Nicosia District Intercultural Network's action plan for social integration and inclusion for 2023-2025

Nicosia, May 2022

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1. Introduction

The European way of life is an inclusive way of life. Intercultural integration and inclusion are key for people arriving in Europe, as well as for local communities who host foreign-born residents and for the long-term well-being of societies and the stability of national and local economies.

It is perceived that for societies to thrive economically, socially, and culturally, all its members must be included.[1] This means providing support and empowering foreign-born and national citizens alike, to actively participate in community and social life, and to enjoy their rights regardless of their background. It is also important to understand that culture is not fixed and bounded, but rather fluid and shifting, particularly as individuals and groups come into contact with one another.

A regional intercultural project, "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus"[2] aims to support the Republic of Cyprus in implementing its national action plan on integration by empowering local authorities, NGOs, and migrant organisations to be part of the integration process. The project is working to assess current policies and activities and recommend future possible actions to improve and strengthen integration policies and community cohesion/social integration in Cyprus.

The project supported the creation of five Regional Intercultural Networks in the Districts of Famagusta, Larnaca, 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.

The Centre for Social Cohesion, Development and Care (CODECA) and CARDET are the co-ordinators for the Nicosia District Intercultural Network. The Nicosia Network held three meetings during 2021-2022, during which they agreed on a terms of reference for the network, and discussed the results of the Intercultural Cities Index Analysis Report for district, as well as deciding on the priority actions for the district and preparing this Action Plan.

The Action Plan is based on the results derived from Intercultural Cities Index as well as relevant discussions within the Nicosia District Network and experts from the Council of Europe, it raises topical issues and challenges, and highlights areas that need to be further discussed and acted upon.

It is blended with the views and thoughts of four main groups of participants (i) professionals from the governmental sector, ministries, and state agencies, (ii) local authorities, (iii) NGO's who work on a wide spectrum of migration and integration issues and (iv) from intercultural city experts. The Action Plan aims to underline the responsibilities and relationships between

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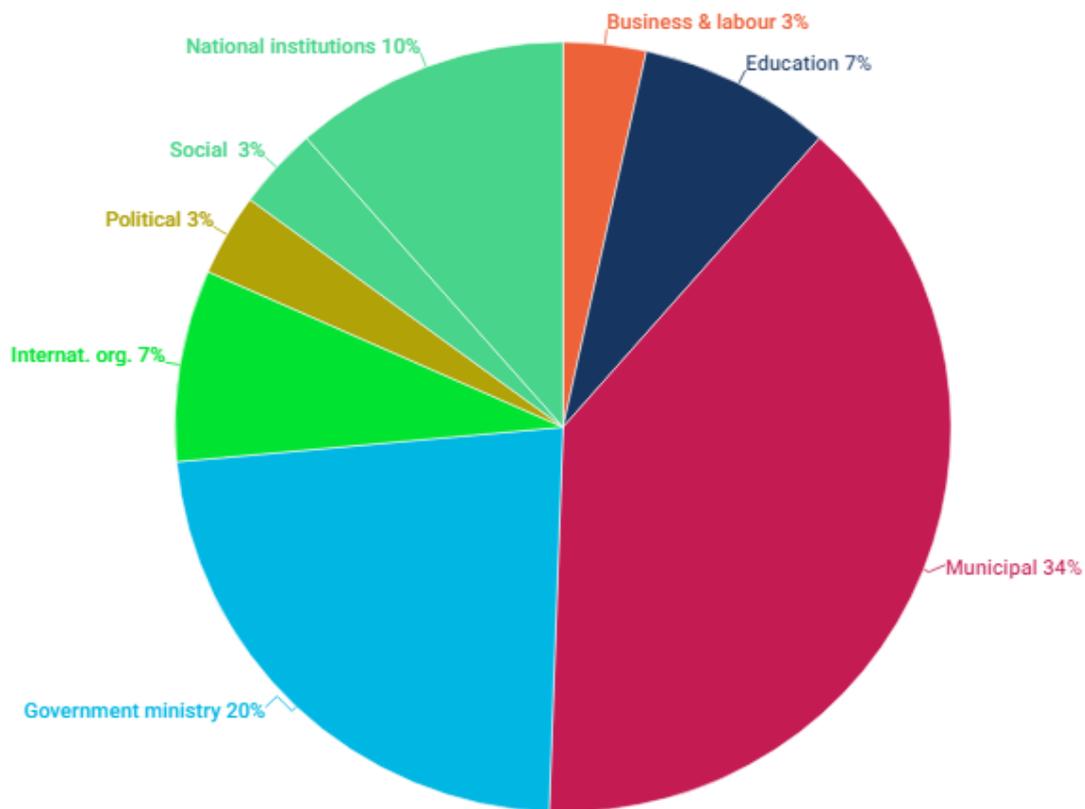[1] Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, European Commission, Brussels (24.11.2020)

