



Larnaka District Strategy for Intercultural Integration

2023-2025



Cyprus
regional
intercultural
networks



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The “Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus” project is being implemented by the Council of Europe’s Intercultural City Programme and the European Commission’s Directorate General for Structural Reform Support in partnership with the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior. It is carried out with funding from the European Union, via its Structural Reform Support Programme, and in co-operation with the European Commission’s DG for Structural Reform Support. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe.

Declaration of the Municipalities of Larnaka, Athienou and Aradippou on their future policies related to Intercultural Integration in the Larnaka District

Larnaka, 19 April 2023

Inspired by the example of cities that are welcoming and inclusive despite the challenging circumstances of increasing numbers of newly arrived refugees and migrants;

Aware that correct management of intercultural engagement enhances resilience and makes the quality of life at the local level better;

We affirm that as a candidate city of the Intercultural Cities Programme, a Council of Europe-led coalition of over 160 local and regional governments across Europe and the world – we will strive to:

- Foster leadership and encourage policy innovation to ensure community cohesion in the context of increased movements of migrants;
- Prevent the discriminatory rhetoric in local media in the context of migration that promotes fear in local communities;
- Encourage constructive public debate between the general public and the local leadership about accommodating cultural diversity;
- Cultivate intercultural competence through training of local authorities and local residents;
- Support organisations that help build strong foundations for solidarity and intercultural dialogue;
- Utilise public space for competence-building related to intercultural integration, personal and professional improvement of quality.

One of our priorities for the next two years will be to strengthen the collaboration between the political leadership of Larnaka District (i.e. the Municipalities of Larnaka, Athienou and Aradippou) and other future local stakeholders, with the support from the Council of Europe to design and implement coherent inclusive integration policies. We are confident that a relationship of trust and cooperation with local stakeholders that support this agenda, will help make our communities more inclusive and resilient.

Andreas Vyras
Mayor of Larnaka



Kyriakos Kareklas
Mayor of Athienou



Evangelos Evangelides
Mayor of Aradippou



Introduction

Larnaka District decided to develop an intercultural plan in 2021, with the support of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme and the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support, in partnership with the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus.

At the national level, in 2021 Cyprus finalised a comprehensive [National plan for the integration of migrants](#) to serve as a reference document for state integration policies, as well as to delineate the overall priorities the state would seek to address. The plan also sets the parameters for project financing for the new EU programming period, 2021-2027.

The role of local authorities is of paramount importance to achieve effective implementation of the national action plan for integration. According to the Law on Municipalities of 2022 ([N. 52\(I\)/2022](#)), article 43.2.C.VII states that the responsibilities of the municipalities in the field of social welfare and social cohesion include the "planning and implementation or participation in programmes and actions for the integration of migrants and refugees in the social, economic and cultural life of the local community."

This is the first time that the Law of the Republic of Cyprus explicitly refers to the integration of migrants and refugees in the local communities. It is in the context of this leap forward that the present document aims to present a strategy with programmes and actions that facilitate integration, therefore, to assist Municipalities in the wider District of Larnaka.

Larnaka has always been a multicultural city. Due to its privileged position in the Mediterranean region, Larnaka has historically been the crossroads of different cultures. Therefore, interculturalism has always been considered an intrinsic feature of Larnaka's identity and was, is, and will be strongly intertwined with the city's history and cultural heritage.

The current District of Larnaka has been defined and emerged through its multicultural past. Accordingly, with the new waves of migration, referring to the history of the phenomenon could work as proof that diversity should be perceived as an opportunity and an advantage for the District of Larnaka, and in no way as a threat or a burden. This will be achieved if comprehensive and interconnected policies are adopted to achieve holistic and sustainable integration.

The road to interculturalism in Larnaka

What is an intercultural approach?

The intercultural approach has emerged in the 21st century to manage cultural diversity. The [Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme](#), and the [European Union's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion \(2021-2027\)](#) pave the way to the transformation of intercultural management principles and methodology into practice.

