services could be extended to all types of newcomers, incorporating more languages than currently utilized.</p>
<p><b>LEADERSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP</b></p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✗</p>	<p>Vaasa is actively developing its efforts in the governance area, focusing on leadership and citizenship. According to Finnish law, individuals residing in a municipality can vote and stand as candidates in local elections after two years of residence. EU and EFTA nationals are eligible to stand as candidates in local elections if they have lived in the municipality for 51 days before the elections. The city occasionally initiates efforts to encourage people with migrant/minority backgrounds to engage in political life. Additionally, the city has a consultative body, the Multiculturalism Board, which advises the municipal government on diversity and integration matters.</p> <p>Vaasa currently lacks any standard for the representation of people with migrant/minority backgrounds on mandatory boards overseeing schools or other public services.</p>
	<p>✓</p>	<p>Vaasa has an Equality and Non-Discrimination Programme to combat discrimination. The service that advises and supports victims of discrimination</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ANTI-DISCRIMINATION</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"></p>	<p>operates at the national level (ETNO). Additionally, the city occasionally runs anti-discrimination campaigns or raises awareness on discrimination.</p> <p>The city does not conduct a systematic review of all municipal rules and regulations to identify mechanisms that may discriminate against residents with migrant/minority backgrounds. Moreover, it does not run regular campaigns against racism or monitor and research the character or extent of discrimination in the city. Additionally, the city does not provide financial or logistical support to civil society organizations that advise and support victims of discrimination.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PARTICIPATION</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p>	<p>Vaasa has a Participation Program for 2021-2025 that emphasizes equality and interactivity among residents. The city has introduced participatory mechanisms to enable all residents to participate in the decision-making process. However, the Integration Programme has not adopted an extensive consultation process, including people with migrant/minority backgrounds, but has involved them to some extent.</p> <p>Vaasa does not take actions to ensure that residents with migrant/minority backgrounds are fairly represented in key institutions or organizations. Additionally, there is no available data on the participation of city residents with migrant/minority backgrounds.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTERACTION</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p>	<p>The city collaborates in a non-organized nor regular way with various civil society and grassroots organizations working in intercultural inclusion. The Participation Programme includes a general list of civil society entities, and the Welcome Office maintains an unofficial list of stakeholders and professionals working with them on inclusion and integration topics. Additionally, teachers in elementary schools receive regular intercultural training.</p> <p>Vaasa currently lacks a comprehensive and updated list/database of all civil society and grassroots organizations that are active in various fields related to intercultural inclusion.</p>

In view of the above, we congratulate Vaasa for the efforts taken. We are confident that if the city reflects more on its different areas of work and what it is already doing, while also following our guidelines and other Intercultural Cities' practices, the results will rapidly become visible and tangible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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When it comes to intercultural efforts, as referenced in the survey, Vaasa could enhance the following sectors by introducing various initiatives:

**Commitment:** Vaasa could develop a comprehensive strategy to create a shared understanding across all city bodies and sectors regarding the responsibility of all services (and their leadership) in implementing intercultural integration/inclusion and fostering good relations in Vaasa. Introducing intercultural storytelling could seamlessly incorporate several existing programs and plans from the city. Vaasa may consider referencing its intercultural commitments more frequently in official communications and giving greater prominence to its intercultural statement and strategy on the website.

**Education:** The city could work more to ensure that teachers' ethnic or cultural backgrounds better reflect those of their students and encourage stronger connections between schools and students.

**Neighbourhoods:** Vaasa may explore strategies to ensure a diverse mix of housing forms in different areas, especially in the suburbs. Additionally, it could organize activities to encourage social mixing and create meeting places in every municipal district.

**Public Services:** The municipality could consider strengthening its recruitment plan to become a more attractive and diverse employer. Furthermore, it may explore more direct efforts to encourage a diverse workforce in the private sector.