[2] 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.

the interested parties and propose relevant governmental procedures interlinked with social integration.

Obstacles influencing the current conditions of foreign-born nationals residing in Cyprus, challenges and ideas that could improve the general framework of integration policies, are outlined and lead to a set of practical proposals / suggested actions - policy recommendations – which aim in achieving a paradigm-shift from a reactive to a proactive national social inclusion policy.

The Action Plan for the District of Nicosia is in part a response to the challenges which are faced due to increased migration[3] and it will feed into future national integration action plans. Effective local and national integration policies will lead to a well-functioning intercultural society across Cyprus.

Members of the Nicosia district intercultural network

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[3] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

2. Nicosia District Intercultural Network's action plan for social integration and inclusion for 2023-2025:

This **Action Plan** sets out a series of recommendations and actions to bring together actors on all levels (from private and public sectors, NGO's, Civil Society Organisations and grass root organisations) in a common effort to achieve integration and inclusion, and to ultimately build a more cohesive and inclusive society. Inclusion in a society is also about ensuring that all policies are accessible to work for all of its members including foreign born citizens. This means adapting and transforming mainstream policies to the needs of an already diverse society[4].

The Action Plan will also consider the specific challenges and needs of the different groups of people and help integrate not only foreign-born nationals, but also vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and minorities.

Outlined below are a summary of the above-mentioned ICC Index Result categories which are considered relevant as a starting point by the Nicosia District Network. The suggested actions were derived from previous meetings and discussions with the Network as well as through meetings with experts from the Council of Europe, and from research initiatives undertaken by CODECA.

A. Commitment

For the indicator of Commitment, Nicosia achieved a rate of **5%**, which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **68%**. This score is an indication that **commitment** will be the first field that Nicosia District Network wish to work on.

Suggestions	Recommended Actions/Activities
• **Engaging local authorities' stakeholders who will support and promote integration goals on a long-term basis and who are not currently members of the Nicosia District Network.**	• Request the Nicosia Network members to promote the project to any NGOs, organisations, private businesses, or people in their own network who may be interested to join the network and to cooperate in organising actions.
• **Convince local authorities and stakeholders who are current members of the Nicosia District Network to sign a Letter of Support in the creation of a set of goals, which will be published on the website of the local authorities and other social media platforms, generating their**	• Organising small events where Municipalities Mayors could be informed about the Project, it is our suggestion that this is conducted as a social event which would be conductive to a discussion and in asking them for their support which would be published to generate interest.

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[4] Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, European Commission, Brussels (24.11.2020)

interest and participation in making their districts more culturally diverse.	
• **Propose regular meetings with elected officials (Local Authorities of the District of Nicosia) and policy makers (Governmental Organizations) to present and discuss the Action Plan and provide the core principles about how their policies and decision-making processes can be beneficial to the Nicosia District network regarding the integration of foreign-born nationals.**	• Send the Action Plan to the Union of Municipalities or join the Meeting of the Union of Municipalities with the topic of the project as a subject of discussion and decision-making.
• **Local authorities could start by adopting an intercultural statement and continue the efforts on consultation mechanisms through the Nicosia Regional Intercultural Network.**	• Preparation of an intercultural statement in the form of a support letter in collaboration with the Nicosia District Network for the local authorities to start adopting. The intercultural statement will lead to the development of an intercultural strategy and action plan, which will include certain parameters such as a communications plan and evaluation and renewal process to ensure long-term sustainability of any future actions.