The Council of Europe's intercultural cities programme prescribes the following elements as the key characteristics of an intercultural city:

1. A city with a diverse population that includes people from different nationalities and origins, thus differences in the use of language, religions and beliefs.
2. A city which reviews its governance policies, discourse and practices from an intercultural point of view.
3. A city whose officials publicly advocate respect for diversity and a pluralistic city identity.
4. A city which actively combats prejudice and discrimination and ensures equal opportunities for all by adapting its governance structures, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population, without compromising the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
5. A city which develops a range of policies and actions to encourage more mixing and interaction between diverse groups in partnership with business, civil society and public service professionals.

The above elements contribute to a high level of trust and social cohesion. Adopting an intercultural approach to policy-making helps citizens shift their perspective to view diversity as a resource rather than a problem and accept that all cultures change as they encounter each other in the public arena. By extension intercultural policies can help to prevent conflicts and violence, increase policy effectiveness and make the city attractive for people and investors alike.

How was the strategy developed?

Under the framework of the joint European Union and Council of Europe project, [Building structures for intercultural integration in the Republic of Cyprus](#), five Regional Intercultural Networks were created in the Districts of Famagusta, Larnaka, Limassol, Nicosia and Paphos with the aim to empower local authorities, NGOs, and migrant organisations to be part of

the integration policy development process through the design and implementation of a tailor-made action plan/strategy for each district.

[Citizens in Power](#) are the co-ordinators for the Larnaka Regional Intercultural Network. The coordinators have worked closely with the local leadership and civil society in the Larnaka District to design the present strategy for intercultural integration.

The first step was to 'map' the area and identify relevant stakeholders. Early involvement of stakeholders in the development process, including but not limited to local communities, civil society organisations, academia, the private sector, trade unions, migrants, is critical for two key reasons: 1) to ensure ownership and acceptance of the network and 2) to take into consideration specific expertise.

Members of the Larnaka District intercultural network

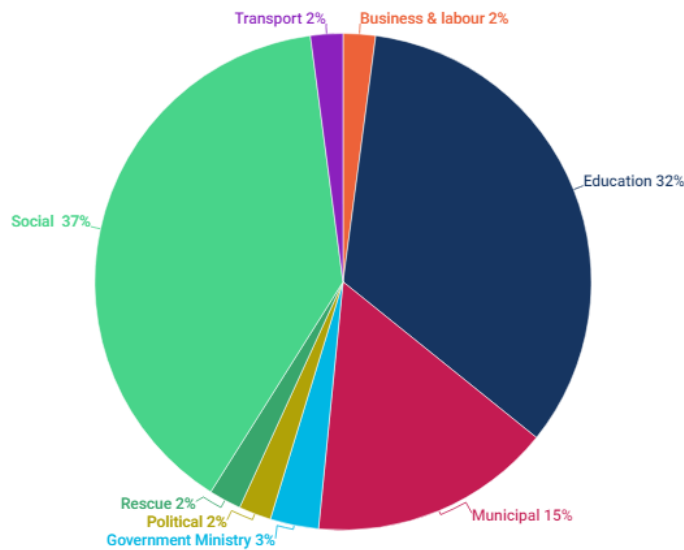


Figure 1: Council of Europe. Members of the Larnaka District Intercultural Network. 2022. <https://infogram.com/larnaca-intercultural-network-1hdw2jpqyydoj2l>

Following an initial mapping of stakeholders in the district, the second step was the implementation of several meetings to understand the gaps and good practices related to integration in the wider District of Larnaka.

These meetings along with research assisted the completion of a third milestone, the completion of the ICC Index questionnaire, which culminated in a report demonstrating the current state of interculturalism in the district.

The ICC Index analysis gave a clearer image as to where the District of Larnaka could work more to incorporate the intercultural paradigm in the local community ([Intercultural Cities](#)

[Index Analysis: Larnaca District, April 2022](#)). The present strategy aims to pave the way to a structured implementation of an intercultural approach to integration in the district.

Larnaka District Strategy for Intercultural Integration

Following research, several meetings, discussions, and brainstorming, Larnaka's Regional Intercultural Network concluded that the themes in its intercultural strategy which would meet the district's priority needs are:

1. Commitment
2. Media and Communication
3. Intercultural intelligence and competence
4. Public Space
5. Education

The selection criteria for deciding on these indicators was based on 1) the potential for improvement, 2) the extent to which they meet the needs and abilities of the Larnaka District and 3) the ability to cover other indicators directly or indirectly from the index report, meaning the topics which overlap with other topics, hence the potential to cover as many fields as possible.

