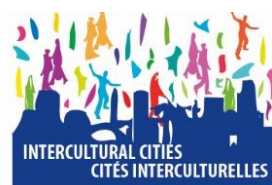


Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme

KRAKÓW: INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Diversity, Equality, Interaction, Participation

**BUILDING BRIDGES,
BREAKING WALLS**



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Kraków

INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Following the Expert Visit of the Council of Europe on the 2 of October 2025

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Intercultural Cities Programme

Intercultural Inclusion Unit

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Executive Summary

Kraków has demonstrated, both through its ICC Index results and during the expert visit to the city, that it has a strong political commitment to promoting policies grounded in the intercultural approach.

The Open Kraków programme serves as the strategic framework for intercultural policies, and it is regularly updated and evaluated with the participation of social actors and representatives of the city's diverse communities. The Multicultural Centre, which opened its doors in 2024 – although the project began in 2021 – is a major reference point for the city's commitment to the intercultural principles of equality, recognition of diversity, interaction and participation.

It is important to highlight the wide range of initiatives being developed to foster interaction and, increasingly, the participation of migrants and minorities. One example is the innovative “Intercultural Dialogues on a Bench” initiative, involving the Mayor and other political representatives who listen and speak directly with members of various communities to better understand their needs. Equally relevant is the city's investment in training public employees, hiring multicultural assistants in schools, and supporting a variety of associations so they can carry out inclusion-focused projects, among many other initiatives.

Naturally, there are areas where there is greater room for improvement, such as promoting the political participation of migrants and other groups, improving the design of public spaces, expanding language-learning opportunities, strengthening the city's internationalisation strategy, consolidating a clear and coherent narrative on diversity management in a highly polarised context, and gathering more data to assess existing discrimination or policy impacts. Above all, it will be essential to deepen a culture of mainstreaming to ensure that all municipal departments integrate intercultural principles into policy design.

Key recommendations include:

- Developing a coherent narrative that does not reinforce polarisation
- Designing a communication strategy grounded in the intercultural approach
- Strengthening mainstreaming and adapting services
- Generating more data and information to enhance understanding and evaluation
- Promoting participation to reinforce democratic values

Kraków is in a very promising position to establish itself as a leading city in its commitment to interculturality and inclusion. To achieve this, it must continue to adopt a proactive stance and reinforce its political commitment through the mainstreaming of its policies, while also developing a narrative capable of reaching citizens whose attitudes towards immigration and diversity may be more ambivalent or uncertain.

We are living through a crucial global moment, marked by the rise of authoritarian, populist and anti-discrimination discourses, and it is in cities where innovation and meaningful action are possible – by creating alliances between institutions and a wide array of civil society actors, and by responding to the needs and challenges posed by increasingly diverse and complex societies.

Kraków Intercultural Profile

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This report is based upon the visit of the Council of Europe on the 2nd of October 2025 including Council of Europe staff and Intercultural Cities (ICC) expert Dani de Torres. It should be read in parallel with the most recent index report for Kraków which contains many more recommendations and examples of good practice.

The Council of Europe has defined the intercultural city as encompassing people with different nationality, origin, language or religion/ belief, where:

- Political leaders and most citizens regard diversity positively, 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;
- The city encourages greater mixing and meaningful interaction between diverse groups in public spaces.¹

Real equality, diversity, meaningful intercultural interaction and participation and active citizenship are four inter-linked values that underpin the development and sustenance of an intercultural city.²

Equality refers to the state of being treated equally, whether before the law, in policy or in practice. This includes equal enjoyment of human dignity and fundamental human rights, and equal access to services and opportunities. More broadly, equality of life chances (or 'access') can be distinguished from equality of outcomes, with different political and economic philosophies putting differing emphases on each end of this spectrum. Within interculturalism, equality is most closely linked to the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, and there is particular attention paid to equity: that is, allocating resources and opportunities to each person, according to their circumstances and needs, in order to obtain a more equal outcome.

Diversity is the condition of a group or entity within which individuals differ from one another in various ways, some but not all of which are characteristics protected by human rights law. Aspects of identity such as age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, mental and physical abilities, social class, education, economic background, religion, work experience, language, geographic location, political opinion, or family status, are among the sources of diversity.

Meaningful intercultural interaction is any constructive encounter in a social setting between individuals or groups from different cultures and lifestyles in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. Intercultural policy speaks of 'meaningful interactions' between different cultural or ethnic groups, which recognise both the differences and similarities between such groups/individuals, promote the atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation, and counter the tendency towards self-segregation. Meaningful interactions are those that take place on equal terms, be they challenging or positive, and which should ultimately be fulfilling for all involved, advancing common goals.

¹ The Intercultural City Step by Step: Practical guide for applying the urban model of urban integration, Council of Europe, 2019, page 14.