The municipalities in the Nicosia District have not yet adopted a public statement, intercultural strategy, or action plan. They also did not carry out a process of policy consultation including the people of diverse cultural backgrounds and do not yet have dedicated web portals communicating their intercultural policies. Consequently, there is not yet a dedicated body or cross departmental coordination structure in the district. However, the municipalities' communication makes references to their intercultural commitment and acknowledges the persons contributing to the community. The district is home to many civil society organisations (CSOs) working in the fields of integration and interculturalism which provides a solid starting point. Following some good practices and recommendations, the local authorities of the District of Nicosia could start by adopting an intercultural statement, which could lead to the development of an intercultural strategy or action plan.

B. Education

For the indicator of **education,** Nicosia District achieved a rate of **25%**, which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **69%**. This score means that there is space for further development of intercultural education in the district.

Suggestions	Recommended actions/activities
• **Introduce an educational recognition system to assimilate to the Cyprus / EU educational standards.**	• Foster cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute and other national authorities and Centres and promote the creation of transparent recognition practices and standards for foreign-born national students who arrive in Cyprus.
• **Introduce goals and quality assurance systems and monitoring mechanisms for the learning achievements of migrants.**	• Present to the relevant authorities a proposal for goals and quality assurance systems and monitoring mechanisms for the learning achievements of foreign-born nationals which will be drafted by the Nicosia Network.
• **Create a mechanism for advising and assisting foreign-born families on the school admission process.**	• Advocate for training staff that would assist and advise migrant families regarding the school admission process.
• **Support foreign-born children with afternoon activities and homework clubs.**	• The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with public schools, could establish after school activities and allow foreign-born children to attend at discounted price. Although this has been implemented in various schools, it is not standard practice for all schools.

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 programs are defined primarily at the national or regional level, public schools can look at alternative and innovative ways of providing opportunities for children of different cultures to build trust and mutual respect, and create 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. It is essential that the education systems move towards education and curriculum reforms and update their learning and teaching practices that embrace the diversity of cultures. Addressing these issues at a policy-making level requires further examination. It is anticipated that educational policy frameworks need to be reconsidered to ensure that they facilitate ease of access to formal and non-formal education for foreign-born nationals (children and adults).

C. Access to public services

In the indicator of **public services,** Nicosia achieved a rate of **0%**, which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **68%**. This score means that public services is a priority field which the District of Nicosia may wish to develop.

Suggestions	Recommended Actions/Activities
• **Introduce an information mechanism through which all migrants will receive information regarding their legal rights, obligations, provision of services, bureaucratic procedures (through official channels) upon their arrival in Cyprus in a format and language they are able to understand.**	• Provide Municipalities with the necessary information (which a migrant might need upon their arrival to Cyprus). Since Municipalities, usually, have websites to provide information regarding their Municipality, any events it maybe organising, any services it might offer and many more. By providing information to the Municipality which they could add to their own website would allow migrants to adapt to the host country more easily.
• **Setup collaborative networks with the participation of statutory and non-statutory organizations and lead professionals.**	• Organise events, where issues pertaining the program can be presented and discussed and whose aim is to foster collaboration between NGOs, Municipalities, local authorities, or businesses.
• **Set up local collaborative networks to inform and assist migrants on social integration matters.**	• Organise events, where issues pertaining the program can be presented and discussed and whose aim is better understanding the needs of migrants and provide information on any services that could be of assistance to migrants.
• **Set up a virtual space where information about migration issues is available in various languages.**	• A virtual request box could be created on the websites for various NGOs or Municipalities, allowing both natives and foreign-born nationals to talk about the issues they face, and which could direct them to a corresponding website which may provide the required information.

As the name implies, public services work for the benefit of the public. 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. The District of Nicosia and the relevant stakeholders must take relevant actions to develop policies for non-nationals and pursuing a range of measures from administration, immigration, labour market integration, health, leisure, and finance to improve the quality of life for all citizens and promote social inclusion.

D. Improving labour market inclusion:

In the indicator of **labour market inclusion**, Nicosia District achieved a rate of **25%**, which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **51%**. The score confirms that there are some actions promoting diversity on workplace and migrants' entrepreneurship. The score confirms that there are some actions promoting diversity on workplace and migrants' entrepreneurship. However, the municipalities in the district do not yet take advantage of all the possibilities, including the possibility to encourage the mainstreaming of business owned by migrants.