1. Commitment

Context

Historically, Larnaka District has had the most foreign-born Mayors, and these Mayors really helped with integration. Collective memory, for example of communities including Maronites, Turkish-Cypriots, Latins, Armenians and Jews in Cyprus, facilitates the enhancement of the intercultural dimension in the district. These communities are good examples of how migrants can integrate into Cypriot society.

The indicator 'Commitment' is promising for further intercultural investment in the case of Larnaka District. There is firm evidence demonstrating the willingness of the Larnaka city leadership to improve its intercultural integration policies. At the political level, apart from participation in several projects and events that facilitate integration, the Mayor of Larnaka, in his role as the current President of the Union of Municipalities of Cyprus, provided support to the project, "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus" with a letter urging municipalities across the country to participate in the project. These are some of the reasons that the network decided to invest in a more strategic commitment towards intercultural integration.

Actions

To enhance and emphasise the commitment of the local leadership the following actions will be implemented:

1. The publication and dissemination of a coordinated statement demonstrating the commitment of Municipalities in the district regarding intercultural actions. For the realisation of this action the following steps should be taken:
 - I. Drafting of the statement
 - II. Agreement and signing by the respective municipalities
 - III. Publication and dissemination in national and local newspapers, social media accounts and websites of the Larnaka District municipalities.
2. The creation of a special tab on the respective Municipality's website dedicated to intercultural integration where news and activities related to intercultural integration will be uploaded. For the realisation of this action the following steps should be taken:
 - I. Creation of a space on the website which is dedicated to intercultural integration. This can be in the form of a separated tab on the website, a hashtag that will be used in all posts related to the topic under the news section and/or under the projects and programmes section. The respective municipality can choose how to proceed with the publication.
3. The frequent publication of news and information about interculturality in the district. The publication can be in the form of blogs, newsletters, social media posts and always embedded to the website of the respective municipality (see Action 2.I.)

Partners

For the effective implementation of the above actions and overall enhancement of the local leadership's commitment to intercultural integration, the following stakeholders in Larnaka District should develop and maintain new relations and/ or enhance existing partnerships:

- Municipalities in Larnaka District
- Press offices of the respective municipalities
- Local and national media

2. Media and communication

Context

The role of the media and other communication means, like social media and websites, have a significant role in achieving intercultural integration. The research and brainstorming sessions leading up to the development of the intercultural strategy demonstrated that media and communication is one of the areas with good and realistic potential for improvement. Closer monitoring for ethical reporting has multiple benefits. In addition to effective integration, media presence and monitoring will strengthen the overall image and publicity of the Larnaka District. This is because working towards integration benefits not only the refugees and migrants, but the local community as well. Specifically, effective

integration policies lowers the risk of crime related to migration. In a community where people peacefully co-exist, risks of criminality also go down.

Actions

To improve intercultural integration in the context of media and communication, the following actions will be implemented:

1. The collaboration with a university in the district and with the Cyprus Media Complaints Commission to facilitate the ethical reporting of the news. Specifically, the following steps should be implemented:
 - I. Establish a collaboration with a university which is located in the wider District of Larnaka.
 - II. Work closely with the respective department for 1) the production of a document/ booklet with guidelines for ethical news monitoring training purposes.
 - III. Publication and dissemination of the booklet with guidelines.
2. The strengthening of collaboration between the respective municipality's press office and media channels through providing the respective local media with the relevant data, numbers and testimonies.
3. Workshops for the exchange of practices related to intercultural competence and inclusive communication as well as alternative narratives.

Partners

For the effective implementation of the above actions in the area of media and communication, thus the overall enhancement of intercultural integration, Larnaka District municipalities could develop and maintain new relations and/or enhance existing partnerships with the following partners:

- Larnaka District municipalities and their respective press offices
- University and/or specific departments
- Journalism students and/or professionals

3. Intercultural intelligence and competence

Context

The network agreed that the district needs to improve its knowledge regarding migration, as well as the ways the topic is researched. There are several systemic barriers that lead to the need for specific focus on intercultural intelligence. These include:

- The exact number of migrants in the District of Larnaka is not known.