² Council of Europe, Model Framework for an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level, Intercultural integration strategies: managing diversity as an opportunity, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093421-gbr-2555-intercultural-integration-strategies-cdadi-web-a/1680a476bd>

Participation and active citizenship occur when stakeholders (all citizens, including foreign residents where appropriate) have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and the support to freely express their opinions and influence decision-making on matters that affect them. In some situations, participation may mean those who are directly affected taking the lead and driving the process. Intercultural participation requires an equal and respectful basis, in which everyone feels heard, and involves tackling obstacles that may hinder certain stakeholders' active participation.

This report provides the first intercultural profile of Kraków.

1. Introduction to Kraków

Kraków is in the southern part of Poland in the historic region of Małopolska and serves as the region's capital. Kraków is the second largest city in the country, and it has a thousand-year-old history. With 810,000 registered residents in September 2025, Kraków combines deep historic roots with a modern and diversified economy. The city is split into 18 districts or units and Kraków's Historic Centre was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978 as an "outstanding example of a medieval urban complex."

The city is experiencing an increasing presence of foreign residents and migrants, enhancing its demographic dynamism. While the migrant population of Kraków amounted to approximately 10% at the end of 2021, in recent years the city has seen the emergence of many new communities, with the largest increase in numbers being from Ukraine, Belarus, and India.

After the start of the Russian Federation's full-scale aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, approximately 80 000- 100 000 Ukrainian residents came to Kraków in the first fourteen days. Data show that the population of the city grew by 19% during the first two months after the outbreak of the war and the Kraków Metropolitan Area housed almost 230 000 refugees.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of non-national residents in Kraków today due to the dynamic nature of the movement of Ukrainian nationals. Kraków City Office estimates that non-national residents now constitute around 15% of the city's residents.

The national minority groups most present in the city are: Ukrainian, Belarusian, German, Jewish, Russian, Czech, Armenian, Slovak and Lithuanian.

Economically, Kraków is a strong regional hub for services, technology, education and tourism, contributing significant value to the national economy and offering good prospects for growth and innovation. In 2021 the city's GDP per capita was about 116 630 PLN (27 496 EUR) notably higher than the regional and national averages.

2. National policy context

Migration trends

After the fall of communism, hundreds of thousands of Poles left to work in Western Europe (mainly Germany, UK and Italy) due to economic hardship and high unemployment. At that time immigration was minimal and Poland was largely a transit country for people moving from the East (former USSR, Vietnam, Armenia, etc.) toward Western Europe. Early arrivals

included Vietnamese, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians, often working informally in trade and construction.

During the period since Poland joined the European Union in 2004 until 2014, emigration peaked: more than 2 million Poles migrated to the UK, Ireland, and Germany under free movement. At the same time, immigration slowly increased, mostly from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, to fill labour shortages left by departing Polish workers.

The war in Eastern Ukraine (2014) transformed Poland into a destination country. Between 2014 and 2019, Poland became one of the largest recipients of labour migrants in the EU, with many temporary Ukrainian workers annually. Other groups increased too: Belarusians, Georgians, Moldovans, Indians, and Nepalis.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022) caused an unprecedented inflow: over 7-8 million Ukrainians crossed into Poland, and around 1-1.5 million remain under temporary protection. Immigration diversification continues with rising numbers from Asia (India, Philippines, Nepal) and Latin America (Colombia, Brazil) to meet labour shortage.

Evolution of migration policies in Poland

Since 1989, Poland's migration policy has evolved from basic border control and emigration management into a complex system addressing both labour migration and integration. In the 1990s, policy focused on establishing legal frameworks for foreigners and asylum procedures. After EU accession in 2004, Poland aligned with European standards and introduced simplified short-term employment schemes for neighbouring Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine and Belarus. During the 2010s, migration policy shifted toward facilitating labour inflows to offset workforce shortages, while local governments began developing integration initiatives. The 2022 refugee crisis marked a turning point, prompting Poland to adopt unprecedented humanitarian legislation granting Ukrainians temporary protection and access to services.

Political context and the new Migration Strategy of Poland

Since the 2023 elections, Poland has been governed by a centrist coalition led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk. This alliance replaced the previous right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) government, marking a shift toward a more pro-European and moderate political stance. The current government's narrative on migration focuses on maintaining control and security while ensuring that migration serves the country's economic needs. Its 2025-2030 strategy, "Regain Control, Ensure Security," stresses selective migration based on skills, tighter asylum procedures, and the integration of legally residing migrants under Polish laws and values. Although it supports equality and inclusion, the coalition's rhetoric reflects domestic pressure to prevent large-scale, uncontrolled immigration.

By contrast, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), now in opposition, continues to promote a nationalist and anti-immigration discourse. During its years in power, PiS strongly opposed EU refugee relocation mechanisms and framed migration – particularly from non-European or Muslim countries – as a cultural and security threat. While the current coalition seeks to balance humanitarian obligations with national control, the PiS opposition maintains a populist

and nationalist narrative that continues to shape public debate and foster social and political polarisation.