Suggestions	Recommended Actions/Activities
• **Translate the necessary employment forms into languages other than English and Greek.**	• Ask for permission to translate the employment forms which might be of use and upload them to the websites of local authorities and Municipalities.
• **Develop a comprehensive plan for employing migrants in several sectors within the municipalities: initiate entrepreneurship schemes.**	• Utilise existing services which aid in finding work in Cyprus and showcasing them at NGOs websites or digital channels most frequented by migrants to inform them.
• **Create a local job vacancies database where migrants and holders of international protection can seek job opportunities.**	• Foster collaboration from the local Labour Offices, where migrants are advised to register to, to receive information regarding work opportunities which we would promote throughout various digital communication channels frequented by migrants.
• **Create subsidized jobs which will be combined with schemes such as language tuition, skills development, and job application training.**	• Assist Municipalities in drafting a request for funds using European Programs, which would provide foreign-born nationals with the ability to utilise their native language and the learning of their host country's language to work. (translators).

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 their 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 and in sectors which promote social enterprises, shops, clubs, restaurants, industry, technical services, and science. In host communities, migration can fill the gaps and introduce new skills and know-how. Coherence between migration and employment policies can help in overcoming many

challenges. However, such performance requires ensuring that migration policies and regulations make relevant linkages to employment policies and labour market integration mechanisms5.

A new outlook on the way foreign-born nationals are integrated into the labour market can create more work opportunities in different labour market sectors. New policies and frameworks could also be drawn from the conclusions of the above recommendations, as there will be less discrimination within the labour market industry, greater tolerance in mainstream society as well as the integration of a greater number of newly arrived foreign-born nationals within the public sector labour market.

E. Welcoming Newcomers

In the indicator of **welcoming newcomers**, Nicosia District achieved a rate of **0%,** which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **57%**. If planning to be an intercultural district, municipalities will need to develop actions welcoming and supporting newcomers on their first contact with the city. Foreign-born nationals arriving in Cyprus are usually well informed by prior contacts, through their compatriots or relatives and friends and communities who have already migrated to the island and currently live and work here.

Suggestions	Recommended actions/activities
• **Set up collaborative networks with other public, private, and voluntary services as well as organizations that may assist both the reception and induction conditions.**	• Advise and assist municipalities and local authorities in creating an event that could take place either yearly or every 6 months, whose aim would be to invite foreign-born nationals and local to interact allowing them to foster a better relationship.
• **Prevent migrants' segregation in certain neighbourhoods or areas by offering alternative solutions for affordable housing.**	• Promote Neighbourhood Projects which enable residents to work together or creation of community centres where people of different backgrounds and ages feel welcome and provide opportunities for people to interact.
• **Seek for training and technical support to create associations and groups to advocate for their rights.**	• Inform foreign-born nationals of the various low-cost services that might be available to them which are provided by the Government and the Municipalities, such as low-cost yearly language lessons, etc. (Epimorphotika)

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5 International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2021). Integrating Migration into Employment Interventions - A toolkit for International Cooperation and Development Actors. Brussels: International Organization for Migration.

Foreign-born residents arriving to Cyprus are usually well informed by prior contacts, through their compatriots or relatives and friends and communities who have already migrated to the island and currently live and work here.

The welcoming and preparation of non-nationals for staying in Nicosia is usually carried out through private initiatives and EU-funded programs. However, is no evidence regarding the involvement of Nicosia municipalities in welcoming and preparatory activities targeting migrants.

The way in which the city can coordinate and effectively deliver 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 extent 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 and stakeholders will convey through direct or indirect actions on diversity, in communication or through concrete measures, which will inevitably determine the welcoming procedures for newcomers.

F. Language

In the indicator of **language**, Nicosia District achieved a rate **34%**, which is slightly lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **45%**. The city's score certifies that the city provides actions promoting multilingualism in terms of local and foreign languages. In the Nicosia District, Greek lessons are offered by the private sector under the co-financing of European funds. Unfortunately, these efforts are not consistent and sustainable and do not constitute official provision of language training services, several private and civic sector stakeholders such as the Pancyprian Labour Institute, offer Greek language classes targeting migrants through EU co-funded projects.

