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Operational recommendations for the sustainability of outcomes from the joint EU and Council of Europe project:

“Enhancing structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus”

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Introduction

In an increasingly diverse Cyprus, fostering intercultural integration has become a key priority for promoting social inclusion, equality, and institutional trust. From 2021 to 2024, the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support and the Council of Europe's (CoE) Intercultural Inclusion Unit, in partnership with the Migration Department of the Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection of the Republic of Cyprus, implemented two projects aimed at [strengthening intercultural integration structures and policies in Cyprus](#):

- Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus
- Enhancing structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus

This document outlines operational recommendations for the Department of Migration to ensure the sustainability and impact of project outcomes, particularly focusing on:

- Output 1 - Establishment and functioning of a multilevel and multistakeholder mechanism for integration policy
- Outputs 2 and 3 - Regional intercultural networks and the implementation and monitoring of their action plans/strategy
- Output 4 - Analysis and assessment of integration policies in the five districts

The recommendations are based on insights from the Council of Europe's work on intercultural integration in Cyprus:

- Report on the [Assessment of needs for the implementation of intercultural integration policies in Cyprus by representatives of national institutions](#)
- Research on the [multidisciplinary coordinating group against human trafficking as a model of multistakeholder and multilevel cooperation in Cyprus](#)
- Feedback forms from the project's capacity building activities
- Satisfaction surveys of the coordinators and members of the regional intercultural networks

and the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance \(ECRI\) 6th report on Cyprus \(2022\)](#).

The CoE's Intercultural Inclusion Unit would like to thank DG Reform's Horizontal Policies Unit (Athens Office) and the Cyprus Department of Migration for their support and cooperation in achieving the project outcomes. They provide a foundation for the Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection to further their work on intercultural inclusion for the benefit of Cyprus society as a whole. Through fostering an environment that values diversity, combats discrimination, promotes equality, and encourages meaningful interaction, we can enhance mutual trust, social cohesion, security, economic development, and well-being for everyone.

Establishment and functioning of a multilevel and multistakeholder mechanism for integration policy (Output 1)

Background

During the implementation of the project, the Cypriot partner, the Migration Department, was transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the newly established Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection. This meant it was not possible for the Department to establish a coordination mechanism within the short life cycle of the project.

The Department plans to establish a coordination mechanism as part of the national integration strategy which will be drafted in early 2025.

The Department should make use of the research prepared under the two EU/CoE projects for intercultural integration for the preparation of the national strategy as well as establishment of a mechanism for integration policies.

- [Assessment of needs for the implementation of intercultural integration policies in Cyprus by representatives of national institutions](#)
- [Baseline overview and assessment of integration policies in the Republic of Cyprus](#)
- [Elements of multilevel governance of intercultural integration and their applicability to the Republic of Cyprus](#)
- [Blueprint for multilevel governance of intercultural integration policies in Cyprus](#)

Operational recommendations

The structure and responsibilities of the Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group against Human Trafficking, which is now coordinated by the Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection, could serve as a model for creating a similar platform for integration. Key aspects be taken into account for the establishment of a multilevel and multistakeholder integration platform include:

1. *Interministerial collaboration*

The platform could involve the ministries of interior, education, labour, health, and social welfare amongst others, ensuring diverse perspectives and coordinated policies for integration. The integration focal points that have received intercultural competences could be the nominated representatives.

2. *Multi-stakeholder engagement*

Regional intercultural networks, NGOs, migrant organisations, and private-sector stakeholders could be included in the platform to address integration challenges holistically. Technical experts such as those in the pool established by the project should also be involved in advising on the work of the platform.

3. *Define clear objectives*

The members of the platform should agree on the clear objectives for their work as well as agreeing and adopting the terms of reference for the nominated integration focal points based on the proposal drafted by the EU/CoE joint project. The objectives could include promoting intercultural understanding, improving access to services, and fostering participation in social, economic, and cultural life. The platform will contribute to the drafting, implementing and monitoring of the national integration strategy.

4. *Policy alignment*

The platform could focus on creating cohesive integration policies that align with Council of Europe recommendations, EU directives and international best practices. Specific integration-focused policies prepared by the platform members could guide actions and ensure accountability across sectors.

5. *Resource sharing and capacity building*

The facilitation of sharing of data, best practices, and resources between ministries and regional intercultural integration networks could be promoted within the platform. Budgets should be allocated from national or EU funds to sustain the platform's activities.

6. *Facilitate training and education*

The Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection could facilitate the organisation of seminars and training programmes on intercultural competences for the officials of the involved services and NGOs. The platform members could contribute to the drafting of manuals and training material on good practices to be followed by all.

7. *Centralised coordination and monitoring*

The Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection would be responsible for coordinating and monitoring the national integration strategy and its accompanying action plan, with the inputs of all the members of the platform.

8. *Public awareness and outreach*

The platform could undertake awareness raising campaigns about the benefits of migration and promote understanding and acceptance of migrants, refugees, and third-country nationals, as well as dealing with issues of equality and the fight against discrimination and hate speech.