Minorities, equality, discrimination and Human Rights

Poland has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework to promote equality and protect minorities from discrimination. The main instruments include the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language (2005) and the Equal Treatment Act (2010–2011), which implements EU anti-discrimination directives and prohibits unequal treatment based on race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief. In addition, the National Action Programme for Equal Treatment 2022–2030 coordinates efforts to eliminate discrimination in public life, strengthen monitoring and awareness, and promote cooperation between government institutions and civil society.

Polish law recognises some national, ethnic and regional minorities.

- National minorities: Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovaks, Czechs, Armenians, Jews.
- Ethnic minorities: Roma, Lemkos (Łemkowie), Tatars, Karaims.
- Regional/linguistic minorities: e.g., Kashubians (Kaszuby) have regional-language status (though not full ethnic-minority status).

Poland's fifth cycle [report](#) under the FCNM shows that the country has the necessary legal and institutional foundation to protect national and ethnic minorities. At the same time, there remain substantial practical challenges: ensuring consistent implementation on the ground, improving minority participation in public affairs, realizing language and administrative rights effectively, and reducing persistent social exclusion of particularly vulnerable minorities (such as Roma or regional identity groups).

While the Ukrainian community in Poland has grown dramatically especially since 2022, there are increasing reports of xenophobic sentiment and discrimination against Ukrainians based on economic competition and social tensions.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) [Sixth Report on Poland](#) (adopted 27 June 2023) finds that Poland has made solid legislative and policy progress in combating racism and discrimination (especially in the wake of the Ukraine crisis) and recognizes good local-level practices. However, significant structural and implementation gaps remain. These include weak protection for LGBTI persons, limited institutional independence of equality bodies, inadequate and uneven inclusion of migrants and Roma, and insufficient monitoring and data collection.

Human Rights

As part of its ongoing work, the Committee on Migration Issues of the conference of INGOS of the Council of Europe, organised a fact-finding mission to Poland from February 10 to 14, 2025 to examine the issue of accommodation and access to fundamental rights for displaced persons. The field visit [report](#) consider that the management of asylum seekers in Poland, particularly at the border with Belarus, is often arbitrary and inconsistent. Displaced individuals can face pushbacks, where their fundamental right to seek asylum is denied. In cases where their right to asylum is recognised, they are frequently detained and taken to closed camps, where their identities are subjected to prolonged checks. This practice raises significant concerns about the protection of asylum seekers' rights, as it limits their access to fair

procedures and places them in detention under conditions that can be detrimental to their well-being.

3. Local diversity and policy context

In Poland, migration policy competences are highly centralised. National authorities define the legal framework: who can enter, stay, work, and access protection; they also coordinate Poland's position within EU migration and asylum mechanisms.

However, like in many countries, local governments are essential in integration and social policy delivery, as migrants and minorities interact mainly with local services. Their roles include:

- Implementing local integration programmes – e.g. language courses, cultural orientation, employment or housing support, and education for foreign children.
- Ensuring access to public services such as healthcare, schooling, and social assistance, in coordination with national funding.
- Promoting intercultural dialogue and anti-discrimination actions – for instance, through city-level strategies like *Open Kraków*, *Warsaw's Integration Policy*, or *Gdańsk Model for Immigrant Integration*.
- Cooperating with NGOs and community organisations to address migrants' needs on the ground.
- Collecting local data and adapting services to demographic changes caused by migration.

Local authorities often face financial and legal constraints, and their success depends heavily on national funding, EU projects, and cooperation with civil society.

Local diversity and minorities in Kraków

Kraków stands out within Poland for having a more diverse and dynamic population, shaped by its role as a university city, economic hub, and cultural centre. While Poland overall remains one of the more ethnically homogeneous EU countries, Kraków has become one of the main destinations for both foreign migrants and internal minorities due to its labour market, education opportunities, and openness to international mobility.

Ukrainians represent over 60–70% of the city's foreign residents, reflecting both pre-war labour migration and the post-2022 influx of war refugees. There is also a significant presence of Belarusians and Russians, especially among students and IT professionals, following political and economic instability in their home countries. Smaller but growing groups from other European countries like Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the UK, often working in business services or higher education. Vietnamese are one of the oldest non-European migrant groups in Poland and smaller groups from India, China, and Nepal, working mainly in gastronomy, trade, or logistics. While Ukrainians make up the majority of refugees there are also Syrians, Afghans, and others with international protection status.

Regarding the Jewish community, is much more prominent in Kraków than elsewhere in Poland, centred around the Kazimierz district. And while small in number, the Roma population is also relatively more active in Kraków through social inclusion and educational programmes.

Kraków is widely considered one of the most advanced and proactive Polish cities when it comes to promote intercultural integration and inclusion policies. Compared to many other Polish municipalities, Kraków has developed a more structured and long-term approach to migration and diversity management, combining institutional commitment, cooperation with NGOs, and participation in European networks.