Suggestions	Recommended actions/activities
• **Introduce Greek and English courses during the first six months of arrival in Cyprus, to develop a considerable level of language skills and be able to communicate among other peers and on a local scale.**	• Provide language lesson services in collaboration with other NGOs and the Municipalities.
• **Invest into Digital Information Technology to create interactive learning material to enable migrants to learn the Greek language at any time before their arrival to the Republic.**	• Using the digital communication channels Foreign-born nationals prefer, to inform them of available material either online or in person they could take advantage to learn Greek as a foreign language upon their arrival.
• **Subsidise jobs for migrants combined with schemes such as language tuition, skills development, and job application training.**	• Assist Municipalities in drafting a request for funds using European Programs, which would provide foreign-born nationals with the ability to utilise their native language and the learning of their

	host country's language to work. (translators)
• **Nicosia might consider providing specific language training in the official language(s) for hard-to-reach groups. It might also consider suggesting to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, and Youth teaching migrant/minority languages as part of the regular curriculum at schools, or as a mother tongue course for migrant children only.**	• Collaborate with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, and Youth and other NGOs to organise a space where younger children could be taught Greek or other languages. This would allow them to integrate more easily in Cyprus and allow their parents to utilise that time to either concentrate on their own lessons or in finding work.

Language learning is usually one of the key steps in becoming part of a new community. 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. 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. The historical interculturalism of Nicosia provides a solid basis for further development of multilingualism of the local society and the current programs and EU initiatives might be further developed through EU Co-funded project initiatives as well as initiatives taken in collaboration with the Municipalities and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

G. Participation

In the indicator **participation**, Nicosia District's rate of achievement is **0%**, which is considerably lower than the city sample's achievement rate of **44%**. To become an intercultural district, municipalities in the Nicosia District would need to develop further actions in the field of participatory mechanisms, involving city's diverse population.

Suggestions	Recommended actions/activities
• **Create a process of lodging complaints and suggestions regarding social inclusion issues.**	• A virtual request box could be created on the websites for various NGOs or Municipalities, allowing migrants to lodge their complaints and suggestions about the issues they face, and which could direct them to a corresponding website which may provide the required information.
• **Define and clarify roles as service providers for material support and social assistance.**	• Upload information regarding service providers for material support and social assistance on the websites of both NGOs and of Municipalities, both so that it more accessible but also to avoid any confusion to who can provide specified assistance.
• **Set up local information points to guide the beneficiaries for different services they may require.**	• Since there are some local information points these could be advertised in various platforms, ensuring that as many as possible foreign-born nationals became aware and utilise of them.
• **Create cultural community spaces, to promote interaction among different social groups and migrant communities as well as the youth of the community.**	• Advocate the necessity of creating cultural community spaces, to promote interaction among different social groups and migrant communities as well as the youth of the community, to the Municipalities.

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. The District of Nicosia might consider increasing its efforts on improving its Participation policies. To increase the participation of migrants in decision making processes, the District of Nicosia might get inspired other good practices and recommendations, to increase community participation in local governments and present opportunities for input into policy and decision making. This will also facilitate proper

governance and promote policy making and legislative frameworks which will in future ensure equal treatment of citizens by including their political participation rights and strengthen relationships between community leaders and non-national community members to build a more inclusive and society.

3. Intercultural Cities Index analysis for the District of Nicosia

3.1 Introduction

As cities embrace the intercultural approach to diversity management, they need to take stock of their achievements and challenges as a point of departure for the development of their intercultural strategies. To sustain motivation and adjust their efforts, cities need to assess progress over time, and acquire good practices from other cities which have concrete experience in this field of intercultural integration and social cohesion, and which can be adapted to meet the requirements of other cities and their inhabitants.

The Intercultural cities index **(ICC-Index)** supports all these objectives. Cities that carry out the ICC Index questionnaire consistently and repeatedly over time, will be able to discern upward or downward patterns in the key indices and, consequently, make more informed decisions about the long-term impact of its policies and future investment on their populations.

Most cities have a diverse population including people of different nationalities, origins, languages, religions/beliefs, sexual orientations, and age groups. Intercultural integration is a policy approach that encourages citizens to regard this diversity as a resource rather than a problem and accept that all cultures change as they encounter each other in the public arena.