Key policy areas for future integration actions

Some key policy areas to promote intercultural integration in Cyprus which could be included in the national integration strategy and tackled by the platform for integration have been highlighted during the project activities.

The proposed policies have been compiled from the:

- Report on the [Assessment of needs for the implementation of intercultural integration policies in Cyprus by representatives of national institutions](#)

- Feedback forms from the project’s capacity building activities
- Satisfaction surveys of the coordinators and members of the regional intercultural networks
- Recommendations from the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance \(ECRI\) 6th report on Cyprus \(2022\)](#)

1. Access to services

- Intercultural competences training for public facing civil servants
 - Multilingual services and resources for diverse communities
- Which is linked to ECRI recommendation: (§76) ECRI recommends that the authorities increase the number of languages and channels in or through which essential information and services related to notably education, health, housing and employment are made available to migrants.*

2. Education

- Integration of intercultural education into the curriculum
 - Promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity in schools and educational institutions
 - Providing continuing education and adult education services for the migrant population
 - Providing support for the integration of children into the school system
- Which is linked to ECRI recommendation: (§84) ECRI recommends that the Cypriot authorities take immediate action to support child asylum seekers and other migrant children in acquiring the Greek language skills necessary to allow them to follow ordinary primary school classes taught in Greek. Such action should be accompanied by individual skills assessments to determine the most appropriate school grade to place the child in.*

3. Employment and economic integration

- Programmes to support migrant employment and entrepreneurship
- Recognition of foreign qualifications and skills

4. Social services and healthcare

- Intercultural mediation and intercultural adaptation of services as well as provision of interpretation services

5. Housing and public space

- Policies and initiatives to ensure adequate housing for migrant communities
- Allowing non-citizens equal access to public infrastructure including municipal halls, parks and sports facilities for their events

6. Community engagement

- Use of cultural events to promote intercultural interaction and to reflect the diversity of Cyprus
 - Facilitating dialogue and positive interaction between all residents
- Which is linked to ECRI recommendation: (§79) ECRI recommends that legislative or other appropriate measures be taken to prevent the exclusion of non-citizens from sport association membership.*

7. Anti-discrimination

- Creation of mechanisms to identify and report discriminatory incidents/actions

Linked to ECRI recommendations:

(§12) ECRI recommends that the relevant authorities take decisive action to secure the effective implementation of the Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents in the field of education, notably by ensuring that the reporting of racist incidents is positively recognised.

(§30) In line with §§ 7 and 30 of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 16 on safeguarding irregularly present migrants from discrimination, ECRI recommends that the authorities change their policies and procedures, and where necessary initiate legislative amendments, in order to decouple labour complaints by migrants, regardless of residence status, from the remit of authorities in charge of immigration control.

(§49) ECRI recommends that the authorities establish a comprehensive monitoring system for hate speech incidents, involving the police, the prosecution service, the courts, the equality body and relevant civil society organisations, especially those supporting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, Black persons and LGBTI people. In doing so, the authorities should draw on the positive initiatives aimed at addressing underreporting with the police and take due account of § 3 c) and d) of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and § 58 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

(§53) ECRI recommends that the authorities step up their efforts in encouraging public figures, in particular high-level officials and religious leaders, to firmly and promptly condemn the use of racist and other forms of hate speech, use counter-speech and alternative speech and promote intergroup understanding, including by expressing solidarity with those targeted by hate speech, in the light of § 4 g) of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech and § 53 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

(§65) ECRI recommends that the authorities i) revise the criminal legislation pertaining to hate speech, including remedies available to victims; ii) provide without delay suitable training to police officers, prosecutors and judges on how to make the best use of the existing legal provisions on combating hate speech and hate crime; and iii) develop awareness-raising measures for persons and groups targeted by hate speech to make them aware of their rights and of the possibility to obtain redress through criminal and other legal proceedings, taking due account of the relevant principles and guidelines contained in ECRI's General Policy.

The policy areas mentioned reflect the priorities identified by participants in the project activities and are not exhaustive.

Regional intercultural networks and the implementation and monitoring of their action plans/strategy (Outputs 2 and 3)

Background

During the implementation of the first EU/CoE project, regional intercultural networks were established in [Famagusta](#), [Larnaca](#), [Limassol](#), [Nicosia](#) and [Paphos](#) districts, following a mapping of integration stakeholders in each region. Each regional network prepared its own terms of reference and completed the Intercultural Cities Index in April 2022. Following the recommendations in their [Intercultural Index Analysis Report](#) each network prepared and adopted an intercultural action plan or strategy for their district:

- [Famagusta District Action Plan on Social Integration and Inclusion for 2023-2025](#)
- [Larnaca District Strategy for Intercultural Integration](#)
- [Limassol District Intercultural Strategy 2023-2025](#)
- [Nicosia District Intercultural Network action plan for social integration and inclusion](#)
- [Action plan for inclusion and diversity in Paphos District \(2023-2025\)](#)

In May 2023, and again in November 2024, at the end of each project, the network coordinators used the tool developed under the project to monitor integration activities from their district action plans/strategies.