4. Commitment & Index Summary

Kraków formally joined the ICC Programme in 2020 and with an impressive overall score of 76 out of 100 in its first Intercultural Cities Index, the city has demonstrated strong performance in key areas. Kraków achieved a rate of 100 on commitment, which is considerably higher than the city sample's achievement rate of 68.

Kraków has publicly shown its commitment as an intercultural city through the adoption of its "Open Kraków" programme in 2016, which serves as an intercultural strategy and action plan. The programme covers actions to combat discrimination and to promote intercultural dialogue, education, and small grants to NGOs and many community initiatives. It is coordinated by the Section for Multiculturalism, Social Projects and Equality Policy at the Department of Social Policy and Health in the Kraków City Office and funds for the programme are allocated in the municipality budget and approved annually by the Council of the City. The intercultural strategy and action plan are often updated through consultations with residents, representatives of minorities, migrants, NGOs and expatriates, etc.

In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, Kraków demonstrated remarkable solidarity and support for Ukrainian refugees. These efforts, together with its long-term commitment on intercultural policies have been widely recognised as a positive and effective response to migration challenges. For example, Kraków has been awarded the Bronze Prize in the 2025 European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, organized by the European Commission. The city was recognized for its wide-ranging efforts to support diversity and inclusion in public spaces, the healthcare system, education, and culture



Apart from commitment, Kraków has demonstrated strong performance in key areas such as: education where the city employ multicultural assistants; neighbourhoods, cultural, social life and interaction as the city takes action to encourage mixing between different neighbourhoods and residents with different migrant or minority backgrounds, and regularly organises events

and activities in the fields of arts, culture and sport that aim to encourage people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds to interact.

Kraków also benefits from both a local and a national business umbrella organisation, which promote diversity and non-discrimination in the labour market. The city also takes the provision of Polish language support seriously and supports projects that show minority languages in a positive light. On communication and Intercultural competence also scores high, because the city carries out surveys including questions about the public perception of migrants/minorities and when it comes to its officials and staff, Kraków promotes their intercultural competence through seminars, networks and training courses.

Regarding welcoming newcomers Kraków has a city-specific package of information and support for newcomers and a new comprehensive guide for residents “Kraków – a city for everyone!” was published in March 2024 in four languages. Different city services and agencies provide welcome support for newcomers, including students, refugees and asylum-seekers and migrant workers. In addition to the Information Point and Multicultural Centre, information support for non-national residents who have just arrived is also provided by the Municipal Social Welfare Centre, which takes care of the needs of those who require support and assistance.

On anti-discrimination the city regularly monitors the extent and the character of discrimination and promotes diverse actions to prevent discrimination and support the victims.

The areas with more room for improvement comprises public services, as there is no data available on whether the migrant or minority background of public employees reflects the composition of the city’s population. Regarding public space, despite the many actions to promote interaction, it lacked consultation methods for involving people with different migrant/minority backgrounds when developing public spaces. The international outlook can also be reinforced as Kraków does not have a unified international policy document.

Finally, Kraków achieved a rate of 15 on leadership and citizenship, which is lower than the city sample’s achievement rate of 38, in part due to national policies on voting and standing for election, but also because the city does not take initiatives to encourage people with migrant/minority backgrounds to engage in political life.

Overall, Kraków is well-advanced compared to many cities in Poland and also in Europe in terms of institutionalising intercultural policy, and the ICC Index result (76/100) bears that out. At the same time, like many cities experiencing rapid change, it is moving from shifting from a strong focus on welcoming newcomers to also placing significant emphasis on policies that foster inclusion especially in ensuring equitable participation, service access, and narrative/communication change.

5. Opening session

This expert visit to Kraków was shorter than usual, as it lasted one day, partly because during the two previous days two training sessions on disinformation and narratives had already taken place. The Deputy Mayor, Maria Klaman, and a wide representation of officials (15 heads of

different departments and units) were present at the morning session at the City Hall. In the first part of the session, the Deputy Mayor gave a presentation, followed by the ICC representative, who presented the Intercultural Cities programme, and after that the ICC expert presented the results of Kraków's ICC Index report.

The Deputy Mayor opened the meeting by stressing the importance of intercultural inclusion, the important work already being carried out under the "Open Kraków" programme and highlighting that inclusion and interculturality is a cross-cutting issue for all city departments, and she mentioned specifically the departments of education and culture. She emphasised that "Kraków aims to be an international leader in diversity management and that the goal is for everyone living in the city – regardless of their background – to feel at home and to be active participants and co-creators of the city".

To this end, she highlighted the importance of ensuring that everyone feels heard and taken into account. This is particularly important given the strong nationalist discourse present in the country, which can generate anxiety among non-nationals. Hence the importance of creating spaces where all the voices can be listened to, which is a fundamental element of interculturality.