**Business and the labour market:** Vaasa may consider collaborating with private companies to develop diversity charters. Additionally, the city may explore local regulations to promote the procurement of goods and services in favour of companies with an intercultural inclusion/diversity strategy.

**Cultural and social life:** Vaasa may consider organizing public debates or campaigns about cultural diversity and coexistence on a more regular basis.

**Public space:** The city could consider systematically incorporating the diversity of the population in the design of public spaces and urban planning.

**Mediation and conflict resolution:** The municipality could explore expanding its work on mediation and conflict resolution to specialized institutions, including hospitals, youth clubs, retirement homes, and within the municipality itself. Additionally, it could further expand the scope of initiatives already implemented in schools and collaborate with the police and social services.

**Language:** Vaasa may consider facilitating the awareness-raising of migrant languages in the city and supporting initiatives that seek to promote a positive image of migrant/minority languages. The city could explore the use of non-official languages (beyond English) to reach all inhabitants and open language learning opportunities to all citizens.

**Media and communication:** The city may explore providing support for advocacy, media training, or mentorship for journalists with migrant/minority backgrounds. It currently does not monitor how traditional local/national media portray people with minority/migrant backgrounds. Additionally, the city could engage with local media when they portray people through negative stereotypes.

**International outlook:** Vaasa could benefit from developing a strategy on how it wishes to engage with the area of international outlook in the context of interculturalism. The city could explore developing business relations with countries/cities of origin of its diaspora groups.

**Intercultural intelligence and competence:** The municipality could ensure that data about diversity and intercultural relations are mainstreamed to inform the city's policy formation. Moreover, it could use diverse methods to improve the intercultural competence of the city's staff.

**Welcoming newcomers:** The city could diversify how it welcomes newcomers and consider activities outside of service provision. Welcoming services could be extended to all types of newcomers, utilizing more languages than currently used.

**Leadership and citizenship:** Vaasa might consider developing initiatives to encourage people with migrant/minority backgrounds to engage in political life. This could include improving their knowledge of local politicians and municipal staff jobs, as well as raising awareness of their rights to vote or stand as candidates in local elections. The city could also develop a strategy and procedures to support and achieve minority ethnic representation on key public boards.

**Anti-discrimination:** The city could consider conducting a systematic review of all municipal rules and regulations to identify mechanisms that may discriminate against residents with migrant/minority backgrounds. Additionally, the city may contemplate running regular campaigns against racism. Vaasa could explore options to provide financial or logistical support to civil society organizations that advise and support victims of discrimination.

**Participation:** Vaasa could take actions to ensure that residents with migrant/minority backgrounds are fairly represented in key institutions or organizations.

**Interaction:** Vaasa could consider establishing a comprehensive and updated database of all civil society and grassroots organizations that are active in various fields related to intercultural inclusion. Additionally, some actions could be enhanced by following the Good Relations Framework.

Vaasa may wish to explore further examples implemented by other Intercultural Cities as a source of learning and inspiration to guide future initiatives. Such examples are provided above for each sector, as well as in the Intercultural Cities [database](#).

Diversity has become a key feature of societies today and is particularly tangible in urban centres. While people of diverse national, ethnic, linguistic and faith backgrounds have immensely contributed to post-war prosperity, inequalities related to origin, culture and skin colour persist, and anxiety about pluralism, identity and shared values is often politically instrumentalised. The challenge of fostering equity and cohesion in culturally diverse societies has become more acute. Cities are uniquely placed to imagine and test responses to this challenge.

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed and validated an intercultural approach to integration and inclusion which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to human mobility and cultural diversity. A decade after the start of this work, there is growing evidence that diversity, when recognised and managed as a resource, produces positive outcomes in terms of creativity, wellbeing and economic development.

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme invites cities in Europe and beyond to explore and apply policies that harness diversity for personal and societal development.

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[www.coe.int/interculturalcities](http://www.coe.int/interculturalcities)

The member states of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

<http://europa.eu>

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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