Operational recommendations

The operational recommendations have been provided by the network coordinators and members.

The priority operational recommendation for the follow-up to the project is financing for the networks should be put in place quickly to maintain the momentum established. The financing should be longer term and include allocated budgets for human resources. It is considered that dedicated personnel would ensure better coordination, consistent communication, and long-term sustainability of network activities.

The networks unanimously support a proposal to establish a national intercultural network as they believe it will enable the regional networks to:

- Share resources, expertise, and best practices
- Enhance collaboration between regions
- Secure larger funding opportunities and organise national-level events
- Strengthen advocacy efforts for intercultural integration at the policy level

They also encouraged fostering stronger collaboration across cities and stakeholders and involving a broader range of sectors, such as businesses, schools, and healthcare providers, etc. to embed the intercultural integration approach across society.

Recommendations for sustaining the networks included:

- Engaging volunteers, including migrants and refugees
- Forming partnerships with NGOs, educational institutions, and local organisations.
- Leveraging digital tools for outreach and engagement
- Aligning network goals with broader community development initiatives, such as cultural heritage or sustainable tourism

Recommendations to increase network outreach included:

- Increasing participation by using multilingual materials and digital campaigns
- Building partnerships with schools, businesses, and community centres to reach diverse audiences
- Developing small, targeted events like mobile workshops, cultural festivals, and storytelling sessions
- Collaborating with mayors, community representatives, and other stakeholders to align activities with local priorities and ensure consistent support and membership

Suggestions to increase participation of third-country nationals included the following ideas:

- Organising events like cooking nights, sports tournaments, and networking sessions to foster connections
- Offering incentives, such as residents' cards with access to services or discounts, to encourage participation
- Providing interpretation services, bilingual staff, and multilingual promotional materials to ensure inclusivity
- Collaborating with migrant influencers and organisations to co-design activities and establish safe spaces for dialogue and engagement

It is recommended that regular monitoring of the implementation of the regional action plans continues using the tool that was developed under the project, as well the continuing use of satisfaction surveys, to identify successes and upscale them, as well as to identify areas that require improvement.

Analysis and assessment of integration policies in the five districts (Output 4)

Background

The five regional intercultural networks reported on the integration policies and activities by completing the Intercultural Cities Index in April 2022 and again in October 2024. The [Intercultural Index Analysis Reports](#) include recommendations and guidance on how to further develop intercultural integration policies in the regions through good practices from other cities.

The impact of integration policies and activities was also assessed through the prototype tool for monitoring regional social cohesion. The results of this research which was carried out in Famagusta and Limassol districts can be found in the [Report monitoring regional social cohesion - Cyprus 2024](#).

Operational recommendations

Cities could be encouraged to join the Intercultural Cities network to enable them to participate in peer-to-peer exchanges on good practices, have access to training on the intercultural approach and have the possibility to further monitor the development of intercultural integration policies through the Intercultural Cities Index and evaluate their impact over time.

The tool for monitoring regional social cohesion has provided some interesting insights with its whole of society approach and it is hoped that it will be used again by the Department of Migration on a larger scale as a benchmark to measure the impact of the future national integration strategy.

Summary table of operational recommendations

Output no.	Output	Summary of operational recommendation
Output 1	Establishment and functioning of a multilevel and multistakeholder mechanism for integration policy	Using the model of the multidisciplinary coordinating group against human trafficking to establish a similar multilevel and multistakeholder platform for integration.
Output 1	Establishment and functioning of a multilevel and multistakeholder mechanism for integration policy	Recommended key policy areas to be addressed include: access to services, education, employment and economic integration, social services and healthcare, housing and public space, community engagement and anti-discrimination
Output 2	Implementation of the regional intercultural networks action plans/strategy	The priority operational recommendation for the support to the networks is that financing should be put in place quickly to maintain the momentum established. The financing should be longer term and include allocated budgets for human resources. It is also recommended that a national intercultural network for Cyprus is established.
Output 3	Monitoring of the regional intercultural networks action plans/strategy	Regular monitoring of the implementation of the regional action plans continues using the tool that was developed under the project, as well as satisfaction surveys, to identify successes and upscale them, as well as to identify areas that require improvement.
Output 4	Analysis and assessment of integration policies in the five districts	Encouraging cities to join the Intercultural Cities network to enable them to participate in peer-to-peer exchanges on good practices, have access to training on the intercultural approach and have the possibility to further monitor the development of intercultural integration policies through the Intercultural Cities Index and evaluate their impact over time.
Output 4	Analysis and assessment of integration policies in the five districts	Using the tool for monitoring regional social cohesion on a larger scale as a benchmark to measure the impact of the future national integration strategy.