The debate

Following the Deputy Mayor's introduction and the presentation of the ICC programme and Kraków's Index results, a debate was opened among participants on the Index findings. Several directors mentioned that they had found the Index report very useful, not only for understanding what is being done in Kraków but also for its examples from other cities around the world, describing the report as a "springboard for further action".

One of the issues discussed was the lack of data on the diversity of the population, which makes it very difficult to assess levels of discrimination or the existing barriers to accessing public services. This is a challenge shared by many European cities, and it is valuable to exchange experiences that offer new insights and approaches.

In this regard, the complexity of collecting data on people's origin or ethnicity was highlighted, given the risk of reinforcing stereotypes and labels, but at the same time, the absence of such information means that public authorities are unaware of the barriers, or the discrimination faced by certain groups.

Another topic addressed was the lack of a document or strategy on the city's international policy and its link with interculturality. However, it was also noted that the absence of such a strategy does not mean there are no programmes or city initiatives that promote its internationalisation.

The most prominent topic was the challenge of mainstreaming intercultural approaches across policies and the need for greater monitoring and evaluation of these policies. Some good practices were highlighted, such as the cooperation between the education and business departments. The session itself was an opportunity for those responsible in different areas to gain a better understanding of the intercultural approach and to become more aware of their

responsibility to help ensure the intercultural principles of equality, diversity, interaction and participation within their respective fields.

Another topic addressed was the importance of creating alternative narratives and communication strategies that are effective and reach a very broad audience. The problem is that society is highly polarised on this issue, and it is difficult to counter the impact of populist narratives with an anti-immigration discourse. However, the idea was shared that it is important to be proactive and to build more positive and inclusive alternative narratives in cooperation with various social actors, while above all avoiding narratives that reinforce polarisation. Hence the relevance of the training sessions held in the previous days on disinformation and alternative narratives.

The debate also served as an opportunity to reflect on the importance of further promoting the participation of all city residents, and on the need to create spaces and opportunities that encourage the participation of those who find it more difficult to take part. In this sense the debate also served as an opportunity to provide a better understanding of some good practices, such as the Intercultural Bench Dialogues initiative, in which the Mayor of Kraków Aleksander Miszański, participates in a direct dialogue with residents and social stakeholders on the main challenges regarding diversity issues. On 25 September, at the Multicultural Center, the Mayor met with foreign residents of the city and representatives of organisations supporting national minorities. Mayor Miszański emphasised that Kraków is a multicultural city, open, safe, and welcoming to everyone. He noted that the thriving Multicultural Center and the Open Kraków program are proof of this commitment. During the discussion, participants raised questions and made proposals on issues such as education, urban infrastructure, and health care. To ensure inclusivity, participants could also submit questions by email, with the assurance that all inquiries will be answered. This was the second edition of the Intercultural Dialogue Bench. The first meeting had been dedicated to Ukrainians, the largest minority group in Kraków.

Deputy Mayor's conclusions

At the end of the debate, the Deputy Mayor highlighted several conclusions and challenges for the city, starting from the idea that intercultural policies are key for the city and that, despite the positive results of the Index, there is still much work to be done, both in terms of policy and also on communication.

The Deputy Mayor stressed that “Our city will remain diverse, and we need to see it as an advantage and prevent the problems we’ve seen in other countries”. Regarding some of the challenges or weaknesses, she emphasised the need to guarantee language learning by strengthening the provision currently available, and she also highlighted the need to bring more residents of foreign origin into the public sector.

Finally, she noted that “we’ve made a mistake by supporting Ukrainians to integrate within their own communities rather than into mainstream society”. This is a situation that occurs in many countries that have to take in large numbers of refugees in a short period of time, and which is initially regarded as temporary, leading to the assumption that it is not so important to implement integration policies or more inclusive measures. However, over time many people end up settling permanently, and it becomes necessary to strengthen all policies that promote interaction and inclusion, in order to prevent prejudice, mistrust and segregation.

6. Civil society

In the afternoon, the ICC team met with a group of four associations of the city to gain a better understanding of their work and their views on the city's challenges and policies. In the first part of the session, the organisations presented their objectives and areas of activity, followed by a discussion on some of the city's challenges. The city supports several associations with small grants (3000 euros) and preferential rental for premises.

Stowarzyszenie Patchwork

Is an association to support immigrant and refugee families, especially mothers raising children with disabilities (from Ukraine, Belorussia, Syria...). It was founded in 2019 by a group of immigrant/refugee women (mothers) who had lived similar experiences and wanted to change the reality of being a refugee woman (and single) mother in Poland.

Key activities:

- Provide emotional, social and practical support: help with legalisation of residence, access to healthcare, work, workshops, Polish/English language classes.
- Rehabilitation for children and youth up to age 25 with disabilities (speech therapy, sensory integration, physiotherapy) and respite care for families.
- Social enterprise initiatives: a handicraft shop and manicure salon employing refugee/immigrant mothers, to foster economic independence.