- Local authorities are not familiar with communication specificities of other cultures.
- Schools in Larnaka District are divided between those to which migrants go and the ones locals attend, hence ethnic concentration occurs.
- Municipalities cannot influence things that fall under the competencies of public services provided by national instances.

Therefore, it was suggested that a bottom-up approach should be adopted, for instance, public consultations where citizens can participate in a structured dialogue with the mayors. Additionally, surveys and their analysis with the help of experts will strengthen the district's intercultural intelligence. Another way to improve intercultural competence is by incorporating in schools migrant teachers with similar cultural backgrounds to the students. The network also considered that sometimes there are competencies to achieve something, but there are several barriers to overcome. Therefore, we also need to consider what the consequences of the limitations are in each of the topics analysed in the Index and start moving towards improvement.

Actions

1. Use material created in the context of Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme to train local authorities on intercultural competencies. Ideally, the training will target local authorities but also other stakeholders who interact with migrants and might benefit from it. The aim will be to acquire specific know-how when dealing with unfamiliar situations and in-depth and often elusive knowledge of all cultures. The network believes this will benefit the district because such sensitivity and self-confidence are not commonly seen, yet it is a soft skill that can be acquired through training and practice.
2. The second approach is the establishment of a series of public consultations with specific topics suggested by residents with the mayors. This will give the opportunity to people to interact with the leadership of the region, discuss problems and find compatible solutions. For the effective implementation of these overarching strategies, both funding and the municipalities' approval will be of paramount importance.
3. Larnaka city tours – A series of tours which aim to acquaint the residents of Larnaka with the history of the old city centre. More particularly, this initiative wants to spread awareness about the contribution of foreigners to Larnaka's history and urban development from the 18th century onwards. Many of the most prominent members of the local society have a migrant background, some of the most prestigious houses and the most admirable monuments of Larnaka were created by foreigners, who have integrated within the local community and have contributed, over time, to the local development and the prosperity of the city. The tours will contribute to the historical awareness of the city and serve as a way of showing that no one should be considered as a foreigner. A proposed route for the tours is: Start at Europe Square, cross over Leoforos Athenon, followed by a stroll on Zinonos Kitieos Street and the

area around Saint Lazarus Church. The city walks are scheduled to last for 1,5 to 2 hours.

4. A bottom-up approach through the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be used as a tool to engage with migrants and locals, to assess what their needs are and what they want to see happening in the District of Larnaka.

Partners

To effectively achieve progress that is related to intercultural competence, partnerships could be developed and maintained between the following bodies:

- Larnaka District municipalities
- Local authorities
- General public

4. Public Spaces

Context

There are good foundations to utilise public spaces in Larnaka District to further enhance interculturalism. The municipalities of Larnaka District already carry out some actions to encourage meaningful intercultural mixing and interaction in public spaces including museums, playgrounds, squares and parks. They include various community spots, where people of all origins can spend their free time, communicate with each other and freely create social networks. These public spaces also host annual events (Christmas markets, festivals etc.), which is also an opportunity for intercultural mixing.

The local authorities in the Larnaka District could take steps to consult the local and migrant populations when developing new building projects or reconstructing the existing ones. There are no spaces or areas in the district that are dominated by one ethnic group (majority or minority) and where other people feel unwelcome or unsafe. Although according to the interviewees, such phenomena might start to be more visible in the near future, especially in the Finikoudes area, if steps are not taken by the local authorities.

Public spaces like libraries and squares play a key role in the inclusion of migrants. Public spaces can become hubs for cultural activities with information points available in several languages. Larnaka District has the capacity to implement a similar action with the right funding and coordination.

Actions

1. Prepare a document with specific guidelines that foresees the adoption of interculturalism when organising festivals, events etc.

2. When developing and/or reconstructing public spaces, consult with the local and migrant populations on how they would prefer to use them (see Education for Labour Market Integration, Action 1).
3. Provision of support from the Municipalities and other local stakeholders for the organisation of an event or a series of events led by migrant groups, where migrants are encouraged to invite the local community to participate.