3.2 ICC Index Results for the District of Nicosia:

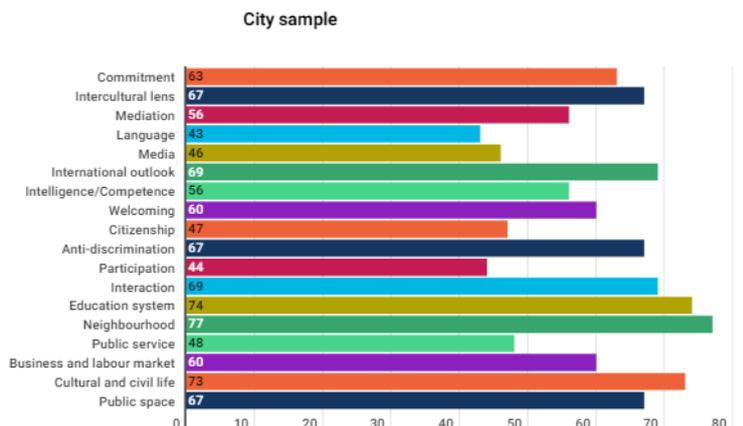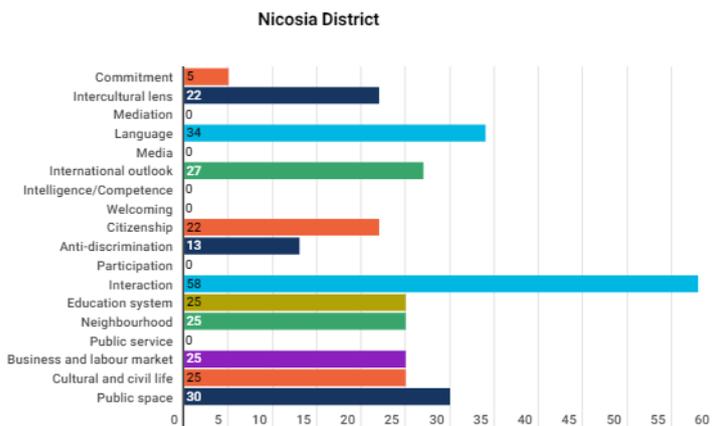The ICC-Index is a powerful tool for the District Coordinators and the Network to:

- **Initiate a discussion** within the local government about what intercultural integration means in practice.
- **Raise awareness** on the necessity of working horizontally between the various departments and services that contribute to fulfilling the intercultural agenda.
- Identify and learn from **"good practices"** from other Intercultural Cities and recommend similar actions which could be implemented within the District of Nicosia.

The ICC-Index Analysis is based on a questionnaire comprising of 86 questions (73 of which were mandatory), grouped in 12 indicators with three distinct types of data. For each indicator, the participating cities *(in this case Nicosia)* can reach up to 100 points.

The ICC-Index comprises of a set of criteria on how intercultural integration can be measured. The Index also provides the score of the city and the city sample of similar population density as a comparison. The average scores and city samples are derived from the results of the Index.

It must be stated that Nicosia scored **16/100 points**. The scope was regional, and it must be stated that Nicosia does not have a District Administration and does not have the authority or competence to implement this plan.

The results of the ICC Index have created an initial road map, for the district of Nicosia, providing to the network its achievements and challenges. This has created a starting point for each district to develop their own Intercultural Action Plans and simultaneously allow them to learn from other networks and their handling of their own achievements and challenges.

Nicosia District

Category	Value
Commitment	5
Intercultural lens	22
Mediation	0
Language	34
Media	0
International outlook	27
Intelligence/Competence	0
Welcoming	0
Citizenship	22
Anti-discrimination	13
Participation	0
Interaction	58
Education system	25
Neighbourhood	25
Public service	0
Business and labour market	25
Cultural and civil life	25
Public space	30

City sample

Category	Value
Commitment	63
Intercultural lens	67
Mediation	56
Language	43
Media	46
International outlook	69
Intelligence/Competence	56
Welcoming	60
Citizenship	47
Anti-discrimination	67
Participation	44
Interaction	69
Education system	74
Neighbourhood	77
Public service	48
Business and labour market	60
Cultural and civil life	73
Public space	67

4. APPENDIX

NICOSIA DISTRICT NETWORK – LIST OF MEMBERS

Cyprus Pedagogical Institute

CARDET

Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC)

CRC Policy Center "Hope for Children"

Association of Filippinos in Cyprus / Coordinator of Labour Affairs

Synthesis (Center for Research & Education)

CSI – Center for Social Innovation

Idalion Municipality