The representative of the association said that a major problem in Krakow is that most public buildings are not adapted for people with disabilities, and there are difficulties for migrants to access some services. She highlights the problem posed by the high level of political polarisation in society and believes that around 50% of the population is highly nationalist, while the other 50% is more open to diversity. This highly polarised context creates a certain tension and often makes it difficult to implement policies and projects.

Regarding the city council, Maria values the relationship with the city very highly, even though in their case they do not receive direct funding. However, there is good cooperation, and this connection also makes them feel safer in the face of certain sectors of the radical far right.

Fundacja Zustrich

Zustrich means "meeting" in Ukrainian; this foundation works in Poland with particular emphasis on the integration and adaptation of people with migrant experience, especially from Ukraine. They support Polish Ukrainian cooperation, intercultural dialogue, education, and psycho-social/legal assistance for migrants and refugees at the Multicultural Centre.

Key activities:

- Language courses (Polish for migrants, Ukrainian for Ukrainians) and clubs for youth, seniors and children from migrant backgrounds and involves Roma as well

- Informational, legal and psychological aid, helping migrants navigate residence, healthcare and integration.
- Safety and awareness campaigns: e.g., for young migrant women in Kraków to strengthen self-defence, assertiveness, support networks and create “safety map” of Kraków.

The co-founder of the foundation was in the Forbes list of influential women to watch and participated in the special task force for the bill of the Open Kraków Programme. She considers that there is not a systematic approach to migrants in Poland and pointed out some challenges.

Regarding education, she views positively the role of the multicultural assistants in some schools, but she says that it is up to each school to decide whether they want to have them or not. She also explained that a group of young people launched an awareness campaign aimed at Ukrainian youths, encouraging them to attend school rather than stay at home following Ukrainian online education. She also mentions a specific programme they have for Roma children, to encourage them to stay in school, funded by the city as part of the Roma support policy. Finally, she emphasised that for young people it is difficult to build their identity in a society that is not always open to accepting them.

Regarding seniors with migrant background, she pointed out there are barriers to access to city services, especially because everything is in Polish and there are older people who are not familiar with it, and they are also not designed to consider the profile of older Roma people.

When asked to identify a challenge she considered significant, she highlighted that the Open Kraków programme recognised the needs of integration and inclusion, but there is another Strategy (2020-2030) that promotes a more assimilationist approach. That means that people can choose which framework they prefer and that is not good for consolidating a coherent narrative of the city regarding diversity.

FestivALT

FestivALT is a cultural festival and platform based in Kraków (since 2017) that focuses on Jewish heritage, activism, art, diaspora, memory and democratic society. It aims to foster critical inquiry around Jewish culture and identity in Eastern and Central Europe, to promote inclusive society, challenge antisemitism and bigotry, and support contemporary Jewish artists. FestivALT is a cultural NGO/festival rather than a service organisation; it uses art, heritage and public dialogue to promote intercultural awareness, memory and inclusion, particularly of Jewish culture.

Key activities:

- A 10-day annual festival of theatre, visual art, performance, activist intervention and community conversation in Kraków.
- Projects such as “The Lucky Jew” performance piece that confronts antisemitic stereotypes, public interventions, heritage walks and partnerships with museums.
- Collaborations with public institutions (e.g., Ethnographic Museum) to improve representation of Jewish and ethnic-minority culture in Kraków.

They are members of the city Council on equality of treatment. The city organise an open call and local organisations can apply to be part of it, and they meet once per month. There are 30 members (associations, migrants, the city etc.)

Example of their projects was a workshop about female holocaust victims from Kraków (they found the Mezo sisters through looking in the Museum archives) and there was an exhibition of their story.

A camp in a suburb of Kraków is now a green space, but before it was a Jewish cemetery and was used for mass burials during the war. The association tried to raise awareness about the camp as many people didn't know about the cemetery and there were no public consultations on how to commemorate the camp. The association provided educational walks 'The Jew, the dog and the neighbour' to raise awareness about it's history and they marked the site with eco pigments and did a sound walk with descendants, researchers and inhabitants.

She mentions that the city is quite active about removing graffiti when it is hate speech, but there is more work to do on communication and narratives and there is a need to provided guidelines to the city on how to talk about religions and how to communicate with inhabitants about migrants and diversity.

Czulent

Founded as a Jewish association in Kraków in 2004, Czulent is an advocacy organisation of Jewish experts from Poland. It focuses on combating antisemitism, promoting tolerance, building coalitions and networks for minority rights, and strategic litigation and advocacy work (legal, political and social) for minorities. They also engage in research, publications, and making policy-recommendations for municipal programmes such as the Open Kraków intercultural strategy.

Key activities:

- Producing reports, policy briefs and practical toolkits on antidiscrimination and antisemitism.
- Running or participating in coalitions of minority and migrant organisations (e.g., the KOMM – Coalition of Minority and Migrant Organisations) to enhance collaboration.
- Advocacy at local and national level: influencing municipal strategy, monitoring public discourse, etc.