Partners

For the effective transformation of public spaces in intercultural public space, partnerships could be developed and maintained between the following bodies:

- Municipalities of Larnaka District
- Construction services
- Architects
- Migrant-led organisations
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

5. Education

Education is vital for intercultural integration, especially for effective integration of migrants in the labour market.

Following brainstorming sessions with Larnaka Municipality, it was emphasised that there is a need for education specifically related to technical skills and/or language.

Actions

1. The utilisation of a public space specifically designed to deliver technical skills to interested residents including migrants, thereby facilitating their effective integration in the Labour Market. For example, Larnaka District already holds seminars for traditional Cypriot professions and Cypriot crafting. This can be an interesting way to inspire innovation to migrants, while learning at the same time about old traditions of Cyprus. Another way to enhance technical skills is by utilizing the already existing [Post-secondary Vocational Education and Training Institutes](#) of Cyprus provided by the Ministry of Education. These programmes offer high-quality two-year education and training programmes in developing sectors, providing the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus with the opportunity to acquire, improve or upgrade their professional qualifications and skills, in order to become more capable and effective for employment and participation in the Cypriot and European labour market. The adjustment of these programmes to meet the needs of migrants is a useful tool to ensure integration in the local labour market.
2. There are well-educated migrants who arrive to Cyprus with qualifications, yet language remains one of the main barriers. Therefore, following a case-by-case

assessment of qualifications already obtained, offer tailored language courses for migrants and locals.

Partners

- Municipalities
- Ministry of Education, Directorate of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Summary of the 10 actions

| | Topic | Name of action | Primary stakeholders |
|----|--|---|---|
| 1. | Commitment | Publication and dissemination of a coordinated statement by Municipalities | Larnaka District Municipalities; Municipality Press Office |
| 2. | Commitment | Creation of a special tab or hashtag on the respective Municipality's website dedicated to intercultural integration | Larnaka District Municipalities |
| 3. | Commitment; Media and Communication | Publication of news about interculturality in the district and information package for 'Welcoming newcomers' | Larnaka District Municipalities; Municipality Press Office; Local media |
| 4. | Media and Communication | Establish a collaboration with a university for the development of guidelines for the effective communication of topics related to migration. | University; Municipalities, Cyprus Media Complaints Committee; Local and national media |
| 5. | Media and Communication | Strengthening of collaboration between the respective municipality's press office with media channels. Investigation and delivery of data, numbers, and testimonials to increase the chances of news publication related to the positive image of migration. | Cyprus Media Complaints Committee; Local and national media; Municipalities |
| 6. | Media and Communication; Intercultural intelligence and competence | The delivery of several workshops for the exchange of practices related to intercultural competencies. | Municipalities; local authorities |
| 7. | Commitment; Intercultural intelligence and competence; Public Spaces | Establishment of a series of public consultations that focus on specific topics, between residents and the mayors. Public consultations can happen in more creative ways, like through the Larnaka city tours for awareness on the contribution of foreigners to Larnaka's history and urban development | Municipalities; General public; Europe Direct Larnaka; Migrant-led organisations |

| | | | |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 8. | Intercultural intelligence and competence | Questionnaire to understand the perspective of migrants (and locals) and what they really need | Municipalities; CSOs |
| 9. | Public Spaces | The preparation of a document with guidelines on how to be aware of the dimension of interculturality when organizing events, and we can test the guidelines by organizing an event where we encourage migrants to invite the local communities. | Municipalities; CSOs; Migrant-led organisations |
| 10. | Public Spaces; Education; Labour Market | The utilisation of a public space specifically designed to deliver technical and/or language lessons to migrants (and interested locals), thereby facilitating their effective integration in the Labour Market. | Municipalities; Ministry of Education, Directorate of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training |