During the discussion, it emerged that they consider Kraków to be a more open city than other Polish cities, and that speaking languages other than Polish in public spaces is not problematic. However, they noted that some migrants prefer to speak only Polish and have even changed their children's names to the Polish version, which reflects a tendency towards assimilation.

We can say that Kraków reflects the country's polarisation on issues of migration and diversity, where policies are being promoted to foster interculturality and inclusion, but there is a certain reluctance to develop a more proactive narrative due to the pressure of the more nationalist and assimilationist discourse.

7. The Multicultural Centre

The day before the “official” start of the experts visit, we had the opportunity to visit the city’s Multicultural Centre as it was the venue of the training session we delivered on narratives. Taking advantage of the opportunity, we were able to have a guided tour with its coordinator, that allowed us to learn in greater detail about the approach, services, and activities carried out at the centre, which opened its doors in 2024 and has now become a key space for promoting not only welcome services but all kind of intercultural initiatives.

The Centre serves as a dedicated municipal initiative within the framework of the Open Kraków programme and is a central hub of the city’s integration and intercultural strategy, located at the Socio-Economic Innovation Cluster.

Main Activities:

- Information & advisory services for foreigners: The Centre hosts the “Information Point for Foreigners in Kraków”, where migrants can receive free legal, psychological support, career advice, translation assistance and help navigating official procedures (e.g., children’s education, residence/work formalities).
- Language and conversation clubs: Regular Polish language classes for migrants, English conversation clubs, plus other language-learning opportunities (including Polish Sign Language).
- Cultural, educational and social events: Workshops (culinary, craft, art), multilingual city walks, multicultural breakfasts, concerts, film screenings, themed evenings, sports & wellness sessions (e.g., yoga in multiple languages) – all free and open-to-all.
- Community activation and minority/migrant participation: Encouraging foreign-born residents and minority community members to organise/co-host events, share their culture, engage in social initiatives, and build networks of support and volunteering.
- Research, conferences and policy dialogue: The Centre organises seminars and conferences on equality, integration, migration experience and collaborates with academic/research partners to translate insights into local policy.

The coordinator told us that the Multicultural Centre actually started in 2021, during the pandemic and in 2022 they had a small office in their foundation (which has been tasked by the City of to run the Centre since 2021) but when the war began and they were managing both the Multicultural Centre and the Information Point for foreigners, they had hundreds of people queuing in their tiny office. The city realised that a much larger physical space was needed. Finally, at the end of 2023, they were offered this space and opened in 2024. The idea behind the building is to bring together the local administration, NGOs, and also businesses and entrepreneurship initiatives, for all residents – not only migrants.

They showed us the Information Point for Foreigners, where people can come every day to make enquiries. The information service provides space for different NGOs (the Red Cross, IOM, legal assistance, etc.), and every week they publish a timetable showing which organisation is present on which days. There is also psychological support available one day a week. They publish this information on social media, send out a newsletter, post it on the city website, and use the communication channels that different communities – such as Ukrainians – use.

Many activities are initiated by migrant communities themselves. On Saturdays they host a group of Latin American mothers, they have a Brazilian dance class in which many Poles take part which means that the Centre is promoting positive interaction among neighbours from diverse backgrounds.

From January to the end of September, more than 7,000 people have taken part in activities at the Centre, and 4,000 have used the Information Point (separately). We have visited intercultural centres in several ICC cities, but it must be said that Krakow's centre has, in just two years, shown such a level of activity and dynamism that it has become a true reference point for the city's intercultural policies and narrative.



8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The expert visit to the city of Kraków was shorter than usual because it was combined with two days of training on disinformation and narratives. But despite the fact that the visit lasted only one day, it made it possible to observe the city's political commitment – particularly that of the Deputy Mayor – to the intercultural approach and policies, to hold discussions with officials from various municipal departments, and to learn about the activities and challenges of several local associations working on migration and intercultural issues.

Kraków obtained a score of 76 in its first Index, which is a very high result, thanks to initiatives such as the Open Krakow programme, which channels the city's intercultural policies; the Multicultural Centre, which we were able to visit and which has, in just two years, become a key space for recognising diversity and encouraging interaction; and the presence of multicultural assistants in schools.

Of course, the city still has room for improvement, and the ICC Index report already identifies the areas requiring greater attention. In this report, we complement those recommendations with additional ideas and suggestions arising from the visit and from the discussions we held with both municipal representatives and social organisations.

From reception to diversity management

A first general reflection concerns the fact that Kraków, like many other Polish cities and others across Eastern Europe, has had to adapt in a very short period of time to the arrival of many Ukrainian refugees. It is not that there was no diversity before – there was – but this increase has placed the issue firmly on the political and social agenda and has forced the strengthening of reception policies.