Conclusion

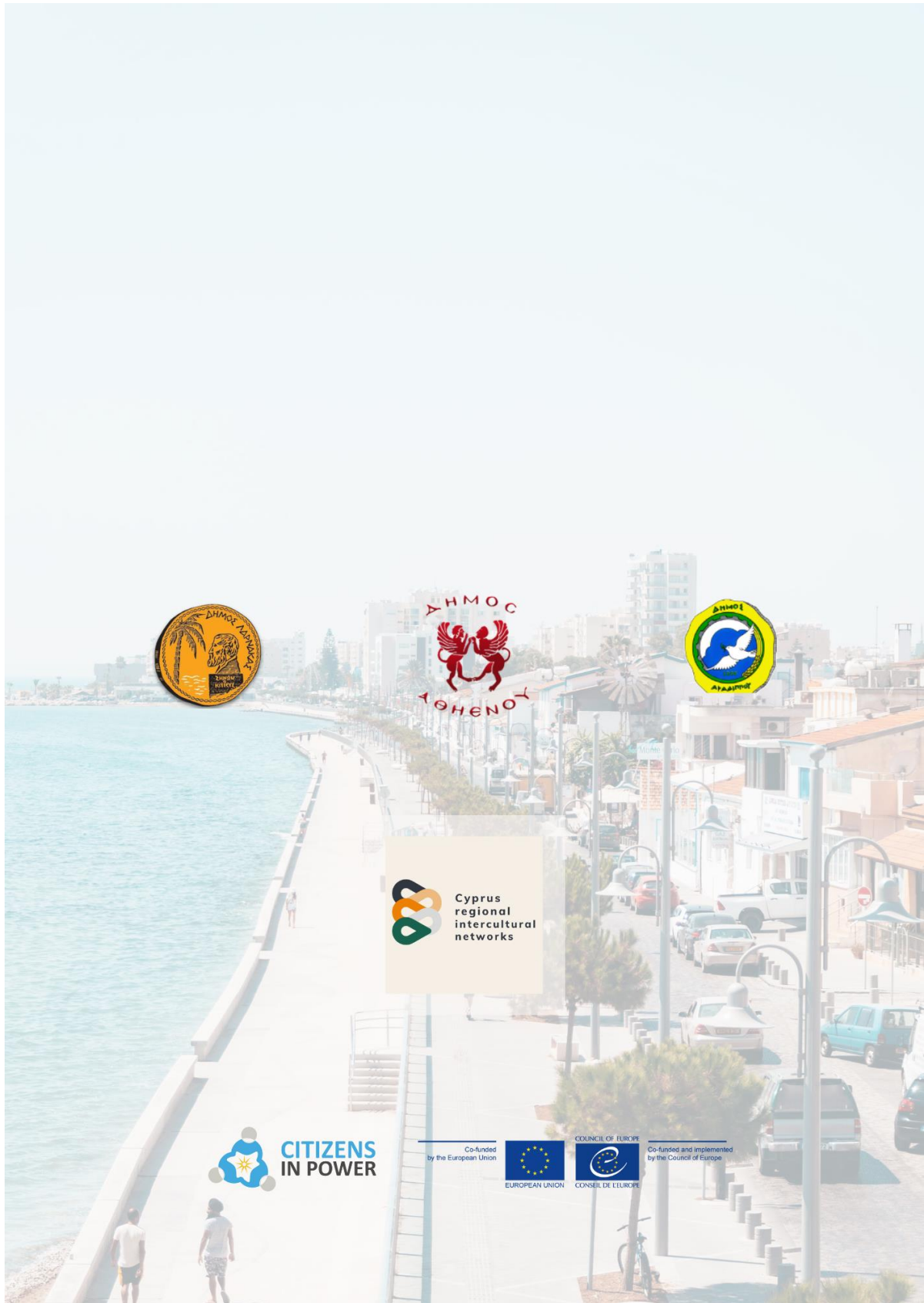
The design and implementation of the present strategy consisting of at least ten actions for intercultural integration in Larnaka District will contribute to the long-term sustainability of intercultural policies for the development of the district.

It is expected that some of the activities planned under this strategy will receive external funding, in particular from the EU’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds, to facilitate the representation of minorities achieve progress in intercultural integration in the region by the end of 2026.

Additionally, this strategy will feed into the future national strategy for integration. Larnaka’s Regional Intercultural Network aspires to extend the effort on the national level, with serious potential to make this a best practice among all 161 intercultural cities that participate in the [ICC Network](#) across the world.

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