Once the initial reception phase passed, people – from within institutions as well as the wider public – gradually began to realise that this situation was not temporary. To a large extent, society already is, and will continue to be, more diverse. The positive and supportive attitudes towards the reception of Ukrainian refugees have gradually been accompanied by more critical attitudes regarding the perceived privileges of Ukrainians, which can reinforce prejudices and generate social tension.

Kraków is undoubtedly one of the cities that realised this reality earlier and began promoting projects not only focused on reception but also on recognising diversity and fostering interaction. But this requires time and, above all, adjustments in mindsets. As the Deputy Mayor said, Kraków is and will remain diverse, and this means assuming the responsibility that comes with it. Below are some recommendations for this transition – from reception to managing diversity as a structural reality of the city's present and future.

Develop a coherent narrative that does not reinforce polarisation

Narratives currently play a fundamental role in diversity management policies. Kraków already has a fairly solid foundation in this respect. The concept of Open Krakow is well known and widely disseminated, but the political and social context is highly polarised, and the influence of nationalist, populist and anti-immigration narratives remains relevant.

Kraków could invest greater effort in consolidating a city narrative that frames the challenge of diversity management positively, without reinforcing polarisation, and that is capable of reaching different segments of the population. Training for political representatives, municipal staff from different departments (including communication teams), together with the co-creation of narratives involving civil society actors and young people would help broaden consensus and prevent polarisation.

One example of a positive narrative developed from a refugee-reception project can be found in the City of Utrecht's [“Plan Einstein”](#).

Design a communication strategy

Designing a comprehensive and cross-cutting communication strategy that embeds intercultural principles and narratives across all municipal departments would provide greater coherence and strength to the city's narrative based on the Open Krakow concept.

For practical next steps in designing such a communication strategy, you may consult the guide [Designing a Communication Strategy in Intercultural Cities](#).

Strengthening mainstreaming and adapting services

During our visit, the challenge most frequently mentioned in the session with municipal departments was the complexity of mainstreaming policies and fostering cooperation across departments.

This is a shared challenge across all ICC cities and must be approached proactively, as it is probably the area where the greatest impact can be achieved. Creating regular spaces for interdepartmental work, dialogue and cooperation – for sharing information, carrying out joint diagnoses and designing shared strategies – is key. Building this culture of collaboration requires political commitment and, above all, ensuring that these spaces are motivating and inspiring; otherwise, they may be perceived as an added burden on already overstretched teams. Joint training, exploring good practices from other cities, or dedicating a morning to creative brainstorming are examples of activities that help strengthen this cooperative working culture.

One of the aims of mainstreaming is not only for municipal departments to adapt their policies, but also for facilities and services to align with the principles needed to advance towards greater interculturality. In this sense, many cities have found it useful to carry out an internal diagnosis within each department, reflecting on the following questions:

- What can we do to ensure greater equality of rights and opportunities?
- How can we better recognise the city's social, cultural and religious diversity?
- How can we promote more positive interaction between people of different backgrounds and profiles?
- And how can we guarantee more inclusive participation that is representative of the city's residents?

Starting from these questions (within the sports, culture, education, employment, security departments etc.) an generate very valuable reflections and, above all, lead to concrete and practical changes.

More data and information for better understanding and evaluation

Kraków needs more data and information on the city's diversity, on the profile of public employees, and on service users. Without data on diversity, it is very difficult to carry out sound diagnoses of discrimination levels, to identify the barriers faced by certain groups in accessing services, or to assess whether policies are achieving the intended impact.

Defining a set of indicators to complement the ICC Index; expanding data collection within different municipal services regarding users' diversity; or conducting specific qualitative studies to identify access barriers among particular groups (e.g., migrants, Roma etc.) would be important steps.

The City of Salisbury's Council policy formulation is heavily informed by demographic statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Social planners gather and analyse demographic statistics to inform all relevant policy. Demographic characteristics include data on ethnicity, language, migration, employment, family composition and education. This information is

central to the development of the City Plan 2030, which overarches all strategic documents developed by the City Council. [Here](#) you can find more information.

Promoting participation to reinforce democratic values

In Kraków, as in many European cities, some residents do not have the right to vote or stand in elections, or even if they have the right to vote, there is often lower participation due to a lack of information.” Legislation is restrictive in this regard, but this does not mean that cities cannot promote policies and strategies that enhance the participation of all people in decision-making processes, whether in designing a public space, deciding how part of the budget should be allocated or sharing needs and experiences that often remain unheard.

Kraków is committed to various participatory processes and has municipal councils in place, but there is still room for improvement. Some examples from other cities working to promote the participation of migrants and minorities in designing more inclusive public spaces, such as this one from [Leeds](#), or in fostering political participation, such as [this initiative](#) in Barcelona – may be a source of inspiration.

The Intercultural Cities programme would like to thank the municipality of Kraków for their welcome and interesting visit, and congratulate the municipality for its continued engagement and commitment to the programme. The work done to date is inspiring and several areas were identified as good practices to share with other cities.

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. Almost two decades 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.

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.

